



“And Yisrael saw Yosef’s sons and he said, ‘Who are these?’”

Yaakov Was Surprised that Yosef Did Not Father Twelve Shevatim to Eliminate the Klipos of Eisav and His Eleven Chieftains

At the beginning of this week’s parsha, parshas Vayechi, we find that Yaakov Avinu asks Yosef a curious question (Bereishis 48, 8): **“וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף: וַיִּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר מִי אֱלֹהִים, וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף: אֵל אֲבֹתַי וְאֲבֹתֶיךָ.”** And Yisrael saw Yosef’s sons and he said, **“Who are these?”** And Yosef said to his father, **“They are my sons whom G-d has given me with this.”** He said, **“Bring them to me, if you please, and I will bless them.”** In this essay, we will explore the intent of Yaakov’s inquiry.

It is with immense pleasure that we will present to our esteemed readership a novel explanation explaining Yaakov Avinu’s profound concern and reason for inquiring **“Who are these?”** We will begin by referring to a wonderful chiddush from Chazal in the Gemara (Sotah 36b): **“תִּנְיָא, הֵיךְ רָאִי יוֹסֵף לְצֵאת מִמֶּנּוּ י”ב שְׁבָטִים, כְּדֶרֶךְ שִׁיעָא מִיַּעֲקֹב אֲבִיו, שְׁנֵאמֹר: אֱלֹהִים תּוֹלְדוֹת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף אֵלָּא שִׁיעָא שְׁכַבְתָּ זֶרְעוֹ מִבֵּין צִיְפוּרֵי יָדָיו.”** It is taught in a Baraisa: **Yosef deserved to have twelve tribes descend from him, the same as descended from his father Yaakov, as it is stated (Bereishis 37, 2): “These are the generations of Yaakov, Yosef.”** However, **his semen was excreted from between his (ten) fingernails.** As a consequence, ten sons were lost to him, and he only fathered two sons—Ephraim and Menasheh.

We will now introduce the amazing commentary of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh related to Yosef’s response to Yaakov: **“בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לִי אֱלֹהִים בְּזֶה.”** He breaks down the word **בְּזֶה** into **ב’ ז”ה**. The gematria of **ב’** is 2; the gematria

of **ז”ה** is 12. According to this interpretation of the text, Yosef was alluding to the fact that he should have rightfully fathered twelve sons instead of only two.

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to embellish this sacred interpretation. Yosef’s response to Yaakov—that he only fathered two out of the twelve sons he was supposed to—implies that Yaakov asked him why this was so. This then is the meaning of the pesukim: **“Yisrael saw Yosef’s sons”**—that there were only two of them. So, he inquired: **“Who are these?”**—why did you only father two sons, when you were supposed to father twelve sons like I did?

Let us add a wonderful tidbit. They deduced from the passuk: **“אלה תולדות יעקב יוסף”**—**these are the generations of Yaakov, Yosef**—that Yosef was supposed to father as many sons as Yaakov. (In fact, they deduced from this passuk that everything that happened to Yaakov was destined to happen to Yosef.) This prompted Yaakov to inquire: **“Who are these?”** This question can be understood in two ways: (1) Why did you only have two sons instead of twelve? And (2) **“Who”** or what happened to the other ten sons that you were supposed to father to fulfill that which is written: **“These are the generations of Yaakov, Yosef”**? To which Yosef replied: **“They are my sons whom G-d has given me בְּזֶה.”** In other words, HKB”H orchestrated that I would only father **ב’ (2)** sons rather than **ז”ה (12)**; on account of the difficult ordeal I endured in Mitzrayim, I lost ten sons.

The Twelve Hours of the Day Correspond to the Twelve Shevatim the Twelve Hours of the Night Correspond to Eisav and His Eleven Chieftains

Since it is the nature of Torah to be interpreted in seventy different ways, I would like to propose my own interpretation of Yaakov Avinu's question: **"Who are these?"** Furthermore, what is the significance of the fact that Yosef was supposed to father twelve shevatim like Yaakov did?

