

קהל שער יתורה
 CONGREGATION SHAAREY TORAH
THE SHTIEBLE
 98 WEST END AVE BROOKLYN NY 11235

SHABBOS TOLDOS

4 Kislev - November 21

R' Moshe Plutchok - מרא דאתרא שליט"א
 R' Akiva Eisenstadt - ראש כולל

Sponsored by The Manhattan Beach Kollel in Honor of Rabbi & Rebbetzin Moshe Plutchok

Candle Lighting:	4:16 pm
Mincha/Kabalas Shabbos:	4:25 pm
Shacharis:	8:45 am
Shiur Halacha:	3:35 pm
Mincha/Seudah Shilishi:	4:05 pm
Maariv:	5:18 pm
Shabbos Ends:	5:30 pm
Avos U'Banim:	6:15 pm - Tonight!

Weekday Schedule

Shacharis

Sunday 8:00 am

Monday - Friday 7:00 am & 7:45 am

Mincha/Maariv: 4:20 pm

Mishna Brurah Chaburah M-F 6:30 am

Talmud Shiur M-F 7:00 am

Night Kollel Mon & Wed 8:00 pm

Torah Tuesday Schmooze 8:00 pm

A Project By The Manhattan Beach Community Kollel



MITZVOS: BEHIND THE SCENE - "Berachos"

BY R'AKIVA EISENSTADT

“Our Sages regarded it as their duty not only to call us from the turmoil of life to a gathering to G-d but to approach us in life itself in order to make vivid for us the thought of G-d in life and to help us towards an active life in the service of G-d. They fulfilled this task by means of the Berachos which they offered us.” (Chorev, English version pg. 473)

Thus writes Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his Sefer of the invaluable importance of reciting Berachos. Rav Hirsch points out that our Sages saw that although there were already Biblically ordained Blessings such as Birchas Hamozon (grace after the meals) and , according to some, the Brachos on the Torah. They felt the need to extend the institution of Brachos to all facets of our life wherein they infuse and sanctify our life in its most important material and spiritual circumstances. While it is important that we should experience our lives as much as we can, it is equally important that we should not forget ourselves in the tumult of life. We should not forget from whom life was given to us. They therefore composed blessings for awakening and for going to sleep, for the enjoyment of nature and the human world, for pleasure, for Mitzvos and for many different aspects of our lives. They did so as to show us G-d everywhere in life.

The Gemarah in Masechta Berachos (Daf 35b) cites a thought provoking idea about the concept of Berachos. “Reb Chanina bar Papa said that anyone who derives pleasure from this world without reciting a berachah is stealing from Hashem, stealing from his fellow Jew and is a colleague of Yiravam ben Nivat”. I can understand that if I don’t thank Hashem for what he has given me then I am, in a sense, stealing from Hashem, but why am I also stealing from my fellow Jews and how am I like Yeravam ben Nivat? How are we to understand this passage of the Gemarah?

Maharsha (Rav Shmuel Eidels, 1555-1631, commentator on Gemarah) explains that the Gemarah is telling us that when a person expresses his gratitude to Hashem and acknowledges that Hashem is the source of everything in the universe it sets into motion a mechanism which causes Hashem to place abundance in this world. When a person does not make a Berachah then that heavenly blessing is held back and not bestowed upon all of mankind. That is how one can steal from his fellow Jew by not reciting Berachos.

Maharsha further explains that Yeravam ben nivat was one of Shlomo Hamelech’s (King Solomon) ministers. He eventually became the first king of the ten tribes that seceded from the kingdom of Yehuda and was the first king to introduce idol worship to the nation. The Maharsha explains that Yeravam had a philosophy that was antithetical to Jewish thought. He believed that there were many different forces governing this world. He felt that these forces weren’t subject to Hashem’s control. When one eats food without reciting a Berachah he is demonstrating that he believes in a similar philosophy. He is declaring that perhaps this food was not from Hashem but from some other natural phenomena. That is why he is a colleague to Yeravam ben Nivat.

The idea of Berachos is simple. When a person is cognizant that all is from G-d and constantly declares that with his Berachos, it gives him an ever-present acknowledgement that Hashem is in his life. Berachos give us a profound opportunity to put our hectic lives on pause for just 30 seconds and focus on the “real” reality at least 100 times a day. May it be our will to do this easy yet powerful Mitzvah of Berachos the right way.

Have a great and wonderful Shabbos.

