

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman** of the **New West End United Synagogue** in conjunction with **Shapell's/Darché Noam***

PARSHAT VAYEITZEI

DVAR TORAH: SOFT EYES

Rav (cited in Bava Batra 123a) and Targum Unkelos seem to differ about the meaning of the Torah's words about Leah's eyes. Whereas Rachel was "beautiful in form and beautiful in appearance"; "וַעֲיַי לְאֵה רַכּוֹת" – and Leah's eyes were "רַכּוֹת" (Bereishit 29:17). Rav translates "רַכּוֹת" as "soft," and explains that when Leah found out that she was destined to be the wife of the evil Esav, she cried until her eyelashes fell out. On the other hand, the Targum simply translates "רַכּוֹת" as "נְאִיִן," Aramaic for nice or beautiful. This seems like a מחלוקת, a classic dispute – that extends to later commentators. Rashbam, Da'at Zekenim, and the Netziv explain the verse like Targum Unkelos; Rashi, the Alshich, and others follow Rav's approach recorded in the Gemara.

However, the author of Toldot Efraim, Harav Efraim Halevi זצ"ל (Rav of Kalish, Poland, in the 1800s) maintains that the Targum and Rav do not differ. Leah's eyes were indeed worn out from tears, as Rav says – but that is precisely what made them beautiful, as the Targum says.

He presents an approach to human beauty that contrasts with two more common definitions: The first and most common approach sees beauty as based on objective physical criteria. Some things and people are beautiful, others – ugly. This contrasts with the totally subjective approach that simply asserts, "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder." The Toldot Efraim asserts that Leah's beauty was a result of her connection to spirituality. Her eyes were beautiful because she cried about having to marry the evil Esav. What makes something beautiful is its connection with Hashem. (Chazal refer to sin as ugliness – see Chullin 44b.)

The Chatam Sofer, Harav Moshe Sofer זצ"ל of Pressburg (1762–1839) applied a similar approach. He rules (in his commentary on Sukkah 36a) that an Etrog, that became discolored through many people handling it to fulfill the mitzvah, is not only still kosher, but is considered specially mehudar, beautiful. "זהו הודו והדרו – This is its splendor and beauty," he says.

The Toldot Efraim brings an additional proof. Soot and ashes are usually considered dirty. Yet the Gemara (Tamid 28b) says that on the holidays in the Beit Hamikdash the Kohanim would allow the ashes to pile up on the altar, because the ashes of the sacrifices bring "נוי למזבה" – beauty to the altar."

He draws an analogy to the concept of honor. Honor is usually associated with socially accepted standards of dignified behavior. Yet the Rambam closes his discussion of joy during the festivals (Hilchot Lulav 8:15) with the following words: "Anyone who is haughty and ascribes honor to himself, seeing himself as dignified in his own eyes in these areas is a sinner and foolish. Concerning this Shlomo warned, saying, "Do not make yourself honorable before the King" (Mishlei 25:6). And anyone who lowers himself and treats his body lightly in these areas is the one who is truly honorable, serving Hashem with love. Thus David, King of Israel said, "I would make light of myself even more and I would be lowly in my eyes" (II Shmuel 6:22). The only real greatness and honor is to be joyous before G-d, for it says, "King David was dancing wildly before Hashem" (II Shmuel 6:16)."

SOURCE GUIDE: SEEING AND HEARING

The Torah explains why Leah chose the names of her first two sons, Reuven and Shimon. This source guide explores an association these two names evoke – as expressed by one of the great Chassidic rebbes, and gives us additional insight into the holidays of Chanukah and Purim.

A. Reuven and Shimon

Leah gives Reuven and Shimon names that reflect her experiences around their birth. But note that Reuven's name is associated with **seeing** – “Hashem saw” – and Shimon's with **hearing** – “Hashem heard”:

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| <p>1. Bereishit 29:31-33 (32) Rivkah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. And she called his name Reuven because she said, “For Hashem has seen my affliction, for now my husband will love me.” (33) She became pregnant again and gave birth to a son. And she said, “For Hashem has heard that I am hated and he also gave me this [son].” And she called his name Shimon.</p> | <p>בראשית כט:לא-לג (לב) ותהר לאה ותלד בן ותקרא שמו ראובן כי אמרה כי ראיה ה' בעיני כי עתה יאהבני אישי. (לג) ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר כי שמע ה' כי שנואה אנכי ויתן לי גם את זה ותקרא שמו שמעון.</p> |
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B. Seeing and Hearing

Harav Tzvi Elimelech זצ"ל of Dinov (1783-1841) was founder of the Dinov Chasidic dynasty and author of the classic Bnei Yissaschar. In his work Igra Defirka, he expands on the Reuven-Shimon and seeing-hearing duality. The roots of this concept trace back to the kabbalistic work Sefer Yetzirah:

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| <p>2. Agra Defirka Section 363 In Sefer Yetzirah: The sense of sight corresponds to the month of Tamuz; and the sense of hearing corresponds to Av. You will find that when you list the twelve tribes in the order of their flags (the Camp of Israel was divided into four main דגלים, flags, each composed of three tribes): Yehudah, Yissachar, and Zevulun are one flag (tribal grouping) and correspond to Nisan, Iyar, and Sivan; Reuven, Shimon, and Gad are the second flag and correspond to Tamuz, Av, and Elul. It turns out that Reuven, who corresponds to Tamuz, is associated with seeing – “For Hashem has seen my affliction ...” (Bereishit 29:32). And Shimon, who corresponds to Av, is associated with hearing – “For Hashem has heard ...” (Bereishit 29:33).</p> | <p>אגרא דפרקא אות שס"ג בספר יצירה (פרק ה): חוש הראיה הוא נגד תמו"ז, וחוש השמיעה הוא נגד א"ב. ותמצא בדגלים כסדרן: יהודה יששכר זבולון דגל אחד, נגד ניסן אייר סיון, ראובן שמעון גד דגל ב', נגד תמוז אב אלול. הנה ראוב"ן נגד תמו"ז, הנה ראובן בבחי' ראיה"ה, "כי ראה ה' בעיני וכו'" (בראשית כט:לב), ושמעון"ן נגד אב בבחי' שמיעה"ה, "כי שמע וכו'" (בראשית כט:לג).</p> |
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Both pairs – Reuven and Shimon, and seeing and hearing – were severely flawed through sin during the Jews' travels through the wilderness:

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| <p>3. Agra Defirka Section 363 You will find that these two heads of tribes sinned (literally, messed up) in the desert. The head of Reuven, Elitzur son of Shedai'ur, sinned with the Korach group; and the head of Shimon, Shlumiel son of Tzurishadai, who was actually Zimri son of Salu (Sanhedrin 82b), sinned at Shitim (with the Midianite princess Kozbi). And you will find that most of the spies' travelling through the Land was in the month of Tamuz, for they left on the 29th of Sivan (Ta'anit 29a). They saw the Land in Tamuz, the month associated with sight – “They saw the Land ...” (Bamidbar 32:9), and they flawed the concept of sight. They then came and maligned the Land, and the People of Israel listened to them in the month of Av, connected with hearing, and the concept of hearing was thereby flawed.</p> | <p>אגרא דפרקא אות שס"ג ותמצא אלו ה'ב' נשיאים קלקלו במדבר. נשיא ראובן בעדת קרח אליצור בן שדיאור, נשיא שמעון בשטים הוא שלומיאל הוא זמרי (סנהדרין פב). הנה תמצא במרגלים עיקר הילוכם היה בתמוז, כי הלכו בכ"ט סיון (תענית כט), וראו את הארץ בתמוז, שהוא החודש בחינת ראיה "ויראו את הארץ ויניאו וכו'" (במדבר לב:ט), ונפגם בחינת הראיה. והנה באו והוציאו דבה, וישמעו אליהם בני ישראל. וזה היה באב, בחינת שמיעה, ונפגם בחינת שמיעה.</p> |
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Seeing and hearing became flawed through sin and needed repair:

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| <p>4. Agra Defirka Section 363 Therefore we say (in prayer), "My G-d, incline Your ears and listen; open Your eyes and see our desolation ... for it is not because of our righteousness ..." (Daniel 9:18). For we have flawed both our seeing and hearing. Therefore, when the time of repairing the flaw, when the moon stands in all of its fullness on the Fifteenth of Av, the daughters of Israel go out and dance in the vineyards and say, "Young men, lift up your eyes and see" (Taanit 26a). The young men see them and hear what they say – everything is geared at making a lofty tikun (spiritual repair) for the Congregation of Israel.</p> | <p>אגרא דפרקא אות שס"ג על כן אנו אומרים "הטה אלקי אזניך ושמע, פקח עיניך וראה שוממותינו וכו', כי לא על צדקותינו וכו'" (דניאל ט:יח). כי אנחנו פגמנו בראיה ובשמיעה. על כן בעת התיקון, כד קיימא סיהרא באשלמותא בט"ו באב, יוצאות בנות ישראל וחולות בכרמים ואומרות, "בחור שא נא עיניך ורא"ה" (תענית כו.). והנה הבחורים רוא"ם ושומע"ם מה הם אומרות, הכל לתיקון עליון לכנסת ישראל.</p> |
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C. Chanukah and Purim

According to the author of the Kedushat Levi (Harav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov, זצ"ל, 1740-1809), the contrast between Reuven and Shimon parallels that of Chanukah and Purim. Chanukah is associated with sight and thought, and Purim with hearing and speaking. He describes how on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the Holy One, blessed be He, remembers all of Israel for the good, but that Divine goodness is distributed step by step throughout the year. It progresses from the level of "thought" to "speech" to "action":

