



SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT · 29 CHESHVAN 5772 · NOV. 26, 2011 · VOL. 19 NO. 6

PARSHA INSIGHTS

MASQUERADE

“Two nations are in your womb; two regimes... The might shall pass from one regime to the other, and the elder shall serve the younger.” (Bereishet 25:23)

I have a picture in my mind of the Olympic games at Nuremberg in 1936. Adolf Hitler (may his name be erased) is at the top of what seems to be an interminable staircase, the grandstand stretching down behind him. His arm is held out in a halfhearted version of the salute he stole from the Romans.

The Nazis stole quite a few things from the Romans. The symbol of the eagle. The lust for empire and an implacable cruelty in achieving it. And the love of pomp and pageantry.

The Romans, however, had a ceremony that beat the Nazis hands down. The Talmud describes the following scene: Once every seventy years in Rome, they would take a man and place him on the back of a lame man. They dressed him in the clothes of Adam HaRishon, the first man (their possession of these clothes dated back to their common ancestor, Esav). Stretched across his face was the mummified flesh of the face of Rabbi Yishmael. (Rabbi Yishmael the Kohen Gadol was one of the ten martyrs whose memory we commemorate in the Yom Kippur *Mussaf* service. After he was murdered, they flayed his skin from his skull and preserved it in aspic.) Around the man’s neck they hung pieces of gold. In this manner, they would parade him through markets whose streets were paved with onyx and proclaim, “*Sach quiri pilaster* — The calculation of the end was a fraud... What use was the trickery of the trickster and the fraud of the defrauder [Yaakov]?” They would finish off by saying, “Woe to this one [the one on top] when this one [the lame man] will rise up.”

The relationship of Esav and Yaakov, twins from birth, is symbiotic. When one is up, the other is down. It cannot be that both are up or down, because the cause of one being down is the cause of the other being up — like two ends of a seesaw.

In the Yom Kippur service of the Beit HaMikdash, we find another symbiotic relationship. There was a lottery with two identical goats. One goat was sent to its death in the desert. It represented the negative drive, the embodiment of Esav. The other goat was offered on the Holy Altar. This goat represented the Jewish people and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for G-d.

A lottery by its very essence means that *this* makes the other *that*; the one going to Azazel — to the desert — causes the other one to end up on the *Mizbe’ach* and vice versa. It’s a symbiotic relationship. A seesaw. Two sides of the same coin. Positive and negative.

When the twins were born, Yaakov was found clutching the heel of Esav. For most of history, the jackboot of Esav’s heel has been on the hand of Yaakov. The word Yaakov is connected to the word for “heel,” *ekev*. The heel is the lowest part of the body. We are living now in the “heel” of time, when events are drawing to their final climax. But Yaakov still seems to be shlepping along through the annals of world history like a lame man. We seem to be the “fossils of history,” as Arnold Toynbee called the Jewish people. And Esav is still “high”.

Esav was the progenitor of the Roman nation. When the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, that faith became the state religion of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire spawned the “Holy Roman Empire”. And subsequently, the spiritual mantle of the Holy Roman Empire was assumed by the Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East. These scions are the direct inheritors of the legacy of Rome — and of Esav.

Every believing Christian has it as an article of faith that G-d gave the Torah to the Jews at Sinai. Without that, Christianity doesn’t get off the ground. But they have a “new” testament, while the Jewish people are left with the “old” testament. In other words, Rome sees us shlep-

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. G-d reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. They grow and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of their grandfather Avraham's funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of first-born. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but G-d tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in

the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

ISRAEL Forever

BROTHERLY LOVE... OR HATE

While the whole world was discussing the threat of a nuclear Iran and the possibility of a preemptive strike, a former head of the Israeli Mossad shocked the nation by publicly declaring that Israel faced a greater threat than that of Iran – the trend towards “religious extremism.”

In this week's Torah portion we read about the birth of the Patriarch Yaakov and his brother Esav. In his commentary in *Parshat Vayishlach* on the words describing the kiss of Esav, Rashi quotes Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai as stressing that

this was a momentary demonstration of affection because “it is well known that Esav hates Yaakov”.

While history has vindicated this view of the hatred of Esav and his descendants towards Yaakov and his descendants, the latter have survived because of the brotherly love which has united them. It is therefore tragic to hear an Israeli Jew who served his country so well speak with such brotherly hatred about the religious community.

Brotherly love must reject such an attitude and unite the people of Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

NACHALAT TZVI – LAND OF THE DEER

In describing Eretz Yisrael the Prophet Yirmiyahu uses the term *tzvi* which has a double meaning: “desirable” and “deer”.

But why should the land be compared to a deer?

One of the Talmudic Sages, Rabbi Chisda (*Mesechta Ketubot 112a*) offers this explanation: Just



as the skin of the deer shrinks after it is removed from its body and is no longer capable of containing the animal's flesh, so too does Eretz Yisrael produce so much fruit that there is not enough room to store it. And just as the deer is the fleetest of the animals, so is Eretz Yisrael the fleetest of all lands in bringing forth its fruit.