WEEKLY INSIGHTS - PARSHAS TOLDOS

BY R' RON FINKELSTEIN

In the Talmud (Makkos 24a) we find eleven ethical principles documented with an example for each one and of a great person who excelled at it. The fourth exemplary trait listed is one “who has no slander on his tongue,” which the Gemara connotes with Yaakov Avinu. The son in law of Rashi (1040-1105), Rabbi Yehuda Ben Natan who is known as the Rivan (middle/late 1000 - early/middle 1100), explains that the context of the word in the Talmud referring to slander, “ragal”, can also mean to lie. This means that Yaakov’s attribute was that he did not have dishonesty on his mouth. As indicated in Tanach (Micha 7:20), “Truthfulness was given to Yaakov”.

So what does this have to do with our Torah portion? Well, profiling Yaakov Avinu as synonymous with truth seems somewhat disingenuous when viewed against the stirring backdrop of this week’s parsha. The Torah states: “And it came to pass when Yitzchak became old and his eyes dimmed from seeing that he summoned Eisav his older son...and he said to him ‘See now I have aged...now sharpen your sword and bow and go out to the field and hunt game for me then make delicacies that I love and bring it for me to eat so that my soul may bless you before I die’. Now Rivka was listening as Yitzchak spoke...and said to Yaakov her son ‘Behold I heard your father speaking to your brother Eisav...so heed my voice and go to our flock fetching two choice young kids of the goats and I will make for him the delicacies that he loves so that you can bring it to him to eat and he may bless you before his death’. Yaakov replied ‘But Eisav is hairy and I am smoothed skinned, perhaps father will feel me...and thus bring upon myself a curse instead of a blessing’ whereby Rivka replied ‘Your curse be on me my son and now go and heed my voice’. So Yaakov did as his mother told him and Rivka brought Eisav’s clothing and clothed Yaakov with the skin of goat hairs she covered his smooth skinned arms and she placed the delicacies with bread in the hand of her son Yaakov”. And Yaakov came to his father and said ‘Father’ and he said ‘Here I am; who are you my son?’ Yaakov said to his father ‘It is I, Eisav your first born” (27:1-19).

The glaring question is how is it that this man of truth, Yaakov, deceived his father in such a fundamental way in seeking the blessing that was meant for Eisav? Was Yaakov

actually deceiving his father? Was there not a conspiracy with Rivka with regards to the events leading up to Yaakov’s interaction with Yitzchak? Didn’t Yaakov falsely identify himself as Eisav when he was asked about his identity? How do we reconcile Yaakov as a man of truth, one who “has no lie on his tongue,” with the account of what occurred before receiving his father’s blessing?

Rashi explains that the statement was not technically a lie in that Yaakov stated “It is I” (“who is bringing you your meal”) and then separately stated, “Eisav is your firstborn”. This answer may not satisfy some, who may believe that in some way this is a reinterpretation of the simple meaning of the words in the Torah.

Yet, on the other hand, if you peruse the many commentators’ works which deal with this subject, you would find that many of our sages do not characterize Yaakov’s words as a lie. Various rationales are given – some indicate that Yaakov did not lie, others describe Yaakov’s actions as the use of cunning, while still others discuss the circumstances surrounding Yaakov but avoid stating that Yaakov lied. It would make sense for us to delve deeper into this subject and try to see what we can discover.

Let us first evaluate the definition of lying. In order to define it, we may have to get a better understanding of truth, since in a sense, one lies when not relaying the truth. So what exactly is truth?

Like so many other areas of our lives, the answer varies depending on the paradigm we view it through. Take, for example, a German soldier who storms into a German household and demands to know if any Jews are hidden there – what should the owner do in response? Knowing that if he turns the Jewish family over, they will surely be butchered and killed - should the owner still adhere to a truth (seen through the scope of separating fact from fiction)? When the German owner of the house points his finger indicating the location of the hidden refugees and thus sentencing the family to certain destruction, and he proclaims loudly, “I cannot tell a lie!” - has he adhered to the truth? Would we hail him as a hero or view him as a scoundrel? Is he righteous or evil? Maybe we need to adjust our definition

of truth to include the notion that there are times when one veers from what is normally considered “true” and is not only not a liar, but is actually upholding virtue.

When considering the events in an expanded sphere we are forced to recognize that Eisav spurned his birthright by earlier selling it to his brother Yaakov. At this juncture, when Yitzhak asks Eisav to follow his directions in order to receive the blessing, is Eisav accepting that which is not his? Is it not Eisav who is looking to steal the blessing from his younger brother whom he sold it to?

