**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Vayishlach – Vol. 12, Issue 8**

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**עזים מאתים ותישים עשרים רחלים מאתים ואילים עשרים (32:15)**

Prior to his fateful encounter with his irate brother Eisav, Yaakov made multiple efforts to appease him. Among the avenues that he pursued was sending a number of animals to Eisav as gifts. The Torah records that Yaakov sent 200 female goats and 20 male goats; 200 ewes and 20 rams; 30 nursing camels with their young; 40 female cows and 10 bulls; and 20 female donkeys and 10 male donkeys. As there are no coincidences in the Torah, Yaakov must have had a calculated reason for the number of each type of animal that he sent.

Rav Nachshon Gaon, the ninth-century leader of the yeshiva in Sura, provides a brilliant explanation for the number of goats that Yaakov sent to Eisav, which totaled 220. He points out that the proper factors of 220 (numbers less than 220 which evenly divide into it) are 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 20, 22, 44, 55, and 110. When they are summed, they add up to 284. Similarly, the proper factors of 284 are 1, 2, 4, 71, 142, which add up to 220. In other words, the numbers 220 and 284 are unique in that the sum of the proper factors of each number adds up to the other number, and they are the smallest set of numbers with this unique characteristic.

A pair of numbers with this unusual property is referred to by mathematicians as amicable numbers, or as Rav Nachshon Gaon calls them, מנין נאהב - beloved numbers. He explains that there was an ancient custom that when a person wanted to curry favor with a prominent individual, he would give him a gift of items numbering one of a pair of amicable numbers, and keep the corresponding number for himself. Rav Nachshon Gaon suggests that this is what Yaakov did in order to placate Eisav: He sent him 220 goats, while keeping 284 for himself. It is clear from the text that Yaakov sent to Eisav 200 female goats and 20 male goats, for a total of 220 goats, but where is it alluded to that he kept 284 for himself?

When Yaakov gave instructions to his servants regarding the presentation of the gifts to Eisav, he told them (32:21) אכפרה פניו במנחה ההולכת לפני - I will appease him (Eisav) with the gifts that precede me. Rav Nachshon Gaon explains that the word אכפרה can be divided into two words - אך פרה. The word אך is understood by Chazal to connote limiting or reducing (see Yerushalmi Berachos 67b). In this case, the numerical value of the word פרה is 285, so diminishing it by 1 yields 284, which is the number of goats that Yaakov kept for himself as part of his attempt to pacify Eisav.

**ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר (32:25)**

After ferrying his family across a stream, Yaakov returned to the other side to retrieve some small pitchers that he had forgotten, where he was confronted by a man who wrestled with him throughout the night. Rashi explains that this was not any ordinary man, but rather Eisav’s guardian angel, who came in the guise of a man to fight with Yaakov and unsuccessfully attempted to subdue him. The Gemora (Chullin 91a) offers two opinions regarding the appearance of this man: One opinion says that Eisav’s angel came in the guise of a Torah scholar, while others maintain that he looked like a non-Jew.

The Chasam Sofer explains the deeper logic behind these two opinions by noting that while Yaakov told Eisav that he had observed all 613 mitzvos (Rashi 32:5), there were two areas in which he was somewhat weak: the mitzvah of honoring his parents, which Yaakov was unable to perform during the time that he was away from home, and the prohibition against marrying two sisters. Eisav’s guardian angel therefore attempted to attack him in these vulnerable spots. One view says that he appeared in the guise of a Torah scholar, hinting to Yaakov’s deficiency in honoring his parents, since the Gemora (Megillah 16b) teaches that he was not punished for neglecting this mitzvah during the time that he was studying Torah in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. The other opinion maintains that Eisav’s guardian angel came to Yaakov looking like a gentile, as a way of implying that he had acted like a non-Jew by marrying Rochel and Leah, as the prohibition against marrying two sisters only applies to Jews.

The Chasam Sofer suggests that these two mitzvos are alluded to in the Torah’s description (32:8) of Yaakov’s response to the news that Eisav was heading toward him with 400 men: ויירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו – Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him. Why are these two different verbs used to express Yaakov’s reaction? The word ויירא hints to the mitzvah of honoring one’s parents, which is expressed by the Torah (Vayikra 19:3) as איש אמו ואביו תיראו – a man should fear his father and mother, while the term ויצר corresponds to the prohibition against marrying two sisters, which is described by the Torah (Vayikra 18:18) as ואשה אל אחותה לא תקח לצרר – you shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister, to make them rivals.

 Rav Moshe Aharon Friedman of Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim offers a different explanation for the angel appearing to Yaakov as either a Torah scholar or a non-Jew. The Shelah HaKadosh writes that Eisav’s guardian angel represents the yetzer hara (evil inclination), which was attempting to assail Yaakov and defeat him. Sometimes, the yetzer hara comes to a person in the guise of a gentile, brazenly trying to entice him to sin. At other times, the evil inclination appears in the form of a Torah scholar, presenting numerous calculations and justifications to “prove” that good is bad and bad is good, in an effort to trick a person into believing that a terrible sin is actually a mitzvah.

  The Gemora (Shabbos 75a) discusses the reason for the prohibition against ritually slaughtering an animal on Shabbos. One opinion posits that it is forbidden because it colors the animal, whose hide becomes dyed by the blood. The Baal Shem Tov homiletically explains that because the yetzer hara’s mission is to “slaughter” us, it attempts to do so by painting a distorted picture of reality, confusing our judgment about right and wrong.

