

The Twelve Tribes of Yisrael from the Realm of Kedushah Combat and Subdue the Eleven Chiefs of Eisav

Toward the end of this week's parsha, parshas Vayishlach, we learn about the birth of Binyamin—the last of Yaakov's twelve sons. Sadly, his birth brought great sorrow to Yaakov Avinu, for it was associated with the passing of his beloved, Rachel Imeinu, as it is written (Bereishis 35, 16):

“ויסעו מבית אל ויהי עוד כברת הארץ לבוא אפרתה ותלד רחל ותקש בלדתה, ויהי בהקשתה בלדתה ותאמר לה המילדת אל תיראי כי גם זה לך בן, ויהי בצאת נפשה כי מתה ותקרא שמו בן אוני ואביו קרא לו בנימין”

—they journeyed from Beis El and there was still some distance to travel to Ephrat, when Rachel gave birth, and had difficulty in her childbirth. And it was when she had difficulty in her labor that the midwife, said to her, “Have no fear, for this one, too, is a son for you,” And it came to pass, as her soul was departing—for she died—that she named him Ben Oni; while his father called him Binyamin.

With the birth of Binyamin, Yaakov Avinu completed the foundation of the structure of the people of Yisrael, which is comprised of twelve tribes, as delineated by the Torah after the birth of Binyamin (ibid. 22): “ויהיו בני יעקב שנים עשר, בני לאה, בכור יעקב ראובן ושמעון ולוי ויהודה ויששכר וזבולון, בני רחל יוסף ובנימין, ובני —בלהה שפחת רחל דן ונפתלי, ובני זלפה שפחת לאה גד ואשר—the sons of Yaakov were twelve. The sons of Leah were: Yaakov's firstborn Reuven, and Shimon, and Levi, and Yehudah, and Yissachar and Zevulun. The sons of Rachel were: Yosef and Binyamin. The sons of Bilhah, maidservant of Rachel, were: Dan and Naphtali. And the sons of Zilpah, maidservant of Leah, were: Gad and Asher.

Thus, Yaakov completed the sacred task delegated to him by HKB”H—to bring into the world twelve holy sons to head the twelve tribes of Yisrael. This was revealed to Yaakov when he took stones to prepare a resting spot, when he spent the night on Har HaMoriah, the site of the future Mikdash,

on his way to Charan, as described in the following passuk (ibid. 28, 10): “ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה, ויפגע במקום וילן שם כי—and בא השמש ויקח מאבני המקום וישם מראשותיו וישכב במקום ההוא” **Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva and went to Charan. He encountered the place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place and he put them around his head, and lay down in that place.** Rashi comments: **The stones began to quarrel with one another. This one would say, “Upon me shall the tzaddik lay his head”; and this one would say, “Upon me shall he lay his head.” Immediately, HKB”H made them into one stone. This is implied by the words: “And he took the stone that he placed around his head.”**

Chazal reveal to us the gist of the stones' dispute with one another. Furthermore, why did HKB”H miraculously cause all of the stones to merge into a single stone? We find the following elucidation in the Midrash (B.R. 68, 11): “ויקח מאבני המקום, רבי יהודה אמר, שנים עשרה אבנים נטל, כך גזר הקב”ה שהוא מעמיד שנים עשר שבטים, אמר [יעקב], אברהם לא העמידן, יצחק לא העמידן, אני אם מתאחות הן שנים עשר אבנים זו לזו, יודע אני שאני מעמיד י”ב שבטים, כיון שנתאחו י”ב Rabbi Yehudah says that he took twelve stones. Thus, HKB”H decreed that he would establish twelve tribes. Yaakov pondered: “Avraham did not establish them; Yitzchak did not establish them; if these twelve stones merge with one another, I will know that I will establish twelve tribes. When they did indeed merge with one another, he realized that he would establish twelve tribes.

The Twelve Sons of Yaakov Avinu versus the Eleven Chiefs of Eisav

Immediately after the holy Torah tells us of Binyamin's birth, completing the twelve tribes: **“The sons of Yaakov**

were twelve—the Torah proceeds to itemize the offspring of Eisav, who is Edom (ibid. 36, 1): **“ואלה תולדות עשו הוא אדום”**—**and these are the descendants of Eisav**. The Torah proceeds to itemize one by one the eleven chiefs that descended from Eisav (ibid. 15): **“אלה אלופי בני עשו”**—**these are the chiefs of the children of Eisav**. The commentaries toil to explain why it was necessary for the Torah to itemize all the progeny of the children of Eisav.

