

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT · 29 CHESHVAN 5775 - NOV. 22, 2014 · VOL. 22 NO. 6

PARSHA INSIGHTS

ONCE MORE WITH FEELING

“...And he prayed to G-d...” (13:17)

They say that every *ba'al teshuva* wakes up one day to find that he's “frum-from-birth”. The unbridled, head-long enthusiasm of a new commitment to Judaism; the thrill of rising at four in the morning to immerse in the mikveh and don those mystical black boxes and pray with the holy of the holies; the transcendent feeling of Shabbat — waking up on Sunday morning and thinking it's Monday; the thrill of sitting in the succa; of hearing the otherworldly cry of the shofar, of the light of the Chanuka candles “replacing” the Xmas tree...

Would that it last forever! But sooner or later most *ba'alei teshuva* wake up and find themselves struggling to make the minyan on time and to keep their the latest news out of their thoughts during the *Amida* silent prayer — the same struggles as I assume exist for many of their brethren FFBs.

“...And he prayed to G-d...”

Rashi comments: “*You cannot compare the prayer of a righteous person who had righteous parents to that of a righteous person whose parents were unrighteous.*”

Ostensibly the reverse should be true — the prayers of someone who manages to overcome his background and the negative effects of his upbringing and cultural milieu should be more powerful than those of someone who did not have such challenges.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 39) makes the point, “*Let Ovadia, who dwelt with two evil people (Achav and Izavel) and learned not from their ways, give prophesy about the evil Esav who dwelt with two righteous people (Yitzchak and Rivka) and failed to learn from their ways.*”

The Talmud teaches, “The Old is more difficult that the New.” (Yoma 29a)

When you learn something new, you know you don't

know it and thus you exert yourself to delve deeply and thoroughly into the matter until it is completely clear. However, when something is “Old” — when you've already learned it and you think you know it — in reality the rust of forgetfulness has already begun to obscure the fine points and intricacies. Someone who, despite this, exerts himself to re-learn something he has already learned with the attitude of someone who is approaching the subject for the first time is therefore on a higher level.

Despite growing up in the home of Avraham where the service of G-d was a well-trodden path and “Old”, Yitzchak spared no effort to find his own way in the service of G-d. He took the Old and he made it New. Rivka, on the other hand, grew up amongst evil and depravity. Her righteousness was a reaction to her background — it was New — and thus her prayers were less powerful than those of Yitzchak.

The real challenge of being a *ba'al teshuva* is when the gloss starts to wear off the enthusiasm that was fired by a rejection of the hedonism and superficiality of the secular world.

That's the moment that separates the men from the boys. Are you going to be satisfied to coast along for the rest of your life and just “phone it in”? Or are you going to take that Old *sugya* and make it new and vibrant?

Are you going to sit back on your laurels and watch them wilt?

Or are you going to become a *ba'al teshuva* all over again?

• Sources: Based on Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm in *Michtav M'Eliahu (Vol III, page 124)* as seen in *Lekach Tov*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. G-d 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 onto 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 first-born. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but G-d 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 re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, 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, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

YEVAMOT 51 - 57

Rav would order to give a punishment of lashes to one who nullified a 'get'.

This is one of a list of cases taught in our *sugya* when Rav would punish the offender with lashes since the action was extremely detrimental, even though it was not specifically banned by Torah law. This type of lashes is called "*maccot mardut*" — lashes for rebelling against rabbinical law (and presumably hurt just as much as Torah-mandated lashes!). The case Rav would punish was when a husband nullified a 'get' that he sent with a *shaliach* agent to give to his wife for divorce, but said that it was null and void while the *shaliach* was on his way to give it to his wife. This law is cited in Shulchan Aruch (*Even Ha'Ezer 141:67*) as being so in the case where the husband nullified it in front of two witnesses. The Shulchan Aruch spells out the problem as that it may cause "*mamzerim*" — since the husband succeeded in his nullification of the 'get' although the wife was *unaware* of this and thought she was no longer married when in fact she was still married to her husband. And even if the husband nullified it in a way that was not effective, it is possible that the husband still would deserve lashes since he casted aspersions on the 'get' and also on his wife who is in this case free to remarry once she receives it, although people might think she is acting immorally (see *Tosefot, Pitchei Teshuva*).

• *Yevamot 52a*

Rav Ashi said, "It is when one is neither fully asleep nor fully awake and responds to being called. When asked where he placed something he is unable to recall, but if asked whether he placed it in a particular place he is capable of answering yes or no."

This definition is offered on our *daf* for the term "*mitnamnem*" — today a word that we usually use to refer to someone who is very drowsy and dozing-off to some degree. Our *gemara* teaches that this term can also be a correct meaning for the word in a *beraita* on our *daf* — "*yashen*" — which generally is translated as full-blown sleep. Although one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of *yibum* while fully asleep, the *yavam* nevertheless fulfills the mitzvah if he is in a state not completely asleep, but rather only drowsy in the manner described by Rav Ashi. We find in other places in the Talmud that this state of drowsiness is considered to be sufficiently awake to fulfill other *mitzvot* as well, although this is certainly not the ideal way to fulfill them.

