

YOU'VE EARNED IT!

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Chullin 5:1-2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sanhedrin 73

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Eruvin 30

In this week's parashah, Yaakov and Esav's conflict over the bechorah / birthright reaches its climax. Yaakov faces-off against Esav's guardian angel, who is unable to defeat the Patriarch. The angel tells Yaakov (32:29): "No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with man, and have overcome." Rashi explains this statement: It will no longer be said that the blessings came to you through trickery ("akaivah" - having the same root as "Yaakov"), but rather openly because of your own strength.

R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (the Klausenberger Rebbe) elaborates: Why is it that Yaakov had to obtain the blessings while wearing Esav's clothes (as described in Parashat Toldot)? It was as if Rivka was telling Yitzchak, "It is true that Yaakov's descendants would be better off with no share in Olam Hazei / the comforts of This World, only in Olam Haba / the spiritual rewards of the World-to-Come. However, the challenge will be too great for many of Yaakov's descendants. If they cannot obtain some measure of comfort in a permissible manner, they will soon put on the garments of

Esav and become a part of his world."

R' Halberstam continues: The name "Yaakov" alludes to a Jew in a lowly spiritual state, while "Yisrael" alludes to a Jew on a higher spiritual level. Here the angel said to Yaakov: "Let it no longer be said that you received the blessings because you are Yaakov, because your descendants will be on a low level. Rather, you received the blessings because you are Yisrael, because you are important and worthy." (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'Geonei Ha'dorot)

"Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esav, 'So said your servant Yaakov, 'I have sojourned / 'garti' with Lavan . . .'" (32:5)

Rashi comments: The gematria of "garti" (gimel-raish-tav-yud) equals 613, as if to say, "I lived with the wicked Lavan and nevertheless observed the 613 commandments, and I did not learn from his evil ways."

R' David ben Shmuel Halevi z"l (1586-1667; author of Turei Zahav) asks: Why would Esav care? He explains:

Yitzchak had promised his son Esav that when Yaakov's descendants cast off the Torah, Esav's descendants would gain ascendancy over them. (See Bereishit 27:40 and Rashi there). Therefore Yaakov told Esav, "That time has not yet come. Even in Lavan's house I kept all 613 of the mitzvot."

R' David adds: How is it possible that Yaakov kept all 613 commandments? After all, some of them can be fulfilled only in Eretz Yisrael! He answers: The Gemara teaches that today, when there is no Temple, if one studies the laws of the sacrificial offerings, it is considered as if he brought a sacrifice. Similarly, writes R' David, Yaakov could have fulfilled all 613 commandments by studying their laws.

(Divrei David)

"Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav." (32:12)

Why was it not sufficient for Yaakov to say, "Rescue me from my brother, from Esav"? What is added by "the hand of"? R' Shmuel de Uzeda (Tzefat; late 1500's) explains:

There are two ways that a person - here, Yaakov - can be saved from an enemy - here, Esav. One is that the enemy (Esav) will have a change of heart and will go home without attacking. The second is that the enemy (Esav) will come face-to-face with the victim (Yaakov) and will see that the victim is too strong to be defeated. There is a definite advantage to the second type of salvation, for in the first case, the enemy can change his mind again and begin his attack anew. In the second case, on the other hand, there is a greater likelihood that the enemy will be too intimidated to ever return.

Therefore Yaakov said, "I do not wish to be saved while Esav is still at a distance. I want to be saved

from Esav's 'hands.' Let him come face-to-face with me and then realize that it is not in his interest to attack."

(Derashot R' Shmuel de Uzeda)

Shabbat

Avraham, about whom it is not written that he observed Shabbat, received a limited inheritance, as it is written (Bereishit 13:17), "Arise, walk about the Land through its length and breadth, for to you I will give it." Yaakov, about whom it is written that he observed Shabbat - it is written (in our parashah, 33:18), "He encamped before the city," which teaches that he established boundaries around the city beyond which one may not walk on Shabbat - he received an unlimited inheritance, as it is written (Bereishit 28:14), "You shall spread out forcefully westward, eastward, northward and southward."

(Yalkut Shimoni: Lech Lecha)

But are we not taught that Avraham observed the entire Torah? R' Zalman Rotberg (rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Bet Meir in Bnei Brak) explains:

The focus of the Midrash does not seem to be on whether Avraham observed Shabbat, but rather on whether the Torah records that he did so. What is the significance of that distinction? Just as Avraham knew prophetically about all of the mitzvot, he knew prophetically that there is a mitzvah to observe Shabbat. And, he did observe Shabbat. However, Avraham's observance of Shabbat is not written about in the Torah because Avraham himself did not achieve the level of knowing where Shabbat is written about in the Torah. In other words, Avraham knew of Shabbat as a mitzvah, but he was not aware of Shabbat's place within the context of the other mitzvot.

What is that place? R' Rotberg explains: Shabbat is more exalted than all other mitzvot, for it is the source of all blessings. All the blessings of the week come from the preceding Shabbat. Thus, for example, Maharal explains that the Shabbat before Pesach has special significance and is given a special name ("Shabbat Hagadol") because the ability of the Exodus to occur derived from the preceding Shabbat.

R' Rotberg concludes: The Midrash does not, of course, mean to demean Avraham. It may be true that he did not reach the ultimate in Shabbat observance. That could not happen until the Torah was given. Nevertheless, Yaakov's Shabbat observance and the Shabbat observance of those who would later receive the Torah were all an outgrowth of Avraham's efforts. This is very much the same as the blessings which are an outgrowth of Shabbat. The ultimate blessings may not come until later, but without Shabbat, they would never be.

(Tuv Da'at, Vol. III)

R' Yitzchak Uziel z"l

R' Uziel was born in Fez, Morocco, in approximately 1550. His family traced its origins to a distinguished Spanish family, many of whose members had fled the Inquisition in 1492. R' Uziel's great-grandfather, R' Yosef ben Avraham Hatzarfati, was a distinguished Torah scholar, and it was he who settled in Fez, where he was greatly respected. R' Uziel's father, R' Avraham Uziel, was a prominent scholar and poet in Fez.

R' Yitzchak Uziel left Fez in 1605 because of a famine, and became rabbi of Oran, Algeria. A year later, he traveled to Amsterdam, where he was a teacher and businessman. Among his students in Amsterdam was R' Menashe ben Yisrael. R' Menashe ben Yisrael is perhaps best known for persuading Oliver Cromwell to allow Jews to settle in England, but he also was a noted Torah scholar who left written works. In Amsterdam, R' Uziel was instrumental in the formation of Neveh Shalom, the second Portugese congregation in the city, and when the first rabbi of the congregation resigned in 1610, R' Uziel himself was chosen to succeed him. R' Uziel had a profound influence on the community of newly professed Jews, many of whom had been born and raised as Christians (because of the Inquisition) and whose outlook was still subject to subtle Christian influences. R' Uziel was steadfast and outspoken in his criticism of negative tendencies that he saw among his congregants, and this made him unpopular in some circles. In 1618, some of his congregants broke off from Neveh Shalom and formed another congregation.

R' Uziel wrote a work on Hebrew grammar entitled Ma'aneh Lashon, and he was considered an able poet. He died in Amsterdam in approximately 1622. (Source: The Early Acharonim)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
