



To truly understand the Torah's concealed messages, years of training are essential, as is the knowledge of the Rabbis' oral transmissions and their cryptic methods of discussion.

In this issue: God's providence over the patriarchs.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

VAYETZE	1,6,7
ISAAC'S WELLS	1,4,5
GOD'S PROVIDENCE	1-3
TZADDIK/ANGER	7
BOOKS: MOODS	8
JACOB'S SPECKLED FLOCK	9-11
VETERANS' DAY ADDRESS	12
ARAFAT & AMALEK	13-15
RACHEL'S DISGRACE	16

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Weekly Parsha

VaYetze

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Yaakov told Rachel that he was the brother of her father and that he was the son of Rivka. And she ran and told her father." (Bereshit 29:12)

The Torah cannot be defined as merely a religion. The term religion is generally understood to

(continued on page 6)

ISAAC AND THE WELLS

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SECOND PATRIARCH

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Written by student

In Gen. 26:1-33, the Torah recounts the story of Isaac, and the famine as the reason why he journeyed to Avimelech in Garar. God then commanded Isaac not to descend to Egypt, for despite the famine, He assured Isaac that he would provide. The Torah notes that this famine was not the same as the one in Abraham's days. Rashi states, the first famine of Abraham was a test for him. Abraham did not base his service of God on whether he enjoyed the fortunes of life. Ramban says Abraham was wrong, and should have had faith that God would provide, despite the famine. But Ramban is silent on Isaac's very same decision. Therefore, leaving a land when it suffers a drought is not inherently wrong. Had God not revealed Himself to Isaac, it would appear correct for Isaac to travel towards Egypt, away from the stricken lands.

We see that God's continued providence for Isaac was dependent on Abraham's guard of God's word. Regardless, each

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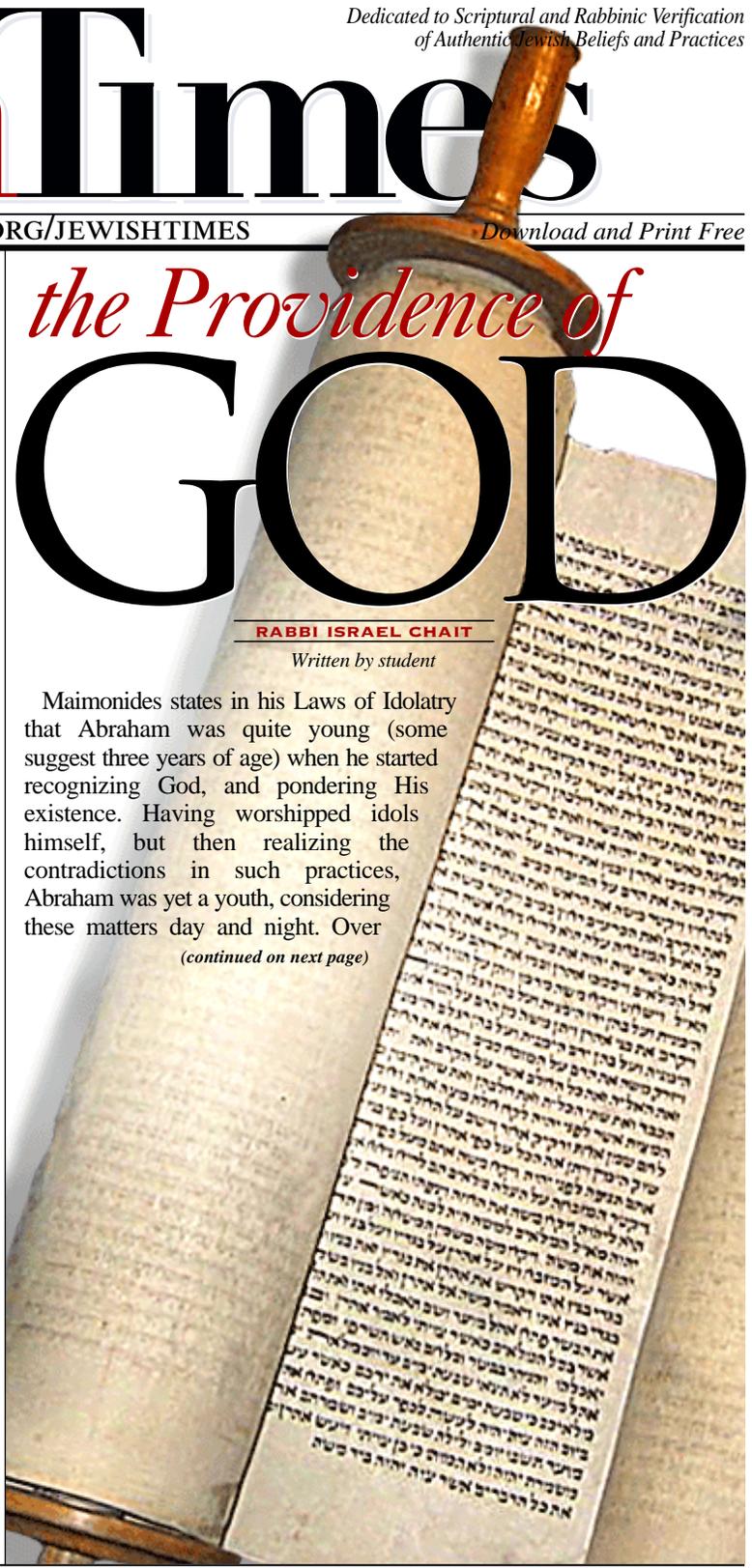
the Providence of GOD

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

Maimonides states in his Laws of Idolatry that Abraham was quite young (some suggest three years of age) when he started recognizing God, and pondering His existence. Having worshipped idols himself, but then realizing the contradictions in such practices, Abraham was yet a youth, considering these matters day and night. Over

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*Hagar had witnessed
God's providence
while in Abraham's
house. But now
exiled, she never
expected to
see providence
outside of
Abraham's house.*

time, he realized the idolaters were gravely mistaken.

Then, Abraham wrote responses to the idolaters and debated with them, but not until he was 40. Although possessing far greater knowledge than they had possessed, for decades, Abraham abstained from entering into debates with others until he fully concluded his thinking process, and attained clarity on the issues he pondered. Maimonides teaches that a poor answer is worse than no answer at all. Influencing people thru truth requires the educator to give over an entire subject matter: a conclusive series of arguments. To effectively present a "system" of truths, an incomplete or poor presentation mars the appreciation intended for the student – the goal is forfeited, and even worse, the student assumes the teacher to possess a flawed system. This would greatly decrease or perhaps even remove the student's ability to ever recognize this system at a later date. The student would thereby suffer the greatest loss: he would never come to an appreciation for the Creator, and His system of knowledge and providence over mankind. Therefore, Abraham patiently studied all matters until he attained crystallized concepts. Only then did he venture out into society, and take on the idolatrous cultures with well-formulated responses, only attained over decades of analysis driven by his yearning to know truth.

Two times in his life, did Abraham engage in debate: 1) in Ur Kasdim, and 2) in Charan. Charan was a major platform. He went from kingdom to kingdom, and called in God's name in many cities. Abraham dealt with others on an individual basis, offering them arguments against their corrupt philosophies: each person according to his own, subjective level. He also wrote many books addressing the flawed views these cultures defended.

However, Abraham's real success was not in Ur or even in Charan. He only succeeded in attracting his 10,000's of followers once God's providence stepped in. Abraham's philosophy continued thru Isaac, until it was almost lost by the time the Jews left Egypt.

Each morning we recite the blessing of "Sanctifying God's name":

"You are the one (who existed) while the world was not yet created. You are the one from when the world was created. You are the one in this world, and You are the one in the world to come. Sanctify Your name by those who sanctify Your name, and sanctify Your name in Your world. And with Your salvation, raise up, and exalt our horn. Blessed are You, God, who sanctifies His name publicly."

