

Parashat Vayesheb: One Spark

After a life filled with hardship, it seems that Yaakov Abinu is finally able to sit in peace. Parashat Vayesheb opens with the phrase **Vayesheb Yaakov**- “*Yaakov settled in the land where his father had sojourned*” (Bereshit 37:1).

In the previous parasha, we find Yaakov **in great distress and fear** over his meeting with Esav. Although the meeting went well, Yaakov Abinu was still not at ease. Yaakov knew that his struggle with Esav was far from over. Yaakov’s fear increased greatly as he heard of the growth of the powerful kingdom of Edom. At the end of the parasha, the Torah records the genealogy of Esav. It lists his descendants, the various clans, and the kings who ruled over them. The Midrash tells us that when **Yaakov Abinu heard of all this, he was very startled and said** “*Who will be able to stand up against all of these great kings?*” Yet, we find Yaakov ‘**sitting**’ in peace at the start of our parasha.

How was Yaakov able to ‘sit’ in peace after this¹? Why is Yaakov no longer scared of Esav and Malchut Edom?

The Midrash Tanhuma tells us that Hashem reassured Yaakov. Hashem told Yaakov not to worry and said “***one spark that comes from you will be able to destroy them!***” It brings a *mashal*- (parable) to elucidate Hashem’s answer:

*There was a group of camels loaded with flax on the street. A smith sees the group of camels and says, “Look at all of this flax! Where in the world is all of that flax going to go?” A bright man answered him “What are you worried about? **One spark that comes out of your bellows can reach the flax and burn it all!**”*

What exactly is the ‘spark’ which Hashem refers to?

The answer can be found in Obadiah’s prophecy which we read as last week’s Haftara: “*Vehaya bet Yaakov esh ubet Yosef lehaba- The **house of Yaakov** will be a **fire**, and the **house of Yosef a flame**, and the **house of Esav like straw***” (Obadiah 1). Yosef is the vehicle through which Yaakov can conquer Esav². “***They shall burn it and devour it, and no survivor shall be left of the House of Esau***”. Yaakov’s fears of Esav were allayed only on account of Yosef.

¹ There is a Midrash that says: It is known that when a dog is chasing after a person, it is recommended that the person **sit still** so the dog leaves him alone (this way the person won’t be perceived as a threat to the dog). Yaakov followed this advice. After all of the dogs in last week’s parasha (kings of Edom) were barking at him, Yaakov decided **to sit** to avoid harm.

² Why is Yosef the one for the task? See our Debar Torah entitled “**An Integrated Life**”. Click [here](#) for a link to the PDF.

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Hence, immediately after the Torah says “*Yaakov settled...*” it continues “*This, then, is the line of Yaakov, Yosef was seventeen...*”

What is the meaning of this spark? What implication does it have for us, the descendants of Yaakov?

It is no coincidence that Parashat Vayesheb always falls out on the Shabbat before, or of Hanuka. The ‘spark’ the midrah refers to relates directly to Hanuka³. The story of Hanuka is essentially a realization of Hashem’s promise to Yaakov. During the time of Hanuka, a small spark – the Hashmonaim- were able to conquer the Greeks in Eres Yisrael. As we say in the Al Hanisim prayer “*Rabim Beyad Meitim-* many in the hands of a few”

Many ask, **what was the purpose of the miracle of the oil? Why did the small amount of oil have to last for eight days?** The war was already over, why the need for a miracle?

Hashem performed the miracle of the oil to reflect on the miracle of the war. Just as the small amount of oil was able to last much longer through a miracle, so too the victory of the small group (of Hashmonaim) over the great group (of the Greeks), was a miracle. The **spark which Hashem spoke of developed into a roaring fire** as our ancestors took on the most powerful empire in the world. Am Yisrael is like that small spark. We have the power to burn tons of “wool and straw”.

Nowadays there are many nations and terrorist organizations that seek to destroy Am Yisrael (Hashem Yasilenu). Our brethren in Eretz Yisrael face brutal attacks on a daily basis. As well, each day we hear of more anti-Semitic incidents, throughout the world. Such incidents are becoming more frequent in America as well, each coming closer to home. The most recent incident at Cong. Ahi Ezer is quite unsettling. Each day we hear & see more incitement to hatred from radical Muslim leaders and organizations such as Hamas, Fattah, ISIS, Hezbolla... Yet the world remains silent through it all.

These are indeed very scary which we live in. Malchut Yishmael seems to be much greater and powerful than Malchut Edom. Yet, we must remember that Hashem assured Yaakov that his descendants have the ‘**spark**’ which gives them the power to overcome all of their

³ It is quite interesting that the parable of the camels carrying flax mentioned in the Midrash is actually the Mishna’s only reference to Hanukah. The Mishna writes, “If the flax on the back of a camel catches on fire from the fire of nerot hanukah, the owner of the store with the nerot hanukah is *patur*. The owner of the store is not obligated because of *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle. This is the one place in the mishna that mentions Hanuka! (Baba Kamma Chap. 6)

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enemies. This assurance came to realization during the time of Hanuka, and Hashem promises that it will once again be realized before Mashiah.

As members of Am Yisrael we must be fully aware of this spark and its' vast potential. We have the power to overcome our enemies. We must recall Hashem's reassurance and not allow our fears get the best of us. **We must fan the spark, absorb all of the kedusha that comes during the days of Hanuka, and turn the spark into a roaring flame** that will vanquish all of our enemies and bring about Mashiah speedily in our days. Amen!