

JEWS ARE NAMED FOR JUDAH

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayechi

Jews Are Named For Judah

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 663 - Belief in the Coming of Moshiach. Good Shabbos!

In Yaakov's blessing to his fourth son, he states: "Yehudah - you your brothers shall acknowledge; your hand will be at your enemies' nape; your father's sons will prostrate themselves to you." [Bereishis 49:8] Targum Yonoson ben Uziel interprets the opening words of this pasuk [verse] (Yehudah - ata yoducha achecha) to mean that the Jewish people will be called by his name (Yehudi), rather than by the name of any other tribe.

Up until this point, the descendants of the Patriarchs were called by the name Ivri (as in Bereishis 14:13; 39:14; 41:12). It is interesting that, in all the earlier places in the Book of Bereishis, Targum Unkelus translates the word Ivri as Avra-ah (ayin veis reish alephe hay), the Aramaic equivalent of Ivri. However, the first time the word is used subsequent to this blessing bestowed on Yehudah by his father [Shemos 2:11], Unkelus translates this very word (Ivri) differently. He translates it as Yehdai (yud hay vov daled aleph yud). Subsequent to Parshas Vayechi, it is established that Jews are called Yehudim, so when a subsequently reference is made to a member of the Hebrews in Chumash, the Targum translates the word as a derivative of the name Yehudah.

Guaranteed Protection from the Evil Eye

In Yaakov's blessing to Yosef, he states: "A son of grace is Yosef, a son of grace to the eye; girls stepped up to gaze." [Bereishis 49:22]. Rashi elaborates on this blessing: Yosef was so handsome that the Egyptian women went to great lengths to get a glimpse of him. Egyptian girls would climb up the walls when he went by, so that they would be able to gaze upon his beauty.

Is this the way we talk about a person known as "Yosef the righteous"? Do we describe him by saying he was "drop-dead gorgeous", that he was "a real knock-out"? Heaven forbid! The Torah is not discussing a movie-star that women swoon over when they see him approach! What, then, is the meaning of this pasuk?

Rashi adds a further insight into this pasuk: "They also expounded it as referring to the fact that the evil eye will not affect his offspring." The pasuk is not coming to tell us that the praise of Yosef was the fact that he was so handsome that women wanted to gaze upon him. On the contrary, the point is that despite the fact that everyone wanted to see him, he was given a special blessing that the "evil eye" [ayin hara] not rule over him. According to this interpretation, the words Alei Ayin in the pasuk are expounded as Olei Ayin, mean they supersede the evil eye and can not be affected by it.

The Talmud [Berachos 20a] states that Rabbi Yochanan used to sit by the ritual immersion pools (mikveh) at night so that when the women would emerge from their immersion, they would see Rabbi Yochanan, who was exceedingly handsome. [This is based on a Kabbalistic idea that the child one conceives immediately after immersing in the mikveh will be impacted by the first thing a woman sees following her immersion]. Rabbi Yochanan's colleagues asked him whether he was not worried about Ayin Hara [the evil eye] to do such a thing (bragging about his beauty, as it were). Rabbi Yochanan responded that he was not worried about Ayin Hara because he was a descendant of Yosef, who was immune from the effects of the evil eye.

The question is why Yosef would be immune from an "ayin hara"? Classically, we would think that he is a prime candidate for being vulnerable to the evil eye (since he is the focus of all the women's attention).

The Shemen HaTov addresses this question by reference to a Medrash [Bamidbar Rabbah Nasso 14] which discusses a special quality of the Mishkan in Shilo. Normally, sacrificial meats have to be consumed on the premises of the Temple compound. Mishkan Shilo however had the quality that one could consume meat sacrificed there as long as one was within sight of the Mishkan (b'chol haroeh). The Medrash goes on to say that Mishkan Shilo was built within Yosef's territory in Eretz Yisrael and since Yosef did not let his eyes feast on that which was not his (when tempted by the wife of Potiphar), therefore measure for measure, he was protected from the evil eye and likewise the Mishkan of Shilo's effect extended to everywhere from where it could be seen.

In other words, the praise of Yosef HaTzadik was that when all the Egyptian women were looking at him, he was not looking at them! He guarded his eyes and therefore he was protected from the evil eye. This is the antidote to Ayin Hara. Everyone in the world is worried about "Ayin Hara". They are the scariest two words in our vocabulary! But Chazal teach us a way to protect ourselves from it. When we watch our own eyes (from straying), then we will not be affected by the gazing of other people's eyes either!

This too, perhaps is what Rabbi Yochanan meant in the previously quoted passage from Gemara Berachos. When Rabbi Yochanan said he was a descendant of Yosef he did not necessarily mean that Yosef was his biological ancestor. He meant that he was Yosef's spiritual disciple. He was not concerned about the evil eye, because he knew that he was not looking at the women when they came out from the Mikveh. For this reason, he could be confident that there was no impropriety on

his part and that the evil eye would not affect him either.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas VaYechi are provided below:

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