

**Kol**

קול

**Mevaseret**

מבשרת

A Compilation of  
Insights and Analyses  
of Torah Topics

by the students of

**MICHLELET MEVASERET YERUSHALAYIM**

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**Editors in Chief:**

Adele Lerner • Rivkie Reiter • Shoshana Rozenberg

**Editorial Staff:**

Ilana Bauman • Kayla Boldt • Rachel Elberger  
Leora Sherman • Atara Shields • Ariela Snowbell

**Faculty Advisor:**

Rabbi Eliezer Lerner

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# מכללת מבשרת ירושלים

## Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim

Rabbi David Katz, *Director*

Mrs. Sharon Isaacson, *Asst. Director*

Mrs. Sarah Dena Katz, *Asst. Director*

Derech Chevron 60

Jerusalem 93513

Tel: (02) 652-7257 / US Tel: (212) 444-1657

Fax: (02) 652-7162 / US Fax: (917)-793-1047

[office@mmy.org.il](mailto:office@mmy.org.il)

**U.S. Mailing Address**

500 W. Burr Blvd

Suite #47

Teaneck, NJ 07666

[www.mevaseret.org/mmy](http://www.mevaseret.org/mmy)

**HaDaF Typesetting**

[HaDaF.Dovid@gmail.com](mailto:HaDaF.Dovid@gmail.com)

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

To spend a year learning in MMY is an incredible experience, but the opportunity to share the Torah of the *talmidot* with whom we spent such a year is even greater. We are grateful to have been able to learn so much from the process of putting together this year's Kol Mevaseret, and we hope that the learning that results from it will be infused with the same sense of hard work, dedication and passion.

One of the most fundamental points of *hashkafa* taught at MMY is that not only do we have a responsibility to learn, but also to spread that learning beyond the four walls of our *Beit Midrash*. Kol Mevaseret is a manifestation of that, where we are able to put the skills garnered from our education to the test and bring our learning to even greater heights.

A student would not be without their teachers, and a *talmidah* would not be without her *rebbeim* and *mechanchot*. We are thankful to have been under the tutelage of such incredible educators at MMY, as the effect they had on our learning is consistently translated into the articles of Kol Mevaseret and permeates far beyond into the very fabric of our lives. We are especially appreciative to Rabbi Eliezer Lerner, whose diligence and patience was the foundation of this year's Kol Mevaseret publication.

We also thank everyone who submitted or edited part of Kol Mevaseret; because, even in the busyness of MMY, they set aside time to help bring more learning and Torah to the world.

We are proud to present Kol Mevaseret 5775!

Sincerely,

The Kol Mevaseret 5775 Editors



# INTRODUCTION

I recall that growing up there was a very popular television commercial for a certain brand of tacos. “I like making them” declared a very determined child. The *machloket* was not far away as a second child defiantly stated: “I like eating them.” Who was right?

Well of course the point of the commercial was that both were true. At any given point in time, depending on context and depending on the personality of the child, either one could be true. At a night activity in camp called “Make Your Own Taco”, being handed a ready to eat taco would be really frustrating. However, someone running to catch a flight and has limited time to grab a bite would be very happy to receive something ready-made. “Make your own taco on the way down the jet bridge” would probably not make a frequent flyer smile.

The Gemara (*Menachot* 99b) records an argument regarding a very hard to understand halachic principle **ההלכה ואין מורין כן**. At times we squelch intellectual honesty and the suggestion is to refrain from fully teaching a particular halacha (usually when the case is **מותר**, but we opt to maintain the impression that it is **אסור**).

The case in the Gemara is the fact that one can fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Talmud Torah* simply by saying *Keriyat Shema* twice a day. This is based on the *pasuk* in Yehoshua **והגית בו יומם ולילה**. The classic translation is that one should learn all day and all night. But one can understand that this *pasuk* requires one to learn only a little during the day and a little at night. If so, *Shema* twice a day does the trick.

This is the context of the Gemara’s debate: one opinion is **ההלכה ואין מורין כן** while the alternate opinion maintains **ההלכה ומורין כן**. In explaining the negative opinion, Rashi states that we don’t want to publicize that one can fulfill the *mitzvah* with such a small amount

of Torah study. After all, if we publicize this, who would spend all that money on Yeshiva tuition! The other opinion, the positive approach, is that we should certainly teach this *halacha*. By publicizing this leniency we give hope and encouragement to those who simply don't have time or resources to study at length. Let these people correctly feel that they too are fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *Talmud Torah*.

Which opinion is correct? Of course both are correct. Like the tacos, it hinges on context, personality, and all sorts of personal circumstances.

The articles in this MMY Torah journal, Kol Mevaseret, are the products of the hard work and full-time energy that our students put in over the course of a long and intense year. For anyone who wrote an article and prepared it for publication, being spoon-fed an article to simply read and enjoy would not be enough. Torah study without putting in the hard work would seem to be lacking. **אין תורה כתורת ארץ ישראל** together with the power of **קבעתי את מקומי בבית המדרש** would seem to be the ideal form of *Talmud Torah*, and the results of those energies can be seen in this volume.

However, context is everything. Not everyone is sitting in the MMY Beit Midrash full-time. University degrees need to be undertaken; camps and organizations such as NCSY; Bnei Akiva and others, need leadership; *chessed* activities are vital; communities need to be built and supported; families have to be nurtured; etc. For some, formal learning in an intense way will inevitably be put on hold for a while. To you we say... Keep learning Torah. **והגית בו יומם ולילה** and be involved in Torah activities of one variety or another as you do great things for your family, community, the Jewish people, and the world.

And always have this Kol Mevaseret at your side (or any of the previous 17 editions) when the time is right to simply read an excellent piece of Torah research. Let that remind you of a time



and a place when your **יומם ולילה** was in fact able to be actualized in its more classic sense.

And to the wider community who are enjoying the articles contained herewith, we are excited to share with you a small glimpse into the MMY *Beit Midrash*. It is merely a taste. But that too is valuable.

**באהבת התורה, העם, והארץ**

Rabbi David Katz



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תנ"ך

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## Yosef and His Brothers

What created the tense relationship between Yosef and his brothers? What caused such hatred that the brothers thought to murder Yosef?

Several *meforshim* comment on these questions. The Ramban<sup>1</sup> traces their strained relationship to Yosef's dreams. Firstly, the content of the dreams aggravated the brothers, for Yosef dreamt of subjugating his brothers. Secondly, the fact that he told over the contents of his dreams to his brothers showed nothing but self-glorification.

The Ohr HaChaim<sup>2</sup> writes that root of the tension cannot be traced solely to Yosef's rebuke of his brothers' behavior, because the effect would not have been so harsh. The brothers would have been able to cope with such claims and argue with Yosef about their falsity. It was, however, the additional element of Yaakov's favoritism to Yosef that exacerbated the situation. Not only did Yaakov seem to love Yosef more than his other sons, he displayed this super-affection publicly. The brothers felt that there was no longer any point in trying to keep the peace with Yosef, as they believed that he was clearly the favorite and that no counter arguments would change Yaakov and Yosef's perspectives.

The Daat Sofrim suggests a third reason for the hatred, outside of jealousy or sibling rivalry. Jealousy over a materialistic gift of a "*ketonet passim*" could have been resolved, and this

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<sup>1</sup> בראשית לז:ח

<sup>2</sup> שם לז:ג-ד

was not the first time that a younger child was favored over his siblings. The brothers hated Yosef because they thought he wasn't worthy of being the leader that he envisioned himself to be. They viewed Yosef as immature and undeserving of spiritual leadership.

Many believe that the tension was later resolved when Yosef finally revealed himself to his brothers (in *Parshat Vayigash*) and they were reunited and forgiven. However, the HaKetav VeKakabalah<sup>3</sup> says that Yosef actually tried to resolve the conflict between him and his brothers much earlier when he told them about his dreams. Even though he knew they hated him, he still made the effort to be friendly with them and chose to tell his dreams to show that he loved them and saw them as his friends. He was trying to show that just because their father loved him more, it had nothing to do with Yaakov's personal feelings; it was just because Yaakov knew that he was destined for greatness.

The Ohr HaChaim<sup>4</sup>, however, shows that the conflict was resolved when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers. Before Yosef revealed himself, he cleared everyone out of the room in order to spare his brothers the embarrassment of becoming known in Mitzrayim as the ones who sold their own brother. Yosef wasn't concerned that the Egyptians would discover his true identity. He wept so loudly that everyone was able to hear. Rather he wanted to ensure that no one should hear about his brothers' role in the sale.

Rashi<sup>5</sup> also teaches many different lessons to be learned from the story. He explains that when the *pasuk* says that Yosef

<sup>3</sup> שם לז:ה

<sup>4</sup> שם מה:א

<sup>5</sup> שם מב:ז

acted like a stranger to his brothers in Mitzrayim, he did this by speaking *harshly* to them. This teaches us that when we speak harshly to people we know, we become a foreign person to them and someone they won't recognize. We should always be careful with the way we speak with others.

Rashi<sup>6</sup> also explains a *middah* in *shmirat halashon* in his understanding of Yosef's initial inability to "hear" his brothers. He says that they didn't know that Yosef was able to understand their language (Hebrew), so while they thought he couldn't "hear" them, he was still listening and understanding. Here we learn that anything said may fall upon listening ears, and that something questionable is often better off left unsaid, because someone can always hear it.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz<sup>7</sup> teaches an enormous lesson from the way that Yosef revealed himself to his brothers. A statement in the *midrash* by R' Shimon ben Elazar says that on the day of judgment, Hashem will rebuke us and we will be speechless and unable to respond, just like the brothers were unable to respond to Yosef's rebuke of "I am Yosef." Rav Chaim asks: how is Yosef identifying himself considered a rebuke for the brothers? What rebuke was the *midrash* referring to?

He explains that Yosef's brief comment contained a powerful message. "I am Yosef" proved to the brothers that he was not just a "*Baal HaChalomot*" as they accused him, but a prophet of Hashem. The shock of this rebuke left the brothers overwhelmed and speechless. R' Shimon ben Elazar shows that if the brothers were so shamed by Yosef simply revealing the truth, how much greater will our shame be when Hashem shows us all our mistakes in our lives on the day of our judgment?

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<sup>6</sup> שם מב:כג

<sup>7</sup> שיחות מוסר תשל"ב:יג

The Sferno<sup>8</sup> also brings a message that we can learn and incorporate into our daily lives. When Yosef said that it wasn't his brothers who sent him down to Mitzrayim, but it was Hashem, it shows that Yosef believed that everything happens only because Hashem wills it to be so, and that others are blameless in any course of events, because everything is caused by Divine will. The thoughts and actions of the brothers were nothing more than what Hashem wanted them to do to bring about His plan. Here, Yosef shows tremendous *emunah*.

We can see from all these sources that there is much to learn from the story of Yosef and his brothers. Opinions differ regarding the cause of their early tension, stating that it could have been because the brothers felt he was self-glorifying for telling over the dreams (Ramban), because they just felt that Yosef was not worthy enough to become a leader (Daat Sofrim), or simply because they felt that Yaakov loved Yosef so much more than the rest of them (Ohr HaChaim). Further differences are shown in understanding the way in which Yosef attempted to resolve their conflict, primarily either by telling the brothers his dreams in order to make peace with them (HaKetav VeHakalah) or by preventing the brothers from becoming humiliated in front of all of Mitzrayim (Ohr HaChaim).

There were also several lessons to be learned from the story of Yosef and his brothers, namely that everything that happens is because Hashem wants it to, and that we should avoid speaking harshly to people. Finally, we are able to learn another great character trait from Yosef. We see that his brothers hated him and called him names, tried killing him and had him sold, but when he sees them and reveals himself, he only wants to restore their relationship.

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<sup>8</sup> בראשית מה:ח



Here, we learn from Yosef the tremendous *middah* of overcoming the wrongs that we feel have been done to us, never holding a grudge, and always seeking out reconciliation in our relationships.



## Esther's Plan

In the fifth *perek* of *Megillat Esther*, Esther requests that Achashveirosh and Haman join her for two consecutive parties. To ask for one party is understandable, but why did Esther also request a second? To answer this question, we must delve into the personalities of the king and of Haman, and investigate the cunning scheme that Queen Esther used to save the Jewish people.

A particular facet of Achashveirosh's personality can be understood from two examples. The first is with the prior queen, Vashti. Due to Vashti's refusal to come to the king when he commands, he orders her to be killed, abruptly and without hesitation. This shows that Achashveirosh is quick to kill when things don't go according to his plan. The second example is when Haman comes to Achashveirosh to discuss destroying the Jews. Haman explains that there is a dispersed nation who does not follow the king's rules and should be destroyed. Once again, Achashveirosh does not show any hesitation, and does not ask any questions. Rather, the king hands over his ring to Haman and says that Haman can do whatever he sees fit, thereby giving permission to kill off an entire nation, without even asking its identity. Achashveirosh is shown to approach death with frivolity. Once someone angers Achashveirosh, his identity is irrelevant, and he is indiscriminately sentenced to death.

The wording of Esther's invitation to the first party is: **וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִם עַל הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יָבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֵּן הַיּוֹם אֶל הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ**. Esther says that if it pleases the king, the king and Haman should come today to a banquet that she has prepared for him (Achashveirosh). However, this request appears to be particularly unusual, and baffles Achashveirosh. To understand Achashveirosh's

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<sup>1</sup> אסתר ה:ד

perspective, one must realize that Achashveirosh has not called for Esther in thirty days, and therefore her actions for the past month had been a mystery. What, therefore, has suddenly prompted Esther to invite Haman, the second in command, to a party otherwise exclusive to the royal couple?

By realizing his confusion, we are able to understand why Achashveirosh responded with such haste. Achashveirosh wanted to attend the party and learn why, after thirty days of no contact, Esther would come, unannounced, to the king's palace and invite him and Haman to a banquet.

The narrative continues at the party, where, in Haman's company, the king asks Esther what she would like, offering her up to half the kingdom. Esther responds that if she finds favor in his eyes, and if it pleases the king to grant her request, the king and Haman should come [tomorrow] to a banquet that she will prepare for them, and tomorrow, she will fulfill the king's word.<sup>2</sup>

At this point, Achashveirosh is confused and angry. He wonders why Esther asked for a second party, why she again invited Haman, and most importantly, why the language of her invitation changed. For the first party, Esther explains to her husband that she is hosting a party for him, the king. However by the second party the language changes from the word 'him' to 'them'.

Esther is not just making a party for Achashveirosh, rather for the two of them – for the king and for Haman. This also explains why Achashveirosh cannot sleep that night and needs to read through the book of records. He is so concerned with the relationship between Esther and Haman that he is unable to fall asleep and needs something to distract him.

At the second party, after a sleepless night, Achashveirosh once again begs Esther to reveal her request. Finally Esther answers and says that she is pleading for the life of her people who have been sentenced by Haman to be killed. Achashveirosh,

in his fury, walks out to the garden in order to sort through his thoughts, leaving Haman and Esther alone. When he returns, however, Achashveirosh sees Haman leaning over the couch that Esther is lying on. Achashveirosh is appalled and furious that Haman would dare try to assault Esther in his palace. Achashveirosh, consistent with his personality, commands Haman to be killed.

