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JewishTimes

Volume XI, No. 5...Dec. 9, 2011

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Weekly Parsha

Vayishlach

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Yaakov's Limp and Its Relationship to his Encounter

*And the sun was shining upon him
when he left P'nuel and he was limping
because of his thigh. (Gen. 32:32)*

(continued on next page)

Weekly Parsha

Vayishlach: Multiple Names

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

The last of the sons of Yaakov, the tribes of Israel, is born in this week's parsha. And as we saw by all the other sons of Yaakov, a special name that conveys some idea is attached to this child. Interestingly enough, there is one trend that emerges in the names of the sons of Rochel that we do not find by the other children. Rather than one idea tied to one name, we see two ideas joined to each one. This aberration is one that, with analysis, helps reveal to a greater degree the distinction of Rochel Imeinu.

We first see the above with the birth of Yosef (Bereishis 30:22-24):

"God remembered Rochel, and

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Fundamentals

Can GOD Do ANYTHING?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

How would you answer someone who asks the question, "Can God do anything?" If we say yes, we arrive at great problems. For in truth, God cannot be unjust, He cannot destroy himself, He cannot make Himself physical, He cannot make my birthday a different day than it was, he cannot place something in two different locations simultaneously, and many other impossibilities. In other words, God being limited is a truth. Most people feel limitation in respect to God is an imperfection.

To correct the error, we must attribute "perfection" to God, under which all other attributes must fall. We do not start with the infantile notion that God can do anything, even impossibilities. This latter belief is the source of the error: it is carried over from youth and has gone unchecked. But realizing the problem, one must now ascribe limit to God, and this limit is a perfection.

Imagine a judge who can never accuse wrongly, and in each and every one of his cases he proves the innocent as innocent, and finds the guilt in the guilty. Would we not attest to the greatness of such a judge, as he is flawless in his judgments? Would we not say that although he is limited to finding the truth in every case, and cannot err, that he is more perfect than a judge who does make mistakes? The same applies to God.

God cannot make Himself physical, nor kill Himself, nor judge falsely, nor punish the righteous, and we say in all these cases that this attests to His perfection. Limitations like these prove God's perfection. ■

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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The commentators disagree over whether Yaakov's encounter was a physical event or prophetic vision

Yaakov is alone prior to this meeting with Esav. He has an altercation with a man. Yaakov and the stranger struggle. Eventually, Yaakov overcomes the man. Yaakov is injured in this battle. In the morning, he is limping from his injury. Our Sages explain that this man was an angel representing Esav.

According to Nachmanides, the events described in the Torah actually occurred. In other words, Yaakov actually engaged in physical battle. The attacking angel assumed the form of a human being. According to this interpretation of the events, Yaakov's limp was the result of an injury incurred during the struggle with the angel. However, Maimonides and others disagree with Nachmanides and contend that the battle took place in a prophetic vision. No actual encounter occurs and no physical struggle took place. According to this interpretation of the account, Yaakov's limp is more difficult to explain.

Abravanel suggests that Yaakov's limp demonstrates the impact of the prophetic vision upon the dreamer

The answer adopted by Don Yitzchak Abravanel and many others is that the limp was not the result of actual physical trauma. They explain that a prophetic vision is very real to the prophet. The experience of the vision can best be compared to a dream. Often, our dreams are vivid. Movement and sensation can accompany dreams. It is not unusual for a dream to influence us even after waking. It may affect our mood. We may even be left with sensations. If this is true for dreams, these affects can also occur through prophecy. The struggle Yaakov experienced in his prophecy was absolutely real to him. He felt the blow of his adversary. This pain remained with him after waking. Consequently he limped.

