

Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

If anyone doubted that meteorological winter started on December 1, the sudden transition from mild autumn to significantly colder weather arrived suddenly on December 1. For those of us in the Diaspora, we start davening for rain (Vetein Tal U'Matar Levracha) a few days later, at Maariv on December 4 (of course really starting Motzi Shabbat the next day). Yes, daily davening will be longer now until Pesach. Fortunately, Hanukkah starts next Thursday evening, so at least we have something to brighten our moods for a week.

Vayishlach contains a very dark and troubling chapter, right after the uplifting conclusion of Yaakov's successful reunion with Esav. The Torah immediately turns to the situation involving Dina, Shechem, Shimon, Levi, and Yaakov (chapter 34). This incident connects with numerous threads throughout Sefer Bereshis. The Torah specifies that Dina is Leah's daughter, and Shimon and Levi are two of Leah's sons.

When Avraham leaves Canaan for Egypt during a drought, he introduces Sarah as his sister, not his wife, hoping that the locals will not kill him to marry her. Similarly, when Yitzhak goes to Gerar, Philistine territory, he introduces Rivka as his sister, for the same reason. Chazal say that this sort of deception is permitted for safety, especially outside Jewish territory. However, when Avraham and Yitzhak go to sacrifice Yitzhak at the Akeidah, they trust in Hashem to find a way that they could obey God's command yet also survive. Might Avraham and Yitzhak have trusted in God to protect them without needing to deceive Avimelech and Paro?

When Rivka gives birth to twins, both parents name the first born Esav (complete), and Yitzhak names the second son Yaakov (heel, or crooked). Yaakov (and Rivka) deceive both Yitzhak and Esav in gaining Esav's bracha of wealth. He also trades deception back and forth with Lavan for twenty years. Chazal approve of Yaakov's using deception in dealing with Lavan. Indeed, Chazal say that Yaakov's dealings with Lavan give us a model of how to relate to those who deceive us. However, Yaakov is not completely successful with his father-in-law. When Lavan tricks Yaakov by substituting Leah for Rachel at his wedding, he says that in his area, the practice is not to favor the younger child over the older. Yaakov immediately realizes that his deception over the birthright has come back to make his married life unhappy. Although Leah is Yaakov's first wife, he hates her (in comparison to Rachel) and favors Rachel's sons over all of Leah's.

When he leaves Lavan's home and returns to Canaan, Yaakov tries to change his way of relating to God and to other people. He is straight with Lavan (when the latter comes upon him three days after his departure). He fights Esav's angel all night cleanly, even when the angel pulls the dirty trick of dislocating his hip. He sends messengers to bring Esav to meet him so he can give Esav the wealth that he had earned outside Israel (wealth from Yitzhak's bracha meant for Esav), bows to him seven times, calls him master, and asks for Esav's forgiveness. The new method of relating, and his successful fight with the angel, earn Yaakov self respect, respect from God, a new name (Yisrael, or straight with God), and the blessing of land and many children that God had promised to Avraham and Yitzhak.

We immediately come to chapter 34, where Shechem, the local Canaanite prince, rapes Dina, wants to marry her, and invites Yaakov's family to move nearby and intermarry. Yaakov is silent after the rape. Shimon and Levi say fine, but first all the men must circumcise. On the third (most painful) day, the brothers come and slaughter all the men in the town. This incident connects with family history in many ways. Shimon and Levi act deceptively, a characteristic that horrifies Yaakov. Their revenge was overkill. While Shechem deserves punishment, are all the men of the town also guilty? (A

frequent traditional interpretation is that the silence of the men of the town when their leader rapes a woman makes them complicity in the awful act.) The Torah has Shechem and his father talk to the brothers, not Yaakov. Is it not Yaakov's right and obligation to have the approach and response come from Shechem and his father to him rather than to Dina's brothers?

The Dina incident also continues the family dynamics another generation. Yaakov favors Rachel over Leah. When Leah's daughter is the victim of rape, Yaakov is silent, perhaps too horrified and stunned to react quickly. Dina's brothers, however, might have wondered whether their father would have been silent if the rape had happened to Rachel's daughter. This incident could have made relations worse between the Leah and Rachel sides of the family. In the next parsha, Leah's sons hate Rachel's son (Yosef), threaten to kill him, and end up leaving him in a pit from where he ends up sold as a slave in Egypt. Leah's sons seem comfortable with their brother being sent away. No one from the family goes searching for him for the next twenty plus years, until a famine leads Yaakov to send them to Egypt for food. Did the aftermath of Dina's rape affect future relations between the Leah and the Rachel sides of the family?

Sibling rivalry exists almost everywhere in Sefer Bereishis – from Adam and Chava's sons on. Even Yosef cannot earn the trust of his brothers despite all his efforts. The only brothers who seems to care for each other without reservation are Yosef's sons, Menashe and Efraim. Disputes and tension continue among various tribes even after the time of Yehoshua.

My love for Sefer Bereshis started half a century ago, with my first discussions with my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, whose 86th birthday would have been two weeks ago. Rabbi Cahan's older grandson, Elisha Gordon-Cahan, will continue family tradition by celebrating his Bar Mitzvah next Motzi Shabbat, Shabbat Hanukkah, and we expect that he will chant the traditional Haftorah on Zoom for family and friends unable to attend in person on Shabbat morning. I did not meet Elisha's father until he was about two months old, but I did know all of his father Josh's grandparents, including Elizabeth Cahan's father, after whom Elisha was named. We look forward to Elisha's Bar Mitzvah bringing warmth and sunlight to this darkest period of the year. Shabbat Shalom and Hanukkah Samaich.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Nossan ben Pessel, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Vayishlach: Landmark Decision

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

This week's portion entails many of the trials and tribulations that Yaakov Avinu endured, both on a national level and on a very personal one. First, he prepared to confront his brother Esav, the results of which would produce either war or reconciliation. Then he battled an angel who dislocated his sciatic nerve. Then finally, Yaakov confronted his brother, playing the role of diplomat-warrior. He carefully weighed how to treat him with Chamberlain-like appeasement or Churchill-like aggressiveness. He returned from that encounter unscathed, but not long afterwards, the Torah tells us that Yaakov's own daughter was brutally violated, which led to a war in which his sons decimated the city of Sh'chem. Then he endures the death of Devorah, who was his mother Rivka's nursemaid.

But all these roles that Yaakov plays — the angel-fighter, the warrior-diplomat, even the father whose daughter is attacked, are different then the role Yaakov must play in another tragic incident in this week's parsha. Yaakov simultaneously becomes a grieving widower during the birth of his final child, Binyamin, who is born an orphan for life. Rachel, Yaakov's beloved wife, dies in childbirth. Now a wayfarer on a trek to Chevron, Yaakov must bury his wife. But Yaakov does something strange. He does not bury her in the family plot in the M'aras HaMachpelah, which was bought by Avraham and reserved for the forefathers and their spouses. Yaakov opts instead to bury her where she dies in Bais Lechem (Bethlehem).

Surely Yaakov had no objection to travelling with a deceased whilst trekking to a final resting place. After all, he asked his own children to bring him from Egypt to Canaan after his demise, surely a longer and more arduous trek than Bethlehem to Chevron? Why then did he bury Rachel in Beth Lechem?

The Midrash tells us that Yaakov foresaw that one day Jews would be in exiled from the Land of Israel. They would plod down the road leading from Jerusalem toward the Rivers of Babylon. They would pass the Tomb of Rachel and they would cry. She in turn would join them in their prayers. Therefore Yaakov opted for a burial site for Rachel on the road to Babylon.

But aren't there many places to pray? Isn't every stone on every road holy? And doesn't Hashem hear prayers and see tears even when they are not shed by a graveside? What gift did Yaakov give his children by relinquishing Rachel's eternal resting-place for a way station on the oft-traveled road of Galut? Is there perhaps an even deeper intent with Yaakov's plan?

Anatoly Sharansky's trials and tribulations from the time of his arrest in March 1977 through his release in 1987 included the Soviet Union's most notorious prisons and labor camps. It was a tormenting journey, but along the arduous term there were many encouraging little reminders that the One Above was holding his hand.

One day during his trial, Sharansky's firmly requested to be allowed to select a lawyer of his own choosing rather than the stooge given to him by the Soviet authorities. The judge who presided over the kangaroo court reacted by declaring a brief recess and had Anatoly thrown into a tiny holding cell. There was hardly any light in the dank compartment, and there was nothing for Sharansky to do but wait for the proceedings to resume. To pass time he stared at the various curses and inscriptions scratched on the walls by prisoners who also sat and waited like he was for the decisions of their mortal fate.

However, Anatoly did not notice the curses etched by the previous men that once sat in that cell. Instead, he saw a message of hope and inspiration scratched on the wall. A Magen David etched in the wall, stood out proudly amongst all the other frivolities of frustration. The words Chazak V'Ematz (Be strong and fortify yourself) were energetically etched underneath it. It was signed Asir Tziyon (Prisoner of Zion) Yosef Begun. Begun knew that like him others would pass this way and he engraved for them a mark of hope.

Yaakov realized that the experience of his personal pain should not be limited to his own personal suffering. He converted it into a message of hope and inspiration for the ages. Rachel was transformed from a symbol of despair and grief into a symbol of hope for eternity. Yaakov foresaw that one day the Jews would leave Israel, shattered and broken. By having Rachel's final resting place as landmark in their agonizing journey, they, too could garner a message of hope. They would see Yaakov's pain and remember his triumphant endurance. They would understand that despite his sad life, Yaakov

persisted. His children united and his legacy was impeccably unblemished. And though he often stood on the desolate road surrounded by enemies, his future was never renounced. And his children's future, too, will never despair. For Rachel cries for them, and she will not stop until they return to their true borders.

Good Shabbos!.

Vayishlach: Going Back for the Small Vessels

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2014, 2020

"And Yaakov was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (Breishit, 32:24). Who was this man? The most common explanation is that it was an angel, the "Heavenly prince of Esav," and that this wrestling represented Yaakov's struggle against his external adversaries and anticipated the momentous encounter he would soon have with the earthly Esav.

It is possible to suggest another interpretation. While Yaakov had to struggle against many outside forces throughout his life, perhaps his greatest struggle was internal. Even for those inclined to have an idealized view of the Avot, the character of Yaakov presents major challenges. He takes advantage of Esav at a moment of weakness to buy the birthright, and he misrepresents himself to his father to take the blessing intended for Esav. He even seems to bargain with God: "If God is with me... and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear... then this stone... shall be a house of God" (28:20–21). And in his dealings with Lavan, Yaakov seems to be using every scheme and loophole to maximize his profit. In short, what we have seen up until now is that Yaakov has lived up to his name: "This is why he is called Yaakov, for he has schemed against me these two times" (27:36).

Yaakov's greatest challenge, then, is not what is outside of him, but what is inside. He has to grapple with those qualities in himself that lead him to taking the easy way around things, to avoiding conflict and scheming to get his way rather than to tackling his problems head-on, with honesty and integrity.

This internal struggle and the resulting transformation have, in fact, already begun. By the end of his stay with Lavan, we hear that his shepherding was done with great self-sacrifice. As he tells Lavan with full confidence: "That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto you; I bore the loss of it... In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" (31:38–40). This is a model of honesty, integrity, and work ethic that most of us could only hope to live up to.

Yaakov was thus a paragon of virtue in matters of money (itself no small feat), and perhaps he only employed his devices with the sheep to counteract Lavan's double-dealing. But how will he react when he encounters Esav, when what is at stake is not just money but relating to Esav and owning up to his misdeeds of the past? It would be very tempting for Yaakov at this moment to convince himself that he acted correctly those many years ago, to continue thinking positively about himself, and to continue feeling entitled to his father's blessing. Just consider how often we engage in similar self-deception, digging in our heels to convince ourselves that we are in the right so that we don't have to confront our own past shortcomings and sins.

It is at this critical juncture that Yaakov is left alone, not just physically but existentially, alone with his own thoughts, his own character, and his own complex personality. He must grapple with the different parts within himself, his tendency to scheme and his desire for integrity and honesty. Will he be the same Yaakov, will he continue to deceive not just others but even himself? Or is he able to embrace the harshest honesty – honesty with oneself?

Significantly, at this moment of struggle Yaakov is asked – or he asks himself – who he is: "And he said to him, What is your name?" In sharp contrast to the past, he does not claim to be Esav; he does not engage in deceit, lying to himself about who he is. Instead, he answers simply and honestly: "And he said, Yaakov." He is able to come to terms with those less-than-ideal parts of himself, the Yaakov/ekav/deceiver within. By not denying this part of himself, by accepting it and being prepared to deal with it, he is ironically now able to become someone else: "No longer will Yaakov be your name, but Israel."

The Rabbis tell us that Yaakov went back to retrieve the *pachim ketanim*, the small vessels that he had left behind. These represent the small vessels that are within us, those easily ignored unpleasant pieces that are a part of us. When we want to move forward in life, it is easier to gloss over our small shortcomings. Paying attention to those will just hold us back,

we say to ourselves. But we ignore them at our own peril. As the saying goes: Wherever you go, there you are. We can never escape who we are, and if we try to ignore those problematic personality traits, they will undoubtedly resurface, probably at the worst times, at times when we are under the greatest pressure. Yaakov's greatness was his realization that in order to go forward, he first had to go back. He had to confront himself and struggle with himself, owning who he was and what his shortcomings – his pachim ketanim – were so that he could then grow and truly change.

Yaakov was victorious in his struggle in the end, but it was not a victory in the simple sense of the word. He did not destroy those vessels; he did not eradicate those parts of his personality. How could he? They were part of him. Rather – “you fought... and you were able” – he found a way to control this part of himself. He became able to dictate how these character traits would be expressed rather than letting them dictate his actions. This is the name of Yisrael, not that you conquered or destroyed your demons but sarita – from the word sar, to be a master – that you have gained mastery over them. He is now someone new, a Yisrael. And yet, as the later verses make clear, he remains a Yaakov. He is a Yaakov who now knows who he is and thus a Yaakov who has mastery, a Yaakov who is a Yisrael.

We all have our shortcomings. No matter how far we have come, if we do not engage in this Yaakovian self-grappling, if we do not go back for those pachim ketanim, we risk having these blow up on us at a later time. This, in the end, is the goal of therapy: to learn to recognize those undesirable parts of oneself, to be able to predict when they may be triggered, to moderate these traits, and most importantly, to choose to act differently. The goal is integration, not eradication.

It is true that there are some vessels that we should not go back for. Some things about us may never change, and we need to learn to make peace with those parts of ourselves. To quote the serenity prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous: “God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, Courage to change the things which should be changed, and the Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.” Yaakov's greatness was first recognizing that the vessels were there. But his second greatness was knowing that this was something that he could deal with and he could change.

Most of us, I imagine, too readily put things in the “cannot be changed” category and give ourselves a pass on doing the work that needs to be done within. Recognizing those things that can be changed, going back for those pachim ketanim, however, can be truly transformative.

Yaakov's struggle was a heroic one, one that is crucial but that we often shirk from undertaking. It can be painful and make us feel vulnerable. Perhaps we are afraid that we, like Yaakov, will emerge from it limping, wounded, and weaker than when we started. This may indeed be a stage in the process, but it is necessary so that we, also like Yaakov, can emerge whole, can be a complete self: “And Yaakov arrived complete to the city of Shechem.” (33:18).

For religious leaders, to engage in such a process is all the more necessary. The demand to see oneself as a representative of the mesorah and a model of ethical probity often makes it hard for a religious leader to be honest about his or her own shortcomings. But such self-deception is a recipe for disaster. Such leaders risk either convincing themselves of their own infallibility or, conversely, allowing the “guilty” knowledge that they have these less-than-ideal personality traits to eat away at them until these traits seek a form of release, often in ways that are both destructive to oneself and destructive to others. Both for their own health and for the religious and spiritual health of the community, it is necessary that our religious leaders engage in the struggle of Yaakov. We will only have true leaders of Klal Yisrael, leaders entitled to the name Yisrael, when they are also able to struggle honestly with themselves and say: “My name is Yaakov.”

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yctarah.org/2014/12/my-name-is-yaakov/> NOTE: Rabbi Linzer's Dvar Torah was not ready by my deadline this week, so I selected one of his excellent archive Devrei Torah.

Vayeishlach: Imagine
by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2020 Teach 613

The reports reaching Yakov were serious. Esav was coming with four hundred armed men to avenge the coveted blessings that Yakov took. Yakov prepared for the possibility of war. But when Esav finally met Yakov we do not find that

the 400 men played any role at all. Instead, as Esav leaned over to “kiss” Yakov, Esav attempted to bite Yakov’s “jugular,” to kill him. Miraculously, Yakov’s neck turned hard like stone, and Esav hurt himself. What happened to the four hundred armed men that Esav had brought? Why do they not play a role in the story?

The Medrash tells us that as loyal as these four hundred were to Esav, when they encountered Yakov, and realized that Esav’s terribly negative information against Yakov was just propaganda, they departed from Esav. They wanted no part of his unwarranted hatred. In Yakov they perceived greatness, not evil.

Esav was able to villainize Yakov, but only to a point.

Rabbi Yakov Kamenetzky, as a community Rabbi in Europe before World War II, was approached by a person who was given too much change at the post office. The Rabbi instructed him firmly, “You must travel back and return it.”

Interestingly, in the coming weeks, many people reported that the postmaster was repeatedly giving extra change to the Jewish customers, as if to test their integrity. Time and again, Rabbi Kamenetzky instructed his followers to return the money. During the Holocaust, this postmaster alone, stood out in his efforts to save the Jews. Nazi propaganda could villainize the Jews from afar; but he knew the Jews from up close, and he knew them as upright people of integrity who did not deserve that hatred.

Sometimes people find relationships degenerate into a fallout where the parties just stop talking. Indeed, people can seem “evil” until they meet and discuss their needs, their challenges, and their differences.

I have a colleague in the Rabbinat of a different community who was invited to a communal event celebrating Israel, and he did not attend due to the fact that the organizers arranged the event to be run with a decidedly non-Jewish tone. In the local Jewish newspapers, he was villainized as a non-supporter of Israel and the Jewish people, because he did not attend. Things degenerated in town until a meeting was arranged. As the Rabbi described it, “The hate had become tangible and so real in the community, until I walked into the meeting, and they realized that I did not have horns. We met; we talked. I explained my position, and they explained their hurt. Meeting was half the solution. It simply took the punch out of the negativity.”

There is an instructive story about Reb Shalom of Belz. The great Rabbi asked two students to accompany him to the outskirts of town during the week before Rosh Hashana. The students joined the Rebbe as he walked briskly until they reached the home of a tailor who had fallen on bad times. The Rebbe invited them to watch from the window as the tailor seemed to be speaking to himself. They listened closely and they heard the tailor say, “Almighty G-d: I used to be very prosperous, and I had a most prestigious house in town. But then you took a large account from me, and I got resentful, and became distant from you. I came to shul less; I gave Tzedaka less. And the more distant I became, the worse off for me it was, until, eventually, I had to sell that house, and ended up living here, alone. Almighty G-d: When Jews have a fallout, what do they do? They meet, they drink a L’Chayim, and they make up. So now, the week before Rosh Hashana, I propose that we make up. I will no longer be angry with You, and You will no longer be angry with me.”

And so, the tailor poured two drinks, and drank his heartily. Realizing that Hashem wasn’t going to drink His glass, the man drank that one as well. The next day, true to his word, the tailor was back in shul, as he had been so many years ago, as he revitalized the relationship that had fallen on hard times.

The Rebbe said to his students, “Was it not worth coming; to see how a sincere Jew perceives reconciliation and applies it to his relationship with Hashem?”

In our time there is plenty of divisiveness in the nation, and in the Jewish world. Imagine, if we would decide to meet, to discuss, to explore challenges, visions, and resolutions.

Esav understood that all of his four hundred men would be worthless to his cause of hatred once they met Yakov in person. He realized that those troops would not support him once they met Yakov, so he decided to try to go for the jugular. Esav knew that meeting is the key to making up; and would result in resolution. The potential is enormous... To drink a L’Chayim. Imagine.

* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.

Esav, Yaacov and Us: Thoughts for Parashat Vayishlah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

Some years ago, I participated in a symposium on interfaith dialogue and cooperation. One of the participants, a highly respected Orthodox rabbi, cited a statement of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai: "It is a halakha that it is known that Esav hates Yaacov." He applied this statement of Rabbi Shimon as an iron law of history: non-Jews hate Jews! When I challenged his usage of this text, he raised his eyebrows in surprise: "Just look at our history. It is a long story of anti-Jewish hatred. Esav will always hate Yaacov; non-Jews will always hate Jews."

I've heard and read words of other rabbis who have echoed this understanding of Rabbi Shimon's statement. Jews are universally and always hated. There is no escape from anti-Semitism. It is a built in "law of nature." I bristle at this line of thought. While indeed Jews have faced—and still face—hateful enemies, it is also true that tremendous numbers of non-Jews don't hate us at all! They respect us, work with us, and stand up for us in times of trouble. To view ourselves as the eternal victim is psychologically problematic. At worst, it generates a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we assume everyone hates us, then we alienate ourselves from those who are perceived to be our enemies.

What did Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai mean when he asserted that it is a law that Esav hates Yaacov? His comment relates to this week's Torah portion.

Esav hated Yaacov for having won their father's blessing. Yaacov fled home and stayed away for many years, ultimately returning with his wives and children. Yaacov was afraid that Esav would attack him and his family. Instead of a hostile reunion, though, Esav hugged Yaacov and kissed him. In the Torah text, the word "vayishakeihu" (and he kissed him) has small dots on top, as though to imply added meaning to the word. Rashi, citing Rabbi Shimon, suggests that Esav's kiss was insincere; he still hated Yaacov. The kiss was only a ruse. In spite of Esav's outward signs of love, he was steeped in hatred for Yaacov. Rabbi Shimon's statement, thus, can be understood simply as an interpretation of a particular biblical text involving just two people, Esav and Yaacov; it has nothing to do with ongoing relationships between Jews and non-Jews.

However, it is possible to apply his statement to a larger context. Rabbi Shimon was known for his deep hostility to Rome. He despised Roman rule over Israel and spent years of his life hiding from Roman authorities who wanted to execute him. It would not be unreasonable, then, to interpret Rabbi Shimon's statement as an expression of visceral opposition to Rome and mistrust of Roman rule. By identifying Rome with Esav and the Jews with Yaacov, Rabbi Shimon was warning Jews to maintain their resistance to Roman rule, and not to trust any peace overtures they may offer. Roman hatred, in his eyes, was implacable.

Although Rabbi Shimon's statement can be understood both in terms of the biblical passage and his own personal historical setting, it is a huge stretch to cast his statement as an iron law of history for Jews and non-Jews in all places and all times. Even if one would want to extrapolate his statement so broadly, why should the views of one rabbi, living several thousand years ago in a highly hostile relationship with Rome, be taken as the one authentic view on Jewish relations with non-Jews? And why should anyone today cite this statement in a way that condemns Jews to eternal victimhood?

If Rabbi Shimon's statement is to be taken in its largest context, I would suggest an entirely different understanding of it.

The Torah and Midrashim describe Esav as a physically powerful hunter. In contrast, Yaacov is described as a quiet person "dwelling in tents." Esav was strong and aggressive. He personifies the bully who depends on his strength to cow others into submission. Yaacov was essentially a shy, hesitant person...an ideal target for bullies.

Rabbi Shimon's statement was not about Jews and non-Jews; it was about bullies and patsies. It is indeed a "law of nature" that bullies will hate and oppress those whom they perceive to be frightened weaklings. Esav-types will always look down on and try to hurt Yaacov-types.

The lesson is: don't be a victim! Don't allow bullies to humiliate you or to physically hurt you. Yaacov was able to overcome Esav by outsmarting him and outmaneuvering him; by defeating the bullying tactics of Esav, Yaacov won his own liberation.

The Esavs of the world—whatever their religion or nationality—are hateful and arrogant bullies. The Yaacovs of the world—whatever their religion or nationality—need to stand up to those who would humiliate and crush them.

When people succumb to the self-image of victimhood, they live as perpetual victims. When the Yaacovs develop their strength and self-confidence, they can resist—and defeat—the bullying tactics of Esav.

* Jewishideas.org. <https://www.jewishideas.org/esav-yaacov-and-us-thoughts-parashat-vayishlah> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

Light and Shadows: Thoughts for Hanukkah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) records a famous debate between the Schools of Shammai and Hillel as to how to light the Hanukkah lights. Bet Shammai rules that we should light 8 lights the first night, and then subtract one light each ensuing night. After all, the original miracle of the oil in the Temple would have entailed the oil diminishing a bit each day.

Bet Hillel rules that we should light one light the first night, and then increase the number of lights night after night. (This is the accepted practice.) A reason is suggested: in matters of holiness, we increase rather than decrease. The miracle of Hanukkah is more beautifully observed with the increasing of lights; it would be anti-climactic to diminish the lights with each passing night.

Increasing lights is an appealing concept, both aesthetically and spiritually. But the increase of light might also be extended to refer to the increase in knowledge. The more we study, the more we are enlightened. When we cast light on a problem, we clarify the issues. We avoid falling into error. The more light we enjoy, the less we succumb to shadows and illusions.

Aesop wisely noted: Beware lest you lose the substance by grasping at the shadow. It is all too easy to make mistaken judgments by chasing shadows rather than realities.

Professor Daniel Kahneman, the Israeli Nobel Prize winner in Economics, has coined the phrase “illusion of validity.” He points out that we tend to think that our own opinions and intuitions are correct. We tend to overlook hard data that contradict our worldview and to dismiss arguments that don’t coincide with our own conception of things. We operate under the illusion that our ideas, insights, intuitions are valid; we don’t let facts or opposing views get in our way.

The illusion of validity leads to innumerable errors, to wrong judgments, to unnecessary confrontations. If we could be more open and honest, self-reflective, willing to entertain new ideas and to correct erroneous assumptions—we would find ourselves in a better, happier and more humane world.

In her powerful book, “The March of Folly,” Barbara Tuchman studied the destructive behavior of leaders from antiquity to the Vietnam War. She notes: “A phenomenon noticeable throughout history regardless of place or period is the pursuit by government of policies contrary to their own interests.” She points out: “Government remains the paramount area of folly because it is there that men seek power over others—only to lose it over themselves.”

But why should people with political power succumb to policies that are wrong-headed and dangerous? Tuchman suggests that the lust for power is one ingredient in this folly. Another ingredient is an unwillingness to admit that one has made a misjudgment. Leaders keep pursuing bad policies and bad wars because they do not want to admit to the public that they’ve been wrong. So more people are hurt, and more generations are lost—all because the leaders won’t brook dissent, won’t consider other and better options, won’t yield any of their power, won’t admit that they might be wrong. These leaders are able to march into folly because the public at large allows them to get away with it. Until a vocal and fearless opposition arises, the “leaders” trample on the heads of the public. They are more concerned with their own power politics, than for the needs and wellbeing of their constituents.