We see that both of Esther's parties were crucial in her plan to save the Jewish nation. At first, Esther planted the seed in Achashveirosh's head that something is odd with her inviting Haman to the party. We then see Esther's subtle brilliance when she switches her phraseology from 'him' to 'them', infuriating Achashveirosh at Haman for his mysterious relationship with Esther. By making Haman Achashveirosh's target, Esther achieves Haman's death and saves the entire Jewish people.



## Wives at War

Sarah, Avraham's first wife, and Hagar, Avraham's second wife, have a difficult relationship. However, before discussing the conflict between these co-wives, we must first examine how Hagar came to be in Avraham's household.

Hagar is introduced as being Sarah's handmaiden:<sup>1</sup> ושרי אשת אברם לא ילדה לו ולה שפחה מצרית ושמה הגר. The *pesukim* do not explain how Sarah came to have an Egyptian handmaiden or how long this handmaiden lived in Avraham's house before becoming his wife.

This is elaborated by Rashi. During Avraham and Sarah's stay in Egypt at the time of the famine in Canaan, Hagar joins Avraham and Sarah's household. In response to Pharaoh taking Sarah into his house, Hashem afflicts Pharaoh and his household with plagues. Rashi explains that when Pharaoh sees the miracles performed on Sarah's behalf, he decides to give his daughter, Hagar, to Sarah as a handmaiden, saying: "It would be better for my daughter to be a handmaiden in this house [Sarah's house] than a noblewoman in another house [in a palace in Egypt]".

Hagar, who has taken on the role of Sarah's handmaiden, eventually becomes Avraham's second wife, due to Sarah's insistence. However, since Sarah's reasoning for his second marriage is that she is unable to bear Avraham's children, the relationship formed between Sarah and Hagar is extremely tense. Additionally, it is a relationship that Sarah uses to "build

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<sup>1</sup> בראשית טז:א

herself up.” In explaining her suggestion that Avraham marry Hagar, Sarah says,<sup>2</sup> אולי אבנה ממנה. Rashi comments that by bringing Hagar, her co-wife and rival-to-be, into her own house, Sarah hopes to merit children of her own. We see a similar idea in Leah’s statement after the birth of Yissachar:<sup>3</sup> “G-d has granted me my reward because I gave my handmaiden to my husband”.

Sforno suggests an alternate understanding to Sarah’s motivation in giving Hagar to Avraham as a second wife. Sarah wanted Hagar to have children with Avraham to spark her own feelings of jealousy, hoping that this jealousy would stimulate potential powers of reproduction, making her able to have children herself.

Ramban explains that by marrying Hagar off to Avraham, Sarah would be “built up” in two ways. Firstly, Sarah would derive satisfaction from Hagar’s children. Secondly, Sarah would merit having her own children because of her self-sacrifice in giving her husband another wife to provide him with children. Ramban adds another piece to the picture. Avraham would not take Hagar as a wife without Sarah’s permission. While Avraham desired having children, he waited until Sarah gave Hagar to him, showing that Sarah and Avraham had a very close and respectful relationship. Out of respect for her husband, Sarah insisted that Hagar be a second wife and not just a “*pilegesh*”, in turn respecting his relationship with Hagar.

A similar situation appears in Sefer Shmuel. Chana, barren for many years, tells her husband Elkanah to take Peninah as a wife, hoping this would help her to aid her own condition of barrenness. We see this in the language used to

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<sup>2</sup> שם טז:א

<sup>3</sup> שם ל:יח



introduce Elkanah's wives:<sup>4</sup> שם אחת חנה ושם השנית פנינה. The Malbim points out that there is no letter "ה" before אחת, the number representing Chana. He explains that Elkanah married Chana out of love, and intended her to be his only wife. Nevertheless, when Chana saw that she was barren, she advised Elkanah to take Peninah as a wife, hoping that through Peninah she would be able to build her own family, just as Sarah did with Hagar.

According to Rav Hirsch, both Sarah and Avraham wanted to have children, but their inability to have children together impacted them differently. Part of Avraham's mission in this world is to have children, but his initial intention of fulfilling this mission with Sarah is denied. However, while Avraham's focus is merely on having children, Sarah, taking the mission very personally, feels guilty and responsible for Avraham's dismay. Nevertheless, Sarah still wants to provide Avraham with children, even if not of her own, so she marries Hagar off to Avraham. Sarah knows that Avraham would not willingly marry Hagar for his own sake, but would do so for her. And that is why Sarah says that she will be "built up" through Hagar – to convince Avraham that marrying her handmaiden would not only be good for him, but for her too.

Why did Sarah wait ten years before giving Hagar to Avraham?

Rashi explains that if a woman tries for ten years to have a child and finds she is unable, her husband is then obligated to marry another woman. But, one may ask, weren't Sarah and Avraham already married for significantly more than ten years?

The Ramban explains that the ten years began when Avraham started living in Eretz Yisrael. The merit of living in Eretz

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<sup>4</sup> שמואל א א:ב

Yisrael can help a couple have children, even if they were previously unable to do so. If a husband and wife spent a number of years outside Eretz Yisrael trying unsuccessfully to have children and then move to Eretz Yisrael, they begin a new counting of ten years. So, Avraham and Sarah began their count of ten years from the time they arrived in Eretz Yisrael.

However, once Hagar becomes Avraham's wife capable of having children, she loses respect for Sarah. She even mocks Sarah when she becomes pregnant, as the *pasuk* says<sup>5</sup>: ותקל גברת בעיניה. Rashi elaborates that Hagar claimed that Sarah is not how she appears to be. She presents herself as a righteous woman but she is not, and that is the reason she has not been worthy of pregnancy all these years.

The Siftei Chachamim explains that Hagar slighted Sarah not because she wasn't able to have kids, but because Hagar conceived immediately, while Sarah, after many years, still remained childless. Since, against all odds, Hagar was able to miraculously become pregnant after her first time trying, she viewed herself as more righteous than Sarah.

This increasingly tense relationship between Sarah and Hagar resulted in an argument between Sarah and Avraham. According to Rashi, Sarah was upset at Avraham for only *davening* for himself not to remain childless, but never specifying in his *tefillot* that Sarah should also merit having a child. Sarah also felt that Avraham should have said something when he noticed how Hagar was treating her. Sarah says that Hashem should judge בניי וביניך.<sup>6</sup>

Rashi explains the writing of בנייך with an extra letter "yud" as alluding to the fact that Sarah was referring not only to

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<sup>5</sup> בראשית טז:ד

<sup>6</sup> שם טז:ה

Avraham, but also to Hagar. [Were she referring to the individual, the spelling בִּינִיךְ would have been used. However, בְּיִנֶיךָ is used, indicating multiple subjects (i.e. Avraham and Hagar).] She also thereby casts an evil eye on Hagar's pregnancy, and Hagar miscarries.

As the narrative continues, the relationship between Sarah and Hagar completely deteriorates and Hagar runs away from Avraham's house. On her way, she encounters an angel of Hashem who asks her two questions: "Where have you come from?" and "Where are you going?" Hagar only answers that she is running away.

The Oznayim LaTorah explains that she was only able to answer the first question, because fugitives do not know where they are going, only from where they have come from. The angel also might be asking two questions that are really one: "What house have you left, and with what house will you replace it?" The angel is rebuking Hagar for running away because her father, Pharaoh, told her to be a maidservant in the house of Avraham rather than a mistress in a different home. When Hagar answers that Avraham's house is a place of persecution and not just servitude, the angel replies that for a mistress like Sarah it is worthwhile to suffer persecution. The angel tells Hagar she is still Sarah's handmaiden, and is required to listen to the word of Sarah and treat her with respect.

We learn from the angel that Sarah was a very special person, and we will further learn that she also kept a very special home. In the book *Self Beyond Self*, we are told that the Jewish mother/wife is what ultimately makes the Jewish home.<sup>7</sup> Without Jewish women, the Jewish people would be lost. The Jewish woman has warmth, modesty, humility, and happiness, and is sure of Hashem's love. She then passes these qualities on

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.Rabbi Y. S. Hurwitz, *Self Beyond Self*, Feldheim, 1994 ראה<sup>7</sup>

to her children. Sarah, the model Jewish woman, brings this atmosphere into the home, as is evident by the Shabbos candles that stay lit from Shabbos to Shabbos. When she passes away, the light of the candles goes out, but once her son Yitzchak marries Rivka, the light of Sarah is once again relit, and so are her Shabbos candles. This light is the light of Torah. If a Jewish mother lives for anything other than Hashem and Torah, the spiritual light in her home will be lost or diminished. Just like Sarah, all Jewish mothers light their own Shabbos candles every week, reminding them to keep the Torah in their homes and lives.

Along with her Shabbos candles and her light of Torah, Sarah brings Hashem's *Shechina* into the home. Hashem places a cloud over Sarah's tent, signifying that Hashem is close to His people and is constantly watching over them. Today, we have the *Kotel*, the *Batei Midrash*, the *Batei Knesset*, and the Jewish home to represent Sarah's tent and Hashem's constant presence in it. Learning and keeping Torah help elevate us and bring us closer to Hashem. Just like the Shabbos candles light up a Jewish home, a Jewish woman's faithfulness also influences the spirituality of her household.

Another blessing that Sarah brought to her home was the blessing of *challah*. Bread is a staple food, and a mother assures that there is always ample amount of whatever her family needs. A mother is the prime provider of all that is vital for her family atmosphere. The aura she generates into the home is the greatest blessing of all – an aura of selfless love. Today Jewish women do the *mitzvah* of *Hafrashat Challah*, representative of their giving of themselves for the sake of their family.

The significance of a Jewish mother in the home comes from Sarah, our mother. She has passed down for generations what it means to be a Jewish mother and what it means to run a Jewish home. She teaches us that the mother has a responsi-

bility to create a positive atmosphere in the home, and to remove anything that could be detrimental to that atmosphere. That is ultimately why Sarah makes Hagar and Yishmael leave – because they hindered the growth of strong Jewish values in Sarah’s house, and she did not want that for her son Yitzchak.

We can learn a lot from the way Sarah handled her tense relationship with Hagar. We learn that there is a greater hope for a Jewish mother in *Eretz Yisrael* to have a child, even if she is incapable of having one outside of *Eretz Yisrael*. However, the greatest lesson we learn is how to build a proper Jewish home. Sarah is the epitome of a Jewish mother. She understood the difference between what was right and what was wrong for her family, and did not allow any negative influences to penetrate the wall of her home. We should all be blessed to adopt the values of Sarah and bring them into our own lives, being the best Jewish women we can be.



## The Relationship Between Yitzchak and Esav

The relationship between Yitzchak and Esav is one that is often underrated and overlooked, but nevertheless one of tremendous beauty. The differences between Yitzchak's sons are great: Yaakov was a perfect son while Esav was ill-tempered and violent. Nevertheless, Yitzchak loved Esav enormously, even favoring him over Yaakov. Yitzchak is known for being the God fearing, Torah-loving replica of Avraham, while Esav is an aggressive and demanding hunter. How could it be that this father and son duo co-existed so well? What is the root of their relationship?

The Torah tells us that: "Yitzchak loved Esav because he trapped with his mouth, while Rivka loved Yaakov."<sup>1</sup> What is meant by this phrase? Whose mouth is it referring to? Rashi gives two explanations.

The first is Yitzchak's mouth; Yitzchak loved Esav because Esav brought him food to eat.

The more complex answer, Rashi explains, is Esav's mouth; Esav was cunning and convinced Yitzchak with his mouth, to believe that he was a real *tzaddik* because of his gifts and his acting skills. Yitzchak was fooled into thinking Esav was something he was not.

Sforno explains that "Yitzchak loved Esav and Rivka loved Yaakov" means that Yitzchak also loved Esav for his hunting skills despite the fact that he was not as great as Yaakov. It is evident that Yitzchak loved Yaakov but not to the exclusion of Esav.

However, it can't be that Yitzchak was only fooled into thinking Esav was so great, or that he only loved Esav because he

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<sup>1</sup> בראשית כה:כח

was a good hunter. There must have been something unique about Esav's nature that Yitzchak truly loved. Many *meforshim* agree that there was a mutual love and respect between Yitzchak and Esav, that they had a great father-son relationship, and that Yitzchak wanted to give Esav the bracha despite his bad characteristics.

Radak explains that Yitzchak desired to bless Esav because he knew that Yaakov would be blessed with Avraham's *bracha* and would give birth to a great nation. Yitzchak wanted Esav to be happy and have a bright future as well. Although his son may have strayed from a more desirable path, Yitzchak still wanted him to succeed and flourish.

The Or Hachaim has a different approach. He explains that Yitzchak wanted to bless Esav because he was the *bechor* and he thought that the *bracha* could change the nature of Esav, fixing his ways. He further explains that Yitzchak had Esav's best interest in mind and as a father he really wanted Esav to become a better person and maximize his potential. By giving Esav the *bracha*, Esav would automatically assume a more religious and pious position.

Furthermore, Rav Hirsch explains that Rivka recognized the physical and spiritual division between her sons: Yaakov possessed all the spirituality, while Esav possessed all the physicality. Yitzchak realized that Yaakov would be the only one serving Hashem, so Yitzchak tried to channel Esav's physical talents and strengths, such as hunting, towards "*Avodat Hashem*". Yitzchak believed that every quality that one possesses could be used toward a higher purpose and everyone is an integral part of our nation. He believed that despite how bad a characteristic may seem, it can always be transformed into something positive.

The turning point in the relationship between Yitzchak and Esav could have been when Yitzchak was tricked into giving Yaakov the bracha. However, as angry as Esav was, he did not



take out his aggression on Yitzchak, and still only had respect for his father.

Rashi says that immediately after Esav found out that Yaakov took his *bracha*, he planned to kill Yaakov. But knowing how much harm that would cause to Yitzchak, he held himself back and promised to kill Yaakov only after Yitzchak was dead, in order not to cause Yitzchak distress. This shows Esav's *kibud av*; he did not want to cause his father any heartbreak. It also shows his ability to hold back his anger, thereby showing his potential.

The Or HaChaim comments on the same phrase, explaining that Esav was afraid to murder Yaakov before Yitzchak was buried since the dead are presumed to be aware of what goes on as long as the coffin has not been sealed. Esav knew his actions were wrong, but even so, he did not want his father to see him in such a bad light. He had enough respect for Yitzchak that he did not want to shame him and throw away their relationship. Esav was known for his *kibud av*, one of his only good qualities.

A main character in the force behind the relationship between Yitzchak and Esav's connection was Rivka. When Rivka was pregnant, she had a prophecy that her elder son Esav would serve her younger son, Yaakov. Why didn't she tell Yitzchak about the *nevuah* so that he would give Yaakov the *bracha*? Ramban answers that Rivka knew how much Yitzchak loved and favored Esav, and if she told Yitzchak, he would not give Yaakov the *bracha* with a full heart. Moreover, Rivka knew that Yitzchak would always resent the resulting situation, because, clearly, Yitzchak wanted the *bracha* to go to Esav, even though it may not have been ideal.

