
א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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וישח

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יעקב The Two Sides of

By Nessa Jaffe and Avishag Salzman

This week's פרשה, וישח, is full of stories, but there is a puzzling part in which יעקב's name was changed to ישראל.

On the way to עשו, יעקב might have forgotten something so he goes back and checks. At this place, he fights with an איש. There are many מפרשים who try to explain who the איש is, but the most widely used opinion is that he was the מלאך of עשו.

After they fight יעקב asks for a ברכה, and the מלאך changes his name to ישראל. The פרשה goes on, but we see that he still gets called יעקב. Later in the פרשה we see that ה' tells יעקב he will be named ישראל again! And even after that he is still called יעקב. When אברהם and שרה got their names changed it stayed changed for the rest of their lives. Not only this but we are also told that we are not *allowed* to call them by their old names. However, even after יעקב's name was changed he's still, at times, called יעקב. In order to know why this is, we first need to know what ישראל means. רש"י explains that the word יעקב means tricking, and he got the ברכה the first time from tricking. But now after living with לבן and doing the מצוות his name is ישראל - which is like ישר - that all the ברכות he gets now are not from tricking ways - all the ברכות he gets now are because he did the מצוות.

ספורנו explains that ישראל has the word שר in it - officer, meaning leader. His original name meant heel, meaning the bottom. He says the name is like a prophecy for the Jewish people, for them to be leaders when משיח comes.

These two sides to יעקב are also displayed in his wives. רחל is the wife of יעקב, his main wife in this world, while לאה is ישראל's wife, his wife in the next world. This distinction is also represented in their kids. The child of רחל, יוסף, was very important in ספר בראשית, back when יעקב was alive, but his שבט wasn't nearly as important as he was, whereas לאה's children, like יהודה or לוי, for example, weren't nearly as important in their lifetimes, but their descendants ended up being very important. The children of לוי were the כהנים and לויים, fulfilling the spiritual role of the Jews, and יהודה's children ended up being the kings and leaders of the Jews, and from him, and therefore from לאה, will the משיח come.

Every time יעקב displays leadership or is about to go into a difficult situation, it is like saying that he is fulfilling the prophecy before his time. ספורנו also says that no matter how much the Jews are being persecuted, they will always be leaders in the end. This relates to this coming holiday, חנוכה. Even though the Greeks tried to get rid of us and were harshly persecuting us, we survived and were victorious.

In the merit of ישראל, as בני ישראל in ארץ ישראל, may we merit to be saved, and end up being the leader of the land, and may our destiny of משיח come, במהרה בימינו.

גיד הנשה The Mystery of the

By Arie Kangoun

In this week's פרשה, פרשת וישלח, פרשה יעקב struggles with an angel at פנואל. While wrestling the angel, יעקב's hip socket got dislocated. Afterwards, יעקב names the place פנואל, after which the תורה says, "וַיִּזְרַח-לּוֹ, הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת-פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צָלַע עַל-יָרְכוֹ: עַל-כֵּן לֹא-יֹאכְלוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-גִּיד הַנֶּשֶׁה עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף-יָרְךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד הַנֶּשֶׁה: ", that the sun rose upon יעקב as he left פנואל, and he was limping on his hip, and due to this, the Jewish people may not eat the גיד הנשה (Sciatic Nerve), that is on the joint of the hip to this day, because the גיד הנשה of יעקב was hurt. (בראשית לב:לב-לג). These פסוקים say that due to יעקב limping on his hip, the Jewish people are not allowed to eat the tendon of an animal's thigh to this day. Why would יעקב hurting his hip, a seemingly mundane event, lead to us not being able to eat this body part for all of time?

The רשב"ם and the בכור שור both say that we don't eat the גיד הנשה in order to commemorate יעקב's great heroism. It was to show that our forefather יעקב was capable of staying alive while fighting an angel. Due to this great feat of strength, we don't eat the גיד הנשה out of respect for יעקב. However, based on this, why would we decide not to eat the thigh? It seems even better fitting to commemorate this event by celebrating the גיד הנשה! Shouldn't we remember the event by eating the thigh on a special occasion?

ספורנו offers an alternative interpretation. He says that the thigh is a bland piece of meat and is not pleasant to eat. From this he concludes that it's a lesson to not second guess ה' judgment. What he means by this is that even if we find a commandment that seems insignificant, we as humans should not question it regardless of whether we prefer something else. This idea of a law we don't understand is a חוק. Throughout תורה there are numerous examples of laws which are difficult to understand. Therefore, we can learn from what ספורנו says that when we don't understand why we have a certain מצוה, we will remember the גיד הנשה, the bland piece of meat which we are not allowed to eat.

We can learn a lesson from each of these explanations. רשב"ם and the בכור שור teach us that we should always have respect for the great things which our people have done. Each day, we are constantly commemorating this feat of יעקב by not eating the גיד הנשה, so we should also remember all of the feats of other great Jews, both in our generation and who have come before us. ספורנו teaches us that we should always trust ה'. Even if a מצוה seems like it's insignificant or unnecessary, it was really put in place for our own good. By following the מצוות, we are able to live long and fulfilling lives, with straight morals and a good lifestyle.

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