

# Shvilei Pinches

## Parshas Vayishlach

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### The מ"ס The Primeval Serpent Struck Yaakov's Thighbone In an Attempt to Regain the Legs He Had Lost

In parshas Vayishlach, which we read this week, we learn of the difficult struggle between Eisav's ministering angel and Yaakov Avinu. This historic struggle left its mark on Yaakov and his descendants and all future generations. As a consequence of this struggle, we were commanded not to eat the "gid ha'nasheh"—located near the socket of the thighbone; this is one of the 365 prohibitions, mitzvos lo ta'aseh. Therefore, let us examine the verses describing this monumental event (Bereishis 32,25):

“ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר, וירא כי לא יכול לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו, ויאמר שלחני כי עלה השחר, ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתנו, ויאמר אליו מה שמך ויאמר יעקב, ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל, כי שרית עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל... על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה אשר על כף הירך עד היום הזה כי נגע בכף ירך יעקב בגיד הנשה.”

“And Yaakov remained alone and a man wrestled with him until dawn; upon realizing that he could not overcome him, he struck a blow to the ball of Yaakov's thighbone and it became dislocated as they wrestled. He said, 'Release me, for the dawn has arrived.' He (Yaakov) replied, 'I will only release you if you bless me.' He asked him, 'What is your name?' He answered, 'Yaakov.' He said, 'Your name will no longer be Yaakov, but rather Yisroel; for you have engaged the Divine and men and you have triumphed.' . . . Therefore the Children of Yisroel shall not eat the displaced sinew of the ball of the thighbone (the "gid ha'nasheh") to this very day; for he struck the ball of Yaakov's thighbone on the displaced sinew.”

Although the narrative does not identify Yaakov's combatant for us, Rashi teaches us, in the name of our blessed Rabbis: “שהוא שרו של עשו”—that he was Eisav's ministering angel. The sources for this fact include the Midrash Rabbah (B.R. 78,3), the Tanchuma (Vayishlach 8) and the holy Zohar (Vayishlach 170.). These latter two sources identify Eisav's ministering angel as סמאל.

It is worthwhile considering, why Eisav's ministering angel chose to strike a blow to the ball of Yaakov's thighbone upon realizing that Yaakov, himself, could not be defeated or harmed. What did that blow accomplish and what damage did it cause to Yaakov and his descendants? Obviously, there is a reason that the Torah prohibits us to this very day from eating the "gid ha'nasheh.”

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### The Battle with Eisav's Ministering Angel Was Directed against Those that Support Torah Study

We will open our discussion of this matter by introducing a well-known principle originally from the Zohar hakadosh (ibid. 171.). Our sacred sources explain that the intent of Eisav's ministering angel was to inflict a blow to those that support Torah study, "tomchei-Torah." Those who support Torah study are considered to be "רגלי יעקב", Yaakov's legs, because all advances in Torah rest upon them.

Even so, why did he choose to strike a blow specifically to the ball of the thighbone in the location of the "gid ha'nasheh"—resulting in the biblical prohibition not to eat from that sinew? We can suggest an answer based on another Zohar (ibid. 170:) which comes to explain the name "gid ha'nasheh":

"ולמה נקרא גיד הנשה, כלומר גיד שהוא משכיח מבני אדם מעבודת אדונם, ושם הוא יצר הרע רובץ... ומשם בא היצר הרע על בני אדם, ומשום כך אמרה תורה, לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה". In other words, this sinew causes one to forget his Creator. The word "ha'nasheh" comes from the same root as the word "nasheni" found in the possuk (Bereishis 41,51): "כי נשני אלקים מכל עמלי"—"G-d has made me **forget all of my hardship.**" So, we see that "ha'nasheh" has to do with forgetfulness.

The Torah states explicitly (Devarim 8,11):

"השמר לך פן תשכח את ה' אלקיך... פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טובים תבנה וישבת, ובקרך וצאנך ירביון וכסף וזהב ירבה לך וכל אשר לך ירבה, ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה' אלקיך המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים... ואמרת בלבבך כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה, וזכרת את ה' אלקיך כי הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל".

Here the Torah warns us, in no uncertain terms, to avoid the pitfall of becoming haughty and taking personal credit for our material, worldly gains. We are admonished never to forget that the Almighty is the source of all wealth.