There was no true negative turning point in Esav and Yitzchak's relationship. Yitzchak constantly looked beyond Esav's sins and chose to see the good in him. He clearly intended to give Esav the *bracha* and would have done so if not for his blindness. The *pasuk* mentions that "Yitzchak had grown old, and the vision

of his eyes had dimmed”<sup>2</sup>. This blindness was not merely a function of Yitzchak’s old age. Rashi explains two reasons for Yitzchak’s blindness. First, that Esav would bring incense for idol worship, and the smoke burned Yitzchak’s eyes. Second, during the *akeida*, the heavenly angels began crying when they saw what Avraham was willing to do in order to show his belief in Hashem, and their tears went into Yitzchak’s eyes, blinding him. Hashem knew that Yitzchak would want to give the *bracha* to Esav, so He caused Yitzchak to become blind in order for Yaakov to receive the *bracha*.

Esav was angry and aggressive, but most importantly, he was selfish. As the father of the enemy of the Jewish people, this trait continues to leave an everlasting mark on the Jewish people. Esav’s legacy for his descendants is to act with violence and cruelty to the Jews and those around them until they achieve their goal. This is shown through countless persecutions: the Roman Exile, pogroms, the Spanish Inquisition, the Holocaust, etc. But while this has imposed many hardships on the Jewish people, it also strengthened our *emunah* and brought the nation closer together.

The relationship between Yitzchak and Esav contains several lessons. First and foremost, it shows that one must look beyond someone’s bad qualities and try to see the good in them. Yitzchak was able to look past Esav’s aggressive and hate filled external qualities and see his good qualities, like his *kibud av*.

Second, the Torah teaches us the importance of family, and the unconditional love between parents and their children. Esav, who was evil, still received love from his father. Even more so, Esav was full of hatred, but was still able to love and respect his father. This idea is mimicked in the relationship between David and Avshalom; although their relationship was rocky, David continued to love Avshalom even when he was rebelling and purposely trying to hurt his own father.

From here we can learn the valuable lesson of cherishing our children, siblings, and parents, despite their faults, for after all, that is exactly what Hashem does for us. Hashem continues to love and provide for us even when we go against His word and disregard His authority over us. It is through the relationship between Yitzchak and Esav that we can understand how much Hashem really cherishes us and continues to treat each one of us like his most beloved child.



# Divine Name Changes

## Meaning, Purpose and Significance

Elie Wiesel wrote, “In Jewish history a name has its own history and its own memory. It connects beings with their origins. To retrace its path is thus to embark on an adventure in which the destiny of a single word becomes one with that of a community; it is to undertake a passionate and enriching quest for all those who may live in your name.” As Elie Wiesel explains, names hold great depth, and we believe that names have Divine significance.

David Ha’Melech, in his great wisdom, writes in Tehillim,<sup>1</sup> לְכוּ חֲזוּ מַפְעֵלוֹת ה' אֲשֶׁר שָׁם שְׁמוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ – “Go see the works of Hashem, who has placed *shamot* in the land.”

This stanza can be translated in two ways. According to Rabbi Eliezer<sup>2</sup>: “אל תקרי שמות אלא שמות” One should not read the *pasuk* as “*shamol*” (devastation), but rather as “*sheimot*” (names). This reading highlights G-d’s intervention in the naming process. In his commentary on Tehillim, R’ Avrohom Chaim Feuer<sup>3</sup> emphasizes that this interpretation, as dictated in the aforementioned Gemara, shows that naming a person is not arbitrary, “but [rather] the result of divine inspiration,” as the name itself reflects a person’s true nature.

This principle exists throughout the Torah, where names hold great influence and are a reflection of *Ruach Hakodesh*. In fact, after nearly every birth in Tanach, a *pasuk* or commentator follows with an explanation of the name. However, if names do reflect Divine inspiration and intervention, why are names changed? And in fact, why does G-d Himself change names?

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<sup>1</sup> מו"י

<sup>2</sup> ברכות ז:

<sup>3</sup> הוצאת ארטסקרול

Several examples of name changes that appear in Sefer Bereishit, and their analysis allows a deeper understanding of name changes, their significance, and their various justifications. Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael, Avram's to Avraham, and Sarai's to Sarah. Through an analysis of Yaakov's two names, followed by a comparison between Yaakov, Avraham, and Sarah's name changes, the complex idea of Divine name change can be clarified.

The *pesukim* note that when Rivka reached full term in her pregnancy, she gave birth to twins; the first was the red, hairy Esav, and the second was Yaakov, the one who emerged grasping his brother's ankle, or "*ekev*." Rashi<sup>4</sup> notes that the name Yaakov, derived from the word "*ekev*," is a play on words reflecting Yaakov holding on to his brother's heel. In his later commentary (Parashat Vayishlach), Rashi<sup>5</sup> explains that the name Yaakov connotes a person who comes "*b'akvah*", in ambush or deceit. Many commentators see this as a reference to Esav's later protest to his father, where he accuses Yaakov of tricking them both by pretending to be Esav and "stealing" the birthright.

The following *pasuk* describes the naming of Yaakov:

ואחרי כן יצא אחיו וידו אוחזת בעקב עשו ויקרא שמו יעקב ויצחק  
בן ששים שנה בלדת אתם.

And after that his brother came out, and his hand had hold on Esav's heel; and he called him Yaakov. And Yitzchak was sixty years old at their birth.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, the *pasuk* says, ויקרא שמו יעקב – "And he called him Yaakov." Rashi suggests that Hashem Himself, and not Yitzchak, named Yaakov. The Siftai Chachamim notes that the *pasuk* continues: "And Yitzchak was sixty years old". Therefore, the "he" cannot be referring to Yitzchak, because if it were, the *pasuk* would continue: "And he was sixty years old."

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<sup>4</sup> בראשית כה:כו

<sup>5</sup> שם לב:כט

<sup>6</sup> שם כה:כו

The Maskil LeDavid asks a brilliant question on Rashi: If G-d Himself named Yaakov, He could have named him Yisrael from the beginning; why was there a need for a name change? This illustrates our overall investigation. If names were given by G-d or with His inspiration, why would G-d subsequently change them?

The first source of Yaakov's name change occurs in an interesting and puzzling event. Yaakov returns over the Yabok river to retrieve small pitchers which were left behind<sup>7</sup>, and is confronted by an individual, who, according to *Chazal*, is Esav's heavenly angel. After wrestling with the angel and winning, Yaakov asks for a *bracha*, and the following exchange results:<sup>8</sup>

ויאמר אליו מה שמך ויאמר יעקב. ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך  
כי אם ישראל כי שרית עם אלקים ועם אנשים ותוכל.

The angel responds and asks, 'What is your name?' to which Yaakov replies, 'Yaakov.' The angel then says, 'No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, because you have striven with G-d and man and have overcome.'

There are different opinions as to the true meaning behind this name change. Most see the name "Yaakov" as something more negative or mundane than "Yisrael," which is viewed as a more positive or complimentary name. Rashi tells us, both here and when Hashem Himself renames Yaakov<sup>9</sup>, that when Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael, it is emphasizing that he should no longer be called by the name Yaakov, which connotes ambush and deceit. Rather, he should be called by the name Yisrael, which connotes being a prince and a leader.

Rav Hirsch<sup>10</sup> sees this name change in a different light. The name "Yaakov" represents someone who appears "at the heel of others," or at a lower level. This is the role Yaakov played prior

<sup>7</sup> רש"י שם לב:כה

<sup>8</sup> שם לב:כט

<sup>9</sup> שם לה:י

<sup>10</sup> שם לב:כט

to his fight with the angel. He was beneath Esav as the second child, and in response, he deceived his father, ran away, and lived a life on the run. Rav Hirsch explains that this name change teaches us that only once Yaakov, the lowly opponent, obtained victory and triumphs over multiple obstacles could he become Yisrael, or “G-d is all conquering.” [*Yisrael* means ‘G-d is all conquering’ from the root ‘sar’ (officer) and ‘Kel’ (Hashem).]

Not only is this name a special recognition of Yaakov’s role, but Rav Hirsch also answers the Maskil LeDavid’s question. One can derive from Rav Hirsch’s answer that Yaakov did not qualify for the name Yisrael until he faced certain battles and reached a specific point in his life, and therefore could not be named Yisrael at birth.

According to many opinions, including the Siftei Chachamim<sup>11</sup> and the Ramban<sup>12</sup>, the naming by the angel was not the real re-naming of Yaakov, but rather a precedent for when G-d would change Yaakov’s name:

ויאמר לו אלקים שמך יעקב. לא יקרא שמך עוד יעקב כי אם  
ישראל יהיה שמך ויקרא את שמו ישראל.

And G-d appeared to Yaakov again ... and G-d said to him, ‘Your name is Yaakov. Your name shall not be called Yaakov, but Yisrael shall be your name.’ Thus he called his name Yisrael.<sup>13</sup>

The phrase, שמך יעקב – your name is Yaakov, seems superfluous, since Yaakov’s name is already known. The Ramban explains that the phrase means you are still called Yaakov. Even though the angel already changed his name, Hashem points out that the angel had no authority to do so. The Ramban adds that this extra phrase of שמך יעקב can also mean, “Your name will remain Yaakov, while Yisrael will be an additional name.”

<sup>11</sup> שם לב:כט

<sup>12</sup> שם לה:י

<sup>13</sup> שם



Similarly, the Ibn Ezra explains that “Your name shall not always be called Yaakov alone,” adding the word “*Levado*”. This can be viewed as expansion on the answer to the Maskil LeDavid’s question. Yaakov’s name is not really changed but rather enhanced with an additional name.

According to the Sforno, שמך יעקב means “I will make your name an eternal name; that after all nations have perished you will survive.” In contrast to many other *mefarshim*, the Sforno explains that Hashem gives a positive meaning to the name Yaakov. “*Ekev*” is something that survives all that precedes it, and so too, the children of Yaakov will be the predominant nation, surviving over all. Hashem adds onto Yaakov the name “Yisrael” because the Jewish people will rule over the world.

In conclusion, the Sforno explains that when the *pasuk* says, ויקרא את שמו ישראל, Hashem is giving him the blessing that the predictions mentioned above [that Yaakov would be the father to the predominant nation, etc.] would begin to come true. By calling Yaakov by the name “Yisrael”, Hashem sets in motion the plans for the future of *Klal Yisrael*.

With a deeper understanding of Yaakov’s name change, we can begin to look at the name changes of Avraham and Sarah In Parshat Lech Lecha, Hashem appears to Avraham and says:

ולא יקרא עוד את שמך אברם והיה שמך אברהם כי אב המון גוים נתתך.

Your name shall no longer be called Avram; but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.<sup>14</sup>

A few *pesukim* later<sup>15</sup>, Hashem changes Sarah’s name:

ויאמר אלקים אל אברהם שרי אשתך לא תקרא את שמה שרי כי שרה שמה.

As for Sarai your wife, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah is her name.

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<sup>14</sup> שם יז:ה

<sup>15</sup> שם יז:טו

The Gemara<sup>16</sup>, quoted by Rashi, analyzes these name changes. Avraham's name is changed from "Avram" to "Avraham" to symbolize his journey from being "*Av LeAram*," the father to Aram, a single place, to "*Av LeChol HaOlam*," the father of all the world. Similarly Sarah, whose name changes from Sarai to Sarah, went from being "*Sari LeUmata*," to "*Sarah LeChol haOlam*."

Rashi also notes that *Sarai*, in its singular and possessive form is "*Sarati*" - my princess. G-d thereby changes the meaning of Sarah's name from "my [Avraham's] princess" to "the princess of the entire world." Both Avraham and Sarah's names shift from an individual description to a more encompassing description.

Unlike Yaakov's name, Avraham and Sarah's names are changed. This is accomplished by the additions of the letter "*hei*". For Sarah, Hashem removes the letter yud and replaced it with a letter *hei*.

The Kli Yakar<sup>17</sup> explains that letter heh represents femininity and therefore has the "*koach hatolada*," or "power of reproduction and giving birth." This change gave Sarah the ability to have children. He also notes that Avraham's additional *hei* compensates for the rest of the value of the yud removed from Sarai.

The Maharsha<sup>18</sup> similarly explains that Avraham's name change enabled him to have a child who would carry on his legacy with the same spiritual inclination and leadership ability possessed by Avraham. According to the Maharsha, "*koach hatolada*" is not just the physical ability to reproduce, but also the ability to bring forth a future leader.

In this vein, the Gemara Brachot<sup>19</sup> mentions a very strict *halacha*: "Anyone who calls Avraham, 'Avram' transgresses an obligatory and prohibitory commandment." If this is the case for

<sup>16</sup> ברכות יג.

<sup>17</sup> שם יז:טו

<sup>18</sup> ברכות יג.

<sup>19</sup> שם

Avraham, does the same prohibition apply to calling Sarah “Sarai”?

The Gemara explains that only Avraham can no longer call Sarah “Sarai”, because Hashem said specifically to Avraham, “Sarai your wife, do not call Sarai, but rather Sara.” The question still remains: Why would G-d prohibit the use of the name Avram but not that of Sarai, and why is Avraham prohibited from calling her Sarai?

The Maharsha suggests a beautiful answer. He explains that Avraham thought that Yishmael would be enough to continue his lineage and lead the future generations, and Hashem corrects this thought by prohibiting him from calling his wife “Sarai.” This prohibition represents the fact that Sarah is not just Avraham’s princess, but that she would be the princess to many, and Yitzchak, the true bearer of Avraham’s legacy, would come through her. Therefore, Avraham would be limiting Sarah’s importance if he continued to call her “Sarai.” Future generations, however, do not have the same prohibition, as it is clear that Sarah is the true mother of the Jewish People and the bearer of Avraham’s legacy.

The Gemara’s discussion raises the same question about Yaakov: if it is prohibited to call Avraham “Avram,” why is it permissible to call Yaakov by this name? The Gemara answers that since Hashem Himself explicitly calls him “Yaakov” later in the text when it says, “And Hashem said... Yaakov Yaakov,” his initial name is not erased. This answer coincides with those *meforshim* who claim that Yaakov’s name “change” was an addition, not a change.

The Ohr HaChaim<sup>20</sup> asks: Why are we not allowed to call Avraham “Avram”, but we are allowed to call Yaakov either “Yaakov” or “Yisrael”? He explains that Yaakov needs two names because a person’s name describes his nature and essence. Both

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<sup>20</sup> בראשית לה:י

Yaakov and Yisrael describe Yaakov's essence, and therefore Yaakov should not be deprived of his original name. Avraham, however, by retaining the letters of his original name, kept within his new name his old name, and by doing so only enhanced his true essence. Therefore G-d commands us to refer to Avraham only by his new name.

The Malbim<sup>21</sup> has a different perspective. He explains that the difference between Avraham and Yaakov's name changes can be seen in the words themselves.

Hashem says to Yaakov, **לֹא יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב** – “your name will no longer be called Yaakov.” This means that your primary name is no longer Yaakov. Regarding Avraham the *pasuk* says, **לֹא יִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת שְׁמֶךָ אַבְרָם**.

According to the Malbim, the addition of the word **אֶת** signifies that Avraham cannot be called Avram at all. He explains that Yaakov's initial name reflects **טְבַע**, or nature, while his additional name Yisrael, reflects **הַנְּהִיגָה הַנִּסִּית**, or G-d's miraculous conduct.

