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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE BIRTHRIGHT EXPERIENCE

“And Eisav spurned the birthright.” (25:34)

There’s a family that lives nearby me in Jerusalem whose Shabbat hospitality is legendary. On any particular Shabbat, you can find upwards of a hundred guests crammed into their regulation-size Jerusalem apartment. The guests range from the merely curious to the certifiably eccentric. For many of the guests, this is their first taste of a Shabbat meal with an Orthodox family.

One Shabbat the indefatigable host was nearly ‘defatigated’ by a student from the nearby Hebrew University. Whenever the host would try to say a *d’var Torah*, a Torah thought based on the weekly portion, this student would shout out “*Rubbish!*”, “*Fundamentalist propaganda!*” “*Chauvinistic xenophobia!*” and similar expressions of encouragement. On his way out, the student passed by the eleven year-old son of the house (one of 13 children). Seeing the ring in the student’s nose, the son said, “Why do you wear that stupid thing in your nose?” The student shot back, “Why do you wear that stupid thing on your head?” Without bat-

ting an eyelash, the son replied, “Because I always have to know that there is something above me and higher than me and greater than me. Now, why do you have that stupid thing in your nose?”

The student returned to his dorm room and wrote in his diary “...that little kid knows why he’s wearing a kippa, but I have no idea why I am wearing a nose ring.”

In this week’s Torah portion, Eisav returns home so ravenous after his work that he sells his birthright for a bowl of lentils. In fact, he is so consumed by his desire for food that he doesn’t even describe the lentils by name. He merely says to Yaakov “*Pour into me, now, some of that red red...*” (25:30) English translators usually append a noun to the adjectives, such as “*that red stuff,*” but in Hebrew there is no noun, there are just two adjectives one following the other. In Hebrew, a noun is called *shem etzem*, meaning “the name of the essence”, the thing itself. An adjective is a *shem to’ar*, “a name of description.” When our physical desires lead us to mistake appearance for essence, when we exchange a world of nouns for a world of adjectives, when style dominates meaning, then we have truly lost our birthright.

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.

KEEPING ISRAEL JEWISH

The religious Jews are growing! This was the recent headline which struck fear in the hearts of many secularists in Israel.

The background for this alarm was a report by Israel's top demographer, Professor Sergio DellaPergola of Hebrew University, to the Knesset Interior and Environmental Affairs Committee. He told the MKs that the religious population in Israel would double by 2020 and its adult members would represent some 17 percent of the general adult population.

The above-mentioned percentage is about what the Arab population is today in Israel. With secular Israelis marrying late and having few children, this projected

growth of the religious sector should be welcomed as a guarantee of a Jewish majority in the Jewish state. Nevertheless, phobia of the religious makes the secularists nervous.

In this week's Torah portion we read about what the Patriarch Yitzchak said when he gained a well which marked peace with the hostile Philistines. Now that G-d had given us relief from the strife which marked the digging of previous wells, he said, "we would be able to multiply in the Land."

Large families are indeed "families blessed with many children" and they represent the best assurance of a Jewish majority in Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

GEMACH TO THE RESCUE

In our *Parshat Lech Lecha* piece on "Kindness Unlimited" we described the impact of Gemachim upon the community. We here present one of the responses, from Frieda Resnick.

"These Gemachim mean something special to me. One year, erev Pesach, my elderly husband and myself were just getting settled at my daughter's home when he realized he had left all his medicine at home. We lived on the other side of the city – in Gilo – no way to go home and get it. And it was about candle-lighting time. My grandchildren told me about the medicine Gemachim, and two of my granddaughters scoured most of Sanhedria and Sanhedria Murchevet, finding half

of his medicine needed for heart, blood pressure and other ailments. One granddaughter returned to the house, and the other kept going to other neighborhoods even after the Pesach seder had begun. She was able to locate all of his medicine, which was really a life-saver. What a wonderful thing that Gemachim exist! And today, at the bris of my great-grandson, I asked my granddaughter where she had gotten the lovely pillow and blanket set that the baby was sleeping on. Guess where – from a Gemach! Thank G-d for Gemachim!"

May we suggest that our readers become partners in these wonderful services to the public by investigating which Gemach in Israel they would like to support.

