

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

DVAR TORAH: HOLDING ON TO SUCCESS

Both Avraham and Yaakov had their names changed. Yet there is a crucial difference between them. Avraham is no longer Avram, and we are told not to refer to him by that name any more. Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael, but he retains the name Yaakov, and both names are used in Tanach and Jewish literature.

Says the Shem Mishmuel, Harav Shmuel Bornshtein, זצ"ל, (the Sochotchover Rebbe, 1855-1926): The name Yisrael is associated with שְׂרָרָה, with dominion, with loftiness, with the high level he attained, overcoming his enemies and rising above even the angels. Yaakov is associated with the עֵקֶב, the heel, with lowliness and humility. Says Hakadosh Baruch Hu to Yaakov: Your name will now be Yisrael, on one condition – that you remain the Yaakov you once were. Don't let it go to your head.

Avraham moved away from merely being Avram and made a permanent transformation into Avraham, אב המון גוים, the father of a multitude of nations; but Yisrael must remain Yaakov, he must combine his loftiness with lowliness, in order to continue being Yisrael.

The Shem Mishmuel quotes Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshishcha, זצ"ל, who points out that when the Torah tells us we will be blessed by G-d it says, "All of these blessings will run after you and will reach you" (Devarim 28:2). The last word of that clause, וְהִשִּׁיגְךָ, they will reach you, teaches us that the blessings will reach you in the place you were before the blessing. You must not let the blessings go to your head or they will evade you. You must be the same humble person after you got the blessings as you were before you got them.

Success, both this-worldly and spiritual, can be fleeting, but it does not have to be. Holding on to success can be as challenging as attaining it, but the challenge can be reduced. The Shem Mishmuel says that staying humble (or becoming humble) can help a person hold on to success – just like Yisrael is able to remain Yisrael by not forgetting that he is also Yaakov.

But humility is not just a segulah, a magic formula to hold on to success. Humility means realizing that of our successes come from Hashem. We can hold on to them only if we hold on to that realization.

"עֵקֶב עֲנוּהַ יִרְאֵת ה' עֶשֶׂר וְכָבוֹד וְחַיִּים" – "As a result of (literally, 'on the heels of') humility comes fear of G-d – wealth and honor and life" (Mishlei 22:4). Humility not only brings fear of G-d, but also wealth, honor, and long life.

Hashem should bless all of Israel with abundance and elevation, and it should stay with us forever.

SOURCE GUIDE: WHY IS AVIGAIL HERE?

Yaakov's message to Esav includes the following line: "I attained oxen and donkeys, sheep and servants and maidservants." The Midrash associates each of the five items in this verse with descendants of Yaakov, ending that the maidservant refers to Avigail. **Why, according to the Midrash, does Yaakov allude to Avigail in his message to Esav?**

A. The Verse and the Midrash

Here is the beginning of Yaakov's message to Esav:

<p>1. Bereishit 32:5-6 (5) He commanded them (the messengers) saying, "Thus you should say to my master to Esav: 'Thus said your servant Yaakov – I have dwelled with Lavan and tarried until now. (6) And I attained oxen and donkeys, sheep and servants and maidservants. And I sent [this tribute] to my master to find favor in your eyes.'"</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">בראשית לב:ה-ו</p> <p>(ה) וַיִּצְוּ אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֵשָׂו כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם לִבִּי גִרְתִּי וְאַחַר עַד עָמָה: (ו) וַיְהִי לִי שׂוֹר וְחֲמֹר צֹאן וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה וְאֲשַׁלְחָה לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמַצָּא חֵן בְּעֵינָיֶךָ:</p>
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The Midrash was probably bothered by a number of difficulties with the expression, "And I attained oxen and donkeys, sheep and servants and maidservants." Why are these five items in the list? (Didn't Yaakov also have camels or other possessions?) Why are the five items in the singular? (Even though צאן can refer to both singular and plural, and perhaps the same is true of שׂוֹר וְחֲמֹר, the usage of עבד and שפחה as plural seems unique in Tanach.) Furthermore, why is Yaakov listing what he has? Isn't it sufficient to say, "And I sent [this tribute] to my master to find favor in your eyes"? Here is the Midrash:

<p>2. Bereishit Rabbah 75:12 Another explanation: "I have ox and donkey." "Ox" refers to Yosef, for it says [in Moshe's blessing of the tribe of Yosef], "His first born ox: splendor is his (Devarim 33:17). "Donkey" refers to Yissachar, as it is written, "Yissachar is a strong boned donkey." A descendant of Yosef will arise to destroy Amalek (descendants of Esav), as it says, "Yehoshua weakened Amalek and its nation by the sword" (Shemot 17:13). And descendants of Yissachar know what the Holy One, blessed be He, is doing in His world, as it says, "From the children of Yissachar, those who know understand timely knowledge, to know what Israel will do, their heads were two-hundred" (Divrei Hayamim I 12:33). "Sheep" refers to Israel, as it says, "And you are My sheep; the sheep that I shepherd; you are people" (Yechezkel 34:31). "And a servant" refers to David, as it says, "I am Your servant, son of Your maidservant" (Tehillim 116:16). "And a maidservant" refers to Avigail, as it says, "Behold your maidservant is a slave" (Shmuel I 25:41).</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">בראשית רבה פרשה עה פסקה יב</p> <p>ד"א ויהי לי שׂוֹר וְחֲמֹר שׂוֹר זה יוסף שנאמר (דברים לג) "בכור שורו הדר לו." חמור זה יששכר דכתיב (בראשית מט) "יששכר חמור גרם." ובן בנו של יוסף עומד לכלות את עמלק שנאמר (שמות יז) "ויחלוש יהושע את עמלק ואת עמו לפי חרב." ובניו של יששכר יודעין מה הקב"ה עושה בעולמו שנאמר (ד"ה א יב) "ומבני יששכר יודעי בינה לעתים לדעת מה יעשה ישראל ראשיהם מאתים." וצאן אלו ישראל שנאמר, (יחזקאל לד) "ואתן צאני צאן מרעיתי אדם אתם. ועבד זה דוד שנאמר (תהלים קטז) "אני עבדך בן אמתך." ושפחה זו אביגיל שנאמר (שמואל א כה) "הנה אמתך לשפחה."</p>
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The general direction of the Midrash is clear, as Harav Moshe Alshich, זצ"ל, says:

<p>3. Torat Moshe on Bereishit 32:1 ... With all of Yaakov's submissiveness, he hinted to Esav that he does not fear him.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">תורת משה על בראשית לב:א</p> <p>... עם כל הכנעתו רמז לו שאין חיתתו עליו.</p>
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This explains the first four items on the list: Yosef's descendant Yehoshua will wage war against Esav's descendant Amalek; Yissachar's descendants are tapped into Heavenly knowledge and are a secret weapon; Israel is G-d's sheep and He is their shepherd so they are protected; and David waged war against Amalek and ruled over Edom. **But why is Avigail mentioned along with Yosef, Yissachar, Israel, and David?**

B. The Story of David and Avigail

[A number of commentators base their explanations of this line in the Midrash on a Kabbalistic tradition that Avigail's first husband Naval was a reincarnation of Lavan – see, for instance, Harav Moshe Wolfson, אשליט"א's article in *אמונת עתיד*. The following suggestion is based on a comparison of the story of David, Naval, and Avigail with the story of the meeting of Yaakov and Esav.]

The episode of David and Avigail appears in Shmuel I Chapter 25. The story develops as follows: Naval was an extremely wealthy man, with thousands of sheep and goats; even though a descendant of the great and righteous Kalev ben Yefuneh, the Navi describes Naval as "a hard man of evil deeds." On the other hand, his wife Avigail is both beautiful and wise (and listed as one of the seven prophetesses on Megillah 14a). The first scene of the episode takes place in Karmel (in Yehudah, near Maon, where Naval lived), where Naval was shearing his sheep. David's men had protected Naval's servants and workers. David sent an extremely peaceful message to Naval – "Peace to you, peace to your household, and peace to all that is yours" – and requested that Naval send provisions to David's men. Yet Naval refused with an angry message: "Who is David and who is the son of Yishai? Today there are a lot of servants that rebel against their masters. I should give my water, bread, and meat that I slaughtered for my shearers to men that I do not know?"

David reacts to the message by girding his sword, bringing 400 sword-bearing men with him, and setting out to kill Naval and all of his men. One of Naval's servants warns Avigail of David's planned attack, emphasizing how David's men had protected all of Naval's staff and warded off attackers. Avigail, on her own initiative, loads donkeys with provisions and rides through the mountains to meet David and prevent a massacre.