Therefore, says the Malbim, his name could not be inherently changed (but had to be in the form of an additional name), because neither miracles nor nature can exist without the other. In contrast, Avraham's name change reflects that of a convert or a newborn baby. His new name is therefore permanent, just as that of a baby and of a convert..

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky<sup>22</sup> adds a unique interpretation to this idea. He explains that while the name “Yaakov” is synonymous with all the hardships and struggles Yaakov faced, “Yisrael” represents Yaakov's victories. This is evident by the fact that Yaakov receives the name Yisrael after defeating the angel of Esav. The double name “Yaakov-Yisrael” represents the duality the Jewish People as they face their destiny. The Jewish People's

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<sup>21</sup> שם להו:

<sup>22</sup> ראה “Yaakov and Yisrael – A Dual Destiny,” 1999, Torahweb.org

history, until the time of *Mashiach*, will consist of victories that require sacrifice. He explains that, like Yaakov, “we are constantly wounded as a people, yet we survive and prosper and will ultimately emerge from exile.” Yaakov therefore keeps his original name because unfortunately, until the time of *Mashiach*, the struggles will continue.

The name changes occur after each individual reaches a certain point in his/her life. They came in recognition of accomplishment and the overcoming of an obstacle, and are created as a tool or key to face new challenges and open new doors. For Yaakov, his new name praises him for overcoming both physical and spiritual obstacles, but also provides him and the Jewish people with a new key for survival. The same thing applies for Avraham and Sarah. While Avraham and Sarah’s name change blesses them with the ability to have children, it also reflects and praises them for reaching a certain point in their relationship with Hashem.

It is for this reason that Hashem could not have simply named Avram “Avraham”, Sarai “Sarah”, and Yaakov “Yisrael” from the beginning. They each had to undergo changes, and grow as individuals, before deserving their new names. Divine name changes do not reflect a flaw in G-d’s creation that He had to correct, but rather they reflect His generosity in providing the keys to succeed, and the strength and greatness in the human ability to grow as individuals and reach unimaginable heights.

I would like to end following the idea of Rabbi Sobolofsky, that, G-d willing, we will – just as Yaakov did – reach a level in our connection with G-d, and defeat our Esav, at which time we will merit to experience the ultimate manifestation of redemption and truly represent Yisrael.



# Man's Struggle with Faith

## The Rashbam on Parshat Vayishlach

Faith is the antithesis of human nature. To put anything in the hands of another goes completely against instinct, as it creates a terrifying lack of control. However, the foundation of *emunah* demands just that. To genuinely develop a relationship with the *Ribono Shel Olam*, one must entirely submit to the realization that any attempt of control is futile, because the world exists as He decides. Faith is the ultimate means to true religious growth and connection. It pushes us out of our comfort zone into the unknown, as “faith does not mean certainty. It means the courage to live with uncertainty”<sup>1</sup>, to place complete trust in our Creator.

Parshat VaYishlach narrates an episode of this inherent struggle of an individual of faith. In this *parsha*, Yaakov is on the precipice of a reconciliation written into his fate from his conception, finally greeting Esav after years of separation. Yet, upon reaching this reunion, Esav's surprising character change is the only thing that seems out of the ordinary.

The message of this interaction can therefore be understood by refocusing from this anticlimactic reunion to the preceding episode. Here, we are introduced to an incredible insight into the human condition, appearing not in Yaakov's reunion with Esav, but in his struggle with the *Ish*.

The Rashbam<sup>2</sup> presents the following scenario.

- (1) In the middle of the night, Yaakov decides that the threat of Esav is too great, and chooses to run for his life.

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<sup>1</sup> ראה 14, Chapter 14, *To Heal a Fractured World*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

<sup>2</sup> בראשית לב

- (2) After sending his family over the Yabbok River, he follows alone, and is stopped by an “*Ish*”, identified as an angel.  
 [It is important to note that the Rashbam, who usually focuses on *pshat*, seemingly strays in this case from his usual methods by incorporating Midrashic elements.]
- (3) The angel, determined to stop Yaakov’s escape, begins to struggle with Yaakov.
- (4) As the struggle comes to an end, in tandem with the approaching dawn, the angel strikes Yaakov in the hip, and this injury truncates any hope of Yaakov’s success of flight from his encounter with Esav.
- (5) As the angel tries to disentangle himself from the struggle, Yaakov creates a condition. Yaakov will only permit the angel to leave after giving him a *bracha*, sending him back “*beshalom*”.  
 [“*BeShalom*” is typically translated as in peace but can also be interpreted as complete or, in this context, as uninjured. Yaakov wanted to ensure that when he would encounter Esav, he would not have any injuries which might disadvantage him.]
- (6) Instead, the angel responds by giving Yaakov an additional name of Yisrael, since he “struggled with Hashem and with man”.
- (7) Yaakov then returns to his camp, ready to greet Esav, limping from the injury sustained in the fight - an injury that is the basis of the prohibition of eating the area of sciatic nerve.

What Yaakov did, by attempting to run away, was the manifestation of an urge so potentially destructive that G-d himself was forced to intervene. In his fear and panic at the impending meeting with Esav, Yaakov prioritized his own desire for control over his trust in Hashem’s protection, promised numerous times in the preceding *parsha*.

The *Ish* wrestles with Yaakov in an effort to force him to reconsider his actions and reevaluate his budding rebellion against the *Ribono Shel Olam*. The ambiguity of the identity of the *Ish*, as the text gives no distinction that identifies him as human



or angelic, manifests the duality of sin. On one hand, Yaakov was fighting an emissary of the Divine, as the angel attempted to force Yaakov into facing his fate, and on the other hand, he was struggling with doubt within the recesses of his own mind.

With this understanding, Yaakov's injury and *bracha* fit perfectly into the Rashbam's narrative. This portion of the story, its subsequent application in *halacha*, and its resounding effect that underscores the history of *Bnei Yisrael*, are reminders that such an attempt at rebellion against a mandated trust in Hashem cannot exist without consequence. Yaakov leaves the encounter imperfect, but the deliberate imperfection and the gift of the name "Yisrael" coincide to form a new fundamental of *emunah*.

The phrase *וירא כי לא יכול לו*<sup>3</sup>, commonly translated to mean that the angel saw that he was unable to conquer Yaakov's strength, takes on a new and telling meaning. At a pure level of translation, this phrase means: "and he saw that he could not".

Through the aforementioned idea, the deficiency of strength now lay not in the *Ish*, but in Yaakov's inability to overcome what was in within himself. Yaakov's strength of moral fiber appears to weaken in wake of the monumental challenge of placing his life completely in the hands of Hashem.

Hashem saw this conflict within Yaakov, and realized that this question of faith was coming from an inherent and almost insurmountable humanistic tendency. Thus, through the *Ish*, Hashem took matters into His own hands by incapacitating Yaakov and giving him no option but to face Esav head on.

Yaakov's final cognitive victory occurs in the moment when he is mandated to face his fears, and his success comes

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<sup>3</sup> שם לב:כו

from the realization that Hashem's promise of protection would never cease to hold strong. The struggle with the angel, therefore, is a manifestation of the most divine of interventions.

The resonance of this episode throughout the history of *Bnei Yisrael* is contained in the blessing of the angel. By giving Yaakov the namesake of his nation, "Yisrael", the angel forms the foundation of a remarkable principle of faith – the leap. "Yisrael" embodies the fact that Yaakov contended against both G-d and man – against both a divine messenger and, possibly more importantly, against his own humanistic struggle – and won.

He is therefore given a brilliant blessing by the angel. While it would seem more natural to recreate reality into one where a total faith comes with inherent ease, the loss of this struggle as a required stepping stone to *emunah* would be irreplaceable.

Instead, the *bracha* of "Yisrael" is twofold: firstly, it reminds us of the destructive nature of man to seek control over that which is simply too great for us to handle. Secondly, it uncovers a strength to overcome the ontological obstacles of fear and doubt that plague man as a religious being, as it shows that here, success is truly possible. So, while the leap of faith required to have true *emunah* is far from shortened, Yisrael now holds the tools with which he can clear the gap.

Not by coincidence does "Yisrael" become the name adopted by our nation; as such, it recognizes both our innermost human weakness – the constant struggle of wanting to be in control yet knowing that we must trust a force infinitely greater than us – and promises us the strength to overcome it. We become *Bnei Yisrael*, a nation destined for leaps of faith.

Never again crippled by fear, we become embodiments of the bravery shown by Yaakov in facing his greatest leap, and sticking the landing. This enormous gift now courses through

our veins, and while it requires tremendous strength of will, it pushes us towards the ultimate relationship with Hashem – one of true love and trust.



## הַנְּנִי

Every word in Tanach is deliberate and purposeful. If a word is repeated or spelled with a slight variation, commentators will glean a lesson from the inconsistency. Throughout Tanach, many people are summoned by Hashem and others, and there are a variety of responses to these summonses. One outstanding response that is used is הַנְּנִי, literally translated as “behold, here I am.”

This wording seems to combine a certain keenness possibly bordering on jealousy. The word הַנְּנִי, with that specific pronunciation, appears in Tanach a total of twelve times. From multiple interactions within Tanach when people use the word הַנְּנִי, one can understand what this ostensibly obscure word means.

The first time it appears is in relation to Avraham Avinu. Avraham had just banished his son, Yishmael, from his home and made a peace treaty with Avimelech. Hashem then called to Avraham, who responded immediately with one word, הַנְּנִי<sup>1</sup>.

It is interesting to note that Rashi comments that right before Hashem summoned Avraham, Hashem and the *Satan* were having a conversation where Hashem said that if He asked Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak, Avraham would oblige. When faced with this seemingly unbearable challenge, Avraham didn't hesitate to prove Hashem correct with the use of the word הַנְּנִי.

Rashi<sup>2</sup> describes the word הַנְּנִי as a response of the pious, and calls it a “phrase of humility and readiness.”

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<sup>1</sup> בראשית כב:א

<sup>2</sup> שם

Ohr HaChaim explains that Hashem's call to Avraham and Avraham's response together convey the message that Avraham was responding to Hashem's summon by saying "Hashem, I know that You're about to ask something big of me and I don't know what it is, but I am ready for anything that You may ask."

Later on, during *Akeidat Yitzchak*, an angel called to Avraham by saying his name twice, to which Avraham responded **הנני**. Rashi explains this double language as a "phrasing of endearment" and the Midrash Rabba<sup>3</sup> adds that it is also a "language of alacrity."

Interestingly, Rav Hirsch and the Kli Yakar comment on this double language and say that Avraham needed to be called twice because he was so engrossed in doing the *mitzvah* and didn't want to be distracted. This shows that his first use of the word **הנני** was not sanctimonious or sacrilegious, but genuine. Nor was it a singular event. This is proven by the fact that when the angel called him, he once again responded with the word **הנני**. Avraham's use of the word **הנני** in response to the angel portrays the fact that Avraham was always ready and willing to be at Hashem's beck and call.

Yaakov used the word **הנני** on multiple occasions. The first instance was when an angel called to him after Lavan asked Yaakov to pick what kind of sheep he would like as his payment for the work he had done<sup>4</sup>.

Rashi<sup>5</sup> notes that the angel was sent during a time of suffering, and nevertheless, Yaakov remained strong in his observance of the *mitzvos* in the face of the adversity of Lavan.<sup>6</sup> The next time Yaakov said **הנני** was years later in response to Hashem's

<sup>3</sup> בראשית רבה נו:ז

<sup>4</sup> בראשית לא:יא

<sup>5</sup> שם מח:טז

<sup>6</sup> שם לב:א, רש"י שם

calling him “Yaakov” during his journey to Be’er Sheva. Rashi<sup>7</sup> once again defines הַנְּנִי as a response to a “phrase of endearment”.

Rav Hirsch explains that Yaakov felt the need to specifically show his complete dedication to Hashem at this point, because Yaakov became depressed when Hashem called him Yaakov instead of Yisrael. He therefore immediately responded with הַנְּנִי to show that he accepted, in advance, anything that Hashem would send him with the hope of rectifying what he believed to be a rift in his relationship with Hashem.

Yaakov’s brother, Esav, used the word הַנְּנִי in response to Yitzchak’s call<sup>8</sup>. Esav’s response might reflect his total dedication to his father due to his *kibud av*<sup>9</sup> or perhaps it was a self-serving הַנְּנִי, wanting to raise his esteem in his father’s eyes before receiving his *bracha*. If the latter is the case, then Esav’s הַנְּנִי was an exception to the aforementioned rule. However, if the former is true, then perhaps this use of the word can help begin to form an understanding of how one reaches the level of הַנְּנִי. It came from Esav’s readiness to do whatever he was asked.

In the final case relating to the *Avot*, when Yaakov called Yosef, he responded immediately with הַנְּנִי<sup>10</sup>. Rashi comments on this pasuk that here הַנְּנִי is a “phrase of humility and readiness,” as Yosef was ready to do whatever his father asked of him. Despite knowing that this task could be life threatening because his brothers hated him<sup>11</sup>, he was ready to fulfill *kibbud av*<sup>12</sup>. Yosef was Yaakov’s “*ben zekunim*”, and therefore Yaakov spent much

<sup>7</sup> שם מח:ב

<sup>8</sup> שם לז:א

<sup>9</sup> דברים רבה א:טו

<sup>10</sup> בראשית לז:יג

<sup>11</sup> רשב"ם שם

<sup>12</sup> רש"י שם

time passing on his heritage to Yosef<sup>13</sup>. As a result, Yosef felt especially connected to his father. The natural thing for Yosef to do when his father made a request of him was to fulfill his bidding because of the deep connection he and his father had.

The first time the word **הנני** appears in Navi is when Hashem first called to Shmuel, who had been living with Eli HaKohen. Shmuel assumed that it was Eli who had called him, so he responded **הנני** thus showing his complete dedication<sup>14</sup>. Due to the fact that Eli raised him, Shmuel was already conditioned to respond to a summons with **הנני** as seen a few *pesukim* later when Eli calls to Shmuel by saying **בני**, and Shmuel responded **הנני**<sup>15</sup>. From here one again can infer that **הנני** is word that shows one's absolute devotion to another being.

When Yeshayahu described the final redemption he explains that the Jewish People will call out to Hashem and Hashem will respond with the word **הנני**<sup>16</sup>. Radak explains that throughout the exile, the Jewish People will forget Hashem, but on the day of redemption, they will remember and call out to Him. He will respond with **הנני**, to show His readiness to acknowledge their call. This readiness represents a declaration of devotion and investment, which leads to a willingness to fulfill the request of the supplicant. This shows that Hashem never abandons the Jewish People while in exile. Rather, He is interacting with them through *hester panim*, and because of His continuous outpouring of chessed towards them, He still feels the connection and responds to our calls with the willingness of **הנני**.

<sup>13</sup> בראשית לד:ג, רש"י שם

<sup>14</sup> שמואל א ג:ד

<sup>15</sup> שם ג:טז

<sup>16</sup> ישעיהו נב:ו



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From Avraham and Yaakov who recognized the magnitude of what Hashem does and dedicated their lives to Him, one can learn where the response of הַנְּנִי originates. Esav, Yosef and Shmuel later adapted it to convey their devotion to their fathers and mentors. From the many key players in Tanach who use the word הַנְּנִי, one can derive the multiple nuances of the word הַנְּנִי and at which point in a relationship it can be used.