I had a wonderful idea based on an illuminating explanation presented by the Pri Megadim in the Sefer HaMaggid (Bein HaMetzarim 119b) in the name of the esteemed author of the Tevuot Shor, zy"a, in the sefer Bechor Shor (Berachos 3a). There, he brings down in the name of his father a fantastic allusion found in the Zohar hakadosh and the writings of the Arizal. They explain that midnight is a propitious time to arise and lament the churban of the Beis HaMikdash. This is based on a teaching in the Midrash that the twelve hours of the day correspond to the twelve shevatim, and the twelve hours of the night correspond to Eisav and his eleven chieftains (listed at the conclusion of parshas Vayishlach):

"ואלה שמות אלוףי עשו למשפחתם למקמותם בשמותם, אלוף תמנע, אלוף עקנה, אלוף יתת, אלוף אהליבמה, אלוף אלה, אלוף פינז, אלוף קנז, אלוף תימן, אלוף מבצר, אלוף מגדיאל, אלוף עירם, אלוף אדום למשבותם בארץ אחרתם הוא עשו אבי אדום."

Now, if we count the wicked Eisav as the leader and first of the chieftains that descended from him, it turns out that the sixth hour of the night aligns with the fifth chieftain—**"אלוף אלה"**. Thus, midnight is at the end of the sixth hour; that is the appropriate time to arise and lament the churban of the Beis HaMikdash. The divine poet, Yirmiyah HaNavi, mourning the churban, alludes to this as follows (Eichah 1, 16): **"על אלה אני בוכיה"**—**over these I weep**. In other words, at the conclusion of the sixth hour corresponding to the Chieftain of **"אלה"**, I weep over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash. This concludes his sacred insight.

This concurs magnificently with what our mentor, the Arizal, teaches in Sha'ar HaKavanos: **The actual control**

and reign of the forces of evil is exclusively during the night. This is alluded to by the passuk (Tehillim 104, 20): **"תשת חושך ויהי לילה בו תרמוש כל חיתו יער"**—**you make darkness, and it is night, in which stirs every beast of the forest.** The "beasts of the forest" refer to the klipos and their malevolent forces; their aim is to devour all that is kadosh, chas v'shalom.

This explains beautifully the insight of the father of the Bechor Shor. As explained, the sixth hour of the night aligns with the **Chieftain of "אלה"**. We also pointed out that the divine poet lamenting the churban alludes to this in Megillas Eichah with the words **"על אלה אני בוכיה"**. He is telling us that he weeps over the churban at the end of the sixth hour which corresponds to the **Chieftain of "אלה"**.

We can explain the matter in greater depth by referring to a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Lech Lecha 92b). In relation to Avraham Avinu, it is written (Bereishis 14, 15): **"ויחלק עליהם לילה"**—**he divided (his men) against them at night.** According to the Zohar, this implies that the night is divided up into two parts. "Midas hadin" reigns from the beginning of the night until midnight. After midnight, HKB"H enters Gan Eden to enjoy the company of the tzaddikim, and "midas hachessed" prevails for the rest of the night. Therefore, midnight signals divine goodwill. Hence it is the fitting, propitious time to weep and lament over the reign of the chieftains of Eisav, characterized by "midas hadin," which concludes the first half of the night with the Chieftain of **"אלה"**. This is the implication of: **"על אלה אני בוכיה"**.

Yosef Was Supposed to Father 12 Shevatim to Negate the Klipos of Eisav and His 11 Chieftains

Following this line of reasoning, we will now explain why Yosef was meant to father twelve sons just as Yaakov Avinu did. Let us refer to the passuk chronicling the birth of Yosef (ibid. 30, 25): **"ויהי כאשר ילדה רחל את יוסף ויאמר יעקב אל לבן שלחני"**—**and it was, when Rachel had given birth to Yosef, Yaakov said to Lavan, "Grant me leave that I may go to my place."** Rashi explains: **Once the nemesis of Eisav was born, as it says (Ovadia 1, 18): "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.**

Furthermore, we find in a Midrash cited by Rashi (beginning of parshas Vayeishev), whose source is the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeishev 1), that the kedushah of Yosef HaTzaddik counteracts all eleven chieftains of Eisav:

Yaakov saw all of the chieftains listed above. He wondered and said, “Who can conquer them all?” What is written further on? “These are the offspring of Yaakov, Yosef,” and it is written: “The house of Yaakov shall be a fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav for straw.” A spark emanating from Yosef will consume and burn all of them.

We can now begin to comprehend why Yosef was supposed to father twelve shevatim like his father. Yaakov Avinu fathered twelve shevatim to sanctify the twelve hours of the day. In similar fashion, Yosef HaTzaddik, the nemesis of Eisav and his eleven chieftains, was meant to father twelve shevatim to sanctify the twelve hours of the night, thereby subduing their klipos that prevail during the twelve hours of darkness at night.

