

Fire, Flames and Flax: Parshat Vayeshev/Chanukah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Parshat Vayetzei concludes by listing the descendants of Eisav. *Parshat Vayeshev* begins by seeming to list the progeny of Yaakov, but lists only Yosef. What is the connection between Yosef and Eisav?

Rashi cites a Midrash based on the prophecy of Ovadyah: "And the house of Yaakov shall be a fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav for flax..." The Midrash speaks of a flax merchant with a full load of flax approaching a town. A blacksmith notices the merchant and wonders where the merchant will store the straw. A clever fellow answers him, "One spark can go forth from your bellows and burn it all up." The fellow was hinting to keep the flax far away from the blacksmith. Yosef represents this spark, that will ultimately consume Eisav. Why are specifically Yosef and the children of Rachel mentioned and why is this parsha always read on or right before Chanukah?

Eisav refuses Yaakov's conciliatory gifts, saying, "I have much." Yaakov's response is, "I have all/everything." Rabbi Tatz explains the difference in the philosophy of each. Eisav values the physical, like straw, which has no intrinsic value, except in quantity. Yaakov, on the other hand, values the spiritual. Within him is the spark of the Jewish soul, the constant connection to God that contains everything he needs and has the power to consume all that is physical.

Yosef had full control over all his physical desires and could withstand the lure of the yetzer hara writes the Shaarei Chaim. Only with his own passion for Hashem could he overcome the physical passion aroused by the wife of Potiphar. The Midrash based on

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein the verse in Tehillim tells us that when the Red Sea saw the coffin of Yosef, it split. If Yosef could overcome his human nature, reasoned the waters, I too can overcome my natural tendency. Perhaps that's why we follow *Beit Hillel* adding to the candles and the flame each night. The name Yosef means adding and we know that one small flame can eliminate a world of evil. As Rabbi Wolbe z"l adds, the small flask of oil the Maccabees found symbolized their self - sacrifice for Hashem. Similarly, we too must rededicate ourselves to the service to Hashem.

Yaakov was told not to worry about the nations of Eisav for they will stay away for fear of being destroyed, as the flax merchant fears approaching the blacksmith. Unfortunately, today the nations are not afraid because we lack the passionate flame of Yosef. If we are to keep the forces of Eisav away, we must fan the flames of our *Yiddishkeit* passion.

As long as the blacksmith keeps focused on his fire, the flax merchant will stay away. Yosef represents the blacksmith and the flax merchant represents Greece. YOSEF, MeLeCh YaVaN, and ANTIoChuS (the Greek king) each adds add up to 156. Yosef in his passion for spirituality is the foil to Yavan. Greek culture considered physical beauty the greatest ideal and believed that the world functioned solely through the laws of nature. This philosophy was the diametric opposite of the Jewish belief in the spiritual and in a supreme God. When the Greeks decreed that Jews "write on the horns of an ox that they have no share in the God of the Jews," they were alluding to the spirituality of Yosef whom Yaakov Avinu compared to an ox.

Yosef embodies the flame, the candle of God

which is the soul within each of us adds Rabbi Schorr. This is a further connection to Chanukah, the only holiday mandated for eight days, for eight represents the supra natural. The Maccabees fanned the flame of connection to Hashem and went beyond the natural calling to dedicate themselves to His service. Therefore, Hashem rewarded them with also going beyond nature with the Chanukah miracle.

It is not only from his father, but from his mother Rochel that Yosef became the antithesis to Eisav, writes the Matnas Chaim. Yosef responds with love even when his brothers want to kill him. This family love he inherited from Rochel who, with tremendous self - sacrifice, shared the signs with her sister Leah. In contrast, Eisav wanted to kill his brother.

It was also from Rochel Imenu that he and Binyamin inherited the power of restraining their speech. While the *Torah* records that Yosef brought evil reports about his brothers to their father, The Megale Amukot clarifies Rashi, that Yosef did not go around gleefully tattling, but rather weighed each word he said, whether it was permitted or not.

The month of Kislev is the month which parallels Binyamin whose stone is *yeshpeh/jasper*. But *yeshpeh* translates to "he has a mouth," (and knows when to use it appropriately). Binyamin knew about the sale of Yosef but kept silent. But there is also a time not to be silent, especially during Chanukah, when we should use our voices to thank and praise Hashem not only for overt miracles, but also for all He does for us.