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.

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This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.

- A lamb whose mother is a goat
- When two male firstborn lambs come out together
- Is it possible for two cities to be exactly equidistant from a central point
- When there is a doubt as to which of twin firstborn animals belongs to the *kohen*
- Firstborn animal delivered by Caesarian section
- Animal purchased from a non-Jew and not known whether it has already given birth
- What constitutes a birth which exempts the animal born afterwards from being a *bechor*
- When three generations of goats can make up the ten required for tithing
- The status of a chunk of blood discharged by a large animal

THE SPECIAL GOAT

Rabbi Oshaya came from the Yeshiva of Nehardaha with a *beraita* which quoted Rabbi Meir as ruling that a lamb born from a female goat has the status of a *bechor* (firstborn).

Rabbi Yochanan qualified this ruling by stating that the goat required for an additional sacrifice on Rosh Chodesh must be a goat born of a goat. The reason for this is that in making its stipulation for a goat as a sacrifice on this day the Torah states that “one” goat must be sacrificed. The apparently superfluous word “one” must be understood to indi-

cate that it is a special species of goat, one whose goat ancestry goes all the way back to Creation.

Although the *gemara* quotes Rabbi Yochanan only in regard to the goat sacrificed on Rosh Chodesh, it is pointed out by Tosefot that the same ruling also applies to the goats offered on the Festivals where the term “one” appears in regard to the goat offered as an additional sacrifice.

It may be suggested that the reason for this stipulation is that the goat offered on these special days is described as “an atonement”, in contrast with the other sacrifices offered on those days.

• *Bechorot 17a*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Wool which does not warm the wearer is exempt from the obligation to give the *kohen* a portion of it.”

The Yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael - Bechorot 17a

PARSHA INSIGHTS

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ping along like the lame man of history, while Christianity rides theologically on the back of Judaism.

The religion of Rome wears the mask of Judaism; it takes the visage, the flayed skin of the high priest, and puts it on itself and claims to be the “real thing”. But their relationship with G-d is only skin deep. It is, in the most literal sense, a masquerade. Their using the visage of a man is apt — for they took G-d and turned Him into a man.

Why did this parade in Rome take place only every seventy years? Seven suggests the natural world. Seven days of the week, seven notes on the musical scale, seven colors in the rainbow. Multiply seven by ten and you get seventy. Ten is also a natural cycle. After ten, numbers go back to one; there is no single number higher than nine. Ten is the completion of the cycle. The Romans were say-

ing: The calculation of your progenitor Yaakov was flawed. The natural cycle has fulfilled itself, and you are still the underdog — and we are still the master race.

“Woe to this one when the other will rise up.” The name Yaakov means “he who will come in the end.” The Western world has become like a Vegas lounge lizard, a vast media machine with gold medallions dangling across his bared chest, crooning into his radio mike: “The calculation of the end was a fraud... The calculation of the end was a fraud...”

We are the children of Yaakov, the children of Israel. Our eyes are Heaven-bent, waiting for that day when Yaakov will “come in the end” — because he *will* come — and Esav’s master race will fall like a concrete eagle from the roof of the Third Reich.

• *Source: Based on an idea by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer*

PASSING THROUGH

From: Jordan

Dear Rabbi,

What is Judaism's view of how much a person may "indulge" in things of this worldly a nature? I'm not really asking about pursuing physical pleasures, but rather obtaining material possessions. Is there anything wrong with acquiring material possessions just for the sake of having belongings if that makes one feel good?

Dear Jordan,

In general, Judaism's view about things of a material nature is to be minimalist. This our Sages expressed in teachings such as, "Learn to be satisfied with little" or "Who is truly wealthy, one who [accepts, and is therefore] happy with his portion".

The basic reason for this is that Judaism stresses that a person endeavor to be engaged with things of a spiritual nature, i.e. Torah study, performance of the *mitzvot*, prayer, and character refinement – all things that are viewed as elevating one's spiritual essence which ultimately acquire for one a place and things of real value in the World to Come.

However, since one's basic needs must be fulfilled to sustain life in order to be able to engage in these things, and what's more, according to Judaism, it is precisely through one's use of the physical world that one acquires the spiritual, for this reason securing material benefit is unavoidable, and even desirable. Thus our Sages also taught, "If there's no flour there's no Torah".

This dichotomy of stressing the spiritual yet encouraging the physical results in a balanced approach of endeavoring to acquire materially only what's needed in order to procure one's spiritual well-being, while ensuring that one's use of the physical is not one of material indulgence but rather directing it towards a higher purpose.

That being said, people are on different levels and at different places in their spiritual journey. Therefore, different people "need" varying degrees of material possessions. Some need more based on position, others based on society, and yet others based on age or personality. If these factors extend need beyond the basic essentials, the main thing is to be careful not to go too far, and to try one's best to honestly direct the

"excess" toward one's service of G-d as well. So, for example, even one who just feels better and happier to have certain belongings (within reason) could excusably do so, if that contentment actually enhances his ability to be observant.

