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# אשרינו Ashreinu

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion



## On a Mission

Ryvka Feigelstock

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Yoni Kurtz ('20)

Aharon Brandwein ('19)

Sara Deichman ('19)

Common sense will make you believe that the name of a parsha is chosen depending on one of the first words appearing in the first pasuk of each Torah portion. However, the Shelah

Hakadosh, Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz (1555-1630) brings an interesting point. There are two parashiot that start with a pasuk of similar structure.

“ואלה תולדות נח...”

“ואלה תולדות יצחק בן-אברהם...”

“These are the generations of Noach...” (Bereishit 6:9)

“And these are the generations of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham...” (Bereishit 25:19)

If we follow the logic that the first word of the pasuk is chosen to bear the name of the parsha, we would need here to have two Torah portions with the same name. However, the first pasuk is from Parshat Noach, whereas the second one is from Parshat Toldot. The Shelah goes on to explain that actually, the name of each parsha represents the essence of the entire Torah portion, to its deepest level, in the same way that the name of a person represents the essence of his soul and personality.

This statement brings us to our own parsha, Vayishlach, “and he sent”. Seemingly, the name “And he sent” refers only to one specific episode of the parsha, where Yaakov sends messengers with presents to his brother Esav in the hope to appease his anger and meet him in friendly terms. However, the Torah is not just a book of stories. Torah in Hebrew comes from the word *hora'ah*, teaching. Every event, pasuk, or

even letter written in the Torah has been designed to teach us a lesson on how to serve Hashem at all times. (Actually, Rabbi Akiva was able to learn lessons from the crowns drawn on top of the letters in the Sefer Torah!)

In the general sense of the word, Vayishlach, and he sent, refers to the concept of *shlichut*, sending an emissary or representative to fulfill a mission. In a more universal aspect, we are all emissaries of Hashem in this world, our souls being sent down to earth to fulfill a Godly mission: to perform the mitzvot of the Torah, to influence our surroundings in positive ways, to make this world a better place; a place of added purity and sanctity.

More specifically, we have two options in how to fulfill our mission to affect the outside world:

1. During each of our interactions in the world, we make sure to be a role model of integrity and dignity so as to inspire others to serve Hashem sincerely.
2. We may decide that the task is so immense that we cannot fulfill it on our own. Therefore we encourage our surroundings and infuse them with the same enthusiasm and sense of responsibility to change the world for the better. We can create our own shlichim who will also take on the role to spread the goodness and kindness in this world.

Those two approaches are alluded to in Yaakov's life over two parshiyot, Vayeitzei, and Vayishlach. Vayeitzei means "and he departed". Yaakov left his homeland in Eretz Yisrael on a mission to influence his new environment (Charan) which is deprived from spirituality.

Vayishlach means "and he sent", alluding to the second phase of his mission, where an emissary is not satisfied with his own achievements and he inspires others to be part of his mission as well.

Subsequently, this leads us to Parshat Vayeishev, which means "and he settled" (Rashi comments that Yaakov wished to settle in peace), alluding to the peaceful harmony of the true and complete redemption that would result from such actions, may

we merit it speedily.

## What's in a Name?

Yoni Kurtz ('20)

Parshat Vayishlach witnesses the birth of Yaakov's youngest son, Binyamin. His birth results in the death of his mother, Rachel, in labor. The Torah describes an odd episode involving the naming of the newborn baby:

וַיְהִי בְצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ, כִּי מָתָהּ, וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ, בֶּן-אוֹנִי;  
וְאָבִיו, קָרָא-לוֹ בְנֵימִין

*"And it was as her soul was departing, when she was dying, and she called him Ben-Oni, and his father named him Binyamin."* (35:18)

When read simply, Yaakov appears to do a terrible thing. Rachel, with her dying breath, names her son "Ben-Oni", and Yaakov has the audacity to disregard her. In perhaps an even more shocking pasuk, the Torah chooses Yaakov's decision over Rachel's, making Binyamin the only one of Yaakov's sons not named by his mother. Just six pesukim later, in listing Yaakov's sons, the Torah says:

בְּנֵי רָחֵל, יוֹסֵף וּבִנְיָמִן

*"The sons of Rachel: Yosef and Binyamin"* (35:24).

What's really going on here?

Rashi, among other commentaries, translates *Ben-Oni* to mean "the son of my suffering", relating to the difficult childbirth Rachel experienced. But raising a child with this name presents a glaring issue. Imagine, if every time Binyamin was called to do something, he was given a reminder that he was the reason for his mother's tragic death. If named *Ben-Oni*, he would have had to cope with even more guilt, on top of the normal teasing he must have gotten as the youngest child. Yaakov recognizes this, and puts an optimistic spin on Rachel's intended name.