This clearly sheds light on the issue of why Eisav's ministering angel wished to inflict damage on those who support Torah study, those referred to as "the legs of Yaakov." Upon close scrutiny, it is apparent that those businessmen who give tzedakah to Torah scholars possess a keen awareness that HKB"H is the source of all wealth. Due to this awareness, they have complete faith that HKB"H will provide them with a plentiful income so that they will be able to support Torah scholars.

It is for this reason that Eisav's ministering angel directed his assault on those that support Torah study, those referred to as "Yaakov's legs," by specifically targeting the "gid ha'nasheh"—the sinew that causes one to forget one's proper duty to his Creator. This causes one, chas v'shalom, to forget that HKB"H is the source of all material gains and leads to haughtiness and the misguided belief that: "כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה"—my material gains and wealth are entirely due to my own skills and efforts. As a result, they will be reluctant, chas v'shalom, to support Torah scholars. Therefore we are warned: "על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה אשר על כף הירך עד היום הזה"—"Therefore, the Children of Yisroel shall not eat the displaced sinew of the ball of the thighbone (the "gid ha'nasheh") to this very day." The continuation

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of the verse explains the reason for this prohibition: “כי נגע בכף ירך יעקב בגיד הנשה”—because the “samech-mem,” the ס”ם, chose to strike this specific site which causes one to forget Hashem.

### Eisav’s Ministering Angel Is the Primeval Serpent Whose Legs Were Cut Off

Next, let us introduce the amazing yet alarming words of the Zohar hakadosh (ibid. 171.)--which are not well known and which it is our obligation to publicize. It states that the ministering angel of Eisav is the very same primeval serpent that caused Adam and Chava to sin by partaking of the Tree of Knowledge. As punishment for his malevolence, his legs were cut off—as it is written (Bereishis 3,14): “וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶל הַנָּחָשׁ כִּי —עֲשִׂית זֹאת אֲרוּר אַתָּה מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה עַל גַּחֲוֹנְךָ תֵּלֵךְ וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ” —“And Hashem G-d said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, you are more cursed than all of the animals and all the beasts of the field; upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.’” Rashi comments: “עַל גַּחֲוֹנְךָ תֵּלֵךְ, רַגְלִים הָיוּ לוֹ וְנִקְצְצוּ” —“it had legs and they were cut off.”

Based on this understanding, the holy Zohar reveals a tremendous insight. Eisav’s ministering angel, who is one and the same as the primeval serpent, directed his blow at the ball of Yaakov’s thighbone, attacking the benefactors of Torah study. For, if those that constitute “the legs of Yaakov” do not support Torah study, the evil serpent steals their legs--allowing him to stand and walk on them. Following is a Hebrew translation of this Zohar:

“פֶּתַח וַיֹּאמֶר וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶל הַנָּחָשׁ כִּי עֲשִׂית זֹאת אֲרוּר אַתָּה מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה וּגְו', עַל גַּחֲוֹנְךָ תֵּלֵךְ, מֵה זֶה עַל גַּחֲוֹנְךָ תֵּלֵךְ, שֶׁנִּשְׁבְּרוּ תוֹמְכִים שְׁלוֹ וְקִצְצוּ רַגְלָיו, וְאִין לוֹ עַל מַה שְׁעוֹמֵד, וּכְאִשֶּׁר יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא רוֹצִים לְתַמּוֹךְ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, הֵם נוֹתְנִים לוֹ רַגְלִים וְשׁוֹקִיִּים לְעִמּוּד וְלִהְתַּחֲזֵק בָּהֶם.”

Based on this idea, we find a beautiful elucidation of the possuk in Iyov (1,6) from the great Rabbi Aryeh Leib Tzintz of Platzk in Derashot Mehara<sup>1</sup>: “וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל ה' וַיָּבֹאוּ גַם הַשָּׁטָן —“It happened one day; the angels came to stand before Hashem, and the Satan, too, came among them. Hashem said to the Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ The Satan replied to Hashem and said, ‘From wandering about the earth and walking on it.’”

The redundant language of the possuk--“מִשׁוֹט בְּאֶרֶץ וּמִהֲתֵהֵלֵךְ בָּה”, “from wandering about the earth and walking on it”—needs to be explained.