While mulling this thought over, let’s delve into an altogether different aspect of lying. Rabbeinu Yonah (1180-1263) lists nine different categories of liars in determining the severity of the offense. There is lying in business, exploitation, deception, fabrication, falsely leading someone on, not keeping a commitment, falsely claiming a favor or good deed, false praise, and adjusting details while reciting an event that occurred (Shaarei Teshuvah, 3:178-186). Interestingly enough, there is no category on that list that vilifies a person who veers from the truth for a good or noble purpose. Those that fall into this group are not labeled as “liars,” but are instead regarded in a completely different framework.

The Talmud is replete with instances where our sages veered from the factual truth in exchange for preserving a higher truth. We see in Talmud (Yevamos 65b) that one is allowed to do this in order to preserve peace. Elsewhere in the Talmud (Bava Metzia 24a) we learn that one is allowed to depart from factual truth for the sake of humility, modesty, or discretion. These are examples of truths in of themselves, which when pitted against factual truth, reign superior. The events surrounding Yaakov’s seeking Yitzhak’s blessing are better understood when viewed through this prism - of the nobility of upholding higher truths.

Applying this thought further, we find that Yitzhak was unaware of two important details: one was that Eisav sold the birthright; the second was of how corrupt Eisav really was. Rivka wanted to prevent Yitzhak from being angered by the truth and, therefore, convinced Yaakov to comply

with her wishes of dressing like Eisav. This explanation carries even more credibility in light of an additional explanation of the Rivan that Yaakov complied with his mother’s wishes only when he understood that there was a prophetic command for him to do so. This elucidation changes the entire dynamics of our understanding.

Judaism does not limit the definition of truth to fact versus fiction. Within Judaism, truth is understood and defined by what is the Will of G-d. If the Will of G-d is not to relate factual events, then withholding such information is not lying. On the contrary, it is viewed as upholding the highest of all truths.

So by looking over the occurrences within this week’s parsha, we see a clear indication that the entire episode came from Hashem. First, Yitzhak’s eyes became weak. Then we find that when Eisav was told by Yitzhak to hunt game, Rivka overheard it. We also find, in multiple places, that both Yitzhak and Rivka were disappointed with Eisav’s choice of wives, indicating that he was not worthy of the blessing. All of these pieces take on new meaning when we consider that these events were not random but rather, were preludes to Hashem’s Will. The Torah most significantly demonstrates this in relaying Yitzhak’s own reaction when Yaakov’s deception was revealed to Yitzhak by Eisav. Yitzhak said, “Your brother came with cleverness and took your blessing” (27:35). Why didn’t Yitzhak call Yaakov a liar? What did Yitzhak mean by “cleverness?” Rashi defines cleverness as “wisdom,” possibly deriving the definition from Yaakov’s compliance with Hashem’s Will, demonstrating his high spiritual level. In this regard, Yitzhak recognized that this was all directed from on high, and had nothing to do with what is fact or fiction.

At this point, you may still ask why the events had to develop in this fashion. Why did Rivka receive a prophetic vision that made Yaakov receive this blessing in such a convoluted way?

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky (1891-1986) deals with this question by explaining that when Hashem told Avraham to slaughter Yitzhak, Avraham had no other thought than fulfilling the word of G-d. Interestingly enough, Rabbi

Kamenetsky explains that Avraham's greatest characteristic was his trait of kindness, so he was given the test of slaughtering his son, which is seemingly the exact opposite of kindness. In our case, Yaakov was regarded for his honesty and truthfulness, so Hashem put him in a situation of having to fulfill His command by veering away from that which is his essence. We still see that there was no changing of the voice, no imitation of Eisav's mannerism, and no other display of chicanery, which was so repugnant to Yaakov. We see here that Yaakov was completely committed to truth, even in a case where he was required to speak falsely. Where prophetic direction dictated that he disguise himself as someone else, he did whatever he could do to minimize the deception. We see when Yitzchak asked, "How did you find game so quickly my son?" Yaakov answered, "Hashem assisted me" (27:20). This was something Eisav would never say; he made no attempt to hide his true being. It is in this regard that according to Rabbi Kamenetsky, Yaakov veered from truth factually, but only to uphold a greater truth. The hesitance of the many commentators who are not willing to state that Yaakov was a liar is due to this amended perception of truth – that truth is Divine truth alone. Rashi clarifies this by pointing out that Yaakov fulfilled a Divine command – he did so in a way which most mitigated the amount of deception because deception was so strongly opposed to his very essence (Emes Yaakov, pg 152).

