

OHRNET

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH 19 KISLEV 5784, 2 DECEMBER 2023
• VOL 31 NO. 7

RAV HIRSCH ON THE WEEKLY PORTION

by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Humanity Prevails

Already in the womb, Yaakov and Esav had drawn out their battle lines. Their vigorous movements in utero, which propelled Rivka to seek answers from Hashem, gave expression to a struggle that would endure for the rest of time. Rivka is told there are two nations in your womb, and two states; they will be different from each other, starting from your innards one state will become mightier than the other, and the mighty one will serve the lesser.

Rivka is informed that she carries two nations who represent two different social systems. One state will be built on spirit and morality, on man's human soul. The other will be built on cunning and power. Spirit and strength, morality and power will oppose each other. From the day of their birth, the two will go their separate ways. When one state will strengthen, the other will weaken, the scales constantly rising and falling between these two states. All of history is but one struggle to determine who will gain the upper hand: the book or the sword.

In this week's Torah portion, the fateful encounter between the now adult brothers – each with a tribe of wives and children – teaches us more about this struggle. Yaakov has spent the last twenty years raising his children. He is the hard-working family man. Esav has spent this time becoming a political force, the leader of an army, a chief of his tribe. Yaakov represents family life, serving others, and seeing to their welfare and happiness. Esav represents the glitter of political power and might. The struggle between them and the outcome of this struggle foreshadow a raging battle that has haunted humanity for thousands of years. In the words of Rav Hirsch:

Is it sufficient just to be a human being, and are political power and social creativity of no significance unless they lead to the loftiest of all human aspirations, or, on the contrary, does everything that is human in man, in home, and in family life exist only to serve the purposes of political triumph?

The night before this fateful encounter, Yaakov experiences an even more fateful encounter – with his brother's angel. This adversary wrestles with Yaakov the entire night, as Yaakov attempts to protect himself. The angel realizes that he cannot prevail against Yaakov, and he is able only to injure his thigh. The angel then asks to be released, for the dawn is breaking, but Yaakov refuses let him go until the angel blesses him:

“You will no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have become the commanding power before Hashem and men, since you have prevailed.”

The goal of history – realized at daybreak – is the recognition that happiness and progress depend on those principles which Yaakov has lived by throughout the ages. No longer shall he be known as “Yaakov” – he who holds on to the heel – but rather, “Yisrael” – he who shows the world that Hashem towers above all.

There is one highlight of the brothers’ encounter which hints to Yaakov’s ultimate triumph. After sending several delegations with gifts, Yaakov himself sees Esav from the distance, approaching with 400 men. Yaakov arranges his wives and children and goes ahead of his camp to greet his brother and bows to him. Esav ran to meet Yaakov, *embraced him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him; and they [both] wept*. Here we see that Esav was overcome by genuine human emotion. A kiss can be an affected gesture; not so tears that flow at such moments. The kiss *and* the tears show that Esav too is a grandson of Avraham.

These tears foretell that Esav too will gradually and eventually lay down his sword. Brute force will give way to humaneness. Yaakov will be the one to provide him with the opportunity of showing to what extent the principle of humanness has prevailed in his heart. When the strong respects the rights of the strong, this is merely discretion, but when the strong, as Esav here, throws himself on the shoulders of the weak and casts away the sword of aggression, it is clear that justice and humanness have prevailed in his heart. The *mightier* will serve the *lesser*, as Rivka was told.

- Sources: Commentary, Ber. 25:23; 32:8; 32:27-32; 33:4

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions, POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. info@ohr.edu

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Q & A

Questions

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Esav?
2. Why was Yaakov both "afraid" and "distressed"?
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Esav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov's leg?
8. Why did Esav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Esav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word nisa in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Esav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states, "The sons of Yaakov were twelve." Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Esav changed his wife's name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Esav's decision to leave the land of Canaan?

Answers

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Esav wouldn't see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Esav from gazing at her.
10. 33:12 - It means "travel". It does not mean "we will travel." This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean 'we' as it sometimes does.
11. 33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
12. 34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
13. 34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
14. 35:17 - His two triplet sisters.
15. 35:18 - Ben-Yemin means "Son of the South." He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
16. 35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
17. 35:29 - One hundred and eight.
18. 36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
19. 36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
20. 36:6 - Esav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be "foreigners in a land not their own." Therefore Esav said, "I'm leaving. I don't want the Land if it means I have to pay the bill of subjugation in Egypt."

