

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Ze'ev ben Mordechai Avraham. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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14 KISLEV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

Camel-ot

...he took from that which had come into his hand a tribute to Eisav his brother: She goats two hundred and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty nursing camels and their young, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys (32:14-16).

This week's *parsha* opens with Yaakov feverishly preparing for meeting his brother Eisav, who was coming toward him in full battle mode. Rashi (ad loc 32:9) explains that Yaakov prepared in three specific ways: tribute, prayer, and war.

The Torah, in the passage quoted above, details the number of animals that Yaakov readied as a gift for his brother. Oddly, four of the five species that Yaakov gave to Eisav are listed as males and females, while the camels were gifted as pairs of mother and child. It seems probable that this is the reason the Midrash offers an alternate reading of the *possuk* (cited by Rashi ad loc).

The Midrash suggests that instead of reading the phrase "thirty nursing camels with their young," (בנידום) it should be read as, "thirty nursing camels with those that build them (בנאידום, i.e. their mates)." Rashi goes on to quote the end of the Midrash that explains why the mates of the camels are written in such a cryptic manner: As camels are modest in their mating habits, the Torah chose not to publicize that the camels were mated pairs.

Why does the Torah describe male camels as "those that build them," and what does this have to do with the fact that they are modest in their mating habits?

Modesty is an attribute that we find

associated with royalty. According to the Talmud, Shaul, the first king of Bnei Yisroel, was destined to come from Rachel because of her modesty, and Queen Esther came from him because of his modesty (see *Megillah* 13b). But what does modesty have to do with kingship?

Modest people are secure within themselves; they don't need constant validation and therefore don't seek the spotlight. They actually prefer to listen rather than speak, so when they take a stand it isn't because they have to be right but rather because they aren't afraid of being wrong and admitting it. Most importantly, they always focus on the needs of others and look for ways to build those around them. These are the necessary characteristics for leadership.

Because the camels are innately modest, the relationship between male and female is one of a bond – they are the only species that Yaakov sent that have 1:1 ratio of male to female. In other words, they were a single unit. The camels aren't focused on self-promotion or merely gratifying their desires, their focus is on having children. The Torah describes having children as being "built" (see *Bereishis* 16:2 and Rashi).

Because the camels have a sense of modesty, the basis of their mating is not self-centered. The male camels are focused on producing the next generation, which in turn "builds up" the females.



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When Angels Sing

Then he said, “Let me go for dawn has broken” (32:27).

This week’s *parsha* recounts the remarkable encounter between Yaakov Avinu and Eisav’s “guardian angel” (see Rashi on 32:25). The angel fought with Yaakov and actually injured him, which is why Yaakov emerged from this encounter with a limp. But Yaakov held him in a vise-like grip and the angel pleaded with Yaakov to let him go. Rashi (32:27) explains that the angel told Yaakov that it was his turn to give *shira* (praise to the Almighty) and that it had to be done by day (see Rashi ad loc).

Yet the Gemara in *Chagigah* states that angels offer song only at night but keep silent during the day out of respect for the Jewish people (who are giving their own *shira*). The Maharsha asks (ad loc), why did the angel beg Yaakov to be set free so that he could offer his *shira* if they only sing at night? Maharsha suggests that there are different types of angels and perhaps this refers to the angels that are created daily and only have the opportunity to sing at that time. This answer seems a little difficult to reconcile with the Chazal, which states that this angel in particular was the guardian angel of Eisav (and presumably not created on that day).

Perhaps there is an easier way to resolve these conflicting Chazals. First, we must understand, in a very simple and basic manner, the purpose of *shira*. Ramchal in *Yalkut Yedios Ha’emes* states that all actions and interactions from heaven take place through *shira*. Obviously, it is difficult to understand exactly what this means. However, at its most basic level, every action is a manner of connecting and interacting.

The word *shira* means a link. Likewise,

the word *sharsheres* means a chain – connected links. This explains the very element of what a song is supposed to do, connect one another and create a bond. Thus the process of *shira* is that of connecting to one another. When Hashem created the world, His goal was to bestow the ultimate kindness; a relationship with Him. Therefore, the purpose of creation is to create a relationship with Hashem. *Shira* becomes the most natural expression of this goal, which explains why all beings say *shira* (see Tehillim 66:4).

Before man, angels were the highest level beings and therefore they had the prominence of saying *shira* during the day. This continued until the creation of the Jewish people. Avraham Avinu made it his mission to connect the world with Hashem, which became the mission statement for Jewish people’s “corporate philosophy.”

This week’s *parsha* contains a seismic shift from angels being the forces of connecting Hashem to the world to Bnei Yisroel taking over that role. The angel of Eisav informed Yaakov that Hashem will shortly come to him in a vision and change his name to Yisrael – officer of Hashem. This *parsha* is also where Yaakov and his family transition from being a brotherhood to being a national entity (a fact made very clear in the story of Dina).

This is why the angel pleads with Yaakov to let him go. Since the status of Yisrael is about to be conferred on Yaakov and his family it is one of the last opportunities that this angel will have to say *shira* during the day. For as soon as there is a nation of Yisrael, the angels’ opportunity to sing is only at night.

Did You Know...

This week’s *parsha* recounts the kidnapping of Dina and her subsequent liberation by two of her brothers, Shimon and Levi. The brothers then went and slaughtered all the male inhabitants of the city of her captivity. In *Pirkei Avos* (5:21) it says that once a male reaches the age of 13 he becomes liable to keep all the *mitzvos*. Rashi (ad loc) explains how we know that the age of responsibility is 13: The Torah (*Bamidbar* 5:6) says “a man or woman that commits a sin,” and we see that the Torah’s definition of manhood is in this week’s *parsha*. Levi, who was only thirteen at the time that he and Shimon wiped out the city of Shechem, is referred to here as a man.

Seeing as Rashi cites our *parsha* as the source for *bar mitzvah* being from the age of 13, we decided to see what others say on the subject.

1. The Gemara (*Niddah* 46a) explains the *possuk* (*Numbers* 6:2) regarding a man’s obligation saying that a “man” is a male who is 13 years and one day old.
2. Another Gemara (*Yoma* 82a) identifies 13 as the year that boys are liable for biblical commandments.
3. As previously stated, the most well known definition of manhood is from the story of when Shimon and Levi wiped out the city of Shechem. The Torah (*Beresheis* 34:25) calls them “*ish* - man,” when Levi was exactly 13 (See *Tosfos Yom Tov* to *Avos* 5:21 for a calculation). According to Rashi (*Nazir* 29b) Levi is the youngest person in the Torah that we find described as a man.
4. According to others, since the Gemara (*Sukka* 5b) says that all measurements were received by Moshe on Har Sinai, many Rishonim say that the age of 13 as *bar mitzvah* is included in this “*Halacha L’Moshe Misiina*” (*Sheilos V’Teshuvos HaRosh Klal* 16 *Siman* 1, *Sheilos V’Teshuvos Maharil Siman* 51, and also quoted by Rashi to *Avos* 5:21).
5. Midrash Raba *Parshas Toldos* 63:14 says that at 13 years of age Eisav and Yaakov parted ways. Until then they were both going to Yeshiva. Rabbi Elazar says until 13 years old one has to raise his child, at 13 a parent says *Boruch Shepatranu* – blessed is the Holy one who released my responsibility (recited by most fathers on the day of their son’s *bar mitzvah*).



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