

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

NOT BY MIGHT

“Therefore the Children of Israel shall not eat the thigh sinew (32:33).”

The spirit of Esau will not conquer Yaakov during their struggles throughout the long ages of darkness, but will hamstring him, prevent him from standing firmly on two feet. Yaakov will be unable to stroll through history. This lack of stability is necessary in order to open our eyes. If Yaakov had stood like Esau at the head of his four hundred warriors and had not been conquered, the role of Hashem would not have been visible. The prohibition of this sinew teaches a lesson, and since the lesson is food-related, it will be constantly impressed on us. This commandment reminds us that we are not dependent on submission to Esau for our survival. Strength for Yaakov (Israel) lies in higher factors which cannot be weakened by Esau’s military might.

If Yaakov does fall, he falls not because he is not equal to Esau in material power, but because he has not understood how to retain the protection of his G-d. If Israel stands, we stand not because of our strong material power, but because our G-d bears us aloft on the “eagle wings” of His Almightyness. This is the message meant for the nation when it finds itself beaten, “Don’t seek the cause of your calamity in a small military budget, nor in your failure to acquire the latest weapons, technology nor even in poor negotiation techniques. Instead return to G-d to ensure your future!”

THE HOUSEWIFE AND THE CAT

“And Yaakov was very frightened and distressed” (32:7).

Rashi comments that Yaakov was *frightened* lest he or members of his family be killed, and he was *distressed*, that he might be forced to kill others. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein asks: Why was Yaakov distressed that he might be put in a position of having to kill Esau or one of his four hundred wicked companions? Wasn’t this an opportunity to rid the world of evil — a reason to rejoice, and not to be distressed?

Rabbi Feinstein answers with the words of Beruriah to her husband Rabbi Meir (*Berachot 10a*): “Better to pray that evildoers repent, than to pray that the wicked die.” There is an inherent danger in using undesirable methods to achieve desirable goals — that one can become tainted by the means. Rabbi Chaim Brisker pointed out that there are two kinds of zealots in the world, who are comparable to a housewife and a cat. Both the housewife and the cat want to rid the house of mice. The only difference is that the housewife hopes that there will never be another mouse to eliminate, and the cat hopes there will be many more. Before we are zealous to attack the evils of the world, let us make sure that we are acting as housewives and not cats.

Sources:

• Not By Might - R. S.R. Hirsch

• The Housewife and the Cat - Adapted from Rabbi Zev Leff in Shiurei Binah

HAFTARA

OVADIAH 1:1 - 21

Ovadiah, the shortest book in *Tanach*, is this week’s *haftara*. Ovadiah was an Edomite convert to Judaism. Esav lived among two *tzaddikim*, Yitzchak and Rivka, and failed to learn from them — Ovadiah lived among two of the wickedest people, Achav and Jezabel, yet he remained a *tzaddik*. His prophecy follows Esav/Edom through various periods of history until its eventual downfall in the times of the *mashiach*.

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

“If he will rise up like an eagle and if he will make his nest among the stars — even from there I will bring him down” (1:4).

Yaakov saw prophetically that the final exile, our current one, would go on and on. He feared it would never end. Hashem assured him: “If he (Edom/Rome) will rise up like an eagle and if he will make his nest among the stars — even from there I will bring him down.”

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 and sending a tribute to mollify Esav. That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the angel of Esav. Although Yaakov emerges victorious, he is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (thus 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 realm (the angel). The brothers, Yaakov and Esav, meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer to dwell together. Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dinah, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dinah'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 mila*. While weakened by the circumcision, Shimon and Levi, two of Dinah's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister. Hashem commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar there. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. Hashem 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 Yisrael. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her, which is still there today. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180, and is buried by his sons. The Parsha concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

In a previous "Ask the Rabbi," we wrote about the ability to move a cursor via electrodes connected to the brain, and the implications regarding Shabbat observance.