The march of folly is not restricted to political power. It is evident in all types of organizational life. The leader or leaders make a decision; the decision is flawed; it causes dissension; it is based on the wrong factors. Yet, when confronted with their mistake, they will not back down. They have invested their own egos in their decision and will not admit that they were wrong. Damage—sometimes irreparable damage—ensues, causing the organization or institution to diminish or to become unfaithful to its original mission. The leader/s march deeper and deeper into folly; they refuse to see the light.

Bet Hillel taught the importance of increasing light. Shedding more light leads to clearer thinking. It enables people to see errors, to cast off shadows and cling to truth.

It takes great wisdom and courage to avoid having the illusion of validity. It takes great wisdom and courage to evaluate and re-evaluate decisions, to shed honest light on the situation, to be flexible enough to change direction when the light of reason so demands.

The lights of Hanukkah remind us of the importance of increasing the light of holiness and knowledge. As we learn to increase light, we learn to seek reality and truth---and to avoid grasping at shadows and illusions..

* Jewishideas.org. <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/light-and-shadows-thoughts-hanukkah>

Parshas Vayishlach – A Torah Identity

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

We are known as “the people of the book” and for good reason. Torah learning takes great primacy in Jewish life and is a theme that runs through everything we do. Our morning prayers include several blessings thanking G-d for the gift of Torah and prayers for success in our studies. We are enjoined to begin each day with Torah study after our morning prayers, and to set aside time by day and by night for Torah study.

The primacy of Torah is subtly woven into the essence of the upcoming Holiday of Chanukah. The miracle of the oil, showing how Hashem had accepted our repentance and been with us in the war, occurred with the Menorah, the lamp. The lamp was the Temple vessel in whose merit we earned depths of clarity and understanding of Torah. The Syrian Greeks decreed against several mitzvos, and despite that our ancestors took great risks and efforts to observe those commandments. Yet, we have only one custom to commemorate those efforts – the custom of the dreidel, commemorating the efforts of the children to study Torah.

Torah study, wisdom and understanding is at the core of our identity and the foundation for everything else. There are many elements and aspects which make Torah so fundamental. Perhaps, we can see one aspect from a Ramba”n in this week’s parsha.

The Torah details for us Yaakov’s encounter with Eisav upon returning to Israel. As they are parting ways, Eisav makes several offers to escort and assist Yaakov in his travels and Yaakov rejects them all. The Ramba”n (Bereishis 32:15) notes, based on a Medrash, that this segment is the parsha of exile, and is the source in the Torah for how to approach Eisav when we are in our current exile. The Medash relates that Rabi Yanai would study this parsha whenever he had to travel to the Roman government. One time he did not study beforehand, and he erred in his dealings with the Romans, not following the lessons hidden in this Parsha. Before he reached the border of Israel, they had already swindled him.

This story clearly highlights the value of constant Torah study, yet it is quite puzzling. Rabi Yanai had apparently studied this Parsha many times before on prior trips to Rome. Certainly, he had a great level of clarity on these lessons, as he had mastered all areas of Torah. Certainly, he reviewed these lessons as he reviewed all of his Torah study. Why was it so critical that he review immediately before each trip?

The gift of Torah is far, far more than a history of our people and a set of laws. Torah is the gift of the guidebook to understanding how to function within the world G-d has created for us. It is the handbook for the world and for life itself. Hidden within the stories and laws are the philosophies, meaning and lessons to grow and achieve, to accomplish and succeed and live life to its fullest. As complex as real life is, that is how subtle and complex the Torah’s guidance must be and indeed is. In truth, the complexity and depth of Torah is so profound that the Gemara tells us (Chagigah 3a) that in

any proper session of Torah study there will always be a new level of clarity and knowledge that did not exist before. There are so many lessons and so many nuances, that it is impossible even to review one's own learning without realizing some new level of clarity.

Rabi Yanai's daily life it seems did not include involvement with Romans. As such, the clarity of these nuances could fade from his mind. In order to prepare properly and be fully aware, it was necessary and appropriate to review and study this parsha in depth before every trip.

The depth and beauty of Torah is endless, and it covers all areas of life. It is only through regular study and review that we can reap the benefits of this priceless gift. With every study, we can find new clarity. By living a Torah life and through constant review we maintain that clarity. It is this clarity which is at the core of our identity; the study of Torah, the study of G-d's world, and the study of living our lives to their fullest.

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Dvar Torah for Vayishlach and Channukah by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Is Fear Good or Bad? Depends!

When I say that an individual is filled with fear, I imagine you wouldn't think I was complimenting the person. Neither does Don Isaac Abarbanel (the great Spanish Jewish rabbi who led the Jews through the Inquisition). He asks incredulously how the Torah can describe Yaakov as having fear when he hears that Eisav is coming to attack him in a vengeful wrath (Genesis 32:7-8). Did Yaakov not receive God's promise that He would protect him (Genesis 28:15)? Did he doubt God even after he met His angels as he entered Israel (Genesis 32:2-3)? Why the fear?

Don Isaac answers that fear is a necessary component of our lives. Faith does not mean we get rid of fear and if we feel it, we have not grown distant from the Divine.

Imagine if Yaakov didn't feel the fear. He would never have sent Eisav gifts or made the necessary war preparations to keep his family safe. Yaakov would not have reached out to Eisav and bowed as a show of peace which ultimately led to their reconciliation.

Fear is a starting point. It is a catalyst for movement. It lets us know that there's something we need to deal with and push through to achieve great things. Don Isaac almost explicitly states the popular adage that courage is not the absence of fear. It is the presence of fear yet the will to go on. We need to develop our courage and we cannot do so without fear.

It is only the human being who does not use fear the way it was meant to be used who develops neurosis. Fear should propel us to action but if we don't take action and just revel in the fear, we freeze and we suffer.

Is there another person that you fear? Good, it means you have to develop strategies to deal with it.

Is there an idea that freaks you out? A thought that when expressed by another causes you consternation and even entertaining it fills you with dread? Great. It means you have to confront the idea and work out what your relationship with it is.

The Book of Maccabees (4:8) details Judah the Maccabee's speech to his army before they confronted the Greeks. The book testifies that the men were filled with fear.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה אֲלֵיהֶם, אֵל תִּירָאוּ מִפְּנֵי הַמּוֹנֵם, וְאֵל תַּחֲפֹזוּ מִפְּנֵי רֹב כּוֹחַם.

Then said Judas to the men that were with him, Fear not their multitude, neither be afraid of their assault.

זכרו את אבותינו אשר הצילם ה' על ים סוף ברדוף פרעה אחריהם ברכבו ובפרשיו.

Remember how our fathers were delivered in the Red sea, when Pharaoh pursued them with an army.

At the Red Sea, the example Judah invokes to gird the hearts of his men, the Jews were terrified of the raging sea in front and of the mighty Egyptian army in back. God said at that time to stop praying and move. You will be dead if you let the fear freeze you. You have to let it propel you forward, in this case into the Sea of Reeds, to be saved.

Shabbat Shalom and A Happy and Healthy Channukah to You and Your Family!

* Rabbi, Kneseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah VaYeitzei: The Prayers of the Avot

According to the Talmud (Berachot 26b), the Avot (forefathers) instituted the three daily prayers:

Abraham — Shacharit, the morning prayer.

Isaac — Minchah, the afternoon prayer.

Jacob — Ma'ariv, the evening prayer.

Is there an inner connection between these prayers and their founders?

Rav Kook wrote that each of these three prayers has its own special nature. This nature is a function of both the character of that time of day, and the pervading spirit of the righteous tzaddik who would pray at that time.

The Morning Stand

Abraham, the first Jew, established the first prayer of the day. He would pray at daybreak, standing before God:

"Abraham rose early in the morning, [returning] to the place where he had stood before God."
(Gen. 19:27)

Why does the Torah call attention to the fact that Abraham would stand as he prayed? This position indicates that the function of this morning prayer is to make a spiritual stand. We need inner fortitude to maintain the ethical level that we have struggled to attain. The constant pressures and conflicts of day-to-day life can chip away at our spiritual foundation. To counter these negative influences, the medium of prayer can help us, by etching holy thoughts and sublime images deeply into the heart. Such a prayer at the start of the day helps protect us from the pitfalls of worldly temptations throughout the day.

This function of prayer — securing a solid ethical foothold in the soul — is reflected in the name Amidah (the "standing prayer"). It is particularly appropriate that Abraham, who successfully withstood ten trials and tenaciously overcame all who fought against his path of truth, established the "standing prayer" of the morning.

Flowering of the Soul in the Afternoon

The second prayer, initiated by Isaac, is recited in the afternoon. This is the hour when the temporal activities of the day are finished, and we are able to clear our minds from the distractions of the world. The soul is free to express its true essence, unleashing innate feelings of holiness, pure love and awe of God.

The Torah characterizes Isaac's afternoon prayer as sichah (meditation): "Isaac went out to meditate in the field towards evening" (Gen. 24:64). The word sichah also refers to plants and bushes (sichim), for it expresses the spontaneous flowering of life force. This is a fitting metaphor for the afternoon prayer, when the soul is able to naturally grow and flourish.

Why was it Isaac who established this prayer? Isaac exemplified the attribute of Justice (midat ha-din), so he founded the soul's natural prayer of the afternoon. The exacting measure of law is applied to situations where one has deviated from the normal and accepted path.

Spontaneous Evening Revelation

And what distinguishes Ma'ariv, the evening prayer?

Leaving his parents' home, Jacob stopped for the night in Beth-El. There he dreamed of ascending and descending angels and divine promises. Jacob awoke the following morning awestruck; he had not been aware of holiness of his encampment.

"He chanced upon the place and stayed overnight, for it became suddenly night." (Gen. 28:11)

The "chance meeting" — a spiritual experience beyond the level to which the soul is accustomed — that is the special quality of the evening prayer. The night is a time of quiet solitude. It is a time especially receptive to extraordinary elevations of the soul, including prophecy and levels close to it.

Unlike the other two prayers, the evening prayer is not obligatory. But this does not reflect a lack of importance; on the contrary, the essence of the evening prayer is an exceptionally uplifting experience. Precisely because of its sublime nature, this prayer must not be encumbered by any aspect of rote obligation. It needs to flow spontaneously from the heart. The voluntary nature of the evening prayer is a continuation of Jacob's unexpected spiritual revelation that night in Beth-El.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 65-67. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 109, Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 409.)

The Struggle of Faith (Vayishlach 5778)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

There are Mozarts and there are Beethovens. Which are you?

I have only the most amateur knowledge of music, but the impression one gets about Mozart is that, from him, music flowed. There is something effortless and effervescent about his compositions. They are not "sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought." He wrote at speed. He carried the worries of the world lightly.

Not so Beethoven, for whom it sometimes took years for an idea to crystallise into its final form, with countless drafts and revisions and crossings-out. This was a man who could be angry with himself and with the world, for whom creativity was a struggle from which he emerged triumphant with work that is rarely less than strenuous and full of conflict until its final majestic resolution. The ethereal, mystical, almost other-worldly quality of his last compositions, the sublime late piano sonatas and string quartets, are the creation of one who has finally found peace after a life of wrestling with his own angels and demons.

All of this is, for me, a way of coming to understand Jacob, the man who became Israel, our father in faith. Jacob is not the most obvious choice of religious hero. He does not appear – at least on the surface of the biblical text – as a man with Abraham's courage or kindness, Isaac's faithfulness and self-restraint, Moses' vigour and passion, David's politics and poetry, or Isaiah's lyricism and hope.

He was a man surrounded by conflict: with his brother Esau, his father-in-law Laban, his wives, Leah and Rachel, and his children, whose sibling rivalry eventually brought the whole family into exile in Egypt. His life seems to have been a field of tensions.

Then there were his transactions: the way he purchased Esau's birthright, took his blessing, and eventually outwitted his wily father-in-law Laban. In each case he seems to have won, but then his situation deteriorates. The episode in which, at Rebekah's request, he dressed up as Esau and deceived his blind father, forced him to leave home and – as we see in this week's parsha – left him traumatised with fear at the prospect of meeting Esau again. Almost the same deception he practised on Isaac, he suffered at the hand of Laban. Even his escape from Laban might have ended in tragedy, had God

not warned him not to harm Jacob (Hence the passage in the Haggada: "Go and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to our father Jacob"). His life as portrayed in the Torah seems to be a constant series of escapes from one trouble to the next.

So who and what was Jacob?

To this there are two radically different answers. There is the Jacob of midrash who even in the womb longed for a synagogue,[1] who spent his years as a young man studying in the bet midrash,[2] who looked like Abraham[3] and whose arms were like pillars of marble.[4] His motives were always pure. He bought Esau's birthright because he could not bear to see Esau offering sacrifices (the privilege of the firstborn) to idols.[5] As for his father's blessing, the very reason Isaac became blind in old age was so that this could be possible.[6] Esau was the opposite, a violent and mercurial character who had deceived his father into thinking he was ultra-pious,[7] but who had – on the day he came in "tired" from the field – committed a whole series of crimes including murder.[8]

This is an extreme portrayal, but not without scriptural basis. Jacob is called an *ish tam*, which conveys the sense of simplicity, integrity and single-mindedness. The plain sense of the oracle Rebekah received before the twins were born was that "the elder will serve the younger." [9] She knew Jacob was the son destined to prevail. Besides which, as Maharatz Chajes says in his Introduction to the Aggadic Literature,[10] midrash paints biblical characters in moral black-and-white for obvious moral and educational reasons. It is difficult to teach children how to behave if all you have to offer is a series of studies in ambiguity, complexity and shades-of-grey.

The other Jacob, though, is the one we read in the plain sense of the text. The obvious question is: why did the Torah choose to portray the third of the patriarchs in this way? The Torah is highly selective in the details it chooses to relate. Why not paint Jacob in more attractive colours?

It seems to me that the Torah is delivering, here as elsewhere, an extraordinary message: that if we can truly relate to God as God, in His full transcendence and majesty, then we can relate to humans as humans in all their fallibility. In every other religious literature known to me, heroes are idealised until they no longer seem human at all. They are Divine or semi-Divine, perfect and infallible. There is no one like that in the whole of Tanakh. Even Noah (righteous, perfect) is seen drunk and dishevelled. Even Job (blameless, upright) eventually curses his fate. The man who, more than any other, epitomises fallibility is Jacob.

And perhaps that is the point. Jacob was a Beethoven, not a Mozart. His life was a series of struggles. Nothing came easily to him. He, alone of the patriarchs, was a man who chose to be chosen. Abraham was called by God. Isaac was chosen before his birth. Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah: these were all singled out by God for their mission. Not so Jacob. It was he who bought the birthright and took the blessing, he who chose to carry Abraham's destiny into the future.

Not until he was running away from home did God appear to him. Not until years later, alone, at night, terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau, did God or an angel wrestle with him. He alone was given, by God or the angel, a completely new name, not an enhancement of his old one but a completely new identity: "Israel." Even more strikingly, despite the fact that he was told "Your name shall no more be called Jacob," [11] the Torah continues to call him Jacob, suggesting that his struggle was lifelong – as, often, is ours.

Were I to choose a soundtrack for the Jacob I have come to know, it would be Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata or his Grosse Fugue, music of such overwhelming tension that it seems on the verge of bursting through all form and structure. Yet it was through these epic struggles that Beethoven eventually reached his own version of serenity, and it was through Jacob's extended wrestling-match with destiny that he eventually achieved what neither Abraham nor Isaac accomplished: all his children stayed within the faith. "According to the pain is the reward," said the sages.[12] That is Jacob.

There are saintly people for whom spirituality comes as easily as did music to Mozart. But God does not reach out only to saints. He reaches out to all of us. That is why He gave us Abraham for those who love, Isaac for those who fear, and Jacob/Israel for those who struggle.

Hence this week's life-changing idea: if you find yourself struggling with faith, you are in the company of Jacob-who-became-Israel, the father-in-faith of us all.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 63:6.

[2] Bereishit Rabbah 63:10.

[3] Midrash Lekach Tov, Bereishit 47:18.

[4] Bereishit Rabbah 65:17.

[5] Bereishit Rabbah 63:13.

[6] Bereishit Rabbah 65:8.

[7] See Rashi to Gen. 25:27.

[8] Baba Batra 16b.

[9] Elsewhere in past 'C&C's on Toldot, I have pointed out that this text is freighted with ambiguity.

[10] R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes, Mavo ha-Aggadot (printed at the beginning of standard editions of Ein Yaakov).

[11] He is told this twice, first by the angel, then by God Himself: Gen. 32:29; 35:10.

[12] Mishnah, Avot 5:23.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See <https://rabbisacks.org/struggle-faith-vayishlach-5778/>

4 Powerful Insights From the Rebbe -- Vayishlach

Compiled by Mordechai Rubin*

The Cosmic Twins

Our sages tell us that before G d created our world, He created an “earlier” state of existence—the world of Tohu (“Chaos”). But this was a world of “much light and scant vessels.” As a result, the vessels burst and the light escaped. G d then created “our” world—the world of Tikkun (“Correction”), constructed with “broad containers and scant light” that allow it to function and endure.

There was a reason for this “debacle.” G d desired that our “correct” world should be built upon the ruins of Tohu, so that we should delve beneath its surface to unearth the “sparks of holiness” that are the residue of this primordial world, tap their potent potential, and ultimately integrate the two realities, capturing the immense light of Tohu in the broad vessels of Tikkun.

The Kabbalists see Esau and Jacob as the embodiment of the cosmic twinship of Tohu and Tikkun.

Esau is the raw, untamed energy of Tohu. A destructive force, because he lacks the discipline and control that would channel this energy in a useful, constructive way. But he is also a very powerful force—far more powerful than the constricted and defined energies that animate Jacob’s correct and orderly world. The challenge, is to bring together the cosmic twins in a way that exploits the best of both worlds: to marry the immense energy of Tohu with the focus and control of Tikkun.

An Unreasonable Source

Thirteen years is the age at which a Jewish male attains the state of daat—the understanding that makes a person responsible for his actions. From this point on he is bound by the divine commandments of the Torah.

This age is derived from the Torah's account of the destruction of the city of Shechem by Shimon and Levi in retaliation for the rape of Dinah. The term "man" is used to refer to both brothers, the younger of whom, Levi, was exactly thirteen years old at the time. Thus we derive that the Torah considers a male of thirteen years to be a "man."

Shimon and Levi's act seems hardly an exemplar of daat; indeed, Jacob denounced their deed as irrational, immature, irresponsible and of questionable legitimacy under Torah law. Yet this is the event that the Torah chooses to teach us the age of reason, maturity, responsibility!?

The situation that prompted their action did not allow them the luxury of rational consideration. The integrity of Israel was at stake, and the brothers of Dinah could give no thought to their own person. In the end, their instinctive reaction, coming from the deepest place in their souls—deeper than reason—was validated; G d condoned their deed and came to their assistance.

This is the message that the Torah wishes to convey when establishing the age of reason and the obligation of mitzvot. Rare is the person who is called upon to act as did Shimon and Levi. This is not the norm; indeed, the norm forbids it. But the essence of their deed should permeate our rational lives. Our every mitzvah should be saturated with the self-sacrifice and depth of commitment that motivated the brothers of Dinah.

Two Names

In this week's Torah reading, after his struggle with the angel of his brother Esau, Jacob is given a second name, Yisrael (Israel).

Judaism, particularly in the light of the mystical teachings of the Kabbalah, puts much emphasis on names. In that vein, the two names used to refer to Jacob highlight different elements of our divine service. The letters of the name Yaakov, Hebrew for Jacob, can be broken into the phrase עֵקֶב י'. The letter י' refers to the fundamental G dly spark that exists within each of us. עֵקֶב, ekev, is the Hebrew for heel, a limb which our Sages describe as "the angel of death within a human being." For the calloused heel is insensitive. It lacks the ability to feel stimuli from the outside and respond to it.

The name Yaakov, Jacob, refers to a Jew on the level of a heel, i.e., when our ability to appreciate and respond to spirituality is hamstrung. Even then, one must realize that the first letter of our name is a yud, i.e., G dliness is what dominates and directs our lives. In a larger sense, the name Jacob refers to the Jews as they are in exile. Yes, their spiritual potential remains intact, but outwardly, they must grapple with their environment, which places them at a spiritual disadvantage.

Yisrael (יִשְׂרָאֵל), Israel, Jacob's second name, communicates a different message. That name can be broken up into the words יֵשֶׁר אֶל, "direct to G d." On the level of Israel, a Jew — and the Jewish people as a whole — need no subterfuge. Their Jewish identity shines powerfully at all times and in all situations. As the Torah states, that name was given when "you strove with men and angels and you prevailed."

The Donkey

The Torah portion of Vayishlach begins by relating that Yaakov sent angels to his brother Esav, informing him that he had "sojournd by Lavan and tarried till now." He then told him that "I have acquired cattle, donkeys and sheep." The Midrash notes: "'Donkey' refers to King Moshiach, as the verse states [in reference to Moshiach]: 'A poor man, riding on a donkey.'"

Moshiach's arrival is dependent on Birurim, the service of elevating the sparks of holiness found in the world. When a Jew refines his body, and his animal soul then the revelation of the Moshiach is drawn down.

Yaakov therefore stated that he had only "sojournd" with Lavan, indicating that physical matters were for him only a means to an end, i.e., their transformation into vessels for G dliness.

Having accomplished this task, he sends angels to inform his brother that he has a “donkey,” i.e., he is now ready for Moshiach’s arrival. He did so since he reasoned that Esav too had concluded his spiritual service, and so for Esav as well, the time for Redemption had arrived.

The angels returned and reported: “We came to your brother, to Esav.” In effect the angels said, “You call him your ‘brother’ — you are ready to go together with him towards the Redemption. But he is still ‘Esav,’ he has yet to be refined.”

Since this was so, the Redemption could not take place.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 29:35.
2. Adapted from Likkutei Torah, Devarim 1a.

* A content editor and staff writer at Chabad.org, writing from Pittsburgh, PA. © Chabad 2020.

Selfless Prayer

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky*

Jacob began his prayer, “I am no longer worthy, due to all the acts of kindness and trustworthiness that You have done for me, Your servant.” (Bereishit 32:11)

Although Jacob was certainly aware of his many merits, he was also able to rise above natural human shortsightedness and realize how infinitely indebted we are all to G-d. With this perspective, Jacob humbly assumed that his merits were insufficient to deserve G-d’s protection. Therefore, he petitioned G-d to save him and his family not on account of his own merits—although he was indeed worthy—but out of G-d’s pure kindness.

Following Jacob’s example, whenever we ask something of G-d, we too should appeal solely to His kindness and compassion. If we ask for assistance based on our worthiness—and we all certainly possess many merits—G-d’s response will be limited to the extent of our worthiness. But when we humbly disregard our worthiness, demonstrating that we, like Jacob, have risen above our natural shortsightedness, G-d will respond with blessings that transcend the natural order.

-- From: Daily Wisdom #1

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Shabbat Parashat Vayishlach

5781 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Be Thyself

I have often argued that the episode in which the Jewish people acquired its name – when Jacob wrestled with an unnamed adversary at night and received the name Israel – is essential to an understanding of what it is to be a Jew. I argue here that this episode is equally critical to understanding what it is to lead.

There are several theories as to the identity of “the man” who wrestled with the patriarch that night. The Torah calls him a man. The prophet Hosea called him an angel (Hosea 12:4-5). The Sages said it was Samael, guardian angel of Esau and a force for evil.[1] Jacob himself was certain it was God. “Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (Gen. 32:31).

My suggestion is that we can only understand the passage by reviewing the entirety of Jacob's life. Jacob was born holding on to Esau's heel. He bought Esau's birthright. He stole Esau's blessing. When his blind father asked him who he was, he replied, “I am Esau, your firstborn.” (Gen. 27:19) Jacob was the child who wanted to be Esau.

Why? Because Esau was the elder. Because Esau was strong, physically mature, a hunter. Above all, Esau was his father's favourite: “Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:28). Jacob is the paradigm of what the French literary theorist and anthropologist Rene Girard called mimetic desire, meaning, we want what someone else wants, because we want to be that someone else.[2] The result is tension between Jacob and Esau. This tension rises to an unbearable intensity when Esau discovers that the blessing his father had reserved for him has been acquired by Jacob, and so Esau vows to kill his brother once Isaac is no longer alive.

Jacob flees to his uncle Laban's home, where he encounters more conflict; he is on his way home when he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men. In an unusually strong description of emotion the Torah tells us that Jacob was “very frightened and distressed” (Gen. 32:7) – frightened, no doubt, that Esau was coming to kill him, and perhaps distressed that his brother's animosity was not without cause.

Jacob had indeed wronged his brother, as we saw earlier. Isaac says to Esau, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.” (Gen. 27:35) Centuries later, the

prophet Hosea says, “The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God.” (Hos. 12:3-4) Jeremiah uses the name Jacob to mean someone who practises deception: “Beware of your friends; do not trust anyone in your clan; for every one of them is a deceiver [akov Yaakov], and every friend a slanderer” (Jer. 9:3).

As long as Jacob sought to be Esau there was tension, conflict, rivalry. Esau felt cheated; Jacob felt fear. That night, about to meet Esau again after an absence of twenty-two years, Jacob wrestles with himself; finally he throws off the image of Esau, the person he wants to be, which he has carried with him all these years. This is the critical moment in Jacob's life. From now on, he is content to be himself. And it is only when we stop wanting to be someone else (in Shakespeare's words, “desiring this man's art, and that man's scope, with what I most enjoy contented least”[3]) that we can be at peace with ourselves and with the world.

This is one of the great challenges of leadership. It is all too easy for a leader to pursue popularity by being what people want him or her to be – a liberal to liberals, a conservative to conservatives, taking decisions that win temporary acclaim rather than flowing from principle and conviction. Presidential adviser David Gergen once wrote about Bill Clinton that he “isn't exactly sure who he is yet and tries to define himself by how well others like him. That leads him into all sorts of contradictions, and the view by others that he seems a constant mixture of strengths and weaknesses.”[4]

Leaders sometimes try to ‘hold the team together’ by saying different things to different people, but eventually these contradictions become clear – especially in the total transparency that modern media impose – and the result is that the leader appears to lack integrity. People will no longer trust their remarks. There is a loss of confidence and authority that may take a long time to restore. The leader may find that their position has become untenable and may be forced to resign. Few things make a leader more unpopular than the pursuit of popularity.

Great leaders have the courage to live with unpopularity. Abraham Lincoln was reviled and ridiculed during his lifetime. In 1864 the New York Times wrote of him: “He has been denounced without end as a perjurer, a usurper,

a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler over the last agonies of an expiring nation.”[5] Winston Churchill, until he became Prime Minister during the Second World War, had been written off as a failure. And soon after the war ended, he was defeated in the 1945 General Election. He himself said that “Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm.” When Margaret Thatcher died, some people celebrated in the streets. John F. Kennedy, Yitzchak Rabin and Martin Luther King were assassinated.