Nevertheless, in my humble opinion, it is quite obvious that HKB”H, the Giver of the Torah, established these versus these from the very outset—the birth into this world of all twelve of Yaakov’s sons, the heads of the tribes of Yisrael, versus the birth into this world of the eleven chiefs of Eisav. The Torah is teaching us that two distinct structures exist in Olam HaZeh. On the one hand, there is the structure of kedushah, comprised of the twelve tribes of Yisrael, who believe in Hashem and His Torah. On the other hand, there is the structure of tumah, comprised of the eleven chiefs of Eisav, the heads of the nations of the world, who believe in the pursuit of material values and the nonsensical whims of Olam HaZeh.

It is worthwhile reiterating the fact that the number of tribes comprising the structure of kedushah, twelve, corresponds to the twelve permutations of the blessed name Havaya. The source for this notion comes from Shaarei Orah (Shaar 7): **“ולפי שזכה יעקב להיות שם הוי”ה נקרא עליו, זכה לצאת ממנו י”ב: (Shaar 7)”—since Yaakov merited the name Havaya being associated with him, he merited that twelve righteous tribes would descend from him, corresponding to the twelve permutations of the name Havaya.** A similar explanation is presented by the Recanati (Tetzaveh) regarding the twelve stones of the “choshen” (the Kohen Gadol’s breastplate), upon which the twelve names of the tribes were engraved:

“ודע והבן עוד כי השם הגדול יתברך יש בו י”ב צירופים ולא יותר... וכל הצירופים האלו מורים על ההויה וסוד מציאות השי”ת... וכנגד י”ב צירופים אלו כאן י”ב שבטים, כל שבט יש לו חותם אחד מאלו השנים עשר, כמה דאת אמר (דניאל ט-יט) כי שמך נקרא על עירך ועל עמך.”

Know that there are only twelve permutations of the great, blessed name and no more... All of these permutations indicate aspects and secrets of the Almighty’s existence... Corresponding to these twelve permutations, we have here twelve tribes...

The eleven chiefs of Eisav, however, represent eleven forces of tumah. Our holy sources explain that corresponding to these eleven forces, we find eleven curses in eleven pesukim in parshas Ki Tavo (Devarim 27, 15-25). Rashi points out this phenomenon as follows (ibid. 27, 24): **ראיתי ביסודו של רבי משה: הדרשן י”א ארורים יש כאן**. (The Sifsei Chachamim questions this, because in reality we find the word **“ארור”** mentioned twelve times. He explains that the twelfth **“ארור”** (ibid. 26): **“ארור אשר לא”**—is an all-encompassing curse applying to anyone who neglects to abide by the Torah’s precepts. It appears that this twelfth **“ארור”**, this general curse, corresponds to the wicked Eisav, who is the leader of the eleven chiefs.) To subdue these eleven forces of tumah, HKB”H commanded us to burn eleven types of incense for the ketores every day. Also, this is the reason why HKB”H commanded us to place on top of the Mishkan eleven panels of goats’ hair.

For this reason, HKB”H juxtaposed in the holy Torah the completion of the births of the twelve heads of the tribes to Yaakov Avinu with the generations of Eisav, which produced eleven chiefs. This teaches us that the combined forces of the twelve forces of kedushah—embodied by the twelve tribes, corresponding to the twelve permutations of the name Havaya—are more powerful than the combined forces of tumah of the eleven chiefs of Eisav—which number one less than the forces of kedushah.

The Exalted Idea of the Bris Kehunas Olam

I gleaned this exalted idea from the immaculate teachings of the divine kabbalist, the author of Bris Kehunas Olam. He addresses the incident described in our parsha, where Yaakov Avinu bows down to Eisav (Bereishis 33, 3): **“וישתחו ארצה שבע פעמים עד גשתו עד אחיו”**—**he bowed down toward the earth seven times until he reached his brother**. Although Yosef HaTzaddik, the force necessary to defeat Eisav had already been born, nevertheless, without Binyamin, the full complement of twelve tribes was lacking. With only eleven tribes in his arsenal, Yaakov lacked the power to fully subdue the eleven chiefs of Eisav. Thus, he was forced to bow down to Eisav. Once Binyamin was born, however, he possessed the power necessary to fully subdue the chiefs of Eisav, outnumbering them by one, and he no longer needed to bow down to Eisav.