Thus, it should be apparent that had Yosef HaTzaddik produced twelve shevatim, their kedushah would have counteracted and negated the reign of Eisav and his eleven chieftains during the twelve hours of the night. As a result, the darkness of the night would have been eliminated and the night would have been illuminated. This is consistent with a passuk related to the future geulah (Yeshayah 30, 26): **“וְהָיָה אֹרֶךְ הַלַּבְנָה כְּאֹרֶךְ הַחֲמָה”**—**and the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun.** However, since the time of the geulah had not yet arrived, it was orchestrated from above that Yosef HaTzaddik would not father twelve shevatim. Consequently, the forces of Eisav and his chieftains succeeded in destroying the Beis HaMikdash.

“Remember, Hashem, for the offspring of Edom, the day of Yerushalayim”

The fact that the churban of the Beis HaMikdash is attributed to the descendants of Eisav is taught in the Gemara and various Midrashim. For, the Roman Empire

responsible for destroying the second Beis HaMikdash is Edom, the descendants of Eisav HaRasha. Here is a pertinent passage from the Gemara (Gittin 57b):

“אמר רב יהודה אמר רב, מאי דכתיב על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו בזכרנו את ציון, מלמד שהראהו הקדוש ברוך הוא לדוד, חורבן בית ראשון וחורבן בית שני, חורבן בית ראשון, שנאמר על נהרות בבל שם ישבנו גם בכינו, בית שני, דכתיב זכור ה' לבני אדם את יום ירושלים האומרים ערו ערו.” Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: **What is the meaning of that which was written (Tehillim 137, 1): “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and also wept as we remembered Tziyon”? This teaches that HKB”H showed David the churban of the first Temple and the churban of the second Temple. The churban of the first Temple, as it says: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and also wept.” That of the second Temple, as it says (ibid. 7): “Remember, Hashem, the day of Yerushalayim for the descendants of Edom, for those who would say, ‘Destroy! Destroy to its very foundation!’”**

This is also evident from the following Midrash (Esther Rabbah 3, 5): **The congregation of Israel said before HKB”H, “Master of the Universe, You saw that Esau HaRasha came, and is destined to destroy the Temple, exile Israel from its land . . .”** In fact, the Gemara (ibid. 56b) states explicitly that the perpetrator of the churban was a descendant of Eisav. For, when the wicked Titus, who subsequently became the Emperor of Rome, approached Yerushalayim to destroy the Beis HaMikdash: **A heavenly voice (a “bas kol”) went out and said to him (to Titus), “O evil man, the son of an evil man, a descendant of Eisav HaRasha . . .”**

We can now begin to comprehend what Yaakov Avinu was hinting to Yosef when he saw Yosef’s sons and inquired, **“Who are these?”** Seeing that Yosef came to him with only two sons, Yaakov realized that the time for the geulah had not yet arrived. He understood that the forces of darkness associated with Eisav and his eleven chieftains, who prevail during the twelve hours of darkness at night, were still in force, since they would only be eliminated at the time of the geulah. As such, they were destined to destroy the Beis HaMikdash, and we would have to arise at midnight, after the sixth hour associated with the Chieftain of **“אלה”** to weep and lament **“על אלה אני בוכיה”**.

This explains Yaakov's question fantastically: **"Who are these?"**—"מי אלה?" How did this happen? Weren't you supposed to father twelve children so that we would not have to weep and mourn over the churban the words: **"על" אלה אני בוכיה**? To which Yosef replied: **"They are my sons whom G-d has given me בזה."** It has been orchestrated from above that instead of fathering **12** sons (י"ב), I would only father **2** sons (ב'); as a consequence of the difficult ordeal I endured, I lost ten sons.

