

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### A Lover of the Land

*“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham: Avraham begot Yitzchak...” (25:19)*

It is difficult to speak of someone as great as Rabbi Mendel Weinbach זת"ל. Together with his life-long partner Rabbi Nota Schiller (lblch"t), Rabbi Weinbach created an institution that brought thousands of Jews back to Torah. I had the privilege to work for him for more than twenty years and I would like to highlight just one of his many talents. Ohr Somayach has been the gold standard in Jewish education. One of the reasons for this has been the tremendous diversity in the faculty, from world-class *talmidei chachamim* and leaders of their generation in Jewish thought to professors of philosophy and linguistics and media and communication experts.

To take such a diverse mix of talented people and keep them performing as a team is no mean feat. Rabbi Weinbach knew how to get the best out of everyone. And I think one of the reasons was his humility and his self-confidence. Many bosses follow the principle of divide-and-rule. This betrays insecurity. Rabbi Weinbach was always happy that someone could do something better than him. As my father a"h used to say, "You don't buy a dog and bark yourself." If you're hiring the "dream team"—let them excel!

Rabbi Weinbach once published a book (among his many) on the mitzvah to love Eretz Yisrael. It was a combination of sayings from our Sages about places in the Land of Israel, together with photographs of

those places. The writing was Rabbi Weinbach's, but the photographs were from stock sources. At the time, I was working on a black-and-white art photography book with many photographs of Eretz Yisrael. When he showed me the book, I was disappointed by the stock color photographs. Some were a bit fuzzy. Not being the most diplomatic of people, I impertinently pointed this out to him. He just smiled and shrugged his shoulders. As far as I could tell, he wasn't insulted or hurt in the least.

*“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham: Avraham begot Yitzchak...”*

Why does the Torah repeat that "Avraham begot Yitzchak" if it already wrote "Yitzchak son of Avraham?"

The primary characteristic of Avraham was kindness, and that of Yitzchak was strength. The emphasis in the verse here is to teach us that kindness and strength must always go hand in hand. Kindness without strength can lead to indulgence and excess. Strength without kindness can lead to intolerance and insensitivity. Happy were those who worked for someone who combined those two qualities with a smile that seemed etched in his face! The eighth *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Chona Menachem Mendel Weinbach זת"ל will be on the 27th of Kislev.

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## *Pesachim 2-8*

### Bye, Bye, Chametz

*Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, "One who checks (for chametz), also needs to nullify (chametz)."*

The “checking” that Rav Yehuda refers to in the *gemara* (on *daf vav*) is taught in connection with the first *mishna* of our new *masechta*, which teaches the mitzvah of *bedikat chametz*: “On the night of the 14th of Nissan, one checks for chametz by the light of a lamp.”

What is the reason for this mitzvah to check for chametz, also known as *bedikat chametz*? Let’s have a look at a few relevant laws of chametz and Pesach. First of all, there are prohibitions against eating or deriving benefit from chametz on Pesach. As the Rambam states, “On Pesach it is forbidden to have any benefit from chametz, as is stated in Shemot 13:3: ‘Do not eat chametz.’” (This verse not only prohibits eating chametz but also prohibits deriving benefit from it on Pesach.)

In addition, there are two prohibitions against the mere ownership of chametz on Pesach. “No chametz may be found in your homes” (Shemot 12:19). “No chametz may be seen in all your territory” (Shemot 13:7).

