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Parshat Vayishlach: Sinew's Significance

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

In Parshat Vayishlach we read how Yaakov wrestled with the angel of Esav until the break of dawn. When the angel perceived he could not overtake Yaakov he struck the socket of his hip and dislocated it. The story concludes, "Therefore the Jews are not to eat the displaced sinew." This is the source for the prohibition of *gid hanashe.*

The Ramban writes that the struggle between Yaakov and the angel of Esav symbolizes the ongoing struggle between good and evil. Rav Wolbe notes that because this was the place where impurity touched Yaakov we may not eat it for all generations. *Nashe* comes from the root word *menashe*, to forget. The mystics teach that one who eats the *gid hanashe* will forget Hashem and Torah. In the same vein, one who is careful not to eat it will merit to connect to spirituality.

The Leket V'halibuv explains the verse in Amos, "When he will flee from the lion the bear will eat him. He will come home and the serpent will bite him." This refers to the times before *Mashiach*. The Maharasha says it will be a period of ongoing tribulations without time to catch our breaths between them. When Yaakov sent gifts to Esav he said, "Let there be a break between each set of gifts." Chazal say it was as if Yaakov hinted to Hashem, "If there will be suffering don't bring them one after the other. Give my children time to breathe between one and the next." When tragedy strikes we need to think how can we grow and change and what can we learn from it. If we allow ourselves to just go on with life then Hashem says, you don't need time to contemplate, your ignoring it all. Suffering is meant to awaken us to *teshuva*. The Navi Yeshaya says, "Sycamores have been cut down but we shall replace them with cedars. The people do not return to the one who truly strikes them and they do not seek Hashem." The Gemara links these verses to the *gid haneshe.* Rav Moshe Breslover asks, what is the connection? The Metzudos David explains that when the enemy comes and destroys, the people will say, " It's by chance. We'll rebuild and return even stronger." They will fail to see the hand of Hashem. Esav and Amalek's essence is denying Divine Providence. In contrast, a fundament of our *emunah* is that no one snaps a finger down below if it wasn't decreed above. It's wasn't a coincidence that Yaakov's sinew was dislocated. Rav Yehoshua says that Yaakov and the angel fought until the dust rose to the Divine throne. The Klei Yakar explains that the dust tried to blind Yaakov's eyes so he wouldn't see Hashem in his life. This is the war of Amalek. We may not eat the *gid hanashe* to remind us that everything that happens in life is divinely ordained. The Esav in the world tries to dislocate us from our connection to Hashem. We must not let ourselves be blinded. We must reveal Hashem's presence.

Rav Hirsh explains that the *gid hanashe* symbolizes submission and powerlessness. When the sinew was dislodged, the muscles were no longer able to control the hip bone. Throughout their long struggle the angel of Esav was unable to defeat Yaakov, but he was able to dislocate his sinew weakening his physical strength. The descendants of Yaakov will become Yisrael precisely through this weakness. When they sit down to eat they will willingly forego this symbol of physical power to Esav. They must not think they need this to face the enemy. The strength of *Yisrael* is dependent on higher powers over which the angel of Esav cannot prevail. If Yaakov falls, it's not because of his limited physical strength, but because he failed to merit Hashem's protection. Conversely, if *Yisrael* stands firm, it's not because of his physical prowess but because Hashem bears him aloft. The drama of the battle of Yaakov and the subsequent *mitzvah* of *gid hanashe* was meant to underscore Hashem's presence in our lives. It's not us, but the Almighty who is fighting for us.

Rabbi Leff notes that the difference between angels and humans is that angels don't have a hip joint. They don't sit. They are never overwhelmed or depressed. They are always running to complete a mission. The angel struck Yaakov in the hip. Yet he continued to struggle because he knew that he would and could overcome Esav. A *tzaddik* falls seven times and gets up. The *gid hanashe* must be discarded to remind us never to be overwhelmed by adversity.

Every prohibition in the Torah is connected to a different day in the year. The *gid hanashe* corresponds to *Tisha B'Av.* The Chofetz Chaim says the Oral Torah's continuation is motivated by the force of darkness. We flourish in the pain of exile. We may limp, but in the end we will be healed. The word *ra* (evil) can be rearranged to read *ah'ir* (to awaken). Setbacks arouse the potential within us. The greatness of *klal Yisrael* is to get up and continue to struggle even when we are wounded. We must use the wisdom and inspiration of Torah to build despite the darkness. We must never allow our failures to keep us down. When Yaakov showed Hashem he could persevere, He took out the sun and healed him. This signifies our ultimate healing in the future world.

The *gid hanashe* teaches us that when a Jew wanders away from Judaism it is only a temporary dislocation. We are eternally connected to our Creator. At times we may be totally overcome by Esav, but then it becomes Penuel, we merit to see the face of Hashem. The Lekut v'halibuv writes that Yaakov called the place Penuel because he saw the *penimiyut*, the essence of the angel. He realized that all his inducements and enticements were in fact empty. And that is how he was able to win over him. When we recognize that the lures and temptation of Esav are meaningless, then we can merit to see the true *penimiyut* of life. The Gemara says the *gid hanashe* is tasteless and is meant to remind us that the *yetzer hara* is just an illusion. Yaakov is given the name Yisrael which can be rearranged to read *li rosh*. If we open our minds and see through the false allures of Esav, we can merit to attain the level of *Yisrael*.