Moving Muktza Items, Part 10: Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

The Shulchan Aruch rules that *tiltul min hatzad* for the sake of a permitted item is permitted while for the sake of *muktza* is prohibited. Rabbeinu Yonah questions this bringing a Gemara in *Shabbat* that discusses straw sitting on a bed. Rashi explains that the straw is meant for kindling a fire and if someone lies on the bed, he will

cause the straw to move. Would it be permitted to lie on the bed? The Mishna rules that although one may not move the straw with one's hands, one may move it with one's body. Rabbeinu Yonah points out that if you would lie on the straw it would get ruined so then perhaps you're shaking it off to save it. How would this be permitted? The Rosh resolves

the question stating that this case would not be considered bonafide *tiltul min hatzad*. If one takes a knife and scrapes off some bones from the table that would be considered *tiltul b'yadayim al yedei davar achar*. The instrument of *tiltul* is your hands, but there's an intervening object that separates between the *muktza* and your hands and that the Gemara

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says is permitted for a permitted item and prohibited for *muktza*. However, moving with one's body is a fundamental *shinui* which doesn't even resemble regular *tiltul* and therefore it would be permitted even for *muktza*.

The Ran in *Maseches Shabbat* suggests another answer. One may move the straw off the bed as here one is doing *tiltul* for a permitted item, one wants the bed. He

disagrees with Rabbeinu Yonah in that *tiltul b'gufo* would also be prohibited in this case. The Shulchan Aruch rules like Rabbeinu Yonah that *tiltul b'gufo* for *muktza* would be permitted and the Mishna Berura explains how far reaching the heter is. Sliding money under a refrigerator would be prohibited with a broom but permitted with one's foot. One can move raw meat with one's elbow to access other food that one wants. The Chazon Ish disagrees with the Mishna Berura. His opinion

is that *tiltul* applies even *b'gufo*. What is permitted is when the moving is a byproduct of another movement. For example, if you lie down on the bed, and the straw falls off as a result, that would be permitted. However, most *Poskim* rule like the Mishna Berura that *tiltul b'gufo* would be permitted. Rav Moshe Feinstein was of the opinion that one should not move *muktza b'gufo* only when it is very necessary.

Shir Shel Yom-Yom Rishon: Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

When Chazal talk about not knowing Hashem it doesn't mean not recognizing His existence but denying that we are dependent on Him, that we are not free to do what we want, and that we were created in order to return everything He created to Him. The world was drifting away from its destiny until Avraham discovered Hashem.

If Hashem created something it indicates to us that there's a purpose, that He wants a connection. "*Mi yaaleh b'har Hashem*- Who will reach great heights in avodat Hashem?" And much harder, who will continue to remain there? It's easy to be inspired during elevated moments. Many things can happen to make us see Hashem in a very clear way. But to remain on top of the mountain on an ongoing basis is not so simple. A person has to be *neki kapayim*, his hands have to be pure. Hands symbolize action. The heart indicates thoughts, inclinations, and character traits. If our actions and heart are pure, we become partners with Him. He didn't leave us on our own. He's with us in the process. Avraham began looking for Hashem and found Him via an intellectual search. Then Hashem revealed himself to him and gave him supernatural powers. So too, says the Malbim, he didn't carry our soul in vain. We were put in this world for a purpose. The *tzelem Elokim* within us is meant to help us to reach our goal.

Hashem gave us all it takes. He gave us a formula- purify your actions, work on your heart, thoughts, character traits and know that you possess a divine image. In order to achieve greatness, we must believe in our capabilities. Chazal tell us that before a person is born, he is sworn to be righteous.

When we speak about not deceiving, we refer to the soul promising to do the right thing.

Before his birth, the candle of Hashem burns atop a fetus' head and the angels teach him the whole *Torah*. We don't remember what we learned, but we're different after having heard it. The clarity we experienced remains within our subconscious.

"This is the generation that seeks you, that asks to see your face." This refers to the generation of the giving of the Torah who were so close to Hashem that He came down to meet them. All the souls that will ever live were at Har Sinai. We can reach the same top of the mountain as all the *tzadikim*. It's my mountain on my terms in terms of fulfilling the goal. It's open to all of us to be the perfect person we can be.

"This is the generation that sought you, Yaakov..." The Malbim says the generation at *Har Sinai* came to the level of Yaakov whose dream of the angels symbolizes connection

between heaven and earth. *Matan Torah* fulfilled the purpose of creation by making this world a dwelling place for Hashem. The *Beit Hamikdash* was the experience of *Har Sinai* on an ongoing basis for Hashem dwelled there continuously. Hashem spoke to Moshe between the *keruvim* where His *Shechina* hovered. When He could no longer dwell among us, the *Beit Hamikdash*, the expression of our relationship with Hashem, was destroyed.

We are called to connect heaven and earth. "The heavens belong to Hashem and earth He gave to man." The Kotzker Rebbe said, Hashem gave earth to people so they could turn it into heaven by elevating it for Hashem. When we connect the two worlds, Hashem dwells there. How do we connect to Hashem? If we visualize Him as all powerful with a goal He wants us to get to. Fear of Hashem, knowing that He watches every one of us and that He doesn't give up on us will help us get to our purpose.

The goal is to serve Hashem with love and joy. The more positive actions we do, the more we work on duties of our heart, on refining our *middot*, learning *Torah*, recognizing that we have a divine image and knowing that Hashem gave us everything we need to accomplish, the more chance we have of reaching that goal.