This blessing reiterates the truth, that the Jews

are the people given the task to sanctify God's great name. But it is only through His providence that we may do so. We learn this from the Torah's omission of Abraham's initial successes prior to God's intervention, and we learn this from Revelation at Sinai. It was this Sinaiic event where God's providence intervened in human affairs, directing the descendants of Abraham to study and observe His Torah, and educate the world on His existence, His Oneness, and His truths.

Maimonides: Only Certain Individuals Knew God

Noah's son Shem recognized and taught about God. Shem established a house of study in B'aire L'chai Roh-ee. We learn when the twins (Jacob and Esau) violently wrestled within Rebecca, that Rebecca went to the study hall of Shem to gain some insight as to why her pregnancy deviated from the norm. What was Rebecca intent on learning? Why did she go here specifically? Upon Eliezer's successful return from locating a wife for Isaac, the Torah tells us that Isaac too was returning from B'aire L'chai Roh-ee. What Isaac was doing there?

Previously, when Hagar fled from before Sarah, she named the well where the angel appeared, "B'aire L'chai Roh-ee". We now arrive at the initial event, from which we may derive the significance attributed to this place. What is this significance?

B'aire L'chai Roh-ee – God's Providence over Individuals

Rashi states that Hagar had witnessed God's providence while in Abraham's house. But now exiled, she never expected to see providence outside of Abraham's house. Hagar, as an individual, no longer comprised Abraham's mission and was surprised to witness an angel of God, i.e., God's providence. (Gen. 16:7) Hagar named that God who spoke to her at the well, "The God Who sees." (Gen. 16:13) The Torah explains why she gave this name, "[13] ...for she said, 'for also further I see, after I have seen'. [14] Therefore the well was named, 'The Well of the Living One Who is Seen.'" Hagar states that she saw God's providence "again". After having seen it Abraham's house, Hagar again witnessed God's providence via His angels. What is the lesson?

Yonasan ben Uzziel explained the name of this place as, "One Who sees, but is not seen." What does this name mean? Hagar's naming of this place on account of a new providential event teach this: "You are the One who has true existence. Here was revealed the providence of God." Hagar praised God. She admitted of the idea that no human knows when providence will take place. She assumed providence was limited to Abraham's mission. But now, Hagar recognized



We learn that God designed two types of providence:

- 1) providence over mankind, and*
- 2) providence over the individual.*

that His providence provides for every “individual”. She experienced God’s intervention, His providence, even away from Abraham’s house. Providence for God’s mission for Abraham to establish the Jewish nation was not the only type of providence. Thus, Hagar identified two distinct roles in which God’s providence relates to man, 1) providence for mankind (Abraham establishing a nation, and 2) providence for individuals. The idea Hagar spoke of, “He sees but isn’t seen”, refers to providence outside Abraham’s mission, that is, “How God’s providence extends to every individual.”

Simultaneously, Hagar demonstrated through her very surprise at God’s intervention that man cannot know when and where God’s providence will step in. In contrast, most people incorrectly feel they “know” when God is in their lives. But as Yonasan ben Uzziel explained, the name means “One Who sees, but is not seen.” “Is not seen” means that man cannot predict God’s methods of providence.

Isaac too came from B’aire L’chai Roh-ee, where Shem was. Shem’s house of study was established precisely in this location, as this was the goal of Shem’s study hall: to study God’s providence for individuals. Shem’s study hall embodied the truth uttered by Hagar. Therefore he established his study hall in the very place where Hagar had expressed this very truth.

Why did Rebecca go to Shem’s study hall? As we stated, Shem taught about God’s providence for individuals. Rebecca didn’t think her pregnancy was anything more than a personal crisis, not on par with God’s mission for Abraham and Isaac to establish the Jewish nation. Therefore she sought understanding about her “individual” case: she felt it was a personal and private problem. However, it was then revealed to her through prophecy that her pregnancy was not a personal matter. Her abnormal pregnancy was an act of God’s providence over the nation, not the individual.

Both Isaac and Jacob learned at Shem’s study hall. Why? To fulfill their roles as forefathers of the Jewish nation, they required knowledge of God’s providence for the individual. To pass on to Israel the traditions and teachings of Abraham, this “individual providence” was required learning. Abraham’s knowledge concerned providence for mankind, while Shem’s knowledge centered on individual providence.

We learn that on his journey from his home to his uncle Laban, Jacob lodged at Shem’s study hall for 14 years. This teaches that Jacob required 14 years of knowledge of God’s providence over individuals, so as to become the establisher of the tribes. This level of knowledge was acquired at Shem. Only then, did the providence relate to Jacob to establish the tribes. Such a long duration

of study teaches that God’s methods of providence require long and deep study. The patriarchs all required a level of in-depth study, in order to accomplish their goals: this study was “God’s Providence to individuals.”

It was asked, “Why did Isaac have to spend so many years in blindness?” The answer was “to give the blessing to Jacob” So why could he not be temporarily blind? We must appreciate that God’s providence is not a simple matter. For some reason, Isaac required this degree of blindness. If Isaac had a condition that led to his blindness, and God did not remove it, it was necessary for God’s plan. It was not a punishment, as it says, “To give the blessing to Jacob”. But we may investigate this matter further.

Moses did not lose his vision. (Deut. 34:7) He knew that beyond a certain point, he could not know. This is the meaning of “...and Moses hid his face” (Exod. 3:6) stated in connection with his encounter with the burning bush. Because of this, Moses merited to attain the highest level of prophecy ever experienced. Moses understood when a matter that was greater than his abilities. However, Isaac tried to understand that which was beyond his abilities. When Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, Isaac pondered how God could first tell Abraham “For in Isaac will your seed be called”, and then Abraham should be commanded to kill Isaac. Isaac sought an understanding for this contradiction in God’s words.

The Medrash states that Isaac’s blindness was due to the angel’s tears falling into Isaac’s eyes as he was bound on the altar. How do we understand this Medrash? The angels represent “ultimate knowledge”. Their “tears falling into Isaac’s eyes” metaphorically alludes to something greater than Isaac (angels) causing a negative (blindness) in Isaac. Thus, Isaac’s very attempt to overextend his inquiry into areas greater than his abilities had a negative effect on him. He became blinded. God’s initial promise of Isaac being a successor would not come to be. This knowledge affected Isaac, i.e., blindness. However, this very blindness helped direct Isaac to review his act, and repent from trying to gain knowledge, which surpassed his abilities. Another Medrash also teaches that Isaac lacked the knowledge concerning how the providence over Abraham works.

We learn that God designed two types of providence, 1) providence over mankind, and 2) providence over the individual. Hagar understood that God granted His providence over Abraham for the sake of mankind. But Hagar was then exiled from Abraham’s house. She did not assume she would experience providence, unless connected somehow with God’s influence over mankind. After experiencing God’s intervention at the well, Hagar now learned of this second type of providence. ■

Isaac left, but then returned. Why? He did so for the express purpose of reopening Abraham's wells. He made a separate journey back after having left, precisely to demonstrate why he came back: to resuscitate Abraham's fame and teachings.

patriarch was worthy to have God's name connected with him. Isaac was not simply perpetuating his studies received from his father Abraham: he added a new dimension, and derived his convictions from his own thinking. God promises His oath to Isaac, as Isaac deserved this providence due to his own merit.

When Isaac entered Garar, he did as Abraham his father, and claimed his wife Rebecca was his sister, to protect his own life. After time had passed, we read that the king, Avimelech, had looked from his window, witnessing Isaac engaged in some activity with Rebecca which clearly conveyed that their relationship was in fact not siblings, but husband and wife. Avimelech rebuked Isaac for endangering his people, one of whom might have taken Rebecca, bringing sin to them. Avimelech then commanded his people that no one should harm Isaac and Rebecca.

