



**“She named him Reuven, as she said,
‘Because Hashem has discerned my humiliation’”**

Leah Foresaw that Reuven Was Destined to Reincarnate into Rabbi Eliezer

This week’s parsha is parshas Vayeitzei. With immense pleasure, we will focus on the birth of the first of the twelve, holy shevatim. Here is the pertinent passuk (Bereishis 29, 32): **“וַתַּהַר לֵאָה וַתֵּלֵד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה: “כִּי רָאָה ה’ בְּעֵינָי”**—**Leah conceived and bore a son; she named him Reuven, as she said, “Because Hashem has discerned my humiliation.”** Rashi comments: **Our Rabbis explained (Berachos 7b): She said, “See the difference between my son (Reuven) and the son of my father-in-law (Eisav), who sold the birthright to Yaakov. But this one (Reuven) did not sell his to Yosef and did not protest against him (Yosef). Instead, he sought to extricate him from the pit.”**

The commentaries are baffled by this comment, seeing as the Torah tells us explicitly why Leah named him Reuven. So, what prompted our blessed sages to suggest a different rationale for her giving her son the name Reuven? Undoubtedly, our sages were taught this rationale in Torah she’b’al peh. Hence, it is incumbent upon us to explain why Leah disregarded this reason and provided another one: **“כִּי רָאָה ה’ בְּעֵינָי”**—**because Hashem has discerned my humiliation.**

Rabbi Eliezer a Gilgul of Reuven Who Rescued Yosef Was Rescued from a Pit when He Was Caught by the Authorities

I would like to propose a wonderful solution to this apparent discrepancy. We will begin by introducing an

intriguing “remez” (allusion) presented in the sefer Lev Aryeh (Chukas 9) in the name of the distinguished Rabbi Yisrael of Ludmir, ztz”l, regarding Leah’s declaration when Reuven was born: **“כִּי רָאָה ה’ בְּעֵינָי”**. This “remez” is based on a teaching in the Zohar Chadash (end of Eichah 111b) that the Ten Martyrs executed by the Romans were reincarnations of the ten shevatim who participated in the sale of Yosef (including Yosef himself who provoked his brothers). Binyamin was with his brothers at the time; he was with his father Yaakov and was not involved in the sale.

According to the Zohar Chadash, Reuven reincarnated into the Tanna, Rabbi Eliezer the Great. Since Reuven was not involved in the sale of Yosef, his gilgul, Rabbi Eliezer, was not among the Ten Martyrs. The Torah’s narrative informs us (ibid. 37, 21): **“וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיִּצִילֵהוּ מִיָּדָם וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא נִכְנְוּ נַפְשׁ, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם רְאוּבֵן אֵל תִּשְׁפְּכוּ דָם, הַשְּׁלִיכוּ אוֹתוֹ אֶל הַבּוֹר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְבָּר וַיֵּד אֶל תִּשְׁלַחוּ בוֹ, לְמַעַן הִצִּיל אוֹתוֹ מִיָּדָם לְהַשִּׁיבּוֹ אֶל אָבִיו”**. **Reuven heard, and he rescued him from their hand; he said, “Let us not kill him.” Reuven said to them, “Do not commit bloodshed! Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him”—his aim was to rescue him from their hands and return him to his father.** Even though Reuven planned to rescue him; nevertheless, HKB”H is extremely exacting with tzaddikim. Consequently, Rabbi Eliezer, his gilgul, was thrown into a pit and saved. The Gemara (A.Z. 16b) recounts how he was apprehended so that he would be coerced to worship avodah-zarah and was miraculously saved.

Based on this, the Lev Aryeh explains that Leah Imeinu perceived via her “ruach hakodesh” that her son Reuven would reincarnate into Rabbi Eliezer and be spared from death. Accordingly, she then proclaims: “כי ראה ה' בעניי”—the word ראה is interpreted as an acronym for ר'בי אליעזר ה'גדול—**Rabbi Eliezer the Great**.