Jacob was not a leader; there was as yet no nation for him to lead. Yet the Torah goes to great lengths to give us an insight into his struggle for identity, because it was not his alone. Most of us have experienced this struggle. (The word *avot* used to describe Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, means not only “fathers, patriarchs” but also “archetypes”). It is not easy to overcome the desire to be someone else, to want what they have, to be what they are. Most of us have such feelings from time to time. Girard argues that this has been the main source of conflict throughout history. It can take a lifetime of wrestling before we know who we are and relinquish the desire to be who we are not.

More than anyone else in Genesis, Jacob is surrounded by conflict: not just between himself and Esau, but between himself and Laban, between Rachel and Leah, and between his sons, Joseph and his brothers. It is as if the Torah were telling us that so long as there is a conflict within us, there will be a conflict around us. We have to resolve the tension in ourselves before we can do so for others. We have to be at peace with ourselves before we can be at peace with the world.

That is what happens in this week's parsha. After his wrestling match with the stranger, Jacob undergoes a change of personality, a transformation. He gives back to Esau the blessing he took from him. The previous day he had given him back the material blessing by sending him hundreds of goats, ewes, rams, camels, cows, bulls and donkeys. Now he gives him back the blessing that said, “Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.” (Gen. 27:29) Jacob bows down seven times to Esau. He calls Esau “my lord”, (Gen. 33:8) and refers to himself as “your servant”. (33:5) He actually uses the

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word “blessing”, though this fact is often obscured in translation. He says, “Please take my blessing that has been brought to you”. (33:11) The result is that the two brothers meet and part in peace.

People conflict. They have different interests, passions, desires, temperaments. Even if they did not, they would still conflict, as every parent knows. Children – and not just children – seek attention, and one cannot attend to everyone equally all the time. Managing the conflicts that affect every human group is the work of the leader – and if the leader is not sure of and confident in their identity, the conflicts will persist. Even if the leader sees themselves as a peacemaker, the conflicts will still endure.

The only answer is to “know thyself”. We must wrestle with ourselves, as Jacob did on that fateful night, throwing off the person we persistently compare ourselves to, accepting that some people will like us and what we stand for while others will not, understanding that it is better to seek the respect of some than the popularity of all. This may involve a lifetime of struggle, but the outcome is an immense strength.

No one is stronger than one who knows who and what they are.

[1] Bereishit Rabbah, 77; Rashi to Genesis 32:35; Zohar I, Vayishlach, 170a.

[2] Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Athlone Press, 1988.

[3] Shakespeare, “Sonnet 29”.

[4] David Gergen, *Eyewitness to Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 328.

[5] John Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, 71.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob journeyed to Succot, and built himself a home...” (Genesis 33:16-17) What is Jewish continuity? How might it be attained? Jewish organizations have spent many years and millions of dollars in search of answers to these questions. And with good reason: how can we expect Jewish identity to exist in three generations without Jewish continuity now? I believe that an answer can be gleaned much more quickly—and inexpensively—through an examination of the lives of Jacob and Esau, where we will discover the secret to Jewish continuity. Jacob finally returns to his ancestral home after an absence of twenty years. Understandably, Jacob is terrified of his brother’s potential reaction and so, in preparation, Jacob sends messengers ahead with exact instructions how to address Esau. Informed of the impending approach of Esau’s army of four hundred men, he divides his household into two camps, in order to be prepared for the worst. But what actually happens defies Jacob’s expectations: Esau is overjoyed and thrilled to see him. The past is the past: “And Esau ran to meet [Yaakov], and embraced him, and fell on

his neck, and kissed him, and they wept” [ibid. 33:4].

The two sons of Isaac emotionally reunite in an embrace of peace, love and hope. The future of Jewish history was set to take a radical step in a new direction. Nevertheless, Jacob prefers a cool reconciliation, delicately refusing Esau’s offer to travel together. Jacob feels the need to traverse a different path and, at his behest, the brothers separate once again. Jacob’s reticence to requite Esau’s warmth is striking. Why refuse his twin brother’s gracious offer? Jacob’s decision has important implications for our generation.

There are positive characteristics of Esau to be found in many Jews across the diaspora. Many are assertive, self-made people who weep when they meet a long-lost Jewish brother from Ethiopia or Russia. They have respect for their parents and grandparents, tending to their physical needs and even reciting the traditional mourner’s Kaddish. Financial support and solidarity missions to the State of Israel, combined with their vocal commitment to Jewry and Israel, reflect a highly developed sense of Abrahamic (Jewish) identity. Similarly, Esau feels Abrahamic identity with every fiber of his being.

But when it comes to commitment to Abrahamic (Jewish) continuity, the willingness to secure a Jewish future, many of our Jewish siblings are, like Esau, sadly found to be wanting. Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors in keeping us “a people apart”, and preventing total Jewish assimilation into the majority culture, has been our unique laws of kashrut. Like Esau, however, the overwhelming majority of diaspora Jewry has tragically sold its birthright for a cheeseburger.

Esau’s name means fully-made, complete. He exists in the present tense. He has no commitment to past or future. He wants the freedom of the hunt and the ability to follow the scent wherever it takes him. He is emotional about his identity, but he is not willing to make sacrifices for its continuity. It is on the surface, as an external cloak that is only skin-deep. That is why it doesn’t take more than a skin-covering for Jacob to enter his father’s tent and take on the character of Esau. Indeed, Esau is even called Edom, red, after the external color of the lentil soup for which he sold his birthright.

And what is true for a bowl of soup is true for his choice of wives, as he marries Hittite women, causing his parents to feel a “bitterness of spirit” [ibid. 26:35]. No wonder! The decision of many modern Jews to “marry out” has, according to the 2013 Pew Research Center report, reached an American average of 58%! The “bitterness of spirit” continues to be felt in many families throughout the diaspora. As the Pew report shows, those who marry out and continue to profess a strong Jewish identity are not able to commit to Jewish continuity. Perhaps Esau even mouthed the argument I’ve heard from those I’ve tried to dissuade from marrying out. “But she has a Jewish name!” “She even looks Jewish!” Esau

Likutei Divrei Torah

may have said, “Her name is Yehudit!” [literally, a Jewess, from Judah]. “She has a wonderful fragrance!” [Basmat means perfume] [ibid. v. 34].

On the other hand, Jacob’s name, Yaakov, is a future-tense verb. Jacob is constantly planning for the future, anticipating what he must do to perpetuate the birthright. Similarly, if we are to attain Jewish continuity, we must internalize two crucial lessons from the example of Jacob and Esau: 1) never sell one’s birthright for any price; and 2) guaranteeing a Jewish future means planning strategically with an eye towards the long-term, sacrificing short-term gains in order to demonstrate a commitment to continuing the legacy and lifestyle of Abraham and Sarah.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb Nameless

There is something special about meeting up with an old friend that one hasn’t seen in years. I recently had just such a special experience, when I spent a weekend in a community where a friend I hadn’t seen in ten years resides.

Of course, we spent much of the time catching up with each other’s lives. He showed me a book he had just written, the product of many years of research on his part. He gave me the book as a gift, and I opened it to find that it was dedicated to a rabbi who had passed away some years ago, who had made aliyah to Israel together with the famed alter, or old man, of Slobodka, Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, in the mid-1920s.

I asked him what his connection was to the old rabbi. He told me that this rabbi was one of those anonymous scholars who can be found only in Jerusalem. He was someone with no official position, who lived in poverty, but who would gladly teach any young yeshiva student who would ask for time with him. He was almost nameless, and, in the world’s eyes, was insignificant, although my friend attributes all of his considerable Talmudic erudition to him. In gratitude, he dedicated his book to this sad soul, who now has a “name.”

Reflecting upon this, I soon realized that I too had similar experiences, and that many people have influenced me who are, in a sense, nameless. I recall, for example, the rabbi, diminutive in stature but superlative in pedagogical skill, who was retained by my parents to teach me Talmud during summer vacations. I studied with him intensely in my early teens and then forgot about him until relatively recently, when I came to realize how much of my modest skill in Talmud I owe to him.

In this week’s Torah portion, Vayishlach, we encounter just such a person. She unobtrusively walked onto the stage of drama of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs in the portion we read three weeks ago, Chayei Sarah. There we read (Genesis 24:59) “... And

they sent away Rebecca their sister, and her nursemaid, and Abraham's servant..." We learn of this nursemaid's existence, but we are not told her name. Indeed, we do not hear of her at all again.

That is, not until this week's Torah portion. This Shabbat, we will read (Genesis 35:8), "And Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the oak; and the name of it was called the Oak of Weeping." We learned that her name was Deborah and that Jacob and his family sorely grieved and mourned for her.

It is left to our imagination, and to the midrash and commentaries, to speculate about her activities and relationships during the many years from the time she escorted her mistress to the land of Canaan until her sad demise so many years later.

Our rabbis tell us that she was sent by Rebecca to bring Jacob from his long exile in the land of Haran back to the land of Canaan. After all, when Rebecca encouraged Jacob to flee, she promised him that when it was safe, she would "send for you and fetch you." (Genesis 27:45). It was Deborah whom she sent to retrieve Jacob, to bring Jacob back.

Deborah then spent much time, probably many years, with Jacob and Rachel and Leah and their growing family. As is evident from the fact that her death occasioned such profound grief that it is memorialized in this week's Torah portion, she must have been much loved. I always imagine that she served as the grandmother figure for all the sons and the daughter of Jacob who grew up without the advantage of a nearby bubby.

For me, as for the old friend with whom I was briefly reconnected this past weekend, Deborah is an archetype of the nameless soul who makes a powerful impact upon us, and who is forgotten for a very long time until we finally remember him and "name" him. Rebecca's nursemaid had no name when we first learned of her existence. Only when she passes on, do we finally learn, under the Oak of Weeping, that her name was Deborah.

The name of my summertime teacher from so long ago? We called him "Rabbi Abramchik," and although I remember him fondly, and he clearly was a major influence in my life, I never knew his first name until he passed away several years ago. It was only then that I learned from his obituary that his first name was Yakov.

Perhaps it is of Deborah and of Rabbi Abramchik that the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said in the Name of the Almighty: "I will give them, in My House And within My walls, A monument and a name Better than sons or daughters. I will give them an everlasting name

Which shall not perish." (Isaiah 56:5)

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand
The Ponevezher Rav Learns a Lesson from This Week's Parsha

The Ponevezher Rav (Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman 1888-1969) was once on a trip to New York. He was riding the subway when he found himself in a car with a bunch of hoodlums that he feared might have their eye on him with the intent of attacking him. Besides being an outstanding Talmudic genius and besides being one of the greatest fundraisers in the history of Yeshivos, it is clear from many stories told about him that the Ponevezh Rav was very fast on his feet as well.

The Ponevezher Rav was alone on a subway car with hoodlums eyeing him. He was in fact carrying a lot of money on him. What is he going to do? (Today we cannot imagine someone like the Ponevezher Rav travelling around New York City in the subway, but this story took place well over fifty years ago!) The Ponevezher Rav took out a slip of paper from his pocket that had an address written on it. He went over to these hoodlums and said to them "Can you help me find which stop I get off at for this address?"

The hoodlums wink to themselves and say, "We'll take you there. Get off at the next stop with us and we'll take you to that address." The train pulled into the next stop, the doors open, the hoodlums walk out. The Ponevezher Rav walks slowly behind them. He exits from the car, but as the doors are about to close, he steps back in and the train pulls away with the gang of hoodlums left behind at the station.

The Ponevezher Rav, in telling over the story, explained: "Where did I come up with this idea? I got it from Parshas Vayishlach!" How? Eisav said to Yaakov, "Come with me to Seir." Yaakov agreed. He said, "Yes. I will go with you, but I need to walk at my own pace..." Eisav heads off to Seir and Yaakov is still headed there to this very day. The Ponevezher Rav said, "I learned from this incident in Chumash that in a time of danger, it is best to let the person think you are going with him and then you wave good-bye."

The Reason the Children of Israel Do Not Eat from the Gid HaNasheh

This week's parsha contains the famous incident when Yaakov was left alone with Eisav's Guardian Angel (described by the Torah simply as a 'Man') and wrestling with him until dawn. This was an epic battle of great symbolism. The Torah states that they fought the entire night. Finally, Eisav's Angel touched Yaakov's thigh while wrestling with him, causing Yaakov to limp away from the scene. The Torah records that because of this incident, "... the Children of Israel do not eat the displaced sinew on the ball of the thigh bone to this day, because he struck the ball of Yaakov's thigh bone on the displaced

Likutei Divrei Torah

sinew." [Bereshis 32:33]. Because of this incident, we are prohibited from eating the Gid HaNasheh (sciatica nerve).

There are many different ways of explaining this incident. Virtually all of the commentaries see great symbolism in this epic battle. I do not know how many years I have been studying Chumash. Even as a student in day school, I imagine I learned Parshas HaShavua every year. It amazes me that after all these years of studying Parshas Vayishlach, I saw an explanation of the incident this week that I never saw before. I never even heard a hint of such an interpretation!

It is an explanation given by not only the Rosh, but also by the Chizkuni (who was also an early Chumash commentary), and by the Sefer Chassidim. The Chizkuni asks—what is the connection? Just because Yaakov fought with the Angel and was wounded there, we cannot eat the sciatica nerve?

In terms of practical Kashrus, not eating the Gid HaNasheh has tremendous implications. Because of this theoretically very limited prohibition, Jews who observe the laws of Kashrus do not eat the entire hindquarters of an animal. Since it is a very labor-intensive process to thoroughly remove the Gid HaNasheh from the animal, virtually all Kosher slaughterhouses have arrangements with a non-Kosher meat packing company such that the Kosher production company takes the forequarters of the animal and the non-Kosher company takes the hindquarters of the animal. I am told that the tastiest meat comes from the hindquarters of the animal. People talk about a porterhouse steak. Have you ever had a porterhouse steak? I hope not! Sirloin steak, the tastiest part of the animal, comes from the hindquarters of the animal.

So the pasuk, "therefore the Children of Israel do not eat the sciatica nerve..." has great implications to this very day. We are stuck, nebach, with the rib steak. It is very tasty, but it does not compare to porterhouse steak!

The Chizkuni explains that it is only right and proper that we cannot eat the Gid HaNasheh. Why? It is because the Children of Israel left their father alone and unprotected, as it says, "And Yaakov remained by himself..." [Bereshis 32:25]. What kind of business is this? Your father is Yaakov Avinu and you leave him alone? You let him cross the river at night by himself? Where are you?

The Chizkuni continues that the children were strong. They should not have let their father go unattended, but should have accompanied him to see if he was in need of any help. They failed to escort him and because of that, he was injured. From this point forward, this should be a reminder to them to fulfill with alacrity the commandment of accompanying someone who might face potential danger.

We need to pay the price because our ancestors failed to provide Yaakov with Levaya (accompaniment). There is a mitzvah called Levaya – to escort a guest. The Rambam writes [Hilchos Avel 14:2] “The reward of accompaniment is greater than all [the acts of kindness involving interpersonal relationships mentioned in the previous paragraph]...” They failed to do that, consequently we need to pay the price.

The Sefer Shabbos U'Moadim takes this idea and explains it on a deeper level. There is a sequence of events over here. Yaakov went back to get small vessels. He is left alone. The Angel of Eisav attacks him. The Angel of Eisav smites him on the thigh. Therefore, we cannot eat the Gid HaNasheh.

The Drashas HaRan explains why the Angel of Eisav came to attack Yaakov specifically now. It is because right now the Angel of Eisav is trying to retrieve the Blessings that were stolen from Eisav. The Saro shel Eisav did not forget Eisav's complaint of decades earlier: “...He cheated me twice—he took my birthright and now he took my blessings...” [Bereshis 27:36]. He wants it back. Why now?

The Drashas HaRan points out that the story in Parshas Toldos—the day Eisav sold his birthright—was the day that Avraham Avinu died. Yaakov was cooking lentil soup to offer as a meal of consolation for his father, Yitzchak, who was in mourning. Eisav apparently was not around at the time of Avraham's passing at all. His grandfather died. Eisav had learned Torah by him as a young boy. Where was Eisav that day? What kind of grandchild does not go to his Zeide's funeral? Eisav was out in the field hunting that day. The Drashas HaRan says that Eisav did not even shed a tear for his grandfather. He was not distressed at the fact that his father was in mourning. He comes into the tent in a boorish fashion. When he sees his brother cooking lentils and his father sitting on the floor in mourning, one would think he would react with some kind of empathy or compassion. Instead, all he can focus on is, “Give me some of that red stuff you are cooking! I'm hungry!” What kind of an uncouth individual is this who has no respect for his grandfather or father!

When Yaakov saw the disrespect that Eisav showed to his father and grandfather, he recognized that Eisav was not deserving of the status of first-born. The whole status of the Bechor is based on the fact that the imprint of the father is most visible in his first-born son. Yaakov realized that clearly his brother Eisav did NOT reflect the essence of his father. Yaakov said, since I show compassion for my father and am comforting him in his hour of sorrow, I am more deserving of the birthright than Eisav. “Sell me, therefore, this status.” You are not the heir apparent of Yitzchak. I am! These are the words of the Drashas HaRan.

Yaakov's entire claim why he felt he should be the Bechor is that he knew what Kibud Av meant. He honored his father, and he would teach his children how to honor their father. Therefore, the Angel of Eisav appears precisely at that time because Yaakov is left all alone. Where was their Kibud Av? Apparently, Yaakov never taught his children how to show proper respect for their father! Yaakov, your entire claim for taking the birthright from Eisav has now been undermined by your own children's lack of concern for your welfare! You were worried that Eisav would fail in his mission of teaching his children; Yaakov, you failed in your mission!

Therefore, the Angel saw this moment as the proper time to wrestle back the birthright from Yaakov Avinu. The pasuk thus concludes, “Therefore the Children of Israel do not consume the sciatica nerve.” This is because the Angel was able to “touch Yaakov in the thigh.” What does the “thigh” represent? The Talmud states “Brah Karei D'Abuha”—children support the father. There is a Talmudic idiom to describe offspring as “Yotzai Yereicho”—those who emerge from his thigh.

The clap the Angel gave Yaakov on his thigh symbolized the fact that his descendants were lacking a proper quality. Consequently, it is appropriate that those descendants be punished somehow for their misdeeds and therefore they do not eat the Gid HaNasheh. We have to pay the price for not accompanying our father in his time of need.

Dvar Torah **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

What did Ya'acov do on the day that could have been the penultimate day of his life? The twin brothers, Ya'acov and Eisav had been separated for 22 long years. Ya'acov recalled how Eisav swore to take his life, because Ya'acov had taken the birth right. And now it was reported to Ya'acov that Eisav was approaching with 400 armed men. There were two possibilities, either Eisav was going to kill Ya'acov or he was going to embrace him.

Knowing about these two options – how did Ya'acov respond? In Rashi's reading of the text he tells us that Ya'acov adopted a three pronged approach: ‘tefilla’, ‘doron’ and ‘milchama’. ‘Tefilla’ means prayer. Ya'acov did what came naturally to him. He prayed before Hashem and pleaded for the mercy of the Almighty to save him. ‘Doron’ means present. He had a strategy. He wanted to appease his brother, so he sent him hundreds of animals which were part of the salary which he had received from Lavan in Mesopotamia. He wanted to indicate to Eisav that he bore no malice. And then there was the third plank of Ya'acov's strategy, ‘mil-chama’ or war. Ya'acov prepared for the worst case scenario. He divided his family into two camps so that if Eisav attacked, at least half his family would survive.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Throughout all subsequent generations the greatest of our biblical personalities adopted Ya'acov's approach in situations such as this. It was Moshe who led our nation through prayer and strategy. Our great prophets and kings were the ones who combined prayer with action. It's from Ya'acov that we learn how important it is always to pray to Hashem. But as the Talmud tells us ‘Ein Som-chim al ha'neis’ – you should never rely exclusively on a miracle. You need to have a strategy. You must plan. You must understand the minds of people. Try and work out a way to win the day for yourselves. And in addition, from Ya'acov we learn that sometimes tragedies occur, and we need to prepare for a worst case scenario. From Ya'acov we learn about prayer, about protection and about prevention. All are crucially important.

It was Ya'acov Avinu who taught the world the invaluable lesson that Hashem helps those who help themselves.

OTS Dvar Torah

Dina's Tragic Story **Rabbanit Devorah Evron**

A young woman comes to a new land, and ventures out to see who her neighbors are, and who she can connect with. She's new on the block. This is what we read in the text: “And Dina went out... to visit the daughters of the land”. I picture her as a curious young woman, who is open to meeting new people and looking forward to some “girl talk”.

While she was walking about, someone else took notice of her, a glance that would end in tragedy: “And Shechem, the son of Hamor, saw her... and he took her, and lay with her by force.” Shechem, the son of Hamor, was the son of a prince of the land, and he took Dina and violated her. The word vaye'aneha, “and he took her with force”, appears twice in Jewish scripture: once in our Parasha, and once again in Samuel II, in the story about Amnon, the son of King David, who raped his sister, Tamar.

The stories of female protagonists are quite rare in the Torah. From the very first verse of the chapter, we expect Dina to be the protagonist in this story, but once she is abducted by Shechem, we realize that she only serves as a trigger for a tragic story between men. The story is solely about the dynamics between men, namely Shechem, his father, Hamor, Jacob, and Jacob's sons.

The male aspect of the environment is accentuated even further when we learn of the conditions for Shechem's marriage to Dina – the performance of circumcision, whereby all of the men of Shechem would need to be circumcised: “Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will become like us in that every male among you is circumcised.”

In the verse that describes Shechem's actions, Dina is described as a maiden. Yet when Shechem asks his father to make sure he'd be able to marry her, he calls her a girl: "So Shechem said to his father Hamor, 'Get me this girl as a wife.'" Midrash Sechel Tov explains that Dina was called a girl because she had reached adulthood, so as far as her age was concerned, she was still a child. The Malbim concurs, writing the following: "And then he said to his father: 'Get me this girl as a wife', and he called her a girl, because she answered him that she was not yet a woman who had come of age, so that she could speak on her own behalf, but rather that she was still a girl, in the possession of her father." Dina seems to be depicted here as an object, in Shechem's eyes. When he desires her, he sees her as a young woman, thus justifying his conduct. However, when he decides to marry her, she is merely a child, still in the possession of her father, so he needed to secure Jacob's consent.

We note that in the simple interpretation of these verses, no real effort is made to get Dina's approval. We can also understand from the words that the Malbim associates with Dina that she wanted Shechem to contact her father, hoping that her father might rescue her from her predicament.

Another pervasive theme in this narrative is the fact that anywhere Dina is mentioned by name, she is always associated with someone else: Dina, the daughter of Leah, Dina, the daughter of Jacob, Dina, their (Jacob's sons') sister... The only place in which Dina's name is mentioned alone, without any reference to anyone else, is at the end of the story: "They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dina out of Shechem's house, and went away." Yalkut Shimoni notes that Dina's brothers were forced to take her away, and that she hadn't left Shechem's household by her own volition.

The Midrash states that Dina found it hard to return to her house, saying: "where will I carry my shame?" Dina feared – perhaps justifiably so – the life that awaited her. She understood that even though she was the victim of a terrible, violent act, society would still judge her and brand her as shameful. She understood that she was alone. This may be the reason why, in this verse, she is called Dina, just Dina, without any association with anyone else.

We don't know how Dina's story ends. The Torah doesn't tell us anything about that. The Midrash tells us that just like Absalom, who took Tamar back to her household, Simeon took care of Dina. Yet in both cases, the women do not build their own homes. At the beginning of the story, Dina leaves willfully. She is an active character. At the end of the story, though, she is passive and victimized, and her brothers are the ones who extricate her.

The story of Dina is tragic, from beginning to end. Unfortunately, similar tragic tales are still occurring today. We must learn, from Dina's story, about how we can make sure that such things never happen; that we must let those who were made victims voice themselves, and realize that there is nothing shameful or disgraceful about them.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

The Ox and the Donkey: An Invincible Force

And Yaakov sent angels, before him, to Esav his brother... "tell my master Esav, so has spoken Yaakov your servant, I have lived with Lavan,... and acquired an ox and a donkey"

The message from Yaakov to Esav is interpreted as either:

- a) Appeasing; i.e. I haven't gained any of the wealth that our father promised and therefore you have nothing to be upset about;
- b) Bribing; as the Ramban interpreted it, as hinting at a possible bribe to keep Esav satisfied;
- c) A show of strength; i.e. "I may seem quite helpless but I've dealt with Lavan and bettered him at his game, and can do the same with you" (see Ba'al Haturim Ha'aruch.)

The Midrash Tanchuma (1) also interprets it as a show of strength, but in a more spiritual sense: ... "I begot an ox" – I need not fear you, for Yosef who is called an ox has been born, as it says about Yosef, "he is a first born, an ox" (Devarim 33); while "a donkey" alludes to moshiach ben David, as it says, "a poor man riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9.)

The Midrash also discusses the fact that these two tribes of Yehuda and Yosef have particular references regarding their ability to vanquish Esav.

The Midrash's interpretation that this passuk refers to some spiritual strength, implies that the issue being addressed in the passuk is a spiritual struggle, i.e. Esav embodying both the force of evil inclination leading Israel astray, and simultaneously embodying the Satan who demands Israel's annihilation because of their misdeeds (as the Zohar explains at great length regarding the yom hadin. Our parsha, says the Zohar, is alluding to Esav's showing up at the yom hadin and demanding that Israel be made to suffer for their sins.)

We therefore may understand Yaakov's boast about Yosef. He is the "ox" which is a paradigm of strength, as Rashi explains regarding the metaphor which compares Yosef to an ox, "he is as powerful as an ox in conquering various kingdoms" (Devarim 33:17.)

But what is expressed by having Yehuda compare to a donkey? A donkey poses neither the beauty and grace of a horse nor the strength of an ox; the donkey is a just a

Likutei Divrei Torah

plodding wretched creature. The passuk that the midrash uses about an impoverished moshiach riding on a donkey, represents an Israel at its nadir. What is there to boast about?

The answer is that the Midrash is actually revealing to us the secret of successful struggle with the forces of evil. That struggle, in order to be truly successful, requires two different, almost opposite, strengths. The first strength is the courage to proactively fight that which is bad, as Chazal tell us, "Raish Lakish said, 'a person should always use his good inclination to confront his evil inclination'" (Berachos 5a.) This requires strength and courage, best represented in the form of an "ox" proactively charging ahead with his powerful body pushing hard. A person should not spend his life guarding himself from the more base elements of his nature; rather he should proactively keep changing and developing his character.

But that alone is not enough, for no matter how hard a person tries, he will inevitably fall at various times. And each fall adds more and more "baggage", mental and emotional. He will have to struggle with the weight of his misdeeds that are dragging him down. It is human nature that even if a person fights energetically when winning; if he begins to suffer defeat, he becomes demoralized and loses his will to continue fighting or even going on at all. This is where the strength of the donkey comes into play. It is not the charging strength of an ox, rather it is the strength to bear burden on top of burden and still continue onwards.

Moshiach will eventually come riding on a donkey, for the final redeemer will be the one who can take a nation, perhaps overwhelmed by its wrongdoings over the millennia, and have it keep plodding on. The donkey may seem slow and ungainly, but it will continue onwards and eventually cross the finish line.