Gershonides argues that the limp reveals the influence of the imaginative facility in the design of the dream

However, Gershonides provides an alternative explanation for the limp. He suggests that the limp was not a consequence of the dream. Instead, it preceded the dream. Common

dreams – that are not prophetic in nature – are often woven from the events and experiences that occurred in the dreamer's recent past or during the day preceding the dream. Dreams are also sometimes provoked by sensations that are experienced while asleep. Many people have woken from dreams featuring ringing or buzzing sounds to discover that their alarm clock is buzzing or their phone is ringing. Geshonides suggests that the prophetic dream takes advantage of that same facility. Its message is woven from recent experiences, events, and sensations. It uses these elements as the raw material from which to construct the prophetic vision. Yaakov fell to sleep feeling discomfort from his aching hip. His prophetic dream-vision used this sensation as raw material from which to construct its message. Yaakov's subsequent limp was not a product of the dream; it was an antecedent to the vision.

This interpretation of Yaakov's limp provides an important insight into Gershonides' understanding to the mechanism through which prophetic vision are constructed. It seems that both the common dream and the prophetic dream are products on an imaginative force within the human being. However, the content of the common dream is produced by this imaginative force acting without any external guidance. In contrast, in the instance of the prophetic dream, the imaginative force is guided in its work by the prophetic influence. In other words, the imaginative force is harnessed and used to create a vision that expresses the intended prophetic message.



Yaakov's Two Names

And Hashem said to him, "Your name has been Yaakov. Your name should no longer be Yaakov, rather Yisrael should be your name." And He called him Yisrael. (Sefer Beresheit 35:10)

Both Avram and Yaakov received new names from Hashem

Yaakov vanquishes the angel who opposes him. He demands that the angel bestow his blessing upon him. The angel accedes. He tells Yaakov that henceforth his name will be Yisrael. This name communicates the

(continued on next page)

outcome of their encounter – that Yaakov has striven with angels and overcome them. Yaakov arrives at Bet El and he has a vision. In this vision, Hashem confirms the angel's blessing. He tells Yaakov that his name shall henceforth be Yisrael.

Avraham had a similar encounter with Hashem. When the first Patriarch is introduced, his name is Avram. Later, Hashem tells Avram that He has changed his name to Avraham. However, although both Avraham and Yisrael received their new names from Hashem, the bestowal of the name had a different effect in each instance. The Talmud explains that with the bestowal of the new name, Avraham's old name became obsolete and inappropriate. The Talmud explains that use of the old name – Avram is prohibited. According to Magen, Avraham the Talmud is establishing an actual legal prohibition. We are not permitted to refer to Avraham by his previous name. In fact, once the Torah announces the new name – Avraham, it never again refers to our first forefather by his original name.

Yaakov's new name did not supplant his original name

In Yaakov's case, his new name Yisrael, does not supplant his original name. The Torah continues to refer to him by the name Yaakov, interchanging the old name with the new name. According to Chizkuni, the different effects of receiving a new name are reflected in our passage. Our passage begins with an acknowledgement of Yaakov's original name. This acknowledgment is intended to indicate the status of the original name after the bestowal of the name Yisrael. The original name will not be discarded. Both names will remain appropriate.

Chizkuni's comments do not completely explain the different outcomes. He demonstrates that the difference is reflected in the passage. However, the reason for the difference still requires an explanation. Perhaps, the simplest explanation is that the name Yaakov communicates its own important message. This message was not replaced or rendered obsolete with Yaakov's new name. Instead, the name Yisrael communicated a message that supplemented the message of the original name. What was the message in the name Yaakov? Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno suggests that the name communicated a prophecy regarding the future of the Jewish people. The name Yaakov is derived from the term ekev. This term means "heal" or "end". Yaakov received this name because he emerged from

his mother's womb grasping the heel of his firstborn brother Esav. Sforno suggests that the manner in which he was born and the name he received foretold the destiny of the Jewish people. They were destined to be dominated by their older brother Esav. But in the end of days – in the Messianic era, Yaakov's descendants will overcome the dominance of their brother and all others who will oppress them. Yaakov retained this name even after receiving the name Yisrael because this message remained true and relevant.