The Ramban teaches that Yaakov wanted to preserve his wife's decision, but did not want to use the name that would remind him and his sons of

the passing of his cherished wife, Rachel. To do this, he played around with the Hebrew language. Giving the word *Oni* its other interpretation of strength, he named him Binyamin, meaning “son of strength”. Since “*yamin*” literally translates to right, and the right hand is associated with strength, Yaakov named his son Binyamin to give an optimistic connotation to the otherwise depressing name *Ben Oni*.

In changing his son’s name, Yaakov does something that can teach us all an important lesson. While preserving the decision of his late wife, who literally gave her life in birthing Binyamin, Yaakov sees the good in the name *Ben Oni*, rather than the suffering of his wife. He uses the more positive translation of strength, over suffering, to give the name Binyamin, which has become a widely popular name today, and eventually became the name of the tribe of several Jewish kings. Ultimately, it’s all about how one looks at it, seeing the good in the bad, seeing strength in a time of suffering. May we all learn the lesson of Yaakov, and always enjoy the positive things in life, with an optimistic outlook.

## Staying Strong

Sara Deichman ('19)

This week’s parsha tells the story of a reunion between polar opposites and distanced brothers, Yaakov and Esav. Yaakov, the learned, God fearing son of Yitzchak, lives for years employed by Lavan, an indubitably evil man, in order to stay far from Esav. However, years later, Yaakov is ready to leave Lavan with his family of 4 wives, 12 sons, and 1 daughter. Esav wishes to meet his brother and kill him. Yaakov then prepares for the meeting, and sends messengers to Esav. The message Yaakov sends is:

“*I’ve lived with Lavan until now!*” (32:5)

עם-לָבָן גִּרְתִּי, וְאַחַר עַד-עֵתָהּ

This phrase connotes an insightful meaning. Yaakov’s words are simply an explanation of his accomplishments. The phrase, “I lived”, in Hebrew, “*Garti*”, has the numerical value of 613, the same

number as the mitzvot of the Torah. While he has not yet received the Torah, our patriarch, Yaakov has divine insight and explains to Esav that even though he lived under the roof of an evil man, he stood in his ways, with his mitzvot, and acknowledges that Hashem is on his side. Therefore, Yaakov warns Esav he does not stand a chance. If Yaakov was able to stay true to his ways under the influence of Lavan, he will also stick to Hashem in the face of his brother, and therefore, Esav should be the fearful one. This teaches us the lesson of faith in God despite external forces.

Looking further into the parsha, when Yaakov originally hears about Esav’s arrival, he turns to Hashem, saying,

הַצִּילֵנִי מִיַּד אָחִי, מִיַּד עֵשָׂו

“*Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav.*” (32:12)

Another question can be drawn from this statement. Why does Yaakov say both my brother and Esav? Aren’t they the same person? The Beit Ha-Levi brings an explanation. There are two ways Esav can attack Yaakov. Either physically through war, or through social pressure. War is disastrous, and greatly appalling. Yet, assimilation poses an almost bigger threat to the Jewish people. Yaakov asks God for strength in two ways. One to be saved from physical war (Esav), and second to be saved from negative influence (my brother). Today, both of these threats stand before the Jewish people. It is important for each and every one of us to recognize where we stand. May we all trust in God to provide us with peace and the strength to stay true to ourselves in the future.

## Family Matters

Aharon Brandwein ('19)

In this week’s parsha we learn that Yaakov sent messengers to Esav and he found out that his brother Esav was on his way to kill him. Yaakov prepared for the worst by distributing his belongings and

praying to Hashem for safety. However, when Yaakov encountered Esav, he was greeted with a loving hug and tears. What caused Esav to have this change of heart? While one can argue that it was purely divine intervention that caused this to happen, others argue it's something more meaningful than that. To understand Esav's reaction, we must recognize what really matters in one's life.

Esav was known for his possessions. Esav had servants, land, money and power. After being introduced to Yaakov's family, Esav says

יש לי רב

*"I have plenty" (33:9).*

Esav definitely had more than "plenty", it seems that he wasn't content with what he had. After, Esav asks Yaakov what he has, Yaakov responds

יש לי כל

*"I have everything" (33:11).*

While Esav may have a lot of monetary possessions, Yaakov has the most valuable item, a loving, God fearing family.

While Yaakov's encounter with Esav was seemingly miraculous, Esav discovered something else, that family matters most. Our families are priceless. The love we have for our parents and siblings will outlast any possessions we may acquire. Esav's recognition of the value of family, diminished his hatred for Yaakov so all that was left was love,

וַיֹּאמֶר, נִסְעָה וְנִלְכָה וְאֵלֶיךָ לְנַגְדָּךְ

*"Thereupon, he [Esav] said, "Travel and we will go, and I will go alongside you [Yaakov]". (33:12)*



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