So, why does our *mishna* insist that *bedikat chametz* be done? Rashi explains that *bedikat chametz* is required in order to not transgress the Torah prohibitions against owning chametz on Pesach. By checking for chametz and destroying it before Pesach (or selling it to a non-Jew or giving it to a non-Jewish neighbor, as I recall doing as a youngster), a Jew will not possess chametz on Pesach. (*Rashi*)

Tosefot questions this reason based on the teaching of Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav, that even if one does *bedikat chametz* he must still *mevatel* and nullify it. If the purpose of the *bedika* is as Rashi claims – to not transgress the prohibitions against

chametz ownership on Pesach – why is *bedika* also needed? Once a person does *bitul*, nullifying his chametz, he no longer owns chametz and therefore does not transgress. The *gemara* clearly states that according to the Torah, even *bitul b’lev* – “nullifying the chametz in one’s heart” – suffices for avoiding the Torah prohibitions of not owning chametz on Pesach. Due to this question, Tosefot argues that although the required *bitul* is indeed enough to fulfill Torah law, the Rabbis enacted a stringency to also do *bedika* so that one will certainly be chametz-free and not mistakenly eat chametz on Pesach.

One defense offered for Rashi’s explanation is that he is explaining the reason for *bedika* at the time of the *mishna* and according to the basic Torah requirement. *bedika* would suffice. Only later was there an additional decree added, the reason for which is explained in the *gemara* on 6b and by Rashi there. (*Rabbeinu Nissim*)

There is much more discussion in the Rishonim and Achronim surrounding the mechanism of *bitul chametz* and the nature of the dispute between Rashi and Tosefot. Pursuit of further study of this subject makes for fascinating Torah study on a quite practical issue and is placed highly on this author’s “Recommended Reading List.”

And, in addition to the Torah’s prohibitions against owning, eating and benefiting from chametz on Pesach, there are numerous additional Torah mitzvahs related to Pesach, such as eating matzah, eating marror (bitter herbs), telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt (Hagaddah), bringing and eating a *korban* Pesach at the time of the Beit Hamikdash, and more. In fact, there is even a mitzvah to not

break a bone of the *korban* Pesach while eating it. “And you will not break any of its (the *korban* Pesach’s) bones.” (Shemot 12:46)

This mitzvah has been explained in many rational ways, such as the notion that princes, unlike animals, eat with dignity, and that we should take special care to behave as royalty on the night of the Pesach Seder, not eating in an undignified manner and breaking bones of the food. (*Sefer HaChinuch* 16)

I would feel remiss in not citing an important life-lesson that the *Sefer HaChinuch* adds in noting the extraordinary abundance of “Pesach mitzvahs.” He

explains that it is human nature that “a person is affected according to his actions.” Pesach is not just another holiday, but rather a time to reflect on our nation’s past, present and future eternal destiny. Pesach represents this all. The greater the number of mitzvahs that we do and the greater the number of prohibitions that we refrain from on Pesach serve to help shape us into the type of individuals and the nation that Hashem wants us to be.

• *Pesachim* 2a

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**A**fter 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.

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## TOLDOT

### 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 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 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.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Toldot: Boys and Girls (Part 2)

Last week, we began our discussion of different Hebrew words for “boys” and “girls” with a discourse on the meaning of the term *naar/naarah*, as well as why the Torah referred to Rebecca as both a *naarah* and an *almah*. In this week’s essay we continue that discussion to explore the etymology of those words, tracing them back to their two-letter roots to help shed light on their core meanings. Then, we will discuss other words for “boy” and “girl” like *yeled/yaldah*, plus some Aramaic counterparts to the words we’ve been talking about.

As is his way, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Brelsau (1740-1814) traces the words in question to their two-letter etymological roots and uses that information to shed light on their primary meaning. This approach is quite useful in showing us how apparent synonyms actually differ from each other because it digs into the core meanings of those words.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces *naar/naarah* to its biliteral root AYIN-REISH, “revealing.” For example, when Rebecca “poured (*vate’ar*) her jug” (Gen. 24:20), the act of pouring out liquid from a container essentially serves to *reveal* the bottom of said container; thus that verb is derived from this two-letter root. Other words derived from this root include *ohr* (“skin”, the part of one’s body which is *revealed* to the outside), *ervah* (“nakedness”, when a person’s body is *revealed*), *taar* (“razor”, a blade used for cutting hair and *revealing* the skin underneath), and *ar* (an “enemy” who *reveals* his enmity outwardly). The word *eir* (“awake”) is also derived from this root because when one sleeps, his or her abilities are not readily apparent, but when they awaken, those abilities are suddenly *revealed*. Building on this last example, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *naar/naarah* denotes a stage in an adolescent’s maturation when their

potential suddenly *reveals* itself, as if they just woke up from the slumber of childhood. (Rabbi Pappenheim also writes that sometimes this word denotes the youthful irresponsibility of one who “shakes off” (*l’na’er*) his or her obligations.)