Accordingly, the Bris Kehunas Olam interprets the passuk (Esther 3, 2): **“ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה”**—**and Mordechai would not kneel and would not bow down**. We learn from the

Arizal in Pri Eitz Chaim (Shaar HaPurim) and in greater detail from the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (44) that Haman and his ten sons represent the eleven forces of tumah. Thus, they correspond to the eleven chiefs of Eisav. This makes perfect sense seeing as Haman and his ten sons were descendants of Amalek, Eisav's grandson, who was one of the eleven chiefs. Now, Mordechai was from the tribe of Binyamin, as it states (ibid. 2, 5): "איש ימיני". As explained, the birth of Binyamin signified the completion of the twelve tribes. Therefore, Mordechai did not need to bow down to Haman as Yaakov did before Eisav, before the birth of Binyamin.

It appears that we can add a spicy tidbit to this explanation based on what the Gaon Chida writes in Midbar Kedemos (40, 25) in the name of the sefer Archei Kinuyim, authored by the divine kabbalist, the Ramaz, Rabbi Moshe Zachuta, ztz"l. Here is what he writes:

"מרדכי הוא גלגול יעקב והמן הוא גלגול עשו, ומאחר שפגם יעקב על שהשתחוה לעשו ז' פעמים, לכן בא עתה מרדכי ולא רצה להשתחוות להמן שהוא עשו. כדי לתקן על מה שקלקל יעקב, וזה היה הסיבה למרדכי להכניס כל ישראל בסכנה גדולה כזו, והטעם כנזכר לעיל, עד כאן לשון ספר ערכי הכינויים להרמ"ד."

Mordechai was a gilgul of Yaakov; and Haman was a gilgul of Eisav. Seeing as Yaakov inappropriately bowed down to Eisav seven times; therefore, Mordechai comes now and refuses to bow down to Haman, who is Eisav; thus, making amends for Yaakov's wrongful act. This is why Mordechai placed all of Yisrael in such grave danger. . .

This explains very nicely why we find in our parsha that Yaakov prayed (Bereishis 32, 12): "הצילני נא מיד אחי מיד עשו"—**please rescue me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav.** The Baal HaTurim points out that the first letters of the words: "המן" spell "ה' צילני נא מיד". Thus, with the words: "מיד אחי מיד עשו"—Yaakov was praying to annul Haman's wicked decree. According to what we learned from the Ramaz, Yaakov was praying for himself—that as his reincarnation into Mordechai, he be rescued from Haman, the reincarnation of Eisav. Regarding this latter interpretation, Yaakov says (ibid.): "כי ירא אנכי אותו מן יבוא והכני אם על בנים"—**for I fear him lest he come and strike me, mother and children.** The Baal HaTurim interprets this statement as referring to Haman, who planned to exterminate all of the Jews—men, women and children.

According to the words of the Bris Kehunas Olam, we can understand how the gilgul into Mordechai afforded Yaakov a

tikun. He adamantly refused to bow down to Haman, the gilgul of Eisav, because he was a descendant of the tribe of Binyamin, who completed the complement of twelve tribes. With the power of the kedushah of the twelve tribes, he was able to overcome and subdue Haman and his ten sons, representing the eleven chiefs of Eisav. In this manner, we can justify Yaakov's actions. He bowed down to Eisav, because Binyamin had not yet been born and there were but eleven tribes in existence.

To Defeat the Eleven Chiefs of Eisav Demands Unity among the Twelve Tribes

Upon closer consideration, we realize that if we wish to overcome the forces of tumah represented by the eleven chiefs of Eisav, it is essential that all twelve tribes of Yisrael unite as a single body, of one heart and mind. Only then do we truly possess the power of the twelve permutations ("tzeirufim") of the holy, esteemed name, allowing us to subdue them. Yet, if Yisrael are divided and in disarray, chas v'shalom, resulting in disharmony among the forces of the twelve tribes, then the eleven forces of tumah of the chiefs of Eisav win out, G-d forbid.

This then is the interpretation of the Midrash (B.R. 84, 1) regarding the passuk (Bereishis 37, 1): "וישב יעקב, כתיב (ישעיה נז): —as a result of gathering together his twelve sons, the heads of the tribes, in unison, they possessed the power of kedushah of the twelve "tzeirufim" of the name Havaya, necessary to subdue the eleven chiefs of Eisav. This is alluded to by the words of the passuk: "וישב יעקב"—**Yaakov settled.** For, twelve times הו"ה possesses the numerical equivalent of the letters ש"ב. Thus, the passuk alludes to the fact that Yaakov tapped into the kedushah of ש"ב—the numerical value of the twelve "tzeirufim" of the holy name.

