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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Spell of the Older Brother

“The children agitated within her...” (25:22)

One of my daughters just started her Master’s degree at the best university in Israel for her particular subject. Almost all the other students are Tzfon Bonim from Tel Aviv and Hod HaSharon. She is the only *charedi* woman there. Every week they have a group lunch, when one of the members brings food for everyone else. Now, some of them are vegetarians, some are vegans, one of the girls has a rule that no plastic can touch her food – and, of course, no white sugar. It’s a different world completely. The guidance counselor who is there to help her “navigate” is an Orthodox man who wears a knitted *kippa*. He brought the first lunch. He told her not to worry about the *kashrut* – everything was “Rubin.” But she still felt uncomfortable. She joined in the meal with them, but, somehow, she felt she hadn’t been careful enough. She hadn’t drawn the line strongly enough.

The next week when each of them had to speak to the class, she got up and said, “I am *charedi*. I have four children, *bli ayn hara*” (which makes her less useful because she will have less extra-mural time for research). She said, “I am married to an *avreich* who immerses himself in Torah night and day, and I have no interest in changing who I am.” She said, “I am different from you. I respect you. I respect what you have to teach me here, but I have no interest in becoming like you. And if I do become like you, then we will both have lost, because I treasure my *Yiddishkeit* – and you need skilled *charedi* women professionals in this particular field.” She spoke about her parents. About her father who had given up a successful career in the music business to learn in Yeshiva, who found his way to Torah by reading a book called *Mesillat Yesharim*.

After she had finished speaking, a young girl came over to her, wearing tight jeans and whose tousled blonde hair made her look like a depressed Barbie doll. She wanted to speak to my daughter. She was interested and respectful. She said, “Please tell me more about your parents.”

People will always respect you if you make your position clear in a respectful manner, and stick to it – much more than if you try to gloss over the differences and blend in and be cool. That’s not to minimize the challenge. It’s still very difficult on a daily basis not to be influenced by people who are very nice but opposed to almost everything you believe in. It’s like entering a toxic environment, but here your radiation suit and mask is your *yirat Shamayim*. My daughter says she’s now extra careful about *tzniyut* (modesty). The way she might dress to take the children to play in the park is not the way she would dress for work. Unlike before, when she barely had time to *daven*, now she has a long bus journey and she prays all of *Shacharit*. She always says *bircat hamzon* with an open *Siddur*, in full view of the class. And she reminds herself that she is an ambassador for the “Torah world.”

The modern Israel is relatively young, and, yet, the age-old strife between religious and secular sectors seems to continue unabated. In a sense it appears that both the ideology of Esav and the ideology of Yaakov exist “together” nowadays. The struggle in the womb of the two twins symbolizes the future struggle of two world views. Our Sages teach (Megilla 6a) that the two will never dominate simultaneously. When one falls, the other rises. However, ultimately the older will serve the younger, and then we will welcome our brothers and sisters who have so long fallen under the spell of the older brother.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Toldot: Nidah 30-36

A Spiritual Sonogram

Rabbi Simlai taught, “What is a fetus in its mother’s womb like? Its two hands rest on its two temples and its head is between its knees. Its mouth is closed and its navel is open, and it eats from what its mother eats. And a lamp above its head gives light by which it sees from one end of the world to the other. And it is taught the entire Torah. Upon birth, an angel slaps it on the mouth, which results in its forgetting the entire Torah...”

What a vivid and fascinating depiction of a child who is being prepared to enter this world! In this description we see many ideas, in particular two fundamental ideas that define the essence of a person. “Its two hands rest on its two temples and its head is between its knees.”

One idea is that a person is a thinker. A person is brought into this world to look around, learn and ponder the nature of existence and the purpose of his life in this world. This can be seen from the “pose” of a person from the earliest time of his formation. I once heard from Rav Moshe Shapiro, *zatzal*, that the description in our *gemara* is one of “a thinker.” He referenced one of the most well-known sculptures in the world, by the French artist Rodin, called “The Thinker.” A person doesn’t just develop into becoming “a thinker,” but rather is a thinker by his fundamental nature.