• *Yevamot 54a*

PARSHA Q&A ?

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?"

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

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 angel's 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.

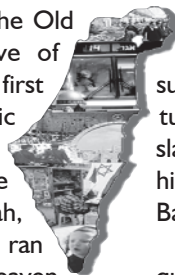
LOVE OF THE LAND

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

THE CAVE OF TZIDKIYAHU

The long tunnel underneath the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, known as the Cave of Tzidkiyahu, recalls the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash and the end of the Davidic dynasty.

As the Babylonian armies carried out the destruction of Jerusalem, the last king of Judah, Tzidkiyahu, fled through a secret tunnel that ran from his palace to the plains of Jericho. But Heaven



had marked him for destruction as well, and a deer was sent to run on top of the tunnel. The enemy soldiers pursued the deer and caught up with it at the other end of the tunnel just as Tzidkiyahu and his sons were exiting. They slaughtered the king's sons before his eyes and then blinded him and carried him off in chains to imprisonment in Babylon.

It is told that it was from this tunnel that stones were quarried for the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT TOLDOT

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

The beginning of this Parsha describes Rivka's pregnancy after a long period of infertility. The Torah relates: "The children agitated within her, and she said, 'if so, why am I thus?'. And she went to inquire of G-d. And G-d said to her: 'Two nations are in your womb; two regimes from your insides will be separated; the might will pass from one regime to the other, and the elder will serve the younger.' When she reached full term, behold, there were twins in her womb. The first one emerged red, entirely like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esav. After that his brother emerged with his hand grasping on to the heel of Esav; so he called his name Yaakov."

Abarbanel explains that contained in this brief narrative is both an insight into the essence of the characters of Yaakov and his brother Esav as well as a prophetic analysis of Jewish history.

According to Abarbanel her inquiry is directed to Avraham, whose enigmatic response hints at four different aspects of the thousands of years of Jewish history to follow:

She is told that she is carrying twins; two separate nations will develop from them, one representing one extreme and the other its opposite. For this reason they struggled and agitated inside her; they could not coexist in one place.

"Two nations" is a reference to the qualitative difference between the two. "Two regimes" is a reference to the fact that they will produce two populous nations when they leave the womb.

These two diametrically opposite and populous nations will be in state of permanent contention. Sometimes one will prevail and sometimes the other.

Unlike the normal situation, here the younger one will dominate the older one. As a result, the older one (Esav) will try to reverse this through natural geopolitical devices, while Yaakov will try to maintain his dominance by invoking the assistance of Divine Providence. Esav's dominance will be physical while

Yaakov's will be through the power of spirituality and intellect. The success of each depends on the failure of the other.

The periods of Yaakov's subservience will not be the result of Esav's strength but rather as a punishment for the nation's transgressions. "When it was that Israel ruled with G-d and was faithful to the Holy One" (Hoshea 12:1) then the older served the younger. When Israel becomes mired in transgressions, "...the earth trembles because of a slave who reigns" (Mishlei 30:21-22). The 'slave' is a reference to Esav.

Esav's redness was an indication of his bloody, violent nature; his hairiness was an indication that his cruelty and other negative characteristics were fully developed and would control his decisions and behavior. Yaakov's physical nature, on the other hand, was entirely subservient to his elevated spiritual level and did not require any specific mention.

Finally Yaakov's grasping Esav's heel hints to several different ideas:

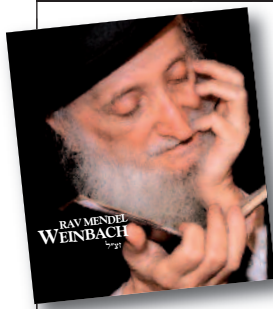
The fate of the two nations would always be intertwined. This relationship began in the womb.

Yaakov grasped onto the ideas and behaviors that Esav trampled under his heel, i.e. moral, ethical and spiritual matters. He attached importance only to the material world. The letter 'yud', which stands for G-d, is added to the word for heel to form the name Yaakov. This is an indication that G-d was always with him.

There would be times when Yaakov and his progeny would be under Esav's heel, i.e. subservient to him. This is especially true in the long years of the exile of the Jewish People.

This is an indication that in the end Yaakov will grasp dominance without any more interruptions. It will come after the dominance of Esav; it will be the end of his reign, just as the heel is at the end of the body. The dominance of Esav will not end until Yaakov rises up and takes it away from him in the Messianic era.

