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Vayishlach

A PARASHA THOUGHT

What Is Your Name?



The new father ran frantically into the Rebbe's office. "Rebbe, Rebbe," he cried, "my wife just gave birth to a baby, what should I name the child?" The Rebbe looked up at the *chassid* quizzically. "G-d gave you the *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration) and you're asking me?" he asked.

A name is not an arbitrary thing, rather it defines the essence of what it is used for. Kabbalistic literature shares that when it comes to naming a child, there is a certain gift Hashem gives parents, in that the name they choose reflects the essence of their child's soul. This is not limited to the names of people. In the Torah's language, the names of the animals also reflect their inner meaning. The *Midrash* teaches that Hashem asked the angels to name the animals, but they were unable to; only Adam had the intellect to choose names for the animals reflecting their true nature. In light of this, we find a very puzzling conversation in our *parasha*. After Yaakov is victorious over the angel of Eisav, which represents the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), he turns to the angel and asks it to tell him its name. With this question Yaakov was asking, "all of my future generations will have to battle with the forces of evil, what is your essence?" The angel's answer seems quite underwhelming. He replied, "Why do you ask me my name?" Yaakov, however, seems to be happy with the answer. What did the angel mean? Rav Chaim Shmulevitz explains that the answer of the angel is the key to overcoming him. His name is "Why do you ask me my name." The entire power of the *yetzer hara* is an illusion. He tries to blind us and convince us not to challenge him but, rather, to follow whatever he tells us. All we have to do is challenge him, and his power dissipates. The *Midrash* compares the *yetzer hara* to a bandit sitting at the side of a road demanding that everyone hand over their money. All it took was one person to challenge the bandit and run away and it became clear that the bandit was a cripple.

We need to realize that the *yetzer hara* is an emissary of Hashem. His job is to provide a challenge in order for us to maximize our potential, but he has no power other than illusion. If we can challenge him, we will realize that there is truly nothing in the way of achieving greatness.

Mazal Tov to

Kollel Chairman, Mr. and Mrs. Ronnie Wilheim and Kollel Founder, Mr. & Mrs. Steve Rosedale, on the birth of a grandson/great-grandson to Eli & Rivka Bleeman!

THE RABBI WAS ASKED *ON THE PARASHA*

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI DOVID SPETNER

Q. When Hashem tells Yaakov to go Beis Eil, Yaakov tells his household to remove all of the foreign gods that are in their possession. Rashi explains that these were in their possession from the booty of the sacking of Shechem. Yaakov takes these gods and hides (presumably buries) them under a tree. Daas Zekeinim quotes a *Midrash* that one idol he buried was actually the form of a dove. Centuries later *Chazal* (the Sages) discovered that the Cusim were secretly worshipping it and, on the basis of this discovery, *Chazal* decreed on them the status of Goyim. Why did Yaakov bury the idol and not destroy it as the Torah prescribes?

A. Ramban asks this question and answers that certainly before taking any items of idolatry, Shimon and Levi had the people (perhaps the surviving women) nullify the status of the idols. This is a process that can be performed only by an idolator and an idolator can even be forced to nullify its idolatrous status. Despite the idols being nullified, Yaakov still wanted his household to be pure from even residual idolatry when going to Beis Eil. However, there was no longer any need to destroy it.

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing parasha@cincykollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

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RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUCK

Mitzvah #9

Take a look at any soap or cream. After a long list of ingredients the average person can't pronounce, there is a phone number for poison control, just in case one of those chemicals enters our sensitive human bodies. In the spiritual world as well, there are foods the Torah deems as poison for the Jewish body. For some reason the Torah names one such food, *chametz*, that is fine all year long but prohibited for the week of Pesach. Moreover, by all other forbidden foods there is no commandment to not have any of it in your house, while on Pesach even owning a small crumb of leavened bread violates a prohibition. This would lead us to believe there is something super dangerous about being connected in any way to *chametz*, like a radioactive material – but then why is it prohibited for only one week?

Brachos 17a says, "The will of the Jewish people is to do Your (G-d's) will. What prevents us? The "yeast in the dough" and the exile. The "yeast in the dough" mentioned here is a reference to the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), the little voice in our head that tries to convince us there is no Higher Power in the world and, even if there is, He couldn't care less what we do, as summed up perfectly in this line: "Drink and be merry because tomorrow you will die." For this reason, he is referred to as the yeast, representative of the inflated ego within each of us. This sounds like the *yetzer hara* has no positive use; it only serves to prevent us from serving Hashem. However, *Brachos* 54a teaches us that when we say in *Shema,* "You should serve Hashem your G-d with all your heart," it means with both the good and evil inclinations. What does serving G-d with your evil inclination mean? We can explain that we have the ability to transform our evil traits for good use – we can use our desire for money as an engine to do more *mitzvos* because we want to receive more reward in the next world, and we could use our ego as a means to not be embarrassed about our manner in which we serve Hashem. (Obviously the ultimate goal is serving Hashem for the true and right reason; nevertheless, our sages teach that doing *mitzvos* not for Hashem's sake will ultimately bring us to doing them for Hashem's sake.) If that's the case, we need to be really careful because we are "playing with fire." The *yetzer hara* is dangerous, even though it has a positive role. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Torah commanded us for one week to stay away completely from *chametz* – to show us that even though we can use the *yetzer hara*, represented by *chametz,* in a good way, it still is an extremely dangerous tool and we truly have to be careful. Precisely because of its danger we are commanded to not just abstain from eating, but even from owning, all leavened bread.

TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

Let's discuss a minhag relevant to this time of year – giving money to children on Chanukah, known as "Chanukah *gelt,*" or, in Hebrew, "*dmei* Chanukah." Where does this custom come from?

The *Mishna Berurah* (670:1) brings a related custom for people in financial need to collect from door to door on Chanukah, and writes that "there is a reason for this." The reason is provided by the Pri Megadim, who writes that since the Greeks were determined to destroy Torah learning, *tefillah*, and *chessed*, in response to that we strengthen our observance of those three *mitzvos* during Chanukah; therefore, giving *tzedakah* is part of our renewed commitment to *chessed*. This is an explanation for why we engage in the general *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* on Chanukah, but why would we specifically give money to children?

One explanation to this is found in the *Sifsei Chaim* (*Moadim* 2:134) in the name of the Ponovezher Rav, which is that after the Greek persecution ended, children were able to study Torah normally, and as an incentive for them to learn well, parents offered them money!



Of the other ideas given to explain the practice of Chanukah *gelt*, most of them are heavily Kabbalistic. See, for example, the *sefer Moed L'kol Chai* (27:77), where Rav Chaim Palagi quotes another *sefer* which provides detailed instructions about what amounts of money to give at what times, in addition to various holy intentions to have in mind while doing this *minhag*.

It's interesting to know that the Steipler Gaon was known to distribute Chanukah *gelt* on the fifth night of Chanukah, the reason being that the fifth night can never fall out on Shabbos (*Piskei Teshuvos* 680 footnote 24).