Chizkuni offers his own explanation for the retention of the name Yaakov. He notes that Esav treated the name Yaakov as a pejorative. He contended that Yaakov had twice cheated him. He had tricked him into trading away his rights as firstborn. Then, Yaakov had stolen the blessings that Yitzchak had intended for him. He attempted to transform the name Yaakov into a reference to these two instances in which – according to his claims – Yaakov had cheated him. Replacement of the name Yaakov might suggest that Esav's claim had some substance. Those aware of Esav's contention might assume that Yaakov was ashamed of his original name because it reflected qualities of dishonesty and deceit that truly were elements of Yaakov's character. In order to discredit

Esav's claims, Yaakov was instructed to proudly retain his original name and supplement it with the name Yisrael. ■

Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 32:25.

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 18:2.

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 2, chapter 42.

Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, p. 344.

Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 205. Mesechet Berachot 13a.

Rav Avraham Avlee, Magen Avraham Commentary on Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 156:1, note 1.

Rabbaynu Chizkiya ben Manoach (Chizkuni), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 35:10.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 31:26.

Rabbaynu Chizkiya ben Manoach (Chizkuni), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 35:10.



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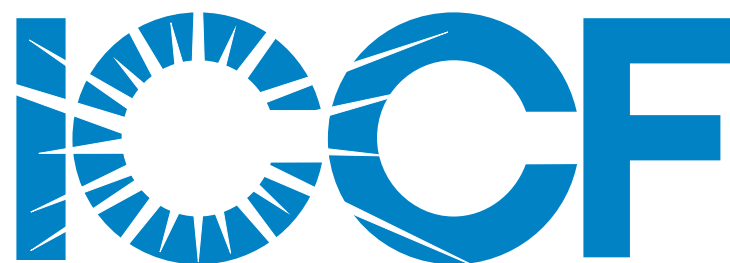
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Weekly Parsha

Let's talk about it

RABBI REUVEN MANN



This week's parsha, Vayishlach, describes the reunion of Yaakov with his brother Eisav. This took place twenty years after Yaakov had left home to escape the wrath of his sibling. Much had happened in the meantime. Yaakov had married two sisters and with them and their handmaidens had sired twelve sons and a daughter. He had worked hard tending the sheep of his father in law, Lavan, and with Hashem's help had amassed great wealth. Now he was returning to his father's home and knew he would encounter Eisav along the way. The inevitable confrontation he had so long avoided could no longer be put off. He had no way of knowing what was in Eisav's heart, whether he had long since dropped his grievances against him or still nurtured a need for revenge. Yaakov decided to send a delegation to Eisav in order to ascertain his state of mind. The messengers were instructed to communicate Yaakov's

intense desire to find favor and have a reunion with his older brother.

The Torah does not recount the meeting of this group with Eisav. The verse says that they returned to Yaakov and said, "we have come to your brother Eisav, and also he is headed for you and four hundred men are with him." Upon hearing this report Yaakov was extremely fearful and distressed and prepared for the worst with a three pronged strategy of prayer, diplomacy, and, if need be, warfare. The question arises, what was it in the report of the messengers that so frightened Yaakov? Wouldn't it be important to know how Eisav treated them and what he said in response to their words? Yet, the Torah omits any information on what took place in this crucial meeting. There is a big gap in their report between the words, "we came to him" and "also he is coming toward you with four hundred men." Why don't they tell Yaakov the details of what transpired in their meeting?

The great commentator, Nachmanides, takes up this issue. He suggests that the Torah does not record the meeting of Eisav and the messengers simply because it never took place. According to this understanding the delegation arrived at the camp of Eisav and sought a meeting but were refused. Thus their report to Yaakov was that we came to him, but he wouldn't even receive us and also he goes forth to meet you with four hundred men. We can now understand Yaakov's fearful

