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פרשת וישלח
Parshat Vayishlach

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Parsha Summary

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayishlach, Yaakov returns to his parents' house in Cana'an, nervous about Esav's response to seeing him again. The brothers meet up and make peace after Yaakov sends Esav gifts, prepares his family for war, and davens to Hashem. Yaakov fights with Esav's angel, and after being injured in his "*gid hanashe*", he gets renamed "Yisrael". Yaakov's daughter, Dina, gets kidnapped by the prince of Shechem, and her brothers, Shimon and Levi, slaughter the entire city of Shechem in response. Rachel dies while giving birth to Binyamin, Yaakov's youngest son. At the end of the parsha, Yitzchak dies.

A Fire from Within

Rabbi Binyamin Frager

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Nesya Levitt ('24)

Daveed Winograd ('24)

Jacob Zucker ('25)

Tali Ohayon ('25)

As we get closer and closer to Chanukah, the parshiyot hint at the lights of the menorah. With this in mind, it would be my *zechut* to share some connections and lessons with you from this week's parsha.

The pasuk reads:

וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר

"And Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn" (Bereishit 32:25). The Torah tells us that as Yaakov was preparing to meet Esav, he went back to retrieve some small jugs (פכים קטנים) from his abandoned camp. The pasuk tells us that Yaakov crossed over the Nachal Yabok and was alone. These pesukim offer us our first connections with Chanukah and the struggle with the darker parts of our psyche. What do I mean?

Rav Nachman of Breslov points out that the word "נָחַל" (Nun-Chet-Lamed) can be an acronym for *Lehadlik Ner Chanukah*. Why is Rav Nachman hinting to Chanukah here? Hold on, we're getting there. Lets keep going… we left off with Yaakov being alone across the

Nachal to retrieve his lost jugs and out of nowhere he is attacked by the *sar shel Esav*, Esav's angel. What is going on? Why is an angel of Esav coming to attack Yaakov? Why does Esav have an angel to begin with?

Back to the פכים קטנים. Where else do we have פכים קטנים emphasized in Judaism? Of course that reminds us of the small jars of oil in the desecrated Beit Hamikdash, only one of which is sealed with the kohen's signet. Now let's bring it all together.

How often do we find ourselves alone in life either in our rooms, in a car, or anywhere for that matter? We are attacked with thoughts that seem to stem from our "inner Esav", or our *yetzer hara*. We are bombarded with voices of doubt and inner turmoil almost like we are struggling with our own *sar shel Esav*, an "אִישׁ עִמּוֹ". It's as if a stranger embedded itself in our heads like an inception (movie)-style takeover, so to speak, and completely took control of how we perceive ourselves in relation to Hashem. But, as Rav Nachman says, "אִישׁ עִמּוֹ" is not the real you! He or she is a foreigner trying to cause us to fall to that sar and be on the level of "Yaakov" (from *eikev*, heel or low) instead of "Yisrael" (from *yashar* Kel, lofty and holy), straight to Hashem. What are we to do? Remember the light of the menorah, remember the pure jug of oil, or the *chelek Eloka mima'al*, the portion of Hashem that is at the essential core of all of us. When we cross over to that lonely place or that "*nachal*", we can win over the sar by remembering who we are and who gave us a bit of Himself to begin with.

The lights of the menorah are all of us. We are the "*Ner Elokim Nishmat Adam*", the metaphorical fire that spreads light in the darkness, especially in our own inner darkness. May we be *zoche* to recognize that we are never alone and that we have what it takes to conquer the darker forces that pressure all of us daily. Remember as we light the menorah we are rekindling ourselves to be attuned to the *kochot* of Yaakov Avinu and the ability to overcome that "אִישׁ עִמּוֹ". Have a good Shabbos!

Fear Factor

Nesya Levitt ('24)

Parshat Vayishlach encompasses many famous aspects of Yaakov's life: his reunion with his brother Esav, his name change, and the death of his wife Rachel. Prior to reuniting with his brother: וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד , "Yaakov became very frightened" (Bereishit 32:9).

Many commentaries have an issue with this pasuk. Why was Yaakov afraid? Why did he not trust that Hashem would have his back? Is this distrust in Hashem considered a sin? The Abarbanel answers that Yaakov's fear was not due to a weakness in his *bitachon*, but that his fear was like that of a warrior before a battle. He knew he could potentially be killed by his brother, but continued on anyway. If Yaakov wasn't feeling scared, we wouldn't think he was brave. Instead, we would think he was oblivious to the onslaught of danger he was about to face.

