

THE LOST JEWEL

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Last week's Parashah ended with a list of Esav's descendants and their family groupings. Our Parashah opens (37:1): "Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan." Rashi z"l writes: "After the Torah has described the settlements of Esav and his descendants in a brief manner . . . it explains clearly and at length the settlements made by Yaakov and his descendants and all the events which brought these about, because these are regarded by the Omnipresent as of sufficient importance to speak of them at length. Thus, too, you will find that in the case of the ten generations from Adam to Noach it states, 'So and so fathered so and so,' but when it reaches Noach it deals with him at length; Similarly, of the ten generations from Noach to Avraham it gives but a brief account, but when it comes to Avraham it speaks of him more fully. This may be compared to the case of a jewel that falls into the sand; a man searches in the sand, sifts it in a sieve until he finds the jewel; when he has found the jewel, he throws away the pebbles and keeps the jewel."

What is Rashi adding with the parable about the lost jewel? Moreover, couldn't the Torah have told us the history of Yaakov's family without telling us the history of Esav's family?

R' Tzaddok Hakohen z"l (1823-1900; Rebbe in Lublin) explains: Yaakov's family is discussed alongside Esav's family to allude to the Jew who is lost among the gentiles – the jewel lost in the sand. Even that "jewel" still sparkles with the glow leftover from the revelation at Har Sinai, Rashi is telling us. Even that Jew is not really lost, for he will someday return to us. (Quoted in Mi'gedolei Ha'chassidut Vol. VII, p.61)

"Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons since he was a child of his old age, and he made him a Ketonet Pasim / fine woolen tunic." (37:3)

Rabbeinu Machir z"l Hy"d (14th century) writes: "Pasim" prophetically foretells the four individuals or groups that persecuted Yosef: Potiphar, the Socharim/ merchants, the Yishmaelim, and the Midyanim. (Avkat Rocheil)

“Reuven heard, and he saved him [Yosef] from their hand; he said, ‘Let us not strike him mortally . . . Throw him into the pit in the wilderness . . .’” (37:21-22)

The Gemara (Shabbat 24a) states that this pit was home to snakes and scorpions. The halachah is that if a man falls into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, he is deemed dead and his widow may remarry. Yet, the Torah refers to Reuven's act as saving Yosef!

In contrast, Yehuda convinced his brothers to remove Yosef from the pit and to sell him into slavery. Yet, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 6a) says that whomever praises Yehuda for this angers Hashem. Why?

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (1749-1821) explains: Reuven caused Yosef to be lowered into a pit full of snakes and scorpions, but the pit was in Eretz Yisrael. Yehuda saved Yosef's physical life, but he caused Yosef to be taken out of Eretz Yisrael. It is far better, said R' Chaim, to remain in Eretz Yisrael surrounded by snakes and scorpions than to live outside of Eretz Yisrael. (Quoted in the journal Yeshurun Vol. VI, p. 200)

“All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted.” (37:35)

Rashi z"l explains: “A person does not accept consolation for a living person whom he believes to be dead, for only with regard to the dead did G-d decree that the loss be forgotten by the heart, but it is not so decreed with regard to the living.”

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) writes: Similarly, the fact that we, the Jewish People, have never reconciled ourselves to our exile is a sign that it is not our true state and that we will eventually return from the exile. This is indicated as well by Midrash Rabbah, which teaches: Rabbi Levi said: Wherever a verse says, “Ain la” / “She did not have,” she eventually did have. Regarding Sarai, it says, “Sarai was barren, she had no child,” and eventually she did have, as is written (Bereishit 21:1), “Hashem remembered Sarah.” It says (Shmuel I 1:2), “Peninah had children, but Chana had no children,” and eventually she did have, as is written (Shmuel I 2:21), “For Hashem had remembered Chana.” Similarly, it says (Yirmiyah 30:17), “She is Zion – Doreish ain la / she has no one who seeks her,” and eventually she will have, as is written (Yeshayah 59:20), “A redeemer will come to Zion.” (Kohelet Yaakov: Aseret Yemei Teshuvah p.275)

Shabbat Candles & Chanukah Candles

The Gemara (Shabbat 23b) states: Rav Huna said, “One who regularly lights candles will have sons who are Torah scholars.”