Reuven Shall Not Die a Second Time

We find a fascinating insight from our illustrious teacher, the Arizal, in Sefer HaGilgulim (Chapter 5) related to the gilgul of Reuven into Rabbi Eliezer. When Moshe Rabeinu blesses the shevatim prior to his death, he says (Devarim 33, 6): “יחי ראובן ואל ימות”—**may Reuven live and not die**. The Targum Onkelos renders this as: **Let him not die a second death**. He cites the Gemara (Sanhedrin 64b) where the sages teach that whenever the Torah says “מִוֹת יוֹמֵת”, the first term refers to death in Olam HaZeh, while the second refers to a death in Olam HaBa. A person’s first death is inevitable. However, occasionally, a person must return as a gilgul and die a second time—an unusual death to atone for a transgression he was guilty of. That is the meaning of the second term “יִוֹמֵת”; it refers to a death in a future life. This did not apply to Reuven, since his intentions were commendable and good. As such, he was not condemned to death like the other shevatim who reincarnated into the Ten Martyrs. This is the implication of Moshe’s pronouncement: “**May Reuven live and not die**”—that he should live in Olam HaBa, i.e., in his next incarnation.

The Arizal adds another chiddush regarding the appellation **Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol** (see Yoma 54b, Ta’anis 31a, Archin 17a). He asserts that since Reuven was the “bechor”—Yaakov’s firstborn—hence, Rabbi Eliezer was also referred to as “**gadol**,” alluding to his special status, like a Kohen Gadol, who is superior to his priestly brothers.

Leah Imeinu Foresaw that Reuven Would Be Spared the Fate of the Ten Martyrs

Now, we have a basic principle that the “psbat”—the simple rendering of a passuk—and its interpretation based on “remez” go hand in hand. Thus, it is incumbent upon us to explain how the simple rendering of Leah’s

pronouncement and the “remez” complement each other. In other words what is the connection between **Hashem discerning Leah’s humiliation** and the mystical allusion to **Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol**?

To explain the matter, let us refer back to Rashi’s comment: **She said, “See the difference between my son (Reuven) and the son of my father-in-law (Eisav), who sold the birthright to Yaakov. But this one (Reuven) did not sell his to Yosef and did not protest against him (Yosef). Instead, he sought to extricate him from the pit.”** According to this comment, Leah saw via her “ruach hakodesh” that Yaakov was destined to transfer the birthright from Reuven to Yosef. Not only would Reuven not harbor any jealousy or resentment against Yosef, but he would even attempt to save him from his brothers’ scheme. Therefore, she named him **Reuven**, because she wanted everyone to **see** the distinct difference between Reuven and Eisav.

Initially, she was distressed by the fact that the birthright would be taken away from Reuven and bestowed upon Yosef. Subsequently, however, she was consoled by the knowledge that Reuven would reincarnate into the renowned Tanna, Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol for two reasons: **(1)** Because Rabbi Eliezer would not be killed among the Ten Martyrs, in the merit of Reuven showing Yosef compassion rather than harboring resentment toward him and **(2)** because Reuven’s wrong would be rectified in his gilgul as Rabbi Eliezer, and the birthright would ultimately be returned to him. As we learned, this is why the Tanna was called **Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol**—because he was once again afforded elite status like a “bechor.”

This illuminates for us the meaning of the passuk: “**ותקרא שמו ראובן**”. She was initially distressed by the fact that the birthright would be taken away from her son and would be given to Yosef. She was consoled afterwards by the knowledge that Reuven would reincarnate into Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol. In other words, because “**Hashem discerned my humiliation**”—my distress concerning the forfeiture of Reuven’s birthright—HKB”H consoled me by showing me that he would reincarnate into Rabbi Eliezer

HaGadol. Furthermore, his gilgul would not be killed and martyred along with the others, since Reuven did not participate in the sale of Yosef. Additionally, he was called **HaGadol**, because he made amends for Reuven's flaw, and Reuven's birthright was restored to its rightful place.

We can now explain very nicely how Chazal arrived at their novel explanation for why Leah named her first son Reuven. According to the text, the reason she gives is: **כי ראה ה' בעניי**. They interpreted the term **רא** as an acronym for **רבי אליעזר הגדול**—alluding to the fact that Leah foresaw that Reuven would reincarnate into Rabbi Eliezer, who was spared the fate of the martyrs. From this, they deduced that when Leah said, **“See the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law,”** she was referring to the fact that because Reuven did not harbor any jealousy toward Yosef, in that merit, his gilgul was not killed along with the Ten Martyrs. Understood this way, both the reason written in the text: **כי ראה ה' בעניי**—and the reason given by Chazal: **ראו מה בני לבן חמוי**—go hand in hand.

