

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYEITZEI • 9 KISLEV 5783 DECEMBER 3 2022 • VOL 30 NO. 5

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Most of us get to a certain platform of spirituality in life and leave it at that. We're happy to move into neutral and coast on what we've already achieved. If we decided to keep Shabbat, we carry on keeping Shabbat; if we said, "I'm going to keep kosher," we carry on keeping Kosher, or putting on tefillin or whatever it is. If we went to Yeshiva, we carry on learning – sometimes less, sometimes more. At some point we feel, "Okay, I'm not that great, but I'm not that bad either." Truth be told, to move outside our comfort zone and do something that's even a little bit more than other people is very difficult. It's difficult because people don't do more than they have to. Some of us struggle to do even that. In terms of spirituality we are a bit like herd animals. We like to stick with the crowd. And we also tend to think, "What difference does it make to the world anyway? True, I'll be a better person, but there are already so many tzadikim (righteous people) in the world, so what does the world need me for? Why do I need to be so religious? Aren't there already enough "Famous Tzadik" pictures to put up in the succa?" "And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan." Rashi explains that the Torah needed to write only that Yaakov went to Charan – what need was there to emphasize that he also left Be'er Sheva? He answers that when a tzadik leaves a place it leaves

an impression. When a tzadik is in a city, his presence causes radiance and a luminous, spiritual brilliance to settle on the city, and when he leaves, the radiance is lost. The question arises, "Was Yaakov the first tzadik to leave a city? Didn't both his father Yitzchak and his grandfather Avraham both leave places? Why does the Torah emphasize Yaakov's leaving over theirs?" The difference is that when both Avraham and Yitzchak left places, they left no tzadik of their stature behind, whereas when Yaakov left Be'er Sheva he left his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka, two great tzadikim. One might have thought that since Yitzchak and Rivka remained, Yaakov's departure would not dim the spiritual light of the place. Therefore, it is specifically here that the Torah emphasizes the reverse – holiness never eclipses itself. The spiritual light that three holy people radiate is much greater than two. When we think that our meager efforts at being close to G-d are eclipsed by the great and the holy people of our generation, we should remember that holiness is never eclipsed, that our every holy thought or action adds immeasurably to the cosmos.

- Sources: Kli Yakar in Talelei Orot

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14-year stint in the Torah Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the Beit Hamikdash. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and Earth. Hashem promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive.

Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel's older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissaschar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef.

Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by Hashem not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,
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Q & A

Questions

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Beer Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. G-d compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with shalom." What did he mean by "shalom"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rache'ls handmaiden?
14. How do you say *dudaim* in Arabic?
15. "G-d remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this weeks Parsha?
19. Who was Bilhah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into Eretz Yisrael?

Answers

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (Yasmin).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldn't be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel asked G-d for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - Yagar Sahaduta, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of Eretz Yisrael.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Gad Luck to You

Upon the birth of Jacob and Zilpah's first son, Zilpah's mistress Leah exclaimed "gad has come," so she named the boy Gad (Gen. 30:11). Rashi explicates the word gad as meaning "mazel tov," which is loosely translated as "good luck." In this essay we explore the deeper meanings of the words gad, mazel and mazar. In doing so, we trace them to their etymological roots and try to tease out how the core meanings of those respective roots shed light on the words in question. After doing so, we will realize that gad, mazel, and mazar are not necessarily true synonyms, but rather each of these words conveys a slightly different idea.

Since we are most familiar with the word mazel, we begin with that word. The term mazel appears only once in the Bible, in the context of King Josiah's anti-idolatry campaign by which the king put a stop to those who were burning incense "to the Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the mazalot and to all the legions of the heavens" (II Kings 23:5). In this context, the term mazalot seems to refer to some sort of astronomical phenomenon (usually understood as the twelve constellations of the Zodiac, see Brachot 32b), which idolaters deified and to which they offered sacrifices.