## Chana

An essential component in the growth and continuation of a relationship is the use of communication. One needs to develop skills in the realms of both speaking and listening. It is essential to articulate thoughts into words and be open to heeding the voice of the other. Connection requires two who are willing to invest time, energy and love into building and strengthening a committed relationship. Although all relationships need development and care, the most important relationship to foster in life is the relationship one has with Hashem. It is foremost and predominant to all other relationships. One can obtain this high, lofty connection through the power of speech and prayer. Prayer takes the relationship to new heights and by default cultivates feelings of closeness and intimacy.

One figure in Tanach who epitomizes what it means to constantly work at her relationship with Hashem is Chana. By example, she serves as a role model for all future generations on how to develop a relationship with Hashem. She had a unique connection to Hashem, and she used *tefillah* to tap into greater heights.

Few people had a relationship with Hashem similar to Chana. As the Zohar<sup>1</sup> says, only two women sang songs of praise to Hashem: Chana and Miriam. In response to her personal issues of being barren, and the torment at the hands of Penina, Chana directed her feelings of pain towards Hashem. Chana became an eternal symbol of *tefillah* and it is she whom we emulate when we *daven*.

Through Chana's famous *tefillah*, we learn many Halachic and Hashkafic principles related to *tefillah*. If properly utilized and tapped into, one can use *tefillah* to become extremely close with

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<sup>1</sup> זוהר ג'ט

Hashem. As the pasuk states, not only did Chana beseech Hashem with a request for children, “ובכה תבכה,”<sup>2</sup> she whole-heartedly became overwhelmed with emotion and cried out to Hashem. The Gemara<sup>3</sup> on this pasuk explains that even when all other gates of prayer are closed, the gate of tears is never locked. When one approaches Hashem broken and crying, the *tefillah* goes directly to Him, bypassing all gates and angels. The reason is because although tears represent pain, they also represent hope. People cry when they know there is someone to cry to. Chana’s tears were a physical manifestation of her internal strong emunah, her knowledge that Hashem was with her and that He has the power to overturn every situation. When we have emunah and feel Hashem by our side, we are able to strengthen our relationship with Him.

In addition, the Gemara teaches that when Chana pleaded *ה' צבקות של עולם מכל צבאי צבאות שבראת בעולמך קשה שתתן לי בן אחד*<sup>4</sup> she was the first to ever call Hashem by the name *צבקות*. According to *רבי אלעזר* this is the highest glorification of Hashem and His honor. Three times in the same pasuk she refers to herself as *אמתך*, G-d’s servant. She chose these words explicitly because she understood that having a child was not for herself, rather she was the servant of Someone much greater, and she wanted to raise a child that would be purely dedicated to the service of Hashem.

Chana was completely loyal to Hashem; she had no selfish intentions and although she davened for years for a child, she wanted to give him up as a gift to Hashem. This idea is explained by the *Netivot Shalom*<sup>5</sup>, who learns from this that in times of tzara one should not daven for himself on his own behalf, rather one should daven to Hashem on His behalf and for His sake. If one davens to Hashem for assistance, they will always be helped and

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<sup>2</sup> שמואל א א:י

<sup>3</sup> בבא מציעא נט.

<sup>4</sup> ברכות לא:

<sup>5</sup> פרשת ויגש

answered – even if at the time it does not seem apparent. Hashem gives *סיעתא דשמיא* to all who are searching to channel their hardships to better their service of Hashem.

Chana had a unique way of *davening*. The *pasuk* states, *היא מדברת על לבה רק שפתיה נעות וקולה לא ישמע*<sup>6</sup>. She spoke from her heart with her lips moving while her voice could not be heard.

According to Rashi, until Chana, these methods of prayer were never used. Being that it was not the normal way of *davening*, when Eli saw Chana *davening* he thought she was drunk.

The Malbim comments that since Chana spoke quietly, we can extract from this that the service of *tefillah* should be done in solitude, each person alone with Hashem. The Gemara<sup>7</sup> explains that we must imitate Chana's ways by directing our hearts, framing the words with our lips, and not raising our voices.

Rav Pincus<sup>8</sup> understands that a main focal point of *tefillah* is that we must recognize that we are standing directly before Hashem, the Creator and Sustainer of the world. We must work to gain a deeper appreciation for the opportunity Hashem has bestowed upon us. To this day, when we *daven* we do so in a way that emulates Chana's ways.

Chana has become a role model for both women and men. She taught us how to be a dedicated *eved* Hashem, completely subservient to His will and service. Although we all go through *tzaros*, we learn from Chana many vital skills that can help us become better *ma'aminim*, strengthening our connection and relationship with Hashem.

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<sup>6</sup> שמואל א א:יג

<sup>7</sup> ברכות לא:

<sup>8</sup> שערם בתפילה



## שבט בנימין

Throughout *Tanach*, Binyamin is often portrayed as the weak, and seemingly less important “little brother.” However, in reality, Binyamin does not fit the above description at all. Although Binyamin was the youngest brother, he maintained a unique characteristic which no other brother had nor was even worthy of receiving. Binyamin and all future members of his שבט were extremely strong physically, but they were also extremely strong spiritually in their interactions with *Hashem* and other people.

It is possible that Binyamin is sometimes considered as “little” since he kept a low profile. He maintained impeccable *middot* and specifically shone in the characteristics of quietness, compassion, and modesty. On top of all that, we also know that שבט בנימין merited having *Hashem’s Shechinah* dwell in his נחלה.

What was it about שבט בנימין that set it apart from all the other שבטים and enabled it to merit the wonderful honor of the *Shechina*? How is it possible for any שבט to have the characteristics of strength, modesty, and quietness all present at the same time? What makes שבט בנימין unique when compared to all the other שבטים?

Understanding the root of Binyamin’s inherent characteristics begins with his name. Binyamin was the second and last child born to *Rachel Imeinu*, who passed away as a result of his birth. As Binyamin was born into this world, Rachel instructed that he should be named בן אוני, just before she passed away. *Yaakov Avinu* changed the name from בן אוני to בנימין. *Yaakov’s* actions beg the question: why change the name from בן אוני? If it was Rachel’s last words, her last wish, shouldn’t he have kept the name she so greatly desired? What exactly sparked *Yaakov* to make this change?

The reason Rachel named her child בן אוני was because she wanted him to constantly remember throughout his life that she risked her life for him. She wanted to leave an eternal message with her son: to never give up and always to prove himself worthy. However, Yaakov was not sure that בן אוני was the best name for his son, and he was worried that every time someone would call his name, he would feel guilty for causing his mother's death. Yaakov also worried that by calling him בן אוני, he would "provide an opening to the *satan*" to cause pain and suffering to the child. Therefore, with those reasons in mind, Yaakov changed his name from בן אוני to בנימין.

The *Ramban* suggests that Yaakov changed the word אוני, which can mean strength, to the word *Yamin*, which also connotes strength or power, since the right hand is commonly stronger. Furthermore, the word *Yamin* can also mean south. While all the other שבטים were born up north, שבט בנימין was the only שבט born in *Eretz Yisroel*, which is south of *Padan Aram*.

Perhaps, when renaming his son, Yaakov picked a name which meant both south and strength to hint to the fact that it would be Binyamin's mission in life to defeat the enemy *Amalek*, who live in the south, and that he would need great power to do so. The word אוני can also mean mourning. On the day of his birth, Binyamin was already an אינן, mourning the death of his mother. The trait of quietness is shown in mourning, which was one of Binyamin's unique qualities.<sup>1</sup>

Remaining quiet and not jumping to the center of attention takes real strength of character. Through naming his son בנימין, Yaakov also foreshadowed the greatness that would become of his son.

Throughout *Sefer Bereishit*, Binyamin is referred to as "*ha'ach hakatan*," Yaakov's youngest son, the "baby brother."

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<sup>1</sup> ראה "A Closer Look at the Name Binyomin" Rabbi Eli Teitelbaum.



However, Binyamin was far from young when he went down to *Mitzrayim*, as he already had 10 sons! Although he may not have been young in age, the other שבטים viewed him as their “baby brother” and they felt an obligation to look out for his well-being. After selling Yosef, the brothers understood that it was vital to look out for their younger siblings, especially Binyamin, the only child left from Rachel. Binyamin therefore was always referred to as the “little brother”.

When examining the story of *Mitzrayim*, we notice that Binyamin remained quiet through it all. From the beginning, Binyamin knew about the sale of his only brother Yosef but hid his pain to protect his brothers’ secret. Binyamin understood when to speak and when to remain silent. Later, when Binyamin was accused of stealing, and the goblet was found in his sack, he also remained quiet, appearing guilty. It is shown through his silence that Binyamin was someone who understood that *Hashem* controls everything. He realized that he had to have a good attitude to overcome the hardships *Hashem* had sent him in his life.

The essence of Binyamin’s qualities of silence and modesty can be traced back to Rachel. Rachel had waited many years to marry Yaakov, and on the day of her wedding her father exchanged her for Leah. Rachel didn’t embarrass Leah, but instead let Leah wed Yaakov. Binyamin, like Rachel, was quiet because he chose not to speak. The traits of modesty and silence are linked – a true *Baal Shtika* holds back some information and doesn’t reveal everything he knows.

In *Parshat Vayechi*, Binyamin was the last of the שבטים to be blessed, and Yaakov’s blessing to him said: “Binyamin is a predatory wolf, in the morning he will eat the loot, and in the evening he will divide the booty.”

Rav Hirsch, however, translates the *pasuk* differently. Binyamin is not the wolf. Rather, Binyamin will tear the wolf pieces. As this was the last *bracha* to his children, Yaakov looked to the future and saw all the pain and suffering his children would encounter in exile. Yaakov saw that the youngest of all his

children, Binyamin, would be the strongest and would ultimately be the one to destroy the wolf, *Amalek*, and protect his brothers. As Yaakov gave over the last *bracha* he realized that immediately, in the morning, Binyamin would start the continuous fight against *Amalek* and the fight would not stop until the evening, the end of days. Yaakov was warning Binyamin that it would ultimately be his fight and his deeds that will bring the redemption.

Yaakov's *bracha* to Binyamin not only referred to the end of days, but also to various events throughout history, including the time periods of Shaul, of Mordechai and Esther, and even current times<sup>2</sup>. The "morning" in Yaakov's *bracha* can refer to when Shaul took the kingdom of Edom and Moav, since that is when *Bnei Yisrael* grew strong like the sun in the morning<sup>3</sup>. The first time the *Navi* mentions Shaul, it refers to him as *איש מבנימין*. At the end of the war against the *Plishtim*, the *Navi* tells that an *איש מבנימין* ran to Eli to tell him of the happenings of the war, the death of Eli's children, and the capturing of the *aron*. *Chazal* say that this anonymous man from *בנימין שבט* was in fact Shaul<sup>4</sup>.

The *meforshim* agree that Shaul was a strong man. He ran by himself, putting his own life in danger in order to recapture the *luchot* from the *Plishtim*. Everything that Shaul did was for *Hashem*, and thus he merited to succeed against the *Plishtim*. From this event we learn of the spiritual and physical greatness of Shaul, a man from Binyamin.

Just as the "morning" of Yaakov's *bracha* referred to the time period of Shaul, the "evening" of Yaakov's *bracha* can refer to the time period of Mordechai and Esther, specifically to the time after Haman's downfall, when Mordechai and Esther divided Haman's riches<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> ראה *The Shevatim*, Rabbi Moshe Polter.

<sup>3</sup> שם.

<sup>4</sup> מדרש שמואל י"א:

<sup>5</sup> ראה *The Shevatim*, Rabbi Moshe Polter.

Mordechai and Esther continued in Shaul's footsteps, as they had the essence of שבט בנימין within them and used it to save the Jewish people. Just as Shaul had *mesirut nefesh* when he ran to recapture the *luchot*, Mordechai and Esther also had *mesirut nefesh* when they risked their lives hiding Esther for a number of years after the king issued the decree ordering all women to his palace<sup>6</sup>. By doing so, Mordechai and Esther risked death, but Esther still hid to protect herself and her Judaism.

The *Malbim* gives several reasons why it was so dangerous for them specifically to keep Esther hidden. Firstly, Mordechai lived in Shushan, the home of the palace, and the center of the gathering of all the women. Hence, he couldn't say he didn't hear the decree. Secondly, Mordechai was well known in the city - it was known that he came from Shaul and שבט בנימין, a lineage of honor and glory. Therefore, he couldn't say he was a lowly person and didn't think the king would want Esther. Thirdly, it was known that Esther was beautiful and that her parents had died, leaving Mordechai as her guardian, and therefore, Mordechai would be blamed if she didn't show up to the king's palace. Even though it was very dangerous to hide, Esther and Mordechai had *emunah* in *Hashem*, and had the strength to keep her hidden.

Unfortunately, Esther was eventually found and taken to the king against her will. Esther portrayed another characteristic of שבט בנימין when she was taken. Throughout her stay at the palace she refused to talk and remained silent even when asked what nation she was from. She stayed quiet, just like Binyamin, because she realized the value in remaining quiet; she had faith that it would be to her advantage in the end.

As mentioned earlier, in Yaakov's *bracha*, Binyamin is referred to as a "predatory wolf". This connotes characteristics of strength and aggressiveness. Some proofs of Binyamin's strength are seen in his descendants: Shaul, Mordechai, and Esther.

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<sup>6</sup> סדר עולם רבא, כ"ט

However there are many other examples throughout *Tanach*. Firstly, Binyamin's camping position in the *midbar* displays his strength. His camp was on the west side of the *ohel moed* along with **שבת אפרים** and **שבת מנשה**. A person's physical strength weakens in his later years, and this is symbolized by the diminishing of the sun's strength as it moves towards setting in the west<sup>7</sup>.

In *Sefer Devarim*, Moshe blesses all the **שבטים** one last time. What, if any, is the connection between Yaakov's *bracha* to Binyamin and Moshe's *bracha* to Binyamin? Moshe blessed **שבת בנימין**, saying: "the beloved one of *Hashem* shall dwell securely beside *Hashem*; *Hashem* protects him forever and dwells among his shoulders." Yaakov blessed Binyamin with strength, and Moshe blessed his **שבת** with *Hashem's* presence. Great strength and power come with responsibility and require control. Moshe calmed **שבת בנימין** down by blessing them with *Hashem's* presence; comforting them by saying that *Hashem* will always be with them to help them keep their power in check.

One needs complete *emunah* in *Hashem* in order for His *shechinah* to dwell in his presence. Binyamin displayed *emunah* in *Hashem* when he didn't bow down to Esav and didn't participate in the sale of Yosef<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, Binyamin's **שבת** showed tremendous *emunah* in *Hashem* when they jumped into the *Yam Suf* first<sup>9</sup>. It was Binyamin and his descendents' complete *emunah* in *Hashem* that merited them to have *Hashem's* presence not only rest in their territory but also rest within each of them individually.