We now have a broader view of what occurred. If we want to view the events as Yaakov protecting the birthright which he bought, then his words and actions are not considered lies, but merely the protection of that which was his. We can take an additional step by understanding that when one veers from truth for a noble or good purpose, that is a higher form of truth than the factual accuracy we usually ascribe to "truth." If we probe deeper we find that Yaakov's mother was a prophetess and gave him explicit instructions as to what to do. Being loyal to his mother and knowing that she was merely transmitting the word of G-d, he followed her directives obediently. Taking it even further, we can say this was the Will of Hashem that Yaakov was fulfilling- the highest truth of all.

So what's the deal with Rashi? I mean, why does he have to make Lavan out to be this thief? If you're not sure what I'm talking about take a look at 23:13. The possuk says that Lavan ran towards Yaakov Avinu and - "וַיִּחַבֵּק לוֹ וַיִּנְשֹׁק לּוֹ" (he hugged him and kissed him). On that, Rashi says that Lavan frisked Yaakov (He checked to see if he was hiding any jewelry). Why can't it be that Lavan was just a nice guy? Why does Rashi have to say he frisked him?

The Maharal explains that at a certain point, p'shat comes to a halt because p'shat means the simple understanding. There will sometimes be things unaccountable for and you can't explain them according to p'shat alone and you have no choice other than L'drosh. L'drosh means to seek further than the p'shat beyond the p'shat to get a fuller p'shat. And it's important to realize that p'shat and drush have to live in harmony; they are not opponents. Therefore, whenever the Rabbis come in and say something it's in response to being Dorush the Possuk to answer those questions that the p'shat can't help you with anymore. If you don't appreciate where the Drush is coming from then you didn't fully examine the Possuk.

Now let's take a good look at possuk 23:13 and we'll see an interesting thing. There are many people who kiss in the Chumash and the word to describe that is always וַיִּשָּׁק (וַיִּשָּׁק יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל, וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ וַיִּשָּׁק לוֹ, וַיִּשָּׁק יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיו). But then in Parshas Vayigash there's one exception when Yosef is finally united with his brothers it says "וַיִּחַבֵּק לָהֶם וַיִּנְשֹׁק לָהֶם" Most of the time it's וַיִּשָּׁק and then one time it's וַיִּנְשֹׁק. Why? So here we need to learn some Dikduk (grammar). The difference between וַיִּשָּׁק and וַיִּנְשֹׁק is that it's a different בנין (grammatical form). וַיִּשָּׁק is what's called a Kal (straightforward) and וַיִּנְשֹׁק is what's called a Pee-ale. What's the difference between Kal and Pee-ale? The Pee-ale always has a connotation of intensiveness. [There are two words for breaking something; שִׁבַּר and שִׁבְרָה (Shubar and Sheeber)/ לִשְׁבֹּר and לִשְׁבֵּר (Lishbor and Le'shaber) Lishbur is to break and Le'shaber is to smash.]

So normally it says וַיִּשָּׁק in the Kal, but by Yosef with his brothers you could well understand that after having been separated for 22 years when they hugged and kissed that it was not "Oh, it's so nice to see you again." Rather, it was a very emotional thing and that's why the נִשְׁקָה (the kissing) is a Lashon of pee-ale (a lashon of intensiveness).

Now come back to our buddy Lavan. Lavan never met Yaakov and the possuk says a lashon of ויִנְשֶׁק (a lashon of pee-ale). I think we could all agree there's a bit too much going on here even just in terms of the words themselves. Hence Rashi says there's something else going on here- he didn't just hug and kiss him, rather he frisked him!

What is the moral? Never doubt Rashi because he is greater than any one of us can even imagine.