Another important idea learned from Rabbi Simlai’s statement is the inherent connection of a person to the Torah. A person is taught the entire Torah before he is born into this world. Many commentaries ask why he is prenatally taught the Torah since anyway he forgets it when tapped by an angel on his mouth at the time of birth. There are many answers to this question found in the teachings of our great Torah scholars.

One answer is based on the fact that the Torah’s Divine wisdom is beyond the reach of normal human intellect. According to the natural order, it should be as unattainable as flight is for fish. Therefore, a person receives a prenatal introduction to the Torah, which makes it possible to connect to Hashem’s Torah in this world.

These prenatal Torah lessons, however, pose a dilemma: If a person is born with complete knowledge of the Torah, he is no longer faced with the challenge to actually learn it – a challenge that requires each person to be immersed in Torah study. The Divine solution is to expose us to Torah before birth, and subsequently forget it, which results in our Torah study in this world to be a type of “*déjà vu* adventure.” In this manner a person is able to earn great reward for his Torah study and his personal connection to the Torah. (For further study see Bnei Yisaschar, Kol Eliyahu, and the Alshich’s commentary.)

I had the merit to learn from Rav Mendel Weinbach, *zatzal*, a fascinating idea that connects our prenatal Torah study to our ongoing study of Torah in this world. He suggested that when we pray to Hashem in the Amidah prayer to “return us to Your Torah,” we are making reference to the fact that we have already learned Torah in our past – before we were born – and all that we need to do now is to *return* to that Torah.

(Parenthetically, and tongue-in-cheek, one who learns and looks at “Rabbi Simlai’s sonogram” almost certainly recalls the quip that a person’s philtrum – the indentation atop his upper lip – might be in some way related to the slap received from the angel at the time of birth. Speaking of “parenthetically,” a friend recently told me of a study of fetal REM activity. Being an indicator of brain activity, such as thinking, it was expected to be relatively low prior to birth, but was, in fact, much higher than expected and begged explanation.)

▪ Nidah 30b

Questions

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring *two* kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot?"

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

Answers

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made."
5. 25:26 G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the *akeida* he had attained the status of a *korban* and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 26:15 - They felt that marauders would attack to capture the wells, or, if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angels tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the *akeida*; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a *korban Pesach*.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of *Gan Eden*.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

Rise and Shine

David from Australia wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have a question that has practical implications. We were sitting in a restaurant and some older people walked in, saying they had a booking. The restaurant management confused the booking, and, it turned out that there was no space for them to be seated. They were angry that we, as the younger generation, did not show "derech eretz" (good manners – Ed.) by getting up for them and offering our table. We were surprised at this, and my question is: Is there an obligation to get up for older people in a commercial setting where we are paying customers like all other customers? What is the teaching of Judaism in this case, and would there be a difference between this and a bus scenario?

Dear David,

First of all, let's not confuse "old" with "sick." The Torah teaches us to honor the elderly even if they are healthy, and to help sick people even if they are young. So, in order not to confuse these issues, let's assume we are talking about healthy 70 year olds who need no physical assistance. Assuming this, you were not obligated to give up your table. Depending on the situation, however, it may have been a good thing to do.

The Torah says, "Rise before an old person, and honor the presence of a sage." The Shulchan Aruch defines "old" as age 70. If a 70 year old person walks by, you must stand. This is not in order to offer him your seat, but rather as a way of showing honor by recognizing his presence.

The obligation to show honor is not limited to standing up, but can also involve giving your seat, helping with a package, or otherwise offering assistance. However, one is not required to incur a financial loss as a result. Since there is a definite monetary value in having a seat in a restaurant, you were therefore not required to offer your seat. Although the same argument can be made for a bus seat, as you have paid for the right to sit there (again, assuming the older people are physically able to stand in relative comfort), nevertheless one should stand for an elderly person on a bus or subway.