The explanation, however, is that this is the Satan’s method of finding fault with Yisroel. When he wishes to wander among G-d’s creatures to check if they are meritorious or not, he must do so on his belly, since he lacks legs to walk around on. If, however, he finds that Yisroel, chas v’shalom, are not engaging in proper Torah study--due to a failure on the part of the benefactors of Torah study, known as “Yaakov’s legs”--he is then able to steal those legs for his own needs and to actually walk about the earth.

So, when HKB”H inquires of the Satan: “Where have you come from?” His response constitutes an indictment against Yisroel: “מִשׁוֹט בְּאֶרֶץ וּמִהֲתֵהֵלֵךְ בָּה”—at first my excursions among the creatures of the lower

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world to see if they were meritorious or not were limited due to my lack of legs; however, once I found that they did not properly support Torah study, I was no longer restricted to “משוט בארץ”-- wandering around on my belly--but was now able to “ומהתהלך בה”---to actually walk around the land. How so? Because I succeeded in confiscating “Yaakov’s legs” which were remiss in their support of Torah study and was able to use them for my own needs.

### Ideally Eisav Was to Function Like Zevulun

Based on the commentary of the Chasam Sofer (Toldos), let us now expand on this concept gleaned from the Zohar hakadosh. He addresses the issue of why Yitzchak wished to bestow the berachos upon Eisav rather than Yaakov, even though he was well aware that Yaakov was engaged in constant Torah study. Yitzchak was of the opinion that Eisav would fulfill his task of supporting Yaakov, the representative and pillar of Torah; he thought that they would function like Yisoschor and Zevulun. In his own incomparable words:

“נראה דיצחק ידע כי יעקב איש תם ועשו יודע ציד, אך חושבו לצדיק, ויהיו ב' אחים אלו כיששכר וזבולון ויעקב מתברך בעבודת ה', ויהיה עשו משועבד ליעקב לעשות לו כל צרכיו כזבולון ויששכר, ויעקב משועבד לעשו בהוראת איסור והיתר, כדכתיב להדיא ביששכר (בראשית מט טו) ויט שכמו לסבול ויהי למס עובד.”

This fits beautifully with what the Chasam Sofer writes in Toras Moshe (Toldos). He writes that the purpose of creation was that Yaakov and his descendants, the people of Yisroel, should act as a nation of priests and a sanctified people; they would all engage in the study of Torah like Yisoschor. On the other hand, Eisav and his descendants, the nations of the world, would serve the function of Zevulun—supporting Yaakov and his descendants so that they could devote their time to Torah study and the service of Hashem in a leisurely fashion.

This provides us with a wonderful understanding of the events surrounding the birth of Yaakov and Eisav. It is written (Bereishis 25,25): “ויצא הראשון אדמוני כולו כאדרת שער ויקראו שמו עשו, ואחרי כן יצא” **“And the first one emerged all red resembling a hairy mantle; and they named him Eisav; afterwards, his brother emerged with his hand grasping onto Eisav’s heel; and He named him Yaakov.”** In truth, Eisav was supposed to function as “רגלי יעקב”, Yaakov’s legs, supporting Yaakov’s life of Torah; however, due to his extreme wickedness, he refused to fulfill this sacred mission.

Therefore, Yaakov acted appropriately as he emerged into this world—grasping onto Eisav’s heel with his hand. He seized from Eisav the power and function of the “legs”—the benefactors of Torah study. Due to this crucial act of seizure: “ויקרא שמו יעקב”---**“He named him Yaakov.”** As Rashi points out, HKB”H, himself, named him Yaakov. This was a divine indication that HKB”H was in agreement with Yaakov seizing the sacred role of the benefactors of Torah study from Eisav. Consequently, HKB”H arranged, ultimately, for Yaakov to receive the berachos from Yitzchak instead of Eisav.

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### Yaakov Represents the Aspect of Zevulun

### Yisroel Represents the Aspect of Yisoschor

We can now understand why it was necessary for both names, Yaakov and Yisroel, to remain in effect. As opposed to Avraham, for instance; once the letter “heh” was added to his previous name Avram, the former name was not used again. As we have been discussing, klal Yisroel is composed of two distinct factions working together as partners like Yisoschor and Zevulun. We have demonstrated that the name Yaakov derives from the fact that Eisav refused to accept his role as a benefactor of Torah study.