We then read that Isaac reaped a hundredfold, and grew very successful. His successes did not cease. The Philistines envied Isaac for this. There is an interesting Rashi on this section. He writes, "Better the dung of the mules of Isaac, than the silver and gold of Avimelech." This is a strange idea: why would people prefer the former? The Torah goes on, "All the wells that his (Isaac's) father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had and stopped up and filled with dirt." For what reason does the Torah inform us of this obscure fact?

Ramban states there is no honor to Isaac in this whole story. So why was it recorded? He answers that the point of this section is to allude to something hidden: these three wells allude to the three Temples. The first well was named Esek, meaning contention. The first Temple was amidst much contention. The second well Isaac dug was named Sitna, for the hatred displayed by the Philistines towards Isaac. Similarly, during the second Temple, there was much hatred. Rechovos was the name of the third well, over which the philistines did not quarrel. Rechovos means breadth, as in the breadth of mind now afforded to Isaac. And in the third Temple, there will be peace. Rabbi Israel Chait commented that although there may be some future correlations, there must also be something in each Torah account, to which we may relate to in the here and now.

Emergence of the Second Patriarch

In what sense were Abraham and his son Isaac patriarchs? Isaac differed from Abraham. Abraham made his mark through his ability to interact with the world. He debated with many, and although eventually exiled, he resumed his teachings. However, there is another element

responsible for their success at spreading knowledge of God: Divine providence. God miraculously saved Abraham on many occasions, paving the way for his continued teachings, while also creating his unparalleled reputation. Isaac was different. He was an "Oleh Temima", a "wholly burnt offering" of sorts. His energies were not directed to the world of the social, but exclusively towards knowledge. Coming so close to death when he was bound to the altar had a profound effect on the personality of Isaac. Thus, God told Isaac not to descend to Egypt; he was a different personality. So how did Isaac play a role as a patriarch?

Both famines were a result of providence. But in Isaac's case, it did not have the purpose as a test, as was the case with regards to Abraham. During the famine in Isaac's era, God instructed him to remain in the land. Why was this necessary?

The Wells

The wells were essential for Isaac's emergence in his role as an independent patriarch. We are told that Isaac became very wealthy. But he does not cease in his monetary growth, as was the case with Avimelech. Avimelech was stagnant in his wealth. Therefore, the Philistines said they preferred Isaac's mule dung to Avimelech's riches. This means they respected Isaac who could take dung (famine) and make successes from it. This wealth created a great respect for Isaac. Avimelech then asked Isaac to leave Garar, as his continued dwelling in Garar made Avimelech, the king, look bad by comparison.

But the Philistines became envious. We learn that they filled up Abraham's well. This demonstrated their denouncing of Abraham's philosophy. Why didn't the Philistines fill Abraham's wells earlier? It is because when they saw the greatness of Isaac, they now learned that Abraham's ideology was not a "flash in the pan", a one-time movement. Isaac's continuation of Abraham's philosophy now created friction in Garar, as they could no longer view Abraham's era as eclipsed by time. His philosophy was sustained through Isaac; there is a dynasty. The Philistines' realization that Abraham's philosophy was continuing was intolerable to their corrupt lifestyle. Had Abraham passed, along with his monotheistic views, they could let matters go. But this was not the case any longer. Thus, they desired to rebel against Abraham's sustained philosophy. But the Philistines could not harm Isaac. They respected his wealth. So they attacked Abraham through stopping up his wells.

Isaac left, but then returned. Why? He did so

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God orchestrated a famine, as the prefect backdrop to emphasize Isaac's wealth.



for the express purpose of reopening Abraham's wells. He made a separate journey back after having left, precisely to demonstrate why he came back: to resuscitate Abraham's fame and teachings. What was the response of the Philistines? They strove with Isaac over his new wells. The Philistines attempted to negate the greatness of Isaac. The Philistines did not say, "ours is the water" as in the first well, demonstrating that the water was not the issue. Rather, Isaac's fame was what they deplored. After a certain amount of time, they saw they could not bring down Isaac. The Philistines eventually succumbed to another emotion: their underlying respect for Isaac's success. The adage, "If you can't beat them, join them" enunciates this very change in the Philistines. Thus, the final well, which Isaac's servants dug, was named "breadth." Isaac was no longer attacked, as the emotion of adulation replaced the Philistines' prior repulsion. This point is when Avimelech desired to secure a truce. Wealth draws people. This was the method

through which Isaac became renown.

God orchestrated a famine, as the prefect backdrop to emphasize Isaac's wealth. No one else prospered during this famine. Ultimately, Isaac returns to Abraham's teaching ground, Beer Sheva. Isaac arrived physically at this location, and philosophically at his goal to be engaged in study. Thus we read, "He called out in God's name", meaning, he resumed teaching about God, his primary goal. We also learn that God's plan was successful, as we read that Avimelech traveled to Isaac, recognizing his greatness. Isaac's fame was now positive. Avimelech did not desire any truce with Isaac while he dwelled in Garar. It was only after his successes. Subsequent to his exile, Isaac became very wealthy, and this wealth was the groundwork necessary for others to recognize Isaac's philosophy.

The Philistines realized that by applying Isaac's philosophy, one could achieve success. This was exceptionally profound, while they endured a famine. ■

refer to a system of worship. It is true that the Torah does include a system of divine service. However, this is only a part of the message to the Torah. Beyond providing a system of worship the Torah also deals with many other issues. It regulates conduct within the family. It includes a system of adjudication and social welfare. The Torah provides regulation and an orientation that extends to virtually every element of communal, national and personal life. This includes a sophisticated system of laws and ethics that govern commercial and business conduct. Our parasha includes the first extensive treatment of business relations. This is communicated through a comparative analysis of the business ethics of Yaakov and his father-in-law Lavan.

Yaakov travels to Haran. There he comes to a well and meets Rachel the daughter of Lavan. In our pasuk, Yaakov introduces himself to Rachel. He tells her that he is her father's brother. Rashi is bothered by the obvious question. This was not an accurate description of his relationship to Lavan. Yaakov was not Lavan's brother. He was Lavan's nephew. Yaakov's mother – Rivka – was Lavan's sister.

Rashi offers two explanations. The simple interpretation is that Yaakov did not mean that he was Lavan's brother in the literal sense. He meant that they were kin. Rashi points out that this is not the only instance in which the term brother is used to denote kinship.

However, Rashi offers another explanation. Yaakov provided two descriptions of himself. He said he was the brother of Lavan and the son of Rivka. Now, it would have sufficed for Yaakov to describe himself as Rivka's son. Why did Yaakov also describe himself as the brother or relative of Lavan? Rashi responds that there was a message communicated in this description. Rivka was an honest, straightforward individual. In contrast, Lavan was a dishonest conniver. Yaakov intended to compare himself to both his mother and uncle and communicate that he was the equal of both. He was as honest as Rachel but also capable as being as devious as Lavan.[1]

It seems that Yaakov is saying that he is prepared to act dishonestly! If Lavan attempts to treat him unfairly, he will retaliate by treating Lavan in the same manner. Yaakov seems to be arguing that it is sometimes appropriate to be less than fair and honest. But as we shall see this was not Yaakov's message.

“And Yaakov loved Rachel and he said, “I will work for you for seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter.” (Beresheit 29:18)

Our pasuk tells us that Yaakov loved Rachel and wished to marry her. He asked her father

for his approval of the marriage and offered to work for Lavan for seven years in exchange for marriage to Rachel. He described Rachel as “Rachel, your younger daughter.” Once again, Yaakov adopts a rather elaborate description when a more simple description would seem adequate. Lavan knew who Rachel was. Yaakov did not need to describe Rachel as Lavan's younger daughter.