This explains very nicely the berachah Moshe Rabeinu bestowed upon Yisrael prior to his departure from this world (Devarim 33, 5): "ויהי בישורון מלך בהתאסף ראשי עם יחד שבטי"—**and He became the King over Yeshurun when the heads of the nations are gathered, the tribes of Yisrael in unity.** We find the following elucidation in the Sifri: "ויהי בישורון מלך. כשישראל שווים בעצה אחת מלמטה, שמו הגדול משתבח למעלה, שנאמר ויהי בישורון מלך, אימתי בהתאסף ראשי עם... יחד שבטי ישראל, כשהם עשויים. When Yisrael are of one mind below, His great name is glorified above, as it states: "And He became the King over Yeshurun." When? "When the heads of the nations are gathered" . . . "The tribes of

as it says: ‘The house of Yaakov shall be fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav for straw.’ Fire without a flame does not have effect over a long distance. Once Yosef was born, Yaakov trusted in HKB”H (to protect him from Eisav), and he wished to return home.

Thus, it seems quite evident that Yosef HaTzaddik, the foundation of the world (“yesod olam”), is the twelfth tribe—the one that tips the scale in favor of the side of kedushah, to defeat the klipah of Eisav and his eleven chiefs. And let us present the amazing alternative version of Rashi (beginning of parshas Vayeishev) citing a passage based on the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeishev 1), regarding the passuk (Bereishis 37, 1): **“וישב יעקב—and Yaakov settled in the land of his father’s sojourning, in the land of Canaan. These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef, etc.:**

“וישב יעקב. הפשתני הזה נכנסו גמליו טעונים פשתן, הפחמי תמה אנה יכנס כל הפשתן הזה, היה פיקח אחד משיב לו, ניצוץ אחד יוצא ממפוח שלך ששורף את כולו, כך יעקב ראה כל האלופים הכתובים למעלה, תמה ואמר מי יכול לכבוש את כולו, מה כתיב למטה, אלה תולדות יעקב יוסף, וכתוב (עובדיה א-יח) והיה בית יעקב אש ובית יוסף להבה ובית עשו לקש, ניצוץ יוצא מיוסף שמכלה ושורף את כולם.”

There was a certain flax merchant whose camels entered a town laden with flax. The blacksmith wondered, “Where can all this flax be stored?” There was a clever fellow who answered him, “One spark can go forth from your bellows which will burn it all up.” Similarly, Yaakov saw all of the chiefs of Eisav written above. He wondered and said, “Who could conquer all of them?” What is written further on? “These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef,” and it is written, “The house of Yaakov shall be fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav for straw.” A spark shall go forth from Yosef which will consume and burn up all of them.

Notwithstanding, a single spark from Yosef without the participation of the other tribes cannot withstand and overcome the eleven forces of tumah of the chiefs of Eisav by itself. This, in fact, is the message Yosef was conveying to his brothers when he told them his dream (ibid. 37, 9): **“והנה השמש והירח ואחד—Behold! The sun, and the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.** He requires that all of the other eleven tribes unite together with his kedushah. Only then, with the power of the combined kedushah of all twelve tribes, corresponding to the twelve “tzeirufim” of the esteemed name, will Yosef be able to burn and consume the straw of the eleven chiefs of Eisav with his flames of kedushah.

The External Forces Have No Power over the Permutation of the Month of Nissan

I would like to propose my own explanation as to why Yosef HaTzaddik is the holy spark whose kedushah consumes the eleven chiefs of Eisav. The explanation is based on what the Bris Kehunas Olam writes concerning the lot Haman cast, as it states in the Megillah (Esther 3, 7): **“הפיל פור הוא הגורל לפני המן—a “pur” was cast, the lot, in the presence of Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.**

He explains that due to the defect created by Yisrael’s sins, the “chitzonim” (the external forces) are able to receive sustenance, chas v’shalom, from the eleven “tzeirufim” of the name Havaya, which are not in the original order (starting with “yud,” then “hei,” then “vav,” then “hei.”). However, from the name Havaya with its letters in the proper order—which is the permutation associated with the month of Nissan, and derives from the first letters of the passuk (Tehillim 96, 11): **“יִשְׁמְחוּ—”they are unable to draw any sustenance, since its illumination is so great. This is the significance of the “pur,” the lot, cast in the presence of Haman. The word פור (286) possesses a numerical value equal to eleven times Havaya (26). Haman attempted to draw and receive sustenance from the eleven permutations of the name Havaya that are not in the original order. By means of this ruse, he malevolently intended to overcome Yisrael and exterminate them, chas v’shalom.**