Yes, it is only when Yaakov had begotten the powerful charging strength embodied in Yosef Hatzaddik, along with the strength of bearing that Yehuda, the quintessential ba'al teshuva, brought to Klal Yisroel, was Yaakov assured that he will someday triumph over Esav.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

For Him the Sun Shone

And Yaakov named the place Peniel, for [he said,] "I saw an angel face to face, and my soul was saved." And the sun shone for him when he passed Peniel, and he was limping on his thigh. (Breishis 32:31-32)

And the sun shone for him: -to heal his limp. – Rashi

It looks a little bizarre that the sun shone for Yaakov. If he would be saying about himself, we can attribute it to a certain degree of egocentricity. A child feels the moon is looking

at him and from his perspective it seems to follow him. However, the Torah is reporting that the sun shone specifically for Yaakov.

The Mishne in Sanheidrin asks, “Why was man created singular?” All other creatures were formed in units of flocks, and dens, and gaggles, but mankind was originally a single being. So the Mishne is curious why that is so. Why was man not even a couple or a family? Why was he created singular?

The answer is stunning! “Because a person has an obligation to say, ‘The world was created for me!’” That means that when Adam opened his eyes and saw the light running towards him at 186,000 miles per seconds, and he felt the green carpet beneath his feet, and the sweet smell of Garden of Eden fruits entering his olfactory glands, he could actually and factually declare that the whole world was created for him.

Subsequently, every person has an obligation, yes, a definite requirement to make that statement, as well. What about all the other people? Wasn’t it created for them too? Yes, and it’s not a contradiction! Imagine putting a 6,000 piece puzzle together. Each piece looks very similar to the others but each was cut out of a perfectly design picture.

What happens if the entire puzzle is put together and one puzzle piece is missing?! It would certainly be conspicuous by its absence.

I must say that everybody else, including all the generations that preceded me and the billions of co-inhabitants of this good earth are mere actors, making cameo appearances in a morality play starred by me! At the same time I am an actor in everyone else’s morality play as well.

This is what the Mishne in Pirke’ Avos famously states, “If I am not for me, then who will be for me?” If I do not fulfill my role of being me in the way that I am supposed to develop and produce as me, then no one else can fill that spot for me. It’s a unique role that I have been given, with particular circumstances and rare qualifications to succeed. The Mishne continues, with these perhaps less well known words, “If I am only for myself then what am I?” If I am only looking out for number one and my having developed myself does not contribute to the others in the puzzle of life then it’s no long an identity crisis but rather a humanity crisis, “what am I?”

The Mishne concludes, “And if not now, then when!?” So when is a person meant to declare that the whole world was made for me? Any time and all the time it can be so! It’s important to remind ourselves so we know the weight of the responsibility we bear for ourselves and world in general. However, it is most true, and absolutely applicable when we behave in such way that supports this reality.

Yaakov just finished a fearsome battle vanquishing his Yetzer Hara. That victory paved the way for future generations to strive and achieve that same degree of success. He was himself but not just for himself, and therefore, it is profoundly proper that for him the sun shone!

Weekly Parsha VAYISHLACH 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

One of the more perplexing questions that is raised in this week's Torah reading is why Yaakov sends agents and messengers to Eisav to inform his brother of his return to the land of Israel. King Solomon in Proverbs had already advised to let sleeping dogs lie, so to speak. So why should Yaakov place himself in a situation of anticipated danger and difficulty when it could have avoided.

There are many insights and comments that have been expressed over the ages regarding this problem. I will take the liberty of adding my ideas to possibly explain this quandary. We all are aware that deep within each of us there is a psychological impetus to attempt to correct what we may deem to be a past error of judgment or behavior. In fact, the entire Jewish concept of repentance is built on this and can be mobilized for good and positive purposes. This impulse is usually sublimated when current events constantly impinge upon our lives.

We are busy making a living, raising a family, engaging in a profession or business, studying or teaching, and we have little time to think and recall all our past misdeeds and errors. In fact, we become so involved in our lives, that almost forget our past behavior and less than noble life patterns. But, as is often the case, the past gnaws upon us, and eventually gives us no rest until and unless we attempt to somehow correct what we feel was wrong and even shameful.

Yaakov is aware that he obtained both the birthright and the blessings from his brother by questionable means. This matter has been discussed for millennia, and we have alluded to the many insights, interpretations, comments, and explanations for the behavior of Yaakov. Nevertheless, the issue remains basically unresolved, for the verses in the Torah remain explicit, unchangeable, and eternal. It is, perfectly understandable that our father Yaakov should try somehow to make amends to his brother for the past times that Eisav, wrongly or rightly, felt that he was taken advantage of and deprived of what was really his.

Considering this, it is perfectly understandable why Yaakov behaves in the way he did and bestows upon Eisav such exaggerated gifts. It may be his attempt to square things and to defuse the bitterness of the past. It is not so much that Eisav should be mollified, but, rather, that Yaakov should become refreshed and more at peace with himself regarding his eternal mission of building the Jewish people – a mission which requires that he possess the birthright and the blessings of his father Yitzchak.

Only people who are at peace with themselves can really be constructive and positive in life, for them and others. It is this realization that impels Yaakov to seek out his brother before establishing himself in the land of Israel and beginning to fulfill the mission and the blessings that were rightly given to him.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Be Thyself (Vayishlach 5781)

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will carry on distributing these essays each week, so people around the world can continue to learn and be inspired by his Torah.

I have often argued that the episode in which the Jewish people acquired its name – when Jacob wrestled with an unnamed adversary at night and received the name Israel – is essential to an understanding of what it is to be a Jew. I argue here that this episode is equally critical to understanding what it is to lead.

There are several theories as to the identity of “the man” who wrestled with the patriarch that night. The Torah calls him a man. The prophet Hosea called him an angel (Hosea 12:4-5). The Sages said it was Samael, guardian angel of Esau and a force for evil.[1] Jacob himself was certain it was God. “Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is

because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (Gen. 32:31).

My suggestion is that we can only understand the passage by reviewing the entirety of Jacob's life. Jacob was born holding on to Esau's heel. He bought Esau's birthright. He stole Esau's blessing. When his blind father asked him who he was, he replied, “I am Esau, your firstborn.” (Gen. 27:19) Jacob was the child who wanted to be Esau.

Why? Because Esau was the elder. Because Esau was strong, physically mature, a hunter. Above all, Esau was his father's favourite: “Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:28). Jacob is the paradigm of what the French literary theorist and anthropologist Rene Girard called mimetic desire, meaning, we want what someone else wants, because we want to be that someone else.[2] The result is tension between Jacob and Esau. This tension rises to an unbearable intensity when Esau discovers that the blessing his father had reserved for him has been acquired by Jacob, and so Esau vows to kill his brother once Isaac is no longer alive.

Jacob flees to his uncle Laban's home, where he encounters more conflict; he is on his way home when he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men. In an unusually strong description of emotion the Torah tells us that Jacob was “very frightened and distressed” (Gen. 32:7) – frightened, no doubt, that Esau was coming to kill him, and perhaps distressed that his brother's animosity was not without cause.

Jacob had indeed wronged his brother, as we saw earlier. Isaac says to Esau, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.” (Gen. 27:35) Centuries later, the prophet Hosea says, “The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God.” (Hos. 12:3-4) Jeremiah uses the name Jacob to mean someone who practises deception: “Beware of your friends; do not trust anyone in your clan; for every one of them is a deceiver [akov Yaakov], and every friend a slanderer” (Jer. 9:3).

As long as Jacob sought to be Esau there was tension, conflict, rivalry. Esau felt cheated; Jacob felt fear. That night, about to meet Esau again after an absence of twenty-two years, Jacob wrestles with himself; finally he throws off the image of Esau, the person he wants to be, which he has carried with him all these years. This is the critical moment in Jacob's life. From now on, he is content to be himself. And it is only when we stop wanting to be someone else (in Shakespeare's words, “desiring this man's art, and that man's scope, with what I most enjoy contented least”[3]) that we can be at peace with ourselves and with the world.

This is one of the great challenges of leadership. It is all too easy for a leader to pursue popularity by being what people want him or her to be – a liberal to liberals, a conservative to conservatives, taking decisions that win temporary acclaim rather than flowing from principle and conviction. Presidential adviser David Gergen once wrote about Bill Clinton that he “isn't exactly sure who he is yet and tries to define himself by how well others like him. That leads him into all sorts of contradictions, and the view by others that he seems a constant mixture of strengths and weaknesses.”[4]

Leaders sometimes try to ‘hold the team together’ by saying different things to different people, but eventually these contradictions become clear – especially in the total transparency that modern media impose – and the result is that the leader appears to lack integrity. People will no longer trust their remarks. There is a loss of confidence and authority that may take a long time to restore. The leader may find that their position has become untenable and may be forced to resign. Few things make a leader more unpopular than the pursuit of popularity.

Great leaders have the courage to live with unpopularity. Abraham Lincoln was reviled and ridiculed during his lifetime. In 1864 the New York Times wrote of him: “He has been denounced without end as a perjurer, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler

over the last agonies of an expiring nation.”[5] Winston Churchill, until he became Prime Minister during the Second World War, had been written off as a failure. And soon after the war ended, he was defeated in the 1945 General Election. He himself said that “Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm.” When Margaret Thatcher died, some people celebrated in the streets. John F. Kennedy, Yitzchak Rabin and Martin Luther King were assassinated.

Jacob was not a leader; there was as yet no nation for him to lead. Yet the Torah goes to great lengths to give us an insight into his struggle for identity, because it was not his alone. Most of us have experienced this struggle. (The word *avot* used to describe Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, means not only “fathers, patriarchs” but also “archetypes”). It is not easy to overcome the desire to be someone else, to want what they have, to be what they are. Most of us have such feelings from time to time. Girard argues that this has been the main source of conflict throughout history. It can take a lifetime of wrestling before we know who we are and relinquish the desire to be who we are not.

More than anyone else in Genesis, Jacob is surrounded by conflict: not just between himself and Esau, but between himself and Laban, between Rachel and Leah, and between his sons, Joseph and his brothers. It is as if the Torah were telling us that so long as there is a conflict within us, there will be a conflict around us. We have to resolve the tension in ourselves before we can do so for others. We have to be at peace with ourself before we can be at peace with the world.

That is what happens in this week’s parsha. After his wrestling match with the stranger, Jacob undergoes a change of personality, a transformation. He gives back to Esau the blessing he took from him. The previous day he had given him back the material blessing by sending him hundreds of goats, ewes, rams, camels, cows, bulls and donkeys. Now he gives him back the blessing that said, “Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.” (Gen. 27:29) Jacob bows down seven times to Esau. He calls Esau “my lord”, (Gen. 33:8) and refers to himself as “your servant”. (33:5) He actually uses the word “blessing”, though this fact is often obscured in translation. He says, “Please take my blessing that has been brought to you”. (33:11) The result is that the two brothers meet and part in peace.

People conflict. They have different interests, passions, desires, temperaments. Even if they did not, they would still conflict, as every parent knows. Children – and not just children – seek attention, and one cannot attend to everyone equally all the time. Managing the conflicts that affect every human group is the work of the leader – and if the leader is not sure of and confident in their identity, the conflicts will persist. Even if the leader sees themselves as a peacemaker, the conflicts will still endure.

The only answer is to “know thyself”. We must wrestle with ourselves, as Jacob did on that fateful night, throwing off the person we persistently compare ourselves to, accepting that some people will like us and what we stand for while others will not, understanding that it is better to seek the respect of some than the popularity of all. This may involve a lifetime of struggle, but the outcome is an immense strength.

No one is stronger than one who knows who and what they are.

Shabbat Shalom: Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4 – 36:43)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel — “So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob journeyed to Succot, and built himself a home...” (Genesis 33:16-17)

What is Jewish continuity? How might it be attained? Jewish organizations have spent many years and millions of dollars in search of answers to these questions. And with good reason: how can we expect Jewish identity to exist in three generations without Jewish continuity now? I believe that an answer can be gleaned much more quickly—and inexpensively—through an examination of the lives of Jacob and Esau, where we will discover the secret to Jewish continuity.

Jacob finally returns to his ancestral home after an absence of twenty years. Understandably, Jacob is terrified of his brother’s potential reaction and so, in preparation, Jacob sends messengers ahead with exact instructions how to address Esau. Informed of the impending approach

of Esau’s army of four hundred men, he divides his household into two camps, in order to be prepared for the worst.

But what actually happens defies Jacob’s expectations: Esau is overjoyed and thrilled to see him. The past is the past: “And Esau ran to meet [Yaakov], and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept” [ibid. 33:4].

The two sons of Isaac emotionally reunite in an embrace of peace, love and hope. The future of Jewish history was set to take a radical step in a new direction. Nevertheless, Jacob prefers a cool reconciliation, delicately refusing Esau’s offer to travel together. Jacob feels the need to traverse a different path and, at his behest, the brothers separate once again. Jacob’s reticence to requite Esau’s warmth is striking. Why refuse his twin brother’s gracious offer? Jacob’s decision has important implications for our generation.

There are positive characteristics of Esau to be found in many Jews across the diaspora. Many are assertive, self-made people who weep when they meet a long-lost Jewish brother from Ethiopia or Russia. They have respect for their parents and grandparents, tending to their physical needs and even reciting the traditional mourner’s Kaddish. Financial support and solidarity missions to the State of Israel, combined with their vocal commitment to Jewry and Israel, reflect a highly developed sense of Abrahamic (Jewish) identity. Similarly, Esau feels Abrahamic identity with every fiber of his being.

But when it comes to commitment to Abrahamic (Jewish) continuity, the willingness to secure a Jewish future, many of our Jewish siblings are, like Esau, sadly found to be wanting. Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors in keeping us “a people apart”, and preventing total Jewish assimilation into the majority culture, has been our unique laws of kashrut. Like Esau, however, the overwhelming majority of diaspora Jewry has tragically sold its birthright for a cheeseburger.

Esau’s name means fully-made, complete. He exists in the present tense. He has no commitment to past or future. He wants the freedom of the hunt and the ability to follow the scent wherever it takes him. He is emotional about his identity, but he is not willing to make sacrifices for its continuity. It is on the surface, as an external cloak that is only skin-deep. That is why it doesn’t take more than a skin-covering for Jacob to enter his father’s tent and take on the character of Esau. Indeed, Esau is even called Edom, red, after the external color of the lentil soup for which he sold his birthright.

And what is true for a bowl of soup is true for his choice of wives, as he marries Hittite women, causing his parents to feel a “bitterness of spirit” [ibid. 26:35]. No wonder! The decision of many modern Jews to “marry out” has, according to the 2013 Pew Research Center report, reached an American average of 58%! The “bitterness of spirit” continues to be felt in many families throughout the diaspora. As the Pew report shows, those who marry out and continue to profess a strong Jewish identity are not able to commit to Jewish continuity. Perhaps Esau even mouthed the argument I’ve heard from those I’ve tried to dissuade from marrying out. “But she has a Jewish name!” “She even looks Jewish!” Esau may have said, “Her name is Yehudit!” [literally, a Jewess, from Judah]. “She has a wonderful fragrance!” [Basmal means perfume] [ibid. v. 34].

On the other hand, Jacob’s name, Yaakov, is a future-tense verb. Jacob is constantly planning for the future, anticipating what he must do to perpetuate the birthright. Similarly, if we are to attain Jewish continuity, we must internalize two crucial lessons from the example of Jacob and Esau: 1) never sell one’s birthright for any price; and 2) guaranteeing a Jewish future means planning strategically with an eye towards the long-term, sacrificing short-term gains in order to demonstrate a commitment to continuing the legacy and lifestyle of Abraham and Sarah

Shabbat Shalom!

Insights Parshas Vayishlach Kislev 5781

eshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Miriam bas Yoel. May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

Camel-ot

...he took from that which had come into his hand a tribute to Eisav his brother: She goats two hundred and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty nursing camels and their young, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys (32:14-16).

This week's parsha opens with Yaakov feverishly preparing for meeting his brother Eisav, who was coming toward him in full battle mode. Rashi (ad loc 32:9) explains that Yaakov prepared in three specific ways: tribute, prayer, and war.

The Torah, in the passage quoted above, details the number of animals that Yaakov readied as a gift for his brother. Oddly, four of the five species that Yaakov gave to Eisav are listed as males and females, while the camels were gifted as pairs of mother and child. It seems probable that this is the reason the Midrash offers an alternate reading of the possuk (cited by Rashi ad loc).

The Midrash suggests that instead of reading the phrase "thirty nursing camels with their young," (בניהם) it should be read as, "thirty nursing camels with those that build them (בנאיהם, i.e. their mates)." Rashi goes on to quote the end of the Midrash that explains why the mates of the camels are written in such a cryptic manner: As camels are modest in their mating habits, the Torah chose not to publicize that the camels were mated pairs.

Why does the Torah describe male camels as "those that build them," and what does this have to do with the fact that they are modest in their mating habits?

Modesty is an attribute that we find associated with royalty. According to the Talmud, Shaul, the first king of Bnei Yisroel, was destined to come from Rachel because of her modesty, and Queen Esther came from him because of his modesty (see Megillah 13b). But what does modesty have to do with kingship?

Modest people are secure within themselves; they don't need constant validation and therefore don't seek the spotlight. They actually prefer to listen rather than speak, so when they take a stand it isn't because they have to be right but rather because they aren't afraid of being wrong and admitting it. Most importantly, they always focus on the needs of others and look for ways to build those around them. These are the necessary characteristics for leadership.

Because the camels are innately modest, the relationship between male and female is one of a bond – they are the only species that Yaakov sent that have 1:1 ratio of male to female. In other words, they were a single unit. The camels aren't focused on self-promotion or merely gratifying their desires, their focus is on having children. The Torah describes having children as being "built" (see Bereishis 16:2 and Rashi).

Because the camels have a sense of modesty, the basis of their mating is not self-centered. The male camels are focused on producing the next generation, which in turn "builds up" the females.

When Angels Sing

Then he said, "Let me go for dawn has broken" (32:27).

This week's parsha recounts the remarkable encounter between Yaakov Avinu and Eisav's "guardian angel" (see Rashi on 32:25). The angel fought with Yaakov and actually injured him, which is why Yaakov emerged from this encounter with a limp. But Yaakov held him in a vise-like grip and the angel pleaded with Yaakov to let him go. Rashi (32:27) explains that the angel told Yaakov that it was his turn to give shira (praise to the Almighty) and that it had to be done by day (see Rashi ad loc).

Yet the Gemara in Chagigah states that angels offer song only at night but keep silent during the day out of respect for the Jewish people (who are giving their own shira). The Maharsha asks (ad loc), why did the angel beg Yaakov to be set free so that he could offer his shira if they only sing at night? Maharsha suggests that there are different types of angels and perhaps this refers to the angels that are created daily and only have the opportunity to sing at that time. This answer seems a little difficult to reconcile with the Chazal, which states that this angel in particular was the guardian angel of Eisav (and presumably not created on that day).

Perhaps there is an easier way to resolve these conflicting Chazals. First, we must understand, in a very simple and basic manner, the purpose of

shira. Ramchal in Yalkut Yedios Ha'emes states that all actions and interactions from heaven take place through shira. Obviously, it is difficult to understand exactly what this means. However, at its most basic level, every action is a manner of connecting and interacting.

The word shira means a link. Likewise, the word sharsheres means a chain – connected links. This explains the very element of what a song is supposed to do, connect one another and create a bond. Thus, the process of shira is that of connecting to one another. When Hashem created the world, His goal was to bestow the ultimate kindness; a relationship with Him. Therefore, the purpose of creation is to create a relationship with Hashem. Shira becomes the most natural expression of this goal, which explains why all beings say shira (see Tehillim 66:4).

Before man, angels were the highest level beings and therefore they had the prominence of saying shira during the day. This continued until the creation of the Jewish people. Avraham Avinu made it his mission to connect the world with Hashem, which became the mission statement for Jewish people's "corporate philosophy."

This week's parsha contains a seismic shift from angels being the forces of connecting Hashem to the world to Bnei Yisroel taking over that role. The angel of Eisav informs Yaakov that Hashem will shortly come to him in a vision and change his name to Yisrael – officer of Hashem. This parsha is also where Yaakov and his family transition from being a brotherhood to being a national entity (a fact made very clear in the story of Dina).

This is why the angel pleads with Yaakov to let him go. Since the status of Yisrael is about to be conferred on Yaakov and his family, it is one of the last opportunities that this angel will have to say shira during the day. For as soon as there is a nation of Yisrael, the angels' opportunity to sing is only at night.

Did You Know...

This week's parsha recounts the kidnapping of Dina and her subsequent liberation by two of her brothers, Shimon and Levi. The brothers then went and slaughtered all the male inhabitants of the city of her captivity. In Pirkei Avos (5:21) it says that once a male reaches the age of 13 he becomes liable to keep all the mitzvos. Rashi (ad loc) explains how we know that the age of responsibility is 13: The Torah (Bamidbar 5:6) says, "a man or woman that commits a sin," and we see that the Torah's definition of manhood is in this week's parsha. Levi, who was only 13 at the time that he and Shimon wiped out the city of Shechem, is referred to here as a man.

Seeing as Rashi cites our parsha as the source for bar mitzvah being from the age of 13, we decided to see what others say on the subject.

1. The Gemara (Niddah 46a) explains the possuk (Numbers 6:2) regarding a man's obligation saying that a "man" is a male who is 13 years and one day old.
2. Another Gemara (Yoma 82a) identifies 13 as the year that boys are liable for biblical commandments.
3. As previously stated, the most well known definition of manhood is from the story of when Shimon and Levi wiped out the city of Shechem. The Torah (Bereishis 34:25) calls them "ish – man," when Levi was exactly 13 (See Tosfos Yom Tov to Avos 5:21 for a calculation). According to Rashi (Nazir 29b) Levi is the youngest person in the Torah that we find described as a man.
4. According to others, since the Gemara (Sukka 5b) says that all measurements were received by Moshe on Har Sinai, many Rishonim say that the age of 13 as bar mitzvah is included in this "Halacha L'Moshe Misinai" (Sheilos V'Teshuvos HaRosh Klal 16 Siman 1, Sheilos V'Teshuvos Maharil Siman 51, and also quoted by Rashi to Avos 5:21).
5. Midrash Raba Parshas Toldos 63:14 says that at 13 years of age Eisav and Yaakov parted ways. Until then they were both going to Yeshiva. Rabbi Elazar says until 13 years old one has to raise his child, at 13 a parent says Boruch Shepatranu – blessed is the Holy one who released my responsibility (recited by most fathers on the day of their son's bar mitzvah).

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Parashat Vayishlach 5781

The Parsha and Current Events: Surviving Evil

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The weekly Torah readings are approaching the end of the patriarchal and matriarchal period, the founding fathers and mothers of our nation who are very much with us, due to the pivotal role they played in the future direction of the Jewish nation and world history.

The Gemara states (Tractate Berachot 16,b):

Only three (Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov) are considered Avot (founding fathers) and only four (Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Leah) are considered Imahot (founding mothers).

And on the dream of Paro's Chief Butler (Bereishiet 40:10):

and in the vine were three branches: and it budded into blossoms and the clusters brought forth ripe grapes

The Gemara (Chulin 92,a) explains:

The vine represents the world, the three branches – Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, its blossoms shot forth – Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Leah, and the clusters brought forth ripe grapes – the twelve tribes.

What made the Avot and Imahot unique?

As explained in volume 1B of "With All Your Might" (parashat Kedoshim 5768) the strange number of 613 mitzvot (HaShem's commandments to the Jewish nation) are the result of the life's work of the Avot – Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. The kedusha (holiness) of these three men was so elevated that, through their actions, they penetrated into the highest domain of the spiritual world and, by doing so, revealed the mitzvot (actions) which unite our world and the Shamayim. Had the Avot been greater, we today would have 614 mitzvot or 1000. Had they been less holy, we would have today 612 or less.

Rava, the great Babylonian Amora confirms this (Sota 17:a):

In the merit of Avraham's humility where he refers to himself as ashes and dust, we have the mitzvot of ashes of the red heifer and the dust of the sota; and in the merit of rejecting the offer of a reward for saving the people of Sodom by saying, "I will not take from a string to a shoe thong," we have the mitzvot of techelet in tzitzit and the leather straps on the tefillin.

The three Avot achieved the pinnacle of human kedusha that enabled them to contact the spiritual roots of mitzvot.

Now, if the Avot were essential in constituting the character of the Jewish nation in the elevated spirituality that connects us to the Creator, the contributions of the Imahot dominated the very real "hands on, day-to-day" involvement and survival of the Jewish nation in the jungle we call olam hazeh (this world).

Our mother Sarah perceived the unbridgeable, contrasting souls of the holy, God-fearing Yitzchak as opposed to the pereh adam (wild, untamable) Yishmael. Yishmael's corrupt, depraved, heinous, immoral, impious and profane basic nature would bring untold human suffering through his pagan beliefs, and eventually through Islam, which are all the absolute antithesis of the basic nature of the future Jewish nation.

Our mother Sarah, with HaShem's approval, "molded in concrete" the future conflict between Yitzchak and Yishmael by urging Avraham to send Hagar and Yishmael away. Sarah's words, "The son of this maidservant will not be heir with my son Yitzchak" would be the guiding factors in who would be the sole heirs to Avraham's spiritual bond with HaShem, as would be indicated by HaShem's gift of Eretz Yisrael to the descendants of the three Avot.

The second of our great Matriarchs was Rivka, to whom I will return shortly.

The third and fourth of our matriarchs – Rachel and Leah, who, unknown to their husband Ya'akov were forced by their father Lavan to exchange places on the wedding night, had a prodigious influence in all of Jewish history. It laid the groundwork for the centuries long contention and rivalry between the House of David from Leah, and the House of Yosef born to Rachel.

The House of Yosef claimed that the monarchy was their legitimate heritage, since their mother Rachel was intended to be the wife of

Ya'akov, first in number and in emotions. The House of David claimed that the monarchy was de facto given to Yehuda, son of Leah, and through him to David.

Ultimately, the rivalry brought about the secession of the ten northern tribes under Yeravam ben Navat, with the city of Shechem, the burial place of Yosef, as the breakaway capital, and the exile of the ten tribes under King Hoshea ben Elah by the Assyrians.

But this is not the end of the story of the ten lost tribes. They will eventually return to the Jewish nation in the most miraculous way, very soon.

Let's return now to Rivka, wife of Yitzchak and mother of Ya'akov and Esav.

Our parasha states (Bereishiet 35:8)

And Devorah, Rivka's nurse died, and she was buried below (in the vicinity of) Beth-el under the oak; and the name of it was Allon-bacuth.

Rashi comments that when Ya'akov left home to go to the house of Lavan, Rivka promised to send for him when Esav's anger would wane. After 20 years, Rivka sends Devorah to inform Ya'akov that he could now return home. When Esav learned that Ya'akov was returning home, he went out to meet Ya'akov with a military force of 400 men, all intent to kill Ya'akov and close the book on the future Jewish nation. Under these circumstances, why did Rivka send for Ya'akov to return?