Clearly, this name represents the aspect of Zevulun—the merchant supporting his brother’s Torah study. On the other hand, a lovely allusion is found in the very name Yisroel to the second partner, the brother immersed in Torah study. The name **ישראל** breaks down to the two words **לי ראש**, which translates loosely as “the head is mine.” Here we have a reference to the Torah scholar whose head and intellect are occupied day and night with Torah study—this is the aspect of Yisoschor. This association between the name Yisroel and Torah scholars is found in the Zera Kodesh (end of Parshas Bereishis) authored by the holy Rabbi of Rophshitz, zy”a.

The Chasam Sofer points out that the numerical value of the two names **יעקוב** and **ישראל** equals the numerical value of the words **קרע שטין**, which means eliminating the satan. The message is clear, both names, Yaakov and Yisroel, are necessary to defeat the Satan, the ministering angel of Eisav. Both the aspects of Zevulun and Yisoschor, the benefactor of Torah study and the Torah scholar, are required for the survival of klal Yisroel and the Torah.

### “It Is Unfortunate that a Great Servant Was Lost from the World”

Come and see how this sheds light on what we have learned in the Gemorah (Sanhedrin 59:) concerning the cost to the world as a result of the serpent losing its legs:

**“תניא רבי שמעון בן מנסיא אומר, חבל על שמש גדול שאבד מן העולם, שאלמלא נתקלל נחש, כל אחד ואחד מישראל היו מזדמנין לו שני נחשים טובים, אחד משגרו לצפון ואחד משגרו לדרום להביא לו סנדלבונים טובים ואבנים טובות ומרגליות.”**

“Rabbi Shimon the son of Menasya says: It is unfortunate that a great servant was lost from the world. For, had the serpent not been cursed, each and every one of Yisroel would have had two good serpents as servants; one he would send to the North and one he would send to the South to bring him gems, precious stones and pearls.”

Here is a clear-cut reference that had the serpent not rebelled against Hashem regarding the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, he could have chosen, instead, an honorable role in creation. He could have put his legs to good use assisting Yisroel in their service of Hashem. While they were sitting in the Beis-Midrash learning Torah, they would have sent the serpent out to perform their required daily chores. What we see, in essence, is that the serpent, himself, was supposed to function as **“רגלי יעקב”**, “Yaakov’s legs,” assisting and providing for the Torah scholars. Instead of assisting mankind to serve Hashem, however, he instigated man to sin.

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Therefore, he confiscated his prestigious role as **“רגלי יעקב”**, “Yaakov’s legs,” and lost his legs as his punishment—dooming him to slither on his belly.

This then is the meaning of HKB”H’s rebuke to the serpent (Bereishis 3,15): **“הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב”**—**“He will pound you on the head, and you will hiss at his heel.”** In other words, **“הוא ישופך ראש”**—man will be able to crush the serpent’s head with his legs, providing that he engages in Torah study and is supported by willing benefactors serving as sacred legs; **“ואתה תשופנו עקב”**—you, the serpent, will kill man by biting him on the heel, i.e. by persuading the possible benefactors not to support Torah study.

On the possuk (Bereishis 25,27) we find a fascinating Targum Yerushalmi. The Targum refers to Eisav as **“גבר נחשירכין”**; the Yonasan cites the Tziyoni who explains that this teaches us that Eisav had the symbol of a serpent on his thigh—alluding to the fact that he represented the primeval serpent. As per our discussion, just as the serpent was created with legs in order to serve and support those engaged in Torah study, so, too, Eisav was supposed to function as “Yaakov’s legs” and support his brother, the Torah scholar. Unfortunately, both the serpent and Eisav forsook their designated roles.

In this light, we can better understand the difficult battle waged by Eisav’s ministering angel—none other than the primeval serpent whose legs were cut off after his involvement in the sin of the Tree of Knowledge—with Yaakov Avinu. After all, Yaakov Avinu had seized Eisav’s heel upon realizing that Eisav refused to fulfill his function as **“רגלי יעקב”**, a benefactor of Torah scholars. The samech-mem’s first strategy was to strike a blow to Yaakov directly, preventing him from engaging in Torah study.