In response, Rabbi Shmuel Globus sent us the following related article entitled "Building Heaven and Earth." It is a translation of a portion of "Hod Yosef" by the Ben Ish Chai (Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad). In it, the Ben Ish Chai examines the halachic stance toward creating live beings on Shabbat via kabalistic means. He cites the view of the Geza Yishai that this is a Torah Prohibition, and then attempts to refute this position. Here is the abridged translation:

"BUILDING HEAVEN & EARTH"

by the Ben Ish Chai

To spread the Heavens and to establish the earth... (Isaiah 51:16)

There is a way to create things with words. The ancient Kabalistic work Sefer Yetzirah [attributed to Abraham] contains the combinations of words with which G-d created the world. Rabbis versed in this wisdom can create things too. Rava once created a man with it. Rav Hanina and Rav Oshayah used to study Sefer Yetzirah every Friday afternoon and would create a choice calf, which they would eat (*Sanhedrin 65b, Rashi ad loc.*).

Is doing this on Shabbat included in the work of Building?

The author of Geza Yishai says it is. True, the rabbis who study Sefer Yetzirah perform no physical action. They merely combine the letters of the Holy Name with which the world was created; through this a man is created. But moving their lips is itself a kind of action. Since it causes such a powerful effect as creating a man or an animal, it is considered a *Torah prohibition* on Shabbat to do so: It falls under the work categories of "Building" and "Kneading." (Geza Yishai, *Ma'arechet Ha'alef*)

This is the view of the Geza Yishai. I, however question whether the Shabbat Laws apply to creating a man. First, Sefer Yetzirah is a highly unusual way of making something. Few can do it. The Torah only forbids work performed the normal way.

Second, the laws of Shabbat are derived from the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). The forms of work performed when building the *Mishkan* are forbidden to us; those that were not performed are per-

mitted to us. The Talmud states this in many places. Since nothing was made for the *Mishkan* by combining Holy Names, such work cannot be prohibited.

The definition of Building cannot be stretched to include "building" a living being. This is the proof: Causing the creation of a child is permitted on Shabbat.... Is this not quite similar to planting wheat in the ground, which later develops into a plant and sprouts from the earth? Planting wheat on Shabbat is surely forbidden by the Torah. The Sages should have forbidden causing a child's creation as well...A living being will have been "planted" on Shabbat! Clearly, there is no such thing as "planting" a living being (insofar as the laws of Shabbat are concerned). And for good reason. Only plants were planted for the *Mishkan*, not people. The same goes for the work of "Building." Inanimate objects were built for the *Mishkan*, not living beings.

This also explains why we are allowed to create angels and heavens, which we create with our *mitzvot* and new Torah ideas. The same reasoning applies: Spiritual entities that exist in another realm were not made for the *Mishkan*.

Lastly, one who creates through Sefer Yetzirah is not really doing anything: The letters themselves are doing it. These combinations of letters performed acts of creation long ago, during the Six Days of Creation. One merely stimulates them, by pronouncing them, to create further. The holy letters are creating. Not the man who stimulated them through his speech.

Sources:

- *Hod Yosef 50*
- Translation by Rabbi Shmuel Globus, soon to be published by Yeshivat Ahavat Shalom

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HOLD THAT HAIRCUTTER

Does the Torah's command not to remove the *payot* (sideburns) from the head of a Jew (*Vayikra 19:27*) apply to the *payot* of a minor as well?

This is the subject of a dispute between the sages. Rabbi Huna contends that one who removes the *payot* of a minor is liable for lashes. Rabbi Ada bar Ahaba's position is that since the Torah included both the one giving the haircut and the one receiving it in the plural phrase used in this command, there is an equation made between the two. Since the minor is not commanded in this or any *mitzvah*, the one giving him a haircut is also not commanded to refrain from cutting his *payot*.

Tosefot points out that the *gemara* (*Mesechta Bava Metzia 10b*) serves as a support for Rabbi Huna's position. This approach is what led to the ruling in Shulchan Aruch (*Yoreh Deah 181:5*) that one who cuts the *payot* of a minor is liable for lashes.