That having been said, keep in mind that "*derech eretz kadma l'Torah*" – good manners and character traits are a prerequisite to observing the Torah. Depending on the situation, simple etiquette and common sense may require you to stand. This is especially true if you wear a *yarmulke*, because people tend to generalize about others based on their dress. Therefore, when you wear a *yarmulke* you are "Judaism's ambassador" and must therefore keep to a higher standard than the letter of the law requires.

In the case of a restaurant booking, I don't think this applies, as it is normal to be seated on a reservation or "first come first served" basis and one is not expected to relinquish his seat for another. In a pizza shop, or other informal setting where people "eat and run," you should give up your seat.

- Sources: *Leviticus 19:32*; *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 244:1*

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WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Smooth Sliding and Glad Gliding

When Rivka told Yaakov that he should present himself as Esav in order to receive the coveted blessings from Yitzchak, Yaakov protested that Esav was hairy, whereas his own skin was smooth and silky. Yaakov was scared that Yitzchak might feel him and realize that he was not Esav. In this context (Gen. 27:11), Yaakov described his skin as *chalak* (“smooth”). To alleviate his concern, Rivka used furry goat skin to cover Yaakov’s arms and the smooth part (*chelkat*) of his neck (Gen. 27:16). In this essay we will discuss the meaning of the words *chalak* and *shiiya*.

As stated above, the word *chalak* refers to something smooth. It can also denote something slippery, as well as the very act of slipping. (Along these lines, in Rabbinic Hebrew, a *chaluk* is a plain, smooth garment with no frills.)

In the context of Yaakov’s skin, the Targumim translate the Hebrew *chalak* into the Aramaic word *shiiya*, whose root is SHIN-AYIN-(AYIN). This suggests that *chalak* and *shiiya* mean the same thing in different languages, with the former being Hebrew and the latter Aramaic.

However, in his work *Tirgem Avraham*, the Vilna Gaon’s son Rabbi Avraham Vilner (1765-1808) demonstrates that *shiiya* is found in Hebrew as well. An instance of a Hebrew *shiiya*-cognate in the Bible is found in Yechezkel’s metaphor comparing G-d’s redemption of the Jews from Egypt to a benevolent stranger taking in a baby girl. In describing the baby’s initial abandonment, Yechezkel says, “You were not washed with water for *mishi* (“smoothness”)” (Ezek. 16:4). *Mishi* shares its SHIN-AYIN root and meaning with *shiiya*. Radak (in his commentary there and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) explains that *mishi* means “smoothness,” as bathing in water causes one’s skin to become smooth. Rabbi Avraham Vilner cites this passage to prove that the SHIN-AYIN root in the sense of “smooth” is not unique to Aramaic, but also exists in Hebrew.

So, now we have two Hebrew words for “smooth: the classic term *chalak*, and the more obscure term *shiiya*. What is the difference between them?

The answer lies in a close analysis of the injunction to not wear *shaatnez* (Lev. 19:19, Deut. 22:11), which is clothing made from a mixture of wool and linen. The Mishna (*Kilayim* 9:8) clarifies that the word *shaatnez* is a contraction of the phrase *shua* (“smoothed”), *tavui* (“spun”), and *nuz* (“woven” or “twisted”), and alludes to the fact that this prohibition applies only to fabric made of wool and linen via these three processes.

The crux of our discussion hinges on precisely defining the term *shua*, which Rashi (to *Yevamot* 5b) explains is a cognate of *shiiya*. In this context Rashi defines *shua* as “combing smooth.” Rashi maintains the prohibition of *shaatnez* applies only if wool and linen fibers were combed smooth together. According to Rashi, a fabric is *shaatnez* only if the wool and linen were combined from the earliest stages of processing, combing them smooth in preparing the fibers to be spun into thread. Even if wool and linen were mixed at a later stage, the resulting thread/fabric/garment would not be *shaatnez*.