I submit:

After 20 years of hateful planning by Esav, Rivka realized that Esav's animosity towards Ya'akov would never dissipate. She sent her lifelong, loyal mentor and companion, Devorah, to inform Ya'akov that his brother's hatred would be carried on from father to son, from nation to nation until the end of history. So, the time had come for Ya'akov to return to Eretz Yisrael and stand up to Esav in defense of God's values of good against evil, without fear or trepidation; and HaShem would be at Ya'akov's side.

In our parasha, the two brothers meet. The Torah relates that Esav ran towards Ya'akov with the intent to kill him, but instead of the "kiss of death" Esav kisses his brother in a dramatic turn of events!

What happened?

As Esav was advancing towards the Jewish family, an exceptional unexpected scene unfolded before his eyes. Ya'akov with his four wives, sons and daughters had fallen to the ground in an act of total submission. Esav felt that the thrill of the ongoing degrading, debasing, demeaning, disgracing, dishonoring, and dehumanizing of his brother was far more pleasurable, entertaining, gratifying, and satisfying than the one instant surge of euphoria of murdering him would be.

Esav says to himself, "Let Ya'akov and the Jews live on. After the Crusades, the pogroms, the auto-da-fé, and the exiles, my children's children will emaciate Ya'akov's children in ghettos, then herd them into cattle cars on the way to the gas chambers and crematoria of Treblinka and Auschwitz. Indeed, let Ya'akov live on".

Ya'akov, for his part, returned home to compete with Esav, as he was told by Rivka. But Ya'akov when seeing Esav's 400 bloodthirsty men as opposed to the few of his family, realized that the time had not yet arrived for him to defeat Esav. It was the will of HaShem to permit evil a free hand in history, with the eventual outcome that evil would devour itself, as has proven to be the case in human history. But in the interim Ya'akov and the Jewish nation would have to be satisfied with mere survival within the evil that surrounds them.

Until when????

The answer is in this week's haftara from the prophecy of Ovadia:

For the day of God is near upon all the nations: as they did to you, it shall be done to them...

But in mount Zion there shall be refuge for you, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall burn among them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining to the house of Esau; for God has spoken.

And they of the South shall possess the mount of Esau, and they of the lowland the Philistines; and they shall possess the field of Ephraim, and

the field of Samaria; and Benjamin shall possess Gilead... And liberators shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be of HaShem.
Shabbat Shalom,
Nachman Kahana

Rabino Pynchas Brener
Conectandote al Judaismo

Vayishlach :: Yaacov Fights An Angel

The patriarch had been absent from his parents' home because he feared the justified wrath of his brother Esav. Hadn't he unlawfully obtained the patriarchal blessing to the detriment of his brother? His parents warned him of possible fraternal revenge and Yaacov found refuge in the home of his uncle Lavan, where he married his two daughters. Including the concubines awarded to him. Yaacov became the progenitor of twelve children who, in turn, fathered the twelve tribes of Israel.

After twenty years of absence from the parental home, the moment of return arrived. In recent days, Yaacov had concluded that Lavan's influence had rubbed off on him and that the time had come to face reality: his brother's anger. But this time he was accompanied by twelve men, a multitude of servants and thousands of heads of animals that made up his herd. The scouts he sent reported that Esav was coming to meet him with four hundred men, a number that augured a warlike confrontation. Yaacov had to prepare.

The night before the meeting he went out alone, probably to ponder the possible outcome of the following day. He ran into an ish, an enigmatic human or angel whom he had to fight until dawn. Who was this iconic figure? Was he a man, a devil or an angel? If he was indeed an angel, what had been his mission? There are those who think that it was Esav's protective angel who came to wound Yaacov to weaken him before the next day's meeting between the brothers. Others believe that he was Yaacov's protective angel, whose mission was to train him and teach him how to overcome Esav.

Rambam thinks that this episode happened in Yaacov's brain. It was a dream. Such as the donkey of Bileam who, years later, would speak only in the mind of the prophet. A kind of fantasy that had a prophetic quality. According to Rambam, the biblical text perhaps refers to the fight that Yaacov had to wage against himself. The dream had had a real impact because it injured his thigh.

Rabbi Yosef Karo considers the experiences of the patriarchs to augur the future of the Hebrew nation. Abraham's journey to Egypt in response to the Canaan famine predicted the exile of his descendants into Egyptian slavery. The events that accompanied the life of Yitschak correspond to the exile in Babylon, and Yaacov exemplifies the millennial exile of the Hebrew people. Now, Esav demands the return of the paternal blessing and the rights of the firstborn that Yaacov took away. Esav knows he has no merit for it and sends his protective angel to fight Yaacov. Yaacov comes out victorious of the encounter and the angel blesses him and thus confirms who owns the blessing that the old patriarch Yitschak had given.

The case of the primogeniture is different: Karo thinks that the wound that Yaacov receives in the thigh is a sign that this matter has not been resolved. With the gifts that Yaacov offers to Esav in this anticipated meeting, the full payment for the birthright is fulfilled, since Esav knows that he does not possess the moral integrity to assume the religious leadership of the family, a primordial function of the primogeniture. Yaacov's limp is cured after Esav accepts his brother's gifts.

Shaul Regev quotes Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, who believes that the birthright was legally acquired by Yaacov. He even received a document signed by Esav which, as was the custom, he tied around his waist and this is the reason why the angel attacked him in that area of his body. The idea is that Yaacov did not acquire that right through a stratagem, behavior that is derived from the etymology of his name Yaacov. Therefore, the angel changed his name from Yaacov to Israel, whose meaning is authority.

Abarbanel, who points to Rambam's interpretation that everything had happened in the course of a prophetic stupor, differentiates between "dream" and "vision." In the case of a "prophetic vision," the events take on a tangible reality, as in the case of the three characters who appeared before the convalescent Abraham after his circumcision.

For Abarbanel, he was not just a person who wanted to eliminate Yaacov; the angel represented a nation and, therefore, the fight against Israel did not end with that episode. The Jewish people will not be defeated, but they will be wounded. As long as Israel resides in Esav's territory, while it is in exile, it will have to suffer injuries. But when the final redemption comes, the other peoples will have to offer him a blessing and, in this way, they will confirm the authenticity and legitimacy of the original blessing Yaacov received from the elder Yitschak.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayishlach

For the week ending 5 December 2020 / 19 Kislev 5781

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Air Thin

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother."

Seeing is believing, but there is far more to see in this world than meets the human eye. Take the air that surrounds you, for example. The air seems empty enough, but take a not-so-powerful microscope and you'll be amazed at how the emptiness of the air teems with all manner of minute particles.

And if you could go further than that, beyond the microscopic, if you'd go beyond the limits of human vision itself, you'd be even more amazed and possibly more than a little frightened.

The fact is that we are all surrounded by myriad incorporeal spiritual beings. Some of these beings are benevolent and others, well, let's just say, they're less than benevolent.

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother."

Why does the Torah include the phrase "before him"? Ostensibly, the sentence could have equally well been, "And Yaakov sent angels to Esav, his brother."

The Mishna (Avot, Chapter 4) tells us that if we do even one mitzvah, we acquire for ourselves a defending angel, and if we do one transgression we acquire a prosecuting angel. The mitzvah itself creates that spiritual entity (so inadequately translated into English by the word "angel"). Every mitzvah literally begets a holy angel.

As in the world beneath, so too it is in the world above.

A defense lawyer will do everything he can to show off his client in a good light, and, similarly, the angel born of a mitzvah pleads for his "client" before G-d's throne in the Heavenly Realms. This angel tries his hardest to advance his client's welfare, not only spiritually but materially too. This angel is really more like a son pleading on behalf of his father, for, like a son, he was created by his "father."

Rabbi Yosef Karo, the Beit Yosef and author of the Shulchan Aruch, the standard compendium of Jewish law, would regularly learn the entire six orders of the Mishna by heart. It is well known that, as a result of this prodigious achievement, an angel would come and learn Torah with him. The book "Magid Meisharim" (lit. The Speaker of Straight Things) details what the angel taught him, and more. This book is still readily available to this day.

The Shelah Hakadosh in his commentary on Tractate Shavuot recounts an amazing story. One Shavuot, he and nine other Torah sages stayed up all night on both nights of Shavuot and they witnessed how the angel spoke with the Beit Yosef. It started speaking as follows: "I am the Mishna speaking in your throat."

The name of that angel was "Mishna," since that was the mitzvah that gave it life.

At the end of this lengthy testimony, all ten Sages, including Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (the composer of the famous Shabbat song Lecha Dodi that is sung in synagogues every Friday night the world over) signed an authentication of what they had seen and heard.

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother"

Yaakov didn't want to employ the services of those angels who stand before G-d's throne. He sent only angels that were the offspring of his good deeds, the ones that were "before him."

Source: Lev Eliyahu

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

He is Not a Candyman

I was privileged to have had several informal conversations with a well-known sage from a previous generation. I will share two of those conversations with you, dear reader, but since they were "off the record," I will not mention his name.

Our discussion centered upon one of his favorite topics, Jewish education. He felt that there was much to be proud of in the then-current state of early elementary education, for students of age six to ten years.

The problem, he insisted, was from that age onward through the range of stages of human life.

"We cannot allow teenagers to remain with the understanding of the stories of the Torah that they first heard when they were kindergarteners. They then heard what the world refers to as 'Bible stories,' and teenagers cannot take 'Bible stories' seriously. We must teach them a more mature understanding of the stories of Chumash if their Torah studies are to have an impact upon their minds and souls."

He went on to argue that if the lessons learned in early grade school are irrelevant, at best, to teenagers, those lessons can certainly not satisfy the intellectual appetites and moral sensitivities of individuals in their twenties, thirties, sixties, and seventies.

I vividly recall leaving his apartment after that conversation. From that moment, I resolved to assure that my lessons, to adolescents as well as to senior citizens, would contain interpretive material adequate to their developmental stages. I would no longer limit my lectures to the surface meaning of Torah texts but would search carefully for deeper meanings, meanings that would resonate with my students "where they were at."

At a much later conversation, the aforementioned sage told me that he had something to add: "It is not just in teaching texts that we must adjust our teaching to the maturity level of our audience. We must do so all the more when we discuss the nature of the divine. Very young children are taught to do good deeds, and that then the Almighty will reward them. They come to think of the Almighty as a grand old candyman who distributes candies to good little boys and good little girls. We cannot allow the kindergartner's perception of the Almighty to persist into adolescence, adulthood, and beyond. Our understanding of the nature of the Lord must grow as we grow older."

I took this conversation even more seriously than I took the earlier one. It was then that, in my own teaching and writing, I began to speak of the need for "spiritual maturity."

Since then, I have discovered numerous texts which speak of "spiritual maturity," albeit in a different terminology. Let me share some of these texts with you.

One text is authored by the great medieval moralist, Rabbenu Yonah of Gerona. His classic work, Shaarei Teshuvah, or "Gates of Repentance," contains these words:

"...Say not to yourselves, 'The Lord has enabled us to possess this land because of our virtues...' It is not because of your virtues and your rectitude..." (Deuteronomy 9:4-5). We have hereby been exhorted not to attribute our success to our righteousness or the uprightness of our hearts, but to believe and to know within our hearts that it derives from the lovingkindness of the Exalted One and from His great goodness, as Jacob our father, may Peace be upon him, said, "I am not worthy of all the mercies and of all the truth" (Genesis 32:11).

Note that this marvelous teaching has its roots in the words of Jacob in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayishlach (Genesis 32:3-36:43). There Jacob returns to the Land of Israel after years of exile. He prefaces his prayer of gratitude with these memorable words: "Katonti—literally, I am too small—to have merited all of the mercies and all of the truth that You have bestowed upon me..."

Rabbenu Yonah insists that these words in Deuteronomy are not merely spoken to the generation of the Children of Israel near the end of their sojourn in the wilderness. Nor are Jacob's words just for the historical record. Rather, there is a message here for each of us for all eternity. As the author of the work known as Sma"K (Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan) states so clearly: "One must never be a tzadik in one's own eyes."

In the eloquent words of the author of the Derashot HaRan (Sermon 10): "When the Children of Israel are victorious against a mighty enemy, the Almighty is not concerned that they will attribute their victory to their own might. After all, the enemy was much mightier than they. He is much more concerned that, although they will concede that their victory was due to His intervention, they will credit themselves for His assistance, believing that it was their piety that caused Him to perform miracles on their behalf... Man attributes his successes to himself, one way or another."

Rabbi Bahya ben Asher comments on the verse in this week's parasha: "We must all reflect, in our prayers, upon our own insufficiencies and deficiencies in contrast to the Master whom we serve. We deserve nothing. He owes us nothing. Whatever we receive from Him stems from His pure lovingkindness."

The Almighty is not just a "candyman" who doles out goodies to us because of our paltry piety. The successes we experience are drawn from His otzar matnat chinam, His treasure house of freely given gifts.

In our contemporary jargon, we must recognize that our successes are from His "pocket full of freebies." Then we achieve "spiritual maturity." "Spiritual maturity" also informs our personal prayers. We must understand that we need the Lord's help not only for our physical requirements, our health, wellbeing, and material success. Additionally, we need His help to achieve "spiritual" benefits. We need His support to control our darker passions. We need His encouragement to become better people. We need His help to untangle difficult passages in the course of our Torah studies. We must pray for His succor as we struggle with the moral, ethical, and, yes, political challenges of our times.

Rabbi Avraham Godzinsky, a Holocaust victim, said it well in an essay written shortly before his murder, posthumously published in the collection of his writings, Torat Avraham:

One must never delude himself into thinking that the spiritual aspects of his life are in his control, that he is the one who improves his behavior, that he is the one who repairs his character, since after all he has free will, and he chooses his way in life on his own. The truth is that all a person can do is to will and to commit to the good. But good actions are ultimately not in his control. Life and health are necessary for effective action, talent and skill are necessary to perform mitzvot, inner strength is necessary to overcome the evil urge. But for life and health and talent and skill, man is utterly dependent upon divine assistance.

After all, we pray daily and give thanks for our intelligence, for our mental capacity to study Torah, for our ability to articulate prayers, for our courage to repent, and so man recognizes that even the spiritual part of him is not his. Man directs his eyes upwards to the Lord as he says in his prayers, "Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, connect our hearts to Your mitzvot, and direct our hearts to love and to fear Your Name."

Is it not poignantly painful, but profoundly edifying, that we owe these elevated words describing "spiritual maturity" to a man whose life was brutally extinguished soon after he wrote these words?

May we all take to heart the need to mature spiritually. Hopefully, we will do so with the help of the words of both a Holocaust martyr and a deliberately unnamed sage who escaped the Holocaust.

Each taught me of the urgency to grow spiritually as we age physically.

Drasha Parshas Vayishlach - Ask Me No Questions Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

One of the Bible's most famous battles was not between two armies or two nations. It was between mortal man and his immortal counterpart — an angel.

Leaving his family's encampment to retrieve some small items, Yaakov Avinu (Jacob) lingered alone in the pre-dawn hours, and a man approached him. The man engaged him in battle, and in the struggle, Yaakov dislocated his sciatic nerve. Nevertheless, he was able to lock the mysterious man in a fast hold. "Send me away," cried the foe, "dawn is approaching."

Yaakov realized that this combatant was no ordinary wayfarer, in fact he was a heavenly messenger — the Angel of Esav — and Yaakov made a condition for release. "I will not release you unless you bless me," he demanded.

The Midrash explains that everyone has an angelic representative. Yaakov, who had Divine inspiration, met his angelic opponent as a prelude to the face-to-face encounter with his adversarial mortal brother. The Talmud explains that the angel had celestial responsibilities that began at dawn. He therefore begged Yaakov to allow him to return to those duties.

In response to Yaakov's demand, the angel asked Yaakov his name to which he declared. "Your name will no longer be Yaakov but rather Yisrael (Israel), as you fought with angels and with men (Lavan & Esav) – and won" (Genesis 32:26-29).

Then Yaakov asks the angel for his name. The response is enigmatic. "Why do you ask my name?" There is no further response. The angel blesses Yaakov who, badly injured, limps back to his family (Genesis 32:30).

The obvious question is: What is the meaning of the angel's response? Why did he answer Yaakov's question with a question? Why did he refuse to divulge his name? Or did the angel actually tell Yaakov an answer with that question?

At our supper table one evening each of our children took turns trying to stump me and my wife, with riddles. Some of the brain twisters were quite tricky, but my wife and I managed to figure out the answers. Then my daughter announced that she had something to say that would stump everyone.

After prefacing her remarks by telling everyone to listen to the clues carefully, She started her riddle.

She began by telling us that China had 1.2 billion people, it occupied approximately 3,700,000 sq. miles, and its population density was 327 people per sq. mi. She continued by listing China's principal languages: Mandarin, Yue, Wu, Hakka, Xiang, Gan, Minbei, Minnan. Then she stopped, and with a probing tone in her voice announced quite smugly: "How long is a Chinaman's name."

We all took the last statement as a question and looked at each other. We were stumped. How did the previously stated facts correlate with the length of a Chinaman's name? How would the fact that China had over a billion people explain how long a Chinese name was?

Again she just stood up and repeated. "How long is a Chinaman's name."

In unison, we all shrugged our shoulders. "O.K.," we conceded, "How long is a Chinaman's name?"

My daughter just smiled. "I don't know either. I never asked you a question all I wanted to tell you, in addition to all the other facts that I compiled about China, is that How Long, is the name of a Chinese man!"

Sometimes, "why do you ask" is a questions, sometimes it is an answer as well. The angel that wrestled with Yaakov responded to Yaakov's question in a very intriguing way. My name is, "why do you ask my name." Rabbi Yehuda Laib Chasman, the Mashgiach (dean of ethics) of the Hebron Yeshiva, explained that the angel of Esau sent a very poignant message through Yaakov. Those who struggle with Jacob do not want us to question them. They want us to act without thought, rhyme or reason. Their motto is, "Why do you ask?" If we do not ask questions, Esav's angel will surely overcome. If you ask no questions, no answers are necessary. Actions go unchecked, and there is never an accounting.

Throughout history, Jews always asked for names. When Moshe first encounters G-d in the Egyptian desert he asks of Him, "when the Jews ask me what is His Name what should I tell them." Hashem responds, "I shall be As I Shall Be" (Exodus 3:13-14). The Jews were asking for an anthropomorphic quality that G-d's name personified. Yaakov, too, wanted to understand the very essence of the angel who personified the struggles he would eternally encounter.

The answer was simple – My name is – Why-do-you-ask-my-name. That name may be a little confusing at times. It may be difficult to comprehend. It may even sound like Chinese. But if we don't ask, and if we are satisfied with the response, "why even ask?", then we will never have an answer. In fact, we won't even have a clue.

Dedicated in honor of the 11th Wedding Anniversary of Dr. Blair and Andrea Tuttle Skolnick. by Drs. Irving and Vivian Skolnick
Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.
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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayishlach
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Rashi's Double Interpretation: A Mixed Message or Two Sides of the Same Coin?

At the beginning of Parshas Vayishlach, the pasuk records Yaakov's charge to his messengers: "Thus shall you say, to my lord, to Eisav, 'So said your servant Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now...'" [Bereshis 32:5]. Yaakov is preparing for his fateful meeting with his brother, and he knows that Eisav harbors ill will towards him, so he sends Malachim to prepare Eisav for their upcoming encounter.

Rashi brings two interpretations of the phrase "Im Lavan Garti" (I have resided with Lavan). The first interpretation focuses on the relationship between the word garti and the word ger (stranger). Yaakov sends the message to his brother: "I have not become an officer or an important personage; I have remained a stranger. You have no reason to hate me for the fact that our father blessed me that I should be a lord over my brother, for this blessing never materialized." This is a message of submission. Eisav, you have nothing to be jealous about. I, your brother, have remained a nothing in life.

Then Rashi brings a second interpretation: Garti equals in Gematria (adding the numerical value of each letter), the value of Taryag (613), hinting at the fact that "I lived (Garti) with Lavan and I kept the 613 (Taryag) mitzvos, and did not learn from his wicked behavior." According to this interpretation, Yaakov is not being submissive. On the contrary, he maintains, "I remained a Tzadik for twenty years without succumbing to Lavan's bad influence in the slightest way."

The Kli Yakar asks that these are two contradictory messages: One claims "I am nothing, I am like a ger." The other claims "I am a Tzadik. I kept all 613 commandments! So, you better watch out." It is rare that Rashi brings two interpretations that are diametrically opposed—that send out contradictory messages. Which is it

The Kli Yakar has his own answer to this question, but I saw an interesting twist, a totally different take on things, from Rav Leib Gurvitz, the Rosh Yeshiva in Gateshead. His interpretation is that these are not mixed messages. In fact, they are the same message. "You should know that I have nothing, and I am nothing." When Yaakov says "I kept the 613 commandments and did not learn from Lavan's evil ways" what he is telling Eisav is that "I kept the mitzvos, but they were very, very lacking because I did not learn from his evil ways." In other words, while living with Lavan, I saw what passion is and what devotion and mesiras nefesh mean. The way Lavan went about his activities, there was no stopping him. He brought to his evil intentions such a dedication and enthusiasm, that my performance of mitzvos paled in comparison to Lavan's passion and hislahavus!

Let us give an example. We are currently holding around Thanksgiving time. After Thanksgiving is "Black Friday." We may read the stories about the Door-Buster sales. We may read about how people camped out in Walmart's parking lot. The doors open at 6:00 am and people will leave their Thanksgiving Dinners and the Thanksgiving football games so that they can go camp out in the Walmart parking lot to be among the first ones inside the store when the doors open, to grab up the limited quantity big-ticket items that go on sale on "Black Friday." Why do they do this? To get an 83-inch-wide screen plasma TV for \$150!

There is nothing that would cause me to camp out in a parking lot of Walmart, ever! I would not do it for a shiur! Their hislahavus (enthusiasm) for the wide-screen TV is more than my hislahavus for my mitzvos. This is an indictment. That is what Yaakov is telling Eisav: True, I kept the 613 mitzvos but I did not learn from Lavan's passion and enthusiasm in his approach to his evil ways, to apply that enthusiasm to my mitzvos. Thus, Rashi's two comments are not diametrically opposed messages. They are in fact the same message.

Expressions of Gratitude are the Mark of a Great People

After Yaakov Avinu meets Eisav, the pasuk says: "Then Yaakov journeyed to Succoth and built himself a house, and for his livestock he made shelters; therefore, he called the name of the place Succoth. Yaakov came intact to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, upon his coming from Paddan-aram, and he encamped before

the city (VaYichan es pnei ha'Ir)." [Bereshis 33:17-18] What does this expression "VaYichan es pnei ha'Ir" mean?

The Pesikta Zutresi says on this phrase: What does this teach us? We learn from here that a person must show gratitude and appreciation to a place from which he derives benefit. So, what did Yaakov do? He sent presents to the people who ran the city—the City Council, the Governor, the Mayor—to show his appreciation. The Pesikta Zutresi then gives a second interpretation: He created a marketplace and sold merchandise cheaply. (He created the first Walmart! He created a large shopping center and brought down the price of commodities for the townspeople.) Why did he do this? To express gratitude to the city!

The Yerushalmi interprets VaYichan es pnei ha'Ir similarly: Rav Yochanon says, "He established public bathhouses for them." Rav says, "He established a monetary system of coinage (matbeyah) for them." Shmuel says, "He created markets for them." Why did he do this? To demonstrate appreciation to the city!

This is a novel concept: Gratitude and appreciation must be shown not only to individuals who have benefited us, but even to a location, a place, that has benefited us!

There was a Jew named Rav Yisrael Zev Gustman. He was a Dayan on the Beis Din of Rav Chaim Ozer in Vilna when he was only in his twenties! He came to the United States of America and started a Yeshiva in Brooklyn called Netzach Yisrael. He later moved the Yeshiva to Eretz Yisrael and ran the Yeshiva there. He was a great individual. He wrote sefarim. He was a gaon olam in the full sense of the word. It was his practice that he would water the trees and the bushes that were planted in front of his Yeshiva. When Bochrin would ask him, "Why is the Rosh Yeshiva watering the plants?" he would tell them the following story (which itself is incredible):

Rav Chaim Ozer passed away in 1940. When Rav Gustman served on his Beis Din in the 1930s, the two would take walks together in the forests of Vilna. Rav Chaim Ozer would tell Rav Gustman "Look at the berries of this plant. You see this plant – it is poisonous. You see this plant? These berries are edible." Rav Gustman could not figure out why Rav Chaim Ozer was giving him a lesson in botany!

He later found out why. When Rav Gustman was running away from the Nazis, he had to hide in the forest. It was those trees that kept him alive, and it was Rav Chaim Ozer's instructions of which berries were edible and which were poisonous that saved his life." He hid among those bushes. Therefore, for the rest of his life he felt hakaras haTov to bushes. Mind you, the bushes of the forests of Vilna were not the same bushes that were growing outside his Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael. But such was his sense of hakaras haTov that a person needed to express appreciation to any place or thing that provided benefit to him. The mark of a decent human being is his level of hakaras haTov. The greater the person, the greater is his demonstration of appreciation.

I will conclude with one last story about hakaras haTov that I recently heard from Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen. He told me over the following story, which itself also contains important lessons:

When Rav Elazar Shach [1899-2001] was still in Europe, he felt that he was not learning so well. (It is hard for us to imagine what that means!) He felt that he needed talmidim and to start saying a shiur, which would force him to develop himself as a serious Torah teacher. He went to Rav Issar Zalman Meltzer and asked him if he could prevail upon his son-in-law to let him say a shiur in his Yeshiva. Rav Issar Zalman's son-in-law was Rav Aharon Kotler, who was the Rosh Yeshiva in Kletsk (Minsk region of Belarus). Rav Aharon rejected the request. He felt that he had a certain style of learning which differed from that of Rav Schach. He did not want to confuse the bochrin in his Yeshiva by exposing them to different styles of learning, and consequently did not allow Rav Schach to say a shiur in the Yeshiva in Kletsk. This is background information. Now listen to the next part of the story.

Many years later, Rav Schach was sitting in Bnei Brak and a Jew came into him and introduced himself as Rav Yaakov Chiger. Rav Schach immediately asked him if he was related to Rav Moshe Chiger. The Jew confirmed that he was the son of Rav Moshe Chiger. Rav Schach excitedly said, "I must see your father. For forty years I have been

wondering – what happened to Moshe Chiger?" Rav Yaakov Chiger told Rav Schach that his father was in Yerushalayim and Rav Schach said "Take me to Yerushalayim!" Rav Yaakov hesitated: "This is not right. Rav Schach is the Rosh Yeshiva. He lives in Bnei Brak. I will bring my father to see you in Bnei Brak."

He brought his father to Rav Schach, and Rav Schach said to the elder Rav Chiger: "A great thank you to you" (A grayser yasher koach). Why? Because after that first refusal, when Rav Aharon told him he could not say a shiur in Kletsk, Rav Schach resumed learning by himself, but he still felt he was not making the proper progress in his learning. He went back to Rav Isser Zalman. He begged him: "Please, prevail upon Rav Aharon to let me say a shiur in Kletsk!" After his father-in-law twisted his arm, Rav Aharon said, "Okay. You can take a small Chaburah—a handful of boys—and say a shiur to them. But, be aware that they will not listen to you. They won't let you say a shiur. The only way you will be able to say a shiur to them is if you can get one of the older students (an eltere bochur) in the group to pay attention to you and let you say a shiur to them."