Nevertheless, he soon realized that Yaakov’s kedushah was too great—thus, eliminating any possible success with this first line of attack. Therefore, **“ויגע בכף ירכו”**—he resorted to a different strategy involving an indirect line of attack. He struck a blow at those that support the Torah study of Yaakov and his descendants, at the site of the **“gid ha’nasheh.”** This is the sinew that causes forgetfulness. By causing businessmen to forget that HKB”H is the true source of their material wealth, they will withhold their support of Torah study, allowing the samech-mem to achieve his ultimate goal—weakening, chas v’shalom, the institution of Torah amidst klal Yisroel.

### **The Sun Rose for Him . . . and He Was Limping on His Hip”**

At the inauguration ceremony of the new home of the Talmud-Torah of the Belzer Chassidim in Yerushalayim (the 27<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei 5771), we applied this idea to a possuk in this week’s parsha (Bereishis 32,32): **“ויזרח לו השמש כאשר עבר את פנואל והוא צולע על ירכו”**—**“The sun rose for him as he passed Penuel, and he was limping on his hip.”** Rashi comments in the name of an aggadic Midrash: **“ויזרח לו לצרכו לרפאות את צלעתו”**—the sun rose specifically for him, in order to heal his limp. We can suggest that the meaning of the phrase: **“The sun rose for him,”** implies that this was a sign that Yaakov and his descendants would experience success concerning mundane, worldly matters.

This is surprising at first glance, since the task of Yaakov and his descendants in this world is to engage in Torah study day and night—as it says (Yehoshua 1,8): **“לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפוך והגית בו יומם”**

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“ולילה—Torah shall never leave your lips. If so, why did HKB”H signify with the rising sun that Yaakov and his descendants would enjoy success in worldly matters? Wouldn’t it have been more appropriate for all of Yisroel, without exception, to occupy themselves in the study of Torah?

To address this difficulty, the possuk states: “ויוזרח לו השמש”—“**The sun rose for him.**” HKB”H signified to Yaakov with the rising sun, success in matters of this world, since “והוא צולע על ירכו” —Yaakov, the pillar of Torah was limping, chas v’shalom, on his hip due the absence of Torah benefactors to serve as his legs. Therefore, HKB”H shone the sun of success upon Yaakov’s descendants, so that they would be able to support the study of Torah in the manner of Yisoschor and Zevulun.

This is how we explained the meaning of Yaakov Avinu’s prayer as he embarked on his journey to Choren (Bereishis 28,20): “ויודר יעקב נדר לאמר אם יהיה אלקים עמדי ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר אני הולך ונתן לי לחם לאכול ובגד ללבוש”—“**Then Yaakov vowed, saying, ‘If G-d will be with me, and He will protect me along this path that I am walking; and He will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear.’**” Yaakov Avinu understood from the start that his sacred mission in life was to engage in Torah study all day long, while his brother Eisav would provide him with sustenance.

Now, however, he was forced to flee from Eisav—having snatched away the berachos, because Eisav refused to accept the role as Yaakov’s benefactor. Therefore, on his way to Choren to establish a Jewish household with the holy matriarchs, he prayed to HKB”H: “אם יהיה אלקים עמדי ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר אני הולך”—“**If G-d will be with me, and He will protect me along this path that I am walking.**” He specifically beseeches Hashem that he be able to walk on his own two legs, i.e. the benefactors of Torah study; thus, “ונתן לי לחם לאכול ובגד ללבוש”—“**I will be provided for by my own benefactors and will not need to rely on the wicked Eisav or Lavan for sustenance.**”

This, then, is implied in the possuk that follows (ibid. 29,1): “וישא יעקב רגליו”—“**And Yaakov lifted his legs.**” Whereupon, Rashi comments: “משנתבשר בשורה טובה שהובטח בשמירה, נשא לבו את רגליו”—“**once he received the good news that he was promised protection, his heart lifted his legs and it became easy to walk.** In other words, upon receiving the good news that HKB”H had accepted his prayer—assuring him that there would be benefactors of Torah study among his descendants—he lifted up his legs, i.e. those that support Torah study, for all to see how important they are in HKB”H’s eyes. After all, the sustained existence and observance of Torah is in their merit.