 Yaakov referenced the angel’s dual nature when he beseeched Hashem (32:12), “Rescue me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav.” As Eisav was his only brother, why did Yaakov use two seemingly redundant expressions? The Bais HaLevi explains that Yaakov was worried about two distinct scenarios: He was afraid that Eisav may come to assault him in his standard non-Jewish appearance, but he was even more frightened by the possibility that he may look like a brother, acting friendly toward him to win him over to his philosophy and worldview.

 Rav Friedman adds that sometimes the yetzer hara opts to attack us not in areas that are clearly black and white, but specifically in areas that are gray, slowly eroding and peeling away our defenses. This too was an area in which Yaakov prevailed. The commentators write that Avrohom’s attribute of chesed (kindness) corresponds to the 248 positive commandments, while Yitzchok represents gevurah (strength), which is associated with the 365 negative prohibitions. What does this leave over for Yaakov? Yaakov’s specialty was infusing kedusha (holiness) into the mundane, optional areas of life. This is why he came out holding onto the עקב (heel) of his brother, as the letters in the word עקב can be expanded to spell קדש עצמך במותר – sanctify yourself in areas that are permitted. Later in life, he had a prophetic dream in which he saw a ladder set on earth with its top reaching the heavens, alluding to Yaakov’s unique ability to fuse the two worlds by uplifting the physical and imbuing it with holiness, an attribute that we would all do well to emulate.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. Rashi writes (32:5) that Yaakov sent a message to his brother Eisav stating that although he had dwelled with the wicked Lavan for twenty years, he had remained steadfast in his faith and had continued to keep all 613 of the commandments. How is this to be understood, as it is physically impossible for any person to observe all of the mitzvos? (Ayeles HaShachar, Taam V’Daas)
2. After Yaakov emerged victorious from his battle with the angel, he asked the angel to reveal his name. The angel refused to divulge this information, responding (32:30), “Why are you asking for my name?” What was the angel’s name, and why did he refuse to disclose it? (Chasam Sofer)
3. The Gemora in Shabbos (55b) teaches that whoever says that Reuven sinned with Bilhah, as is indicated by a simple reading of the Torah, is mistaken. Rashi writes that this is derived from the fact that the Torah states (35:22) that Yaakov’s sons were twelve, which comes to teach that they were all equal, which could only be the case if Reuven didn’t sin. How does this proof teach that Reuven never sinned when it could be that he did indeed sin but immediately repented his actions, thereby rendering him once again equal to his brothers? (M’rafsin Igri)
4. After listing the twelve sons of Yaakov, the Torah concludes (35:26) by stating that these are Yaakov’s sons who were born to him in Paddan-Aram. How can the Torah say that they were all born in Paddan-Aram when Binyomin was born in Canaan (Rashi 35:18)? (Rema MiPano)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) **Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman** rejects the explanation that Yaakov meant that he had studied the laws of all 613 mitzvos, as Rashi writes that he said that he had observed them. Instead, he suggests that because Yaakov’s intention was to fulfill every mitzvah when he would have the opportunity to do so, it was considered as if he kept them all. **Rav Moshe Shternbuch** notes that Yaakov didn’t say that he fulfilled all of the mitzvos, but rather that he was שומר all of them. Rashi writes (37:11) that this term can be used when a person guards something in the sense that they are waiting and anxiously looking forward to its fulfillment. In this case, Yaakov was guarding the mitzvos through his desire for the opportunity to perform all of them. Rav Shternbuch adds that at present, we lack the Bais HaMikdash and all of the mitzvos which can only be performed there, but if we yearn for the time when we will have the merit to observe them, it will be considered as if we have already done so.

2) Although at first glance the angel seemed to refuse to reveal its name, the **Chasam Sofer** suggests that the angel did indeed answer Yaakov’s question. The name of an angel is a reflection of his particular mission in this world. In this case, the purpose of the angel, who was Eisav’s guardian angel (Rashi 32:25), was to teach Yaakov – and all of his descendants – the importance of distancing oneself from the wicked. The name that most appropriately reflects this purpose is “Why are you asking for my name,” which denotes the utter waste of time in being involved in any way with him and all that he represents.

3) **Rav Chaim Kanievsky** notes that the verse stresses that all of the brothers were equal. If Reuven had sinned with Bilhah and immediately repented his actions, this would not be the case. Reuven would not be equal to his brothers, but would in fact be greater than them, as the Gemora (Berachos 34b) teaches that those who have sinned and repented are on an even higher level than those who never sinned at all. **Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman** answers that the verse equating Reuven with his brothers was written immediately after the incident with Bilhah, but Reuven didn’t repent his actions until much later, as Rashi writes (37:29) that Reuven was not present when the brothers sold Yosef because he was busy fasting and donning sackcloth to atone for moving his father’s bed. Rashi also writes (Devorim 33:7) that Reuven was inspired to repent by the confession of Yehuda that he was responsible for Tamar’s pregnancy, which only happened much later. If the verse equated Reuven to his brothers before he repented his actions, his must not have been that great and he must not have engaged in forbidden relations with Bilhah.

4) The **Rema MiPano** explains that when Rochel gave birth to her first child, she named him Yosef, saying (30:24) “Hashem should add for me another son.” Because of the principle that (Tehillim 145:19) רצון יראיו יעשה – Hashem does the will of those who fear Him – Rochel’s request for another son made it as if he was already born, and the Torah therefore views all of Yaakov’s sons as having been “born” in Padan Aram.

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