Who was that "eltere bochur" in Kletsk who convinced the younger students to sit in on and pay attention to the shiurim of the young Elazar Schach? It was Rav Moshe Chiger! Rav Schach said that for forty years he had been looking for Moshe Chiger to thank him. "Because of what Moshe Chiger did for me forty years ago, today I am the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponnevitz. Without him, I would not be who I am today!"

For forty years, Rav Schach kept this thought in his pocket: I need to express my gratitude to this man! If not for him, what would have become of me?

This is what I have been saying this evening: The mark of any decent human being is that he should be an appreciative person. The mark of a great person is the extent of how far this hakaras haTov will go. With Yaakov Avinu, it goes to the city. With Rav Yisrael Zev Gustman, it goes to the bushes in Yerushalayim. And with Rav Schach, it is waiting forty years to say "Thank you!"

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Vayishlach - The hidden challenge facing the Jewish people

What are the three greatest challenges facing the Jewish people?

Realistically, there are many more than three, but If I were to focus on three, I would identify 'the three A's'. So what are the three challenges which all start with the letter A? Before I explain, let's have a look at Rashi, at the commencement of Parsat Vayishlach.

Yaakov Avinu, Jacob our Patriarch, sent messengers to his twin brother Esau just before the two brothers were to meet. Yaakov declared, "Im lavan garti," – "I have been living with Lavan."

What was it that Yaakov wished to convey with these words? Rashi tells us that the word garti has a gematria, numerical equivalent, of 613. Indeed, if you rearrange the letters of garti then you get taryag, 613. So what was it that Rashi was saying?

Says Rashi,

"Im lavan harasha garti," – "I have been living with Lavan the Wicked,"

"V'taryag mitzvot shamarti." – "and despite living in that environment, I have kept all 613 commandments,"

"V'lo lamadti mima'asav hara'im," – "and I didn't learn from Lavan's bad ways."

Now those concluding sentiments seem to be redundant. If Yaakov was keeping all the commandments, that means that he didn't learn from Lavan's ways.

The Chofetz Chaim, as brought down by his talmid, his student, Rav Elchonon Wasserman, gives the following peirush: Yaakov constantly strove to raise his levels of spiritual attainment and in this regard he was self critical because he always wanted to do better. Yaakov noticed that when Lavan went out to perform an aveira, an evil deed, he was filled with passion and enthusiasm for that task.

Yaakov therefore meant to say, “I haven’t carried out my mitzvot in the way that Lavan carries out his aveiros. I didn’t learn from his evil ways.”

From Yaakov Avinu we can learn an important lesson. If we are to successfully convey the wondrous qualities of the mitzvot to the coming generations, we need to perform them with passion and enthusiasm.

And this now brings me to my three A’s.

The three greatest challenges that we as a people face today are:

Antisemitism, Assimilation and Apathy.

The first two are obvious. One is a threat from within, the other a threat from without. The third one, apathy, is a hidden danger. We need to learn from the ‘Lavans’ of this world and the way in which they carry out their aveiros how passionate and enthusiastic we should be when it comes to our mitzvot.

Shabbat shalom.

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blogs.timesofisrael.com

Vayishlach: The Pain of Uncertainty

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Doubt is a pain too lonely to know that faith is his twin brother. - Kahlil Gibran

Jacob had escaped from the land of Canaan and his brother Esau’s murderous wrath, to spend 20 years with his uncle Lavan (who would later become his father-in-law as well). Now that Jacob is returning to Canaan, he’s not sure if his hot-headed brother still wants to kill him or not.

The Bechor Shor on Genesis Chapter 32 analyses Jacob’s predicament and how he navigates the dilemma. Verse 8 states that Jacob was very afraid and it pained him. The Bechor Shor explains that what pained Jacob was the uncertainty. The best scenario, would of course be if Esau had forgiven him, allowing Jacob an amicable return to Canaan. The second-best scenario would be to know if Esau still meant to kill him and Jacob could prepare himself accordingly, either running away from Esau or finding a fortified city where he can get out of reach of Esau and his warriors. However, not knowing Esau’s intentions kept Jacob in a fearful and painful state of uncertainty. Not knowing can be psychologically more distressful than knowing a certain negative outcome. When one knows the facts, one can start to deal with the situation. But a cloud of doubt and uncertainty can be painfully paralyzing.

On one hand, Jacob would love to have a peaceful resolution to the ill will Jacob had generated 20 years earlier by stealing Esau’s blessings. On the other hand, he wanted to protect himself and his large clan which included four wives, twelve children (eleven sons and one daughter, at that point), many servants, and significant flocks and herds.

If there was a chance for reconciliation, Jacob wanted to do whatever he could to make that happen. Jacob sends messengers ahead to Esau to inform him of his return to Canaan, and to try to gauge Esau’s state of mind. However, the messengers return with inconclusive reports: Esau is coming to meet Jacob, together with 400 of his men. It’s not clear if this is a war outing or the entourage that would normally accompany Esau. It could be that Esau was coming to honor his long-absent brother. If Jacob would choose to run away, Esau may interpret that negatively and perhaps pursue and attack as opposed to having a warm brotherly reunion. If Jacob runs, he may ruin any chance of reconciliation. Yet, if he meets Esau, he may be opening himself up to the death and destruction of himself and his entire family.

Jacob sends multiple deliveries of his flocks and herds as gifts, in the hopes that it will soften Esau’s heart as well as to see if Esau lashes out against Jacob’s gifts. However, until the very last moment, Jacob has no idea if the reunion will be bloody or friendly. Upon seeing Esau, Jacob bows profusely, demonstrating his subservience. In the end, Esau proves to be peaceful and Jacob is surely relieved by both the warm reunion and the resolution of the uncertainty.

May we often know the joy of the resolution of doubts.

Dedication - To the men and women responsible for the removal of our enemies. Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rav Kook Torah

VaYishlach: Reuben's Sin

In an enigmatic passage after the death of Rachel, the Torah harshly condemns Reuben: “Reuben went and lay down with Bilhah, his father’s concubine” (Gen. 35:22).

According to Talmudic tradition, what actually transpired was far less shocking. Reuben was in fact protecting his mother’s honor and place in the family. When Rachel was alive, Jacob kept his bed in Rachel’s tent. After she died, Jacob moved his bed to the tent of Rachel’s handmaid, Bilhah.

But Reuben, Leah’s first-born, was upset. Perhaps his aunt Rachel could displace his mother as Jacob’s primary wife; after all, Rachel had been the woman that Jacob intended to marry. But surely Rachel’s handmaid held a lower position in the household than his mother Leah! So Reuben removed his father’s bed from Bilhah’s tent and placed it in the tent of his own mother, Leah.

The Talmud in Shabbat 55b explains that we should not think that Reuben literally slept with Bilhah; rather, he “disturbed Bilhah’s sleeping arrangements.” The Sages could not accept the idea that one of Jacob’s sons was guilty of incest. Furthermore, the verse immediately continues, “Jacob had twelve sons.” Surely we know this already! The Torah is emphasizing that, even after this disruption in Jacob’s household, all twelve were still sons of the tzaddik Jacob; all twelve were equally righteous.

Still, we need to understand. If the incident in Jacob’s house occurred the way the Sages described, why did the Torah not write it that way? Why does the Torah ‘mislead’ us into thinking that Reuben had performed such a serious offense?

Two Perspectives on One Event

Rav Kook wrote that the Torah describes events in a particular way so that they will make a certain desired impression. Every detail in the Torah is carefully measured, so that the narrative will suitably affect us. Sometimes a story, when written in a straightforward fashion, cannot be properly appreciated by those reading it, especially if they are greatly removed from the incident in time and place. From afar, we may not be properly sensitive to the moral outrage that took place. In such instances, divine wisdom dictates the precise fashion with which to clothe the story, in order that it should make the appropriate impression on the reader.

Together, the two Torahs, the Oral and the Written, paint a complete picture of what occurred. The Written Torah gives a simpler account, providing the emotional impact to which we are accustomed from our youth. The Oral Torah adds to the written account a more insightful understanding that is acquired through careful examination.

The activities of the Patriarchs deeply influenced, and continue to influence, the Jewish people. The spirit of Jacob’s house lives with us to this day; the light of his family will forever illuminate our hearts. Any dimming of that light, any inner strife or moral imperfection, will also be felt by us. In fact, even more so: any minor eclipse of light from that time will reach us from afar as a serious and deeply disturbing darkness. For us, the true extent of Reuben’s offense — upsetting the delicate balance in his father’s household and eroding Jacob’s authority in his own home — is as if Reuben had actually committed incest with Bilhah. The literal account of the written Torah corresponds to our natural feelings of hurt and indignation.

But if we wish to accurately evaluate this offense in terms of Reuben’s moral level, we must return to the Talmudic version of this event. Here the Midrashic insight reveals the event as it actually occurred: Reuben disturbed the sleeping arrangements in his father’s house, in order to protect his mother’s honor.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 75-77. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 43-44)

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Vayishlach 5781

Jacob and Israel – Two Names, Two Spiritual Attitudes

In this week’s Torah portion, Vayishlach, we read about Jacob’s name being changed:

And he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have commanding power with [an angel of] G-d and with men, and you have prevailed.” (Genesis 32, 29)

Jacob's name was changed to Israel. But, as opposed to Abraham whose name was changed from Abram to Abraham and the name Abram was erased, Jacob's name was not. He was still sometimes referred to as Jacob and other times as Israel. This points to the possibility that these were two names referencing two identities that merged in the personality of Jacob-Israel.

The name Jacob was given to him at birth, but to understand it, we must go back to the months prior to his birth. After Rebecca became pregnant, she began to feel odd movements in her belly, as it says: "And the children struggled within her, and she said, 'If [it be] so, why am I [like] this?'" (Ibid 25, 22). Rebecca went to ask the prophets Shem and Ever, and they told her that, "'Two nations are in your womb, and two kingdoms will separate from your innards, and one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom, and the elder will serve the younger'" (Ibid Ibid, 23). She discovered that the struggle she felt in her womb was only the beginning of the struggle between two nations.

When Rebecca gave birth, one baby came out first and his twin brother emerged after him while clutching his brother's heel. Apparently, he was trying to get the first baby back into his mother's womb so he could be the firstborn. The first one was called Esau and the second Jacob, for the Hebrew word for "heel." Actually, in that first struggle, Jacob failed and came out second. Years later, he bought the birthright of the firstborn son from Esau for a bowl of stew. The name Jacob symbolizes his spiritual position in facing his brother; someone who grabs his brother's heel and tries to chase and catch up with him.

Now, decades later, Jacob is returning from the home of his father-in-law in Aram Naharayim and is about to meet his brother Esau again. He is very nervous about this meeting since the reason he escaped his father's house twenty years earlier was because Esau threatened to kill him. Jacob planned for this meeting with Esau in several ways: He sent him gifts ahead of time to appease him; he divided his camp into two to prepare for war; and he turned to G-d in prayer:

"Now deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him, lest he come and strike me, [and strike] a mother with children." (Ibid 32, 12)

Did G-d respond to Jacob? That same night, Jacob transferred his wives, children, and belongings across the river and returned alone to the other side to get the belongings that remained there. When there alone, he experienced a violent encounter with an anonymous person who later identified himself as an angel. All through the night, they wrestled with one another with Jacob calling upon his best skills and strength not to be taken down by the stranger. As dawn broke and the battle ended, the angel said to him, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have commanding power with [an angel of] G-d and with men, and you have prevailed." The angel told him to change his attitude in regards to his brother – no longer clutching a heel, no longer pursuing a chance to overtake the older brother. He had reached the goal he had set and now had the ability to fight. After Jacob proved he could take an active stand, his name was changed to Israel as he prepared for the meeting with his brother.

The greatest sages of the Hassidic movement learned from these two names – Jacob and Israel – that there are two emotional/spiritual attitudes that one must be prepared to have in dealing with forbidden desires, with our "yetzer hara." One attitude requires a negotiation with these desires, a stand that assumes a diminished position and tries to attain the maximum – an attitude of Jacob. But sometimes a person needs to fight, to have faith in his ability to overcome his desires and not give up on his spiritual aspirations. This is an attitude of Israel. A person, therefore, must identify the situation he is in and his emotional abilities and act accordingly.

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https://www.torahweb.org/torah/2020/parsha/rkoe_vayishlach.html

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

The True Grandeur of Klal Yisrael

The Torah describes how after Shimon and Levi kill all the inhabitants of Shechem, Hashem tells Yaakov to return to Beis El and make a mizbei'ach (Vayishlach 35:1). Yaakov directs his household to remove

all of the avodah zara they still possess from the booty of Shechem, to cleanse themselves and prepare to travel to Beis El. The possuk continues that when they set out to Beis El, there fell a G-dly terror (chitas haElokim) on the cities around them, and those living there did not pursue Yaakov's children (35:5). Earlier, Yaakov had criticized Shimon and Levi for their actions precisely because he was afraid that those living in the area would rise up against his family and destroy them (34:30). And yet, the exact opposite occurred; a G-dly fear took hold of the people and they did not chase after Yaakov and his family.

But the possuk does not explain why those living in the surrounding cities were gripped with such terror. The Sforno comments that in fact Yaakov's concern was warranted, so he needed divine protection. It would appear that the Sforno understands that the chitas haElokim was a supernatural feeling that Hashem instilled in the hearts of those living in the area to prevent them from attacking Yaakov's family. This idea is also expressed by the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayishlach 22) that Hashem placed His fear on the surrounding cities, in fulfillment of the Torah's promise, "And all the nations of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will fear you" (Ki Savo 28:10). Hashem placed His aura as it were over Yaakov's family and that made others afraid to pursue them.

But the Malbim explains differently. He suggests that the members of Yaakov's household demonstrated yiras shamayim by removing all of their avodah zara and preparing their hearts to serve Hashem in Beis El. It was that yiras shamayim that spread to those living in the surrounding cities and caused them to have yiras shamayim as well, which is why they did not chase after Yaakov and his family. The chitas haElokim, the fear of Hashem, in the hearts of Yaakov's children had a ripple effect on the people in the surrounding cities and it gave them a newfound respect and awe for Yaakov and his family.

This could be the deeper meaning behind the Torah's promise in Parshas Ki Savo that all the nations will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you and they will fear you. It is not simply an expression of divine mercy that Hashem will cause the nations of the world to fear Klal Yisrael despite the fact that they are undeserving. To the contrary, the Torah is saying that if we study Torah with energy and excitement, and we observe mitzvos scrupulously and joyfully, that will earn us the respect and the awe of all people.

The Torah says earlier, "And you shall safeguard and perform them (the mitzvos), for it is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who shall hear all of these decrees and proclaim..." Which is a great nation that has proper decrees and laws such as the entire Torah? (Va'eschanan 4:6,8) When Klal Yisrael is careful to observe both negative and positive commandments - to safeguard and perform (u'shmartem va'asisem) - they earn the respect and admiration of all people because the proper observance of mitzvos purifies and elevates a person, and the special sense of refinement that is exuded by a Torah Jew is impressive and inspiring even to a non-Jew.

Chazal explain that these two pesukim (in Va'eschanan and Ki Savo) are alluded to in the ultimate bracha the Torah offers to Klal Yisrael when it is true to its mission. The Torah declares, "Hashem has distinguished you today to be for Him a treasured people, as He spoke to you, and to observe all His mitzvos, and to make you supreme over all the nations that He made, for praise, for renown, and for splendor" (Ki Savo 26:18-19). Chazal comment in the Midrash (Psikta Zutrasa ibid), "To make you supreme: supreme in Torah, supreme in mitzvos, as it says, 'And which is the nation that has proper decrees and laws?' (Va'eschanan) Supreme, as it says, 'And all the nations of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you and they will fear you.' (Ki Savo)" The Torah warns that Klal Yisrael's prominence is not an automatic gift. Rather, only when Klal Yisrael elevates itself through talmud Torah and shmiras hamitzvos does it connect with the Name of Hashem, and earn the respect and the awe of all people.

On Chanukah, we celebrate the victory of Torah values over Greek culture. The Greeks enacted many harsh decrees to persecute the Jewish people spiritually. They tried to prevent them from studying Torah and observing mitzvos (Al Hanissim). According to one source, they singled

out Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and bris milah (Megillas Antiochus). But how did all this persecution begin? The Bach (Orach Chaim 670) writes that initially Hashem allowed the Greeks to have the upper hand because Klal Yisrael neglected the avodah of the Beis Hamikdash - hisrashlu b'avodah. So middah k'negged middah, the Greeks abolished the korban tamid and the lighting of the menorah in the Beis Hamikdash. And later, they issued decrees against other mitzvos as well. (see Shem M'Shmuel, Chanuka and Parshas Mikeitz, who elaborates on the idea of the Bach). When Klal Yisrael observes mitzvos with dedication and love - when they connect with the Name of Hashem - they are respected and admired by all. But when they become disinterested and apathetic in their observance of mitzvos - when they experience a hisrashlus b'avodah - then they are ridiculed and persecuted. This Chanukah, let us rededicate ourselves to the avodah of talmud Torah and shmiras hamitzvos. Let us strengthen our relationship with the Ribbono Shel Olam and reap the benefits of that connection.

https://www.torahweb.org/torah/2004/parsha/rsch_vayishlach.html

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National Pride

Rabbi Herschel Schachter

In the days of Yehoshua, Eretz Yisroel was divided among the shevatim. With the exception of shevet Levi, each of the other shvatim got an equal share in the land. When Bnai Yisroel crossed over the Jordan, it took the first seven years to conquer the land from the thirty one kings, and then another seven years to divide the land among the tribes, families, and individuals. The rabbis had a tradition that the mizbeach in the Beis Hamikdash may not be located in the section that belonged to shevet Yehuda. The kings were to come from Yehuda, the mizbeach represented the religion, and it was deemed inappropriate that the religion be under the control of the government. (This is one of the weak points of the Chief Rabbinate in Israel; since it is a branch of the government, it is basically under their control.)

This should have left the possibility open for the mizbeach to be located in the area of any of the remaining eleven tribes. But the tradition had it that only the area of shevet Binyamin qualified. This was already ordained by Yaakov Avinu and by Moshe Rabbeinu when each of them expressed their blessings to each of the shvatim before they died.

Why was Binyamin singled out? The Medrash gives two suggestions, which perhaps really blend together to become one: 1) When the entire family of Yaakov met up with Esav, they all showed their respect by bowing down to him, except for Binyamin (who was not yet born.) 2) All of the other children of Yaakov were born outside of Eretz Yisroel, except for Binyamin, who was born in Eretz Yisroel; he was the only "sabara".

As long as the Jewish people lived in foreign lands they had no choice other than to be respectful and conciliatory to their enemies. Everyone had to bow down to Esav. But as soon as the Jewish medinah was established, they could no longer be conciliatory to these enemies. An independent sovereign state must act with pride! Yes, the possuk in Tehillim describes Eretz Yisroel as "geon Yaakov", "the pride of the Jewish people", and sometimes they are even obligated to go to war (and obviously, to sacrifice human lives) to maintain their sovereignty over the medinah! Many will ask, does it really make any sense to loose human lives merely for the sake of "pride"? And the answer is "yes"! The Tehillim refers to Eretz Yisroel as "the pride of the Jewish people." Every country in the world has the right to go to war to maintain sovereignty over its land; and the Jewish people not only have the right, but even the obligation.

G-d considers "arrogance" to be an abominable trait. But Binyamin who was born in Eretz Yisroel was a "sabara", and he had "national pride." This "national pride" was what was needed to have the mizbeach built in his section. Arrogance pushes one away from G-d; but a healthy sense of independence and national pride brings one closer to G-d. The individual who is subservient to other human beings can not fully be subservient to G-d.

Only the Jews who live in Eretz Yisroel have the mitzvah of aliyah laregel; to come closer to G-d. The Jew with the galus mentality can not be fully subservient to G-d, and thus only the free men in Eretz Yisroel have this mitzvah. The Torah expresses itself by stating that three times a year all the Jewish men must come to visit "the Master" Hashem. The Talmud understood this to mean that slaves who are subservient to their human masters don't have this mitzvah. They can not succeed in becoming fully subservient to Hashem, which is the purpose of the aliyah laregel.

Binyamin, of course, must be careful that his "national pride" not lead to the abomination of "arrogance". If the sabra's independence and "national pride" will bring him closer to Hashem, there will be no room to develop any arrogance. The closer one comes to Hashem, the more humble he will become.

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Chalav Akum – Non-Jewish Milk

Rabbi Avraham Rosenthal

This week's parsha mentions the mitzvah of gid hanasheh, the first mitzvah commanded to the Jews germane to kashrus. This article will examine a different area of kashrus, the rabbinic injunction against chalav akum – non-Jewish milk.

In the course of preparing this article, it has come to my attention that different communities understand various terms connected to this subject in different ways. For this reason, I wish to clarify the meaning of certain key phrases that will be used extensively throughout this article.

Chalav Akum – Literally, this means "milk of a non-Jew," and it refers to milk that was milked by a non-Jew without any supervision whatsoever, not even by any government agency, nor in a way that industry standard can guarantee what species of mammal was milked.

Chalav Yisrael – This is milk where the milking process was supervised by a Jew.

Chalav Stam – Literally, "unspecified or regular milk." This refers to milk that was milked by a non-Jew, but, based on oversight of government agencies or checkable industry standards, the assumption is that it is milk of a kosher species.

Non-kosher milk – This refers to milk obtained from a non-kosher animal.

The Premise for the Injunction

The starting point for Chazal's injunction against chalav akum is actually a Torah prohibition. Let us begin with a passage from the Mishnah (Bechoros 5b): "If a kosher animal gives birth to a type of non-kosher species, it is permissible to eat. If a non-kosher animal gives birth to a type of kosher species, it is forbidden to eat. For whatever comes from non-kosher is non-kosher, and whatever comes from kosher is kosher." In other words, if a kosher animal produces an offspring whose hooves are not split, it is nevertheless kosher. Similarly, if a non-kosher animal, such as a camel or llama that chew their cud, bears an offspring bearing split hooves, such that the offspring now has both kosher signs – it has split hooves and it chews its cud -- it is non-kosher.

The Gemara (ibid. 6b) derives that milk or anything else derived from a non-kosher species is forbidden according to Torah Law from the word "gamal," camel, that appears in the Torah (Vayikra 11:4). Furthermore, the Gemara derives from a repetitive pasuk in Devarim (14:7) that not only is the camel itself forbidden, but also its milk.

The Injunction against Chalav Akum

The Mishnah (Avodah Zarah 35b) lists several non-Jewish foodstuffs that are prohibited to eat, but one is allowed to derive benefit from them. One of these items is "milk that was milked by a non-Jew without a Jew's supervision."

One of the reasons why Chazal made this injunction was out of concern that the non-Jew added milk from a non-kosher animal (ibid.). He may have done so in order to increase the volume of milk he has to sell (Meiri, ad locum). Alternatively, perhaps the non-Jew was not careful that the utensil into which he began milking was clean of prohibited product such as milk from non-kosher species (Mordechai, Avodah

Zarah #826; Semak #223; Biur Hagra, Yoreh Dei'ah 115:4). It should be noted that according to this opinion, the concern specifically is that some non-kosher milk will be mixed in with the kosher milk. The Gemara states that there is no concern that the non-Jew will attempt to sell pure non-kosher milk to his Jewish customer, as one can easily differentiate between the two, based on its appearance (Avodah Zarah 35b).

Gilui – Uncovered Liquids

Before proceeding with the next reason why chalav akum is prohibited, a brief introduction is required. Chazal forbade drinking three liquids – water, wine and milk, as well as eating various types of fruits, that were left uncovered (Mishnah, Terumos 8:4-6). This injunction is referred to as “gilui” – “uncovered.” The concern was that perhaps a snake may inject poisonous venom into the drink or food, rendering it dangerous for consumption.

Accordingly, another reason why non-Jewish milk is forbidden is because of the prohibition against gilui (Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah 2:8). Since non-Jews may not be particular about gilui, there is concern that the perfectly kosher milk was left uncovered, and some poisonous venom found its way into the milk.

The Rishonim raise the question why Chazal limited their injunction to chalav akum. If the concern is gilui, it should be forbidden to buy water from a non-Jew, as well, for the same reason. (Obviously, wine is not relevant to the discussion, as non-Jewish wine is forbidden in any event.) The answer is that although non-Jews were not concerned about gilui, they are and were concerned about cleanliness. Therefore, when it comes to water which is drunk “as is,” they are careful to keep it covered and clean. Milk, on the other hand, is usually not consumed as is, but is first strained or homogenized (and, in today's world, pasteurized). Therefore, the non-Jew will not be as concerned to keep it covered. Although the straining might be sufficient to satisfy the non-Jew's concern for cleanliness, it does not remove the concern of venom (Tosafos, Avodah Zarah 35a, s.v. mishum nikur).

Although some Rishonim (Tosafos, Avodah Zarah 39b, s.v. ee; Tosafos, ibid. 35a, s.v. mishum) maintain that one needs to take into account the reason of gilui, most Rishonim (Rif and Rosh, Avodah Zarah chap. 2; Rambam, Hilchos Maachalos Asuros 3:13), as well as the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Dei'ah 115:1) rule that we are only concerned about the non-Jew mixing in milk of a non-kosher animal.

Davar Shebeminyan

Before proceeding to the next part of our discussion, we need to introduce a new topic. Throughout Shas, we find that many decrees put into place by Chazal were voted on by a gathering of sages. Such decrees are referred to as “davar shebeminyan.” Although most will recognize the word “minyan” as referring to a quorum of ten for davening, it can refer to anything that is counted, and in this case, it means the votes cast by the sages to determine whether or not to institute a specific decree.

The Gemara (Beitzah 5a) sets forth a rule, derived from pesukim, that “kol davar shebeminyan, tzarich minyan acher lehatirot.” This means that whenever Chazal had a reason to put a particular piece of legislation into place – and it was voted on -- if it will ever occur that the reason is no longer applicable, we cannot merely ignore the law, but, rather, another gathering of sages must vote to rescind the law.

Now, let us see how this applies to chalav akum.

There is a disagreement among the early authorities whether the injunction against drinking chalav akum is a davar shebeminyan or not. Some maintain that it is and, therefore, even when there is no concern that a non-Jew added non-kosher milk, it would still be forbidden to drink. According to this approach, the original prohibition was instituted only when no Jew supervised the milking. Chazal themselves included in the decree that when a Jew watches the milking process, the milk is permitted (Shu"t Mahari Bruna #78, citing Rabbeinu Yonah).

Other authorities contend that the injunction against chalav akum was never a davar shebeminyan. This means that Chazal recognized a concern, and ruled that each individual is obligated to make sure that he is consuming kosher milk. However, if we know for a fact that there is

no non-kosher milk, the milk is permitted (Shu"t Radvaz, vol. IV, #1147).

