



Rachel's Last Words

By Yosef Fertig, 12th Grade

In the last moments of her life, Rachel Imeinu was lying on her deathbed as she was giving birth to her second son. During her last moment on Earth, Rachel says her final words. "As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named him Ben-oni" (35:18). Rashi quotes from Bereishis Rabbah that Ben-oni means, "the son of my pain." The simple understanding is that the birth of Binyamin caused her tremendous pain; therefore, she called him Ben-oni, representing the affliction caused by his birth.

There's a famous idea that when a parent names their child, they have a sort of Ruach Hakodesh while doing so. A name is a very powerful thing that represents the essence of a person. How then could Rachel have given her son such a name? Seemingly his name is really just a complaint about the pain that she was experiencing at that moment. Also, this was Rachel's "last will and testament" and her legacy before she died. Why then would she take this opportunity to seemingly complain, rather than to give a blessing or words of hope as a reflection on her life?

I want to humbly suggest the following explanation. It is evident

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Brachos Before Mitzvos

By Ari Zelefsky, 11th Grade

The gemara in Pesachim 7b states that brachos need to be recited oveir laasiyasan (before the mitzvah is performed). However, this word "oveir" is very strange, and is not commonly used to mean "before."

The word is so strange, in fact, that the gemara itself questions how the word oveir means before.

In answering this question, the gemara quotes three pasukim where "oveir" is used. One Pasuk comes from this week's parsha, when Eisuv approached Yaakov and his family. The pasuk says "Vihu avar lifneihem", using a variation of oveir to say that Yaakov went in front of, or before, his family. The second time oveir is used to mean before is in Shmuel Bet, when Achima'atz ran before the Kushi in order to tell Dovid the news that Avshalom had been defeated. Finally, in the second perek of Micha, the Navi describes what will happen when Mashiach will come, and uses the word oveir to tell us that Hashem will go ahead of us.

All three of these pesukim seem to prove that oveir can mean before. So why is it, then, that the gemara quotes all three of them? Wouldn't just one pasuk be enough? Rav Yamin Goldsmith explains that the gemara quoted all three of these pesukim to teach us three distinct lessons about birchos hamitzvos, and why they are completed before the act of performing a mitzvah. The pasuk that describes Achima'atz running ahead to tell

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Torah Teasers

By Rabbi Moshe Erlbaum, 9th Grade Rebbe

Parshas Vayishlach Questions

1. This parsha begins: "And Yaakov sent messengers" to Esav. Where does the Torah state: "And Yisrael sent messengers"?
2. In this parsha, what verse has 8 words in a row ending with the letters *yud-mem*?
3. What competitive sport is mentioned in this parsha?
4. Who is mentioned in the Torah as walking with a limp?
5. In this parsha, Shchem and Chamor who are killed "at the point of a sword." Who else in the Torah is killed "at the point of a sword"? (2 answers)
6. In this parsha, who dies during childbirth? Where else in Tanach does a woman die during childbirth?
7. Which married couple in this parsha have names that begin with the same letter? Which other married couples in the Torah have names that begin with the same letter? (2 couples - one found in Rashi)

Answers

1. Numbers 21:21 states that "Yisrael sent messengers" - i.e. the Jews sent messengers to the Emorite king for permission to cross his land.
2. In Genesis 32:15, the gifts of Yaakov to Esav are enumerated, with 8 words in a row ending with the letters *yud-mem*.
3. Wrestling is mentioned in Genesis 32:25: "And a man wrestled with him [Yaakov]."
4. Yaakov walks with a limp after he is injured in the wrestling match (Genesis 32:32).
5. The nation of Amalek is killed "at the point of a sword" (Exodus 17:13), as is Sichon (Numbers 21:24). Bilaam is also killed by sword but the verse states "with the sword," not "at the point of a sword" (Numbers 31:8).
6. Rachel dies when giving birth to Benjamin (Genesis 35:18). In Tanach, the wife of Pinchas ben Eli dies in childbirth (1-Shmuel 4:20).
7. Esav is married to Ada, both beginning with *ayin* (Genesis 36:2). Aaron married Elisheva, both beginning with *aleph* (Exodus 6:23). The wife of Noach is Na'ama, both beginning with *nun* (Genesis 4:22 with Rashi).

