

Vayishlach 5776

November 27, 2015

A Taste of Torah

Make a Name for Yourself

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

What's in a name? Does one's name have an effect on their future? Let us examine some of the Torah's emphasis on the importance of one's name. In this week's parsha, Yaakov Avinu is told by Hashem, "Your name is Yaakov. Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael will be your name." (Vayishlach 35:10) The gemara (Berachos 13a) infers from the fact that the Torah continues calling him Yaakov (on certain occasions, as discussed further) that the name Yisrael was being instated as his primary name. The Maharsha (Rabbi Shmuel Eidels, 1555-1631), in his commentary on this passage of gemara, contrasts this with Avraham Avinu, whose name was originally Avram. When his name was changed to Avraham (Bereishis 17:5), his original name was no more, and one who continues using the name Avram, says the gemara (ibid.), transgresses a Torah commandment.

Why the different set of rules? The Maharsha explains that Avram means "father" of the land of Aram (see Rashi, Bereishis 17:5). Avram's role changed, as he was now going to father a great nation in the strict biological sense of the word; his name was thus changed to Avraham, meaning father of great nations. The old name no longer applied, and using it is misleading. However, Yaakov's name change was different. He merited receiving an additional dimension, the name Yisrael, which denotes importance (as in *sar*, minister). This doesn't render the old name obsolete, but, rather, secondary to the new, primary name.

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftoli Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, 1817-1893), in his commentary on the Torah, Ha'amek Davar, adds a

deeper understanding into this concept. In Parshas Vayigash (46:2), when Yaakov is on his way down to Egypt, he receives a divine dream which begins with Hashem calling him, "Yaakov, Yaakov!" He explains that from this point onward, during the seventeen final years that Yaakov spent in Egypt, he is rarely called Yisrael by the Torah. Yisrael is the name reserved for Yaakov and his descendants when they are on a subliminal level, not engaged in the daily physical aspects of this world. As they were about to embark on a new leg of their mission, the exile of Egypt, they would be forced to connect with the physical and are only called Yaakov. Only on the occasions when reaching the above-mentioned subliminal level are they again referred to as Yisrael.

The gemara (Pesachim 56a) tells us the origins of *Shema Yisrael*. When Yaakov was on his death bed, he called his children together, intending to reveal to them the time of the arrival of the Messianic Era. Suddenly, the Divine Presence left him, and he was unable to do so. He thought this was due to one of his children not being worthy and asked them if this was correct. They answered him "*Shema Yisrael*", "Hear, (our father) Yisrael, Hashem is one." The reason they referred to him as Yisrael is extremely appropriate when Yaakov is trying to climb the greatest spiritual heights and reveal some of the universe's greatest secrets.

One's name and how and when it's used can reveal his or her inner dimension. May we merit to live up to the full potential contained in our names and fulfill our purpose in this world.

Stories For The Soul

Stop Signs

On a fund raising trip to New York City, the Ponevezher Rav, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman (1886-1969) was approached by a gang of teenagers on the subway. Realizing the hoodlums meant trouble, Rabbi Kahaneman pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket and innocently asked the leader of the gang if he knew which subway stop would be closest to the address on the scrap of paper. Realizing that once off the train, they would have their target isolated and an easier victim, the leader smiled and signaled to the gang to wait patiently and politely until they got off at the stop.

When they arrived at the stop, the Ponevezher Rav let them go off first and lingered in the doorway. As the doors closed, he quickly moved back onto the train, leaving the stunned gang standing, embarrassed, on the platform, outwitted by an old man.

When Rabbi Kahaneman told this story to a friend, he explained that the Ramban says that when dealing with the Eisavs of the world for all future generations, one would be wise to look into Parshas Vayishlach, based on the principle of *maaseh avos siman labanim*, the deeds of the forefathers presage what will occur to their descendants. In this case, he explained, his circumstances compared to those of Yaakov when Eisav offered to escort him. Yaakov demurred, explaining that he'd be unable to keep up with his brother's pace, and suggested to Eisav that he go ahead to his land of Se'ir, while he would proceed slowly and arrive later. Yaakov's true intent was not to arrive at all, until the coming of Moshiach, who will arrive at Se'ir to bring Eisav to justice. Thus, concluded Rabbi Kahaneman, Yaakov's actions were a lesson on how to outwit those who wished to harm him.

Kollel Happenings

FAMILY FUN AT JEWISH FAMILY EXTRAVAGANZA ON DEC. 25TH

Join the Kollel for family fun at the annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza on Friday, Dec. 25th, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event will be held at South Suburban Family Sports Center, 6901 S. Peoria. Cost: \$15. Admission includes unlimited rides. Visit www.mazeltot.org to find out how to join for free until 12/23. For general information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE & HALACHA AT Dec. 2nd TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Daniel J. Sherwinter, Esq., partner, Marsh Fischman & Breyfogle LLP, and adjunct faculty at University of Colorado – Boulder, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they delve into the challenges posed by artificial intelligence. December 2nd, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

In Judaism, numbers are not simply a way to count things. Every number has a special significance. From *gematria* to *Who Knows One?* recited at the end of the Passover Seder, discover the world of numbers with Rabbi Moshe Heyman of the Denver Community Kollel. Every other Thursday from 2-3 pm Marathon Investments, 6565 South Dayton St., #1200. For more info, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: Why is *kaddish* recited after reading the Torah on weekdays but not at *mincha* on Shabbos?

A: Technically, *Chatzi Kaddish* is recited after every Torah reading, as it marks the end of a segment. At *mincha* on Shabbos, however, were we to recite *Chatzi Kaddish*, we would be unable to recite it again just prior to *Shemone Esrei*, which is what is usually done. We therefore

combine the requirement of *Chatzi Kaddish* into one recitation before *Shemone Esrei*. (see Mishna Berurah 292:4)

This week's question: Why is *kaddish* recited on Shabbos morning before the *maftir* reading?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbeinu Gershom Me'or Hagolah – Part III

There is a story that has been recorded that occurred during Rabbeinu Gershom's younger years. His teacher, Rabbi Leontin, had a daughter named Devorah. Rabbi Leontin took his illustrious pupil as a son-in-law for his daughter Devorah. Rabbi Gershom and Devorah then travelled to the famed Talmudical academy in the Babylonian town of Pumbedisa, where he studied under Rabbi Sherira Gaon and his son, Rabbi Hai Gaon. After several years of study, he trained to become a goldsmith, and moved to Constantinople, where he continued his studies and supported himself from his work as a goldsmith.

During this period, a terrible fire swept Constantinople, followed by a plague. Rabbi Gershom, being a man of great intellect, was also somewhat familiar with medicine, and he helped tend to the sick and wounded during this difficult time.

The Byzantine emperor of Constantinople, Basil II, had an advisor named John who was a rabid anti-Semite, and he convinced the emperor that the Jews were responsible for the twin calamities. Basil decreed that the Jews would be expelled from Constantinople.

At this time, the emperor's daughter fell ill, and none of the doctors could help her. Rabbi Gershom offered his services, and, after beseeching G-d to assist him, he succeeded in curing the princess. The emperor was overjoyed, and asked Rabbi Gershom what he wanted as reward. Rabbi Gershom responded that he wanted no wealth or riches; he only desired that the emperor cancel his decree of banishment. The emperor agreed, and Rabbi Gershom became Basil's advisor and confidant. Of course, this only served to inflame the evil John even further in his hatred of the Jews and, especially, of Rabbi Gershom.

To be continued

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