In our lives we have many fears that make us question Hashem's path for us. As the Abarbanel stated, we are allowed to have these doubts and fears – that's what makes us human. Believing in a higher, supernatural Being is part of what makes being a Jew such an amazing experience. We put our lives in the hands of something bigger than ourselves and must trust that He is putting us on a path destined to lead us to greatness. We

should carry this message with us until the arrival of Mashiach, *bimheira b'yameinu*.

Know Yourself

Daveed Winograd ('24)

In Parshat Vayishlach, the pasuk says:

וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ

"And Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him" (Bereishit 32:8). Rashi says that Yaakov had two different emotions: he was scared that Esav might kill him, and he was scared that he may have to kill others to save himself.

The pasuk in Mishlei (11:10) says:

בְּטוּב צַדִּיקִים תַּעֲלֹץ קִרְיָה וּבַאֲבֹד רְשָׁעִים רִנָּה

"When the wicked perish, there is joyful song". Furthermore, Chazal say, "If someone is coming to kill you, preempt him and kill him first". This leads us to the question of why Yaakov was so distressed. There are many answers and opinions, but one that stands out is that Yaakov is distressed over the idea of murder itself because it would have a negative effect on him as a person.

The Sefer HaChinuch explains that breaking of the bones of the Korban Pesach is prohibited because "*ha'adam nif'al k'fi pe'ulotav*", which means that a person is affected by his actions. If Bnei Yisrael broke bones while eating the Korban Pesach, it would lead them to a broken spirit. Therefore, the Torah prohibits breaking the bones of the korban Pesach to ensure that Bnei Yisrael will act as royalty.

Yaakov was scared of the negativity that the act of murder would bring upon him. This teaches us a lesson that just because something is allowed, doesn't always mean we should do it. Furthermore, Yaakov also teaches us that we should be more careful in doing everyday tasks that won't bring us negativity.

Name Game

Jacob Zucker ('25)

The Torah portion in Parshat Vayishlach says:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל
כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹקִים וְעִם אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל

"No longer shall your name be called Yaakov; rather, Yisrael shall be your name. For you have struggled with the divine and with men, and you have prevailed" (Bereishit 32:29). This is said by the angel with whom Yaakov wrestled for a night prior to his historic reunion with Esav. Later, we read that Hashem Himself appeared to Yaakov and reiterated the change of his name to Yisrael. Avraham also had his name changed (from Avram) by Hashem. However, Avraham's change was absolute; the gemara (Brachot 13a) is quoted as saying "Whoever calls Avraham 'Avram' violates a prohibition of the Torah, as it is written, 'No longer shall your name be called Avram.'" Yaakov, too, was told, "No longer shall your name be called Yaakov", yet the Torah continues to call him by both names, often alternating between Yaakov and Yisrael in a single narrative, or even a single pasuk. The Jewish people, who carry the name of their exclusive ancestor, are also called both "Yaakov" and "Yisrael." Yaakov kept both names to teach us an important lesson. The names of Yaakov and Yisrael highlight two important aspects of the Jewish people. At times, we will struggle and need to push ourselves to survive. However, the name Yisrael will remind us of our ultimate goal, to be straight towards Hashem. While we may struggle and have our ups and downs, we always keep our focus on Hashem.

Linking the Generations

Tali Ohayon ('25)

In this week's parsha, Parsha Vayishlach, Rivka Imeinu dies. She was Yitzchak's wife, the mother of Yaakov, and was a great *tzadeket*. If she was so important, why does the Torah not even mention her death? Furthermore, why does it mention the death of Devorah, Rivka's nursemaid, and where she was buried? What is the superior importance of Devorah's death if she's never even been mentioned in the Torah before?

When Rivka sent Yaakov to leave his fathers home, she told him that when it was safe to come back he would receive a message from her. The person who would give him the message to leave Lavan's house and come back home was Devorah. But as Devorah was traveling back with Yaakov, she died on the way. A few days later, Yakkov gets the news that Rivka, his mother, had died as well. However, the Torah does not explicitly mention her death but only hints to it. This is to show us that Rivka's death was kept quiet by her family and they didn't want many people to know. If there would have been a public funeral, people may have cursed her for giving birth to Esav (Rashi).

But why does the Torah tell us instead about the death of Devorah? Yaakov's children needed to grow up with role models, and instead they only knew Lavan, who was definitely not a role model. So Yaakov was excited for them to meet his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka, and be in the presence of their holiness. But he found out they were not going to have the opportunity to meet Rivka, so Hashem sent her nursemaid instead. Devorah was not as great as Rivka, but because she spent so much time around her and with her, she learned piousness and purity and absorbed a lot of Rivka's essence. She gave Yaakov's kids a small taste of the role model that Rivka was. For this reason, her death made an impact and was worth being recorded in the Torah.

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