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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 - THE MITZVOT

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

SHIKCHA

TORAH SOURCE

"When you reap the harvest of your field and you forget a sheaf in the field, do not return to take it but let it be for the proselyte, the orphan and the widow."
(*Devarim* 24:19)

FULFILLMENT

When a Jew is harvesting his field or the fruit of his trees, he must not retrieve what he has forgotten in the process. There are laws governing what constitutes forgetting which are detailed and clarified in *Mesechta Peiah*.



REASON

The needy set their eyes on the produce of the field as the sheaves or fruits are being reaped and bound and they think in their hearts how wonderful it would be if they could have some of those crops. It was therefore an expression of G-d's loving-kindness toward His creations to fulfill this yearning when the owner of the field forgets it.

The benefit for the owner is that he will thus develop a generous character and a blessed spirit for it is certainly a quality of generosity and a blessed spirit not to care about a forgotten item of produce and to leave it for the needy.

- The method for measuring distance to determine the *techum* limit
- Measuring hills and valleys and resolving conflict of expert calculations
- The *eiruv* of cities large and small
- Making a communal *eiruv* for a courtyard in which a non-Jew resides
- Ruling on a halachic matter in the presence of one's teacher
- Why the sons of Aaron died and why there was a famine in King David's time
- Why Yehoshua was punished to die without having a son
- The importance of Torah study in comparison to sacrifices
- How to overcome the problem of the uncooperative non-Jewish neighbor
- The problem of making halachic rulings or praying after drinking wine
- Not to be selective in which part of Torah study meets your taste
- How two Torah scholars should take leave of each other
- How to protect income earned without effort
- The secret of sobering up
- The lessons learned from the journey of Rabban Gamliel

TAKE THE CAKE ON THE ROAD

Rabban Gamliel traveled from Akko to Chaziv shortly after Pesach riding on a donkey accompanied by Rabbi Ilayi on foot. When he noticed a cake on the road he asked Rabbi Ilayi to pick it up. Upon encountering a non-Jewish traveler, he said to him, "Mavgai, take the cake from Ilayi."

There are mysteries in this story and lessons to be learned from it. When Rabbi Ilayi subsequently discovered that the fellow to whom he gave the cake was indeed named Mavgai but that Rabban Gamliel had never before met him, he came to the conclusion that this Sage, who was the head of the Sanhedrin, was blessed with *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration) which endowed him with superhuman intelligence.

But why did he ask his escort to pick up a cake which he would not allow him to eat?

One lesson learned from this is that one should show respect for food he sees on the road and not pass by it without picking it up. The reason that his escort was not given permission to eat the cake himself was because Rabban Gamliel assumed that it was not kosher for consumption since it must have been dropped by one of the non-Jews who comprised the majority of travelers on those roads.

Tosefot raises the question as to why consumption of the cake was forbidden to Rabbi Ilayi only because it was assumed that it did not fall from a Jew. In the account of the story it is mentioned that it took place right after Pesach. Had a Jew been in possession of such *chametz* on Pesach would it not be forbidden for any Jew to eat it after Pesach?

The answer given by *Tosefot* is that if the majority of travelers on that road had been Jews, Rabban Gamliel would have concluded that the cake fell from a Jew who baked it after Pesach and would therefore be permissible for consumption.

It is interesting to note that no consideration was given to the possibility that a Jewish traveler would have in his possession *chametz* which was forbidden to him.

• *Eiruv* 54b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"The study of Torah is more important than the offering of sacrifices."

• Rabbi Shmuel bar Inia quoting the Sage Rav
Eiruv 63b

A KISS ON THE HEAD

From: Martha in Pennsylvania

Dear Rabbi,

My question for you is very short and sweet. I have seen a lot of rabbis kissing young children on their foreheads. Is there a reason for that? I had a number of dreams where I was kissing someone's forehead and received some interpretation, but I would like to know if there is a scriptural/spiritual reason for it? I'd like to know this so I can compare/confirm what was told to me by this individual and what G-d says about it. Thank you.

Dear Martha,

Your question brings me a fond memory of my father-in-law of blessed memory who used to bless the children, as is customary on Sabbath evening, by placing his hands on their heads while blessing them. The children would then kiss his right hand and he would in turn kiss their foreheads. May G-d bless and embrace his soul in eternal light and life.

There are numerous examples of kissing the forehead in ancient Jewish sources. Let's explore some of them to get an inkling of its meaning and significance.

