

עפרת השבוע

A Weekly Torah Publication from the Students of Mesivta Ateres Yaakov
Ruth & Hyman Simon High School

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AN EVERYDAY MIRACLE

Yaakov Sonnenblick, 12th Grade

וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו אל עשו אחיו [לב:ד]

THEN YAAKOV SENT ANGELS AHEAD OF HIM TO EISAV HIS BROTHER

We read in this week's parsha concerning the "showdown" between Yaakov Avinu and his brother Eisav, who haven't seen each other in over twenty years (since Yaakov received the *bechorah*).

The word '*malachim*' can be in reference to two things. It can either be referring to messengers - regular people; or it can be referring to literal *malachim*; angels. Rashi at the beginning of our *sedrah* says that in this case when the Torah says *malachim*, it's literally referring to angels.

Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* is bothered by this. Why did Yaakov Avinu need to send real *malachim* to his brother Eisav – why couldn't he just send regular messengers? We know that someone on such a *madreigah* who can perform great *nissim*, should only do so when necessary. Why then did Yaakov make such a miracle when he could have sent a regular person without performing a great miracle?

Rav Yitzchak Gross offers a beautiful *moshol* to help explain the answer given by Rav Moshe. Imagine a regular man walks into the home of a *gevir* (wealthy man). The regular person is used to regular drinks. When the wealthy man takes out his bottle of Blue Label, the simple person is left in awe. For the rich man, a drink like this is regular! He always has beverages of such stature. Only to the simple person is a bottle of Blue Label so *shtatty* and unusual. Yet to one who is accustomed to it; it's nothing great at all.

(Continued on page 2)

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Ari Jager, 9th Grade

ויהי בצאת נפשה כי מתה ותקרא שמק בן אוני ואביו קרא לו בנימין [לה:יח]

AND IT CAME TO PASS AS HER SOUL WAS DEPARTING, FOR SHE DIED, THAT SHE CALLED HIS NAME BEN-ONI, BUT HIS FATHER CALLED HIM BINYAMIN.

As Rachel Imeinu was at death's door, it dawned upon her that the child she had yearned for was about to be born. She named him *Ben-oni*, most commonly interpreted as "the son of my grief" in Aramaic. Yaakov Avinu named him *Binyomin*, which is Hebrew for "the son of my right hand."

The Ramban says that Yaakov and Rachel have contradicting views on the child. Rachel, the dying mother, is seemingly stressing the negative side of the word *און*, "a son of my sorrow". Yaakov, however had an optimistic view in order to protect the child from an *ayin harah*. Horav Mordechai Rogov *zt'l* quotes a Midrash that differentiates between the Aramaic and Hebrew translations of Ben-oni. He uses a *mashal* to compare Yaakov and Rachel's perspectives on their son's name.

A woman who was childless for many years was finally blessed and at long last becomes pregnant. As she impatiently awaited the day she had been yearning for all these years, she fell terribly ill. The doctors said that it was impossible for her to give birth to a healthy child and survive at the same time. Either they perform a surgical procedure that will forfeit the life of the child, or if the child is to be born she will not survive. The woman chose not to have surgery; and in doing so was giving up her life for the unborn child for whom she had ached so many years. All those present at her bedside attempted to dissuade her but to no avail. Although she will never see the child, she will die knowing she made the ultimate sacrifice for the long awaited infant.

In the last minutes of her life, the woman told her friends and relatives that she saw her future child as her link to the future. She will die, but the child will live on. During these final moments she requested one last favor, "When my son matures, please tell him about the mother he never saw. Tell him about my ultimate sacrifice so that he would live. Please relate to him

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<i>An Everyday Miracle</i>	1
<i>What's in a Name</i>	1
<i>Gematria</i>	2
<i>Insights</i>	2
<i>Focus on Greatness</i>	3
<i>Emes L'Yaakov</i>	4

that on my deathbed I asked only one thing – that he repay me by being a Torah observant Jew. By fulfilling my wishes, he will bring me much nachas and will truly be a living memorial to my name.” When they guaranteed her that her wishes would be fulfilled, she died content in the knowledge that her child would continue her legacy.

Rav Mordechai Rogov says that this happened before Rachel's death. As the labor pains grew stronger and she knew she would die, she made one last request. She named her son Ben-oni, “son of my sorrow”. This name would constantly remind him of his mournful beginning and his mother's tragic end. This name would cause him to remember his mother's sacrifice, and he would grant his mother's wish by following the path of Torah. This is why Rachel chose the Aramaic version of the name.