Most Jews today are either from **שבת יהודה**, **שבת בנימין**, or **שבת לוי**. Thus, since many of us are probably from Binyamin, it is important to remember the important qualities he, and his **שבת** possess. These powerful qualities of **שבת בנימין** do not end with

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<sup>7</sup> כלי יקר

<sup>8</sup> מעם לועז

<sup>9</sup> ילקוט שמעוני

*Tanach*, but continue within all of his descendents for all times. שבט בנימין alone has characteristics of quietness, modesty, and power, which all lead to the underlying characteristic of having complete *emunah* in Hashem. The ability to understand when to talk and when to be silent, and the ability not to care about what other people think, both contribute to being able to believe in Hashem completely. As explained, שבט בנימין's constant and complete *emunah* merited them to have His *shechina* rest in their *Nachala*.

שבט בנימין is one of the strongest and most important שבטים. In the future it will be שבט בנימין who will destroy the enemy *Amalek* and bring redemption. שבט בנימין alone is perfect for this job, and they will, *b'ezrat Hashem*, use their power to destroy *Amalek* and bring *Am Yisrael* together, and then use their qualities of quietness and modesty to lead *Am Yisroel* in the ways of Hashem. May we all merit to learn from the qualities of Binyamin, aspire to have complete *emunah* in Hashem, and merit to see שבט בנימין prepare the way for *Mashiach*, *Bimhaira Veyamenul*



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**מחשבה ומעשה**

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## A Jewish Approach to Cloning

Dolly the Sheep's cloning was a scientific breakthrough in genetic engineering in the late 1900's. After 239 similar attempts, Dolly was the first success. Humans have yet to be cloned, but the question remains: would it be humane, natural, and morally justifiable?

Hospitals have ethicists to help people make decisions when faced with difficult circumstances. The ethicist's job is to help others make moral medical decisions through rational intellect. They have three primary values: autonomy, justice, and *primum non-nocere* – do no harm. However, according to Orthodox Judaism, ethical decisions are determined through the interpretation of *Halachic* texts and the spirit of the Torah.

The DNA used in cloning is taken from a fully grown adult and therefore has been exposed to an outside environment. This can result in a shortened lifespan as well as many health issues for the clone, as seen in the case of Dolly. Even according to Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who holds that it is man's role to imitate G-d and therefore create, it is not advisable to clone people.<sup>1</sup> "A cloned human would be a terrible experiment," says Dr. Robert Pollak, Director of The Center for the Study of Science and Religion at Columbia University. The creation of such a being could be dangerous.<sup>2</sup>

Within the sphere of cloning there are many concerns. The status of a cloned person in any court system as a citizen, as property, and even as a human, would be up for debate. According

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<sup>1</sup> *Torah u-Madda Journal* vol. 9 ט"א

<sup>2</sup> *The Faith of Biology and the Biology of Faith* ט"א

to Rabbi Dr. Avraham Steinberg,<sup>3</sup> the creation of people with identical appearances would “compromise the individuality of every member” of the human race. The capability to create beings with genetic immunities would lead to the creation of perfect organ donors, but this does not necessarily mean that an entire person need be created. Rather, creation of simply an organ could use this capability to its whole benefit. However, science may move forwards from this point to the creation of genetically superior beings, making select people more attractive, stronger, or more intelligent than the average person. Ultimately, a cloned person would become little more than a slave, a second-class citizen, and a genetic guinea pig.

Rabbi J.D. Bleich points out that there is no known *halachic* prohibition for man to tamper with science. In fact, G-d wants man to be as creative as possible.<sup>4</sup> The Gemara states:<sup>5</sup> “The righteous could create worlds if they so desired.” The Meiri claims that anything done naturally is permitted<sup>6</sup>, and one could assume that since man’s capabilities are within nature, anything man is capable of doing is natural. Therefore, according to the Meiri, cloning might be permitted. Furthermore, the argument of cloning as a compromise of individuality can be refuted, as genetic composition alone does not create the entirety of a person. Rather, personality, behavior and the soul of an individual is beyond genetic determination, and Judaism believes that each person’s soul is unique in its own right.

Nevertheless, cloning can lead to many ethical problems. Rav Waldenberg felt that cloning would be viewed negatively in *halacha*.<sup>7</sup> The basic family structure would be affected. Families

<sup>3</sup> ראה 9 *Torah u-Madda Journal* vol.

<sup>4</sup> ראה 32:3 *Tradition*.

<sup>5</sup> סנהדרין סה:

<sup>6</sup> שם סז:

<sup>7</sup> ציץ אליעזר חלק ט"ו מה:ד.

would no longer follow the usual social order, affecting the commandment of reproduction. Man and woman would no longer be necessary in creating and raising children. Rav Eliashiv professed that this change in the basic social structure goes against השקפת התורה<sup>8</sup>.

When and if human cloning ever becomes a reality, more analyses will be necessary.



## ***Retzon Hashem***

### **Leading to *Hashgachat Hashem***

King David was stricken with hardship throughout his entire life. His days were riddled with war, his father-in-law wanted to kill him, he was constantly on the run, his wives were taken captive, and life was extraordinarily difficult. Despite the hardships he faced, David shows us that when faced with a difficult situation, acting in the ways of *retzon Hashem* will prove to be fruitful. Through David, we see that acting on *retzon Hashem* leads to his benefitting from *hashgachat Hashem*.

David was sent by his father to check on his brothers, who are fighting with Shaul and his men against the Plishtim. When David heard Golyat humiliating and belittling the fighters of Israel, David stood up for G-d's people. He knew that G-d did not want His nation humiliated, and he recognized that G-d's will was for the nation to fight back and win. David says:

כי מי הפלשתי הערל הזה כי חרף מערכות אלקים חיים

Who is this uncircumcised *Plishti* that he disgraces the battalions of the Living G-d?<sup>1</sup>

David fought with Golyat, and although it was seemingly impossible, Hashem helped David kill Golyat.

In another example, Shaul was very jealous of David, who was much more successful in battle. However, David's successes in battle were not because of his own skill, but rather, because he was fighting according to the *ratzon* of Hashem. As it says: עמו דוד לכהיל וה' עמו.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, David was very

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<sup>1</sup> שמואל א' יז:כו

<sup>2</sup> שם יח:יד

successful in war, and killed many enemies of Israel. This caused Shaul to become jealous, prompting him to try to kill David, but Hashem protected David: וַתְּהִי עַל מְלָאכֵי שָׂאוּל רוּחַ אֱלֹקִים וַיִּתְּנָבוּ אֹגֹם הֵמָּה.<sup>3</sup> We can see that because David always tried to act according to *retzon* Hashem, he became worthy of Hashem's *hashgacha*.

David writes: 'אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֶל דָּל בְּיוֹם רָאָה יִמְלֹטְהוּ ה' According to Rav Kook, the person being referred to in this pasuk is David himself. On a surface level, it seems to be that in this *pasuk*, David is speaking about his own experiences falling ill and recovering. The Midrash<sup>5</sup> tells us that David was bedridden with a severe illness for thirteen years. The illness lasted until David asked for *rachamim* from Hashem, and Hashem healed him. However, the Navi has no mention of David contracting an illness! What, then, is David referring to when he writes about the illness that he went through?

In order to better understand this *midrash*, we must further interpret the *pasuk* of אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל. What follows are two interpretations of the *pasuk*, and each of which outlines the relationship between acting upon *retzon* Hashem and receiving *hashgachat* Hashem.

One way that the *pasuk* can be read is:

דָּל אֲשֶׁרִי מִשְׁכִּיל אֶל דָּל – “Praiseworthy is he who contemplates and discovers the *ratzon* of Hashem in a tough situation!”

בְּיוֹם רָעָה יִמְלֹטְהוּ ה' – “May Hashem save him from evil, since he acted upon the *ratzon* of Hashem!”

This is already shown in David's life. When David fought with Golyat for the sake of maintaining the *kavod* of Hashem, Hashem caused him to come out on top. When escaping from Shaul, David acted according to the *ratzon* of Hashem in everything he did, and so he merited being saved by Hashem.

<sup>3</sup> ש"ם י"ב

<sup>4</sup> תהילים מא:ב

<sup>5</sup> אגדת בראשית בובר פרק ל"ה

Another way the *pasuk* can be read is:

דל אשרי משכיל אל דל – “Blessed be everyone who learns from how Hashem helped me overcome hardship!”

ה'מלטהו ה' רעה ביום רעה – “When you are in a tough spot, Hashem will help you too!”

Here, David comes to tell everyone what happened to him. When he says אשרי, he is blessing everyone who comes to hear his story and learn from what Hashem helped him overcome. The second half of the *pasuk* is a description of the good that Hashem does for those in need. The author is trying to teach all those listening that, when they find themselves in darkness, Hashem will deliver them from evil, just like Hashem delivered David from evil. David shares this message hoping that all those who hear his story will learn from it and apply it to their own lives.

Without recognizing that all of his hardships came from Hashem for a reason, David would have drowned in the רעה of his life. However, by being דל אשרי משכיל אל דל, by contemplating the reasons for everything that was happening, David was able to target the specific aspects of his character that Hashem wanted him to act upon. By discovering what the *ratzon* of Hashem was in his situation, he was able to receive *hashgachat* Hashem. Once this occurred, he went out to share the lessons he learned with the world.

Returning to the *midrash* of David's illness, we can now see that it is a metaphor for the trying situations he went through, and that his act of asking for *rachamim* was Hashem's *ratzon* at that time. By introspectively discovering the hidden messages being sent to him through his circumstances, David opened up his eyes to see that by acting with *retzon* Hashem, he would become deserving of Hashem's *hashgacha*. Therefore, by acting on Hashem's *ratzon*, David was healed.

The trend of David's actions following the outline of first discovering and acting upon *ratzon* Hashem, receiving *hashgachat* Hashem, and then letting others learn from that *hashgacha* also

come into play very clearly by another Jewish royal - Esther haMalka. In Megillat Esther, Esther was torn away from her family, forced to live with Achashveirosh in his palace, and isolated from the Jewish people. When Mordechai told Esther that she must approach the king in order to save her nation, she originally refused. She was afraid of the king, and the fear clouded her vision of what she should be doing – acting upon *ratzon* Hashem.

Although we are told that Esther's Jewish name is Hadassa, we learn that she is given the Persian name of Esther. The root of the name "Esther" is סתר – hidden. Her Persian name is a reflection of the fact that, by being so immersed in Persian culture in Achashveirosh's palace, Esther began to lose clarity of her religion and of *ratzon* Hashem. The more time she spent in the palace, the more G-d's will became hidden from her, and because of this, she began to fear man (Achashveirosh) instead of realizing that G-d put her in this position for a purpose, and she should not have been afraid. Unlike David, who was able to find *ratzon* Hashem from the start, Esther required a push from Mordechai in order to identify what she should be doing.

We see Esther's lack of clarity of *ratzon* Hashem reflected in the way Mordechai says to her:

אל תדמי בנפשך להמלט בית המלך מכל היהודים

Do not imagine that you will be able to escape in the king's palace any more than the rest of the Jews.<sup>6</sup>

Mordechai reminds Esther that she was allowing her fear to blind her of her faith. Mordechai used this language to prove that, although she was afraid to approach Achashveirosh, she was still מכל היהודים – she was still Jewish, and, as a Jew, she did not need to answer to the מלך – Achashveirosh – but rather, to המלך – Hashem! Mordechai pointed out to Esther that Hashem is the only king who matters, and she had to try to find the *ratzon* of Hashem in her situation. She needed to get past the סתר of knowing how

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<sup>6</sup> אסתר ד:יג



she should act by contemplating her situation through the lens of *retzon* Hashem.

Through his words, Mordechai reminded Esther that when she acted upon the will of G-d, she was carrying out her opportunity to be the emissary of *רעה ימלטהו ה'* – delivering her people from evil. Only when she put in her effort to act according to G-d's will did Hashem reveal his *hashgacha* in the situation, allowing the Jews to win the war and Haman to be hung. After experiencing Hashem's *hashgacha*, Esther wrote the Megillah, allowing everyone to learn from what she went through – her journey to understanding *retzon* Hashem and receiving *hashgachat* Hashem.

This idea of human responsibility being guided by *retzon* Hashem is common to Esther haMalka and David haMelech. The Midrash<sup>7</sup> tells us that, while David will be the shepherd over Bnei Yisrael<sup>8</sup>, Hashem is the shepherd over David. David has the responsibility to guide *Bnei Yisrael* and show the right path, but in order to do so, he must let Hashem guide him on his path, and be receptive to the messages that Hashem sends him throughout his life.

Through the experiences of both David haMelech and Esther haMalka, we clearly learn that in order to be receptive of Hashem's *hashgacha*, we need to open our eyes to learn from the circumstances around us, and look for the messages that Hashem sends us through our circumstances. By trying our best to act with *retzon* Hashem and by learning from our own lives, as well as that of all those around us, we will become deserving of Hashem's *hashgacha*.

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<sup>7</sup> בראשית רבה נט:ה

<sup>8</sup> דברי הימים א' יא:ב



## Life's Constitution

King Henry VIII is known for his plethora of wives and, more pertinently, for his deviation from the Roman Catholic Church. The start of Protestantism, is arguably the beginning of Western Civilization's penchant for secular law. The divergence from a theological based judicial system became more prominent with time.

For example, the United States of America, the twenty-first century's emblem of Western Civilization, strictly adheres to the amendable Constitution (and its twenty-seven amendments) whose very foundation is built upon the separation of church and state. As Thomas Jefferson explains in one of his letters, one of the functions of the first amendment is: "... [the peoples of America's] legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.'" In Judaism, however, that wall of separation is non-existent.

The following *pasuk* heads the section of the Torah dealing with civil law and tails the section of the giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments: ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם – "And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them."<sup>1</sup>

Commentators, such as the Sforno and the Ramban, examine the juxtaposition of the giving of the Torah and *mitzvot* pertaining to civil law.

The Ramban explains that all the *mitzvot* are an expansion of the Ten Commandments, or, more precisely, a delineation of the boundary between obeying and transgressing them.

He then quotes Midrash Rabba: כל התורה כולה תלויה במשפט – "All of Torah is dependent on civil law."<sup>2</sup> The Torah does not

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<sup>1</sup> שמות כא:א

<sup>2</sup> שם ל:טו

present a system of beliefs and practices that are to be observed simultaneously with civil law; the Torah is civil law. Rashi explains that to further demonstrate the relationship between civil law and 'religious' practices, the Sanhedrin was placed right next to the Temple. Accentuating this assertion is the fact that men, who are righteous in their actions and well learned in the matters of *halacha*, are the individuals who create the Jewish judicial system. The statement, "Henry is a good citizen but a bad Jew," or vice versa, would be a contradiction of terms.

Western Civilization's wall is a multi-tasked existence; it creates the distinction between faith and law just as it constructs another wedge between the Jewish people and Esav. The way Jews execute judgment on civil and mundane matters will differ from a non-Jew's execution of judgment. And this wedge is the very reason Hashem chose to word the verse in Parshat Mishpatim, "placed before you" – 'You' refers to the Jews, thereby excluding the other nations who will judge according to the law of the land. Even if the gentile law or a gentile judge's execution of the law seems identical to the Torah, bringing a civil suit before a non-Jewish court desecrates the name of Hashem.<sup>3</sup>

The Western gentile courts' aversion towards religious influence conflicts with the Torah's perspective about civil law, and anything that deviates from Torah is an abomination to Hashem's name. A primary example of this difference of approach is the topic of a Jewish slave – which is actually the first civil law concept discussed after the Torah's recount of *Matan Torah*.