The First Tanna Mentioned in Torah She'b'al Peh Is Rabbi Eliezer

Based on what we have learned, we can begin to understand why the first Tanna that Rabeinu HaKadosh chose to mention in Torah she'b'al peh is Rabbi Eliezer. Here is the first Mishnah (Berachos 2a): **מאימתי קורין את שמע בערבין, משעה שהכהנים נכנסים לאכול בתרומתן, עד סוף האשמורה.** **From when may we recite Shema in the evenings? From the time that kohanim may enter to eat their terumah until the end of the first watch; these are the words of Rabbi Eliezer.** Surely, this is not a coincidence. Hence, we will endeavor to explain why the Tanna Rabbi Eliezer specifically was awarded this honor.

I found an answer to this question in the sefer Ohalei Shem (Likutim) authored by the great Rabbi Shem Klingberg, the head of the Beis Din in the holy community of Zaloshitz, hy"d. He relies on the teaching of the Arizal that Rabbi Eliezer was a gilgul of Reuven, the firstborn of the shevatim. As such, the birthright was rightfully

his; so, his gilgul was the first to be mentioned in Torah she'b'al peh.

The problem with this answer is that the birthright was confiscated from Reuven. So, why did Rabeinu HaKadosh see fit to return it to him at the beginning of Torah she'b'al peh? I believe we can expand on this answer based on the assertion of the Arizal presented above. The appellation **Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol** attests to the fact that by rectifying the flaw of Reuven, the birthright that had been confiscated from Reuven was returned to him. This explains very nicely why Rabbi Eliezer was privileged to be the first Tanna mentioned in Torah she'b'al peh; it was a form of birthright he was entitled to as a firstborn after the tikun was accomplished.

Now, we find something truly fascinating. We have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 2, 1): **רבי אומר, איזו היא דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם, כל שהיא תפארת לעושיה ותפארת לו מן האדם**—**Rebbe says: Which is the proper path a man should choose for himself? Whatever is a credit (“Tiferes”) to himself and earns him the esteem (“Tiferes”) of fellow men.** In Likutei Shas, the Arizal explains why Rabeinu HaKadosh chose to begin Torah she'b'al peh specifically with this teaching. It was because Rebbe was a “nitzotz” of Yaakov Avinu the personification of the midah of “Tiferes.” Therefore, he chose a teaching that emphasizes the virtue and importance of “Tiferes.” Now, Rebbe's official title was Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi. According to the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (83), the term **נשיא** is an acronym for **ניצוץ של יעקב אבינו**—a **“nitzotz” of Yaakov Avinu.** Thus, it was fitting for Rabeinu HaKadosh to be the one to return the birthright to Yaakov Avinu's firstborn.

Furthermore, Yaakov Avinu confiscated the birthright from Reuven with the words: **“פחז כמים אל תותר”**—**unstable as water, you shall not take more.** In other words, even though you should have been the “bechor,” **“you were as unstable as water”**; so, you forfeited your status and privilege. However, after his gilgul made amends for his wrongs, the birthright was returned to him. Hence, his gilgul was called **Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol.**

So, now, Rabeinu HaKadosh—the “nitzotz” of Yaakov Avinu—comes along and returns the birthright to Rabbi

Eliezer—the gilgul of Reuven—that he himself had taken away from Reuven by mentioning him first ahead of all the other Tannaim. We can view this as a form of (Kesubos 16a): **“הפה שאסר הוא הפה שהתיר”**—**the same mouth that has prohibited is the mouth that has permitted.** Yaakov confiscated the birthright from Reuven, and Rabeinu HaKadosh, his gilgul, returned it to him—after the tikun accomplished by Rabbi Eliezer HaGadol.

To reinforce what we have learned, we will introduce a “remez” presented in Seder HaDoros in the name of Teshuvot Halachos Ketanot. Before he passes away, Yaakov addresses Reuven and says (Bereishis 49, 3): **“ראובן—Reuven, you are my firstborn and my strength and my initial vigor.** He points out that the gematria of the words **כח”י וראשית** equals **ז”ה רב”י אליעזר ב”ן הורקנו”ס** plus one. Simply put, these words allude to the fact that Rabbi Eliezer was a gilgul of Reuven. Furthermore, we can imply from this that when Yaakov took the birthright away from Reuven, he informed him back then that in reality: **“Reuven, you are my firstborn”**—i.e., I am going to return the birthright to you in the future.

In fact, he specifies when that will happen. With the words **כח”י וראשית אוני”** which are equivalent to **ז”ה רב”י אליעזר ב”ן הורקנו”ס**, Yaakov informed Reuven that he was destined to reincarnate into Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanos, who would rectify his flaws. At that time, the birthright would be returned to him, but for now you are **“as unstable as water.”** Nevertheless, we see that Yaakov Avinu was true to his word and his midah of “emet.” His “nitzotz,” Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, returned the birthright to Reuven by mentioning Rabbi Eliezer, Reuven’s gilgul, first in Torah she’b’al peh.

