

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE BLIND MUSEUM

“So he (Yitzchak) drew close and kissed him (Yaakov); he smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him; he said, ‘See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field that G-d has blessed...’” (27:27)

Finding a place to take the kids on the “Intermediate Days” of a Festival is always a challenge. I find it difficult to get excited at the prospect of making a picnic in a park in Tel Aviv with a couple of thousand other families. I’m just funny that way I guess.

So it was to my great pleasure that I discovered the “Blind Museum” in the city of Holon.

You are led through several large rooms in total darkness. The only way you can sense where you are is by using your other senses — touch, smell and hearing.

The place is a fascinating experience of what it must like to be blind.

The next morning when I said the blessing to G-d “Who gives sight to the blind,” I said that blessing as I had never said it before in my life.

Blindness plays a central role in this week’s Torah Portion. Yitzchak cannot see that it is really Yaakov to whom he is giving the blessings instead of Esav. Yet on a deeper level he “sees” who is the correct recipient of those blessings. Through the pungent smell of the washed goatskins that wrapped Yaakov’s arms, Yitzchak was able to detect the aroma of the Garden of Eden that accompanied Yaakov when he entered the room.

The guides who take you around the Blind Museum are all sightless themselves, yet they have developed their other senses to a remarkable extent. They are able to navigate the site as though they could see.

In many ways this world is like that Museum. In this world we think we see, but there is more that is hidden from our eyes than that penetrates them.

From looking at the world would you know that from sunset on Friday night a different existence takes hold, giving one an opportunity to experience an “out-of-body” experience? And that as exhilarating as that experience is, it is accompanied by great danger? For example, turning on a light between Friday night and Saturday night might cost you your life. Can you see that with your eyes?

And yet there are those among us who, while they cannot see those realities in their totality, have developed their spiritual “eyes” so they can make out that spiritual world far more clearly than the rest of us.

Those people are the great Torah Scholars of every generation who guide us around this Blind Museum that we call the world.

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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

PALESTINIAN – OLD AND NEW

Three wells of spring water were dug by Yitzchak's servants in the land of the Pelishtim (Palestinians). In regard to the first two the local shepherds of Gerar put up a fight over ownership. He therefore called them by names which connoted strife and hatred (Esek and Sitna).

It was only when a third well was dug that it was not contested and so he called it Rechovot, "for now G-d has made room for us and we shall be fruitful in the land" (*Bereishet 26:22*).

Our commentaries see these incidents as portents of the

struggles which brought about the destruction of the first and second Beit Hamikdash and the eventual peace which will accompany the building of the third.

It is interesting to note that while the first two were destroyed by Babylonians and Romans, the third is threatened by Palestinians. We can therefore look forward to the day when our national return to G-d will put an end to this threat and allow us to be fruitful in our land of Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

LAND OF THE PELISHTIM

In this week's Torah portion we read of the Patriarch Yitzchak's stopping off at the king of the Pelishtim in Gerar on his way to Egypt to escape the famine in Eretz Yisrael.

But G-d appeared to him and commanded him to remain in his place and not to continue on to Egypt. The reason, say our commentaries, was because Yitzchak, as one who had been consecrated as a possible



sacrifice, was too holy for anywhere outside the Holy Land.

It was the Roman conquerors who renamed this holy land Palestine on the name of the Pelishtim in order to obliterate any Jewish connection to their land. The Palestinian Arabs in Gaza, which is in the land of the Pelishtim, were always a source of trouble for the Jewish inhabitants of the land and continue to be so today.

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.

S U B S C R I B E !

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- For which erroneous judgments does the court or *kohen gadol* bring a sacrifice
- Other exceptions to the rule of erroneous judgment
- Which animals are brought as atonement sacrifices by individual or collective sinners
- The *kohen gadol* or king who lost their position after sinning or only gained it after sinning
- The astronomical expertise of Rabbi Yehoshua
- An improper mitzvah and a proper sin
- The sinner who cannot offer a sacrifice
- The *kohen gadol* anointed with oil and one who is otherwise appointed
- Priorities in sacred service and in lifesaving

SINAI AND MOUNTAIN MOVER

When the Sages in Babylon had to choose a leader, there were two outstanding candidates. Rabbi Yosef was renowned as “Sinai” because of his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah. The Sage Rabba was distinguished as a “mover of mountains” because of his analytic skills.

The Sages in Eretz Yisrael advised them to appoint Rabbi Yosef because “everyone depends on the owner of the wheat”, a reference to the importance of information. Rabbi Yosef declined the offer of the position and Rabba served as leader for 22 years.

During all those years Rabbi Yosef, in his great humility, avoided doing anything that might infringe upon Rabba’s

honor. Although occasional bloodletting was a standard health practice in those days, he never summoned a surgeon to his home. Rashi offers two different explanations for this behavior. One is that he felt that summoning the surgeon to his own home might appear to be a show of authority. He therefore waited until bloodletting was done in the home of Rabba and he would go there. Another explanation is that throughout all those years Rabbi Yosef was so preoccupied studying Torah with Rabba that he never had time for bloodletting.