“Duck, Duck, Duck, Pigeon — Not everything will be as it seems”

- David Nisanov, DRS GO President

ALIYAH SUMMARY

First Aliyah: On his way home to his father, Yaakov sent messengers to Eisav. The messengers reported back that Eisav is coming to greet Yaakov with 400 men. In response Yaakov divided his family and belongings into two groups so one group could flee if the other faced a battle. He also prayed to Hashem to protect him.

Second Aliyah: Yaakov sent Eisav gifts, in the form of hundreds of heads of cattle and sheep, in order to appease him. That night, Yaakov crossed a river with his family after which he encountered Eisav's angel who wrestled with him until dawn. Although Yaakov won, he was injured by his sciatic nerve. When the angel wished to leave, Yaakov refused to let him go until he got blessed by the angel. The angel blessed Yaakov and informed him that his name would eventually be changed to Yisrael.

Third Aliyah: The Torah tells us that we do not eat the sciatic nerve (*gid hanashe*) of any animal because of the wrestle between Eisav's angel and Yaakov. When Eisav and Yaakov finally met up they embraced and wept.

Fourth Aliyah: Yaakov's family approached and greeted Eisav. Yaakov pushed Eisav to take the gift he had sent him. Eisav offered to accompany Yaakov on his trip home, but Yaakov declined the gesture. Eisav returned to his home in Se'ir, and Yaakov proceeded to the city of Sukkot. Eventually Yaakov arrived at the outskirts of the city of Shechem, where he purchased a plot of land and built an altar to God.

Fifth Aliyah: Yaakov's daughter, Dinah, was abducted and violated by Shechem. Chamor, the governor of the city and father of Shechem, informed Yaakov that his son wanted to marry Dinah. Yaakov's sons slyly agreed to the proposition, provided that all the men of the city would circumcise themselves to which they agreed. On the third day following their mass circumcision, Dinah's two brothers, Shimon and Levi, killed all the city's male inhabitants and saved Dinah. Yaakov was displeased by this act, fearing reprisal from the neighboring Canaanites. Yaakov arrived in Beis El, and Hashem appeared to him, blessed him, and changed his name to Yisrael.

Sixth Aliyah: On the way to Chevron Rachel passed away while giving birth to Binyamin; Yaakov buried her there. Later, Reuven interfered with his father's marital life. Finally, Yaakov arrived in Chevron. Yitzchak died, and was buried in Maras HaMachpeilah alongside his wife Rivkah and his parents. The Torah now lists the wives and descendants of Eisav who settled in Se'ir.

Seventh Aliyah: The Torah continues its listing of the family of Eisav in Se'ir.

Adapted from Chabad.org

10-Minute Halacha Shiur

Given by *Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz*
on yutorah.org

Transcribed by
Ari Keller

Eating Before Lighting Ner Chanukah

One must light the Menorah before he eats. However, if you know that you won't be able to light till late at night what must you do? Interestingly enough, this topic does not come up in the Gemarah, Rishonim, or even the Shulchan Aruch. While the Mechaber does discuss the permissibility (or lack thereof) of eating before other Mitzvos, he doesn't mention anything on that topic regarding Ner Chanukah.

When it comes to eating before doing Mitzvos, there are four categories of Mitzvos. Some Mitzvos can't be preceded by even a Te'ima (a little taste) such as Kiddush and Havdalah. Then there are some Mitzvos where you can't eat or taste, but can be Makel if you feel the need for it, such as before Mikras Megillah. A third category is when you can't eat before doing the Mitzvah, but you can taste; for example before davening Mincha and Maariv, and before Lulav. At first glance, the Mitzvah of Ner Chanukah would fit into this category. The fourth category encompasses eating before Shacharis; namely, that you can only be To'em certain bland drinks.