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| <p>4. Kedushat Levi – Chanukah ... It is only on Chanukah that Israel sees that good in their minds; that is, in thought. For the "eyes of the congregation" Rashi explains as "the wise men of the congregation" (based on Bamidbar 15:24) . Therefore, on Chanukah [the mitzvah] involves candles, which are connected with sight. Afterwards on Purim we [receive the Divine good] on the level of speech; for on Purim we read the Megillah. And on Pesach the Divine goodness is on the level of action, for on Pesach we eat matzah. Therefore, Chanukah, which focuses on sight, is in Kislev, whose configuration of the Divine Name is hinted at in the verse "Those who live in the Canaanite land saw" (Bereishit 50:11), indicating sight.</p> | <p>קדושת לוי - דרושים לחנוכה ... רק בחנוכה ישראל רואין הטובה בשכל והוא במחשבה. כי "עיני עדה" פירש רש"י ז"ל "חכמי העדה" (עיין במדבר טו:כד), ולכך בחנוכה בנרות כי הוא לשון ראיה ואחר כן פורים הוא הדיבור כי קורין את המגילה ובפסח הוא במעשה שאוכל מצה ולכך חנוכה שהוא על הראיה והוא בחודש כסליו הצירוף הוא "וירא יושב הארץ הכנעני" (בראשית נ"א), שמורה על הראיה.</p> |
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Perhaps this contrast between Chanukah and Purim relates to the contrast between their respective miracles. Chanukah's miracle was overt – you could see the supernatural burning of the candles in the Beit Hamikdash with your eyes – and its mitzvah is therefore connected with sight and publicized through lighting candles that can be seen by others. But Purim's miracle took place outside of the Land of Israel and was less revealed – you had to piece together all of the pieces of the plot to appreciate it. Its mitzvah is connected with hearing; and the miracle is publicized by enabling all to hear the Megillah, the story of the miracle.

Following the direction of Rav Tzvi Elimelech in Igra Difirka, we can see that each of these two holidays, Chanukah and Purim, gives us the opportunity to focus on elevating one of our senses. On Chanukah, as we look at the candles, we elevate and repair our vision, our sense of sight; and on Purim, as we listen to the Megillah, we elevate and repair our sense of hearing.

LIGHT FEET BY RABBI FYVEL SHUSTER

In this week's Parshah we find a very special expression describing Yaakov Avinu: "וישא יעקב רגליו" – Yaakov Avinu raised up his feet" and travelled to the east (Bereishit 29:1). Rashi writes that when Yaakov got the good news that Hashem was going to protect him, "ונעשה קל ללכת – his heart raised up his legs – and it became easy, light, for him to walk." An essay about middos sheds light on Rashi's comment.

Harav Avraham Grodzinski, זצ"ל (1884-1944), who was the Mashgiach of the original Slabodka Yeshivah, clarifies the distinction between inborn, natural character traits and those that are developed through habit (Toras Avraham pp. 208-211). For instance, it is natural for a father to have mercy on his son. This is why the Akeidah was considered a נסיון, a test; for Avraham Avinu had to overcome his nature in order to follow Hashem's command. This is also why (according to the Sforno in his comment on Vayikra 23:28) the punishment for doing forbidden work on Yom Kippur is more severe than one who eats on Yom Kippur – it is more natural to give in to the natural desire to eat on Yom Kippur than to work on Yom Kippur.

זריזות, the trait of doing things energetically, is natural. Do not think that Hashem created us lazy. You can see, even in the animal kingdom, the energy with which animals hop around and run around when they do whatever it is they have to do. The same is true of little children. Little children, if they're healthy, are not sitting still. They're full of energy and movement. That is the way we're created.

True, Harav Moshe Chaim Luzzato, זצ"ל (1707-1746, Italy), author of Mesilas Yesharim, writes, "טבע האדם כבד מאד – The nature of a person is very 'heavy'" (Mesilas Yesharim Chapter 6). But do not mistakenly think that the Mesilas Yesharim is saying that the nature of a person is to be lazy. That's not what he's saying. Instead, he is referring to the gravity and inertia that are part of the human condition. כבד means there's weight. Just like we have to deal with gravity in the world every time we move, every time we sit up, every time we stand up; so a person has to expend effort in order to accomplish in this world.

But laziness is a learned trait. It comes as a result of other middos, other character attributes. Laziness comes about because of sadness, or deliberation, or fear of what might happen if I act. Impediments to our natural זריזות, our energetic nature, can also come about from how a person looks at the world.

This is what we learn here from Yaakov Avinu. Yaakov had to travel to the east to build a family, to follow the direction of his parents, Yitzchak Avinu and Rivkah Imenu. But he was entering the unknown world of Lavan and the world outside Hashem's Land, and that threatened to weaken his natural energy. But after his dream, with its Divine promise, that outlook changed. Yaakov's interaction with הקדוש ברוך הוא, the Holy One, blessed be He, at the place of the future Beit Hamikdash gave him a new outlook on the world. His heart, filled with the promise of Hashem's care and protection, gave him the energy that he needed and that lifted up his feet and it became easy to walk. His natural energy was restored. If we find our energy or enthusiasm waning, we should spend some time thinking. If we take bits of time to speak to our hearts and listen to our hearts we will find, like Yaakov Avinu, that our hearts will raise up our legs as well.

שבת שלום ומבורך

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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