However, there are opinions cited in *Tosafot* maintaining that even if wool and linen were processed separately but were later attached, the mixture is considered *shaatnez*. One practical ramification of this dispute is whether felt made of wool and linen is prohibited. Felt is made by pressing various fibers together into one textile. According to Rashi the resultant textile is *not* considered *shaatnez* since the wool and linen were not combed smooth together, whereas according to these Tosafists it is considered *shaatnez* because wool and linen were attached.

The Tosafists’ difference of opinion with Rashi stems from an alternate definition of “*shua*.” Clearly, *shua* is a cognate of *shiiya*, and thus means “to make smooth.” But

how is the thing in question made smooth? Rashi understands that, by definition, *shua* means “making an (individual) item smooth.” In the context of fabric production, fibers are made smooth by being combed. Thus, in the context of the Mishna, Rashi understands *shua* to mean “combed smooth.” On the other hand, the Tosafists understand that, by definition, *shua* means “the smoothness that results from attaching multiple things.” In the context of the above-mentioned Mishna, the Tosafists understand *shua* to mean “squishing together smoothly.” According to Tosafot, felt is a prime example of “*shua*,” and thus felt made of wool and linen would certainly be *shaatnez*.

From where can we derive this definition of *shua*?

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) points to Maimonides’ commentary to said Mishna, which defines the word *shua* by citing the Targum to a different verse. The Torah commands that if the stones of one’s home are afflicted with *tzaraat*, then one should remove the affected stones, replace them with other stones, and bring new mortar “and plaster the house” (Lev. 14:42). The verb for plastering in Hebrew is *ve’tach*, which Targum Onkelos there translates into *ve’yeshua*. This is the Targum that Maimonides points to in order to define the word *shua* in the Mishna. Now, in that context, *shua*’s primary meaning is not “making smooth” but rather “applying plaster.” In other words, if *shua*’s entire meaning is “making smooth” (as Rashi explains), then it makes no sense in this context. The only way to explain *shua* is that it also means “attaching,” with the implication of thereby making smooth. In the context of plastering a wall, the wall is made smooth by having plaster attached to it (and vice versa, the plaster is smoothed over the wall).

Rabbi Mecklenburg notes that another cognate, *sha* (spelled SHIN-AYIN), means “closing one’s eyes” (Isa. 6:10, 32:3). When one closes his eyes it appears as though he is attaching the upper eye lid to the lower eyelid. This supports his point that *shua* also means attachment.

If we return to our original discussion of *chalak* versus *shiiya*, we can now say that the two words are not one-hundred percent synonymous. In light of Rabbi Mecklenburg’s explanation, *chalak* is simply an adjective meaning “smooth,” while *shiiya/shua* refers to daubing or pasting material onto another material, which incidentally entails *smoothing* out the surface.

Rabbi Mecklenburg also writes that the SHIN-AYIN root serves as the core of the word *sha’ashua* (“delight,” “enjoyment”). He explains the connection by noting that feeling something smooth is an enjoyable sensory experience. Thus, the root meaning “smooth” is borrowed to refer to anything “enjoyable.” (In contrast to the other commentators mentioned above, Menachem ibn Saruk and Rashi explain that *mishi* is related to *sha’ashua*, and in the context of Yechezkel’s prophecy refers to bathing for fun.)

The Yiddish/German word for *chalak* is *glatt*. That term is most famously used to refer to the halachic stringency that requires an animal’s lungs to be smooth and free of bumps. *Glatt* meat thus refers to the meat of an animal which meets these requirements. *Glatt* (“smooth”) is also a cognate of the Yiddish/German *gleiten/glitchen*, a relative of the English word *glide*. The relationship between smooth and glide is obvious: one can easily *glide* on a *smooth* surface.