reaction. Eisav's refusal to meet and his advance toward him with such a large force could only mean that he had not forgotten the "offense" of Yaakov nor had let go of his anger. Indeed, the most telling indication of Eisav's unabated hatred was his refusal to meet and talk. This is the way of the wicked who keep their anger within and are unwilling to even express themselves. This story contains a significant lesson for our lives. We all are subject to powerful feelings of anger and hatred when we believe that we have been deeply offended. The test of one's virtue is how he reacts when these emotions have been aroused. The Torah prohibits us from harboring hatred in our hearts. Rather, no matter how convinced we are of the legitimacy of our feelings we are obligated to confront our "enemy" and be willing to talk things out. If this is too difficult then, at the very least, we should express how we feel to someone we trust who is neutral and can help us work through our emotions and gain some useful perspective. Experiencing the passions of anger and hatred is not a sin as we are all human. Making the decision to store it in one's heart and not even talk about it is a major transgression. True holiness consists in the recognition that no matter how powerfully we feel we are bound to listen to reason and follow the dictates of wisdom.

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Weekly Parsha



JACOB *and the* ANGEL

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
as heard from a wise Rabbi

The human being is quite intricate in design. This applies not only to our bodies, but more essentially, to what and how we think, feel, value and decide. As the Torah is not to perfect our bodies, but is a guide for our most primary objective – the perfection of our souls – the Torah includes lessons on how to attain this perfection.

The Torah's mitzvahs cannot be simple rote acts. They must offer us opportunities to imbue us with greater knowledge of God, and perfection, if we study them. This explains why the Rabbis wrote about mitzvahs at great length, and why the Talmud is voluminous. But Torah contains more than mitzvahs; there are countless stories of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. These stories must offer us lessons in perfection. Jacob and the angel is such an example.

A wise Rabbi once offered a marvelous interpretation. He commenced by asking how the verse could say that "Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the coming of daybreak (Gen. 32:25)." If in fact Jacob was "alone," no one else was present! And why do we care that they wrestled only until the "morning"? The Torah account and the Rishonim's commentaries provide many details.

We are told that Jacob's hip socket was dislocated in the fight. The angel then asked to be released as morning was coming. (Again, morning is an issue.) Jacob conceded to release the angel only if he received a blessing. So the angel gave

him the name Israel, meaning that Jacob wrestled with man and before God, and succeeded. The Rabbis say this angel was the "officer of Esav." We wonder why at this specific moment, when Esav is traveling towards Jacob with 400 men to annihilate him and his family, does Jacob have this "fight." We are also told that the dust of the ground "rose to the heavens" due to the struggle. This wise Rabbi offered the following beautiful insights.

As the verse states, Jacob was alone. The Rabbis ultimately described the "man" to be an "angel" and the "officer of Esav." In fact, this struggle was Jacob battling a component of his personality.

Esav's approach awoke in Jacob a self-awareness of a problematic trait he harbored. Esav was a warrior; this was his essence, a "man." Esav was essentially living without intelligence and by pure emotion. He primarily lived to project and maintain his self-image as a powerful man. Many people live their lives striving to maintain a self-image that pleases them. Jacob too is human, and possessed the desire for a self-image. As Esav approached, this awoke in Jacob this realization that Jacob too desired a self-image. But Jacob felt that living to satisfy this specific ego emotion was incorrect for a man following God. God must be the focus, not the self. So Jacob began to "struggle" with his self-image so as to release himself from the grips of this emotion. Jacob was struggling with his own personality, referred to as "angel" or "officer of Esav". Angel simply refers to a force:

here, a psychological force. And "officer of Esav" informs us of the specific force: the ego, or self-image which was essentially what Esav was. He had no higher function, and was simply striving to maintain a self-image.

To indicate that this struggle was in the realm of perfection or metaphysical issues, we are taught that the dust reached the "heavens" (a spiritual battle), and also that the angel had to leave once morning came. This unconscious force – this "angel" – is not conscious to us at most times; our underlying feelings are mostly hidden. We are unaware of them during the "day" when we are conscious. The Torah uses "day" and "night" to refer to our conscious and unconscious states respectively. This explains why our unconscious thoughts are revealed in dreams, at night. Jacob too wrestled with his unconscious feelings at night, explaining why the angel had to "leave" in the morning. In the morning, the conscious takes over, and we can not readily tap this part of our psyches.