The Bach says that you aren't allowed to learn or eat before Ner Chanukah, just like by Bedikas Chameitz, and you should stop learning if you are already doing so. The Bach is Machmir here to prevent one from missing the Zman for lighting the Menorah. The Shaar Hatziyon is Machmir for the Shitah of the Bach. The Maharshal and the Mishnah Berurah are Machmir as well. To clarify, when we say you can't eat before Ner Chanukah, it means you can't have an Achilas Keva (a legit meal), but you can have a little Te'ima. Meaning, you can have Pachos Mi'Kebaitzah (less than the amount of an egg) of Pas (bread), Mezonos, fruits, or drinks. Just make sure not to be Kovea anything of Pas or Mezonos. However, some poskim are more lenient on this matter. Take the Magen Avraham for example, who quotes the Sefer Haminhagim saying that it's "Tov" to not eat before lighting. The language of "Tov" implies that there's no prohibition of eating, but it's probably a wise idea (so you don't miss the zman for lighting the Ner Chanukah).

Based on the above Shitas, the preferable practice seems to be to refrain from eating before lighting the Ner Chanukah. However, if you're in a situation where you won't be home till late (i.e. you're at a Chanukah party) what should you do? The Mishnah Berurah says that if you ask someone to remind you to light later on, or you set a reminder on your phone, you can eat before you light. However, some say that you should not ask a person who also has to light and should ask either a woman or someone who was already Yotzei the Mitzvah. For this reason, setting an alarm on your phone would be the better option.



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SPARKS OF CHASSIDUS



*With Max
Blumenthal*

As we all know, many of our role models from the Torah, such as Avraham, Sarah, and Yehoshua, had their names changed by Hakadosh Boruch Hu. In this week's Parsha, Hashem changes Yaakov's name to Yisrael. But this name change is different from all of the other ones that we learn about in the Torah due to the fact that he is called both Yaakov and Yisrael throughout the rest of the Torah. The obvious question is, what makes Yaakov's name change different from all the rest? Why is it that he is still referred to as both Yaakov and Yisrael?

The Nesivos Shalom, Rav Shalom Noach Berezovsky, or better known as the Slonimer Rebbe gives an amazing answer that we can learn an even more amazing lesson from. He explains that the reason why we refer to Yaakov as both Yaakov and Yisrael is to teach us about the two different forces that he had to deal with throughout his life, Lavan and Eisav. Lavan represents the flaws of one's mind, beliefs, approaches, and outlook. We know this because Lavan says in last week's Parsha, "The daughters are mine, the sons are mine, the sheep is mine, and everything you see here is mine" (31:43). We even say in the Pesach Haggadah that "Lavan wanted to uproot everything," because all Lavan wanted to do was to strike out the mind, which is like the driver's seat of our Neshamos. On the other hand, Eisav represents the impurity of our bodies and the bad desires that we all have. The Gemara (Bava Basra 16b) says that on the day that Eisav became a Bar Mitzvah he had relations with a married women and committed murder. Eisav relates to the animalistic side of man.

The name "Yaakov" counteracts Eisav. This is hinted at when the Torah says, "His hand held onto Eisav's ankle," meaning that Yaakov overcomes Eisav's body. "Yisrael" counteracts Lavan, who wanted to destroy the mind and soul. The letters of the word Yisrael can be regrouped to say, "Li Rosh" (lamed yud reish aleph hei), meaning, "The head belongs to me." In other words, Yisrael is in control of the head, not letting it get contaminated by the Lavan force. The Torah strengthens us against both of these forces. The Torah protects against the evil inclination, Eisav's force, as the Gemara says, "I created the Yeitzer Hara and I created the Torah to counteract it" (Kiddushin 30b). On the other hand, the Torah certainly purifies and illuminates the intellect and mind of the Jew.

