

# A GOOD NAME FORFEITED IN A MOMENT

*by Shlomo Katz*

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As this parashah opens, Yaakov sends messengers to his brother Esav to prepare Esav for their reunion. Yaakov's message is (32:5- 6), "I sojourned with Lavan and lingered until now. I have acquired an ox and a donkey . . ." Chazal say that the ox is a reference to Yosef, as it is written (Devarim 33:17), "Sovereignty is his, ox-like one," while the donkey is a reference to Yissachar, as it is written (Bereishit 49:14), "Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey." What was Yaakov's message to Esav?

R' Gedaliah Anemer shlita (Rosh Hayeshiva of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington) explained as follows: When Yaakov fled from Esav, but before he set out for Lavan's house, he prepared himself in two ways. First, Chazal tell us that Yaakov spent 14 years studying Torah in the house of Shem and Ever. Second, we read at the beginning of last week's parashah of the dream that Yaakov dreamt before reaching Lavan's home. (In contrast, we do not find in the Torah even one instance where either Avraham or Yitzchak dreamt.)

Yaakov's son Yosef most exemplified Yaakov's nature as a dreamer, as we will read in next week's parashah. As for Torah scholarship, this is the trait most associated with Yaakov's son Yissachar. [Throughout the generations, Chazal tell us, the distinguished members of the Sanhedrin came from Yissachar.] This, then, is the message that Yaakov sent Esav: "I can face any challenge that I may encounter because of the two weapons that I have. I have the donkey, i.e., Yissachar the power of Torah and I have the ox, i.e., Yosef the ability to dream of great things ahead." With such weapons, any dark force, even that of Esav, can be defeated. (Heard from R' Anemer, 9 Kislev 5758)

## An Astonishing Midrash

*"Therefore Bnei Yisrael will not eat 'et gid hanasheh' / the displaced sinew on the hip socket to this day." (32:33) this includes Tisha B'Av.*

G-d had contemplated that there would be 13 tribes, not 12 [see Bava Batra 122a], but the angel made this impossible when he injured Yaakov. Thirteen is the gematria of the word "echad/one," signifying the unity that would have existed among the tribes had there been 13 of them.

Because Yaakov could not father the 13th tribe, Yosef had to be divided into two tribes. So, too, there has always been division among the Jews, and such a division caused the destruction of the Temple. Thus, the quoted verse alludes to the four fast days that commemorate the destruction of the Temple, as follows:

1. The "gimmel" of "gid" alludes to Tzom Gedaliah. ("Gimmel," the third letter of the Aleph-Bet, stands for the third day of Tishrei.)
2. The "yud" of "gid" alludes to Asarah B'Tevet. ("Yud," the tenth letter, stands for the tenth day of Tevet.)
3. The gematria of "gid" is 17, representing the Fast of the 17th of Tamuz.

Where is Tisha B'Av alluded to? Chazal teach that wherever the article "et" appears in the Torah, it comes to include something that is not obvious from the verse itself. In this case, the word "et" alludes to Tisha B'Av. Indeed, the word itself is the acronym of the words "Av-Tisha."

(Binat Nevonim)

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## ***"Why do you ask my name?" (32:30)***

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l observed that Yaakov faces two confrontations in this parashah, one with Esav and one with an anonymous "man." These two confrontations were qualitatively different.

When Yaakov faced Esav, he knew that Esav hated him and he knew exactly why (i.e., because Yaakov took the birthright and the blessings). However, when Yaakov fought with the unnamed man, he did not know who his enemy was, let alone why the enemy attacked him.

Such is the nature of our experience in exile. More often than not, we do not know who our enemies are. At the beginning of this century, for example, many Jews believed the socialists who claimed that capitalism caused anti-semitism. Yet, when the socialists (i.e., communists) gained control in Russia, anti-semitism actually became more intense.

(Divrei Hashkafah p.23)

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***"Yaakov arrived whole at the city of Shechem . . . and he camped before the city." (33:18)***

The Hebrew words which mean "he camped before the city" also mean "he beautified the face of the city." The gemara (Shabbat 33a) offers three interpretations of how Yaakov beautified the city: (1) he introduced coinage; (2) he built bathhouses; or (3) he established public squares.

R' Yeshayah Horowitz z"l (the "Shelah Hakadosh"; 17th century) explains this as follows: On the statement in the above verse that "Yaakov arrived whole," Rashi comments, "Whole in body, whole financially, and whole in his Torah learning." Yaakov shared this "wholeness" with the people of Shechem he was whole financially, so he introduced coinage to improve their financial dealings; he was whole in body, so he built bathhouses to improve their health; and he was whole in Torah, so he built public squares as places to spread the word of G-d.

(Shnei Luchot Haberit; quoted in Mussarei Ha'Shelah)

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***"Discard the alien gods that are in your midst . . ." (35:2)***

Rashi writes that this refers to the spoils from the city of Shechem. Did Yaakov's sons actually have idols from Shechem in their possession? Surely not, said R' Dovid Soloveitchik shlita. However, whenever one meets evil, even if he meets it in battle and destroys it (as Yaakov's sons did to Shechem), he is tainted by it. Thus Yaakov said, "Discard the taint of the evil of Shechem which is in your midst."

(Quoted in Shai Latorah)

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***"And Yitzchak expired and died . . ." (35:29)***

In the case of Avraham it says, "And die did Avraham" (i.e., the name Avraham is mentioned after the word "die"). R' Moshe Feinstein z"l explained that even after Avraham died, he was alive for his descendants, even for Yishmael, who had repented. Not so when Yitzchak died; in Esav's mind, he, and all he represented, was forgotten.

(Darash Moshe)

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R' Shlomo ibn Gabirol z"l

born 1021 - died 1058

R' Shlomo ben Yehuda ibn Gabirol was born in Malaga and died in Valencia (both in Spain). He was a paytan/liturgist and philosopher of whom it was said, "By subduing his natural instincts and inclinations in order to purify his body and soul, he achieved sublime holiness and ascended to heights unparalleled by his contemporaries." R' Avraham ibn Ezra wrote of him that "he possessed great wisdom regarding the secret of the soul."

Many of R' Shlomo's poems have been incorporated into our liturgy (although not all hymns signed "Shlomo ben Yehuda" are his), and, in some cases, later halachic authorities derived halachic principles from these poems. Several later sages also wrote commentaries on R' Shlomo's poems.

R' Shlomo also wrote a major philosophical treatise, *Mekor Chaim*. This work was written in Arabic, and in the 12th century was translated into Spanish and Latin. Thereafter, the original work was lost and its Jewish origins forgotten. In time, *Mekor Chaim* known by the Latin name, *Fons Vitae* became popular among Catholic intellectuals, while Jews shunned it. Only in 1846 were the work's origins discovered, and only in this century was it published in Hebrew for the first time.

R' Shlomo also wrote *Tikkun Middot Hanefesh*, in which he arranges virtues and vices in relation to the five senses, with every sense becoming the instrument of two virtues and two corresponding vices. (Sources: The Artscroll Rishonim p.61-62; Ibn Ezra, Bereishit 3:21; She'eilot U'teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer, Chelek Ramat Rachel)

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