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PERPLEXED IN PRAYER

From: Ben

Dear Rabbi,
I find that often when I daven, rather than having an uplifting experience of holy thoughts, I actually get a flood of distracting mundane thoughts. It's like all of a sudden I remember something I was supposed to do, or somewhere I am supposed to go, or some solution to a problem at work, or any number of things that have nothing to do with my prayer. Do you have any explanations why this is and what I can do about it?

Dear Ben,

Don't get bent out of shape because of this. It's extremely common and there are several reasons.

The first is simply this: Prayer is a great thing and a very important mitzvah. Therefore the yetzer ha'ra is very interested in distracting us, disturbing our prayer and even discouraging us from it. Don't be discouraged by these distractions but rather view them as an indication of just how important prayer is! This should give you the fortitude to repel these thoughts and concentrate more fully on the prayer itself.

Another reason for this dynamic is a lack of preparation.

We are told in the Talmud that the pious of old would actually prepare for prayer a full hour before praying. In this way they were able to clear their minds of mundane matters and prepare themselves properly for the powerful experience that prayer is meant to be. Nowadays, for many reasons, we don't do this, but if you can take at least a few minutes to gather and focus your thoughts beforehand, you'll find it helps a lot.

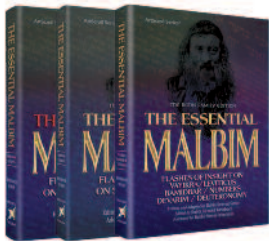
A third reason why this happens is because of the uplifting power of prayer itself. The experience of prayer and its wording unlocks mental and spiritual gates that normally bar us from elevation. As these portals open, expanded awareness initially flows laterally, resulting in what feels like a flood of mundane thoughts. We're usually so occluded that we don't sufficiently consider even these temporal concerns properly. The proof is that they come to us just as we start praying.

But the fortitude and preparation I mentioned earlier should enable a person to harness this opening of the mind in a vertical direction for elevation in prayer. This influx of expanded potential through prayer may be compared to pouring out water from a vessel. If it's poured out on a table, the water flows laterally in all directions; but if it's poured into a glass, the water rises within the walls of the glass. Similarly, as the portals of prayer open and elevated consciousness flows in, it can either run off in all directions or be harnessed to elevate us back to its source!

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THE SHEMONEH ESREI: THE SIXTH BLESSING - PART 2

“Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned accidentally; pardon us, our King, for we have willfully transgressed — for You pardon and forgive.”

What is the reason we mention accidental sins when addressing God as our Father, while, when addressing God as King, we mention willful sins?

Because of the great love a father has for a son, he will look at even willful sins committed against him as though they were accidental. In contrast to this, a king can sometimes treat an accidental sin in the same way as willful transgression, giving both the same punishment.

Alternatively, we can see the change in language as an instruction to one approaching a king for forgiveness. Instead of saying that he only sinned accidentally, he should accept upon himself responsibility as if he transgressed willfully even though the act was done only accidentally. By doing so one can merit a full pardon, which is even greater than being forgiven. When one is forgiven for a wrongdoing, the act still remains, but when one is pardoned it is as if the act was never done.

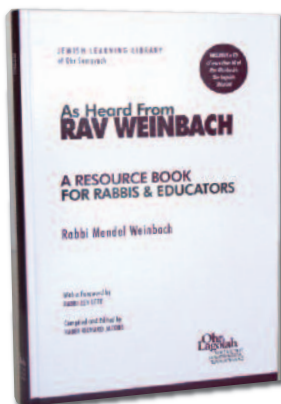
“Blessed are You, G-d, the gracious One Who pardons abundantly.”

According to the simple meaning we mention G-d as being gracious since, strictly speaking, one is not obligated to forgive or pardon. Rather, when one pardons it is an act of goodwill on the part of the wronged party.

The Jewish nation is taught to emulate G-d’s behavior, and since G-d is merciful and forgiving we are also expected to act in a merciful and benevolent manner. It is therefore praiseworthy to always work to find it in one’s heart to forgive. However, in truth, it is not fair or logical to expect or think that someone must forgive him. Rather, the fact that the Torah encourages a person who was wronged to forgive does not take away the obligation from the person being forgiven to recognize that he has received a favor.

Alternatively, it is difficult for humans to forgive someone who hurt them even once. To do so a second or third time would be close to impossible. However, since G-d’s ability to forgive is unlimited, G-d can forgive a person for the same type of act several times (provided that when he asks for forgiveness he is sincere). We thus proclaim that G-d is gracious to us, forgiving and pardoning us over and over without limit.