These, in a much broader way, are two focuses of Yiddishkeit, Kedusha and Emunah. Kedusha (holiness) is the opposite of Eisav, and Emunah (belief) is the opposite of Lavan. They are also represented by the two Moshiachs, Moshiach ben Yosef and Moshiach ben Dovid. Mashiach ben Yosef will conquer the Eisav force, as Yosef stood above negative physical desire, and Mashiach ben David, connected with the quality of Malchus (Royalty), will bring the final geulah, conquering the Lavan force.

There is a big difference between the struggle over Kedusha and that over Emunah. Perfecting one's Kedusha demands superhuman power, special assistance from Hashem, whereas belief is embedded into every Yid. We are taught that Moshiach ben Yosef must sacrifice his life for the struggle, but that the final geulah will come through Emunah, which is a natural possession of a Jew. Yaakov, when his name was changed, was told, "You have struggled with the Divine and with man and triumphed" (32:29). Yaakov struggled both using his own powers against that which he could and through Hashem's help against that which was beyond his ability. In this pre-Moshiach time, the focus of our struggle is on Kedusha, counteracting the Eisav power. For this we require special help from the Ribono Shel Olam. However, this special help is available every Shabbos in the form of the Neshama Yeseira, the extra soul that we receive when Shabbat enters. The holiness of each Shabbos gives us the ability to rise in Kedusha. And hopefully by us rising in Kedusha we will merit to see the ultimate geulah, Moshiach, Bimheira B'Yameynu!

NATHANIEL DANESH

9TH GRADE

BECOMING THIRTEEN

In Parashat Vayishlach we see the Pasuk “Vayickchu Shnei Bnei Yaakov Shimon VeLevi Achei Dinah Ish Charbo” (34:25), which translates to, “Shimon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took each man his sword.” However, there is some confusion with this Pasuk. What does it mean when it says the word “Ish: man”? It seems as though that word doesn’t really add anything to the Pasuk and is extra?

To answer this question, we must look at the ages of the two sons being spoken about at this moment in time. When Dinah was taken, Shimon and Levi were only thirteen years old. However, the word “Ish” is there to tell us that they were already considered members of Klal Yisrael. Even though they were only thirteen years old, they were obligated to do all of the Mitzvot of the Torah, as though they were fully grown adults. However, this leads us to an additional question: what is the source for this Halacha? It doesn’t seem to be written anywhere in the Torah?

The Rosh answers this and writes that being Bar Mitzvah at the age of thirteen, and having all the obligations of an adult, is not a Halacha which is derived from the Torah. Rather, it is a Halacha L’Moshe MiSinai: something which is learned from Moshe at Har Sinai. The two types of Halachos differ in that a Halacha L’Moshe Misinai only applies to Jewish people, while a Halacha learned from the Torah can even apply to non-Jews. This crucial difference is the basis for much of Judaism, and is where we derive the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach.

A very important lesson can be learned from the ages of Shimon and Levi. The fact that they were only thirteen years, yet they still went out to fight for Dinah as though they were full adults, shows us that at the age of thirteen we must have Mesirat Nefesh. We become obligated in all of the Mitzvot in the Torah, and have to defend the sanctity of Klal Yisrael like a full fledged adult. Have a great Shabbos!