Rashi explains that Yaakov was fully aware of Lavan's deviousness. He did not want to describe his chosen wife as “Rachel.” Lavan might substitute another girl with the same name. Also, Yaakov was not satisfied to describe his wife as “Rachel, your daughter.” Lavan might switch the names of his daughters and then substitute Leya – the newly named Rachel – for the real Rachel. In order to preclude either of these possibilities, Yaakov described his chosen very carefully as “Rachel, your younger daughter.” But Rashi explains that despite these precautions, Lavan succeeded in deceiving Yaakov and substituting Leya for Rachel.[2],[3]

This raises two questions. Yaakov claimed that he could be Lavan's equal in deviousness. Apparently, Yaakov was very wrong! Why did Yaakov assume he could match Lavan and where did he make his mistake?

Let us begin with the first question. Why did Yaakov assume he could match Lavan? Yaakov believed that he was just as smart as Lavan. He knew that Lavan was very shrewd. But he assumed that his own wisdom was a match for Lavan's shrewdness. In fact, Yaakov was correct. Yaakov described Rachel with such precision that he succeeded in precluding any legitimate substitution of Leya or any other woman for Rachel. It is true that Lavan substituted Leya for Rachel. But Lavan never claimed that he had fulfilled his bargain. He admitted to the substitution.

We can now understand Yaakov's intention in describing himself as Lavan's equal. He did not mean that it is appropriate to be dishonest or unfair and that he could and would match Lavan in dishonesty. He meant that his wisdom was the match for Lavan's shrewdness. He claimed that he would be able to foresee and preclude any attempt by Lavan to be devious with his own wisdom. So, what was Yaakov's mistake?

“And Lavan said, “This is not done in our place – to give the younger daughter before the elder daughter.” (Beresheit 29:26)

Yaakov discovers that Lavan has substituted Leya for Rachel. He confronts Lavan. Lavan does not deny the substitution. Instead, he explains that the substitution is justified. Leya is the elder daughter. It not appropriate to give the

younger daughter in marriage before the elder daughter.

In this passage, the Torah tells us how Lavan succeeded in deceiving Yaakov. Yaakov realized that Lavan would use any legitimate means to substitute Leya or some other woman for Rachel. He assumed that by removing all legitimate opportunities for a substitution he would prevent the substitution. However, he did not realize that Lavan would rationalize an overt abrogation of their agreement. Through relying on the rationalization that Leya was the elder daughter, Lavan completely ignored the terms of his agreement with Yaakov and substituted Leya. In other words, because Yaakov underestimated Lavan's deviousness he was deceived. He assumed that Lavan would rely on his shrewdness. But he did not expect an open breach of their agreement.

Of course, this raises another question. Yaakov recognized that Lavan was a cheat. He knew he was devious. Yet, he did not predict that Lavan would be able to rationalize and open breach of their agreement. Why was Yaakov unable to foresee the extent of Lavan's dishonesty?

“And he came also to Rachel. And he loved Rachel more than Leya. And he worked with him another, additional seven years.” (Beresheit 29:30)

Lavan agrees to give Rachel to Yaakov as a wife. They make a new deal. In exchange for Rachel, Yaakov will work for Lavan for an additional seven years. Our pasuk tells us that Lavan gives Rachel to Yaakov and Yaakov fulfills his part of the bargain by serving Lavan the additional years.

The wording of the passage is problematic. The pasuk says that Yaakov worked for Lavan another, additional seven years. The phrase “another, additional” is a clear redundancy. It would have sufficed to use either term – another or an additional. But why does the Torah use both? Rashi explains that the intent is to equate this second seven years for the first seven years of labor that Yaakov provided. During the first seven years, Yaakov worked under the assumption that Lavan would respect their agreement and provide him with Rachel as a wife. However, the second seven years began after Lavan cheated Yaakov. This second set of seven years was a direct result of Lavan's dishonesty.

Nonetheless, the service that Yaakov provided during this second seven years was undistinguishable for the service during the first set. During the first set, Yaakov was a dedicated and honest employee. He provided the same level of service during the second set.[4]

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There is an important point here. Yaakov entered into this agreement as a result of Lavan's dishonesty. Nonetheless once Yaakov made the agreement, he scrupulously observed its terms. Unlike Lavan, he did not resort to rationalization. He did not breach his agreement and reduce the quality of his service. Despite the disagreeable circumstances that motivated him to enter into this agreement, Yaakov did not rationalize cheating Lavan.

Now, we can explain Yaakov's error at a deeper level. Yaakov was confident in his own wisdom. He correctly considered it the match for Lavan's shrewdness. But his was not a master of human psychology. As a fundamentally honest person, he could not appreciate the ability of human beings to rationalize complete dishonesty. Lavan resorted to a form of behavior with which Yaakov could not identify. Because this behavior was so alien to him, he could not foresee or predict it. Yaakov could not rationalize dishonesty. Because he could not identify or relate to such open dishonesty, he could not foresee Lavan's behavior. Because of his own goodness, he underestimated the human ability to rationalize open dishonesty. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 29:12.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 29:18.

[3] It should be noted that there seems to be a contradiction in Rashi's comments. Our Rashi explains that Lavan succeeded in deceiving Yaakov. However according to Rashi's comments later in the parasha, this is not the case. According to these later comments, Yaakov and Rachel agreed to a signal that they would use in order to assure that the woman Yaakov married was indeed Rachel. This signal should have prevented Lavan from making a substitution. However, when Lavan made the substitution Rachel provided Leya with the signal, rather than expose her sister to embarrassment. According to these comments, Lavan did not succeed in out-maneuvering Yaakov. Instead, Rachel's complicity led to Yaakov's marriage to Leya. It is possible that this apparent contradiction can be resolved through assuming that Lavan suspected that Yaakov and Rachel had arranged some signal but depended on Rachel's loyalty to Leya to undermine this precaution. However, this explanation is speculative.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 29:30.

The Patriarchs:

When a Tzaddik is Obligated to Get Angry

RABBI REUVEN MANN

A careful and honest study of the Torah makes it absolutely clear that Judaism categorically rejects the possibility of "miracle workers". In order to have a proper relationship with God, we must scrupulously avoid any attribution of "supernatural" power to mortals.

A fascinating episode in a recently read sedra (Vayetze) clearly illustrates this point. Rachel, who was childless, and envious of her sister Leah, pleaded with her husband to "give" her children or else she would die. Most of the commentators are puzzled with Jacob's angry dismissal of his wife's request. His lack of compassion and sensitivity to Rachel's emotional distress seems incomprehensible. Very surprising, as well, is his display of anger which is an emotion which the righteous must always avoid except in matters pertaining to heaven.

We must pay attention to the words of Jacob for they go to the heart of the matter at issue. The pasuk says "Jacob's anger flared up at Rachel and he said 'Am I in the place of God who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?'" The commentary of the

Sforno is most illuminating. He says, "Jacob's anger flared up for saying 'Give me children', implying that he had the power to do so. In his zeal for the honor of God, he disregarded his love for her." Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz in the notes appended to his translation of the Sforno explains, "Jacob was angry with Rachel for saying 'Give me' not 'Pray for me'. The latter request would have been proper, the former was not since it implied that Jacob had the power to grant that which only God can give....His great zeal for God's honor, however, caused him to set aside his feelings of love for Rachel, for his love for God was greater."

Jacob who ranks among the greatest of men displayed anger at any implication that he had the power to change the natural order of events. This type of overestimation of man violates the honor that is due exclusively to the Creator. The true tzaddik is the one, who like Yaakov Avinu, reacts with anger to even the slightest suggestion that he has transcended the bounds of human limitations and shares a power, which is exclusively that of the Creator. ■

Taken from "Getting It Straight" Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity

Moods

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"What's wrong?" he asked.

I downshifted my Schwinn mountain bike and swerved to avoid a chuckhole in the trail. Next to me, gliding along like he did this every day (and for all I knew, he did), my friend, the King of Rational Thought, rode effortlessly beside me. We had traveled the first mile of this made-over railroad trail south of Duvall in silence, finally broken by his gentle question.

"Nothing," I said, not convincingly. Then, "no, everything. I mean- oh, I don't know. It just seems like nothing's going right."

