

וישלך הגידה נא Vayishlach The Vein of Forgetting

שמך

There are so many word plays in this week's Torah portion, one doesn't really know where to begin. Vayivater, Yaakov Levado, sounds like the other place in the Torah where the word Vayivater comes, but without a vet. There it's a, there it's a vet, here it's with a vav, so it's an oral homonym, but it means to split. Here it means he was left alone, Vayivater Yaakov Levado, but really over there by Av Mavinu, that's one place to look. Vayiaveik Ishimo, and he was wrestled with, also sounds like Yaakov. There's the river called Yabok, which is also sounds like Yaakov, and so on. Panim, and so many words that are word plays, or leitmotifs, and words that repeat themselves over, it's such a beautifully constructed story here in this week's Torah portion.

But of all of those that I've heard and read, I'm indebted to Shmuel Klissner for this one, which I won't easily forget, because it's about not forgetting. Hagida Na Shmecha, when Jacob says to the angel, please tell me your name, Hagida Na Shmecha, and then later on when the Torah says that Jacob's injury, the source, the location of Jacob's injury becomes the original root, so to speak, of the prohibition against eating from the sciatic nerve.

Kashrut, all of a sudden Kashrut comes into this week's Torah portion out of nowhere, and we're told that that place that we're not allowed to eat from, that nerve that we're not allowed to eat from, is called Gid Hanashe. Gid means a nerve or a sinew. Hanashe, this thing called Nashe. Gid Hanashe. So that's the place in Jacob's hip that he was hit, so we can't eat it in the cow. We're not allowed to have this Gid Hanashe. And Shmuel Klissner says, you know, if you listen carefully to the text, it sounds very much like Hagida Na Shmecha. Hagida Na Shmecha. Hagida Na Shmecha. Tell me please your name. Okay everybody, so thanks Rabbi. Very interesting for the Torah idea. Lovely, interesting. I'm going to go tell it over at some point and be the hit of the party.

What's the connection? What's the connection that Shmuel Klissner is trying to make for us, and what indeed is the meaning of Gid Hanashe? So all of the commentaries have their own trying to work with it. It's the sinew of Nashe. What does that mean? It's the sciatic nerve. What does the word Nashe mean? And Rashi makes a very beautiful point. He says we really have this word appearing earlier on in the Torah. I'm sorry, later on the Torah, excuse me, later on the Torah, where Joseph will name his children. He'll name one of them. Do people know the two names of Joseph's children? Ephraim and Menashe. He Nashani Elohim, for God has Nashani, Rashi says. What is Nashani? Joseph is alone in exile. He's away from his family. He misses them terribly, longs for them. There's no Skype. And he names his child Menashe for what? For God has made me forget. God has made me forget my sufferings. Menashe means the one who helps me to forget.

Of course, the irony is profound because in naming him as the one who helps me forget, what does he do? He ensures that he doesn't ever forget. But here comes Menashe and Rashi says the word Gid, sinew of Nashe means, now if you connect everything, what does it mean? It means the sinew of the forgetting vein. The vein of forgetfulness. You get that? We are never allowed to eat from the vein of forgetfulness. The Gid and Nashe is that place,

which is Hagida Nashmecha, tell me your name, which means, have you forgotten who you are? Jacob wants a name. He wants control. He wants to know who you are, which is what we want to know from Jacob. Jacob, who are you? We've seen you in so many guises, literally and figuratively. Are you the Ishtam Yoshe Voalim? Are you the simple son? Are you the conniving son? Are you the mama's boy? Are you the deceitful one with your uncle Lavan? Are you the one who is the victim? Who are you, Jacob? Will the real Jacob please stand up? And he tells the angel, Hagida Nashmecha, I'm sorry, have we met before? I forgot. Hagida Nashmecha, if I don't have my name, if I don't know who I am, then indeed I am. I'm in a place of forgetfulness, a place of deep sleep. Hagidana, Hagidana, don't forget.

You could say that it's the vein of repression. The vein of repression. It could be the vein of suppression. It could be the vein of the unconscious. It could be anything, but the Torah is telling us here that forgetfulness, darkness, is in our tradition, you want to use the word sin, it's an unfortunate word. It's the primal correction that needs to take place. It's the fixing in our lives of bringing light to those places that are dark. It's no secret that the rabbis view darkness with a little bit of a, I wouldn't call it ambivalence. The entire holiday of Hanukkah is a holiday of bringing light to places that are dark. The word in Hebrew for dark and the Hebrew word for forgetfulness are the same letters, choshech l'shkoach, to forget, to lose your way. So the Torah is saying here a couple of weeks before Hanukkah, remember, the Torah is saying here a couple of weeks before Hanukkah that in all of our struggles, what we're really trying to do is to wake up and see clearly. In all of our spiritual practices, we are sitting face to face with the things that we usually say, you know, I'll get to you soon.

In truth, every one of us on that day that Yaakov was touched in that place was touched in that place too. Each and every one of us struggled with that angel that day. Each and every one of us was wounded in that place of forgetfulness. And each of us has our particular limp, a particular crawl that is the result of that struggle.

So God should bless us and he blessed me back, please, all of us, that as the dark days are upon us, that we ourselves become the Hanukkah limples, we become the Hanukkah lights, bringing awareness and light. And when we, all of us observe this particular halachah of kashrut, if anybody asks you if you're kosher, you could say yes, I'm kosher. I try to remember at all times. That's my practice, in addition to other things.