**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Vayeitzei – Vol. 12, Issue 7**

**Compiled by Ozer Alport**

**ויקח מאבני המקום וישם מראשתיו וישכב במקום ההוא (28:11)**

 Rashi writes that before Yaakov went to sleep, he placed stones around his head to protect him against a potential attack by wild animals. The stones began to fight with each other, as each one desired to be the one upon which the righteous Yaakov would actually rest his head. To appease them, Hashem miraculously combined all of the rocks into one large stone. However, this is difficult to understand. Since Yaakov’s head would still only lie on one small part of the overall rock, how were the stones which occupied positions upon which he was not sleeping mollified by this solution?

 Rav Shloma Margolis answers that when Yaakov initially placed twelve discrete rocks around his head, each rock viewed the others as separate and distinct, and they therefore fought over which one would merit supporting Yaakov’s resting head. Once they were merged into one large stone, they now viewed themselves as one combined entity, in which case there was no longer any reason for disputes, even for those parts of the new rock upon which Yaakov did not place his head. All of the stones recognized that they were now united as one, and there was no longer any purpose to jealously quarrel and compete with the other stones.

 My dear cousin Shaya Gross z”l adds that this concept also applies to marriage. Just as a person views his entire body as one united entity and does not get upset at his stomach if it is hungry or at his foot when it is in pain, so too if each spouse views the other as connected to him or her as part of one larger unit, they will intuitively understand that it is senseless to fight with one another.

 Unfortunately, human nature is such that we are all born selfish, primarily focused on fulfilling our own needs. At the same time, Hashem expects us to move beyond these innate tendencies and feel compassionate and helpful toward others. What is the secret to overcoming our natural propensity toward self-centeredness?

 In the introduction to his work Shaarei Yosher, Rav Shimon Shkop explains that rather than try to deny our innate focus on ourselves, each of us should instead work on expanding our definition of who “I” am. Most people are able to extend their definitions of self to include their families, while more magnanimous individuals manage to also include their friends and neighbors, and truly great people are able to enlarge their concept of self to incorporate all Jewish people, and all of Hashem’s creations. By striving to expand our perspectives to include as many people as possible and to view them as part of who “I” am, we will automatically find it easier to get along with them, just as we are naturally at peace with ourselves, and just as Yaakov’s stones resolved their dispute by merging into one larger entity.

**ורחל היתה יפת תאר ויפת מראה (29:17)**

 Every Friday night, before we begin the Shabbos meal, we sing Shlomo HaMelech’s beautiful praise of the אשת חיל – woman of valor. Toward the end, we declare (Mishlei 31:30) שקר החן והבל היופי – Charm is false and physical beauty is vain and empty. At the same time, the Torah praises Rivkah and Rochel as being attractive, and the Gemora in Megillah (15a) teaches that Sorah was one of the four most beautiful women in all of history. Why do we praise the Imahos for such a superficial, illusory quality?

 The Vilna Gaon explains that Shlomo himself alluded to the resolution of this apparent contradiction. Immediately following the aforementioned verse, he continues אשה יראת ד' היא תתהלל – Only a woman with fear of Heaven is truly praiseworthy. In other words, if a woman possesses physical beauty and uses it for the immodest and immoral purposes glorified by the society around us, it is indeed vain and empty. On the other hand, if she is G-d-fearing and uses her beauty in a modest and appropriate manner, as did the Matriarchs, it indeed becomes a positive attribute worthy of praise.

 Similarly, Rav Avrohom Yaakov Pam likened physical beauty to the number 0. If all a woman has going for her are good looks, she is an empty 0, a container which is fair to the eyes but with no inner value or inherent worth. If, on the other hand, she also possesses other laudable and praiseworthy traits, adding her attractive features to the list enhances and magnifies her intrinsic value from 10 to 100 or from 100 to 1000, a message which is all too relevant for a generation that has become increasingly fixated on external appearance as an overriding consideration in evaluating potential matches.

**ואחר ילדה בת ותקרא את שמה דינה (30:21)**

 Rashi writes that when Dina was conceived, she was originally a male. However, Leah knew prophetically that Yaakov was destined to have 12 sons. At that point in time, she had already given birth to six sons, and the maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah each had two sons. Leah was therefore concerned that if she gave birth to yet another male child, her sister Rochel would only be able to have one son, and in this sense would be even lower than the maidservants. To prevent this from happening, Leah petitioned Hashem to change her fetus from male to female, which is how Dina came to be born.

 The Targum Yonason ben Uziel writes that the mechanism by which Dina was transformed was through an in utero transfer. At the time that Leah conceived a son, Rochel was also pregnant with a girl. In response to Leah’s entreaties that her sister have at least as many sons as the maidservants, Hashem miraculously switched their two fetuses, with Rochel going on to give birth to Yosef and Leah giving birth to Dina. The Gemora (Berachos 60a) explains that the name Dina is derived from the word דין – judgment – to hint to the judgment that Leah made in asking Hashem to transform her fetus into a female.

 Although it seems that Leah’s self-sacrifice in willingly giving up a son who was already in her womb cost her the opportunity to mother an additional one of the 12 tribes, Rav Shimshon Pinkus notes that Hashem rewarded her magnanimity by giving her even more than she initially relinquished.