"Such as?" he inquired.

"Well, let's see," I said, sighing heavily. "Where should I start? My house needs re-roofing. Some developers bought a golf course near my home and plan to inundate our quiet dead-end street with over 100 closely-packed urban dwellings. One part of my investment portfolio has gone incredibly sour. I broke the stem off one of the control knobs on our kitchen stove.

"And," I added with emphasis, "my birthday went by and none of my friends called me."

We rounded a bend and caught the warm morning breeze full in the face. The day was already shaping up to be a scorcher.

"Sounds like you're in a bad mood," said the King of Rational Thought.

"I am."

"Nothing to worry about," he said, almost nonchalantly.

I turned my head so sharply to glare at him that I almost rode into the ditch.

"What do you mean, nothing to worry about?" I said, my voice rising. "You think I enjoy feeling this way? Doesn't anything ever bother you? Don't you ever get upset, or troubled, or angry?"

"Of course," he replied. "But I've learned to deal with it. I'll show you. You say you're in a

bad mood. Have you ever been in a bad mood before?"

"Uh, yeah. I guess so."

"And what happened?"

I thought about it. "Well, I got over it somehow."

"Ok then. Here's the problem. You get into a bad mood. It's not a catastrophe. It just happens. We could explore all the psychological ramifications of it and spend the next 100 years analyzing it, but the fact is, you occasionally get in a bad mood. Now when that happens, you have a feeling that this state - this lousy, nothing-ever-works-right-for-me-and-nobody-likes-me state - will go on forever. Right?"

"Yes," I said. "In spades."

"But that's not reality, is it? Reality is that you've been in a bad mood before, and you've gotten over it. True?"

I didn't want to admit it, but he was right.

"Yes," I finally said.

"In fact," he continued as we crossed a bridge, "if you look back on your life, how many times have you been in a bad mood and then gotten out of it?"

"I suppose lots of times."

"So what makes you think this situation is any different? You're in a funk, true. Will it last forever? Almost certainly not."

I saw his point. I had been in these spots before and I always got over it.

"If you're deeply depressed or suicidal," he said, "that's different. Then you need professional help. But otherwise, your life will be a whole lot more peaceful if you just recognize the temporary nature of moods... and situations."



We crossed another bridge. The background chorale of bird songs and rustling trees was surpassed by the distant whistle of the Remlinger Farms steam train.

"I suppose you're right," I said, knowing full well he was right. "It's just so hard to imagine not being in a lousy mood when you are."

"Remember King Solomon?" asked the King of Rational Thought.

"Yes," I replied. "Purported to be the world's wisest man, if I recall."

"It's said of him that he wore a ring bearing the words, 'This will also pass'."

"Hmmm," I said thoughtfully. "Nothing like a constant reminder."

"Speaking of which," he said, "what if I could show you an unusual technique that could simultaneously change your mood, cool you off from this hot ride, and has no long-term after-effects?"

"Sounds great," I said.

He squirted his water bottle at me. ▣

The Patriarchs:

Jacob and the Speckled Flocks



Reader: I was wondering if you had any literature on the section of this week's Parsha, when Jacob makes the deal with Laban for his wage. I had a couple of questions. Why would Jacob offer a deal like that? Meaning, if Laban separated all the spotted and striped from Jacob's flock, how did he expect to breed his own - of those very markings? You cannot create black sheep from white ones! And secondly regarding the design of the sticks in the feeding burrows during the mating season: did Jacob know some scientific formulation affecting the phenotype of the animals? That seems strange. I think the commentaries also suggest that there was Divine providence involved. If that's the case, did Jacob know that for sure, or was he just relying on it? And if it was Divine providence, why did he have to design the elaborate breeding with the streaked rods, let the Divine providence take charge, and forget the whole streaked rods procedure! If you had time I think that there is definitely some interesting idea underlying this section- it seems too strange not to!

Thanks, Daniel

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Mesora: Let's place your questions into context: After Jacob had already worked 14 years for both of Laban's daughters, and after Joseph's birth, Jacob desired to take leave of Laban. Jacob asked Laban for his wages. Laban, resorting to standard business tactics, did not want to be the first one to suggest Jacob's wages. Jacob understood his conniving father-in-law, and then suggested that he would herd the flocks, taking for his wage all future speckled and spotted lambs and goats, and brown sheep.

The Torah then reads, "I will pass over your entire flock, removing from there, every speckled and spotted lamb, every brown sheep, and the speckled and spotted goats, and this will be my wage." (Gen. 30:32) Jacob stated this, but the meaning is unclear. What is his wage: these flocks, or only their offspring, or both? According to one view, Jacob told Laban to remove these from the current flock so as to eliminate any claim Laban might make later, saying, "These were already there from before and are mine - they are not the 'future' flocks you spoke of." To avoid this anticipated trickery, Jacob agreed that Laban might separate for himself, all of the speckled and spotted lambs and goats, and brown sheep. However, according to Rashi, it was not Jacob who took the speckled and spotted flock: this was Laban's own move to eliminate any chance of Jacob's success. Thus, according to Rashi, Jacob's plan was to take for himself the speckled and spotted flock alone, as a means to enrich his own flock. This makes more sense, as where would Jacob obtain speckled and spotted flock if he had none from which to reproduce? But Laban agreed to allow Jacob to separate these flocks, but then undermined Jacob's true intent, and in other words said, "Yes Jacob, good idea. Separate those flocks". But the less shrewd Jacob assumed Laban took the meaning as Jacob intended. So Jacob separated them, but only to discover that Laban then said, "Now give them to me." This was not Jacob's intent. But Laban

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twisted his words in his favor. Jacob was now left with less than he intended.

We then read that Laban cheated Jacob again: Laban took the “ringed” goats too. This was not part of the agreement. Laban lessened Jacob’s prospects by removing more than what they had agreed to. Chizkuni states this deceit justified Jacob’s streaked rods tactic. Ramban disagrees, suggesting that one has the right to manipulate the flocks any way he sees fit. This was not trickery on Jacob’s part according to Ramban. But according to all views, the Torah clearly teaches that Laban took more than what was agreed.

Laban then took the greedy precaution of placing a three-day journey between his separated, speckled and spotted flocks, and Jacob’s flocks. Laban wanted to eliminate any chance of Jacob’s flock mating with the patterned flocks, which would increase Jacob’s flocks.

Jacob was now left with his commitment to accept as his specified share, the speckled and spotted flocks. He had fewer prospects, as Laban also wrongly removed the ringed flocks. Jacob had counted on the ringed flocks to contribute to his projections of patterned offspring. Jacob devised a plan: he placed streaked rods in the watering troughs, and when the animals were heated, the rods’ patterns were somehow absorbed by the flocks, and they reproduced in the patterns of these rods. Jacob successfully reproduced his flock in the patterns Laban agreed would be his.

How did Jacob know this streaked rod idea would work? Was it really Jacob’s own idea? Keep these questions in mind.

Later on, after Jacob’s speckled and spotted flocks greatly multiplied, he saw that Laban’s countenance towards him decreased due to his success. God instructed Jacob to return and that He would be with him. In Genesis 31:10-13, Jacob then tells his wives that he had a prophecy regarding the flocks wherein the angel informed him that the speckled and spotted flocks would be greatly multiplied. But when did Jacob receive this vision? One of two possibilities exists, either prior or subsequent to Jacob’s plan to place the streaked rods in the watering troughs. We must ask: did the angel tell Jacob only ‘THAT’ the speckled and spotted flocks would increase? Or did the angel also tell Jacob ‘HOW’ to make these flocks multiply, via the streaked rods?