Parshat Vayishlach: The Dual Meaning of the Ox and the

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

As Yaakov nears the land of Israel, he sends angels as messengers to his brother Esav. The Shem MiShmuel finds several aspects about this incident puzzling. Why did Yaakov tell Esav, "I had an ox and a donkey in the house of Lavan?" Additionally, since he was

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met by the angels of Israel while the angels of Chutz L'aaretz were still with him, he selected angels from both groups to go to Esav. Why did he need both types of angels and what was the difference between them?

The Shem MiShmuel explains that there are seven inhabited continents that comprise the world. The land of Israel is at the center with three continents on each side. Shabbat, similarly, is the focal point of the week. We prepare for Shabbat during the three days that precede it, and we bask in the glow of the previous Shabbat for the three days that follow.

The Gemara says there are weekday angels and Shabbat angels. The Shabbat angels correspond to Eretz Yisrael, and the weekday angels relate to the other six continents. The midrash on Breishit discusses a disagreement about the day on which G-d created angels. Rabbi Yochanan maintains that they were created on the second day, while Rabbi Chanina states that they were created on the fifth day. The Shem Mishmuel suggests that both opinions are correct. An angel's mission is to be a conduit between the spiritual world of Hashem and the physical realm of man. An angel is supposed to connect Hashem's infinite being with our finite world. Hashem sends his spirituality down to us. We elevate our physical world, delivering it back to Him. The angels participate in this process.

The angels who were created on the second day were very close to Hashem. The physical world was just beginning to take shape. These weekday angels were charged with the mission of transporting spirituality to the physical world. On the fifth day, Hashem created the Shabbat angels who would serve man, who would be created the following day.

Man's purpose is to activate the spiritual dimension found within the physical world, and return it to Hashem. During the week we benefit from the spiritual power brought down by the weekday angels. On Shabbat, we take all the physical struggles of the week, and with the assistance of the Shabbat angels, create a holy gift for Hashem. This movement from spiritual to physical also applies to our world. In the six continents, the weekday angels work to bring the life giving force from the higher spheres to the lower world. In the land of Israel, where there is a yearning to connect to Hashem, the Shabbat angels help transform the physical back into spiritual.

This pattern is also found with tzaddikim. One kind of tzaddik excels in serving Hashem through prayer and kind deeds. He elevates his physical existence to spirituality. There is another kind of tzaddik who is outstanding in Torah learning. He uncovers Hashem's manifestation of spirituality as found in the Torah, and internalizes it within his physical form.

This is what Yaakov meant when he told Esav that he had an ox and a donkey. The ox symbolizes Yosef Hatzadik, who elevated physical to spiritual. The donkey refers to Yissachar, who excelled in Torah.

There are also two types of evil. The ox corresponds to the evil person who will destroy anyone blocking his path to power. This is psychological energy, derived from the ego, flowing from above downwards. The donkey represents immorality and unbridled pleasure. This is physical energy moving up.

The Eved Hashem fights the evil of power. The Torah scholar battles the evil of immorality. Esav, whose fundamental evil was tyranny, joined hands with Yishmael, who signified physical pleasure. Therefore, Yaakov sent him a message, "I had an ox and a donkey." In a sense he was saying, "I have Yosef and Yissachar," who can counteract your dual evil.

Yosef and Yissachar are typical of Jews throughout the ages. As we read the parsha describing the encounter of Yaakov and Esav we can discern what our purpose is – to bring heaven to earth and earth to heaven. May we merit to succeed in our mission.

Honorable Mentchen
When Damaging Information Is Permitted

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

Although under certain circumstances, Jewish law permits us to speak *lashon hara* for a purpose, it never gives us permission to lie or exaggerate. There is a prohibition in the Torah, "Do not stand by your brother's blood." The commentators explain that if someone is being misled you have to proactively help him. *Lashon hara* for a purpose comes up a lot in the world of employment and *shidduchim*. The Torah mandates us to share information that can save someone from harm or significant injury. For example, if you see someone entering a partnership with someone who you know is dishonest, you are required to divulge this information. You should try to help the person, but remember to be fair. Stay away from mentioning anything that is not pertinent to the situation. If a *shidduch* is being suggested and there's a significant flaw that the other person does not know, you're obliged to reveal that information. When trying to verify information, it's fair to ask questions about character and behavior from someone who has first-hand knowledge. But be sure that the questions are relevant to what you need to know.

Rumors as a rule are never positive. They often end up turning into lies. If you spread a false rumor, it is a violation of *motzi shem ra,* which is worse than *lashon hara*. The Talmud says that a person is not obligated to forgive *motzi shem ra.* Saying, "I didn't know that it wasn't true," is not a valid defense. It's as if you get drunk and get in a car and hurt someone. You can't say afterwards, "I didn't mean to do it." Someone who spreads rumors also violates the prohibition of, "*Lo sisa shema shav*." Do not carry false reports.

Destroying someone's reputation is one of the worst form of *lashon hara*. It is almost impossible to make amends. The Chofetz Chaim relates a classic example of a person who spoke *lashon hara* about his rabbi. After some time feelings of guilt overcame him and he confessed. He asked the rabbi how he could rectify his mistake. The rabbi said, "Take a pillow of feathers. Go atop a hill and release the feathers. Then try and gather them up."

Henry Ford, one of the wealthiest people in America, was a rabid anti-Semite. He spread rumors that the Jews wanted to wreak havoc on the world and that they wanted to destroy every religion except for Judaism. Lucy Davidowitz wrote in her book, The War against the Jews, "The antisemitism propagated in the U.S. after the First World War brought more damage to the European Jews than to the American Jews. The restriction of immigration prevented thousands of Jews from entering America when it was a difference of life and death." Ford's false rumors cost the European Jews their lives.

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