Glitchen has found its way into some other familiar words, such as (according to some linguists) the English word *glitch* (a “malfunction” or “slip up”). Etymologists even trace the English word *glad* (“joy” or “happiness”, i.e. the feeling one has when life is sailing along smoothly) to this Germanic root.

In Modern Hebrew the act of surfing, skiing or sliding down a slide in a children’s playground is *glisha*, which is also derived from *glatt/glitch* (since Hebrew does not have the *itch*-sound, it morphs into a *sh*-sound, such that *glitch* becomes *glish*).

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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 on to Esav's heel. They grow, and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah, developing his soul.

On the day of their grandfather Avraham's funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of firstborn.

A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but 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, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he could find a suitable wife.

LOVE OF THE LAND

The Arizal and the Brit Milah

The famous leader of the kabbalists in Tsefat, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (Adoneinu Rav Yitzchak), came to that city after living for years in Egypt. He is also known, with dearness and awe, as "The Arizal."

Tradition has it, however, that he was actually born in Jerusalem, to extremely righteous parents. The Prophet Eliyahu told his father that he should not allow the *brit milah* of his son to take place until he appeared to him in the synagogue. When the time of the *brit* arrived, Eliyahu had still not appeared. No one among the assembled guests understood the reason for the delay, since the *mohel*, the father and the baby were all there. The father ignored the mounting cries to start the *brit* – until Eliyahu finally arrived.

The prophet, who traditionally arrives at every *brit* in invisible form, was this time seen taking the baby in his arms and informing his father that he should take special care of his son, for he would be a light to all Israel and the entire world.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Exile and Envy

Yitzchak is instructed to remain in the land of Canaan, and he dwells in Gerar. After the trial with Avimelech – bearing striking resemblance to his parents’ ordeal with Avimelech – he settles in the land and becomes fabulously wealthy.

Avraham also had vast wealth, but something changes for Yitzchak. So many of the circumstances are eerily familiar – he dwells in the same land, reclaims his wife from the same local king and re-digs the same wells. But *his* experience, or rather the experience *of him*, is different. Avraham was known by his neighbors as “a prince of G-d among us,” and is treated with utmost respect. But now, the Philistines are envious of Yitzchak, and they chase him away on account of their envy.

The change marks the beginning of exile. The prophecy to Avraham that “*your offspring will be strangers*” begins with Yitzchak. The status of Avraham’s family will yet decline further in the lifetime of Yaakov, who was swindled and violated by those around him and described himself as a servant of his gentile brother.

Here, the lives of the three patriarchs tell more than their individual stories. They represent historical archetypes of the position of Jewry in the world throughout its exile. There are three distinct positions to be assumed by the House of Avraham as strangers in the midst of the nations: as servants, as great figures but objects of envy, and as honored noblemen. In each of these three turns of

destiny, the Divine covenant has protected and will continue to protect the Jewish People. As G-d promised, He remembers “My ‘covenant Yaakov’ and also My ‘covenant Yitzchak’ and also My ‘covenant Avraham.’” (Vayikra 26:42)

History has and will continue to unfold from the Yaakov position to the Yitzchak position, and ultimately to the Avraham position. The years of trial and servitude, poverty and persecution, will define Jewish destiny for many long centuries. But when the years of suffering and blood will have transformed the Jewish heart, the Jew will no longer be an object of hatred. Instead he will become a light unto the nations.

But on the way from servant to nobleman, from object of hate to prince among us, the nation will pass through the Yitzchak position – the object of envy. In the midst of growing prosperity, living among nations wavering between humaneness and envy, the Jew will be challenged to preserve his unique character, just as Yitzchak did. This test is not the test of keeping our chin up in the face of unrelenting blows, but the test of walking free and independent, undeterred by envy and with the courage to remain different.

Only then can we look forward to the last stage of exile, a state in which we will win the respect and recognition of the nations, not *although* we are Jews, but *because* we are Jews. Like Avraham, we will then walk with pride among the nations.

▪ Source: Commentary, Genesis 26:15

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