Yaakov understood Rachel's reasoning and chose a Hebrew name that would encourage their son to follow the proper *derech*. Therefore he chose Binyomin, “the son of my right hand”. This name connotes the positive attributes needed to fulfill his mother's legacy. Yaakov and Rachel both had the same goal in naming their son, but differed in their emphasis. Yet the outcome was a tremendous bequest.

ויהי לי שור וחמור. . . [לב:ו]

by Tzadok Picker

AND THERE ARE TO ME A BULL AND A DONKEY. . .

The Baal HaTurim points out that the *gematria* of the words “לי שור; *to me a bull*” is equal to a “שנולד יוסף; *that Yosef was born.*” In addition, the word “שור” is equal to the words “קרן יוסף” the glory (i.e. horn) of Yosef.” This is referring to the *pasuk*; “וקרנו ראם קרניו בהם עמים” (i.e. horns) IS LIKE THE HORNS OF A *RE'EM* ANIMAL; WITH THEM HE WILL ‘GORE’ NATIONS TOGETHER UNTIL THE END OF THE LAND.” Rashi on this *pasuk* explains that a bull has great strength, but its horns are not very appealing. Yet a *re'em* animal is known for its beautiful horns, but lacks great strength. Yet the *pasuk* describes Yosef as having both the might of a bull and the beauty of the *re'em* animal together, and with them will rule over the non-Jews.

Why does the Baal HaTurim here allude to this *pasuk* from *sefer Devarim*? As the Baal HaTurim explains elsewhere, Yaakov is referring here to Yosef with the words ‘לי שור’ since Yosef is the ‘שטנו של עשו’; the equal (if not better) to Eisav. Yaakov is alluding to the fact that through his son, he can defeat Eisav if need be.

From here we can see the greatness of Yosef, that Yaakov who is the known ‘איש תם, the perfect man’ still felt that he needed Yosef in order to defeat Eisav. In addition, we can see the humility of Yaakov Avinu, that although he surely had many great merits which he could have used to defeat his evil brother, he nevertheless told Eisav that because of my son Yosef, you will never defeat me.

YAAKOV SONNENBLICK (continued from page 1)

The rich man is compared to Yaakov Avinu, and we are compared to the simple person. Yaakov looks at a tree and sees the miracle at how the tree grows. He sees The hand of Hashem in everything, and to him sending *malachim* is no more a miracle than a plant growing. It's only to us simple people that such things are great *nissim*. This is because we don't always notice the many miracles which take place every single day. Yet to Yaakov Avinu, what's the difference in the miracle of trees growing, bees buzzing and *malachim* flying? Let us work on ourselves and see the hand of Hashem in everything that happens in a regular day, and understand that as great as Blue Label is – it is simply one of many different drinks. May we be *zoche* to this understanding and appreciation, bringing closer the ultimate redemption, speedily in our day. *Gut Shabbos Yidden!*

INSIGHTS ON THE PARSHA

by Avi Lieberman

עם לבן גרתי [לב:ה]

I HAVE SOJOURNED WITH LAVAN

When Yaakov Avinu sent messengers to his brother Eisav, he told them to relay this message that he stayed with his *shverer shver* Lavan. Rashi comments that the word ‘גרתי’ has the *gematria* of 613, equal to the mitzvos of the Torah. By using this word, Yaakov was alluding to Eisav, “I dwelt with the *rasha* Lavan and kept the mitzvos – ולא למדתי ממעשיו הרעים, and I did not learn from his bad deeds.”

The simple meaning of this statement is that even the great Yaakov Avinu had to be strong against the ways of Lavan. It was therefore a big accomplishment that he succeeded and withstood the test of living with his evil father-in-law.

Rav Elchonon Wasserman *zt'l* quoting his rebbe the Chafetz Chaim *zt'l*, gives a different insight into Rashi's explanation on the words of Yaakov. He explains that when Lavan did something improper, he did it with great enthusiasm and ‘*zerizus*’. Yaakov is telling his brother that his own strides in following the mitzvos did not compare to Lavan's zeal in doing evil! He is elaborating, “Though I sojourned with Lavan and observed the 613 mitzvos, I unfortunately did not emulate him: ולא למדתי ממעשיו הרעים, and I did not learn from his bad deeds!” As my rabbeim always explain, “If only our mitzvos could reach the level of our forefathers' *avieros*. . .” The care and afterthought which Yaakov portrayed in his deeds should give us inspiration and motivation, thus refreshing us in our own *shemiras hamitzvos* as well. Good Shabbos.