Studying Torah at Night Abolishes the Reign of the Forces of Evil

Notwithstanding, it is incumbent upon every Jew to do his part in rectifying this situation. Even though Yosef did not father twelve sons, which would have negated the reign of Eisav and his chieftains during the twelve hours of the night; nevertheless, the divine poet of Megillas Eichah advised us how to overcome them. As they taught in the Gemara (Tamid 32b): **"תנא רבי חייא כל העוסק בתורה בלילה שכינה כנגדו, שנאמר קומי רוני בלילה לראש אשמורות שפכי כמים לבך נכח פני ה'."** **Rabbi Chiya taught a Baraisa: Whoever studies Torah at night merits that the Shechinah stands opposite him. As it says (Eichah 2, 19): "Arise, sing (the words of Torah) at night, at the beginning of the (night) watches; pour out your heart like water in the presence of Hashem."**

The Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3, 13) extols the virtues of studying Torah at night in enthusiastic terms. He is cited by the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 246, 24). Here is a translation of the moving words of the Rambam:

Even though it is a mitzvah to study during the day and at night, it is only at night that a person acquires most of his wisdom. Therefore, a person who desires to merit the crown of Torah should be careful with all his nights, not wasting even one with sleep, eating, drinking, idle chatter, or the like. Rather, [they should be devoted to] the study of Torah and the words of wisdom. Our Sages declared: "The song of Torah can [be heard] only at night, as it states (Eichah 2:19): 'Arise, sing out at night . . .'" Whoever occupies himself with Torah study at night will have a strand of divine favor extended over him during the day, as it states (Tehillim

42, 9) . . . **And any house in which words of Torah are not heard at night, will be consumed by fire, as it says (Iyov 20, 26) . . .**

The Tiferes Shlomo (Vayeitzei) also extols the virtues of nighttime Torah-study and asserts that it subdues the reign of the forces of evil that prevail during the night. Here is a loose translation of his magnificent words related to the passuk (Bereishis 28, 11):

"He lay down in that place." Rashi comments that Yaakov lay down to sleep there but had not done so during the fourteen years that he studied in the House of Eiver, because he stayed awake at night studying Torah. It is vital to understand why tzaddikim do not sleep much at night. We find that this was also true of David HaMelech; he was always awake at midnight. The same holds true of all the tzaddikim. For, as we know, the night is the dominion of the forces of evil, may the Merciful One help us. Therefore, due to the Torah-study of tzaddikim at night, the forces of evil are subdued and overcome, preventing them, chalilah, from corrupting human beings.

This is precisely what HKB"H instructed Yehoshua, a member of shevet Ephraim, a descendant of Yosef (Yehoshua 1, 8): **"לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפִּיךָ והגית בו יומם ולילה"**—**this book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth; rather you should contemplate it day and night.** For, by engaging in Torah-study during the night, we are able to negate the reign of Eisav and his eleven chieftains.

The Incredible Prophecy of Yaakov Avinu concerning the Ten Martyrs

We will now continue on this sacred path of enlightenment to explore the significance of what Yaakov Avinu said to Yosef after Yosef reveals to him that he was only privileged to father **two** sons instead of **twelve**. Yaakov says (Bereishis 48, 5): **"ועתה שני בניך הנולדים לך בארץ מצרים עד: בואי אליך מצרימה לי הם, אפרים ומנשה כראובן ושמעון יהיו לי, ומולדתך אשר הולדת אחריהם לך יהיו על שם אחיהם יקראו בנחלתם."** **And now, your two sons who were born to you in Mitzrayim before my coming to you to Mitzrayim, they are mine; Ephraim and Menashe shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon. But your progeny whom you beget after them**

shall be yours; they will be included under the name of their brothers with regards to their inheritance.

I would like to suggest an explanation with the utmost reverence and love. Yaakov Avinu was conveying to Yosef a powerful and dreadful nevuah. Yaakov was hinting to him what was destined to occur as a consequence of his brothers selling him into slavery. As already explained, as a consequence of the difficult ordeal he had endured, he did not father the additional ten sons he was supposed to father. To begin to better comprehend Yaakov Avinu's remarks, we will introduce two precious insights that will illuminate the way for us.

Firstly, we are taught that the ten shevatim involved in the sale of Yosef reincarnated into the "ten martyrs" as their atonement. This is taught in the Zohar Chadash (Midrash Ruth): **The ten martyrs were punished on account of the sale of Yosef.** According to our master, the Arizal, in Sha'ar Ma'amarei Rashbi (ibid.), the shevatim involved in the sale of Yosef, they themselves reincarnated into those martyrs in order to atone for their sin.

Secondly, in Sha'ar HaGilgulim (Intro. 34), the Arizal asserts: **All of those ten martyrs are the ten drops of semen that were excreted from Yosef.** Here is how he explains the matter in Sha'ar Ma'amarei Razal on Maseches Shabbas (119b): Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues, who were the "ten martyrs," came from the drops that were excreted from Yosef's ten fingers. As Chazal inform us, he should have produced twelve shevatim just like his father did etc. Yet, only two came from him. The other ten, however, exuded from his fingers when he gazed upon them. This is the implication of the passuk (Bereishis 49, 24): «וּפְּזֹזוּ זְרוּעֵי יָדָיו».