Our Sages taught that after Pharaoh decreed all male children be thrown in the Nile, Amram decided it was futile to have more children and divorced his wife; the other men followed his example. His daughter Miriam, who was only five at the time, criticized her father saying, 'Your decree is harsher than Pharaoh's: his is only against boys, yours is also against girls; his is only in this world, yours applies also to the next; his may not be executed, yours offers no chance'. Amram accepted her rebuke and remarried his wife; the other men followed suit. She then prophesied, 'My mother will soon give birth to the savior of the Jews.' When Moses was born, the house became full of light and Amram kissed Miriam on her forehead and said, 'My daughter, your prophecy has been fulfilled' (Sota 12a, 13a).

However, this gesture is not only reserved for parents to children. The Talmud relates that once Shimon HaTzadik saw a 'nazir' with attractive eyes, a goodly

countenance and curly hair. The rabbi asked, 'Why do you want to cut your lovely hair'? The man replied, 'I went to draw water from the spring. I saw my reflection and became haughty. Then I said to myself, why are you being arrogant about something that is not yours, and which tomorrow will be in the grave? It was then that I decided to cut my hair for the sake of Heaven'. The rabbi kissed him on his forehead and said, 'May there be more people like you!' (Nedarim 9b).

There are even some instances when one rabbi kisses another on his forehead. Rabbi Elazar ben Arach was speaking about 'Ma'aseh Merkava', part of the secrets of Kabbalah, to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai. Fire came down from Heaven and encircled the trees among which they were sitting. Then an angel called out from within the flames and concurred with what the rabbi was saying. At that point, Rabbi Yochanan stood up, kissed Rabbi Elazar on his forehead and said, 'Blessed is the G-d of Israel who gave such a son to Abraham who knows to expound on 'Ma'aseh Merkava' (Chagiga 14b).

I think what characterizes all of these cases is the use of one's mind, each according to his own level, to subjugate and harmonize oneself with the will of G-d. Miriam was not as concerned about her parents' separation as with the continuation of the Jewish people. The 'nazir' realized the fallacy of ephemeral physical beauty compared to spiritual splendor. Rabbi Elazar penetrated the deepest secrets of Kabbalah to bring down Divine Energy into this world. Since this represents bringing one's thoughts in line with G-d's will, it deserves a "kiss on the forehead".

This can be understood on a deeper level as well. According to Jewish mysticism, the forehead is associated with the inclusive of Keter (including Chochma, Bina and Da'at). This is related to the verse, "The gold plate shall be on Aaron's forehead before G-d" (Ex. 28:36), since the plate was engraved with the Tetragrammaton, G-d's Holy Name. In addition, the Zohar (Tikkunim 13b) compares the rest of the head to the Menorah of the Sanctuary of which it is written, "When you [Aaron] light the Menorah, its seven lights shall shine toward the center" (Num. 8:2). The seven lamps emanating light from the oil correspond to the seven apertures of the head: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and the mouth, which radiate the light of the mind. This light should be

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YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME!

Question: As a result of the position I hold in my community I am frequently called upon by people in the community to deal with problems which they assume I am capable of solving. Since I am well aware that I have neither the experience to counsel them or the influence to assist them, I am tempted to tell them at the outset that they are wasting their time in turning to me. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The only way to decide on a proper response in your difficult situation is to try putting yourself into the shoes of those who turn to you. They suspect that you are indeed capable of helping them but hesitate to do so because they are not worthy of taking up your

time by even presenting their case. It is therefore important for you to at least listen to them and to respond by sympathizing with their problem and reiterating your inability to help them for the reasons that you provide.

A further observation is called for in regard to counsel that you initially feel you are incapable of providing. Many people in your situation have been happily surprised that they came up with lifesaving advice. Perhaps if Heaven ordained that you should be the one to whom a person in need turned, you have been chosen as the channel for Heavenly counsel to be provided.

In conclusion, people who turn to you may indeed not be wasting their time and neither will you.

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directed toward the Center, in the service of G-d. Lastly, these four sets of organs correspond to the four letters of the Divine Name, where the mouth relates to the last 'heh' and the last of the sefirot, Malchut.

We see then that the Ten Sefirot permeate the head, from Keter in the forehead on high to Malchut in the mouth. Subjugating and harmonizing one's thoughts to

the will of G-d brings one into 'the spiritual loop' such that he becomes a conduit for the flow of Divine energy cascading from on high down below. This is symbolized by a kiss on the forehead that originates in the mind of the bestower, is transmitted down through the mouth, and received by the mind of the recipient who is now resonating in harmony with G-d.

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