Yaakov Avinu Was the Chariot for Torah She’b’chsav Yosef HaTzaddik Was the Chariot for Torah She’b’al Peh

Proceeding along this enlightening path, we will now demonstrate to our esteemed audience the wonders of the Torah. As mentioned, the rationale given in the Torah for Leah naming her firstborn Reuven is: **“כי ראה ה’ בעניי”**—

because Hashem has discerned my humiliation. Yet, in the Gemara, in Torah she’b’al peh, our sages provide a different rationale: **“אמרה לאה ראו מה בין בני לבן חמי”**—**Leah said, “See the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law.**

Let us begin by quoting a passuk from the Navi (Ovadhiah 1, 18): **“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.** The Pri Tzaddik (Balak 1) interprets this passuk as follows: Yaakov Avinu is associated with **“fire,”** namely, Torah she’b’chsav. As it is written (Devarim 33, 2): **“מימינו אש דת למו”**—**from His right hand, He presented a fire of law to them.** Yosef, on the other hand, is associated with **“a flame,”** namely, Torah she’b’al peh, which is comparable to a flame that spreads from the fire. Together, this incredible combination of Yaakov and Yosef, Torah she’b’chsav and Torah she’b’al peh, burns down the house of Eisav easily like **“straw.”**

We can substantiate Rabbi Tzaddok’s contention that Yosef is associated with Torah she’b’al peh with the passuk (Bereishis 41, 42): **“ויסר פרעה את טבעתו מעל ידו ויתן אותה על יד יוסף וילבש אותו בגדי שש... וירכב אותו במרכבת המשנה אשר לו”**—**and Pharaoh removed his ring from upon his hand and put it on Yosef’s hand; he then had him dressed in garments of linen . . . and he had him ride in his second chariot (“merkavah”).** In Ohev Yisrael, the great Rabbi of Apta, zy”a, points out several allusions in this passuk: **“וילבש אותו בגדי שש”**—alludes to the fact that HKB”H adorned Yosef with the kedushah of the six (**“שש”**) orders of the Mishnah; **“וירכב אותו במרכבת המשנה”**—he was the master of the chariot—**“merkavah”**—of the six orders of the Mishnah (note the similarity between the word **“mishneh”** in the passuk and Mishnah) that encompass all of Torah she’b’al peh. The Degel Machaneh Ephraim (Mikeitz) makes a similar comment regarding these words and adds that Yosef actually merited becoming the **“merkavah”** of the six orders of the Mishnah.

Now, if we scrutinize these words: **“וירכב אותו במרכבת המשנה אשר לו”**, it seems that the two words **“אשר לו”** are superfluous; of course, the second chariot was his (Pharaoh’s). Instead,

let us interpret these words as an allusion to the ל"ו (36) tractates of Gemara on the Mishnayos. Accordingly, in the Derashos Chasam Sofer (Part 2, p. 411, column2), this is how he explains the final teaching in the Talmud Bavli (Nidah 73a): "תנא דבי אליהו כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא" The Academy of Eliyahu taught: **He who studies "halachos" every day is assured that he will be an inhabitant of Olam HaBa, as it states: "The ways ('halichot') of the world are His (ל"ו).** This statement alludes to the fact that the world exists and endures—"halichot olam"—in the merit of the study of the ל"ו (36) masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh. This then is the "remez" of the words "במרכבת המשנה אשר לו"—they allude to the 36 masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh that Yosef HaTzaddik was the chariot of.

This provides us with a very nice interpretation of the passuk (ibid. 41, 45): "ויוקרא פרעה שם יוסף צפנת פענח"—and **Pharaoh named Yosef Tzaphnat Pahneiach.** Rashi comments: **Tzaphnat Pahneiach means decipherer of the cryptic.** It seems that this was a prophecy uttered by Pharaoh unwittingly. For, as the "merkavah" of Torah she'b'al peh, Yosef was truly "צפנת פענח"—**a decipherer of the cryptic**—since Torah she'b'al peh deciphers and reveals all the mysteries of Torah she'b'chsav. Moreover, Rashi adds that there is no word resembling "פענח" in Scriptures. We can suggest that Rashi is alluding to the fact that Torah she'b'al peh explains all of the things for which we cannot find a satisfactory explanation or similarity anywhere else in Torah she'b'chsav.