The Daas Z’keinim (41:45) writes that when Dina was defiled by Sh’chem (34:2), she became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter. This daughter was sent away and through a tremendous miracle of Divine providence, she was wedded to none other than her uncle Yosef. Yosef and his wife Osnas had two sons, Menashe and Ephraim, who are counted as two of the tribes in Israel. According to this account, it turns out that through Leah’s noble gesture of giving up the right to mother one of the tribes, she actually gained, as she became the progenitor of not one, but two additional tribes.

 Rav Pinkus points out that the Torah stipulates (Shemos 22:3) that if a thief steals an item, he is required to pay back the owner double the value of the object that he stole. If the Torah mandates a double punishment for wrongdoing, the reward for a mitzvah should certainly be double as well, a lesson that we see illustrated by Leah and Dina.

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

1. When Yaakov encountered Rochel, he began to cry (29:11). Rashi explains that in contrast to Eliezer, who arrived at Rivkah’s house bearing presents, Yaakov greeted Rochel and her family empty-handed. Although he set out with appropriate gifts, he was accosted on his journey by Elifaz, who was commanded by his father Eisav to kill Yaakov, but was hesitant to do so. Instead, he took all of Yaakov’s possessions, as the Gemora (Nedorim 64b) teaches that a poor person is considered as if he is dead, and this was considered a partial fulfillment of Eisav’s instructions to kill Yaakov. Where is this episode hinted to in the Torah? (Yalkut HaGershuni, Gan Yosef)
2. The Gemora in Megillah (13b) relates that when Yaakov encountered Rochel at the well, he asked her to marry him. She replied in the affirmative, but warned him that her father Lavan was a trickster. In what way do Jews living in America thousands of years later still need to protect themselves from Lavan’s deceit?
3. Rashi writes (29:25) that to prevent potential trickery by Lavan, Yaakov gave certain simanim (signs) to Rochel that only she would know. When Rochel realized that Lavan intended to send Leah under the bridal canopy instead of her, she feared the humiliation her sister would face and told her the simanim so that she could pass for Rochel. Even if Leah knew the simanim, why wasn’t Yaakov able to recognize that her voice wasn’t that of Rochel? (Eichah Rabbah Pesicha 24, Chizkuni, Bechor Shor, Sefer Gematrios, Maharsha Bava Basra 123a, M’rafsin Igri)
4. Rochel’s intention in stealing her father’s terafim (idols) was to prevent him from idol-worship (Rashi 31:19). Does this mean that if somebody possesses something forbidden it is permissible to steal it from him? (Ayeles HaShachar, Meshech Chochmah 31:32)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) **Rav Yehuda Assad** points out that the letters comprising the words (28:10) מבאר שבע וילך חרנה – (Yaakov traveled) from Be’er Sheva, and he went to Charan – are an abbreviation for מיד בא אליפז רשע שהוא בן עשו ויתן יעקב לו כל חילו, רק נשאר המקל – Immediately the wicked Elifaz the son of Eisav came, and Yaakov gave him all of his possessions, and all that remained was his staff. Similarly, the **Gan Yosef** notes that the letters in the words (29:13) את כל הדברים האלה – (Yaakov told Lavan) all of the things that had happened – are an abbreviation for אל תאמר כי לא הבאתי דבר, ברוב רכוש יצאתי מביתי, הלך אליפז לקח הכל – Don’t say that I didn’t bring anything; I left my house with a tremendous amount of possessions, but Elifaz came and took them all.

2) Although American Jews feel comfortable that the government respects our rights, Rav Nachman Bulman pointed out that it is no coincidence that the President’s residence, the White House, when translated into Hebrew becomes בית לבן – the house of Lavan, who seemed externally to be fair, yet in reality wanted to destroy the Jewish nation. While we must be appreciative for the unprecedented freedom granted us, we must remember that we are still in exile and never completely let our guards down.

3) The **Chizkuni** answers that Yaakov was so holy that even on his wedding night, he spoke to his new wife so minimally that he was unable to recognize that her voice was different than Rochel's. **Rav Yehuda HaChossid** suggests that they didn't speak at all, explaining that Leah pretended to be embarrassed to avoid having to talk and risk revealing her true identity. However, the Medrash states that they did converse and when Yaakov called her "Rochel," she responded. The **Bechor Shor** writes that although Yaakov was betrothed to Rochel for 7 years and lived in close proximity to her, he intentionally limited his interactions with her and wasn't sufficiently familiar with her voice to discern that Leah’s voice didn't match. The **Medrash** says that Rochel hid under Yaakov's bed on the night of his marriage to Leah, and when he spoke to her, Leah remained silent and Rochel responded so that Yaakov wouldn't recognize Leah's voice. The **Maharsha** explains that the fact that Leah knew the secret signs that Yaakov gave Rochel tricked him into assuming that she was Rochel and not correctly identifying her based on her voice, similar to the fact that Yaakov's hairy hands deceived Yitzchok into thinking that he was Eisav despite the difference in their voices (27:23). The **M'rafsin Igri** posits that since they were sisters, the voices of Rochel and Leah were so similar that Yaakov was unable to differentiate between them.

4) **Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman** writes that if somebody has something which can only be used for prohibited purposes, it is permissible to take it to prevent them from sinning. However, he notes that this is difficult to reconcile with Yaakov telling Lavan that whoever has the idols should die, which the **Meshech Chochmah** explains is due to the fact that non-Jews are killed for stealing.

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