Rashi z"l explains: Since it is written (Mishlei 6:23), “For a Mitzvah is a lamp, and Torah is light,”

therefore, through the Mitzvah lamp--i.e., Shabbat candles and Chanukah candles--the light of Torah comes.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains this connection further. He writes: The parallels that our imagination draws between our observed experiences and esoteric spiritual concepts should not be readily dismissed. G-d created man with all the powers that he needs to grow spiritually, and the powers of imagination and illustration also have a role in accordance with G-d's goodness and wisdom. Since we instinctively feel a connection between physical light and the wisdom of Torah, that instinct must be something that can direct us to the correct path in life, to follow in G-d's ways. [Ed. note: In English, too, we speak of someone who is educated as "enlightened," while the period in history when there was relatively less education or scholarship is called the "Dark Ages."]

R' Kook continues: One who regularly lights candles will develop an appreciation for the benefits of light and will realize how unpleasant it is to dwell in darkness. Such a person will not think of light as a luxury. Moreover, the more light that a person is used to, the more he will appreciate each additional lamp that is lit, even if it does not add to the amount of observed light. This should help a person understand that the same thing is true of Torah study--the more that one studies Torah regularly, the more he will appreciate additional study. And, the more that one has enjoyed his initial Torah studies, the more he will recognize the necessity of additional study. It is this personal growth that makes it more likely that one will have children who are Torah scholars. (Ein Ayah: Shabbat ch.2 no. 28)

R' Chaim Shorin z"l (mid-1800s; rabbi of Khaslavitch, Belarus) comments on the above verse, "For a Mitzvah is a lamp, and Torah is light," as follows: The Zohar teaches, "A lamp without a light is worthless." This is teaching the importance of studying the parts of the Torah relating to a Mitzvah (the light) before performing the Mitzvah (the lamp). This refers both to practical study (i.e., Halachah) and more esoteric study. Knowing the laws of the Mitzvah better before performing it makes it a "stronger" Mitzvah. Knowing something about the Mitzvah's esoteric aspects strengthens the impact that performing the Mitzvah has on one's faith. (Divrei Chaim: Parashat Chayei Sarah)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"Yosef's bones, which Bnei Yisrael had brought up from Egypt, were buried in Shechem, in the parcel of land that Yaakov bought from the sons of Chamor, father of Shechem, for a hundred Kesitah / pieces of silver, and it became a heritage for the children of Yosef." (Yehoshua 24:32)

Rashi z"l comments: "From Shechem they stole him [as described in our Parashah]; to Shechem they returned him."

R' Moshe Nussbaum/Reisher z"l, best known as the author of Mishlei Yaakov, a collection of the

teachings of the Dubno Maggid z"l, grew up in Yerushalayim in the mid-1800s. Around 1868, he traveled to Europe as a fund-raiser, and there he wrote Sha'arei Yerushalayim--a guide book combining Talmudic teachings about Eretz Yisrael with his own experiences in, and observations of, the Holy Land. He writes:

Approximately the distance of the Techum Shabbat away from Shechem [i.e., 2,000 Amot, the distance a person may walk outside of a city on Shabbat], is the field that Yaakov bought for 100 Kesitah. It is level ground, pleasing to look at, and very large--it takes approximately three hours to walk across it. In it are fields that yield all types grain in abundance, and, in the center, Yosef is buried. Above the tomb is a building with no roof, just four walls of quarried stone. In the center, there is a handsome monument. Flanking it are two pillars, each one-and-a-half Amot tall, and it is said that they mark the tombs of Yosef's sons, Menashe and Ephraim. Next to this structure is a wondrous cave called "Be'er Yaakov" / "The well of Yaakov."

R' Reisher continues: The gate [to the tomb] of Yosef Ha'tzaddik is locked and a certain Arab guards it. When he sees Jews approaching, he opens the gate for them and collects ten paras [an Ottoman coin] per person. When I traveled from Yerushalayim to Tzefat via Shechem with ten men, we came to this parcel of land, and the Arab immediately came toward us and opened the gate. We bowed down at the grave and recited prayers and supplications. The Arab stood at the gate so that we should not depart without paying ten paras per person. (Sha'arei Yerushalayim ch.8)