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Saving Survivors

In a standard *Chumash*, at the end of every *parashah*, there is a comment from the Masoretes that tells the reader how many verses were in that particular *parashah* and provides a mnemonic for easily memorizing that number. In general, these mnemonics consist of a word/phrase from the *parashah*, or the name of a Biblical character, either of which has a *gematria* that equals the sum of the verses in the *parashah*. However, for *Parashat Vayishlach*, the Masoretes gave the word *klitah* – which literally means “surviving/saving” – as the mnemonic for remembering that its total sum of verses equals one-hundred and fifty-four. The word *klitah* is neither a word that appears in the *parashah*, nor the name of a Biblical character, but it does echo the theme of Jacob dividing his camp so that if Esau attacked one group, the rest of will be “for survival” (Gen. 32:8). A similar theme appears in the *Haftara* to *Vayishlach*, which foretells that Mount Zion will be a place “for survival” in the final showdown with the House of Esau (Ovadia 1:17). But the word for “survival” in these Biblical passages is *pleitah* – not *klitah*.

In general, the Targumim translate inflections of the Hebrew words *klitah* and *pleitah* into the same Aramaic word for “salvation” (*shizba/shaziv* and its cognates). This suggests that in some ways, those two Hebrew terms can be viewed as synonymous, as they both refer to “saving” in a general way. Nonetheless, this essay will show that there is a fine line between the deeper meanings of these two Hebrew terms: the core meaning of *klitah* refers to being saved by being “received” or “collecting into” a safe space, while the core meaning of *pleitah* refers to being saved by being “expelled” from a place of danger.

The term *klitah* per se does not actually appear in the Bible, but two forms of its root KUF-LAMMED-TET do appear in the Bible. One form is the noun *miklat* (whose initial MEM is not really part of the root), which means “place of receiving, i.e., refuge.” This word appears twenty times in the Bible, all in the books of Numbers and Joshua, except for two cases in Chronicles (I Chron. 6:42, 6:52). This word invariably appears related to the *Ir Miklat* (“City of Refuge”) into which somebody who murders by mistake may flee and escape the wrath of his victim’s vengeful relatives. This clearly refers to the concept of “saving,” as such cities “receive” those who flee into them and offer legal protection and sanctuary to save murderers from retribution.

In Modern Hebrew, the term *miklat* came to refer to a “bomb shelter,” which likewise “receives” those fleeing air raids and protects them. Along these lines, the noun *klitah* in Modern Hebrew means “reception,” in the sense of “comprehending” an idea by receiving it in one’s brain, as well as in the sense of cell phone reception and immigration absorption.

The second form of the root KUF-LAMMED-TET in the Bible is in the word *kalut* (Lev. 22:23), which refers to non-Kosher animals whose hooves are “not split.” This word also appears in the Mishnah (*Bechorot* 6:7, 7:6) in the same context. It relates to the ideas discussed above in the sense that something “received” by a safe shelter is protected from harm by being “closed in,” so a *kalut* refers to an animal whose hooves are likewise “closed” and not “split/open.”

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Kama 30-36

Burying the Danger

A beraita teaches: “The very early pious ones would hide and discard their sharp objects by burying them in their fields at a depth of at least three tefachim so that they would not obstruct the plow.”

Our Sages teach here that it is characteristic of righteous and pious people to be extremely careful to take special precautions so that their property would not pose a risk to others or their property. As the *gemara* states afterwards: Rav Yehuda said, “One who wants to be pious should fulfill (be careful in) matters regarding damages.”

In addition to the example stated in the *beraita* to bury the potential damagers in the field, the *gemara* quotes two other methods that our Sages employed to dispose of these items. “Rav Chisda would throw them into a fire. Rava would throw them into the Diglot River (Chidekel River – Rashi).” This halacha of responsibly disposing of sharp objects is codified in Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 415:3, and the latter two scenarios are mentioned as examples of proper disposal.