RABBI AHARON KOTLER ZT'L 5652 / 1891 – 2 KISLEV 5723 / NOVEMBER 29, 1962



- Aharon was born in 5652 in the town of Sislovitz, where his father was the town rav.
- His genius was recognized while he was yet a young child, through his knowledge of *Tanach* which he could repeat by heart, as well as through his amazing comprehension of *gemora*.
- At the age of ten, he was sent to learn with HaRav Zalman Sender-Shapira of Krinki.
- At thirteen, he went to Slabodka, where he learnt under the Alter, Rav Nosson

- With the Russian occupation of Poland in 1939, Reb Aharon escaped; first to Vilna, then to Kobe, Japan, arriving in the United States in April, 1941. Two tattered suitcases, four hundred dollars and a churning heart, were all that Reb Aharon brought with him when he arrived in America.
- When Reb Aharon came to America, his primary task at hand was the *hatzolah* of European Jewry. He assumed a leading role in the operations of the Vaad Hatzolah, a coalition of Orthodox Jewish groups dedicated to the relief and rescue of Europe's Jews. Reb Aharon's role in galvanizing and directing the group was a major factor in the significant accomplishments of the Vaad throughout the war years.
- Reb Aharon took his first step towards the vitalization of Torah life in America, with the opening of Beth Medrash Govoha in a converted house in Lakewood, New Jersey in April 1943.
- The yeshiva grew and progressed from its opening; increasing from fourteen bachurim into 140 by the time of Reb Aharon's *petirah* nineteen years later.
- During this time, Reb Aharon's emergence as the leading *gadol hador*, expressing pure, Torah ideals in his characteristic, uncompromising way, brought a new consciousness of Torah Judaism to American - and world Jewry.
- Reb Aharon became involved in many different organizations throughout his tenure in America. He was part of Chinuch Atzmai, the independent network of Torah day schools in Eretz Yisroel, founded in 1953, and took over the leadership of Torah U'Mesorah, the American day school movement, after the death of its founder HaRav Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz zt'l.
- Reb Aharon also headed Agudas Yisroel's Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah and the Agudas Horabbonim, guiding them and taking part in all their major decision making.
- Reb Aharon Kotler was *niftar* on Thursday, 2 Kislev, 5723 at the age of seventy one.
- It was estimated that 50,000 people attended the *levaya* in America and another 100,000 in Eretz Yisroel where he was buried next to his father-in-law Reb Isser Zalman Meltzer zt'l.

Tzvi Finkel and HaRav Moshe Mordechai Epstein.

- During his time there, young Aharon also heard *shiurim* from Rav Boruch Ber Lebowitz, who had his own yeshiva in one of the suburbs of Slobodka.
- He was known as the "*Sislovitzer Iluy*," after the town from which he was born, and became famous in the yeshiva world.
- Reb Aharon became the son-in-law of HaRav Isser Zalman Meltzer, the *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshivas Eitz Chaim in Slutsk, where he was appointed a *rosh yeshiva* and delivered *shiurim*, all before he was twenty-five years old.
- When the Bolsheviks rose to power in Russia and began their persecutions of religion, Yeshivas Eitz Chaim of Slutsk was one of their first victims. The *roshei yeshiva* were hounded and the yeshiva was ordered to disband.
- Reb Aharon crossed secretly into Poland with the larger portion of the student body and opened his own Yeshivas Eitz Chaim in Kletsk, which flourished until the Second World War.
- In addition to his duties as *rosh yeshiva*, Reb Aharon was active in efforts to bolster *Yiddishkeit* in Kletsk and the rest of Poland.

"The purpose of the yeshivah is not the Roshei Yeshivos or Rabbanim or educators that it produces, but simply the development of true Bnei Torah, versed not only in the fundamentals of Torah but in the fundamental nature of Torah, to whom Torah is the pulse of life. The yeshivah is the repository of the mesorah, securing the future of Torah and of Klal Yisroel." [Rabbi Aharon Kotler zt'l]

One of Reb Aharon Kotler's talmidim was given the privilege to be his driver on one of his "typical" trips in New York, and recalls with honor all the events of that day. Reb Aharon left his apartment in Boro Park immediately after breakfast. The entire day was spent without any let-up - traveling, meetings, the Yeshivah office, visiting people to solicit funds - a day full of strain and its usual share of heartache.

