

Parshas Vayishlach

This week's parsha, Vayishlach, we are introduced to Yakov meeting his brother Esav, after many years "on the run".

Yakov's had a trying time with Lavan, who he lived with for 20 years. Lavan was a difficult and manipulative person to live with, the last parsha ends with Yakov and Lavan parting ways, Lavan returning to his place (i.e., he never grew or changed) and Yakov went on his way (i.e., steadfast in the ways of Hashem). Posuk 5 states, "Eem Lavan Garti", with Lavan I lived, "garti" is an ambigram for "taryag" the numerical value of 613, that is Yakov kept the entire Torah, and in that merit was able to achieve uplifting himself to lofty spiritual heights, such that he was even able to command and send literal angels as his messengers¹.

Yakov's language and expression of fear of Esav thematically remains throughout the parsha. The entire beginning of the parsha deals with the struggle of Yakov, and his splitting of his family, and the battle with the angel, culminating with Yakov and Esav meeting. This is the precursor to the rest of Jewish History. Yakov was so strong, and so holy, he laid the foundations of the future success of the Jews, and their survival regardless of the Edomite influence, and destructive behavior over us. Edom (the decedents of Esav) and Esav are the Achilles heel of the Yakov and his descendants. Namely Edom, will always try to destroy us, yet we remain steadfast in our ways. In the Gemara in Tanis 5b, R' Yitzchak said to R' Nachman after finishing eating, in the

name of R' Yochanan, that "Yakov Lo Meis" (Yakov never died). The gemara asks but didn't they embalm and eulogize for Yakov? The gemara answers from Yirmiah, and explains, that the posuk (in Yirmiyahu) draws a parallel between Yakov and his seed (offspring), just as the seed of Yakov are living, so to Yakov lived (at the time). Commentaries, and medrish explains, that while there may not be a physical manifestation of Yakov's existence, we know from these parsheos, that Yakov empowered his offspring to remain steadfast in the ways of Hashem, and with that he lives. As it states in multiple sources, "Ki Gedolim Tzadikim B'misan yoser bichayehem"² or "Hatzadikim b'misan keruim chaim".

The Medrashim and Rabbanan interpret the Roman Empire to be descendent of Esav, and these descendants destroyed the second Beis Hamikdash. Which is the connection of the Haftora to this week's parsha.

Firstly, Rashi on posuk 14 of chapter 33 quotes the haftora, in the Rashi divrei hamaschil "Ad asher avo el adonee seira", where Rashi references that fact that Esav will be conquered by Yakov "V'alu Moshi'im B'Har Zion...".

This week's Haftora is from Obadiah, (we read the entire book-a single chapter). Obadiah was a righteous Edomite, who saved nevi'im who were being massacred by Achav and Yizevel. He lived at the time of Elisha, and due to his personal sacrifice of

¹ See footnote 4 for explanation

² Berachos 18a; Ein Yakov Berachos, Divrei Sofrim,, Me'or Einyaim Chayei Sara.

sustaining 150 prophets, he was rewarded with this vision³.

The entire prophecy is about the oppression Esav caused, and causes Yakov, but that retribution will come, and we will be redeemed. The final posuk being “and saviors will ascend Har Zion to judge the Mountain of Esav, and kingdom will be Hashem’s”. This is a cross reference to Micah 5, which is partially read as the Haftora for Parshas Balak. The similar sentiment is shared, that Yakov will prevail, and our enemies will fall.

This parsha reads Obadiah simply because one may read the parsha and know that Edom seems to have always ruled over us, and conquered us, and all the negative prophecies have come true, but, says the prophet, do not forget that Yakov will prevail. Yakov was blessed as we see in the parsha, a plethora of times, the same blessing, the strength, nation building, and success of the future, especially to a time, when we will conquer our Edomite enemy. Which connects to parshas Balak thematically, where our enemies tried to use our own blessings against us (Bilam and Balak), yet even though there was a moment of error, we prevailed. Furthermore, Obadiah, being an Edomite is a reverse of Bilam was to Balak. He prophesied, as an Edomite instead of the destruction of the Jews, of their future when they will be conquered by the Jews. (Although not in this parsha, but later when Yakov is finally laid to rest in Ma’ras Hamachpeila, Dan’s son Chushim beheads

Esav. Chushim is an ambigram for Mashiach-a reference to the future prophecy of Obadiah, and our conquering of Edom in the days of Mashiach.)

The Alter Rebbe in Torah Ohr on this week’s parsha references the sources of Yakov and Esav’s souls. Yakov derived from the Olam Hatikkun, and Eisav from Olam Hatochu. Olam Hatikkun is the manifestation of order and reconciliation in this world, for two or more opposing powers to exist (Yakov is known by the trait Tiferes, which combines the Chesed and Gevura of Avraham and Yitzchak before him). Whereas Esav represented chaos and disorder. And although the world of chaos derives from a higher level than the world of order, nevertheless, Esav was not able to reconcile his traits in an orderly method as part of his mission on this world to make it a dwelling place for Hashem. This is also why Esav is Yakov’s antithesis, whereas Yakov represents order and reconciliation, and the power to create order out of chaos, Esav is completely and utterly chaotic. This then further substantiates the prophecy of Obadiah, about the end of days, when Esav will be conquered by Yakov (per the original Shem prophecy to Rivka about her twins), and reconciliation and tikkun will override chaos⁴.

Good Shabbos

³ Him being an Edomite, prophesying on Edom’s future destruction, is referenced in Tanya that from the forest comes the handle of the axe.

⁴ This could be a reason why Yakov had the power to harness actual angels as Rashi says in the beginning of the parsha, angels represent steadfast and orderly servitude to Hashem, which Yakov mastered.