We will see that several Acharonim apply the latter approach and therefore rule leniently at times.

Definition of “Seeing”

The Mishnah (Avodah Zarah 39b) states that if a Jew watches the process, the milk of a non-Jew is permitted. The Gemara explains that it is unnecessary for the Jew to observe the milking process from start to finish; as long as he has the capability to watch, the milk is kosher. The Gemara notes that this is true even in a situation where the non-Jew has a non-kosher animal in his herd whose milk could easily be added to the “kosher” milk. Nevertheless, since the non-Jew knows that the Jew can observe the milking at any time, we can assume that he will not add milk from the non-kosher animal, since he knows that if he is caught he will lose the sale.

The Rishonim add two stipulations to this: 1) The non-Jew is milking the animal for the benefit of the Jew and 2) he is aware that Jews do not drink the milk of a non-kosher animal. If he is not aware of these two points, he will not be afraid to mix in non-kosher milk (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dei'ah 115:1).

The Gemara's example of the Jew being able to see the milking at his whim is where the Jew is sitting near the herd. While sitting, he cannot see the non-Jew milking, but when he stands up, he can. In this scenario, the non-Jew is afraid to be caught adding non-kosher milk. The Rishonim extend this lenience and they rule that the Jew does not have to “sit next to the herd” the entire time. Rather, he can be “yotzei venichnas,” “go out and come in.” In other words, the Jew is allowed to leave his post while the non-Jew is milking his herd; since he can reappear at any moment without warning, it is not necessary for the Jew to be in the immediate vicinity at all times (Semak #223; Issur Veheter 45:2; Shach, Yoreh Deah, 115:4).

Clean Utensils Only

Several Rishonim maintain that although the Jew does not have to watch the entire milking process, he must be there before the milking commences in order to ascertain that the pail had no non-kosher or unsupervised milk beforehand (Semak #223; Mordechai, Avodah Zarah #886, citing Rabbeinu Peretz; Issur Veheter 45:1; Rema, Yoreh Dei'ah 115:1).

Furthermore, there is a custom to be stringent and not use the utensil usually used by the non-Jew during the milking. This is out of concern that there is some non-kosher milk residue in the utensil that will go unnoticed (Issur Veheter 45:2; Rema, Yoreh Deah 115:1).

Bidi'eved, if the non-Jew's usual milking utensil was used, the milk is permitted, provided that the utensil was inspected beforehand (Issur Veheter 45:2). If it was not examined before the milking, there is a disagreement among the Acharonim whether the milk can be used (Rema 115:1; Shach 115:8).

No Non-Kosher Species

There is a disagreement among the Rishonim concerning the milk of a non-Jew who has no non-kosher mammals in his possession. Some maintain that when the non-Jew does not possess any non-kosher animals and he milks his herd without supervision, the milk is permitted (Shaarei Dura #82, citing Bnei Romi). Others argue that no distinctions can be made, and if a Jew does not observe the milking, or at least have the capability to do so, the milk is forbidden (ibid, citing Rashi).

According to a third opinion, although the Jew must be on the premises during the milking process (or minimally, yotzei venichnas), where there are no non-kosher animals, he does not need to see the actual milking. The reason why this is sufficient is that since there are no non-kosher animals, the only concern is that the non-Jew will bring non-kosher milk from another place. Since the Jew is on the premises, the non-Jew will be afraid to do so (Toras Habayis Hakatzar, 3:6, page 90b; Meiri, Avodah Zarah 35b). This view is codified by the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Dei'ah 115:1). In any event, as we mentioned earlier, the Jew must be there at the beginning of the milking to ascertain that the utensils used are clean of any non-kosher milk residue (Rema ad loc.).

Early Leniencies

We will soon discuss the famous ruling of Rav Moshe Feinstein regarding the consumption of non-chalav Yisrael milk. However, it should be noted that, prior to Rav Moshe, there were other lenient rulings proposed by great Acharonim. One of these was issued by the Pri Chadash, who lived during the second half of the seventeenth century. He ruled that in a city where non-kosher milk is not found, or that it is more expensive than milk from a kosher animal, one may drink milk of a non-Jew, even if a Jew did not supervise the milking. He writes that this was the custom in Amsterdam, and that he, himself, followed this practice (Pri Chadash, Yoreh Dei'ah 115:6).

It should be noted that this ruling follows the view cited above that the prohibition against chalav akum is not a davar shebeminyan. In other words, the Pri Chadash's ruling is applicable only if we maintain that once the reason behind the prohibition does not apply, the injunction no longer applies either. Not everyone agrees with this premise and, for that reason and others, many Acharonim did not accept the leniency of the Pri Chadash.

Government Regulation

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Yoreh Dei'ah #47) writes that in places where the dairies are under government regulation which does not allow them to adulterate cow's milk -- and anyone caught doing so will be fined -- such milk is permitted. It does not have the status of chalav akum, since we have the right to assume that it is one hundred percent cow's milk, equivalent to actually seeing the milking. Rav Feinstein calls this knowledge an "anan sehad," a Talmudic term that literally means, "We testify." It refers to the idea that anyone can be a virtual witness to this fact, even though he has no visual proof of it being true.

Rav Feinstein concludes that although this is the halachah, it is proper for a baal nefesh, a conscientious person, to act stringently and drink only milk that was supervised by a Jew (see also Chazon Ish, Yoreh Dei'ah 41:4). Nevertheless, in his own household in the United States, he allowed the use of non-cholov Yisrael milk, although he did not drink it himself.

The Coining of a Phrase

Rav Feinstein, in his responsum, sometimes refers to this type of milk as "stam chalav" -- "unspecified or regular milk." From that, the term "chalav stam" came into being. It cannot be called chalav akum, as chalav akum is forbidden and this is not. On the other hand, it also cannot be referred to as chalav Yisrael, for that term is reserved for milk that had Jewish supervision.

Rav Feinstein's Ruling in Modern Times

There has been some discussion during the last several years whether Rav Moshe Feinstein's lenient ruling concerning chalav stam is still applicable today. Government guidelines have changed in recent years, and the question is whether these changes affect the ruling. In the past, it was common for government agencies to verify at the dairies that the milk being processed was, indeed, cow's milk. This was accomplished by testing fat or casein ratios in milk samples. Nowadays, however, these tests are generally not done. The milk is tested only for bacteria count and the presence of antibiotics. Additionally, while in former times it was common for dairies to have on-site farms and inspectors who would physically see the animals present, nowadays, this is no longer the case. This leaves us with the question as to what creates the given -- the anan sehad -- that the chalav stam is, indeed, cow's milk?

I found on the website of the Orthodox Union (OU) an article entitled, "Rav Moshe zt"l's Heter of Chalav Stam Revisited," which discusses this issue. What follows in italics are either direct quotes from the article or paraphrased sentences:

Currently, the government inspects all milk farms 2-6 times per year.

Governmental (state) farm inspection protocol specifically includes a provision that only cows are in the farms' milking parlors and/or cow-yard. This provision (formulated in terms of swine) is part of the standard farm inspection form.

Government inspectors track the intake and output of all milk at dairies. Thus, the source farms are identified by the inspectors, and they must correlate with farms approved by the government.

Furthermore, the OU was told by state farm inspectors that they have never encountered horses, pigs or other livestock (besides cows) on dairy farms, and that were they to do so, they would immediately report it as part of their responsibilities.

In light of this current state of affairs, the farms are indeed uniformly inspected for non-kosher animals, and the dairy plants' inspectors work with the farm inspectors' data. Rav Yisrael Belsky ruled that the heter of chalav stam applies for those who wish to rely on it, albeit based principally on farm inspections rather than on dairy inspections. The correlation of data between the farm and dairy inspections extends the farm inspections' efficacy to the dairies, and therefore retains its permissibility.

The Lesson of Chalav Akum

Boruch Hashem, most religious Jews today live in countries where chalav akum is not an issue. If one wishes to rely on the ruling of Rav Moshe Feinstein and use chalav stam, most Westernized countries have some type of government regulation on the milk. It should be noted, however, that prior to traveling, an individual should inquire ahead of time from experts in the kashrus field regarding the milk sold in those locales. For example, in many countries, camel's milk is used in coffee interchangeably with cow's milk.

And, if one wants to be stringent and drink chalav Yisrael, that is also readily available in the majority of situations. So, the question that remains for us is what lesson can we learn from the concept of refraining from drinking chalav akum.

One possible idea is that, too often, many people will say, regarding a particular food item, "What could be wrong with...?" The injunction against chalav akum is put in place to get us to think differently, as one could also say, "What could be wrong with milk?" Chazal are telling us: "Think again! Even the simplest food item could have kashrus issues! Be careful what you eat!"

Weekly Halacha :: Parshas Vayishlach

Medications On Shabbos Part 1 Of 3

Rabbi Daniel Neustadt

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

One of several rabbinic decrees that our Sages enacted in order to guard the sanctity of Shabbos concerns the use of medications. In the opinion and experience of the Rabbis, easy access to medicine could lead to the transgression of certain Shabbos Labors. While issuing the decree, however, the Rabbis were bound by the halachic principle of being as lenient as possible with those suffering pain or distress. Thus, they established guidelines for determining when it is permitted to take medication on Shabbos and when it is not. Towards the end of this discussion, we will list many common conditions which normally require medication and how they are dealt with on Shabbos.

Explanation of the rabbinic prohibition

To determine when one is allowed to take medicine on Shabbos for non-life-threatening conditions, we must focus on two separate halachic considerations. First of all, we must ascertain that none of the thirty-nine Shabbos Labors is being transgressed in any way, either Biblical or rabbinic. For instance, we cannot prepare medication by either grinding raw material or mixing it; we cannot buy medication at a drug store; we cannot put on a light to see where medication was stored, and so on. In this regard in determining that there is no transgression of the thirty-nine forbidden Shabbos Labors there is no difference between this Shabbos prohibition and any other.

However, the prohibition against using medication on Shabbos is also governed by a rabbinic decree against using medication on Shabbos even when no forbidden Shabbos Labor is performed. The Rabbis prohibited unrestricted use of medication on Shabbos for fear that it would lead to the violation of one of the thirty-nine Shabbos Labors. The Labor which concerned the Rabbis most was Grinding, since grinding some substance is a prerequisite for almost every medicinal preparation[1].

Once the Rabbis prohibited using medicine on Shabbos, they included in this prohibition any kind of treatment or procedure which could involve

the use of medicine-even if medicine was not actually being used. The classic example in the Shulchan Aruch is the prohibition against the old-time remedy of sweating for medicinal purposes[2]. Sweating can be induced in one of two ways: 1) by taking certain medicines which are prepared by grinding, and 2) by performing certain types of exercises. Even though exercise is totally unrelated to taking medicine and cannot possibly lead to Grinding, it is still forbidden to induce sweating through exercise on Shabbos[3] since one could also induce sweating by the first method-taking certain medicines which are prepared by grinding[4].

If, however, the goal of the treatment or procedure can only be achieved without the use of medicine, then it is permitted to avail oneself of that treatment or procedure. For example, it is permitted to press on a bump with a knife, since the goal, which is to reduce or prevent swelling, cannot be achieved by taking medicine. Similarly, braces may be worn on Shabbos because there is no medicine for aligning teeth properly. Included in the rabbinic prohibition are only actions which heal a wound or alleviate pain. If the action merely serves to protect a wound from infection[5] or to shield a healed wound from being re-injured[6], it is allowed. It is permitted, therefore, to clean and bandage a wound or to pour hydrogen peroxide over it. The rabbinic prohibition includes medications only. Food and drink, however, are permitted even when they are being consumed for medicinal purposes. It is permitted, therefore, to drink tea for a sore throat, to eat almonds to relieve heartburn and to chew vitamins which serve as a food supplement[7].

Question: Why did the Rabbis suspend the prohibition against taking medicine when one feels weak all over or bad enough to lie down?

Discussion: The Rabbis suspended many of their decrees for a person who can be classified as “ill,” even if not dangerously so. Thus, for example, it is permitted to instruct a non-Jew to do anything which an ill patient may require on Shabbos, since instructing a non-Jew is a rabbinic prohibition. Since taking medication on Shabbos is a rabbinic prohibition, it is suspended when the patient can be classified as “ill.” The poskim agree that when one has fever, feels weak all over or feels bad enough to require bed rest, he can be classified as a “patient not dangerously ill” and he is permitted to take medications[8]. Since “requiring bed rest” and “weak all over” are subjective terms, it is up to each individual to determine his personal pain threshold. Consequently, one who feels that he must lie in bed for his condition may take medication on Shabbos even though other people in the “same” condition would not go to bed. There is no requirement to be overly stringent when judging the degree of illness[9]. In addition, healthy infants and babies until the age of three[10] (and according to some poskim even older children till the age of six[11] or nine[12]) are also halachically classified as “patients not dangerously ill,” which means that the rabbinical prohibition against taking medication is suspended. They are permitted to take all forms of medicine[13], provided that no Biblical prohibitions are transgressed.

Question: Nowadays, when medicine is always prepared at a pharmacy, there is no longer any fear that using medicine will lead to Grinding. Why, then, is this rabbinic prohibition still in effect?

Discussion: Although contemporary poskim debate whether nowadays we can be more lenient with taking medication on Shabbos because of the change in technique[14], the general consensus is to reject this argument. Some of the reasons offered are as follows:

Generally, a rabbinic decree, once enacted, is not repealed even when the reason behind it no longer applies[15].

There are several homeopathic remedies, such as natural herbs and spices, which are still prepared at home and require grinding. In fact, these types of medications are gaining popularity.

In underdeveloped countries, people have never stopped preparing medicines in their own homes.

Some modern-day medication may lead to other Biblical Labors, such as Smoothing, Kneading, Cooking or Carrying. In spite of the above, there are some poskim who feel that nowadays we can be somewhat more lenient when interpreting the rabbinic decree. Although all the poskim agree that we may not do away with the rabbinic decree altogether, we may, nevertheless, find some room for leniency in case of severe distress or pain (even if the pain is localized and does not require bed rest)[16].

Note: Although one who is not classified as “ill” may not begin taking medicine on Shabbos, still, one who requires daily medication for an ongoing condition may continue doing so on Shabbos as well[17]. Some poskim go even further and permit continuing taking medicine on Shabbos, even if the patient is not medically required to take the medicine on a daily basis[18].

1. Mishnah Berurah 327:1.

2. O.C. 328:42 and Beur Halachah, s.v. kedei.

3. If the purpose of the exercise is to work up an appetite, it is questionable if it is permitted; see Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 301:9. If the exercise is for pure enjoyment, it may be permitted according to the basic halachah, although it may be considered *uvda d'chol*, “a weekday activity”; see Shulchan Shlomo 328, note 110, and Chut Shani, vol. 4, 89:2. Physical therapy is also permitted; Shulchan Shlomo, 328:66-2; Ohr l'Tziyon 2:36-12.

4. Mishnah Berurah 328:130.

5. O.C. 328:23, as explained by Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 35, note 20). [See Tzitz Eliezer 11:37, who permits drinking certain oils (like castor oil) to aid in the elimination process.]

6. O.C. 328:27. See Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:54.

7. Note, however, that the purpose of many vitamins is not to serve as a food supplement but rather to strengthen a weak body or to relieve certain symptoms. In the opinion of many poskim, those vitamins may not be taken on Shabbos; see Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:54, Minchas Shlomo 2:37 and Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 34, note 86, quoting Rav S.Z. Auerbach. See, however, Tzitz Eliezer 14:50, who takes a more lenient approach concerning vitamins on Shabbos.

8. Entire paragraph based on O.C. 328:17 and 37 and Mishnah Berurah, *ibid*. [Note that although Shulchan Aruch rules that a *shinui* is required for rabbinic prohibitions to be suspended, the general consensus of the poskim is that this restriction is waived when taking oral medication. When using other medications, however (such as ointment), it is proper to employ a *shinui*; see Mishnah Berurah 328:85 and 130.]

9. See Tzitz Eliezer 14:50-7 and 17:13.

10. Chazon Ish, O.C. 59:3, Rav S.Z. Auerbach in Nishmas Avraham 328:54, and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv in Eis Laledes, pg. 57, quote the age of 2-3.

11. Tzitz Eliezer 8:15-12.

12. Minchas Yitzchak 1:78. In the final analysis, it all depends on the strength and maturity of the child.

13. Rama, O.C. 328:17. Note, however, that not all of a baby's needs are exempt from the prohibition against medication; see, for instance, Mishnah Berurah 328:131. See Tehillah l'David 328:24 and Minchas Yitzchak 4:124 who deal with this difficulty.

14. The complex preparation that manufacturing modern medicine entails is another reason for leniency, since it may be argued that the Rabbis were fearful that “simple” and quick Labors such as Grinding would be transgressed; they did not fear that someone would engage in the lengthy and involved processing required today.

15. See Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:100 for a general explanation of this rule.

16. See Minchas Shabbos 91:9; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 134:7; Chelkas Yaakov 4:41; and Tzitz Eliezer 8:15-15. See also Minchas Yitzchak 3:35, who permits taking aspirin for a headache when one is in severe distress.

17. Chazon Ish (oral ruling, quoted in Imrei Yosher on Moed 97); Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 34, note 76). See a dissenting opinion in Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:53.

18. Rav S. Kluger (Sefer ha-Chayim 328:10 and Shenos Chayim 1:152); Minchas Shabbos 91:9; Tzitz Eliezer 8:15-15:15; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (Koveitz Teshuvos, O.C. 1:40, and oral ruling, quoted in Refuas Yisrael, pg. 14).

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לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

Parshat Vayishlach: How We Struggle

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PREPARATION QUESTIONS:

1. Parshat VaYishlah is where Ya'akov rises from "Ya'akov" to "Yisrael." What events of this week's parasha show Ya'akov's transformation? Considering the personal challenges Ya'akov has faced (or failed to face) so far, how does he overcome those challenges in this parasha?
2. In what ways does Hashem facilitate, encourage, and confirm this transformation?
3. As this week's parasha comes to a close, so does a major chapter in Ya'akov's life. This makes it a good time for a retrospective. What lessons have we learned from Ya'akov's life?

CLOSING THE CIRCLE OF VISIONS:

Last week, we left Ya'akov at Gil'ad, the place where Lavan confronts Ya'akov and searches his belongings to find his stolen "terafim" (idols or oracles). After Lavan departs, Ya'akov sees a vision of angels and realizes that the place he has come to is a "camp of Hashem."

This should remind us of something.

In the *beginning* of last week's parasha, Ya'akov leaves home (Be'er Sheva) fleeing Eisav, arrives at a place somewhere along the road to Haran, and goes to sleep. His dream shows him a vision of a ladder with the angels ascending and descending, with Hashem at the top. When he awakens, he realizes that the place he has been sleeping is "Beit Elokim," the house of Hashem, and "sha'ar ha-shamayim," the gate of heaven.

By the time we arrive at this week's parasha, we have come to the end of Ya'akov's sojourn in Haran with Lavan, as he returns home to Canaan. Ya'akov has come full circle, and the vision of angels he sees at the end of VaYeitzei symbolizes the completion of an important stage of his life and the beginning of the next stage. The stage of his life just completed was examined last week. What we are looking at now is the new stage. In that context, this vision of angels provokes certain questions:

- * What is the significance of the new vision?
- * Why have the angels appeared to him now? Since the angels don't say anything, what is their message?
- * What does it mean that this place is a "camp of Hashem"?
- * What is the difference between a "camp of Hashem" and a "house of Hashem / gate of heaven"?

There are many explanations of this vision, but perhaps the one that fits best into context is that the angels appear specifically as a camp (as opposed to a fixed structure like a "house of Hashem" or "gate of heaven") to signal that the angels are *traveling.* Unlike the vision at the beginning of VaYeitzei, with its "house of Hashem" and "gate of heaven," structures which don't move from place to place, these angels may be here to reassure Ya'akov that they will be traveling with him; their camp will be traveling with his camp to protect him. The angels appear now, assuring him of protection, in order to encourage him to do what he does next -- sending messengers to his brother Eisav.

FACING THE MUSIC:

Our parasha opens with Ya'akov's sending messengers toward Eisav. Many of us reading the parasha assume that Ya'akov sends messengers to Eisav only as a defensive measure: he believes Eisav is still eager to kill him for stealing his berakha, so he sends scouts ahead to check if Eisav has learned of his return to Canaan.

But there is no evidence for this assumption. In fact, the simple reading of the text makes it sound like Ya'akov takes the *initiative* of sending messengers to Eisav! Eisav does not know that Ya'akov is on the way: Ya'akov has to send the messengers to "artza Se'ir, sedei Edom" -- all the way to Eisav's doorstep -- because Eisav has no inkling of Ya'akov's whereabouts and his impending arrival in Canaan. Ya'akov takes this bold step because he wants to meet Eisav. He sends messengers to Eisav, he says, to "find favor in his eyes."

Why? Wouldn't it be safer to steer clear of Eisav forever? Why go looking for trouble?

Perhaps we will have answers as we move further. But one thing is clear already: this is not the same Ya'akov as before.

- * The Ya'akov who now goes looking for Eisav is not the same Ya'akov who sneaked away from Lavan's house eight days ago, seeking to avoid confrontation.
- * He is also not the same Ya'akov who fled from Eisav twenty years ago, seeking to avoid a confrontation.
- * He is also not the same Ya'akov who usurped Eisav's blessing through deception.
- * He is also not the same Ya'akov who took advantage of Eisav's impulsiveness and lack of foresight by buying the birthright from him for a bowl of soup.
- * And he is also not the same Ya'akov who tried to be first out of the womb by grabbing his brother Eisav's heel, committing the symbolic act of underhanded competition which earned him the name "Ya'akov," "he who grabs the heel."

BRACE YOURSELF:

The messengers return to Ya'akov with bad news: they have arrived at Eisav's court and given him Ya'akov's message of greeting, but Eisav has apparently reacted badly. He, too, is eager to meet his long-lost brother, and he is bringing four hundred of his closest friends - his closest heavily armed friends -- with him to the "reunion." Ya'akov, of course, is terrified. Hazal note that he prepares for battle in three ways:

- * Militarily: he splits his camp, hoping that if one camp is attacked, the other may escape.
- * Religiously: he turns to Hashem and asks for His protection from Eisav.
- * Psychologically: he sends a huge bribe to brother Eisav, hoping to gain his favor.

These three forms of preparation have stood as an example to centuries of Jewish communities facing impending violence: Jews have long utilized all three strategies at once. As we will see, Ya'akov's preparations seem to pay off when Eisav eventually arrives and only tears flow, instead of blood. But we will also see that these strategies may not be exactly what they appear to be.

YA'AKOV BEGS HASHEM:

Let us take a look at one aspect of Ya'akov's preparation for conflict: his tefila (prayer). Let us first deal with an internal contradiction: why does Ya'akov keep asking for Hashem's protection and at the same time insist that he doesn't deserve His kindness? Does it make sense to ask for something and keep emphasizing that you really don't deserve it?

The question itself is the answer: Ya'akov emphasizes that he deserves nothing, that all the kindness Hashem has already shown him is undeserved. In justifying his desperate request, he focuses completely on Hashem's promises and on the relationship Hashem had established with Ya'akov's father and grandfather. The humility of this prayer is obvious -- "I do not deserve the kindness and support . . .", but is implicit as well in the fact that Ya'akov places all of the stress of this tefila on the promises Hashem has made to him, and on the fact that his fathers have an established relationship with Hashem.

This pattern is reflected later in the Torah, when Bnei Yisrael are told by Moshe that Hashem favors them not because they are so wonderfully righteous, but because He loves them (a statement which requires explanation) and because of the promises He made to their forefathers. In similar fashion, Ya'akov adopts a posture of humility by spotlighting the promises made to him and the relationship Hashem established with his fathers.

Note also that this tefila is not Ya'akov's first recorded tefila: that prayer took place at the beginning of VaYeitzei. Back then, during Ya'akov's dream of the ladder ascending heavenward, Hashem promised him that he would produce a great nation, inherit the Land of Canaan, be a source of blessing, and that Hashem would protect him while he was away from home (and return him safely home). When Ya'akov awoke in the morning, he realized that he had slept in a special place. He then made a promise to Hashem: if Hashem would keep His side of the deal -- if He would come through on all of the promises He had made during the dream -- then Ya'akov would do something for Hashem in return: he would make the spot in which he had slept into a "Beit Elokim," and he would give to Hashem a tenth of anything he acquired (ma'aser).

By now, Ya'akov realizes that he cannot make deals with Hashem. There is no such thing as "holding up your end of the deal" with Hashem, because nothing you have to offer Him can ever equal what He gives to you; no matter what you offer, you will never deserve what He gives you. Ya'akov now recognizes the futility and inappropriateness of the deal he had made, and changes his tone entirely: now, he deserves nothing, has nothing to offer. He bases his claim solely on Hashem's promises, the fact that Hashem was the God of his fathers -- and the fact that he is terribly, terribly afraid.

BUTTERING UP BROTHER EISAV?:

Ya'akov's next activity is to engage in that time-honored Jewish tradition, "Preparing The Bribe." He instructs his servants to lead flocks of animals to Eisav and to offer them to him as gifts from Ya'akov. The Torah then summarizes Ya'akov's thoughts as he instructs his servants:

BERESHIT 32:21-22 --

"You [the servants] should say, 'Your servant, Ya'akov, is behind us,'" because he said [to himself], "I shall atone before him [akhapera panav] with the gift which precedes me [le-fanai], and then I will see his face [panav], so that perhaps he will forgive me [yisa panai]." The gifts passed before him [al panav] . . .

A friend of mine, Rabbi Assaf Bednarsch, pointed out to me the startling repetition of the word "panim," meaning "face," in Ya'akov's words. In different forms, "panim" appears five times in this brief space. Why so much emphasis on the face?

It is apparent that the Torah means to emphasize the confrontational nature of what Ya'akov is up to, the face-to-face nature of what he has initiated. The Torah means to highlight that Ya'akov is seeking a direct and open meeting. This, of course, stands in clear contrast with Ya'akov's previous tendency to avoid challenges, employ deceit, and run away to avoid consequences. Now, breaking his pattern, he seeks Eisav out for a meeting "panim el panim," face to face! That this is a reversal of Ya'akov's old pattern is also hinted by Ya'akov's name -- literally, "heel" -- the diametric opposite of "panim" -- "face." As we will see, this pattern of "panim" continues to play a central role. And, as we will see, "Ya'akov" is soon replaced by a name which describes his new strength.

HEDGING HIS BETS:

As night falls, Ya'akov moves his wives and children across a river. Abravanel explains that he is splitting his camp by placing his family in one camp (the one across the river from Eisav) and leaving the servants in the forward camp. When Eisav shows up, the first camp he encounters will be that of the servants, and if he attacks it, the family camp will escape. This seems like classic Ya'akov behavior . . . facing a challenge by hoping to avoid it.

But this is not how the Torah seems to tell the story at all! It does indeed seem that Ya'akov splits the camps, but the split is not family/servants! The Torah says that after moving his family and possessions over the river, "Ya'akov remained alone." What was he doing by himself?