When it comes to the word *elem/almah*, Rabbi Pappenheim finds that its etymological root is the biliteral AYIN-LAMMED, which means “on top.” The most common word derived from this root is *al* (“on”) – conjugations of which appear in the Bible close to some 6000 times! A whole slew of other words also come from AYIN-LAMMED, including *elyon* (“high”), *l’maaleh* (“up”), *oleh* (“elevate”), *aleh* (“leaf” which grows *on* a branch), *ohl* (“yoke” which is placed *on* an animal), *meil* (“tunic” which is worn *on* top of other clothing), *na’al* (“shoe” which is worn *on* top of the foot), and more. For our purposes, the most relevant words are *olel* and *elem*. The word *olel* (“toddler”) denotes the age at which a child has already been weaned from his mother’s milk and now “gets up” on his own to find/ask for food. The *olel* experiences a growth spurt throughout his childhood years, until he becomes an *elem*, at which stage he has grown “up” to nearly his maximum.

On the surface, Rabbi Pappenheim’s explanations of *naar* and *elem* seem to refer to the exact same stage in life. In fact, Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach and Radak (in their respective works entitled *Sefer HaShorashim*) explicitly write that *naarah* and *almah* mean the same thing. Nevertheless, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) offers a synopsis of Rabbi Pappenheim’s explanations, which accentuates the difference between *naar* and *elem*. He admits that according to Rabbi Pappenheim both terms refer to the same stage of life, but that *elem* focuses on the manifestation of physical

maturity, while *naar* focuses on the development of intellectual/spiritual maturity.

Segueing to the word *yeled/yaldah*, Rabbi Pappenheim writes that this is a general term for “child,” and does not necessarily denote a specific age. In fact, Yishmael is still called a *yeled* at the age of sixteen (Gen. 21:15-16), and when the Mishna (*Erachin* 4:4) uses the term *yeled*, Rashi (to *Erachin* 18b) explains that it refers to anybody between the ages of twenty and sixty (as opposed to *zaken*, who is someone over sixty).

*Midrash Tadshe* (ch. 6) lists six stages in a person’s life: *yeled*, *naar*, *roveh*, *elem*, *ish*, *sav*, and *zaken*. Unlike what we have seen earlier, this source places *elem* after *naar*, and adds the stage of *roveh* between the two. In terms of our discussion, we see from this Midrash that *yeled* connotes the earliest stage of a person’s life. (Interestingly, Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir (1659-1729) cites anonymous “sages of astrology” who explain that *yeled* refers to a boy between the ages of 2-5, *naar* is between 5-8, and *bachur* is between 8-18.)

When Reuben tried to convince his brothers not to harm Joseph, he called Joseph a *yeled* (Gen. 44:22). Rabbi Meir Simcha of Divnsk (1843-1926) explains that Reuben specifically used that term, as descriptive of a seventeen-year old Joseph, in order to highlight the fact that Joseph had not yet reached the age of twenty and was thus not yet liable to be punished in the Divine Court.

As simple as it seems, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *yeled* to the two-letter root LAMMED-DALET, which refers to “birth.” Hence, *yalad/yaldah* is the verb for the act of “giving birth,” *toldot* refer to the “results” of birth, *valad* is the “womb” from whence birth begins, and *yeled/yaldah* is any “child” who is born.

In Aramaic, there are another two sets of words that refer to “boys and girls.” It is a complicated discussion as to exactly how they correspond to the various Hebrew words we have encountered so far, and so I will just point out some of the difficulties. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky (1891-1986) already

noted some of the Targumic inconsistencies we will raise, but his resolution lies beyond the scope of this essay.

