

Vayigash

Lions and Moshiach

And the sons of Dan were Chushim.

Bereishis 46:23

In the process of building the Mishkan, Moshe was told by Hashem to choose Betzalel of the tribe of Yehuda, and Oholiav of the tribe of Dan to take charge of this monumental project. Rashi¹ quotes the Midrash Tanchuma,² which explains, “Oholiav was from the tribe of Dan, the lowliest of the tribes from among the maidservants’ children [as opposed to Leah or Rachel], and the Torah considered him as great as Betzalel, a member of the greatest of the tribes, when it came to building the Mishkan.”

The tribe of Dan was not simply a lowly tribe as a result of having been born to a maidservant of Yaakov. Rashi³ tells us that they all worshiped idols, and thus the clouds of glory spit them out! The tribe of Yehuda was a lion, the source of a lineage of distinguished kings. Yehuda led the nation in their travels, and Dan took up the rear. And yet, the only two tribes compared to lions are Yehuda and Dan. Yaakov said,⁴ “A lion cub is Yehuda,” and Moshe said,⁵ “Dan is a lion cub.” R. Avraham Ibn Ezra⁶ explains that it was necessary to have a lion taking up the rear just as it was needed to have a lion leading the Jewish nation, in order to protect them from both ends. So Dan was a lion, while at the same time, being the weakling, struggling to keep up.

What is going on with Dan? Is he the weakest or one of the strongest? Is he in the back because he is inferior, or because he is a lion?

Yaakov had died, and it was time to bury him. The Gemara⁷ tells us that, “When they arrived at the Cave of Machpelah, Esav approached and began disturbing them. He said, ‘We know that there can only be four couples buried in this cave, and thus far, there are three, plus Leah; the remaining spot next to Leah is for me!’ They replied to Esav, ‘But you sold your rights to Yaakov.’...Esav said, ‘Show me the contract,’ and they replied, ‘But the contract is back in Egypt!’ So they sent Naftali, who was swift like a gazelle, to retrieve the contract. Chushim, the son of Dan, was there, and he was hard of hearing.⁸ He asked the others, ‘What is going

1 Shemos 35:34

2 Shemos ch. 13

3 To Yechezkel 16:15. See also Targum Yonason to Dvarim 25:18

4 Bereishis 49:9

5 Dvarim 33:22

6 Commentary to Bamidbar 1:19

7 Sotah 13a

8 This is Rashi’s opinion. See, however, *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer* 39, where it is clear that Chushim could neither hear nor speak at all. See also Radal, ad loc.

on?’ They told him. He said, ‘And until Naftali returns, must our father sit here in this disgraceful state?’ He took a staff and smashed Esav on the head with it. Esav’s eyes fell out and landed on Yaakov’s leg. Yaakov opened his eyes and smiled.”

So Chushim killed Esav. And yet, Tosafos tells us⁹ that the descendants of Esav have a tradition telling us that Yehuda killed Esav, and in fact, this is the opinion of the Sifri. He explains that both are true. First, Chushim stepped in and gave Esav a serious blow causing his eyes to come out, but he was still alive. Then Yehuda stepped in and finished him off, killing him.¹⁰

“The [Messiah] son of David will come only to a generation that is entirely righteous, or one that is entirely wicked,” teaches the Gemara.¹¹

Esav was finished off either by the handicapped son of the lowest tribe, or the king of the greatest tribe! In fact, R. Moshe Wolfson¹² writes that in the times just before the Moshiach, those alive will be the reincarnations of the souls of the tribe of Dan. It is interesting that only now in history do we witness the mass phenomenon of people being brought back to Torah out of their lowliness – “A generation that is entirely wicked.” In any other time in history, there was always something in the world that was not available, which provided a lure to the righteous. “Maybe fulfilling that desire will be pleasurable,” people wondered. In our age, every single degenerate action is readily available to any sixteen-year-old! There are so many people who are twenty-one years old, have already tried every single *avierah* in the world, and have seen how hollow life can be. *Baalei Tshuva* are made every day of people who are “entirely wicked,” by people who have tried everything, and have nowhere to go but up. [These people are not “evil,” merely engaged in wicked deeds, usually by no fault of their own. It is not our place to judge them.]

Maybe the ultimate redemption, the death of the kingdom of Esav, will follow the death of the actual Esav, beginning with the weakest of the weak, and being concluded by the strongest of the strong.