During the day, Reb Aharon ate one apple - in the car, holding the core, the peel, and the pits in his hand until the next stop, so as not to litter the road.

The day continued beyond exhaustion, finally returning home close to midnight. The moment Reb Aharon walked in, he stopped. "Oh" he exclaimed, a look of pain on his face, and the sound of anguish in his voice, like a man who had been starving for a month - "I have not yet learned today!" - despite the fact that he had held a sefer in his hands throughout the day, glancing into it every spare moment, and that he had been "talking in learning" with his driver.

He immediately seized a Gemara and sat down to learn with extreme zeal. When the Rebbetzin brought in a bowl of soup, he refused it. "Give it to him," he said pointing to the exhausted and hungry driver. He himself had no time to eat.

Days of this sort were the rule rather than the exception.

אמת ליעקב

Weekly Insights from Moreinu HoRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l

In this week's *parshah*, we read about the famous story of the fight between Yaakov and the *malach* of Esav. The Torah tells us that Yaakov helped his entire family cross over the river. Afterwards, he remained by himself, on the opposite bank. While he was there, the *malach* attacked him, and the two struggled the entire night. When the *malach* realized that he would not be able to defeat Yaakov, he injured a ligament in Yaakov's thigh. The Torah tells us that for this reason, Klal Yisroel do not eat the *gid hanasheh*, the ligament comparable to that which Yaakov injured.

HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l offers a very interesting *pshat* regarding this story. The *malach* chose to attack Yaakov when he was alone, as he thought that Yaakov would be vulnerable without the protection of the *tzibur*. When he realized that he would not be able to overcome him, he "injured" Yaakov's descendants, in that they would be vulnerable while alone, and would require assistance from one another. As such, it was necessary to create the *issur* of eating from the *gid hanasheh*. The nature of a *mitzvas lo sasei*, especially one regarding eating, is that it draws Klal Yisroel together. Klal Yisroel are unable to eat from the meals of non-Jews, and as such they are forced to depend on one another instead. This protects individual members of Klal Yisroel from the vulnerability of being alone. It is for this same reason that the Rabannan decreed the prohibitions of *pas akum*, and *stam yaynam*.

This idea can be used to explain a Rashi earlier in this week's *parsha*. The *pasuk* tells us that Yaakov sent a message to Esav, which began, "אם לבן גרתי ואחר עד אתה." "I have lived with Lavan and I waited until now." Rashi writes that Yaakov's intent in saying this was that he had kept the 613 *mitzvos*, even while living with Lavan the *rasha*. This is somewhat puzzling, as presumably Yaakov did not intend to tell this to Esav, and ostensibly the *malachim* did not repeat this fact to Esav. Why then does Rashi add this fact? Rav Yaakov answers that Yaakov used the word "גרתי," which is a temporary dwelling, as opposed to the word "ישבתי," which is more permanent. As Yaakov had lived with Lavan for twenty years, wouldn't "ישבתי" have been a more appropriate word? Rashi is answering this question, by explaining that although Yaakov had spent twenty years in the house of Lavan, he never felt comfortable there. He remained complete in his beliefs and in his *avodas Hashem*, and was not assimilated to Lavan's ways. How was Yaakov able to accomplish this feat? To this Rashi answers that it was the 613 *mitzvos* that kept him separate from Lavan, and enabled him to remain true to the ways of his fathers.

A young man was once sent to Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l to obtain his signature on an appeal for tzedakah to finance an operation abroad for a child whose life was in danger. After inquiring about the case, Reb Shlomo Zalman agreed to sign, and the young man immediately rose and left.

When already halfway down the block, Reb Shlomo Zalman called him back. "Chazal tell us," he said, "Decorate yourself before decorating others'. How can I advise others to contribute to a matter of *piku'ach nefesh* - of life and death - if I do not first contribute myself?" He handed the young man a handsome amount of money and asked him to give it to the needy family. "Now," he said, "you can publicize the appeal with my signature on it."



Reb Yaakov zt"l with
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