Ramban: Two Visions

If the first possibility, we must then ask 2 more questions: 1) If Jacob was guaranteed by the angel that these flocks would multiply, what

need was there for the streaked rods? To this, Ramban states that after this vision, Jacob no longer used the streaked rods, he trusted in God. Thus, Ramban holds that Jacob had at least one vision of the he-goats mounting the speckled and spotted flocks ‘after’ he initiated his streaked rods plan. And once he saw this vision, he ceased from using the rods out of trust in God. 2) If the angel did not inform Jacob of the streaked rods’ abilities, how did he know these rods would work? However, since Jacob was the one who selected the speckled/spotted flocks, perhaps he already knew something about animal breeding: environment affects their appearance. Jacob may have observed that in certain regions, those flocks were affected by their surroundings, creating physical markings on their coats. We do see today that in varied regions, one species may bear different markings and colors, while the same species in other global locations appear different. Accordingly, Jacob possessed some zoological knowledge. But had the angel also informed Jacob “how” to increase the flocks via the rods, we may assume less about Jacob’s knowledge.

Ramban states that the vision Jacob recounted to his wives was in fact not a single vision. Ramban says that Jacob received the later vision, while he was yet working his initial years for Laban for his two wives, and not during the later time of this deal with the speckled/spotted flocks. Accordingly, this is what occurred: Jacob agrees to work 7 years for Rachel. Jacob is tricked, and Leah is substituted. Jacob agrees to work yet another 7 years for Rachel. During these years, Laban switches his wages numerous times, to secure the greatest wealth for himself, cheating Jacob. Also during this time, Jacob received this vision recorded in Gen. 31:11,12, “And an angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob’, and I said, ‘Here I am.’ And he said, ‘Lift up your eyes and see all the he-goats that are mounting the flocks, are ringed speckled and checkered. For I have seen all that Laban has done to you.’” Ramban states Jacob received this vision while he was yet working his 14 years for his wives.

Jacob knew prophetically that these flock types would be numerous. But, did he know they would be his? I am not sure. But if he did, what need would there be for his streaked rods? He had a guarantee! Perhaps, all he knew was that these flocks would greatly increase...the rest remained up to him. In either case, Jacob had a reason to desire them, and asked for these flocks from Laban. If Jacob was not told anything other than the fact that these flocks would increase, we learn that he used the streaked rods to make these flocks his own. Meaning, God gave Jacob just enough

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*How did Jacob
know this streaked
rod idea would
work? Was it really
Jacob’s own idea?*

knowledge, i.e., that these flock would increase, leaving the 'acquisition' up to Jacob. Later, Ramban states that Jacob had another vision at the time the flocks were heated, (31:10) "And it was at the time the flocks were heated, and I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the he-goats that mounted the flock were ringed speckled and checkered." At this point, this latter vision came to secure the acquisition, confirming to Jacob that God's providence is granting these flocks to him. Jacob therefore ceased from using the rods any further.

So the sequence of events is that Jacob received one vision in which he learned of the flocks' increase. Years later, during the deal to take the speckled and spotted flocks, Jacob received a second vision securing them to him as his. The verse's words attest to this, as the verse defines 'when' Jacob received one of the visions, as "And it was at the time the flocks were heated...". The second vision he repeats to his wives, omits any date. This would explain why Ramban holds that there were two visions.

One Vision

We understand Ramban's view. Now, let us consider an alternative understanding: the visions were a single prophecy. The verses read as follows: (31:10-12) "And it was at the time the flocks were heated, and I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the he-goats that mounted the flock were ringed speckled and checkered. And an angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob', and I said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see all the he-goats that are mounting the flocks, are ringed speckled and checkered. For I have seen all that Laban has done to you.'" Why is Jacob first given the opportunity to see the vision, and only afterwards, addressed by the angel, and at that, instructed to look again at what he already saw? What is added the second time Jacob views the he-goats? It is this, "For I have seen all that Laban has done to you."

When he devised the plan regarding the streaked rods, it was his own thinking. Now, as the flocks became heated, he received this vision. Of his own accord, Jacob attempted to use his knowledge of animal behavior to increase his wealth. Why then was a vision necessary at this point?

By its very definition, a vision means that God is relating to the person individually. Jacob was now being informed that God is providing for him. He need not concern himself that Laban might cheat him anymore. This reasoning makes sense, as this reassuring vision came exactly when Jacob was trying to outwit Laban. Jacob felt he was on his own, and rightfully so.

A righteous person is humble by nature, and does not rely on miracles. However, God informed Jacob through this vision that "all is in God's hands. You need not worry." This is a general rule, which Maimonides teaches at the very end of his Laws of Shmita and Yovale. He states that any person who enters the world, if he desires to take on the life of Torah, abandoning the life of monetary concerns, that he will be given enough to sustain him. God does not give this Torah follower excess finances, as he would not need it, and as Hillel taught, "with increased possessions comes increased anxiety." (Ethics, 2:7) God administered this precise providence for Jacob at this juncture. The message, "For I have seen all that Laban has done to you" means to say, "Despite what Laban has done, I am with you. You will be successful."

We are left with one question: why is Jacob first given the opportunity to see the vision, and only afterwards, addressed by the angel to look again at what he already saw? Seeing twice in a vision also occurs in connection with Abraham. Genesis 18:5 reads, "And he lifted his eyes and he saw, and behold three men standing (waiting) on him, and he saw..." The Rabbis teach that the second "and he saw" implies understanding of the matter, not a redundant viewing. Perhaps here too, Jacob was instructed to 'understand' the vision, after already seeing it. I am not sure why in some cases a person will see a vision once, and why in these cases, a further understanding is required. Perhaps, this emphasizes to the prophet his ignorance of a specific area of knowledge. The angel instructs Jacob to delve deeper, indicating that at first, he was unaware of something. Why is this necessary? Perhaps the emphasis of the prophet's ignorance is to teach him precisely, that he is now attaining knowledge of a new area of God's providence. Had the angel told Jacob to look at the vision, and then Jacob first did so only 'after' the angel's instruction, Jacob would still learn something new, but he may not have acknowledged that this new knowledge partook of a distinctly "new" category of Divine providence. Thereby, Jacob is forced to recognize this vision as entering him in to a new realm of God's providence.

When one sees a new "realm" of knowledge, it affects how he treats this knowledge. He understands that this is not an "instance" of a known category, but it is the tip of the iceberg. Knowing this, a person treats such knowledge differently. He is thereby prompted to explore that new category of knowledge. But if a person looks at new information as merely an instance of his already-learned categories, he will not think that there is greater knowledge subsumed therein. He will treat it as the end of the line. ■

Why is Jacob first given the opportunity to see the vision, and only afterwards, addressed by the angel, and at that, instructed to look again at what he already saw?

THE SWORD OF PEACE

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Congregation Rinat Yisrael
Plainview, New York

VETERANS'
DAY
ADDRESS
2004



"Almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth.

We have gathered here today at a critical moment in our history, fully aware of the great blessings you have bestowed upon this nation. We have just concluded one of the most toughly-fought presidential elections ever. Yet, in spite of all the passion, the American people made their choice democratically, without a shot being fired. We thank both candidates for their energetic campaigns and calls for reconciliation. Let us never forget that unity and dedication to the greater good of America are vital for our survival at this time.

We can never forget 9/11/01, the day on which we sustained the most devastating attack ever to take place on our soil. On that day of darkness and despair we rediscovered a virtue which we had almost lost: Gratitude. Gratitude for those whom we take for granted but without whom we could not function. Gratitude for the faithful souls who put their lives on the line every day — the police, firefighters and emergency medical responders — who threw caution to the winds and established a beachhead of bravery amid the smoldering ruins of the Twin Towers. They too are veterans who must be remembered and revered.

Our debt of gratitude and appreciation does not stop there. It is hard to believe that there are many people who do not adequately appreciate the nation's most cherished asset — the men and women, young and old, active and retired — who are part of the greatest military force in history: the Armed Forces of the U.S.A. In times of peace

we take our freedom and opportunities for granted. Let us be humble and admit that we did not earn the privileges we enjoy. We must be grateful to all who answered the call of duty, and took up arms so that we could enjoy the American way of life. As George Orwell said: "We sleep safely in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm." Let us therefore unite in full support of our soldiers who are fighting the war against terror. I call upon everyone — especially those with a public voice — to be extremely careful of what they say and how they say it, lest, heaven forbid, they undermine the morale of our troops or provide psychological encouragement to the enemy.