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STORIES OF GREATNESS

TOLD OVER BY: YOSEF SCHAFLER

Reb Eliezer Lipa was a simple but devout Jew who lived in Tarnow, Galicia. He was not well versed in Torah and didn't know the meaning of most of his daily prayers, but he always prayed with the minyan (prayer quorum) and was scrupulous to say all the proper responses to the prayer leader. He never conversed in the shul (synagogue), and he gave honor to Torah scholars and rebbeim. Reb Eliezer Lipa was a laborer who knew many trades, but he was most well known as a water-carrier. He worked hard and managed to make a decent living, as he had four wealthy customers who paid him above the average rate for his services. One day, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov arrived in Tarnow. This was before the Chassidic master had revealed himself to the world, and he appeared as a simple itinerant, with a gift of storytelling. He used to congregate with the other laborers and tell them stories from the Talmud. He would also speak to them about how G□d was pleased with the sincere prayers and straightforward faith of ordinary Jews. Reb Eliezer Lipa was guiding his wagon with its full barrel of water through the center of town, when he spotted his friend Reb Zalman Dov, a fellow water-carrier, along with some other men, gathered around a simply dressed itinerant, listening intently. His interest sparked and Reb Eliezer Lipa went over to join the circle of listeners. The Baal Shem Tov was telling the story of a wealthy man who lived in the days of the Holy Temple. "The wealthy man was taking a fattened ox to the Temple for a sacrifice. It was large, and when it decided to stop still in its tracks, nobody was able to convince it to walk further on. No amount of pushing and prodding could make that animal budge. "A poor man was watching the scene. In his hand were freshly picked greens. He decided to hold them to the muzzle of the ox, and when the animal began to nibble, he drew them away and thereby led the animal to its destination. "That night the owner of the ox had a dream. In his dream he heard a voice call out, 'The sacrifice of the poor man, who gave up the bundle of greens he was bringing to his impoverished family, was a more desirable sacrifice than your fattened ox.' "The wealthy man brought a large fattened ox for a burnt-offering. He was so joyful at being able to bring such an offering, that he also made a huge feast for his family and friends. He also distributed the proper gifts to the priests. His joy was intense. The poor man, on the other hand, had only a bunch of greens to bring home for his family. What were his few stalks compared to the fattened animal of the wealthy man? "Nevertheless,"

concluded the Baal Shem Tov, "G□d desires the heart. Any mitzvah a person may do, whether great or small, is judged by how it is performed. A mitzvah done for G□d's sake, with great joy and purity of heart, is very precious to the Creator. G□d, from His place in the heavens, saw that although the wealthy man had offered much, the poor man had offered much more." Reb Eliezer Lipa's mind knew no rest. How he longed to be able to do a mitzvah like the poor man in the story, with pure intention and a joyful heart! The weeks passed and Reb Eliezer Lipa still knew no peace; he ached with the desire to be able to do such a mitzvah. One day, as Reb Eliezer Lipa was delivering water to one of his wealthy customers, he had an idea. Reb Eliezer Lipa's four wealthy customers provided him with half of his livelihood since they paid him more than the going rate for a barrel of water. On the other hand, his friend Reb Zalman Dov supplied the town's four synagogues, which paid him half-price for their water. "I can exchange four of my customers for four of his," thought Reb Eliezer Lipa. "Four wealthy homes for four synagogues." He was anxious to serve G□d by providing water that the congregants would wash their hands with. Certainly, the mitzvah was of more value than the profits he would give up. He went home and told his wife about the story he heard, and how doing a mitzvah with joy is like bringing a sacrifice in the Holy Temple. His wife readily agreed to the idea, as did Reb Zalman Dov, who needed the extra income. They exchanged their customers. No one but Reb Eliezer Lipa and his wife knew what had happened, and they were overjoyed at the prospects for their new "business." Whenever he went down to the river to collect water, he would concentrate on the mitzvah of preparing the water for the congregants to wash their hands with; his joy was boundless. Amongst Chassidim, there is a tradition that Reb Eliezer Lipa and his wife were blessed with children as a merit for their mitzvah. They gave birth to two sons who grew to light up the Jewish world and inspire tens of thousands to return to G□d and to serve Him with joy: Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk and Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli— two of the most illustrious disciples of the Baal Shem Tov's successor, Reb Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch.

Adapted from Chabad.org

(Yosef Fertig-Continued from page 1)

in the Torah that Rachel had many hardships in her life. Beginning from her birth, Rachel grew up in the house of Lavan. Then, when she was ready to get married to Yaakov, her father tricked Yaakov into marrying her sister, Leah, instead. After all of that, Rachel spent years watching her sister give birth to one son after another while she remained barren for years; she then finally gave birth to one son next to her sister's six. This was tremendously painful for her and led to disputes with Leah as well as disputes with Yaakov. Now after all of this, she finally has a second son and she's dying. She won't even be able to see him grow up.

