

Parashas Vayishlach – Gid HaNoshe - David Levy

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This week's *Parashah* of *Vayishlach* contains the first negative *Mitzvah* in the Torah, namely the prohibition of eating the *Gid HaNoshe*.

Yaakov, having taken his family and his possessions across the *Yabok* stream, crossed back over it to collect some small jars (according to *Rashi*) and was left alone with a man (identified in the *Medrash* as *Eisov's Malach*) who wrestled with him and the man being unable to prevail over Yaakov injured Yaakov by dislocating his thigh. *Bereishis* 32:33 continues: *Al Kein Lo Yochlu V'nei Yisroel Es Gid HaNoshe Asher Al Caf HaYoreich Ad HaYom Hazeh Ki Noga B'Chaf Yerech Yaakov B'Gid HaNoshe* "Therefore the Children of Israel are not to eat the displaced sinew on the ball of the thighbone to this day because he struck the ball of the thighbone on the displaced sinew".

Why is it "displaced sinew"? Because it popped out of its place and moved upwards (*Noshe* means "jump out").

Why did the *Malach* grab Yaakov by the thigh? The *Baal Haturim* brings two reasons (based on *Medrash Tanchumah*): (i) to check if Yaakov was also a *Malach* (angel) – angels cannot sit, only stand (for example when the three angels visited *Avrohom* it says he invited them *V'hishoanu tachas Hoetz* to lean on the tree) so an angel would not have this sinew; (ii) *Eisov* regretted that he had let Yaakov acquire his *B'choroh* (birthright) and his *Malach* wanted to disqualify Yaakov from the Priestly service (originally designated for firstborns) by giving him a *Mum* (blemish). Alternatively it is suggested he wanted to grab the *Shtar* (document of sale) – people kept important documents tied to their thighs.

Why does it say: "Therefore *Bnei Yisroel* do not eat the *Gid Hanoshe*"?

Chizkuni gives two reasons: (a) Yaakov's companions should have accompanied him when he went back to collect these jars. We learn in several places in the Torah the importance of *Leviyoh* "accompanying" someone when he begins a journey and they were punished by not being allowed to eat this piece of meat (however this is difficult to understand as the *Gid HaNoshe* itself actually has no taste); (b) *Eisov's* angel wanted to kill Yaakov but could not so he just hurt him by grabbing the *Gid HaNoshe* and for that reason we don't eat it - we acknowledge the miracle that the angel was unable to kill Yaakov.

What exactly is the *Gid HaNoshe*?

It is the sciatic nerve; a sinew that goes down the legs from the spine to the hoof (of an animal). There are actually two such sinews an inner one which is near the bone and an outer one which is near the flesh. The inner one is forbidden by the Torah and the outer one Rabbinically (*G'moro Chullin* 91a)

From when were the *B'nei Yisroel* not allowed to eat the *Gid HaNoshe*?

There is a dispute in *Mishnah Chullin* 100b. Rabbi Y'hudah says from the time of this incident but the Rabbis say only from when the *Torah* was given. *Rambam* says it was only effective from the time when the *Torah* was given but it is mentioned in *Parashas Yayishlach* to explain why the prohibition exists. Other commentators suggest that even from the time of Yaakov the *B'nei Yisroel* did not eat the *Gid Hanoshe* but we do not eat it only because it was prohibited in the *Torah* from *Sinai*.

From which leg is the *Gid Hanoshe* forbidden? In *Chullin* 91a Rabbi Y'hudah says only from the right leg but the Rabbis say from both legs. The *G'moro* itself gives two views of Rabbi Y'hudah's reasoning: either that the *Malach* looked to Yaakov like an idol worshipper who might attack him and following the advice in *G'moro Avodah Zoroh* 25b you should walk on the left side of such a person who insists on accompanying you (so as to be able to defend yourself on your strong side) or that he looked like a *Talmid Chochom* and in *G'moro Yoma* 37a it says you should walk on the left side of a *Talmid Chochom*: so according to Rabbi Y'hudah either way Yaakov was attacked on his right side. The Rabbis held that Yaakov was attacked from both sides and behind and therefore the prohibition applies to both the right and left legs.

Sefer HaChinuch echoed by the *Medrash* and *Ramban* says that the reason for this *Mitzvah* is a hint to us that all the troubles that have fallen upon us from the descendants of *Eisov* and all the control they have over us stem from the fact the *Eisov's Malach* hurt Yaakov's *Gid HaNoshe*. To end on a happier note the *Zohar* on *Parashas Vayishlach* states that the 365 negative *Mitzvos* correspond to the 365 days of the solar year. It says that *Gid HaNoshe* specifically corresponds to *Tisha B'Av* (the word before *Gid HaNoshe* is *Es* (Aleph Tov) and this hints at *Tisha B'Av*). Why does it say: *Ad HaYom Hazeh* (to this day) we don't eat *Gid HaNoshe*? Regarding other *Mitzvos* it either says *Ad Olom* (forever) or *Ledoroseichem* (throughout your generations) or is without time limit. Here it indicates that just as when *Moshiach* comes *Tisha B'Av* will no longer be a day of mourning so there will no longer be this prohibition of *Gid HaNoshe* and we will be free from *Eisov's* control.