TOLDOS: "War & Peace"

BY ROGER WRIGHT

Parshah Toldot begins with a very common theme from Bereishit, that of the barren wife. Just as Avraham's wife Sarah had been barren, so too was Yitzchak's wife. Therefore, Yitzchak beseeched Hashem on behalf of his wife Rivkah, for offspring. Given the repetition of this theme, and it's connection to Hashem's original blessing of nationhood to Avraham, this scenario requires further examination. Why should both Sarah and Rivkah have been barren after Hashem's promise to Avraham of descendants more numerous than the stars? It seems incongruous that these women would have had difficulty conceiving, when their husbands had been given a guarantee of numerous progeny. Sarah tried to rectify this contradiction by giving Hagar, her maidservant, to Avraham. This resulted in Ishmael, which later brought enmity to Avraham's house after Yitzchak was born. Again, a theme is recycled, strife between brothers. After Yitzchak's entreaty to Hashem, Rivkah becomes pregnant with twins. It is written that "the children clashed inside her", and according to Rashi, she went to the Yeshiva of Sheim to inquire about the cause of her discomfort. Then Hashem revealed to her that "two nations are in your womb, and two kingdoms will separate from within you. One government will be mightier than the other, but the greater one will serve the smaller one." Thus the seeds of strife between Yakov and Eisav were sown. Why then was this struggle necessary? We have the conflict between Yitzchak and Yishmael and then later, the struggle between Yakov and Eisav. Both cases can be traced back to the original problem of barrenness and it's juxtaposition to Hashem's promise to Avraham. What is the meaning of this cycle of blessing, barrenness, and strife?

Negative cyclical patterns can replicate indefinitely un-

less acted upon by an outside force. This is where the greatness of Yitzchak and Yakov becomes evident. They were able to break the cycle and bring forth peace and reconciliation. Just as we read in the previous parshah that Yitzchak and Yishmael reunited to bury their father Avraham, we later learn of the reunion between Yakov and Eisav. It seems that both Yitzchak and Yakov were able to transform the energy of hatred and warfare, and make peace with their brothers. Peace is often an illusive and rare phenomenon and only a truly righteous person has the ability to bring about peace and reconciliation.

At this point however, it's important to establish a definition of, and a criteria for peace. Peace is not appeasement, nor is it undue compromise. Peace attained at the expense of one's values, is neither genuine nor lasting. How then is authentic peace obtained? In order to answer this question an investigation of the various brachot bestowed upon Yishmael, Yakov, and Eisav is necessary.

When the angel appeared to Hagar he informed her that her son would be a "wild uncivilized man. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand will be against him." This is hardly a description of peaceful relationships with other nations or people. Clearly Yishmael's bracha is more akin to war than peace. Eisav also receives a similar injunction that he "shall live by the sword." These are not brachot of peace, but of war, strife, and perpetual enmity with others. Yakov's bracha deviates radically from the previous two. Yitzchak's blessing proclaims that, "those who curse you shall be cursed, and those who bless you shall be blessed." Couched in this statement is the solution to genuine peace. "Those who curse you" refers to our enemies who will be pursued with violence when necessary, because their hatred cannot be appeased. "Those who bless you" refers to the people or nations that can accept peaceful coexistence and do not seek to subjugate their neighbors. This highlights the complexity and rarity of peacemaking. Both Yitzchak and Yakov were able to bring Yishmael and Eisav to an understanding of peaceful coexistence. They did not compromise their values, nor did they agree to unnecessary demands in order to obtain peace. They maintained their own identity and mission, whilst simultaneously placating their opponent. This is the lesson of authentic peace embodied in Yakov's bracha and a lesson to us upon how to cultivate peace without concession.

HALACHIC PERSPECTIVES

BY R' HESHY KAHAN

With the upcoming Thanksgiving season just around the corner some insight into the famed Turkey bird may be relevant to how we go about celebrating the 4th Thursday in November.

Q: How is one to know which birds are permitted to be eaten according to Torah law?

A: While exact knowledge of which specific fowl is permitted to eat is unclear as only birds that are definitively not kosher are written in the Torah¹, all Poskim are in agreement that if there is a known “Mesorah (tradition)” concerning a particular bird it is then permitted to eat it².

Q: Is there any particular signs to look for when trying to figure out the Kashrus status of any particular bird?

A: Any bird that is a “Dores (predator)” is not kosher³. Included in this category of “Dores” is any bird that grabs their prey with it's nails or eats it's prey while the animal is still alive. Another characteristic of a “Dores” brought down in the Gemarah is that when holding onto a rope or pole⁴ it's fingers are split (i.e. eagle or vulture).

Q: Which birds are not considered “predators” in regards to this Halachah?

A: While there clearly is a tradition regarding the Kashrus of the chicken, the Shulchan Aruch⁵ (Jewish Code of Law) mentions that other birds that has both a wide beak and webbed feet does not actually require the previously mentioned tradition. Based on this, eating duck, geese, and swan would be permitted as they are not considered predators.