I once wondered why the *gemara* mentions, and Rashi explains, that Rava disposed of his sharp items in the Chidekel River, also known as the Tigris. Why is it important to know which river it was? Also, why did he throw it there and not into a different river? After recalling the commentary of Rashi on Chumash regarding the “Four Rivers” that branched from the river that went out from Eden (Ber. 2:10-14) to water the Garden, I’d like to suggest a possible answer. Rashi describes the names of each of the four rivers, and the nature of each one. While the nature of the other three rivers was to “overflow”, the Chidekel’s nature was “*kal*” – “flowing lightly and gently”. Therefore it was important for the *gemara* to note that he disposed of his dangerous items specifically in that river, where they would be safely carried away and not wash up onto land where they could be dangerous.

▪ *Bava Kama 30a*

Greeting the Shabbat

Rabbi Chanina had the custom of announcing, “Let us go out to meet the queenly bride”. Rabbi Yannai would wear a special garment, and stand in his place, saying: “Come to me, my bride, come to me, my bride.”

The manner in which our great Torah Sages would welcome the beginning of Shabbat are the source of central words and themes that are incorporated into the prayer/song of “*Lecha Dodi*”, which is part of the Kabbalat Shabbat prayer service on Shabbat eve.

The Maharsha explains a number of key lessons that we learn from these Sages: Why is Shabbat called our “bride,” why it is called a “*malka*” (queen), why did Rabbi Chanina “go out” (*quickly*, in the context of the *gemara*) to greet the Shabbat bridal queen, whereas Rabbi Yannai called to “her” to come to him, and why did Rabbi Yannai *repeat* his call to the Shabbat bride?

Shabbat is the bride of the Jewish People. The Midrash states that when Hashem created the world and established seven days in a week, “Shabbat” complained that each day of the week had a “mate” (the next day), but Shabbat was without a mate. Hashem replied that Shabbat would be the mate and “bride” of the Jewish People, her “groom.” And since all Jews are considered “royalty,” our “bride” is a “queen.” Rabbi Chanina felt that just as it is customary for a groom to go out to greet his bride at the marriage ceremony, so too we should “go” to greet and welcome our Shabbat bride.

Rabbi Yanai, however, thought and taught otherwise. From the place where he stood, he called out with an invitation to the Shabbat bride to come to the wedding *chupa*, and then afterwards to come to his home. And just as every bride is welcomed twice in this manner to complete the marriage, likewise Rabbi Yannai would say twice say to the Shabbat bride “to come” – “Come to the *chupa* and then come to our home.”

▪ *Bava Kama 32 a, b*

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON – BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

PART 3

“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

The first blessing begins: “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who nourishes the entire world in His goodness, with grace, with kindness and with mercy. He gives nourishment to all flesh, because His kindness is eternal.”

The first three blessings of Birkat HaMazon are unique in that they are the only blessings over food that are mandated by the Torah. All other food-related blessings are Rabbinical decrees. Our Sages teach (Brachot 48b) that the first blessing of Birkat HaMazon was composed by Moshe Rabbeinu when the *mahn* (manna) began to fall in the desert. The second blessing was composed by Yehoshua when the Jewish nation entered the Land of Israel, after journeying through the desert for forty years. The third blessing was composed by King David and King Shlomo. King David composed the first part of the blessing, and his son, King Shlomo, added the section that speaks of “the great and holy House, on which Your Name is called” – a reference to the Holy Temple that King Shlomo built. The fourth blessing is not a Torah obligation, but, rather, was instituted by the Rabbis.

One of the most basic tenets in Judaism is that Hashem is intimately involved in the running of the world. As opposed to Deism, which propounds that G-d created the world but has no practical connection to it, Judaism teaches that Hashem not only created the world but He also sustains the world’s every moment of existence. This is why our blessing begins by saying that Hashem nourishes the entire world. But, Hashem does not just nourish us with the bare minimum. He does so with grace, kindness and mercy.

My Rebbe once related that at one of his Sheva Brachot, Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna (1890-1969) was present. Rabbi Sarna was the head of the Chevron Yeshivah and was an influential spiritual leader. During the festive meal, Rabbi Sarna asked my Rebbe what the words “grace, kindness and mercy” refer to. On the table was an orange, and the Rabbi picked it up and pointed out that oranges are full of minerals and vitamins, which is what makes them so healthy for us. When Hashem created oranges, He did so as a source of health and

goodness. Fruit that was to be plucked from the tree, peeled and eaten with minimal effort. This is the kindness and the mercy that is mentioned.