The word *roveh/revva/ravya* (“boy”) is the standard Aramaic translation of *yeled* in Targum Onkelos (e.g., see Gen. 21:8, 21:16, Ex. 2:6, see also *Succah* 5b). The feminine counterpart to this word is *rivah/riviysa*, which means “girl” (see Rashi to *Sanhedrin* 58b). Interestingly enough, in the one place that the Hebrew word *yaldah* appears in the Pentateuch (Gen. 34:4), Targum Onkelos translates that word as *ulemta* (the Aramaic form of *almah*), rather than *rivah*.

To make things even more complicated, *ulemta* and its masculine counterpart, *ulema*, are the words Onkelos typically uses as translations for *naarah* and *naar*, respectively (although there are exceptions like Gen. 37:2, Num. 30:17, Ruth 2:5-6, when Onkelos translates *naar* as *ravya*). Rashi (to *Shabbat* 127b, *Kesuvot* 62b, and *Sanhedrin* 109b) also translates *rivah/riviysa* as *naarah*.

Finally, Targum also uses cognates of *revi/ravya* as Aramaic renderings of the Hebrew *bachur* (Ruth 3:10, Lam. 5:13), but also uses the word *ulema* for *bachur* (Ecc. 11:9). Rashi (to *Sotah* 26a) throws a wrench into this discussion by defining *roveh* as *bachur* and *yeled*!

In some places, Targum gives the Aramaic word for *yeled* and *naar* as *tali/talya* (its female counterpart is *talya/talyasa*, see *Megillah* 5b and *Dikdukei Sofrim* to *Yevamot* 114a). Indeed, Rashi (to *Megillah* 5b) also defines *tali* as *naar*. Interestingly, the Rashbatz and Bartenura (to *Avot* 1:10) write that the name of the early Sage Avtalyon alludes to that Sage’s role as the head of the Sanhedrin, as the Talmud (*Gittin* 36a) says that the court functions as the “father of orphans,” and the name Avtalyon can be read as a portmanteau of *av* (“father of”) and *talyon* (“children”).

Although I have not found any sources that explicitly deal with the origins of these Aramaic pairs of words for “boy” and “girl,” I think that their etymologies are straightforward. Firstly, the

words *ravya*, *reva*, and their various cognates, are clearly derived from the two-letter root REISH-BET, which means “to grow” in Aramaic (e.g., see Targum to Gen. 25:27). This refers to “boys” and “girls” as people who are still “growing.” Secondly, the words *talya*, *talyasa*, and their various cognates

seem to be related to the Biblical Hebrew word *tleh* (“young goat”). Just like the English word *kid* refers to both “young goats” and “young children” (ostensibly because they both run around wildly), so does the Aramaic term carry both of those meanings.

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### RISE & CHOOSE TO SHINE

#### THE “BATHROOM BLESSING” – FROM THE MUNDANE TO THE SUBLIME

*“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who fashioned man with wisdom and created within him many openings and many cavities. It is absolutely clear and known before Your Throne of Glory that if but one of them were to be ruptured or but one of them were to be blocked, it would be impossible to survive and to stand before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who heals all flesh and acts wondrously.”*

There really is no more mundane action than going to the bathroom. It is a vital component to our physical wellbeing but it certainly does not seem to have any kind of spiritual dimension to it. And yet, on leaving the bathroom we are supposed to wash our hands and recite a blessing. One of the many beauties of Judaism is that there is no action that we do that does not have some kind of a spiritual connotation to it. Even after performing the most banal act of all, we utilize the moment to recognize to Whom our health belongs.

In truth, the meaning behind the blessing and the necessity to recite it is really quite self-evident. Despite that, I would conjecture that many of us imagine that the human body is just *supposed* to function properly. That it is some kind of automatic process that requires little input from our side. We wake up in the morning and simply expect our organs and limbs to do what they are designed to do. But, at heart (pun intended) we all know the reality. The human body is a delicate and complex tapestry, and there really is no overwhelmingly logical reason why it should function perfectly. As one of my

students once quipped, anything labeled as “worry-free” is normally something that needs to be worried about! And that is exactly what the text of this blessing is imparting to us.