Let us be grateful to all who bear the wounds and scars of war, and especially to those whose loved ones went to serve — and did not come back. I speak specifically to John and Jacklyn Kolin, who are with us today, and whose son Kevin Kolin fell in the line of duty. No words we utter can make up the loss you have suffered. We pray that with time God will comfort and heal you, and restore your grieving souls. Always remember how much we appreciate his sacrifice — and be strengthened by the knowledge that he lived a noble life — that he did not die in vain — and that he will be a source of inspiration to countless others who will emulate his example.

Finally, I ask you to join me in prayer for the men and women in harm's way — especially on the battlefield of Falluja, which is of decisive consequence to our War against Terrorism. May God be with them to protect and shelter them, and give them the strength to be successful in their mission. I call upon each and every person never to lose sight of the evil nature of the enemy we face. Remember 9/11 when thousands of innocents were slaughtered — Remember the merciless beheadings of innocent captives — Remember the brutality visited upon schoolchildren in Belsan Russia. Remember, also, this critical distinction: The enemy fights for glory, conquest and the destruction of advanced civilization. We fight for freedom and the dignity of man. Theirs is a sword of war and destruction; Ours is a sword of liberation and peace.

Almighty God may the sword of peace be triumphant and may the prophecy of Isaiah be soon fulfilled. "They will beat their swords into ploughshares. Nation will not lift sword against nation — neither will they learn war any more. For the earth will be filled with knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea."

Let this be thy will; and let us say — Amen."

*Presented at the Annual Veteran's Day Ceremony
Middle School Veteran's Memorial Park,
Hicksville, New York November 11th, 2004*

God's Divine
Commandments:

Obliterate Evil and its Memory

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
AND SHAYA MANN

Part II
Amalek
&
Arafat
Philosophical
Brothers

In fulfillment of God's command "don't forget", we must not allow Arafat's death to go forgotten. News fills our ears daily, replacing yesterday's "old news" with today's current events. However, God commanded, "don't forget Amalek". The Torah has no category of "current events". Arafat and his ruthless philosophy will always remain as "news".

God is unfathomable. We obtain but a glimpse of His infinite wisdom. The "drop in the ocean" analogy greatly exaggerates and distorts what we truly know of His wisdom. Therefore, when reading His Torah, we must be patient, and respect the truth that there are worlds of wisdom waiting our discovery.

Arafat's evil is but another permutation of Amalek. To truly understand Arafat's ideology, we must study the sections addressing Amalek: the nation who attacked the Jews when they exited Egypt, while all other nations dreaded us. The knowledge of God's plagues and His redemption of the Jewish people was incontrovertible, and taught the world of His one, selected

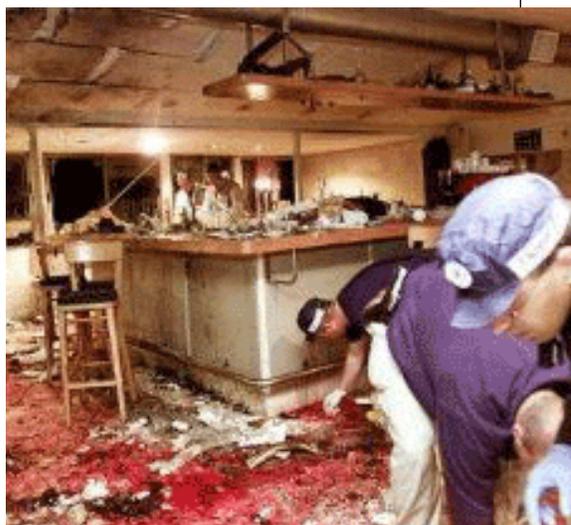
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people, and how He would obliterate those who opposed His will. Like Amalek, Arafat denied God's selection of the Jews. Like Amalek, Arafat cowardly attacked us from the "rear", targeting innocent men women and children. Like Amalek, Arafat and his ideology must be obliterated, but not forgotten. For when we forget or forgive such atrocities, we will fail to identify it when it surfaces again in others. We would thereby become victims once more.

Amalek

Amalek is recorded twice in our Torah. A review of the verses will help us to appreciate God's message.



Arafat's handiwork: bloodstained halls throughout Israel

(Exod. 17:8-16) "And Amalek came and warred with Israel in Rephiddim. And Moses aid to Joshua, 'Select for us men, and go out and war with Amalek. Tomorrow, I stand on the peak of the valley, and God's staff in my hand'. And Joshua did as Moses said to him, to wage war with Amalek, and Moses, Aaron and Hur ascended to the peak of the valley. And it was, when Moses' hands were raised, that Israel was victorious, and when he rested his hands, Amalek was victorious. And Moses' hand s grew weak, and they took a stone, and placed it under him and he sat on it, and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, from this side one, and from that side one, and Moses' hands were steady until sunset. And Joshua weakened Amalek and his people by the sword. And God said to Moses, 'Write this remembrance in a book, and place it in Joshua's ears, for I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens.' And Moses built an altar and called its name 'God is my miracle'. And he said, 'For the hand is on the throne of God, God's war with Amalek from generation to generation'."

(Deut. 25:17-19) "Remember what Amalek did to you on the path when you exited Egypt. That he happened upon you on the journey, and he tailed you, all the weakened ones at your rear, and you were tired and wearied, and he did not fear God. And it will be when God your God, gives you rest from all of your enemies from your surroundings in the land that God your God gives you as an inheritance to inhabit, blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens, don't forget."

Numerous questions present themselves here.

1) Why did this event of Amalek's attack

demand (more than any other war) to be "inscribed" in a book, and be read, as a Torah command? What was unique about Amalek's evil?

2) Why in this war alone, does Moses ascend a mountain, and pray to God with his arms outstretched? Additionally, why did Moses' lowering of his hands cause Amalek to be victorious? Why did he take his staff with him?

3) We read that God states he will wipe out Amalek's infamy, but we must also do so. Which one of us will be blotting out Amalek – their infamy can only be blotted out once. Additionally, why does God "Himself" have to deal with Amalek? As it states, "a war to God with Amalek".

4) God states He will "utterly" wipe them out. Why is such a degree of obliteration required?

5) Moses named the altar, "God is my miracle". To what miracle does he refer? Why was a miracle required?

6) Why do we find the command of "don't forget" only in connection with the Jews' blotting out of Amalek?

7) Why did God command Moses to "place" in Joshua's ears the idea that God would utterly wipe out Amalek? Can we learn anything from the repeated use of "under the heavens", as in "blotting out Amalek from under the heavens"?

8) Why does the command to wipe out Amalek devolve upon the Jews, only after they have rest from all other enemies? (Ibn Ezra)

9) The Rabbis explain that in this section, God's "throne" is written in an incomplete form. ("kase" and not "kisay") What does this teach?

10) The verse states, "God's war with Amalek". What does it mean by "God's" war?

11) What is significant about "They did not fear God"?

12) How can this war of God against Amalek be from "generation to generation"? Isn't a nation obliterated only once?

Amalek's primary distinction is enunciated, as "they did not fear God". Their war against the Jewish people was in fact, a war against God. They did not tolerate the reality of God's selection of the Jewish people and thereby, they denounced God. Other nations who war with the Jews may do so out of national considerations. But when a people fight us to oppose our Torah, their corruption is deeper: their ideology is the flaw. As such, the obliteration of flesh and blood does not rid the world of the corruption. Thus, this war is from "generation to generation". This very idea is so essential to this matter, that God commanded Moses to place these words "in Joshua's ears". Why? To demonstrate that ideologies are not time bound, but travel through

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all generations. The Amalekite philosophy will not end, and therefore, the very command to pass on this teaching in the form of a public recital is essential. (See Deut. 25:19) I also believe that the need to obliterate Amalek from “under the heavens” alludes to creation. Creation is incomplete, as long as this philosophy survives. Creation was for the sake that Man has that, with which to study God’s wisdom.