The Shevatim Attached to the "Ten Martyrs" through Ibur

We will now attempt to combine these two insights into one. We are taught by our master the Arizal in Sha'ar HaGilgulim (Intro. 2) that occasionally HKB"H brings the neshamah of a tzaddik down to this world to join and assist a person who has already been born and is in need of assistance. This process of temporary attachment of a

neshamah is called "ibur"; it is different from gilgul. HKB"H sends this attachment down to earth to assist a person and enable him (or her) to accomplish his task related to Torah and mitzvos. It also provides whatever tikun is necessary for that particular tzaddik.

Furthermore, in Sefer HaGilgulim (Chapter 61), he clarifies the assertion of the Zohar Chadash presented above that the "ten martyrs" were the sons of Yaakov atoning for the sale of Yosef. He explains that what this means is that the neshamos of those shevatim attached to the actual martyrs through the process of "ibur" to achieve atonement. The Gra concurs with this explanation in Yahel Ohr (Pekudei): **וְזֶמֶן שֶׁכָּתֵב בְּזוֹהַר חֲדָשׁ אֵיכָה שֶׁהֵן עֲשָׂרָה בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב** "ומה שכתב בזוהר חדש איכה שהן עשרה בני יעקב"—that which is written in the Zohar Chadash that they (the "ten martyrs") were the actual sons of Yaakov is referring to the obscure process of "ibur."

It appears that we can combine these two ideas. The ten drops that exuded from the ten fingers of Yosef did indeed reincarnate into the "ten martyrs." Nevertheless, since the shevatim were culpable in this matter, having sold Yosef into slavery, therefore, it was arranged from above that they attach to the "ten martyrs" as "iburs." Thus, they could receive atonement for their regrettable deed.

We can now begin to comprehend Yaakov's profound words to Yosef: **"And now, your two sons who were born to you in Mitzrayim before my coming to you to Mitzrayim, they are mine; Ephraim and Menashe shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon."** After all, they are part of the twelve shevatim you were supposed to father like me. Then he went on to reveal to Yosef that the ten drops that exuded from his fingertips were not for naught. For, they were destined to become the "ten martyrs," who were all holy and pure.

This is the implication of the continuation of Yaakov's remark: **"But your progeny whom you beget after them"**—namely, the "ten martyrs" who came into existence from those ten drops; it is as if you fathered them—they **"shall be yours"**—they will be holy and righteous like you proving that you did not sin. And those that are destined to be killed for the sake of "Kedushas Hashem"

will be **“included under the name of their brothers with regards to their inheritance.”** In other words, the “ten martyrs” will be associated with the names of their brothers, the ten shevatim who will reincarnate into them to achieve tikun for having sold Yosef.

Thus, if we count the “ten martyrs,” Yosef HaTzaddik also fathered twelve shevatim. Since, however, the act was not complete, it did not suffice to totally negate Eisav and his eleven chieftains. That feat will only be accomplished le’asid la’vo, when the twelve shevatim of Yaakov Avinu will be united with the twelve shevatim of Yosef HaTzaddik. At the time, the following will be fulfilled: **«והיה בית יעקב אש ובית יוסף להבה ובית עשו לקש»—the house of Yaakov shall be fire, and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav for straw.**

We can find a very nice allusion to this in the prophecy of the navi related to the future geulah (Yeshayah 54, 12): **«ושמתי כדכד שמשותיך»—I will make your walls out of kadmah stone.** Rashi explains that “kadmah” is a precious variety of stone, a gemstone. So, in keeping with this discussion, let us suggest that the navi is alluding to two aspects of the sun that will shine for us le’asid la’vo. One sun will be that of Yaakov Avinu with his twelve shevatim; the second sun will be that of Yosef HaTzaddik with his twelve shevatim (counting the “ten martyrs”). Together, they will be a **כדכד**—two sets of **כד** (**24**)—the **24** shevatim of Yaakov and Yosef, who will illuminate the **24** hours of the day. In their merit, the forces of tumah led by Eisav and his eleven chieftains will be eliminated, and the night will shine like the day—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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