With this understanding, we can truly appreciate the great love and attachment Yaakov Avinu displayed for Yosef HaTzaddik. It represents the bond between Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh. Additionally, we have learned in the Gemara (Gittin 60b): "לא כרת הקב"ה ברית עם"—**HKB"H only entered into a covenant with Yisrael on account of the Oral Law.** This then is the underlying message conveyed by the passuk (ibid. 33, 3): "וישראל אהב את יוסף מכל בניו כי בן זקונים הוא לו"—**and Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons, because he was a son of his old age (wise).** Rashi comments: **Everything Yaakov learned from Shem and Eiver, he**

conveyed to Yosef. He conveyed all of his Torah to Yosef, so that he would clarify it in Torah she'b'al peh. And once again, the term ל"ו here alludes to the 36 masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh.

Yosef the Chariot of Torah She'b'al Peh Subjugated the Klipah of Mitzrayim that Opposed Torah She'b'al Peh

This explains fabulously why HKB"H arranged for Yosef to be sold and end up in Mitzrayim. For, we learn from the great Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy"a, in Zera Kodesh (Bo), that the klipah of Mitzrayim opposes Torah she'b'al peh. He supports this assertion with an incredible "remez": This wicked, corrupt nation is named מצרי"ם, because Torah she'b'al peh begins with an open letter "mem" in its first Mishnah (Berachos 1, 1): "מ'אימתי קורין את שמע בערבית"—and concludes with a closed letter "mem" in its final Mishnah (Oktzin 3, 12): "ה' עוז לעמו יתן ה' יברך את עמו בשלום".

Let us explain this "remez": When a person opens his mouth to articulate the letter "mem"—מ"ם—he begins by opening his mouth with an open מ' and concludes by closing his mouth with a closed ם, without any interruption between them. This is how a person should study Torah she'b'al peh. He should begin with the open "mem" of "מאימתי" and conclude with the closed "mem" of "בשלום", without any interruptions or distractions in between. Stopping to satisfy bodily needs gives one the strength to study Torah and is an integral part of Torah-study; hence, it is considered as if one is still engaged in Torah-study.

This is the "remez" of the name מצרי"ם. It begins with an open "mem" and concludes with a closed "mem"; the three letters between them form the word יצר—**yetzer**—the negative influence that tries to disrupt the study of Torah. Thus, the name מצרי"ם alludes to the fact that the klipah of Mitzrayim opposes a Jew's study of Torah she'b'al peh—that begins with an open מ' and concludes with a closed ם.

With immense joy, this enlightens us as to why Rabeinu HaKadosh—the "nitzotz" of Yaakov Avinu—mentioned Rabbi Eliezer—the gilgul of Reuven—as the first Tanna in the first Mishnah of Torah she'b'al peh. For, it was on

account of Reuven that Yosef's life was spared, and he was sold into slavery and landed in Mitzrayim. There he became the viceroy—"mishneh la'melech"—and became the "merkavah" of the Mishnayos of Torah she'b'al peh—"מרכבת המשנה". In that role, he subjugated the klipah of **Mitzrayim** that opposes Torah she'b'al peh. Therefore, Rabeinu HaKadosh chose to return the birthright to Reuven by mentioning his gilgul as the first Tanna in the Mishnayos, which are the foundation of Torah she'b'al peh.

This explains fantastically why the reason given in Torah she'b'chsav for the naming of Reuven by Leah is: "ותקרא שמו ראובן כי אמרה כי ראה ה' בעניי"; whereas the novel reason given in Torah she'b'al peh is: "אמרה לאה ראו מה בין בני לבן חמי". In other words, even though Yosef was awarded Reuven's birthright, nevertheless, he still rescued Yosef by

convincing his brothers to throw him into a pit instead of killing him. As we know, he intended to come back and pull Yosef out of the pit.

Let us elaborate. By saving Yosef, the scene was set for Yosef to be sold and end up in Mitzrayim; there, he would subjugate the klipah of Mitzrayim in his role as the "merkavah" of Torah she'b'al peh. For this reason, the sages of Torah she'b'al peh mentioned in the Gemara specifically the reason of: "אמרה לאה ראו מה בין בני לבן חמי". Not only did Reuven not hold a grudge and hate Yosef, but he made every effort to save his life. As a result, it was orchestrated from above for Yosef to subjugate the klipah of Mitzrayim by becoming the "merkavah" of Torah she'b'al peh, as we learned from the passuk: "וירכב אותו במרכבת המשנה אשר לו".



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