Perhaps, naming Binyamin "the son of my pain" was, in fact, a reflection on her whole life. After a life full of hardships, Rachel looks at Binyamin and sees how everything led up to this. She is calling him "Ben-oni," saying that he is the product of her pain. He is the product of her life of hardships and suffering. She is saying that it was all worth it to be able to give birth to Binyamin, to complete the shivtei kah.

Throughout our lives, we are often overwhelmed with personal struggles. Every person has things going on; people even try to brag about how much suffering they have. In the moment, the natural response is to complain. Maybe even to c"v be angry at Hashem. But if we truly believe that there's a greater plan and that it's all worth it, we can change our whole perspective. Rachel is teaching us this lesson as she shows us that all of her pain was worth it. Perhaps, this name is extremely fitting for Binyamin. Binyamin also had a lot of struggles growing up. Rachel is giving Binyamin the tools to get through his challenges by seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. May we all merit to live this idea and see all of the blessings in our life! Shabbat Shalom!

(Ari Zelefsky- Continued from page 1)

Dovid what happened in the battle teaches us that a birchas hamitzvah sets the tone for a mitzvah. Much like Achima'atz made sure he got to Dovid Hamelch before anyone else, so he could set the tone and make sure Dovid Hamelech was informed of such important news in exactly the right way, we recite brachos to get us in the right mindset for a mitzvah and to make sure that we do the mitzvah properly. The use of overir in this week's parsha, parshas Vayishlach, also teaches us about the purpose of birchot hamitzvah. Much like Yaakov went before the rest of his family, essentially telling Eisuv "you have to go through me before you can get to my family," one needs to say a bracha in order to allow them to do a mitzvah. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik famously explains that a birchas hamitzvah is needed to allow you to have the opportunity to do a mitzvah, just like a bracha before food is said to allow you to eat. Finally, the pasuk in Micha teaches us that, above all, a bracha is said for Hashem. We must not lose sight of that and simply recite brachos without having any kavanah. If we make sure to listen to all three of these lessons, we will find that we can connect deeply to brachos, mitzvos, and Hashem.

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Aiden Buchbinder

9th Grade

Reuven, Dina, and Teshuva

In Parshas Vayishlach, when the Torah discusses the story of Reuven switching the beds of Yaakov's wives, the Pasuk makes it seem like it is a sin. Later in the same Pasuk, the Pasuk recounts that "Yaakov had twelve sons." (Bereishis 35:22) Rashi says that since they were considered all equal, it proves that Reuven didn't sin.

The Aderes asks the obvious question: How does being listed as "equal" prove that he never sinned? Maybe he sinned but did Teshuva, and as such he regained his Tzaddik status?

The Aderes answers that if in fact Reuven had repented, he would be on an even higher level than that of his brothers, and would not be called equal. As Chazal say in Maseches Brachos, "[Even] The greatest tzaddikim can't stand in the place where baalei teshuvah stand."

This concept is more clearly seen in Reuven's uncle, Esav. Despite the fact that Esav was a lifelong sinner, Hashem still desired his Teshuva. Furthermore, when Esav came out to meet Yaakov, the Pasuk lists all the present family members, except for Dinah. Rashi says Yaakov didn't allow Esav to see Dinah, because Esav would see Dinah, and would want to take her as a wife. Despite Yaakov's good intentions, however, Yaakov was punished for hiding her, because maybe Dinah would have helped Esav do Teshuva.

There is always a way to do Teshuva; even the lowest of the low can still repent. Another example of the universality of Teshuva is illustrated in the Gemara in Avodah Zarah, which recounts the story of Elazar ben Durdayah, a person who did a very large amount of aveiros. Upon realizing the error of his ways, he cried himself to death. A Bas Kol proclaimed that Rebbe Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for Olam Haba. Rebbe Yehuda HaNasi commented that through just one moment of Teshuva, "Rebbe" Elazar ben Durdaya could erase a lifetime of sins.

Hashem greatly desires the teshuvah of every Jew. No one should believe that they are too bad, or not capable of obtaining teshuva. It is never too late for anybody.

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