Q: Is there a clear Mesorah (tradition) to permit eating turkey?

A: While there is much discussion concerning the particular tradition of turkey as it is unclear whether or not it originated from India or from the western hemisphere, in specific Mexico, it seems to be the tradition of most people to eat turkey⁶. This is probably attributed to the fact that it is found amongst birds that are not predators as well as having been monitored for at least twelve months and not found to exhibit predatory behavior⁷. Hence turkey, even without proper knowledge of its origin and no specific “Mesorah” may still be eaten by Jews today.

Q: Are there those who refrain from eating turkey because of its lack of Mesorah (tradition)?

A: Although most people do eat turkey there are families today such as descendants of the Tosefos Yom Tov and the Sh'l'ah who are stringent and don't eat this particular bird. R' Yakov Kamanetzky, in deference to his wife's family also refrained from eating turkey over the duration of his lifetime.

Q: Is there any prohibition with eating turkey on Thanksgiving?

A: While there is mention of people eating certain foods in commemoration of something significant such as King Yanai who ate certain vegetables when celebrating his conquests in remembrance to his forefathers who ate the same vegetables⁸, it should be understood that this was only done on a one-time basis. However eating turkey on an annual basis may infringe upon the prohibition of “U'Vichukosa'im Lo S'lecho” (not following the laws of the non-Jews).

Q: How would merely having turkey infringe upon any Torah prohibition?

A: The Poskim⁹ hold that as long as there is a bonafide reason for a certain secular custom, such as Doctor's wearing specific uniforms for their profession, then we are not concerned for the prohibition of “not following in the laws of the non-Jews”. However if one were to practice a custom that has absolutely no logical reason to explain it, they would then be transgressing this prohibition. The reason for this is by default of us not knowing any good reason for such practice we assume that it emanated from idol worship¹⁰.

Q: What should one do in the event that he is invited to to his family for a Thanksgiving dinner?

A: In the second of his three responses to this question R' Moshe Fienstein Zt”l¹¹ seems to say that as long as it is not an annual “Yom Tov” with any semblance to religious conviction but is rather merely a convenient time to get together with family who happen to be off that day, then it would be permitted, even with Turkey on the menu¹². Rather the prohibition that R' Moshe Zt”l was concerned about was “Bal Tosef”¹³ (the prohibition not to add on to Hashem's commandments, or in this case adding on to Hashem's holiday's¹⁴). Therefore if one were to treat the dinner more as a family gathering then a strong religious ritual one can avoid all Halachic qualms comes Thanksgiving day.

FOOTNOTES

1. Chulin 59a, S.A. Y.D. 82:1
2. S.A. 82:2, Rama 82:3
3. Mishneh Chulin 59a, Rashi D"h Hadores
4. Rashi Chulin 59a D"h Hacholek Raglan
5. 82:3
6. Avnai Nezer Y.D. 1:76:13-14
7. Kuntros HaTeshuvos Arugas Habosem
8. Kiddushin 61a
9. Rama Y.D. 178:1
10. B'iur HaGra 178:7
11. Igros Moshe Y.D. 4:11:4
12. In fact until recently the food of choice to be served at the annual Agudah convention which always takes place during Thanksgiving weekend was actually...turkey
13. Devarim 4:2, Megillah 7a
14. See Ramban 4:2 D"h Lo Soseifu
15. Mishneh Halachos 10:117, Sh"ut Bnai Banim 3:37 who mentions that giving thanks is a real Torah value, hence the concept itself is not really antithetical to Torah law.

OMEK HADAVAR: "The Perfect Servant"

BY R' MOSHE WARSAWSKY

When looking at our calendar, one is surely joyful when thinking of the various holidays that we celebrate. A question that must be addressed when trying to appreciate the cycles through which we find ourselves circling, is why do holidays fall in the specific months in which they occur? Why is Chanuka in Kislev, why is Pesach in Nisan, why Shavuos in Sivan etc.? There can be two ways of looking at our months; either the overall "feeling" and strength of the month is the way it is as a result of the relative holidays falling within that month, or that the holiday occurs in that month as a result of the month having a unique spark which spurred that holidays occurrence. Our outlook as Jews is that our holidays are enabled as a result of the strengths which HaShem embeds within each month. For instance, HaShem created the month of Nissan as a month of Geulah (redemption), therefore the month of Nissan was a perfect fit when G-d needed to take the Jews out of Mitzrayim (Egypt). The month was the most equipped for taking Jews from slavery to freedom, and every year we experience our own freedom in different ways during that time of year.