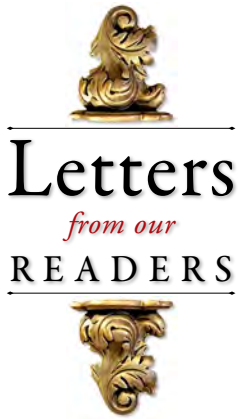
Jacob asked the angel to "bless" him. This means Jacob was reflecting upon himself and the inner workings of his psyche. He was a brilliant man. He was investigating what benefits – blessings – he might obtain by controlling this psychological force. Once Jacob succeeded over this emotion, he awoke and was "limping." Bilam too hurt his leg in his vision. In both cases, limping refers to a slower movement in a specific direction in life. Whenever we make a significant change in our outlook, our energies do not move quickly towards this new direction. It takes time to withdraw our energies from one emotionally-involved path, and redirect them towards a new path. We abstain from eating this part of the animal to demonstrate the vital need to conquer our own personality flaws.

Jacob named that location Pini-ale (face of God), referring to his confrontation with his personality to perfect himself before God. He says "my soul was saved" indicating that he saved his soul from incorrect values.

The Torah discloses vital information, but conceals those areas that people typically will not grasp, or accept. This concealment preserves the truth we require, making it available only to our wise leaders...while protecting those less informed from disparaging the Torah when it does not meet with their approval. Psychological truths are now world known. These ideas should pose no threat to our generation, and in fact, imbue us with the realization that God wishes that we deeply understand our psyches and personalities, and perfect ourselves accordingly.

The Torah contains Mitzvahs and accounts of our Prophets. To derive the depths of God's wisdom, we must investigate both areas under the guidance of intelligent leaders, and discard explanations that simplify this brilliant Torah system. ■

Letters

**God Doesn't Follow His Laws****Reader:** Hello Rabbi,

My question is stems from a question that a Christian asked. I know how to answer but I'm not sure how to word it so the point is clear. God forbids human sacrifice but does that also mean God forbids it of Himself? The same with murder. Murder is forbidden but God has struck men down. Thank you.

Rabbi: God's commands for humans are to perfect them, since humans act from flawed emotions and poor notions. Therefore, as a man might kill for wrong reasons, he is commanded not to. But man is commanded to kill for proper reasons, like punishing murderers. Killing is acceptable, under the right considerations.

In contrast, God has no corrupting emotions, and He is omniscient, "All of His ways are perfect (Deut. 32:4)." Therefore, as all of God's acts are perfect, whenever He kills, it is for a proper purpose.

Jewish Souls: Are They Superior?

David: You wrote to me that "all Torah sources show that gentiles and Jews are equal in "design".....No one has a "better soul". Can you please point me to some of these sources? Where this is in the Bible, exactly? And elsewhere? Even AISH seems to push that Jews are superior: aish.com/tp/i/ky/48952261.html

Thank you, David

Rabbi: David, here are a few articles I wrote over the years:

<http://www.mesora.org/createdequal.html>

<http://www.mesora.org/dirshu.htm>

<http://www.mesora.org/SuperRace.html>

<http://www.mesora.org/perfection2.htm>

The Aish article does not say that Jews possess superior souls. It does not say people are different. It merely discusses the need to respect authority, so we might come to respect God.

The conclusive response is that we see God spoke with Abraham, a gentile. Thus, one need not live after the Torah was given (and be a Jew) and follow Torah, in order to be a superior person. Who can compare to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses? These individuals were of the same lineage as every other person on Earth: Noah's offspring. Yet, these few men perfected themselves, to the point that they received prophecy. No one today is a prophet; not one Jew. Yet, these gentile were prophets. Thereby, we learn that gentiles do not lack anything when compared to Jews or others. All men are created equal. There is no such thing as a "Jewish soul" or a "non-Jewish soul". This is found nowhere in Torah. It is an arrogance some Jews utter to soothe their egos

which also breeds anti-Semitism. If one born to Jewish parents sins greatly, he can lose his afterlife and departs from Israel's lot. (Maimonides states this after writing his 13th Principle.) While a person born to Christian parents who selects to follow Torah will join in Israel's portion of Olam Haba. So it does not matter how we are born. What matters is how we have lived. Ruth was born a Moabite, and converted. Kings David and Solomon descended from her...as will the Messiah.

