

# RABBI FRAND ON PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

## The Explanation of a Familiar Custom

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #659 - Father of the Bride. Good Shabbos!*

This week's parsha contains the first occurrence of the concept of erecting a tombstone on the grave of a deceased person. Anyone who has been to a Jewish cemetery has probably noticed the custom of placing a rock or a few pebbles on a tombstone when departing. What is the source of the custom?

The Be'er Heitiv explains [Orach Chaim 224] this to be a manifestation of honoring the deceased (kavod hameis). When others pass by and see the collection of stones on the tombstone, they will say "Look how many people came to visit this grave site! It must have been a distinguished person who was buried here."

### Contrasting the Teshuva Of Yishmael With That of Eisav

I would like to share two comments on a rather obscure pasuk [verse] at the end of Parshas VaYishlach [Bereishis 36:3]. In listing the wives of Eisav, the pasuk mentions "Bosmas the daughter of Yishmael, the sister of Nevayos". Superficially, this is strange because we learned previously that Eisav married "Machalas the daughter of Yishmael" [Bereishis 28:9]. To explain this contradiction, Rashi quotes a Medrash from the Book of Shmuel. The Medrash names three individuals who have all their sins forgiven: (1) A convert; (2) A person who ascends to greatness; and (3) A groom who gets married. All of these concepts are derived from the fact that Eisav's wife was called Machalas (having the same root as mochel, which means forgiveness) even though her real name was Basmal.

The Ramban quotes a similar Medrash. At this point, Eisav intended to convert (i.e. - repent) and in fact was forgiven for his previous sins when he married Machalas (although he later reverted to his evil ways). The Ramban quotes a Medrash that she was called Basmal because "nisbasma da'ata alav". Rav Simcha Zissel Brodie explains this expression to mean that Eisav was exceedingly happy with himself. Rav Brodie explains an interesting phenomenon: Eisav did Teshuva but then apparently went back to his old ways. His Teshuva did not last. This is contrasted with Yishmael, who repented and the Teshuva did last until the end of his life.

We know that Yishmael's Teshuva lasted from the fact that Yishmael showed subservience to Yitzchak at the time of Avraham's death. Even though he was older and he originally hated Yitzchak, he showed Yitzchak respect by letting Yitzchak precede him during the burial service for Avraham. In contrast, when Yaakov died, the pasuk mentions that Eisav and Yaakov buried him. The implication is that Eisav still apparently demanded to be shown preference as the older of the two brothers.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that the reason why Eisav's Teshuva attempt was not successful is because he was too smug about it. The only way a person can remain on the straight and narrow is if he realizes that he has to continually grow. When a person reaches a state of contentment and is perfectly satisfied with who he is, that is a recipe for falling back down.

Many classic commentaries point out that the name Eisav (ayin sin vov) is related to the word asu-ee (ayin sin vov yud) meaning made or finished. A person who is "made" or "finished" has no more growing to do. The Baal HaTurim comments that the numerical value of Eisav is shalom (peace). Eisav's problem is that he is too much at peace with himself. He is too happy with his own accomplishments, looking at himself as a man who has no more growing to do. The Teshuva of such a person will not last. Teshuva can only be successful when a person knows that he has to constantly battle his yetzer hara and never rest on his laurels.

### **The Shifted Tzeire Shows Who Really Has G-d's Name Within Their Own**

Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer point out that only two nations have G-d's Name within their national identity: YisraEL and YishmaEL. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer then expounds the pasuk from Bilaam's "Blessing" [Bamidbar 24:23] which literally means "Woe is the one, who will live in the name of G-d" as referring to the nation of Yishmael that acts as if they were messengers of G-d. He can do dastardly things, but he thinks that he has the sanction of the Almighty Himself.

The name Yishmael appears 48 times in all of Tanach. This time [Bereishis 36:3] is the last time that it appears in Chumash. The next two times (in Melachim and Yirmiyah) are actually referring to a different person, a Yishmael ben Nesanya. The only other time it is mentioned is in Divrei haYamim, when the genealogy of Avraham is given and it mentions that Avraham had a son named Yishmael.

Grammatically, the sound of a Hebrew letter (the 'os') actually comes from the vowels underneath it. The suffix EL in the name YisraEL and YishmaEL gets its essence from the tzeire vowel (..) underneath the silent letter Aleph. However, throughout Tanach, the tzeire in the name YishmaeEL is not under the Aleph. It is under the preceding letter Ayin.

Yishmael may have the letters of EL in his name, but it is not the essence of EL (with the proper vowels). It is only a remote allusion to G-d's Name, not the essence of His Name. YishmaEL CLAIMS to have G-d's Name within his national identity. He acts as if it is there, but it is not really there.

I heard from Rav Chaim Kahan that this could be alluded to by the pasuk [Yeshaya 8:10] "Let them

plan (against us), it will become nullified; let them speak a matter (against us), it will not come to pass; for with us is G-d (ki imanu [k]El). We are the only nation that have G-d's name - [k]El - within our national identity.

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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 Vayishlach are provided below:

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