Therefore, when Esther HaMalkah addresses the King—the King of the Universe—to bring about Haman’s downfall, it is written (ibid. 5, 4): **“ותאמר אסתר אם על המלך טוב יבוא המלך והמן היום—”אל המשתה אשר עשיתי לו.”** We learn in the Arizal’s Pri Eitz Chaim that Esther was specifically alluding to the name Havaya formed by the first letters of the words: **יִבֹּא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּן הַיּוֹם.** Based on what we have learned, Esther intended to bring about Haman’s downfall by tapping into the power of the name Havaya in its original form—the configuration with which he had no association. As a consequence, Haman was indeed hung during the month of Nissan, the month associated with the name Havaya in its original form. This concludes his explanation.

Now, we know that there are several different methods as to how to arrange the twelve tribes with relation to the twelve

months. For instance, they can be arranged based on the birthing order of the tribes; they can also be arranged based on the order of the flags and encampments in the midbar. Yet, for this purpose, we find a novel arrangement for the correspondence of the tribes to the months of the year proposed by the Yearos Dvash (Part 1, Drush 2):

Reuven corresponds to the month of Tishrei; Shimon corresponds to the month of Cheshvan; Levi corresponds to the month of Kislev, the month during which the priestly Chashmonaim from the tribe of Levi were victorious over the Greeks; Yehudah corresponds to the month of Tevet; Yissachar corresponds to the month of Shevat. Yosef corresponds to the month of Nissan; this is alluded to by the passuk (Tehillim 81, 6): “עדות ביהוסף שמו בצאתו על ארץ מצרים”—**as a testimony for Yosef, He appointed it, when He went out over the land of Mitzrayim;** for, it was in the merit of Yosef’s casket that Yisrael departed from Mitzrayim in the month of Nissan. Binyamin corresponds to the month of Iyar; Dan corresponds to the month of Sivan; Naphtali corresponds to the month of Tamuz; Gad corresponds to the month of Av; Asher corresponds to the month of Elul.

According to this scheme, the month of Nissan, whose permutation of the name Havaya is its original form, corresponds to Yosef. This explains very nicely why the Torah emphasizes repeatedly that the name Havaya was with Yosef HaTzaddik (Bereishis 39, 2): “ויהי ה' את יוסף ויהי איש מצליח ויהי בבית אדוניו המצרי, וירא אדניו כי ה' אתו וכל אשר הוא עושה ה' מצליח בידו... ויברך ה' את בית המצרי” **Havaya was with Yosef, and he became a successful man; and he remained in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that Havaya was with him, and all that he would do, Havaya would make successful in his hand . . . Havaya blessed the**

Egyptian’s house on Yosef’s account, and Havaya’s blessing was in all that he had, in the house and in the field.

The Torah is conveying to us that the permutation of the name Havaya in its original form was with Yosef, who corresponds to the month of Nissan. Therefore, he was successful; because the external forces had no power over him. This is the message conveyed by the passuk even after they imprisoned Yosef (ibid. 23): “אין שר בית הסוהר רואה את כל מאומה בידו כאשר ה' אתו ואשר הוא עושה ה'—**the prison warden did not scrutinize anything that was in his custody, because Havaya was with him; and whatever he would do, Havaya would make successful.**

We have now been thoroughly enlightened and can appreciate the incredible power which Yosef HaTzaddik, in conjunction with the other eleven tribes, possesses to subdue the force of tumah of Eisav’s eleven chiefs. At times of sin and iniquity, chas v’shalom, the eleven chiefs of Eisav receive sustenance from the eleven “tzeirufim” of the holy name that deviate from the original order. Yosef, however, corresponds to the month of Nissan, whose permutation of the holy name is its original form. The “chitzonim” have no connection with this name and draw no power from it. Hence, when the eleven tribes connect with Yosef’s kedushah as foretold in the dream: והנה השמש והירח והעשר כוכבים משתחוים לי—**Behold! The sun, and the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me**—the name Havaya shines brightly with enormous illumination; it subdues the eleven chiefs of Eisav, preventing them from receiving sustenance from any of the permutations. Thus, the inevitable is fulfilled: ניצוץ—**a spark emanates from Yosef that consumes and incinerates them all.**



Donated by Family Madeb for the Refuah Shelimah of Lea bat Virgini

To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com