Even though we rule like Rabbi Huna on this point, we do not follow his example in allowing his wife to cut the *payot* of his sons. He based his permission on the fact that the above mentioned passage speaks both of cutting *payot* and shaving the beard with a razor. Since a woman has no beard and is exempt from the ban on shaving, she is also exempt from the ban on cutting *payot*, whether they are hers or those of a man. When Rabbi Ada heard of what Rabbi Huna's wife, Chova, was doing, he expressed strong objection; because if Rabbi Huna held that a minor's *payot* may not be cut, this ban should apply to a woman cutting them as well. He even wondered aloud if Chova would not end up burying her children for such a violation. This slip of the tongue of this sage, says Tosefot, was responsible for what the *gemara* relates about the premature deaths of Rabbi Huna's children during Rabbi Ada's lifetime.

This incident is the background for the mention in the Shulchan Aruch (*ibid. 181:6*) of a halachic opinion that a woman should not cut the *payot* of a man, even a minor.

One ruling in the aforementioned section of the Shulchan Aruch requires closer examination: Rema cites a ruling that a minor may have his *payot* cut by a non-Jew. The problem with this — a problem raised by the commentaries — is that a Jew cannot ask a non-Jew to do something that he himself is forbidden to do. It is also highly unlikely that Rema is referring to a situation in which the minor went to the non-Jewish barber on his own, because the issue of whether one must prevent a

minor from doing something contrary to *halacha* is discussed in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 243, and it does not belong here.

• Nazir 57b

VIVA LA DIFFERENCE!

Afascinating chapter in Biblical history is cited by the commentary presumed to be Rashi in explaining a point in our *gemara*.

After Hashem delivered the Canaanite invaders into the hands of the Israelite forces — led by the Prophetess Devorah and Barak ben Avinoam their general — Sisera fled for his life and sought refuge in the tent of Yael. Aware that as long as he remained alive there was a serious threat to her people's security, Yael cleverly induced a deep slumber by giving him milk to drink and then set about slaying him.

Yael could easily have taken the sleeping enemy's sword to kill him. Instead she took the peg of the tent and drove it into his temple (*Shoftim 4:21*).

The reason for this, writes Rashi, is that Yael was cognizant of the Torah command "A woman shall not don a man's garb" (*Devarim 22:5*), which Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov in our *gemara* explains includes a ban on a woman going to war with the weapons of a man. It is this maintaining of femininity, even in the crucial moment of slaying an enemy, which Devorah praised in her victory song: "She extended her hand to the peg" (*ibid. 5:26*).

In his "Gilyon Hashas" footnotes, Rabbi Akiva Eiger calls attention to the sources for Rashi's comment. One of them is the Targum of Yonatan ben Uziel on the aforementioned passage. Another is the Midrash cited in Yalkut Shimoni (*Shoftim 56*) which notes that Yael's action was a personification of the praise which King Solomon gives to the "*Eishet Chayil*" (Woman of Valor) when he describes one of her attributes as "She extends her hand to the spinning peg" (*Mishlei 31:19*).

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PARSHA Q&A?

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 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?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

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 twin 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.”

I DIDN’T KNOW THAT!

“Thus say to my master, to Esav...” (32:5)

Yaakov calls Esav “my master” eight times in this week’s Parsha. Because of this, Esav merited to have eight kings emerge from his descendants before any king emerged from Yaakov’s descendants.

• Chizkuni

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

How would you answer this question on the Parsha?

Name Withheld@vjmail.com from California asked:

Why, even after the angel tells Jacob that he is to be called Israel (Genesis 32:28) does he continue to be referred to as Jacob? (Genesis 33:1)

Answer:

The name Israel is an additional name, not a replacement. Furthermore, the angel wasn’t sent to change Yaakov’s name.

• *Ibn Ezra, Ramban*

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!