Another example of such excusable excess is recorded in the Talmud regarding Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, who is described as being fabulously wealthy, and who always had even out-of-season delicacies on his table. This was acceptable since his being the Exilarch representing the Jewish community to the non-Jewish authorities required him to receive world leaders on matters of great import, and it was necessary for the benefit the Jewish people for him to maintain an appropriate display of wealth and honor.

However, the Talmud also relates that upon his death, Rebbi (as he is referred to) raised his hands and declared that he had no enjoyment from the world with any of his ten fingers. One explanation of this seeming contradiction to his lifestyle is that he derived no personal benefit from his wealth — rather it was enjoyed only by those he was obligated to entertain. Another explanation is that, even if he did eat out-of-season strawberries (or benefit from any other of the trappings of wealth) while receiving visiting dignitaries and emissaries, he did not indulge in the pleasure for himself, but rather intended that his deriving benefit from these things was only for the service of G-d and the benefit of the Jewish People.

Just as Rebbi's degree of wealth was unique, so was his ability to avoid indulging in it. Most people, however, for all intents and purposes, are rather encouraged to take a minimalist, albeit individualized, approach to amassing wealth and material possessions. And this is exemplified by a story regarding the great Chafetz Chaim:

Once a certain wealthy man en route visited the rabbi's house while traveling through town. He was astounded by the stark simplicity of his home and furnishings (or lack thereof). When he commented as such, the Chafetz Chaim remarked to his visitor that, given the size of his suitcase, his guest also lacked belongings. The man exclaimed, "What's the comparison, I'm on a temporary journey and only take only what's necessary for my trip. But I'm heading home to a mansion replete with a multitude of rooms and furnishings!" To this the rabbi replied, "I too am only passing through and fear being weighed down by too much baggage. But I also look forward to such a homecoming as you describe!"

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RELIEVING THE MOURNER'S GRIEF

Question: I recently paid a condolence visit to the mourners of an old friend and was somewhat taken aback by the nature of the conversation which was being conducted between the consolers and the mourners. What is the right thing to do and to say when making such a visit?

Answer: Since the principal objective of *nichum aveilim*, as we call the mitzvah of comforting mourners, is to relieve the grief suffered by those who lost a close relative, the very act of coming to their home during their *shiva* mourning period, regardless of what you say, expresses your empathy with their sorrow and relieves some of the agony of feeling alone in a time of tragedy.

Ideally, however, such a visit should provide both consoler and mourner with an opportunity to recall the virtues of the deceased in the same manner as the funeral provides the ones delivering the eulogies that opportunity. The concept behind this is that the judgment being conducted in Heaven for the soul of the deceased takes into account what the survivors on

earth have to say about him.

Even more praiseworthy is conversation about the theological aspects of life and death with a stress on the mercy of Heaven expressed even in what appears to be a tragedy, on afterlife and resurrection. Such talk reinforces the mourner's sense that death is not an end but rather a beginning. One should be careful, however, to avoid saying "What can we do?" which our Talmudic sages viewed as a blasphemous suggestion that if it were in our power we would act against the Divine decision.

When you comfort the mourner, writes Rambam, you are also comforting the soul of the deceased. This may be the reason why the traditional blessing made by the comforter in the Ashkenazic community is said in the plural form "May the Omnipresent comfort you (you is in the plural in Hebrew) together with all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem and may you (plural) be spared further grief" even when there is a single mourner.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

DANGEROUS JOURNEY

Many are the roads that lead to Jerusalem. But rarely is one as filled with danger as the one traveled by Eliezer.

It all started with a long trek from his native Ethiopia to Johannesburg which included a tension-filled night in a tree surrounded by a pride of lions. The Johannesburg Jewish community, in which he would spend the next couple of years on his journey to Judaism, was a major stop in his journey to Jerusalem and Yeshivat Ohr Somayach. But before he

reached South Africa he was held up by six robbers near the Swaziland border crossing. Rummaging through his meager belongings they came across a box containing his *tefillin* and demanded to know what was inside.

"I got so angry when I saw them approaching my *tefillin*," he recalls, "that I told them that if they touched them they would all die. They were so frightened by my attitude that they let go of the box, gave me some money to continue my journey and quickly ran off."

NEW
FEATURE!

@ OHR Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students

Jesse Rasowsky

Albany, NY • Amherst College
Currently a student in the Main Beit Midrash

When Jesse was not occupied with molecular nanomagnets during his spare time studying mathematics in Budapest, he turned his thoughts to mundane matters like the structure of salt in water or quantum entanglement. Somehow, the college Hillel House, NCSY, and

memories of Hebrew school kept his Jewish spark alive, and while studying physics in England, he heard about Ohr Somayach's Center Program. Fearing "the fanatics," he decided to stay put, but shortly after his first experience learning Talmud he was off and flying. A surprising three and a half years later at Ohr, Jesse finds the "fanatic" to be fantastic, the Jewish family to be entirely admirable, and the fun of finding a Jewish topic and plumbing its depths in the sources to be spiritually clarifying.