Avigail convinces David to ignore Naval. She warns David against uselessly spilling blood, for G-d Himself will punish her wicked husband Naval for his actions. David blesses Avigail for preventing an unforgivable sin, accepts her present, and returns home. When Avigail returns home her husband is in the midst of drunken feasting, but in the morning she informs him of what transpired. Naval's "heart was as stone within him," realizing how close to death he was. Ten days later G-d smites Naval. Eventually David marries Avigail.

C. Striking Parallels

Both the plot and the language of the story strikingly parallel the meeting of Yaakov and Esav:

- David and his 400 sword-bearing men travelling to kill Naval recall, lehavdil, Esav and his 400 men coming to kill Yaakov. Both Esav and David are described as אדמוני, reddish (Bereishit 25:25 and Shmuel I 16:12).
- Avigail, like Yaakov Avinu, is told by a messenger about the impending attack and plans to avert the massacre through both a gift – in both stories referred to as a blessing (ברכה in Bereishit 33:11 and הברכה in Shmuel I 25:27) – and a convincing speech.
- Both Avigail and Yaakov Avinu show extreme submissiveness, bowing down and referring to themselves as servants.

These parallels between the two episodes might be the background of the midrashic mention of Avigail.

D. Explaining Our Midrash

Perhaps our Midrash is imagining the following conversation:

Esav: True, your Yehoshua is stronger than my Amalek, and your Yissachar has inner Divine knowledge and G-d is the shepherd of Israel His sheep – but who says that if you were wronged the way I was you wouldn't want to kill me? Who says you are any more moral than I am? I'm going to kill you because if the tables were turned you would have killed me.

Yaakov: My descendant David was in a position very much like yours. He was wronged by Naval and was on the way to kill him. But he was convinced by my descendant Avigail not to spill blood. David did not kill the one who wronged him the way you are trying to kill me. Plus, look at the contrast between your wives, Esav, who were a cause of bitterness to both Yitzchak and Rivkah, and David's righteous [eventual] wife Avigail, who gently turned him in the right direction. **I have a servant – David – and a maidservant – Avigail.**

THE LIGHT OF DINAH BY RABBI GIDON SHOSHAN

On the night before the dramatic reunion of Yaakov and Esav, the Torah tells us that Yaakov crossed the land bridge at Yabok with his two wives, two maid-servants, and eleven children. Rashi asks: Was not Yaakov already the father of twelve children – his eleven sons and his daughter Dinah? Where, in this event, was the twelfth child?

Rashi answers and acknowledges that Dinah was not among the numbered children. For on the eve of his encounter with Esav, Yaakov hid his only daughter so that Esav would not see her and ask for her hand. Rashi adds that Yaakov was punished for hiding Dinah, as he should indeed have shown her to Esav and allowed Dinah to marry him. Dinah, Rashi explains, would have had a positive influence on Esav and returned him to the righteous path of his parents and grandparents.

Surely, Dinah must have been some young woman. But still, how could Dinah have succeeded where Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov failed? Esav was raised in the home of Yitzchak, spent his youth around his grandfather Avraham, and matured alongside Yaakov. The influence of these three spiritual titans was not enough to keep Esav in the fold. How could Dinah's kiruv have been more effective?

I recall Rabbi Yitzchok Cohen, one of the Roshei Yeshiva at Yeshiva University, once asking this question in his weekly address. He answered with a simple explanation that made an indelible imprint on my mind and soul. It is simple. Nothing is as powerful and impactful on a man's spirit as is the influence of his wife. Sure, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov could not impact Esav, but they were not his wife. Dinah, as his wife, could return Esav to the righteous traditions of Avraham and his family.

Rabbi Moshe Wolfson explains that Dinah, whose light was so powerful that it could shine within the darkness of Esav and Shchem, is symbolic of the light of Chanukah. We light the candles not only to shine on our homes; we light them by the doors and the windows to shine out into the dark streets and exiles of our surroundings.

More than any mitzvah, Jews of all religious levels and affiliations perform the traditions of Chanukah lighting in their homes. The light of Chanukah, like Dinah, harnesses the power to illuminate even those souls who have strayed furthest from their source. Prepare yourself to access the light.

We mourn the tragic deaths of Reuven Aviram, ר"ה, Harav Aharon Yesayev, ר"ה, Harav Yaakov Don, ר"ה, Ezra Schwartz, ר"ה, Hadar Buchris, ר"ה, and Pvt. Ziv Mizrahi, ר"ה, all murdered in terrorist attacks. We continue to pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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