With the aforementioned in mind, I ask you, the reader, to kindly direct your attention to the calendar date of this

Shabbos. This Shabbos falls out on the 4th day of Kislev. You'd actually have to be a Tanach buff to recognize any special significance for this date. The Navi writes in a prophecy that came to him on the fourth of Kislev (Zechariah Chapters 7 & 8) that there will be a time that all Jews will rejoice on the previously sad "fast days;" and those days instead will be turned to days of rejoicing and good times. Rav Avrohom Schorr (Halekach V'halibuv 5763/64) writes that anytime a date is specified in Tanach, that date has a unique strength in the way that it's being mentioned.

The question being posed at that time was "will we have to fast on the fast days this year?" Part of that very same Nevuah (prophecy) includes a prophecy of the future, time of no war, and no sorrow; a time of the purest happiness. From the fact that this prophecy was given on the fourth of Kislev, it informs us that there's a tiny seed planted in today that contains a special strength in bringing about happy part of the prophecy; our redemption. The Parshios that we're currently going through are loaded with meaning and insight that will help us ready ourselves as we reach the end of days. Let's glean some insight from this week's Parsha.

One who pays attention to the Brochos being given over to Yaakov in this week's Parsha will notice that many things are incongruous with the storyline. Right at the beginning of the story, when Yaakov is discussing with his mother Rivka how to take what is rightfully his, he mentions that Yitzchak will immediately recognize that he's not Esav, because Esav was a hairy individual and Yaakov was smooth skinned. What we begin to wonder is; why does Yaakov not worry that his voice in fact sounds different (or according to some the manner in which he spoke was different) than Esav's. Additionally, when describing the act through which Yaakov acquired the Brochos, the Posuk uses the word "B'mirmah," which is typically used for treachery, while Unkelos here translates the word as "Bechuchma" (with wisdom). This procures a question of, in what way was Yaakov's ruse carried out that demonstrates exceptionally wisdom; it just seems like a plain old trick. And we finally reach the most pressing question of all. Put yourself in Yitzchak's position. You are about to deliver the fate of the world into your pride and joy, Esav's hand. You're all ready, you enjoyed your meal, and now's the time for the blessings to be bestowed. But wait, something's wrong, "It sounds like Yaakov but feels like Esav." What is Yitzchak thinking? The Posuk itself quotes him as verbalizing his lack of clarity as to which son is in front of him! Why didn't he investigate any further? Make sure you're giving the Brochos to the right person!

The Beis Halevi presents an unbelievable Mehalech (method of explanation) that lets us understand how truly brilliant Yaakov Avinu was. Esav was no fool; he knew that Yaakov may try to "steal" his Brochos, therefore before he left for the field, he made up a code with Yitzchak. Esav thought to himself, "if Yaakov comes to take my Brachos, he's going to change his voice to sound like me," therefore, he made a code with his father that the way Yitzchak would know it's truly Esav is that he would come in feeling like Esav, yet sounding like Yaakov (thinking that with this trick he would fool Yaakov because Yaakov would be trying to sound like Esav). But you see my friends, Yaakov had a Gemaracup (advanced reasoning powers as a result of many years of Talmud study), and he understood what Esav's plan was right from the start. Yaakov knows that in order to get the Brochos, he must sound like Yaakov yet feel like Esav.

Therefore Yaakov has no concern with the voice differences when originally discussing the plan with his mother; he needed to sound like himself for the Yitzchak/Esav code, and all that was needed was the fur for his arm. Now one can understand the actual Chochmah that Yaakov used, to outsmart Esav, and not just pure trickery. And now most importantly, we understand that there was no laxity in Yitzchak's handling of the situation, in fact Yitzchak announcing that it sounds like Yaakov yet feels like Esav was all part of the plan, which is why he calls it out, it was like him saying; "good now the code has been matched, now let me give you the Berachos."

One can learn an incredible thing from Yaakov Avinu. This concept gets developed even more when Yaakov has to really become a trickster when dealing with Lavan. The lesson to be learned is that being sweet and easygoing is very nice, but sometimes one has to stand up for what's right. We all have a Yetzer Hara driving strong within us, and we can't just be naive when dealing with him. Just as if when one is in the trenches of war, even a moment's hesitation can be the difference between life and death, so too every moment counts in the game we play against the evil inclination. We must be as cunning as possible and always stay "three steps ahead of him. There are a lot of Esav and Lavans out there, beware!