The anonymous commentator to Maimonides' Laws of Yesodei HaTorah explains that mazel is related to the Aramaic word azal, "going/walking" (used by the Targumim to translate Hebrew words related to halichah), arguing that mazalot are called so because the sun and the moon "go, travel" through them or near them. He also relates the Hebrew term mazel to the Arabic terms al-manazil ("house," or "lunar/celestial station") and means the same as the Arabic burj ("tower/constellation").

The classical Hebrew lexicographers offer an alternate explanation: Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1050) and Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235) write that the trilateral root NUN-ZAYIN-LAMMED refers to the movement of liquid, like "dripping" and "flowing." For example, the verb nozel means "downward flow." Based on this, they explain mazel as deriving from that trilateral root, with the disappearing NUN replaced by the dot in the letter ZAYIN. Rabbi Kimchi adds that the movements of the mazalot flow with consistency, so the very word for them is related to "flowing."

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) takes a slightly different approach by tracing the word mazel to the biliteral root ZAYIN-LAMMED ("instability of related components"). One corollary of this core root are the words related to NUN-ZAYIN-LAMMED because they conjure liquids' inability to remain one solid mass, as its requisite parts tend to drift away from one another – mostly commonly in a downwards flow due to gravity. Of course, the quintessential downward-flowing liquid is rainwater. Because of this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains, the term mazel came to refer to those heavenly forces which seem to regulate rainfall. In a borrowed sense, the beneficent heavenly forces that grant any sort of weal or blessing are likewise called mazalot.

*To read the rest of this article, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

The Amidah (Part 27) – The Final Paragraph: Personally Speaking

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life”

(Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer)

“May Hashem, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent, and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah, then my soul will pursue Your commandments. As for all those who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design. Act for Your Name’s sake, act for Your right hand’s sake, act for Your sanctity’s sake, act for Your Torah’s sake. That Your beloved may be given rest, let Your right hand save and respond to me. May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer. He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Israel. And let us say: Amen.”

The final paragraph of the Amidah differs from the rest of the Amidah. It is not a blessing but is a list of personal requests made in the singular. All the blessings of the Amidah are written in the plural because when we recite the Amidah, we are not just requesting for ourselves. Rather, we are praying for the entire Jewish People. Obviously, each person has their own personal requests and needs, but when we turn to Hashem, we do so as integral members of His chosen nation, beseeching Him to shower us all with blessings and goodness. In fact, so fundamental is this concept that the Ari z”l would begin each recitation of the Amidah with the words: “V’Ahavta L’Reicha Kamocho – Love your fellow as yourself.” (Vayikra 19:18)

Yet, the concluding paragraph of the Amidah is not said in the plural and does not end with a blessing. From its syntax it is clear that it was not a part of the original composition but was added at a later time. The Talmud (Brachot 16b-17a) lists the personal prayers that were recited at the conclusion of the Amidah by some of the most righteous scholars of the Talmudic era. Our final paragraph is based on the one that Mar the son of Ravina composed. Why did some of the most illustrious Sages feel a need to add an extra paragraph to the end of their recitation of the Amidah? Why was it not enough to recite what had been composed by the Men of the Great Assembly without any additions?

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (1713-1793) was the Chief Rabbi of Prague and one of the most decisive authorities of Jewish Law of his era. He was famed for his brilliance throughout Europe. His erudition even came to the notice of the government, who appreciated his ability to comprehend the long-term repercussions of their actions, and was asked to advise them accordingly. Due to the excellent relationships that he cultivated within the governing circles, he was able to use his influence to temper, and sometimes even annul, the flow of anti-Semitic laws that were constantly being legislated. Among several scholarly works that he authored is one called Tziyun leNefesh Chayah (commonly known by its acronym, Tzelach), containing his insights on the Talmud. Rabbi Landau offers an intriguing reason for our final paragraph’s inclusion and why its composition is so different from the rest of the Amidah. He cites our Sages (ibid. 29b), who teach that a person should endeavor to pray with a sense of freshness and innovation and not pray by rote. Prayer should be an expression of our inner yearnings and not something that is said habitually. Before the Men of the Great Assembly formalized the concept of prayer by composing the Amidah, this is exactly what prayer was – a spontaneous outpouring of