How are we to combat the inclination to take our bodily functions for granted? By reciting a blessing after having been to the bathroom. Yes, even going to the bathroom can be a vehicle to a heightened awareness of G-d’s continuous involvement in our lives. Our blessing reiterates what we already know – that each person’s survival in this world requires Divine involvement.

Many years ago, one of my students had an emergency appendicitis in the middle of the academic year. With G-d’s help the doctors operated and took out the septic appendix just in time, and she made a complete and speedy recovery. At the end of the year she gave a little speech to all of her fellow students and the faculty. Her message was very simple. From now on she would be sure to recite the blessing on leaving the bathroom carefully and with intent. Not just rattle it off unthinkingly. Definitely a beautiful lesson for us all and one that we should

take to heart. But then she added a line that spoke to every single one of us personally. She said, “Don’t wait for something to go wrong with your body to appreciate what you have!”

Even today, more than two decades later, those words reverberate in my mind. It is such a simple and

obvious message. And, yet, it is a message that we can overlook so easily, without even trying. But, armed with the knowledge that we are expected to recite a blessing after each visit to the bathroom, we have been given a powerful and effective means of remembering that the health and the functionality of our bodies is *always* dependent on G-d.

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## LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

### Qualifying for a Blessing

**A**mong the many questions that the story of the blessings of Yaakov and Eisav evoke is the question of why Yitzchak saw fit to request of his son to prepare him a tasty meal before he would bless him. It would be strange indeed if the implication were that a tasty roast would send his soul into a rapture from which the blessing would flow! What could have been Yitzchak’s motive in making this request as a prerequisite for blessing?

The text provides a clue. Yitzchak asks not for a meal in order *that I should bless you*. Rather, he requests of Eisav to prepare this meal so that *my soul* may bless you. Such an expression is not to be found in any comparable blessing. Blessings are bestowed by the entire person, not by a specially emphasized part of the person, such as the soul.

Eisav is described as one who “understood hunting, a man of the field.” His character was one who understood the art of hunting. His vocation was a hunter in the field. The Hebrew word for hunt – *tzud* – is phonetically related to *sod*, secret. The common meaning is one’s keeping a plan to oneself until the time comes to carry it out – a secret is kept until the opportune time to reveal it. A hunter lays his trap and waits patiently for the opportune moment. Eisav was an expert hunter – an expert in this self-control. Used in a different sphere, this could have enabled him to be a great warrior for G-d.

Yitzchak wanted to bless Eisav in the spirit of his future calling. Just as he hoped that Eisav’s natural tendencies would someday be a source of blessing and be used for exalted purposes, he also wished to see him in this light when he blessed him. So, the savage craft of hunting – Eisav’s livelihood and hobby – must be elevated and used for human purposes. Eisav did not usually hunt to provide a nourishing meal for his aged feeble father. He enjoyed hunting for its own sake, for the sight of steaming blood of his prey. It was not his way to hunt game for the purpose of providing for someone weak and ill.

What Yitzchak instructs is this: *Please take your gear, hunt some game for me and prepare a tasty dish for me*. This time, Eisav is to take his implements and his skill and use them in an act of kindness for someone, to restore the strength of an old man. Yitzchak wanted Eisav to experience how good it feels to use one’s strength and skill in the service of another. This display would qualify him for a blessing – to use his nature, his talent and his skill for exalted purposes.