Chushim was the son of Dan; he was one fellow. But the Torah tells us that “the sons of Dan

9 Gittin 55b s.v. *biyehuda biharugei malchus*.

10 Midrash Shocheh Tov 18:32 supports the view that Yehuda killed Esav, but says that it was at the funeral of Yitzchak, and it was Yehuda’s successful attempt to protect Yaakov’s life.

11 Sanhedrin 98a

12 *Emunas Itecha*, Vayigash, s.v. *b’Midrash*, and there in *maamar* “Iggeres Hapurim”

were Chushim.” Why is he called more than one person?¹³ The Sheloh¹⁴ quotes the Arizal as pointing out that the letters of Chushim, *ches, shin, yod* and *mem*, are the very letters that also spell *Mosbiach!* The Sheloh, elsewhere,¹⁵ talks of the transformation of Dan from a snake (Yaakov called him a snake¹⁶) into a lion, in the times just before Moshiach’s arrival!¹⁷ In fact, R. Tzadok of Lublin writes¹⁸ that while the father of Moshiach will be from Yehuda, his mother will be from Dan! Perhaps these are the two sons referred to in the verse. The sons of Dan were Chushim (and Moshiach).

We are handicapped, and are the lowest of the low, in so many ways. There has never been a generation that was at this low a level. But when we stand up, we turn from a snake into lion. When we will fight and struggle, and stand up for the truth, we will bring the Redemption. We will turn ourselves from weak snakes, slithering in the back of the camp in our filth and in idolatry, to great roaring lions. We will get up and declare, “Must our Father sit here in this disgraceful state?” The Moshiach can only come to a generation that is entirely righteous or entirely wicked. Esav was only done away with by a combination, first of the weakest of the weak, and then by the greatest of the great. The Mishkan was only built by the combination of Dan and Yehuda. Moshiach himself will be a combination of Dan and Yehuda. Yehuda was far more powerful than Chushim, but until Chushim stood up and took responsibility, Yehuda was powerless in fighting Esav. There are many great people in our generation, and then there are the rest of us. But they cannot end it all until we make the move that we really

13 See the Targum Yonsason that understands that, in fact, Dan had many children, and Chushim is simply a description of them – meaning that they were strong and incredibly numerous. This seems to be why they were not mentioned by name – because there were so many eventual descendants! Ibn Ezra suggests that there were two children, and only one survived. The same is found in *Chizkuni*. There were seventy souls who went down to Egypt (see Exodus 1) and this does not work out, should Dan have had more than one child at the time of the exodus. That left room for either the interpretation that he had more children who did not survive, or the interpretation (of Rava, as explained in Tosafos to Bava Basra 143b) that he may have had more children after that. See Bereishis Rabbah 94:9: “In the Torah of R. Meir it said, ‘And the son of Dan was Chushim.’” [This does not mean that his text was different – its depth is beyond the scope of this footnote.] See there also (according to *Yefei Toar*) that Chushim, because of his greatness, may have counted as two people, thus making the Jews seventy in number! See also *Tiferes Hagersbuni* (of R. Gershon Ashkenazi, the author of *Shaalso Uteshuvos Avodas Hagersboni*) on Chumash to Vayigash, s.v. *issa kol hanefesh* (p. 109 ed. Stepansky), where he explains further based upon the Midrash (Yalkut Haazinu 942) that the seventy nations correspond to the seventy souls of the Jews who went down to Egypt, and therefore, if there is one person who is like two people, then one nation does not really have a proper counterpart. Therefore, the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 10a) teaches us that the descendants of Esav do not have their own script or language, for they are the second part of Chushim, and don’t have a proper counterpart. Therefore, he explains, it had to be Chushim himself who put an end to Esav himself!

14 *Torah Ohr*, Parshas Pinchas. This is already found in *Sefer Haremazim* of Rabenu Yoel to Vayigash p. 168. See also his remarks to Vayechi p. 181 s.v. *Gur aryeh* where he asserts that the power of *Gur aryeh* this power of Moshiach, and points out that the gematria of *gur aryeh* is the same as that of *Moshaich*.

15 *Derech Chaim Tochacos Mussar*, Vezos Habracha.

16 Bereishis 49:17

17 See also Shir Hashirim Rabbah 4:15, where it speaks of Dan becoming a lion from a snake.

18 *Likkutei Maamarim*, Inyan Shimshon 1. He explains that this is how Yaakov mistook Shimshon for the Moshiach, for his father was from Dan and his mother was from Yehuda; but this is the exact opposite of how things will be.

should. We are all “Chushim ben Dan”s – and every Chushim ben Dan has the power of Moshiach in him.