Is Asceticism the Torah's Way?

Lorne: Ethics of the Fathers states: "Such is the way of Torah: Bread with salt you shall eat, water in small measure you shall drink, and upon the ground you shall sleep; live a life of deprivation and toil in Torah. If so you do, "fortunate are you, and good is to you" (Psalms 128:2): fortunate are you in this world, and it is good to you in the World To Come."

The Vilna Gaon led an ascetic life. He interpreted literally the words of the Jewish sages, that the Torah can be acquired only by abandoning all pleasures and by cheerfully accepting suffering; and as he lived up to this principle, he was revered by his countrymen as a saint. Is this the general Torah view on these conditions? I thought otherwise.

Rabbi: Perhaps Maimonides' rejection of asceticism (Hilchos Dayos 3:1) is when it is performed as an ends, like monks. Such deprivation has no purpose, and rightfully called a sin.

But when deprivation is to direct all one's energies (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:6) to obtain the Kesser Torah, the "Crown of Torah", this is praised. In this case, one is not abstaining from regular human enjoyments per se, but it the result of being totally focused on Torah study and performance. Many great minds from Newton to Einstein were known as having spent weeks at a time working on theories, eating and sleeping only when in dire need. After tending to their physical needs to restore their energies, they returned to studying creation. Exactly like the Vilna Gaon.

Heresy

Reader: I've been studying a well written English guide to Kabbala, "Inner Space" by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. R. Kaplan explains the concepts of the partzufim and sefiros. At one point R. Kaplan describes the Sefiros as filters or garments for Hashem's light. In another section R. Kaplan goes on to explain how the Partzufim (Abba, Ema, Zeer, etc.) have faces and beards (Dikna), they have sexual relations, they get pregnant, and are brother and sister. On p.101 he says "there seems to be a fine line between Judaism and idolatry...why is praying to God through these Names (Sefiros-Partzufim) not only permitted but is an essential part of the Kabbalistic system...". Then R. Kaplan quotes Pardes Rimonim which seems to say that the Kabbalist's prayers are associated with Sefirot, but their kavanah is supposed to be on the Ein Sof.

This raises two questions in my mind. I have studied the Tohar HaYichud essay on your website,

which addresses my first question somewhat:

1. How can these "Partzufim" not be considered some type of polytheism (idolatry)? Do we have any Ashkenazi Gadolim who would hold they are polytheism?

2. Is it possible that Kabbalistic ideas have corrupted the ideology of the Hareidim, resulting in some of the contemporary problems we see in the Hareidi world? Your thoughts on this would be appreciated.

Rabbi: This idea of partzufim and sefirot is heretical, as you stated. I never saw a Rishon or Ashkenazi Gadolim talk of them. And of course, nonsensical ideas will corrupt others. But the mere ideas themselves are heretical, as they attribute physical properties to God.

Divine Downfalls?

Reader: I have been reading some Chassidic writings and one of the ideas I found is this: as a Jew progresses to a higher level, he suffers a fall, the sort of which is determined by heaven, and that the new level is closer to the gates of Holiness or closer to Hashem. Do you know if this idea is in Talmud or other authoritative Jewish writings?

Rabbi: "For those who God loves, does He rebuke (Proverbs 3:12)." Meaning, God offers rebuke – opportunities for perfection – to only those who will use such opportunities to grow. Such people are termed "those who God loves". He loves them, since they are striving to love Him. One view of Abraham's trial to sacrifice Isaac was to actualize his potential. This must have been an even greater trial for Isaac. (Ibn Ezra) But if one will not use such an opportunity, God will not offer it, since God does not perform futile acts.