SHUL NEWS

The shul is now taking orders for Yartzeit Memorial Plaques. If you would like to order one for a loved one please speak to Elliot Kurlander or Perry Newman, and provide them with the English and Hebrew names to be engraved and the Hebrew Yartzeit date. If you only remember the English date, give this to us and we will convert it to the proper Hebrew date for you. The cost of the plaque will be determined by the number of plaques we order. We are planning to order the plaques by Chanukah so please place your order ASAP.

ברכות השחר

PART II

Last week we started to look at the benedictions that comprise the blessings we say each and every morning. This week we will continue this study in order to gain a better grasp on their meaning.

- **Hanoten Layaef Koach** (*Who gives strength to the weary*). The simple explanation of this blessing is thanking Hashem for rejuvenating our vigor. After a long day we come home tired and utterly exhausted - we get into bed, close our eyes, and fall asleep. It is remarkable that after the night has passed and morning has come, we have awakened with fluttering eyes. We have slept away our weariness and have been given renewed strength for the upcoming day; it is for this that we thank Hashem. It should be noted that while the majority of these blessings come from the Talmud (Berachot 60b), this particular one, “Who gives strength to the weary,” was not originally included with the rest; Rabbanan Savorai (500-540 CE), editors of the Gemara, inserted it later. An interesting question arises as to the context in which this blessing is recited, near the end of the series of benedictions: Why not recite this blessing immediately after waking up, or at the very least, before reciting the other various benedictions, if its core focus is thanking Hashem for renewing our strength when we awaken? The answer can be found in the following deeper meaning of this blessing: The Jewish people have been in exile for thousands of years, and as they await Mashiach, they continually face a world deeply antagonistic towards them. Rabbanan Savorai recognized that these circumstances usually cause weariness in those that are oppressed, but the Jewish soul was uniquely endowed with the remarkable power to deal with its banishment. The blessing was thus instituted as an acknowledgement of the Jewish people’s ability to survive in a world that is so bent on destroying them, a special gift given to them by Hashem.

- **Rokah Haaretz Al Hamayim** (*Who spreads out the earth upon the waters*) – Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) explains this beracha by pointing to the Talmud’s description (Tamid 32a) of experienced sailors, who spend so much of their life at sea, yet still do not feel completely secure until

they come to land. When we consider that 70% of the earth’s surface is water, that deep beneath the ground we inhabit is liquid, and that the earth’s center is molten metal, we must be grateful for the land upon which we stand. Therefore, we thank Hashem for the dry land which stays stationary and firm, allowing us to live and exist the way we do.

- **Hamaychin Mitziadei Gaver** (*Who firms man’s footsteps*). – This blessing simply conveys gratitude towards Hashem for our ability to walk. Even those who cannot walk say this blessing since if they require help, others that can walk can do so on their behalf. On a deeper level, each of us has our own unique path of life through which we must “walk.” We state in this blessing that it is Hashem who has helped us choose the right direction to follow. We have been given the Torah and through it we discover the true purpose and meaning of the life through which we travel.

- **Sheasa Li Kol Tzorki** (*Who has provided me my every need*) – Originally this blessing was expressed after one would put on his shoes since that is usually when one finished getting dressed. We convey to Hashem how grateful we are for all that we have, including that which most people take for granted every day. Our ability to think, feel, hear, taste, and see – for that and so much more, we want to acknowledge that all we have is thanks to Hashem. If we only consider the innumerable components that make up our basic ability to function in this world, we would be not only be in awe of Hashem, but genuinely be happy with our lot and appreciative for what we have.

- **Ozer Yisrael Bigevura** (*Who girds Israel with strength*) – Originally, the point at which this blessing was to be said was as one was putting on his belt. The Torah and mitzvot which we have been given allow us the special opportunity of overcoming our base instincts and reaching a higher spiritual plateau. A belt divides between a man’s heart (representative of cognitive ability) and the lower part of his body (representative of man’s animalistic side). It is the Torah which Hashem has given us that allows us to rise above the mundane and to be girded with strength in the battle between these two opposing forces. Ultimately, we pray to become refined and polished, to harmoniously combine both inclinations, so that we may raise our souls, bringing us closer to Hashem.

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