

MITZVAH 1: NOT TO EAT THE GID HANASHEH

by Rabbi Moshe Goldberger

The sun rose for him [Yaakov] when he passed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. Therefore, the children of Israel do not eat the sciatic sinew which is on the thigh until this day, for [the angel] touched the hollow of Yaakov's thigh on the sciatic sinew. (Bereishis 32:31-32)

The first mitzvah the Chafetz Chaim lists is not to eat the part of an animal called the gid hanasheh. This is based on the pasuk in Bereishis, which explains how we do not eat the sciatic sinew of an animal because Yaakov Avinu was hurt in his struggle with the angel.

The commentators explain many lessons that are inherent in this mitzvah: 1. To remind us that we must always maintain our guard against the evil inclination, whom the angel that Yaakov battled symbolized. We need to continue to fight without weakness or discouragement (Rav Miller, *The Beginning*, p. 499).

2. To remind us that when we do our best, Hashem will help us overcome our enemies, as He helped Yaakov Avinu in his battle against the angel (Sefer HaChinuch, mitzvah 3).

3. It is a reminder to thank Hashem for helping Yaakov Avinu and for continuing to help us (Da'as Zekeinim, Bereishis 32:33).

4. To remind us that Yaakov's children should not have let their father go alone to retrieve the small jars, since this resulted in him being vulnerable to the angel's attack. Had they gone to escort him, the injury would never have occurred (ibid.).

It is interesting to note that the Sefer HaChinuch, which chronicles all the mitzvos of the Torah in the order they were given, lists only three mitzvos from Sefer Bereishis: procreation, bris milah, and not eating the gid hanasheh. Thus, this is the first prohibition of the Torah given to the Jewish people, and the only one in Sefer Bereishis. The three mitzvos of Bereishis have been explained to parallel the three avos. Procreation parallels Avraham, the pillar of chesed, since it is a mitzvah similar to hachnasas orchim, bringing guests into Hashem's world and caring for them. Bris milah parallels Yitzchak, the pillar of avodah, since bris milah is a symbol on our body that we are ready to serve Hashem. Yitzchak was also the first child in history to have his bris on the eighth day of his life. Gid hanasheh parallels Yaakov, whose middah was emes, or Torah, since the gid hanasheh is in the thigh, which is a support of the body, corresponding to Torah, which is one of the pillars that support the universe. The sefarim cite a fascinating Zohar based on the Talmud (Makkos 23b) which explains that the 365 prohibitions of the Torah correspond to the 365 days of the year. Each day reminds us to

obey one of the 365 prohibitions of the Torah. The Zohar adds that Tishah B'Av is the day which corresponds to the gid hanasheh. The two Batei Mikdash were destroyed on this day, which corresponds to a slight weakness in our great ancestor, the third of our founding fathers. We fast and refrain from food on this day, until the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt, may it happen speedily in our day.

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