When and where God rebukes man is not easily determined, since we cannot readily distinguish natural occurrences from God's intended opportunities. People today foolishly throw around the word "bashert" and "meant to be" when things go wrong, as if they know what God is doing. This is arrogant, and baseless. In fact, Maimonides teaches that most of the downfalls we suffer, are our own doing. (Guide)

Does God Know Our Thoughts?

Nate: How do we know that Hashem is all powerful, knowing our thoughts, "bochein levovos"?

Rabbi: Nate, the watchmaker knows all of the workings of the gears, coils, springs and their actions and results, as he created every part of the watch. So too, God knows all aspects of all His creations. He also created man's ability to think, so He knows man's thoughts...every man's thoughts.

And while this is an overwhelming idea to accept, since how could we keep track of billions of humans and their thoughts...we must not assume God is overwhelmed. We know this, since He created every soul. If He can create billions of souls, He knows them and their thoughts.

So we learn two principles:

- 1) The Creator knows His creations,
- 2) The Creator is not weak or subject to forgetting.



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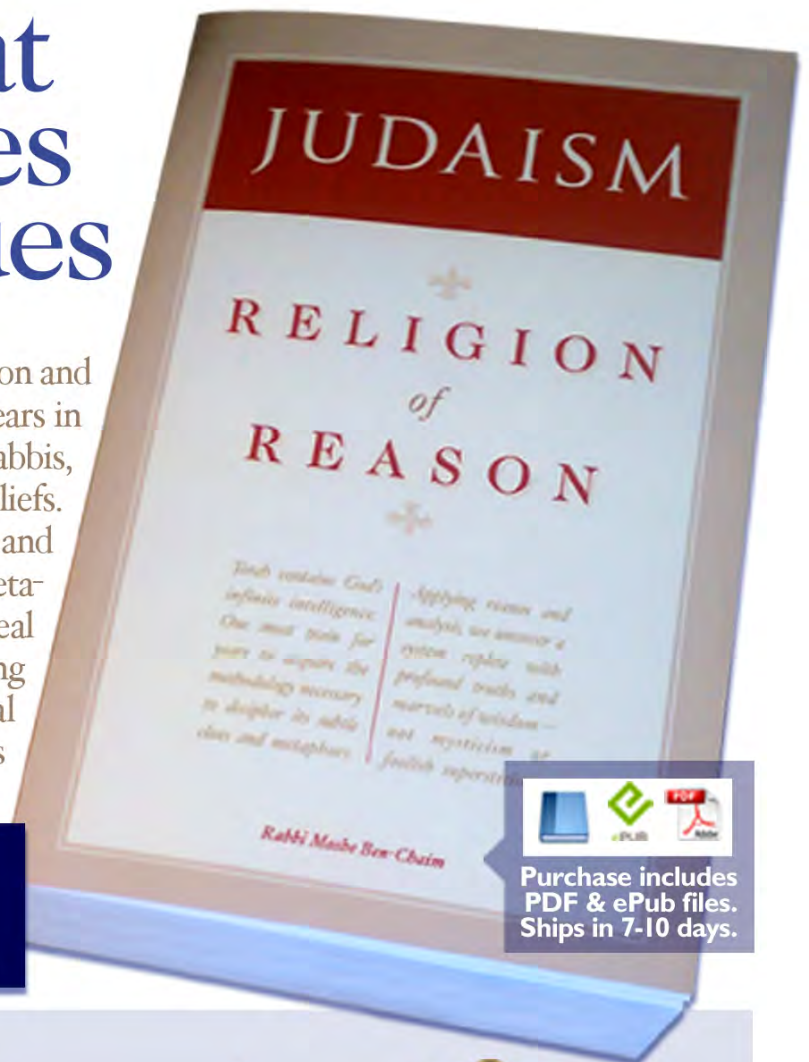
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(Names continued from page 1)

Weekly Parsha

God perceived her [plight] and opened her womb. She conceived and gave birth to a son. She said, "God has removed my shame." She named him Yoseif, saying, "May Hashem add to me another son.""