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Finding the Filched Fowl

Mr. Checker works as a *mashgiach*. It is his job to supervise kosher establishments, to make sure that they are keeping the Jewish dietary laws. As well as keeping an eye on food preparation, he has to pay attention to food deliveries, and notice who comes in and out of the kitchens, to make sure there's nothing untoward going on. It's hard work, and not very well paid. But the only real qualifications required are that the person be an observant and trustworthy Jew, who can be relied upon to ensure that kosher standards are maintained. A *mashgiach* also doesn't even have to be physically present all the time. The Talmud explains that periodic checks are sufficient, as long as the people working at the establishment can't predict when he'll turn up, and are afraid of financial or other penalties for being caught cutting 'kosher' corners.

One day, when Mr. Checker is particularly down in the dumps about his financial situation, wondering where his next rental payment is going to come from, he receives a helping hand from Heaven — a call from a certain Mr. Marrioff whose daughter is getting married the following month. "Mr. Checker," he says, "of course we are having the wedding at a kosher hall, but the in-laws-to-be and I would like to employ you as a private *mashgiach* to keep an eye on things and make sure that everything is up to the highest kosher standards. After all, we want the banquet to be fantastic in every way. We will need you there from when the food starts arriving at 6 pm, until when the party is over at midnight. We will pay you \$300 for those 6 hours — \$50 an hour — which I'm sure you'll agree is very generous." Needless to say, Mr. Checker agrees on the spot, filled with gratitude.

The big day finally arrives. Amidst all the festooning of both venue and participants, Mr. Checker presents himself five minutes early, ready to safeguard the kosher whims of his reverent employers, with his mind firmly on the \$300 prize because his financial situation has meanwhile become even more dire.

The marriage ceremony goes off without any issues to speak of and the happy couple sits down at the head table with family and friends in close attendance to enjoy the meal, thankful and secure in the blissful knowledge that the custom at weddings in Jerusalem is not to have any speeches! The food begins to arrive and all the guests are happy to dig in. After the first round of energetic dancing, the main course is brought to the tables: "Butterflied Poulet Dijon on a Bed of Sorrel en chiffonade, with Aubergine Caviar" reads the far-too-pretentious menu, but no one is particularly put out by not understanding what it means because the cuisine is truly superb (as it should be given how much Pierre les Couque, the French chef, charges for his endeavors). But then the unthinkable happens! The bride's father Mr. Marrioff, upon making the rounds and schmoozing with the feasting guests, notices that two tables

are bare of food. In a panic, he rushes into the kitchen, scouring the scene for the missing food. But it is nowhere to be found, seemingly vanished into thin air, and the unimpressed guests remain with whopping hunger pangs.

After the wedding, the hall manager, a Mr. Evan Trunner, gets wind of proceedings and suggests that they examine the secret closed-circuit camera footage of the happenings in the kitchen to determine the fate of the fowl. The contents of the surveillance footage leave all present dumbfounded. Before their very eyes, on the HD screen, they watch in shock as, at precisely 9 pm, Mr. Checker helps himself to a box of chicken breasts and loads them into his car! They confront him and he breaks down: "I know I have committed a grave sin, but my family doesn't have any food and I just figured one box wouldn't be missed!" He returns the chicken, but needless to say, Mr. Marrioff is livid. Mr. Checker apologizes profusely and begs forgiveness, but to no avail. "Just leave, now!" roars Mr. Marrioff. "Okay," says Mr. Checker, "as soon as you've paid me I'll be on my way and you won't hear from me again." "Pay you?!" cries Mr. Marrioff incredulously. "You are a thief! Hardly a trustworthy *mashgiach*! You don't deserve a penny!" But, as you have no doubt already guessed, it's not quite that simple.

"I admit stealing at 9 pm, but up until then I hadn't stolen anything. I was a kosher and proper *mashgiach*. So I deserve to be paid \$150 for the first half of the night!" claims Mr. Checker. "I had a *chezkat kashrut*!"

What did he mean by this? The phrase "*chezkat kashrut*" refers to the principle in Jewish Law that a person is accorded a presumption of trustworthiness up until a time when he does something to forfeit that presumption. It's a little like "innocent until proven guilty", but in a temporal sense. Given that he enjoyed this state of trustworthiness, we may not assume that he became untrustworthy until we have evidence. And even once we have that evidence, it cannot affect his status at the time before he did anything. That is, in our case, even though we have evidence that Mr. Checker stole, that was only at 9 pm. This cannot tell us anything about pre-9 pm Mr. Checker, who was still accorded the "trustworthy" status. Seemingly, then, he would be justified in claiming the \$150.

This case was brought before one of the most respected rabbis in recent times, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, although obviously the names of the people concerned were a little different. His ruling was not what one might have expected. He awarded Mr. Checker not \$150, but the full \$300. His reasoning: Even after 9 pm, when Mr. Checker had lost his trustworthy status, the staff in the kitchen had no idea of his crime. Thus, his presence in the kitchen between 9 pm and midnight was an effective deterrent to anyone who might have been contemplating any stealthy chicanery. The purpose of a *mashgiach* had been served and he deserved to be paid in full.