Rabbi Sarna then asked, “But what is grace?” He explained that grace is that the orange looks delicious and tastes even better! The word for grace in Birkat HaMazon is *chen*. *Chen* is actually a difficult word to translate because it has no physical aspect to it. Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch writes that the word *chen* is related to the word *chinam*, which means “free.” Rabbi Sarna explained that there is no need for oranges to look and taste as they do. They could just as well be drab and tasteless, and we would still eat them. Perhaps, not for our enjoyment, but because we need their minerals and the vitamins. An orange being enticing to the eye and exquisite to the taste is a wondrous gift from Hashem. This is an example of the *chen* that Hashem has bestowed upon us for free.

In the expressive and colorful (pun intended) words of Rabbi Avigdor Miller, “Hashem does kindness with a measure far beyond our ability to picture. He feeds everybody and He does it with kindness. He delivers packages of food, wrapped in beautiful red wrappers, hanging from trees, and beautiful gold wrappers hanging from trees, and beautiful yellow wrappers. Apples and oranges and bananas are packages of food that Hashem is delivering to us. To whom? Not only to you; to everybody, all the time!”

The very first blessing of Birkat HaMazon is teaching us one of the most foundational lessons of all: not to take Hashem’s blessings for granted. Rather, we should open our eyes to the indescribable deliciousness that Hashem showers upon us. And, then, we should be careful to thank Him with the proper sense of gratitude for what He has given us.

To be continued...

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

GID HANASHEH

(Mitzvah 3 in Sefer HaChinuch)

“Therefore, the Jewish people shall not eat the gid hanasheh on the rounded part of the thigh (identified as the sciatic nerve) until this day, for [the angel] made contact with the rounded part of Yaakov’s thigh, on the gid hanasheh.” (Bereishis 32:33)

THE MITZVAH

An angel wrestled with Yaakov, and Yaakov proved the stronger. However, the angel managed to dislocate Yaakov’s *gid hanasheh* and thereby cripple him, though he later recuperated. The Torah teaches that because of the injury of Yaakov’s *gid hanasheh*, the Jewish people may not eat the *gid hanasheh* of animals.

REASON ONE: MEMORIAL

1. By refraining from eating the *gid hanasheh*, we recall Hashem’s great kindness in helping Yaakov to miraculously overpower an angel (*Rashbam*).

2. This mitzvah commemorates the greatness and glory of the Jewish people, whose ancestor overpowered an angel (*Bechor Shor*).
3. Just as a person might fast on the day that his parent died, as an expression of honor, we refrain from eating the body part that corresponds to our patriarch's injury, in his honor (*Moshav Zekeinim; Radak*).

REASON TWO: REMINDER OF PROPER CONDUCT

1. Yaakov suffered this injury when he travelled at night alone, and his sons were therefore at fault for not accompanying him. The Jewish people refrain from eating the place of his injury in order to remind them to be careful in this matter (*Chizkuni*).
2. The injury of the *gid hanasheh* renders a person crippled, and hence it symbolizes our ability to stand and function on our own. By refraining from eating it, we recall that we are, in truth, dependent upon Hashem, and we need to fulfill His will in order to merit His protection and blessing (*Rav Hirsch*).

REASON THREE: IMPURITY

According to esoteric sources, the angel was Eisav's ministering angel, which is associated with the Side of Impurity. It probed Yaakov's body for a weak spot, and found that the only place it could dominate was the *gid hanasheh*, the sinew in the thigh, from which the *yetzer hara* derives its strength. When the angel dislocated the *gid hanasheh*, it moved from its place of holiness and contaminated it, and that is why the *gid hanasheh* has no taste. Hence, it is called *gid hanasheh*, which means "the sinew that was moved." Alternatively, *gid hanasheh* means "the sinew that causes forgetfulness," because its impurity nourishes the *yetzer hara* of whoever eats it and causes him to forget the service of Hashem. Therefore, the Jewish people may not eat the *gid hanasheh* (*Zohar* Vol. 170b and *Ohr HaChaim*).

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav.

That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together.

Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit milah*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister.

G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Torah portion concludes by listing Esav's descendants.