- Sources: Commentary, Ber. 27:24; 25:27

# THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

## (Part 4 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

### Fasting on Friday?

Another fascinating characteristic of 5781 is that the *Taanit Tzibbur* of *Asarah B'Tevet* will fall out on a Friday. This status is actually exclusive to this fast, as it is the only one that we do actually observe as a communal fast on a Friday. Proof of this, perhaps, is from the words of Yechezkel HaNavi that states that *Asarah B'Tevet* – the beginning of the siege of Yerushalayim, leading up to the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash – transpired “*B’Etzem HaYom HaZeh.*” This wording – “on this very day” – implies that the fast must always be observed on that exact day, no matter a conflicting occurrence. This would explain why it is fully observed on Friday, with no dispensation given for its preceding Shabbat.

This is fairly interesting since there is a debate in the *Gemara* about how to conduct fasts on a Friday, when we must also take *kavod Shabbat* into account. This seems to imply that it is a common occurrence. However, according to our calendar, a communal Friday-fast is applicable only with *Asarah B'Tevet*, and it does happen quasi-frequently. The last few times *Asarah B'Tevet* fell out on a Friday were in 1996, 2001, 2010, and 2013 – the latter of which, quite appropriately, coincided with a “Yerushalmi Blizzard.” [According to the *Targum (Rav Yosef) to Divrei Hayamim*, ‘*Yom Hasheleg*,’ ‘The Day of Snow’ that Benayahu ben Yehoyada “smote the lion in the pit” (*Shmuel II*, Ch. 23:20 and *Divrei Hayamim I*, Ch. 11:22; see also *Gemara Berachot* 18a), is none other than *Asarah B'Tevet*!]

*Asarah B'Tevet* is next expected to occur on a Friday in 2023 (5784), 2025 (5785), 2034 (5795), and 2037 (5798). In another interesting calendar twist, but not the Jewish calendar, due to the differences between the Jewish lunar-based year and the Gregorian solar-based year, this year’s fast curiously falling on December 25th is actually the second *Asarah B'Tevet* fast to occur in 2020. The first was back on January the 7th. Does anyone remember that, B.C. – Before COVID?

### Halachas of a Friday Fast

The halachas of a Friday fast generally parallel those of a regular fast day. In fact, even though there is some debate in the *Rishonim* as to the *Gemara*’s intent that “*Halacha – Mesaneh U’Mashlim*, a Friday fast should be completed” whether or not one may accept Shabbat early and thereby end the fast before nightfall, nonetheless, the halacha follows the Shulchan Aruch and Rema – that since *Asarah B'Tevet* is a public fast (*Taanit Tzibbur*) and not a *Taanit Yachid*, one must fast the whole day and complete it at nightfall (*Tzeit HaKochavim*) before making *Kiddush*.

There are many *Poskim* who maintain that it is preferable to pray *Maariv* earlier than usual on such a Friday night, in order to enable making *Kiddush* and breaking the fast exactly at *Tzeit HaKochavim*.

### Zachor – Terumah

Another interesting calendar anomaly, albeit one with absolutely no halachic significance, is on which weekly Torah portion will *Parshat Zachor* be read. Usually, in a non-leap year, *Parshat Zachor* is read on *Parshat*

*Tetzaveh*. Yet, this year, it will be pre-empted a week, and read on *Parashat Terumah*. This also last occurred twenty years ago, in 5761.

### **Purim Shechal B'Erev Shabbat**

As we are already discussing the Purim season, the next calendar quirk has significant importance. You see, in 5781, Purim will fall out on Friday. For most of us worldwide, this will mean a rushed day to pack in all of the Purim-day mitzvahs before the onset of Shabbat. Yet, for those fortunate enough to live in Yerushalayim (or other walled cities from the time of Yehoshua Bin Nun) where Purim is celebrated on the next day, Shushan Purim, which falls out on Shabbat, this unique set of circumstances triggers the incredible *Purim Meshulash*, or “Triple Purim,” a rare three-day Purim extravaganza. This last occurred back in 5768/2008, and prior to that in 5765/2005 and 5761/2001, and is next expected in another four years, in 5785/2024, followed by a long break of 21 years, in 5805/2045, and then three years later in 5808/2047.