devotion to Hashem. But due to the plummeting levels of spirituality prior to the destruction of the First Temple, the Men of the Great Assembly had no alternative but to compose the Amidah in a more formal fashion. However, once the Amidah became obligatory, with a standardized text recited by all, it ran the risk of becoming a prayer that is recited simply because the Men of the Great Assembly commanded us to say it in certain way. Rather than it being an individualistic expression of our complete reliance upon Hashem, it could become just another part of our daily routine, thereby losing its astonishing potency. That is why, explains Rabbi Landau, an extra paragraph was introduced into the end of the Amidah. It is a paragraph that expresses itself in the singular. It is a paragraph that allows each of us to express ourselves personally and to petition Hashem for our own unique needs in our own individual way. It is a prayer that, retroactively, lets us understand that everything that we have said up until now has also been recited with the same sense of purpose and singularity, despite the fact that it is said in the plural.

Why was the prayer of Mar the son of Ravina chosen to conclude the Amidah over all the other alternatives that the Talmud cites? What was it about his composition that made it the choice of the Rabbis to bring to a close our recitation of the Amidah? In describing each of the other options the Talmud writes that the author would recite his prayer after he finished his recitation of the Amidah. However, when the Talmud describes Mar the son of Ravina's prayer, it says that Mar the son of Ravina recited it while he was finishing his Amidah. As far as Mar the son of Ravina was concerned, his prayer was not an addendum to the Amidah, but was a continuation of the Amidah. For this reason it was chosen to conclude our recitation of the Amidah – because it belongs to the Amidah.

To be continued...

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nedarim 23-29

Annuling Future Vows

“One who doesn’t want his vows for the entire year to be binding should stand on Rosh Hashana and say: ‘Any vow that I will make in the future will be null and void’.”

In this manner our gemara explains the mishna on amud aleph, and this statement is codified in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De’ah 211. This “nullification in advance” of his vows is qualified by certain conditions, which are specified in the gemara, and cited as halacha.

The main concern is that when the person makes a vow in the future, he doesn’t do it in a manner that “nullifies” his earlier declaration of future vows being meaningless. For example, if he recalls that he made the earlier statement, and nevertheless makes a new vow, this would be interpreted as “nullifying his nullification” – thereby resulting in a binding vow that he did not want. The Aruch Hashulchan points out that since we have the custom to say a fixed, communal prayer of “Kol Nidrei” on the night of Yom Kippur, we are not actually negating vows – past or future – but offering a prayer that G-d will accept our prayers (Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 619:3). It is interesting to note that although our gemara mentions “the night of Rosh Hashana,” our custom is to say “Kol Nidrei” on the night of Yom Kippur.

Nedarim 23b

The Mindset for an Oath

“When an oath is imposed on a litigant in court, he is told: ‘Know that we impose this oath not based on how you interpret it, but rather based on how we and Hashem interpret it’.”

This halacha is taught on our daf and is cited in Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 87:20. The gemara illustrates an example of the significance of this warning by relating a story that occurred in the courtroom of Rava.

A man made a claim against a person who had borrowed money from him, and but failed to repay any of the loan according to the claim of the lender. The borrower, however, denied owning the entire amount, saying that he had repaid part of the loan and only owes the rest (Rabbeinu Nissim). The halacha in this case is that the “denier-admitter” must take an oath, while holding a Sefer Torah, to deny that he owes the part that he claims was already paid. At this point, the borrower asked the lender to please hold onto his walking cane so that the borrower could hold the Torah to make the oath. Little did the lender know that the borrower had put the amount of money that the lender claimed inside the cane before giving it to him to hold while making the

oath! After making the oath that he had given the money to the lender, the lender became angry and even broke the cane – resulting in the money falling out and the truth being revealed for all to see.

The warning decreed by our Sages is to cancel the validity of an oath made with a trick like this. After being warned that his oath is to be interpreted as the court and Hashem say, and not as the oath-maker would like, a person who makes an oath “on his terms” is making a false and invalid oath.