– "כי תקנה עבד עברי שש שנים יעבד ובשביעית יצא לחפשי חנם  
If you purchase a Jewish male slave, he shall work for six years, and in the seventh he shall be released to freedom, for no charge."<sup>4</sup>

The civil laws mentioned at the start of Parshat Mishpatim, which discuss the laws of property and the consequences of contravening those laws, correspond to the tenth commandment,

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<sup>3</sup> שם כא:א, רש"י שם

<sup>4</sup> שם כא:ב

לא תחמד – “do not covet that which is not yours.” The laws of property prove to be extremely intricate and complicated, and as such, they must be studied at length to prevent the transgression of the tenth commandment. If not, a violation of the tenth commandment results in severe consequence.

The Glasgow Herald, a British newspaper, had an article on Wednesday, August 28, 1929, about a car thief. A man, who had been sent to prison for eighteen months in America for grand auto theft, was deported to England after his sentence had been served. He arrived in Britain in 1927, and two years later, he stole another car. This time, the thief tried to sell the stolen vehicle. The judge sentenced this man to three months in jail.

The Torah would have judged differently. In this situation, the man would have, most likely, been ordered to return the stolen vehicle. If the man were unable to return the vehicle, he would have to pay restitution to the victim. A Jewish thief, who is unable to pay the penalty decreed by the judge, is sold into slavery for six years, against his will. If a Western judge were to sentence a poor thief to six years of slavery, the public would gasp, piles of legal suits would litter desks, and the judge would likely be asked to step down.

The laws regarding a Jewish manservant are derived from the verse (stated above) in Sefer Shemot, as well as some verses in Sefer Devarim that also discuss Jewish slaves:

כי ימכר לך אחיך העברי או העבריה ועבדך שש שנים ובשנה השביעית תשלחנו חפשי מעמך

If your Jewish brother or sister is sold to you, and he works for you for six years, then in the seventh year, he is sent free from you.<sup>5</sup>

וכי תשלחנו חפשי מעמך לא תשלחנו ריקם

And when you send him free from you, you shall not send him empty handed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> דברים טו:יב

<sup>6</sup> שם טו:יג

These *pesukim* instruct us on how we should think about and concern ourselves with thieves who cannot afford to pay. A Jewish man, who is unable to pay the penalty for theft, is sold against his will into slavery for six years<sup>7</sup>.

The Ramban derives a *mitzvah* from verse twelve (stated above) that the *Beit Din* can only sell the thief to a Jewish home that acts in accordance with the laws of the Torah. Ideally, he is sold to a pious household that will, by example, prepare the slave for a holier future. During the six-year sentence, the Jewish slave must be treated with respect: he cannot be given labor that is degrading, impossible or useless.<sup>8</sup> Even though the slave is a convict, he is still Jewish and therefore has the ability to turn his face towards the heavens.

By working for a G-d-fearing Jew, the slave can acquire the tools to do *teshuvah*. Once the six-year sentence is complete, the slave is freed with the means to restart his life with an honest livelihood. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch<sup>9</sup> explains that the slave must be sent away with parting gifts, to prevent suspicion that, if the man were to steal again, he did so because of a lack of resources.

Unlike the Torah, which attempts to rehabilitate thieves into honest society, Western Civilization tries to clear society of perpetrators. Jewish slaves leave with the tools (i.e. spiritual and physical capital) to start anew, while the thieves of the West exit jail with a record – making redemption unlikely at best.

According to the Torah, not only are civil law and religion one and the same, but the sins of the individual are also a community problem. Another's religious behavior is everyone's business, unlike the Western philosophy that exempts one from another's problem.

<sup>7</sup> שמות כא:ב, רש"י שם; קידושין יד:

<sup>8</sup> רמב"ם הלכות עבדים פרק א'

<sup>9</sup> דברים טו:יג

The concept of Jewish slavery is one means of correcting another's wrongdoing. Freeing the slave with parting gifts is another way to ensure civil obedience in the future. The six-year sentence is not a punishment as much as it is a cleansing process for the thief. The Torah's civil punishment for this kind of thief gives him the means to raise his spiritual gradient. Again, Torah, the recipe for spiritual height, is civil law.

The Torah acts as "life's constitution," but there are no amendments, and the religion and state are conjoined twins. Unlike the Western approach, the true Constitution is placed before the Jews like a prepared meal on a table. We, the guests, cannot alter the nourishing food. Because of the interrelationship between our actions and every single aspect of our mundane lives, we have to realize that every action has a resultant consequence that affects the whole Jewish nation. Building a wall between religious practice and any other part of life does not lend protection against the reality. Invisible walls do not shield a city from enemy arrows.





## Pursuing צדק

The first time ירושלים is mentioned is with respect to מלכי צדק.<sup>1</sup> Who is this צדק ומלכי צדק מלך שלם הוציא לחם ויין והוא כהן לקל עליון? מלכי צדק?

The תר"ק suggests that this is a general title given to the kings of ירושלים, almost as a reminder that the city is a place of צדק and those who are not צדק cannot abide within it. Therefore, the king, and, through him, the people, are reminded that in order to remain where they are, they must be such people.

However, the מדרש רבה on this פסוק says that the city makes its inhabitants into people of צדק, and that the city's influence on its inhabitants changes them for the better, making it easier for them to be worthy of a continued presence within it.

But what is this צדק?

Rashi, on the *pasuk* צדק תרדף צדק<sup>2</sup>, quotes חז"ל, that there is a command: הלך אחר בית דין יפה – go after a good court, and appoint proper judges to the court. In this merit, Hashem will allow us to live in the Land.

The Ramban also interprets this as a personal command, explaining that one should be willing to move to another place in order to be in a location with a good בית דין:

אתה צריך לרדוף הצדק תמיד שתלך ממקומך אל מקום חכמים הגדולים אחרי רבן יוחנן בן זכאי ליבנה אחר רבי לבית שערים.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> בראשית י"ה

<sup>2</sup> דברים ט"ז

<sup>3</sup> רמב"ן שם

The Ibn Ezra writes of the obligation to be willing to pursue justice: **שִׁירוּיָהּ בּוֹ אִוּ יִפְסִיד** regardless of whether he gains or he loses, even if it is difficult to do so. The reward for this is that one will be able to conquer the land and pass it on to the children as an inheritance.

The Ramban adds that the double expression of **צדק צדק** hints towards a double reward: both **ארץ ישראל** and **עולם הבא**.

What is actual **צדק**, which needs to be pursued to this end?

The Kuzari<sup>4</sup> tells us that Divine justice is incomprehensible to the human mind and that one needs to accept that Hashem knows best. Human failure to comprehend the reasoning behind it does not make it any less correct.

**נתן אבות דר'** teaches that **צדק ומשפט** are two of the *midot* that minister before the **כסא הכבוד**<sup>5</sup>, indicating that just as Hashem has a complete comprehension of His throne that humanity never can, so too with these attributes.

Ramchal explains that when Hashem considers His world, He wishes to execute absolute justice on it, but if He were to do so, all of Creation would be unable to survive, implying that absolute justice isn't **צדק**, even if it may be true **משפט** or **דין**<sup>6</sup>.

Unkelos translates **צדק צדק תרדף** as: **קשטא קשטא תהי רדיף**, referring to the concept of truth. The Netivot Shalom writes in praise of the judge who renders a **דין אמת לאמיתו**. This truth is indicative of an element of subjectivity in determining truth and fairness.

<sup>4</sup> מאמר שלישי

<sup>5</sup> אבות דר' נתן ל"ז

<sup>6</sup> דעת תבונות

Ramchal adds that משפט צדק allows Hashem, as it were, to enter into our world, and that the judge becomes a partner with Hashem, in that he, by delivering a fair judgment, is allowing the purpose of Creation to be fulfilled. He tells a story of how, after a monetary case was heard in the בית דין, one of the litigants felt that the verdict that he had to pay was unfair, and the דיין told him that in a previous גלגול, he had cheated the other man. It was therefore decreed in שמים that the two of them should return to this world and come to the בית דין so that he could repay him, even if it didn't seem to be fair in the specific circumstances. One can learn from this that fair judgment will be achieved eventually and that our efforts to ensure its success can help it being reached faster and less painfully.

How, practically speaking, can one implement the value of צדק?

Pirkei Avot teaches:

אל תעש עצמך כעורכי הדיינין.

A judge should not make himself into a lawyer<sup>7</sup>.

We learn that a judge must always remain impartial, and one who knows *halacha* must take care not to give one party advice that will lead to loss incurred by the other party, even if he feels that the advised party is in the right. It is unfair for one party to arrive in court better prepared and advised than the other<sup>8</sup>.

The Shulchan Aruch<sup>9</sup> rules that a judge must intercede on behalf of the 'weaker party' if he feels that their case has not been well represented, pointing out arguments that they could use to their advantage.

<sup>7</sup> אבות א:ה

<sup>8</sup> רבינו יונה, מאירי

<sup>9</sup> חושן משפט יז:ט

A בית דין must challenge a note of collection issued against orphans for their father's debts, as a creditor may be placed in a position where he is tempted to take advantage of the orphans. This would not be fair, because in their naivety, the orphans may very well acquiesce to dishonest demands for payment.

The Mishnah adds:

וכשיהיו בעלי דינין עומדים לפניך, יהיו בעיניך כרשעים.

In order to ensure fairness in judgment, one must view both litigants equally with a healthy degree of skepticism, not easily swayed by the eloquence of one of the parties.

A judge is also warned:

והוי זהיר בדברייך, שמא מתוכם ילמדו לשקר.<sup>10</sup>

To ensure that questions are not obviously phrased in order to trip up the witnesses and check them for suspected lies or discrepancies. Otherwise, the witnesses may lie in order to support their side or to please the judge.<sup>11</sup> Besides ensuring that the correct verdict is reached in this case, a judge must also make sure not to make the reasoning for the verdict overly clear, so that people will not learn from this case in order to deceive the courts in future and get a judgment that is unfairly biased towards them.

Tehillim teaches: <sup>12</sup>עומדות היו רגלינו בשעריך ירושלים, and the *midrash* on this *pasuk* states that the reason that the fighters could stand firm in battle was because of the Torah learned at the gates of the city. The specific type of Torah this

<sup>10</sup> פרקי אבות א:ט

<sup>11</sup> רש"י

<sup>12</sup> תהלים קכב:

refers to can be seen from Megillat Rut: **ובעז עלה השער**,<sup>13</sup> where the Malbim comments that he went to the gate of the city because that was the seat of the *Sanhedrin*.

Through having justice and fairness throughout the land, we are deserving of it and cannot be removed from it. In order to truly deserve to live in this holy land, we need to remove unfairness and corruption. May this happen and hasten the coming of *Mashiach* speedily in our days.

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<sup>13</sup> רות ד:א



## **The Timing of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim***

In the middle of *Magid* at the *Pesach Seder*, we come across a story about five Sages sitting around their Seder table until the early hours of the morning.

What could these five scholars have been discussing so intensely and for so long that they lost track of time and had to be alerted by their students that the time for *Kriat Shema* was approaching?

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria instigated the debate amongst the *Chachamim* sitting around the table, as he was of the belief that the mitzvah of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* ended at *Chatzot*, and since that time had passed, he held himself responsible with convincing the other *Chachamim* of his view.

The first *machloket* between Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria and the other *Chachamim* concerned the timing of the main miracle of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. One side held that the main miracle was *Benei Yisrael* being granted permission to leave, while the other side held that it was the actual departure from *Mitzrayim*. Therefore, a question arose: does the mitzvah of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* expire at *Chatzot* or at *Alot HaShachar*?

Their second *machloket* was regarding when we must remember the miracle of *Pesach*: exclusively by day, or by day as well as night?

The *Beit HaLevi* in *Parashat Bo* holds that these two *machlokot* are connected; the timing of the main miracle of *Pesach* was directly related to when we must actually remember the miracle.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria held that the main miracle of *Pesach* was being given permission to leave, and therefore the

*mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim* ends at *chatzot*, not *alot hashachar*.

The other *Chachamim* believed that the main miracle was the actual leaving of Egypt, and therefore it is important to tell the story until the *alot hashachar*. Therefore, they held that they were actually discussing the miracle in its correct time.

How can each side prove their beliefs? Is there an answer to the debate?

After the 10<sup>th</sup> plague when Hashem finally stopped hardening Pharaoh's heart, Pharaoh ran into the streets looking for Moshe begging him to leave Egypt with all his people. This was a strange time for Hashem to bring the redemption.

This begs the question. Did *Yetziat Mitzrayim* take place in its correct time or did it have to be hastened due to the dangerously low level of impurity of *Benei Yisrael*?

This too is a *machloket* among the *Chachamim*.

Those who believe that the 400 years of being "strangers in a strange land" began with the birth of Yitzchak hold that *Yetziat Mitzrayim* came at its destined time. This is the position of the *Chachamim*.

Nevertheless, some believe that the 400 years started from when Yaakov left *Eretz Canaan* and therefore the miracle of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* came in the middle of the night, symbolic of *galut*. Although *Benei Yisrael* were being redeemed, they will still need to complete the *galut* at a later time. This is the position of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria.

If, however, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria believed that the *mitzvah* was long over, why did he continue to engage in the telling of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*?

We learn that one who goes above and beyond the *mitzvah* of telling the story of Pesach is highly praised. Therefore Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria joined with the *Chachamim* even though he believed the *mitzvah* was over.



From here we can learn that despite the fact that the *machloket* remains unsolved, we can use this as inspiration to go above and beyond at the *Seder*, because as we learned, we should embrace the opportunity to expand upon the *mitzvah* of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*.



## Kedusha: A Unifying Tefillah

*Kedusha* is recited by the entire congregation in unison, immediately after the second *bracha* of *chazarat hashatz*. This requirement of collective, audible recitation is unusual. Additionally, Hashem's holiness, stated in *kedusha*, is immediately declared again in the third *bracha*. Finally, *kedusha* seems, at first glance, to be completely out of place in the order of the *amidah*. Nevertheless, these apparent problems can be resolved with a deeper look into the inherent nature of *kedusha*.

An analysis of the second *bracha* of the *amidah* is crucial. One of the major themes of the second *bracha* is *death*, the epitome of *tumah*. After an individual dies, the people around him must go through a process of purification. Furthermore, death symbolizes ultimate physicality, the antithesis of divinity and infinity.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, *Kedusha* is the height of spirituality. Rav Pincus<sup>1</sup> describes *kedusha* as a point in *tefillah* where we strive to emulate the holiness of the angels – the exact opposite of the physicality of humanity. Although the differences between the themes present in the second *bracha* and the themes of *kedusha* are seemingly almost too wide to bridge, the juxtaposition of these portions of the *amidah* can be seen as a microcosmic reflection of a balance G-d wants humanity to achieve.