Such an ideology is not specific to one nation. Others, thousands of years later like Arafat, may also adopt Amalek’s views, thereby; they too become “Amalek” and deserve obliteration. And when such an ideology exists in the world, God’s plan is obscured: His name is incomplete in the world, and all of humanity suffers. It is impossible for man to recognize God’s singular plan, if other philosophies gain prominence. In such an era, mankind lacks the conviction of what exactly God desires. (Ramban describes this as; “others have their hand on the throne”. Rashi writes, “I want to destroy Amalek”, says God.) Because of this, God too must enter the war. His involvement, as seen from the miracle of Moses’ hands effectuating the victory, teaches that the war is one in which God Himself is opposed by others. To teach this idea, God enters the war through rendering miracles: His “response” indicates that ‘He’ was attacked. This teaches mankind the level of corruption embodied by Amalek. This is how Amalek is distinguished from all other enemies.

Moses understood this distinction, and realized that for the Jews to succeed, they must understand what they were fighting. When they saw Moses’ staff in his hand, the one with which Moses performed God’s miracles, and viewed him praying to God, they realized they too

Numerous, ruthless, mass-murders leave orphans and cripples in its wake



required prayer, for this war would not be won through military maneuvers alone. In order that they, and succeeding generations appreciate that Amalek opposed God, this war must be won through a miracle. This would teach all others that Amalek opposed God, not simply the Jewish people.

Not only does God blot out Amalek, we too must do so. Why is this? The reason is because as we adhere to God’s Torah, our actions must mirror God’s ideals. With our reflection of God’s action, we thereby support this very principle. If we do not wipe out Amalek’s infamy, we display a flawed view of what is evil. It is essential to Torah values that we do not succumb to emotions of pity, but at times, obliteration is demanded. There must be no compromise when identifying and eradicating evil. Any sign of remorse or pity is a denial of God’s truth, and paves the way for continued atrocities against all of mankind. As King Solomon said, “There is a time to kill and a time to heal.” (Ecclesiastes, 3:3) When the Amalekites and Arafats of the world arise, it is truly a time to kill. We kill not in self-defense, but as a command of God: to vanquish humanity of any ideology that obscures God’s name. The fact that God “utterly” wipes out Amalek teaches that they have no positive element whatsoever. No equation may exist, weighing Amalek’s “bad against their good”, for they have no good. Understanding this point helps man to battle his own reluctance to shed blood. This also explains why we are commanded, “do not forget”, precisely because it is in man’s disposition to be reluctant in this matter.

Rabbi Reuven Mann stated the reason why our obligation to wipe out Amalek devolves upon us, only once we have peace from all other surrounding nations. For if we are at war with others, and then we also war against Amalek, our war might be construed as a military battle, and not one of eliminating an ideology. But when we are at peace, and then take up battle against Amalek, the reason is clear: their distinct philosophy is what we fight. It is not a war of defense or conquest.

“Don’t forget” Amalek’s philosophy, or how they attacked the weak and wearied ones, the “stragglers”. They were as cowardly as Arafat’s attack of our children. Amalek will always arise until the Messiah comes and educates the world away from false ideologies. Do not fear human condemnation for destroying those like Arafat, for then you do not fear God’s words. Be convinced that our lives as Jews can only succeed when we live as Jews: adhering to God’s word, not our fear of man or our desire for approval from the world.

“One who is merciful to the wicked, is wicked to the merciful.” ■

Rachel's: Disgrace

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



My friend asked, “In Genesis 30:23, upon the birth of her first son after having been barren, Rachel our matriarch said, “God has gathered in (removed) my disgrace”. Rachel said this, as she was relieved, finally having a child. The simple explanation is that her disgrace was her being barren, and now it was finally removed. However, Rashi states a Midrashic interpretation, “All the time a woman has no son, there is no other person upon whom her guilt may be placed. Once she has a son, it is cast upon him; as in, ‘Who broke that vessel, your son’, ‘Who ate those dates, your son’.”

This Midrash sounds quite accusative. Who would ever think that a mother would feel relieved once she has a son, and cruelly view him as a vehicle through whom she may divert her blame? The question is certainly strengthened when the woman at hand is Rachel, the mother of two of the Twelve Tribes.

How does one approach interpreting such a Midrash? The first step is to review the facts

and note the inconsistencies. My first question is WHO is the one casting blame on the mother? Is it the neighbors, a friend, a relative? And what is meant that there is now “another who may be blamed”? I believe the answer to the first question opens up this area.

The one who would blame the mother would be the husband. If a neighbor’s property was damaged, they would take measures to be recompensed, blame is not the recourse for this objective. I suggest the one

casting blame is the one person who has no recourse for compensation - as the damage took place by his own dependents. It is the husband.

Now we may view the mother’s sentiment. Having someone “to take the fall”, the mother is not happy to shift blame. This is not what is meant. The focus is not on the child, but rather, on her. I mean that she is relieved that she is no longer the focus of blame. She doesn’t willfully lie stating the child broke objects - if she in fact did. The person casting blame is the father. He says to his wife upon seeing a broken object, “Who broke it, your son?” It is the father’s assumption, that the son broke it. The mother is not malicious - certainly not one such as Rachel. This we see from a careful reading of the text: it does not say, “she has no one else to blame”, but it says, “there is none other.” The mother is passive. Nonetheless, the mother is relieved that she was not the target of her husband’s fury. Since there is another person in the house now, she no longer feels the brunt of

his disappointments. She doesn’t choose that her husband accuses the child, but she does enjoy not being scolded.

This must now be examined. Why is there “relief”? To answer this question, we may first note that whenever we see a reaction in people, such as relief, it is indicative of the person’s overall personality. We can deduce something about the person by their very reactions. When, for example, we see children mocking a fellow student, we deduce that a prior event was committed by the one mocked, not to the approval of his peers. Again, if we see someone sad when it starts raining, we deduce he had plans for outdoors. In our case, we see Rachel relieved when she has a child. We can ask, “what need is being filled when blame is not cast upon a wife?” It would seem clear that she desires the husband’s praise and favor. Rashi is not teaching that the mother desires the son to be blamed, but rather, this response indicates she desires her husband’s approval. This is the lesson of Rashi.

When Rashi came upon this passage, he saw the plain meaning of “...God has gathered in my disgrace”. This is clear; a mother feels relief when after years she bears children, as childbearing gives a woman her sense of worth. Her self-image is greatly marred if she cannot fill her vital role in family life. But Rashi desired to teach us that this is not the only focus of a mother. She equally desires another thing - her husband’s approval. His love is also something, which she cannot bear to be without. These are the two great desires, which form a woman’s central focus, and give her happiness. They are both essential for a peaceful and productive home. In connection with a wife’s need for husbandry, the Torah teaches, “v’el ishaych tishukasayche”, “and unto your husband will your cleave”. The simple meaning teaches that a woman has a yearning for her husband. The same idea is taught in the Talmud where it teaches that an unmarried woman has it more difficult than an unmarried man.

We see that Rachel’s “removal of disgrace” can be understood to refer to one of two central desires in woman. We also see how if taken superficially, a Midrash can be inexplicable. We learn to appreciate the depth of knowledge possessed by our Rabbis, the Midrashic authors. Even more, we are awed that there is a Divine Source of this knowledge, which is so pleasant and reasonable to our minds.

As a Rabbi once taught, we must eventuate in a deeper love of God whenever we learn. We should reflect and appreciate God’s kindness in creating us with an intellect through which we can perceive His wisdom. ■