This rare occurrence is due to the same decree from Chazal that we previously discussed regarding Shofar and Lulav – due to the Megillah obligation, one might mistakenly unwittingly carry it on Shabbat outside the permitted domain to show/ask an expert. Hence, the Megillah may not be read on Shabbat. Therefore, Purim’s mitzvahs get divvied up to the surrounding days.

It is important to note that this three-day *Purim Meshulash* is not an actual three-day Yom Tov. Each separate day possesses unique observances of Purim exclusive to it, with the different mitzvahs of Purim applying separately on Friday, Shabbat, and Sunday. Friday’s mitzvahs are the *Megillah* reading and *Matanot L'Evyonim* (like the rest of the world). Shabbat has the recitation of *Al Hanissim* and the special *Purim Maftir* (“*Vayavo Amalek*”), as well as the *haftarah* of *Parshat Zachor* (“*Pakaditi*”) read a second time (two weeks in a row). Sunday has *Mishloach Manot* and the *Purim Seudah*. Yes, as one who has celebrated a few over the years, there is nothing quite like a *Purim Meshulash*!

Yet, whenever there is a *Purim Meshulash*, there is an even greater phenomenon with great halachic ramifications that will occur exactly one month later: *Erev Pesach Shechal B'Shabbat*. When this happens, we need an entirely new rulebook on how our Pesach preparations are supposed to ensue.

*To be continued...*

*Written l'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha l'yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad.*

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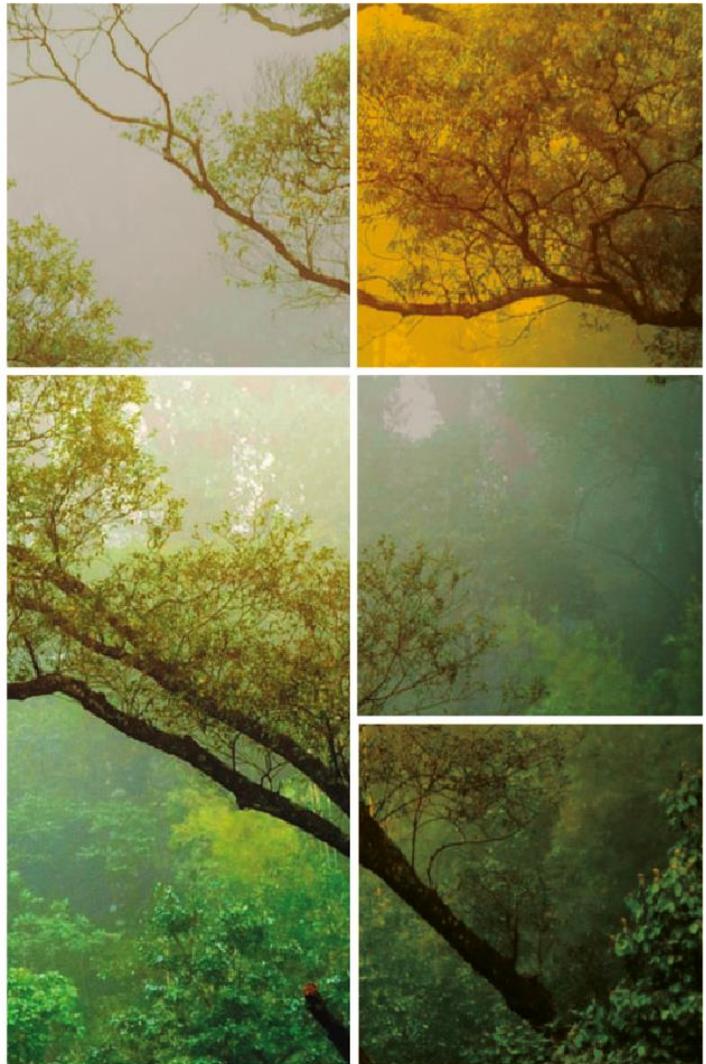
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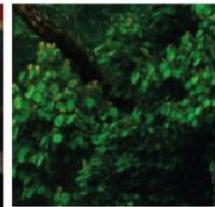
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