Rav Soloveitchik<sup>2</sup> describes the creation of the world and G-d's creation of man by analyzing the first two chapters of Bereishit and their descriptions of Adam Harishon. "Adam One"

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<sup>1</sup> ראה נפש שמשון.

<sup>2</sup> ראה Rav Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*.

embodies the more physical features of man, while “Adam Two” deals with the more spiritual aspects of man’s persona. He explains that G-d created Adam with this dual personality and sanctioned both. Rejection of either aspect of humanity would be tantamount to an act of disapproval of the divine scheme of creation which was approved by G-d as being very good.

Rav Soloveitchik understands that G-d does not desire that man ignore either his physical or spiritual nature, but that he strive to create a balance between the two seemingly opposing forces. This idea leads to the development of an explanation of the contiguity of the second *bracha* and *kedusha*.

Furthermore, the principle of balancing physical and spiritual can explain the requirement of the entire congregation’s audible recitation of the *kedusha*. Indeed, even in the physical aspect of *tzibur*, we see this concept of fusion. The Gemara<sup>3</sup> teaches that we are obligated to say *kedusha* with a *tzibur*, explaining that וּנְקֻדְשֵׁי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<sup>4</sup> requires a *minyan*.

Elsewhere, the Rashbam<sup>5</sup> comments that the word וַיִּצְבְּרוּ, similar to צִיבּוֹר, means “to gather all the food together”, while צִיבּוֹר refers to the gathering of people from various places. These parallels explain why a *minyan* is required, because the spiritual unification achieved from a collective *tefilah betzibur* is so much greater than the metaphysical elatedness that stems from an individual’s *tefilah*. A *tzibur* “is not created by simply gathering ten individuals,” but rather that the individuals must go beyond a mere gathering to “merge into an organic matter,”<sup>6</sup> acting as one unit. The requirement of a *tzibur* to recite *kedusha* contains another proof of the *kedusha*’s enormously powerful unification,

<sup>3</sup> ברכות כא:

<sup>4</sup> ויקרא כב:לב

<sup>5</sup> בראשית מה:לה, רשב"ם שם

<sup>6</sup> ראה רבני ברנר, “Reciting Prayers as a Tzibur,” OU.org

both of spirituality and physicality and of the congregation as a whole.

After the metaphysically unifying experience of *kedusha*, the *amidah* continues with the third *bracha*. Here, G-d's holiness is again declared, but on a corporeal plain, as the holiness mentioned is in relation to what is given and permitted in this world, קדש עצמך במותר לך. This *bracha* emulates the product of the fusion and balance brought by the second *bracha* and *kedusha*.<sup>7</sup>

The world is filled with diversity and seemingly opposing dialectical forces, and spirituality and physicality are often seen as opposing forces that cannot be combined. However, through the *kedusha* it is clear that the truest way to serve G-d is through their unification; their equilibrium is essential.

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<sup>7</sup> ראה הערות בסידור הוצאת ארטסקרול.



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# **FACULTY**

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## Mordechai, Esther and Yosef

### - I -

After communicating how heroically Mordechai facilitated the miraculous salvation, the Megilla concludes:

כי מרדכי היהודי משנה למלך אחשוורוש וגדול ליהודים ורצוי לרב אחיז  
דרש טוב לעמו ודבר שלום לכל זרעו.

Because Mordechai, the Jew, was second to the king, great for the Jews, accepted by most of his brethren, interested in the well-being of his nation and a good spokesman for his people.<sup>1</sup>

Although at first glance this seems to praise Mordechai<sup>2</sup> for his successful action and efforts, surprisingly, Rashi,<sup>3</sup> quoting Chazal,<sup>4</sup> disagrees. “Accepted by most of his brethren,” implies that there were those, albeit a small number, who did not accept and appreciate Mordechai. Who were these critics? Rashi believes that members of the *Sanhedrin*, were disappointed in Mordechai. They felt that Mordechai should have spent more time learning Torah and limited his involvement in politics. [The Ibn Ezra notes that no one can gain the favor of everyone. There will always be those who are jealous.]

One might wonder: why did the Megilla conclude by raising doubt about Mordechai’s character? Until this point Mordechai is a hero; there is nothing but praise for Mordechai’s commitment and dedication to Hashem and his people? Moreover, Mordechai himself authored Megillas Esther.<sup>5</sup> Why would he allude to this critique of himself in such an anticlimactic way?

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<sup>1</sup> אסתר י:ג

<sup>2</sup> תרגום

<sup>3</sup> אסתר י:ג

<sup>4</sup> מגילה טו:

<sup>5</sup> עיין הקדמה לדעת מקרא

**- II -**

Before directly answering our opening questions, let us make an interesting observation. Both Esther and Mordechai are strikingly similar to Yosef. Many details about Esther recall and resemble details that describe Yosef.

- (1) Both Esther and Yosef are extremely attractive individuals.
- (2) Both of them are described by the word נָעַר.<sup>6</sup>
- (3) Moreover each found חן in the eyes of others: Yosef in the warden<sup>7</sup> and Esther in everyone who saw her.<sup>8</sup>
- (4) They each lived outside of Israel, in a foreign land. Moreover, both are separated from their families, courted by an aristocrat from the local country (Potifar and Achashveirosh), and ultimately married into the foreign aristocracy (Yosef married Potifar's daughter and Esther married Achashveirosh).
- (5) Esther and Yosef each withheld their true identity, Esther from Achashveirosh and Yosef from his brothers. And after initially hiding who they were, they each reveal their identity in an incredibly dramatic manner, one that serves as the central turning point in each episode.

**- III -**

However, not only does the Megilla portray Esther as similar to Yosef, Mordechai is portrayed so as well.

- (1) Mordechai's introduction<sup>9</sup> mentions his exile four times,<sup>10</sup> just as the brothers exiled Yosef.
- (2) Both were challenged daily by an aristocratic character in the story, Yosef by Eishet Potifar<sup>11</sup> and Mordechai by Haman

<sup>6</sup> בראשית לז:ב; אסתר ב:ב,ד

<sup>7</sup> בראשית לט:כא

<sup>8</sup> אסתר ב:טו; ספרי במדבר, פרשת נשא, מא; ספרי זוטא, ו.

<sup>9</sup> אסתר ב:ו

<sup>10</sup> ראה רש"י אסתר ב:ה

<sup>11</sup> בראשית לט:י

- demanding that he bow down to him.<sup>12</sup> The term יום (ו)יום appears in both places.<sup>13</sup>
- (3) Achashveirosh got angry with and ultimately killed ותרוש just like Paroh got angry with the שר המשקים and שר האופים and ultimately killed שר האופים.<sup>14</sup>
- (4) Despite being exiled from the land of Israel, both Mordechai and Yosef rose to political power.
- (5) They each became “second to the king.”<sup>15</sup>
- (6) Each rose to power primarily based on a single act of helping the king; for Mordechai it was informing the king of a planned assassination and for Yosef it was interpreting his dreams.
- (7) Ultimately, they were both paraded around the city’s capital in a declaration of their elevated status.<sup>16</sup>
- (8) The king empowered them both with important decision-making responsibilities by taking off his ring.<sup>17</sup>
- (9) Mordechai, like Yosef, received special clothing indicating a beloved and unique status.<sup>18</sup>

#### - IV -

Although the question begs to be asked as to why the Megilla would present both main characters in parallel to Yosef, it is worth first noting the contrasts between Esther and Mordechai on the one hand, and Yosef on the other. Here are numerous differences.

- (1) In contrast to how Yosef was exiled as an individual and by his brothers, Mordechai was exiled as part of a nation.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> אסתר ג:ד

<sup>13</sup> בראשית רבה, פז

<sup>14</sup> במדרש לקח טוב, וישב, מ

<sup>15</sup> בראשית מא:מד; אסתר י:ג

<sup>16</sup> בראשית מא:מג; אסתר ו:יא; בראשית רבה, פז

<sup>17</sup> בראשית מא:מב; אסתר ח:ב

<sup>18</sup> בראשית רבה, פז

<sup>19</sup> אסתר ב:ו

- (2) Although both Yosef and Mordechai were given special clothing, Yosef received his as a permanent gift from his father, while Mordechai's was temporary and from the king.
- (3) Moreover, Yosef's clothing gift led to his misfortune while Mordechai's clothing reflected his success.
- (4) While in the Yosef story, redemption began with Paroh's dreams at night; it was Achashveirosh's insomnia that led to Mordechai and Esther's salvation.
- (5) Furthermore, Achashveirosh asked advice of his most trusted assistant, Haman, whereas Paroh consulted a stranger, an imprisoned Hebrew slave. The contrast is even more profound because Haman's advice was selfish, while Yosef's was completely selfless. It was precisely these events that led to Haman's downfall and to Yosef's rise to power.
- (6) Achashveirosh took Esther, while Eishet Potifar was unsuccessful in her courting of Yosef, but the contrast may be extended, because as a result Esther became the queen while Yosef was incarcerated.
- (7) Although ultimately both Esther and Yosef reveal their true selves, Esther communicates that Achashveirosh does not know her upbringing and past, while Yosef says the exact opposite; he tells his brothers that they do know his history and past. Esther further tells her family, "You think we are family, but you do not know me," while Yosef conversely states, "you think that I am an Egyptian stranger. Surprise, we are family."
- (8) Yosef's story begins with a national problem, a famine in Egypt, which Yosef creatively solves. In Persia, by contrast, there was a plethora of food, enough to eat and drink for one hundred and eighty days of partying for one hundred and twenty seven nations.
- (9) Unlike the naturally developed problem that Yosef solves, Achashveirosh creates for Benei Yisrael the one that Esther solves.
- (10) Yosef's primary intention was to assist Paroh and save the Egyptian kingdom. Mordechai's primary mission, though, was to save the Jewish people; the peripheral mention at the end of the

city being transformed, והעיר שושן צהלה ושמחה, “The city of Shushan was cheerful and happy”<sup>20</sup> was simply a byproduct.

(11) Achashveirosh took his wife Esther from Mordechai while Paroh gave Yosef a wife.<sup>21</sup> [The contrast is even stronger since Mordechai was married to Esther.<sup>22</sup>]

- V -

Returning to why the Megilla was written this way: firstly it was Mordechai, just like Yosef, who caused Hashem to save the foreign monarch.<sup>23</sup> But the parallel is stronger, for in neither episode is an overt miracle performed; yet each redemption clearly displays Hashem working behind the scenes. The numerous unlikely coincidences that occur one after another can only be traced back to Him. Yosef faithfully trusts Hashem that everything was part of Hashem’s plan – his being sold, falsely accused of attempted adultery, imprisoned, and then ultimately crowned as second to the king. Mordechai, equally devoted, expresses his faith when he requests Esther’s help. He states with confidence that we cannot know the larger plan, but the outcome will be positive. Hashem will bring salvation and will not abandon his people.<sup>24</sup>

However, although it is speculative, perhaps we can further hypothesize why the Megilla was written this way. Perhaps Mordechai was subtly defending himself against the critics. Mordechai was addressing the members of the Sanhedrin, who disapproved and thought that he was too involved in government. Mordechai used Yosef as a religious paradigm and precedent for government involvement, believing his approach was at least a legitimate one. Yosef too lived among the foreign people, assisting and abetting a foreign government. Yosef too was second to the king and perhaps also

<sup>20</sup> אסתר ח:טו

<sup>21</sup> בראשית מא:מה

<sup>22</sup> מגילה יג.

<sup>23</sup> מדרש לקח טוב, לך לך, יב

<sup>24</sup> אסתר ד:ד

sacrificed some of his time – time that could have been devoted to Talmud Torah – to involvement in Egyptian political affairs. Perhaps paralleling the stories defends both Mordechai and Esther, who were criticized for their heavy involvement in the Persian government.

## - VI -

In addition to the many similarities listed above, there are a number of differences as well. By contrasting these stories, Mordechai may have been further explaining and justifying his heavy involvement in the Egyptian government.

Unlike Yosef, whose intentions were to save himself and yet remained completely legitimate, Mordechai and Esther were tasked with the salvation of the entire Jewish people, a significantly more altruistic ambition. If Yosef was justified in his conduct, as presumably his critics would concede, the justification of Mordechai and Esther's actions should be all the more apparent. Moreover, Yosef has a completely happy ending. He reunites with his family, while Esther, by contrast, remains a wife to Achashveirosh.

However, there may be an additional defense for Mordechai's character. Even if one disagrees with Mordechai's ideological position with regards to a Jew's involvement in government, somehow rejecting the comparison to Yosef, Mordechai can still claim that he was well intentioned. In other words, even if he acted incorrectly, which the author, Mordechai, does not accept, he certainly did not act selfishly. This may be precisely the conclusion of the Megilla. Immediately after reading that Mordechai was רצוי לרב אחיו, "accepted by most of his brethren," we see that he was דרש טוב לעמו, "interested in the well-being of his nation." [Mordechai does not criticize his critics either. Presumably he respects both positions, just identifying more with Yosef.]

Lastly, perhaps the phrase ורצוי לרב אחיו, while hinting to the comparison with Yosef (who was also not fully appreciated by his brothers), also highlights the fact that Mordechai, unlike Yosef, was liked by the majority. Mordechai, as the author, is telling his readers that one must recognize and even respect those with different

ideological values. And yet this does not conflict with the need to be true to one's heart, looking for proper ideological direction from the Torah and tradition in order to act with sincerity and selflessness.





## Adam and Adamah

We often try to discern a person's essence by examining his or her name in *Lashon HaKodesh*. The first human being is referred to as Adam. What does this tell us about the nature of humans?

The following idea is from Rav Shlomo Freifeld zt"l, based on the writings of the Maharal.

Adam is closely related to the word "*adamah*", earth or soil. What do the two have in common? Most things in the world appear to us as they really are. A cow is a cow, a mountain is a mountain and a star is a star. They cannot change into something else.

Soil, however, is different. Two identical looking fields can turn out quite different from each other. It all depends on what is planted or sown in the earth. One might grow watermelons, while the other will turn into a wheat field. Soil is all potential.

That is how man resembles earth. A human being is pure potential. He can become almost anything he wants. Not every *gadol* or (*lehavdil*) artistic genius was known to be a child prodigy, but they all had potential and utilized it to the utmost.

A person can grow in quality. We all can become better people, better Jews. By definition, every person has potential for growth. This is often realized in the *Beit Midrash*. The root of the word "*midrash*" is "*derisha*", seeking or desiring. A *Beit Midrash* is a place where a person comes with spiritual desires and yearnings. It is a place where a person who aspires and is willing to struggle can fulfill his potential.

The influence that a *Beit Midrash* has on our own growth can extend far beyond the time we actually spend there. The Gemara (Eruvin 53a) relates that R' Yochanan learned for eighteen days in R' Oshaya's *Beit Midrash*. The term that R' Yochanan uses

to describe those days is “*gidalti*”. The implication is that he grew for eighteen days in R’ Oshaya’s *yeshiva* in such a way that the growth remained with him for a lifetime.

We are all *Benei Adam*. We all have the potential for growth that was nurtured in the *Beit Midrash*. As long as we maintain our hopes and aspirations, as long as we still strive to achieve those goals, we have the ability to grow and flourish into the person who we truly want to become.