Rashi explains that her shame was not actually "removed", rather: "He has brought it into a place where it will not be seen". This shame, he notes later, was attached to her being barren. Her prayer for another son, as noted in the second reason for the name, was due to her prophecy that Yaakov would have a total of twelve sons - her desire being that she be the one to bring about the completion of the tribes.

It is quite intriguing to see Rashi emphasize the fact that the shame of Rachel was not actually removed, only hidden from view. Since she was barren, one would think the birth of a child would erase this stigma of indignity. And yet, it did not. The prayer should also be understood, as why Rachel was immediately turning her attention to another child.

When it comes to Binyamin, as Rachel emitted her last breaths, we see two names once again, albeit with some differences (Bereishis 35:18):

"As her soul was departing, for she died, she named him Ben Oni [son of my sorrow], but his father named him Binyomin."

In this case, Yaakov offers the second idea, rather than, for obvious reasons, Rachel. We also see no explanation for the second name, that of Binyomin.

The Ramban offers an approach to try and understand the meaning of the two names. The name "Ben oni", or "son of my sorrow", refers to her son being "ben aveili", or "son of my mourning". Yaakov, however, added another idea. Binyomin, or "ben yamin", is a reference to his son being a "ben koach", reflecting strength (as the right is associated with the strength of God). In other words, according to the Ramban, Yaakov's intention with the name of Binyomin was to imply that his son would be associated with courage and success. The Ramban further notes that Yaakov's intent was to keep the name as close as possible to the original name given by Rachel.

We see similar difficulties with the account offered by the Ramban. What was Yaakov adding? Why not leave the name as is?

As mentioned above, it is possible that the naming of Yosef and Binyomin are offering us

insights into the personality of Rachel. We see by Yosef a focus on the emotion of shame being felt by Rachel. One would naturally assume that this shame was centered on her current status as being barren. No doubt, the maternal instinct to have children was quite strong in Rachel, and the inability to accomplish this result can certainly be something that leads to shame. However, if this were all, then her shame would dissipate once she gave birth to Yosef. Instead, Rashi points out that her shame was hidden from view, meaning there was still something there. What was still lingering? Being one of the "mothers" of the future nation of Jews, she was in a prime position to play a pivotal role in its emergence. This could only be accomplished through having children, becoming a participant in its creation. Being barren meant she was closed off from this tremendous opportunity. This could also have been a source of shame, and can be tied into its persistence. There was one obstacle she could never overcome, even with her first child. She was now a contributor to the future of Judaism, so part of her shame was gone. But she would always have a more secondary influence, as Leah had a far greater impact on the nation through her children. Therefore, she acknowledges this reality in the name of Yosef. But that's not all. One would think this child would bring about a sense of completion and fulfillment – after all, she could never be that dominant progenitor. Knowing full well her role would always be reduced as compared to her sister, she still prayed to have another child. Rather than be

content, she realized an additional opportunity presented itself to her, the chance to have another impact on the future nation. In other words, there was nothing personal in this request, no self-serving purpose. This is reflected in the tefilah, and for this selfless request from God, she merited another son.

This leads us to Binyomin. The first name given to him by his dying mother reflects a state of mourning. Rachel obviously was aware of her own impending death. She could ruminate on the fact that God indeed answered her tefilah with this second child. Yet bringing these children into the world was only one part of her desire. She also wanted to raise them, to mold them into the future leaders of the Bnei Yisrael. And now, as it was clear, she would never partake of this – thus, the sadness evoked in the name "ben oni". Yaakov saw something else that needed to be emphasized. Understanding the loss of Rachel as not just a loss of his beloved wife, but as the great woman and potential mother to his children, Yaakov knew full well there was a greater risk of his two sons ending up deficient as a result of being raised motherless. He therefore wanted the ideas of strength, courage and success to be part of the identity of his new child during his formative years. When Binyomin would reflect on his name, he would recall the loss of his mother, but he would also be motivated to know more about her, to see the greatness she achieved. This would always be a source of strength and courage, paving the way for his ultimate success. ■

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