Nedarim 25a

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The Song of the Starling

The Starling says, “Their progeny became known amongst the nations and their descendants within the peoples. All those that see them recognize that they are the progeny blessed by Hashem.” (Yeshayahu 61:9)

Starlings are very common worldwide and individual flocks can number over one million. The flapping of their wings can be heard hundreds of meters away.

Starlings are known to mingle with the non-Kosher raven. Halachically, mingling of species is an indication of their relationship, but only if they are alike. That is, if two alike species mingle, and one is known to be non-Kosher, we classify the other is non-Kosher as well. Starlings, however, have distinguishable appearances and behaviors, and are therefore Kosher.*

Thus, the starling sings of the Jewish people, who have been forced to mingle amongst the nation throughout their exile but who have remained distinct – and therefore pure. With sideburns, circumcision, tzitzit, tefillin, mezuzahs and a code of conduct that refuses to bend to immoral winds of the secular society, we stand proudly as a nation within nations. The starling’s verse describes us being “known,” that is, distinct, despite our being “amongst the nations.” It is due to our clinging to our traditions that we remain “a progeny blessed by Hashem.”

*That which we have stated that the starling is Kosher is in accordance with one opinion in the Gemara, which does not necessarily reflect the Halachah.

Sources: Bereishis Rabbah 65:3; Chullin 65a; Kenaf Renanim; Beis Elokim; see also Yaavetz and Kol Rinah. Wikipedia.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Tefillat Haderech: A Prayer to Travel Through Life

Yaakov has just left his home, and is headed to Haran to find a wife from the house of Lavan. He will spend the next twenty years building his family, and establishing his financial independence. En route, he vows to G-d: *If G-d will be with me, and guard me on this path on which I am going, and will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and I return in peace to my father's house – then G-d will be G-d to me.*

In the context of the priestly blessing, we first mention material blessing (*yivarechecha*) and then ask that G-d protect that blessing (*v'yishmirecha*). But here, Yaakov first asks for protection (*guard me on this path*) and then for the blessing (*bread to eat and food to wear*). Since he has no more than the shirt on his back, he cannot be referring to his possessions. But there is something he did pack for his journey, in abundant supply – his spiritual and moral attainments.

Until now, Yaakov has been a *yoshev ohalim*, dwelling in the tents of study. He now sets out to seek a wife and a livelihood to support a family. He is right to fear the dangers that lurk ahead. Once Paradise was lost, and man was to eat by the sweat of his brow, earning an independent livelihood became complex. More than effort and skill are required to gain that loaf of bread. Rarely is the race for that loaf unaccompanied by pressure to attain social status. That “path to bread and clothing”, having become a dizzying quest for success, is ridden with potholes. Unscrupulous business practices, dubious marketing techniques, unfair competition, and undignified treatment of employees are but a few of the stumbling blocks on this path. “This path,” our Sages comment, alludes to cardinal sins such as idolatry, illicit relations, murder, and slander. It takes courage and conviction to walk this road with honesty and integrity, to continue to value hard work, even as the outcomes of clever cunning seem ever more gainful. The path is indeed steep and thorny, with luxuries and windfalls beckoning the traveler to stray from his honest and law-abiding toil.

Yaakov's prayer is a model for similarly situated travelers. First, he prays for the preservation of his character, that he not forfeit his integrity. Only then does he ask for respectable sustenance (food) and social position (clothing). His third wish is for “shalom” – peace – and “return to his father's home” – intact family ties.

Finally, Yaakov vows that he will respond to G-d's preservation and blessing by declaring, “G-d will be to me Elokim.” Most who have been so blessed would surely wish to continue that relationship with the G-d of mercy (*Hashem* – spelled *Yud, heh, vav* and *heh*), but Yaakov expresses the lofty wish of the Jew, to continue the relationship also with G-d as Lawgiver (*Elokim*). He vows: *The G-d who showered upon me the bounty of His love and goodness will be to me G-d Who not only gives and bestows, but also demands that His Will be done with all that bounty.* With that vow he has directed every thought in his mind, every sentiment in his heart, and every penny in his possession to be used in accordance with the Will of G-d.

- *Source: Commentary, Bereishet 28:20-21*