In his commentary on Chumash, Ramban offers a totally different perspective of Rabbi Yosef’s behavior. He was so totally attached to G-d that he had no need for human healing “for there is no need for doctors in the home of the righteous.”

• *Horiyot 14a*

What the SAGES Say

“G-d does not withhold reward even for only using dignified language.”

• *Rabbi Chiya bar Abba on behalf of Rabbi Yochanan - Horiyot 10b*

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RAINBOW

From: Melissa

Dear Rabbi,

According to the Torah, the rainbow symbolizes G-d's promise that He will no longer destroy the world with a flood. So that after heavy rains, the appearance of the rainbow is G-d's way of letting us know of G-d recalling His promise. It follows, then, that the rainbow conveys our would-be destruction, if it weren't for the promise. It seems to me, therefore, that the appearance of the rainbow is a curse, not a blessing. But if this is so, why is the rainbow so beautiful?

Dear Melissa,

First of all, you're right, the appearance of the rainbow does imply G-d's disfavor with the world. Your line of reasoning is shared by the Talmudic Sages who noted that the rainbow never appeared in the lifetime of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Why? Because in the merit of this holy and righteous Sage, the world was never in danger of being destroyed. Therefore, there was no need for a rainbow as a sign of G-d's promise.

So you ask, "If the rainbow is essentially a curse, why is it so appealing?"

On a purely simple level, one answer might be that there are many very tantalizing and appealing things in life which are not a blessing, but rather a curse. Pursuing them too fervently can actually lead to destruction of one's self and others. The multi-hued beauty of the rainbow may in fact represent this multiplicity of seductive paths leading away from holiness. Perhaps this is why we may not indulge in gazing too intensely at the rainbow's beauty – lest it lead us somewhere over the rainbow way up high.

That being said, it's interesting that we make a blessing over this "curse". Upon seeing a rainbow in the sky after rain, one recites: "Blessed are You, G-d...Who remembers the covenant, is trustworthy in His covenant and fulfills His word." True, the wording of the blessing implies the multi-colored arc's crooked nature – but if the rainbow is in essence a curse, it's hard to understand how it is the subject of, and

inspires, a blessing with G-d's name.

Let's explore a deeper answer, then, to your question.

Interestingly, while water in Jewish sources represents sensuality and physical pleasures, it is also a symbol for Torah. So, if on one level the rainbow represents the way in which pure, G-d-given energy is refracted through this-worldliness yielding a multiplicity of worldly pleasures, it simultaneously also represents the way in which that pristine, Divine light is refracted through the Torah, yielding a vast variety of spiritually fulfilling opportunities in G-d.

The generation of the flood indulged in this worldliness to the point of perversion. Their wanton obsession with variety and variation resulted in their abusing the full gamut of their G-d given powers for the purpose of impurity. The flood purged the world of this impurity and the rainbow was given as a sign and reminder of what results from inundating the world with indulgence. However, the same rainbow simultaneously reminds us to repent from the relentless pursuit of multiplicity drawing us away from G-d. It urges us to direct the full spectrum of our powers and interests over the rainbow to the One on High.

In this way the rainbow is at once both curse and blessing; transgression and repentance; seductively appealing and pristinely beautiful. It depends on what you're looking for in life. And perhaps that's why, although it's forbidden to indulge in the rainbow's beauty, one may gaze at it – for the purpose of doing teshuva and directing one's pluralities to G-d — in order to make the blessing.

This understanding may also partially explain the Kabbalistic reference to the rainbow as a taut, upturned bow with which spiritual arrows may be shot into the World of the Sefirot, which, when impregnating their target, result in bounty and blessing being birthed into this world. The arrows correspond to our assorted powers that may be aimed in any direction we choose. We are to contemplate the message of the rainbow and harness the tension drawn between the physical and spiritual to project our plurality of powers upward in repentance. These properly aimed prayers penetrate the spiritual realm, are received favorably by G-d (who seeks not the destruction of the wicked but rather that they repent and live) who then bestows benevolence on the world like sunshine after rain – with a rainbow.

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Answer: There is a famous takeoff on the Biblical phrase “*b’appom hargu ish*” (in their anger they slew a man) used by Yaakov in describing the slaughter of the wicked

Shechemites by his sons Shimon and Levi. The word *b’appom* which here means anger also translates “with their nose”. Sometimes the twist of a nose silently expressing disdain can be as murderous as evil speech or a dagger.

Every effort must therefore be made to disguise your criticism even if it is shared by others. Who knows if you may not need the same kind of consideration in other circumstances.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

OPEN THE DOOR!

Terrible pains which had bothered him for years came to a climax on Pesach eve for Rabbi Shmuel Chaim Klein. As the traditional Seder began, it was almost impossible for him to move.

Just as the family reached that part of the Seder where the door is opened and a special prayer is said, they noticed that Rabbi Klein was making an effort to stand up despite his pain. As they rushed towards him they heard

him ask that they summon a young man who was a guest.

It turned out that this pain-racked host recalled that opening the door at that point in the Seder is mentioned in sources as a merit for finding a marriage partner. Since the young guest had encountered difficulty in this area, his host made the supreme effort of giving him this opportunity to open the door – to his future as well.

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