Hazal suggest that Ya'akov went back over the river to get some small things he had left there from the previous trips. But the Torah itself says nothing about this at all. The simple reading of the Torah tells us that Ya'akov put his wives and children in one camp, and he himself "remained alone" -- he HIMSELF was the other camp! Ya'akov puts himself in the forward camp, the one more exposed to Eisav's approaching forces. And, as we all know, Ya'akov is indeed the first to clash with the forces of Eisav -- but not his "physical" forces. Ya'akov is attacked by a mysterious "ish," an unnamed "man," who wrestles with him through the night. Again, we see Ya'akov,

the "heel," turning to "face" a challenge. He no longer squirms to avoid facing the consequences of his actions; instead, he courageously risks his own safety to protect his family, putting himself in the vanguard.

THE ANONYMOUS WRESTLER:

Ya'akov's plan to split the camps pays off when an unnamed "man" attacks him as he awaits Eisav alone. Let us take a closer look at this wrestling match and at the very strange conversation which goes on during the match:

BERESHIT 32:26-30 --

He [the angel] saw that he could not best him [Ya'akov], so he touched the hollow of his thigh; the hollow of Ya'akov's thigh become dislocated as they wrestled. He [the angel] said, "Let me go, for the dawn has risen!" He said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Ya'akov." He said, "No longer 'Ya'akov' shall your name be called, but instead 'Yisrael,' for you have fought with Hashem and with men, and you have won." Ya'akov asked and said, "Please tell me your name!" He said, "Why do you want to know my name?" And he blessed him there.

Clearly, we have a lot of explaining to do:

- * Who is this angel-man?
- * Why does he wrestle with Ya'akov? Why does he underhandedly injure Ya'akov?
- * What sort of blessing is it to change someone's name? Why not promise riches, or children, or land, or divine protection? And why does Ya'akov want a blessing anyway?
- * What is the significance of the change from "Ya'akov" to "Yisrael"?
- * The angel asks a good question -- which we must answer -- why does Ya'akov want to know the name of the angel?

NOT JUST FOR SPORT:

What could possibly be the point of this wrestling match? Clearly, Hashem could have programmed the angel to simply overpower Ya'akov, so the match cannot be a test of Ya'akov's physical strength. Instead, it is a test of his moral strength: *how* he will face the challenge, not whether he can overcome it. If he fights face to face, strength against strength, nothing "below the belt" -- then he wins, because the angel-man has been programmed not to physically overpower Ya'akov, and must take his leave when daybreak arrives. But if Ya'akov, seeing that he cannot achieve a quick and easy victory, turns to deception and underhandedness as before -- for example, by trying to dislocate the thigh of the enemy! -- then he has lost even if he "wins," because by being dishonest, he will have failed the test.

Not only does the new Ya'akov of our parasha (the one who has initiated open, honest confrontation with Eisav) play fair, he even continues to play fair when the angel-man, seeing his own lack of success, plays a dirty trick (an old-Ya'akov-type trick) and dislocates Ya'akov's thigh. Ya'akov continues to fight fair even though the stakes are incredibly high -- even when he has every reason to believe his life is at stake. Yes, Hashem Himself had helped Ya'akov use a "deception" of sorts to beat the despicably treacherous Lavan, but Ya'akov aspires to be more than "Ya'akov" -- he aspires to be "Yisrael." Only "Ya'akov" grabs at the heel of his enemy, hoping to trip him; but "Yisrael" meets his challenges face to face.

NAME GAMES:

Why does Ya'akov seem so eager for a blessing from his sparring partner? And why is he so eager to know the name of the angel? Why is this important? It seems clear from Ya'akov's actions after the angel leaves -- which we will examine soon -- that Ya'akov is well aware that his opponent is an angel. So what does he hope to learn from knowing the angel's name?

The answer to this question will take us back to the end of Parashat Toledot and forward to the end of Parashat VaYishlah. But first, it will require a deeper understanding of what Ya'akov demands from the angel -- a berakha. What is a berakha?

The place to look for the answer is, of course, the Torah itself. And the answer, as Abravanel points out (in Parashat Toledot), is that there are several different types of berakhot, all included under the name "berakha" because they are similar in important respects (Abravanel identifies only two categories). The first category of berakhot are those offered by Hashem Himself (there may be more than those listed here):

BERAKHOT FROM HASHEM:

1) Berakha as a command: Hashem blesses the first human beings [1:28 -- "va-ye-varekh otam Elokim va-yomer la-hem Elokim . . ."] with the command to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the land and conquer it . . ." Implied in the blessing/command is that Hashem also gives the recipient the "ability" to achieve the command; this is the "blessing" part of this blessing, along with another, more subtle gift: knowing what one's mission is. Everyone at some time has felt the anxiety and frustration of not knowing what his task is, what he or she is here for; that knowledge is a welcome gift.

2) Berakha as gift: this is a very common usage of "berakha" in Sefer Bereishit, as we find Hashem blessing the avot every time we turn a page.

The next category of berakhot are those offered by people. There are two types:

BERAKHOT OFFERED BY PEOPLE:

1) Berakha as prayer: the person giving the berakha is really composing a special tefila to Hashem on behalf of the recipient of the berakha; since Hashem has given the blesser the power to bless (as He gave to the avot), this prayer has much more power than your garden-variety prayer.

2) Berakha as revelation of the future: the other type of berakha which people give to other people is the predictive berakha, which does not actually ask Hashem for anything, but instead tells the recipient what good things are in store for him (if he lives up to them).

The classic example of this type of berakha is the series of berakhot which Ya'akov gives to his sons at the end of Sefer Berieshit. On the one hand, the Torah describes what Ya'akov does as "blessing":

BERESHIT 49:28 --

This is how their father spoke to them and BLESSED them, each man according to the BLESSING that he BLESSED them.

On the other hand, Ya'akov himself characterizes what he does as prediction of the future:

BERESHIT 49:1 --

Ya'akov called to his sons and said, "Gather together, and I will tell you what shall happen to you in the end of days."

AND NOW BACK TO OUR SHOW:

Let us now look at the *two* berakhot Ya'akov received in Parashat Toledot: the berakha he received by tricking his father, and the berakha his father gave him with full knowledge at the end of Parashat Toledot.

The berakha really meant for Eisav:

BERESHIT 27:28-29 --

"May Hashem give you from the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land, and much grain and wine. May nations serve you, and peoples bow to you; be master of your brother, and may the children of your mother bow to you; those who curse you are cursed, those who bless you are blessed."

This sounds a lot like a tefila-berakha, i.e., Yitzhak is praying that these good things should come to Eisav (really Ya'akov disguised, of course). It does not sound like a prediction-berakha, especially since part of the berakha ("be master . . . those who curse you . . .") seems to be in unambiguous present tense. This means it can only be a tefila, not a prediction.

On the other hand, here is the berakha given to Ya'akov at the end of Parashat Toledot:

BERESHIT 28:3-4 --

"E-I Shad-dai SHALL BLESS YOU [ye-varekh] and increase you and multiply you, and you shall become a throng of nations. And He SHALL GIVE YOU the blessing of Avraham, to you and your children, so that you shall inherit the land in which you live, which Hashem gave to Avraham."

This berakha is clearly very different than the previous one: instead of naming some good thing that Ya'akov will receive, as in the first berakha (i.e., dew of the heavens, fat of the land, grain, wine, leadership), it is a step removed from that: it states that Ya'akov will receive *blessings*, and only then does it go on to say what these blessings will entail -- many children, nationhood, the land:

BLESSING CONTENT OF BLESSING

First blessing -----> Dew, fat of land, grain, wine, leadership

Second blessing -----> Future Blessing (by Ke-I Shad-dai)

As we saw when we looked at Parashat Toledot, Yitzhak gave this second blessing -- the blessing of spiritual leadership -- to Ya'akov reluctantly. It was clear to him that Eisav was not at all a candidate for this berakha (because he had already taken wives from among the spiritually corrupt Canaanites), but he was also reluctant to pass spiritual leadership to Ya'akov, who had just deceived him into giving him the blessings meant for Eisav.

NOW WE UNDERSTAND

We see now that Yitzhak did not pass the spiritual leadership to Ya'akov at that time at all! The spiritual berakha Yitzhak gave to Ya'akov was only a *prediction* that in the *future,* the aspect of Hashem called "Ke-I Shad-dai" would come to Ya'akov and bless him with the blessing of Avraham -- the Land, Eretz Canaan, nationhood, and an everlasting relationship with Hashem. Yitzhak, as we saw when we looked at Toledot, was not at all "blind," except in the physical sense. He saw that Ya'akov was flawed and that he was not yet ready to lead Hashem's nation, but he also saw that Ya'akov had enormous potential. So what he passed to Ya'akov was the prediction/prayer that Ya'akov would eventually be worthy of this blessing, and that at the point when that occurred, "Ke-I Shad-dai" would come to Ya'akov and officially give to him these berakhot, the Birkat Avraham.

In effect, then, Yitzhak's berakha was that Ya'akov should eventually be worthy of the spiritual berakhot to be delivered by Ke-I Shad-dai.

AN UNUSUAL NAME OF GOD:

Who is this "Ke-I Shad-dai"? Obviously, it is Hashem, but why does Yitzhak refer to Him specifically as Ke-I Shad-dai? Where have we seen Ke-I Shad-dai before?

The first time Ke-I Shad-dai appears is in Parashat Lekh Lekha, in chapter 17. Hashem comes to Avraham and says, "I am Ke-I Shad-dai," and proceeds to make an everlasting covenant with Avraham: Avraham will become a great nation, and Hashem will be the God of the nation forever; Avraham's descendants will also receive the Land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. As a sign of this covenant, Hashem commands the berit milah, the mitzvah of circumcision.

"Ke-I Shad-dai" is the source of the berakha given to Avraham to found the nation which will have a special relationship with Hashem and inherit the Land. Significantly, Ke-I Shad-dai also redefines the individuals He blesses: He renames Avram and Sarai (Avraham and Sara), and as we will see, He also renames Ya'akov.

Ya'akov is aware of all this. He understood that his father was holding back the spiritual leadership, giving it to him only in potential -- Yitzhak's language was unmistakably not the language of blessing, but the language of prediction that Ya'akov would one day receive this blessing. Ya'akov understood that he had to earn it. And now, having learned hard lessons at the hands of Lavan, he has 'reinvented' himself and resolved to face the brother he cheated out of a different blessing long ago. He knows that his symbolic struggle with the angel has demonstrated his new approach to challenges. He believes he now deserves to assume the spiritual leadership. And so, when the angel renames him -- and he knows that Ke-I Shad-dai renamed Avraham and Sara! -- he is desperate to know whether the angel comes in the name of Ke-I Shad-dai. If so, it will mean that he has finally become worthy of the blessings and has received them!

But the angel refuses to tell him its name. Ya'akov understands that it is too early, that work still must be done before he deserves the berakhot of spiritual leadership signified by the appearance and blessing of Ke-I Shad-dai. We will soon see what that work is, and then we will see that Ke-I Shad-dai does indeed come and does indeed deliver the blessings promised by Yitzhak (almost word for word!).

Ya'akov's reaction to the struggle with the angel shows that he understands this experience as a symbolic confrontation:

BERESHIT 32:31 --

Ya'akov called the name of the place 'Peniel' [=Penei E-I, "face of the powerful one," or "face of God"], "For I have seen a powerful one face to face, and my soul was saved."

He again emphasizes that things are now "face to face," that he no longer meets his challenges by running or deceiving. Although the language he uses here ("elohim") is also used to refer to Hashem, it will become clear as we go on that here it refers to "the powerful one," meaning the representative of Edom, not to Hashem.

A BROTHERLY REUNION: THE SAME OLD YA'AKOV?

It is now morning, and Eisav approaches. Note that Ya'akov's camp is no longer split into two camps, for he has already faced the great danger: last night, he faced up to (and bested) the angel who attacked him representing Eisav, so he now faces Eisav without fear. He has already beaten his internal foe, overcome his tendency to avoid trouble through deception; he has nothing more to fear from Eisav, and indeed, eagerly awaits his opportunity to greet Eisav. Ya'akov arranges his family and goes out ahead toward Eisav, bowing seven times on the way. Every time he refers to himself, he calls himself Eisav's "servant." Ya'akov is not just putting on a show of self-subordination and humility, trying to flatter Eisav into leaving him alone; as we will see, he is acknowledging Eisav as the true bekhor, the true firstborn, head of the family.

Eisav meets Ya'akov's family and then he asks about the animals Ya'akov has sent him as a gift. Eisav wants to know what they are for, so Ya'akov repeats what he has said before: they are to find favor in Eisav's eyes. Eisav, who has plenty of his own animals, politely refuses the gift, but Ya'akov insists:

BERESHIT 33:10 --

Ya'akov said, "Please do not [refuse]; if I have found favor in your eyes, take the gift from my hands, because SEEING YOUR FACE IS LIKE SEEING THAT OF A POWERFUL ONE ["elokim"], and you have accepted me."

Ya'akov explains that seeing Eisav is a privilege for him, one worth paying for with a gift. He uses almost the exact same words to describe the confrontation with Eisav as he used to describe the confrontation the previous night with the angel-representative of Eisav. Just as "my soul was saved" despite that encounter, "you have accepted me" in this encounter. Last night, he saw "the powerful one face to face," and now he "sees the powerful one" again.

PLEASE TAKE MY BRIBE?

But why is it important to Ya'akov that Eisav accept the gift of the animals? If the whole purpose of the gift is to bribe Eisav into docility, then why does Ya'akov keep insisting that Eisav take it even once it becomes clear that Eisav has decided not to kill him? Ya'akov himself tells us the answer . . . and then we understand that this gift of animals has never been a bribe in Ya'akov's mind at all. It serves a much nobler purpose. Ya'akov begs Eisav to accept the gift with the following explanation:

BERESHIT 33:11 --

"Please TAKE MY BLESSING [birkhati], which has been brought to you, for Hashem has been generous to me, and I have everything." He [Ya'akov] insisted, and he [Eisav] took it.

The whole purpose of this confrontation, the reason Ya'akov risks his life for this moment, is so that he can say the lines above -- so that he can return to Eisav the berakha that he stole twenty years before. Ya'akov may have made an internal decision to face his challenges squarely from now on, but in order to clear the record and to deserve the spiritual leadership, he must right this old wrong. Of course, he cannot literally return the berakha, but by this symbolic gift, he admits to Eisav that what he did was wrong and asks Eisav's forgiveness. For this reason, it is crucial that Eisav accept the gift; Ya'akov wants to walk away not only with his life intact, but also his conscience restored. Eisav understands the gesture and accepts the gift. He forgives Ya'akov.

All that remains is for Ya'akov to perform an act of leadership, guiding others to discover what he has discovered: that challenges must be faced, no matter how painful. The opportunity to demonstrate this arrives with the rape of Ya'akov's daughter, Dina: Shekhem, prince of a Canaanite town, rapes Dina and wants to marry her. Ya'akov's sons agree, provided that all the men of Shekhem undergo circumcision. The people of Shekhem undergo circumcision, and, taking advantage of the recuperating men's weakness, Shimon and

Levi massacre the town. Ya'akov reacts in horror:

BERESHIT 34:30 --

Ya'akov said to Shimon and Levi, "You have befouled me, sullyng me among the people of the land, the Cana'ani and the Perizi, and I am few in number; they will gather against me and strike me, and I and my household will be destroyed."

Shimon and Levi protest, unable to accept their father's criticism in the face of the injustice done their sister. But Ya'akov has learned that no matter what is at stake, whether leadership of the family (which he acquired through deceit), his wives, children, and wealth (which he protected by deceiving Lavan and running away), or even his own life (which he saved by running from Eisav and then risked by confronting him), deceit is unacceptable. Ya'akov expects revenge for this deceit to be visited on him by the neighboring nations.

The nations never bother Ya'akov. In fact, we hear later that they are afraid of Ya'akov and his family. But the reason Ya'akov's family is spared the consequences of this deceit is because Ya'akov has spoken out against it, not because the nations fear the fierceness of Ya'akov's sons:

BERESHIT 35:5 --

They traveled, and the FEAR OF HASHEM was upon the cities around them, and they did not chase after the children of Ya'akov.

The Torah is telling us that the reason they did not pursue the children of Ya'akov -- i.e., those responsible for the massacre -- is because Hashem placed fear upon them, not because they were impressed with the ferocity and craftiness of Ya'akov's sons.

At this point, Hashem signals to Ya'akov that he has merited the spiritual berakhot. Hashem commands him to go to Beit El and make an altar to Hashem. Hashem appears to Ya'akov there and delivers the following message:

BERESHIT 35:9-12 --

Hashem appeared to Ya'akov as he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. Hashem said to him, "Your name, 'Ya'akov,' shall no longer be your name; instead, 'Yisrael' shall be your name," and He called his name Yisrael. Hashem said to him, "I am E-I Shad-dai; be fruitful and multiply. A nation, a throng of nations shall come from you, and kings shall emerge from your loins. And the land I gave to Avraham and to Yitzhak, to you I shall give it, and to your children after you, I shall give the land."

Hashem changes Ya'akov's name to Yisrael ["One Who Struggles with the Powerful," or "Powerful Righteous One"], symbolizing the finality of Ya'akov's personal transformation, and then informs him that He comes as Ke-I Shad-dai, the Powerful Provider, the One who grants Ya'akov the destiny of nationhood and the gift of the holy land given to Ya'akov's fathers.

With this, Ya'akov receives the berakhot which Yitzhak knew he had the potential to earn. And with this, his major challenge is completed, his great test passed. From this point, Ya'akov begins to share authority with his sons, although he remains the final power in the family. Ya'akov has become Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom

[Emphasis added at various points and name of H' changed to add K to avoid pronouncing and writing the Holy Name]

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH -

FROM YAAKOV TO YISRAEL - Part One

Was Eisav really planning to wipe out Yaakov's family with his four hundred men? Or was his intention all along simply to welcome his brother back 'home'?

When reading Parshat Vayishlach, it is difficult to reach a clear conclusion.

Similarly, when Yaakov crossed the Yabok River (with his wives and children), was he planning a secret escape from this confrontation? Or, was Yaakov's intention all along to confront his brother - face to face?

And finally, was God's purpose in sending a 'mal'ach' to struggle with Yaakov - simply to bless him at this critical time, or was it an attempt to thwart Yaakov's planned 'escape'?

When one reads Parshat Vayishlach, it is difficult to find precise answers to these (and many other) questions.

In Part One of this week's shiur, we'll suggest some answers to these questions, while offering a reason why the Torah's account of these events is intentionally so vague. Based on that analysis, Part Two will discuss the deeper meaning of Yaakov's name change to Yisrael.

INTRODUCTION

Before we begin our shiur, a short remark re: its methodology:

In our study of Sefer Breishit thus far, our goal has usually been to find the underlying meaning (or message) of each story, based on its details. However, when the story itself is difficult to understand, then it becomes even more difficult to uncover its message.

However, when we encounter ambiguity in a certain narrative - one can also entertain the possibility that its vagueness may be intentional, and hence its message may lie in that ambiguity.

With this in mind, we begin our shiur by considering the events that lead up to Yaakov's encounter with Eisav - in an attempt to better understand both the details and ambiguities of that encounter.

WAS THE 'COAST CLEAR' YET?

Recall, from the end of Parshat Toldot, how Yaakov ran away from Eretz Canaan in fear that Eisav would kill him. To verify this, let's quote the departing message that he heard from his mother:

"Your brother Eisav is consoling himself by planning to **kill you**.

Now, my son - listen to me, get up and run away to Charan - to Lavan my brother. ...Until your brother's anger quells, and **he**

will forget what you did to him - [then] **I will send someone** to call you to return..." (see 27:42-44).

Neither Rivka nor Yaakov know how long this will take, but clearly - Yaakov plans to stay by Lavan until 'the coast is clear'.

On his way to Charan, God appears to Yaakov at Bet-El, assuring him with Divine protection during his journey:

"Behold I will be with you, and guard you anywhere you go, and I will bring you back to this land..." (see 28:15).

Note however, that despite this promise of protection, God never told Yaakov **when** he was supposed to return.

Years pass, but Rivka never sent for Yaakov.

Finally, after some twenty years God tells Yaakov that it's time to return home - demanding:

"Return to the land of your fathers and birth - and [then] I will be with you" (31:3).

Does this imply that Eisav is no longer a threat?

If so, why didn't Rivka send for him? [Possibly she didn't know, even though God did.]

Could it be that God wanted Yaakov to return, knowing that

Eisav was still a threat? Could it be that God **wanted** these two brothers to confront one another? If so, did God want them to fight, or to make peace?

Clearly, God wants Yaakov to return home - yet He does not inform him concerning **how** he should deal with Eisav!

When Yaakov approaches the land of Israel, he sees (once again) a vision of angels ['mal'achei Elokim'] who come to greet him (see 32:2-3). As this vision parallels Yaakov's original vision of mal'achim (when God first promised protection - see 28:10-15), is God now telling Yaakov that the 'coast is clear' - and hence he need not worry about Eisav?

And how about Eisav himself? Certainly, Yaakov is still worried about him; but does Eisav still want to kill him- or has he put his past behind him?

As you may have guessed by now, it is very difficult to reach any definite conclusion about any of these questions, but Chumash certainly keeps us pondering.

YAAKOV SENDS AN ENVOY

Parshat Vayishlach begins as Yaakov sends messengers ahead, apparently to assess to what extent Eisav is still a danger. Note, how this decision comes immediately after his vision of God's angels at Machanayim, suggesting that this vision gave Yaakov the confidence to initiate an encounter - i.e. to make sure that it was truly now safe to return home (see 32:4-5).

However, to Yaakov's surprise, his messengers come back with a report that he most probably did not expect: Eisav, with four hundred men, was on his way to meet Yaakov! There can be no doubt concerning how Yaakov understood this report. Eisav is out for his head!

This explains Yaakov's sudden fear (see 32:7 -12 'va-yira Yaakov me'od...'), as well as his next course of action.

Expecting that Eisav was on his way to kill his entire family, he quickly divides his camp in two (to save at least half of them), then turns to God in prayer (see 32:7-12).

Yaakov's prayer (see 32:9-12) reflects this predicament. On the one hand, God told him to return and promised to protect him. Yet on the other hand, God never told him to initiate an encounter with Eisav. Did Yaakov think he had made a mistake? Maybe he was supposed to return to Canaan and avoid Eisav entirely?

Had he 'sinned' by sending messengers? Did God want him to stay clear of Eisav (and his bad influence)?

Note how Yaakov's prayer reflects our discussion. First, his opening appellation:

"And Yaakov said: The God of my father Avraham & the God of my father Yitzchak - the God who told me - Return to your homeland and I will be with you [i.e. protect you]" (see 32:10).

Note how Yaakov first reminds God that it was His idea for him to return, and that God had promised to protect him

Nonetheless, if Eisav remains a danger, it must not be God's fault, rather his own. Therefore, Yaakov concludes that maybe he has done something wrong, or possibly has 'used up' all of his 'protection' points, and God had already provided him with so much ('katonti...' / read 32:11!). Then, Yaakov states his precise fear:

"Save me from Eisav my brother, lest he come to kill me, mothers and children alike - but **You promised** me that you would be with me and that my offspring would be numerous like the sand of sea..." (see 32:12-13).

In the final line of his prayer, Yaakov may be 'hinting' that even if he deserves to die, God should at least save his children, as He had promised to his forefathers.

To our surprise, even though Yaakov prayed, God doesn't appear to provide Yaakov with an immediate answer!

WHAT SHOULD YAAKOV DO?

Yaakov now faces a predicament. After all, what does God want him to do?

Should he confront Eisav? If so, should he try to appease him, or should he stand up and fight for what is right? [And it may not be clear to him who is right - for it was Yaakov who stole the blessings!]

Should he run away directly to Eretz Canaan? Maybe that is what God originally wanted him to do? Maybe only there will he be worthy of divine protection! Alternatively, maybe he should hide his wife and children, and then face Eisav himself?

Let's take a look now, and see what he does.

After he prays, that evening Yaakov prepares an elaborate 'peace offering' for his brother (see 32:13-20). Hence, it appears that Yaakov has chosen the path of 'appeasement', hoping that his brother will be so impressed that he may change his mind (see 32:20).

Nevertheless, there is an interesting detail in these instructions that must not be overlooked. Note how Yaakov instructs his men to leave a gap between each flock of animals. In other words, he wants this 'offering' to be presented very slowly and staged. Then he commands each group to make the same statement:

"When Eisav will meet you [i.e. each group] and ask who are you and where are you going and who are these for? Answer him, they are a present from your servant Yaakov - and **he is right behind us**" [i.e. on his way to meet you as well] (see 32:17-18).

Then, Yaakov repeats this very same command to each group, emphasizing each time that each group should state - "Behold, Yaakov is right behind us..." (see 32:19-20).

What are the purpose of these 'gaps' and the repeated message of "Yaakov is right behind us"?

Either Yaakov is telling the truth - i.e. the purpose of these gaps is to gradually 'soften up' Eisav. Or possibly, Yaakov is trying something 'tricky' [again], and these gaps (and the entire offering) are part of a decoy, to stall Eisav's imminent attack, thus providing Yaakov with ample time to run away! [or at least to hide his wives and children].

As we will see, the story that ensues can be read either way.

WHAT DIRECTION IS HE CROSSING?

That very same evening, after he designates his offering and the men that will bring it to Eisav, Yaakov takes his two wives, two maidservants, and his eleven children; and crosses the Yabok River (see 32:21-23). [Re: Dina (child #12)- see Rashi on 32:23!]

But it's not clear why he is crossing this river, and what his intentions are! Is this simply part of his journey to meet Eisav (as most commentators understand), or possibly (as Rashbam suggests), Yaakov is **running away**!

If Rashbam's interpretation is correct (see Rashbam on 32:23-25) - then we have a wonderful explanation for the 'gaps'; the message that 'Yaakov is right behind us'; and the need for the Torah's detail of Yaakov crossing the Yabok! They all are part of Yaakov's plan to 'run away' from Eisav, to save his life. [Otherwise, all these details appear to be rather superfluous.]

[Alternately, if Yaakov is telling Eisav the truth, then we would have to explain that the 'gaps' are to increase the chance of 'appeasement', Yaakov plans to be right behind this offering, and the Torah tells us about the Yabok crossing as the background for Yaakov's struggle with the mal'ach.]

THE STRUGGLE

That evening, as Yaakov crosses the Yabok with his family, God sends a mal'ach who struggles with Yaakov until the morning (see 32:24-25). It would only be logical to assume that there is a divine reason for this struggle.

If we follow Rashbam's approach (that Yaakov is running away), then God's message seems to be quite clear. By keeping Yaakov engaged in battle all night long, God is not allowing Yaakov to run, thereby telling him that he shouldn't (or doesn't need to) run away. [See Rashbam 32:25.] In fact, Rashbam claims that Yaakov's injury is a punishment for his running away! [See Rashbam on 32:29.]

With this background, we could explain some additional details of this encounter. First of all, this could explain why the angel asks to leave at dawn. If his job was to keep Yaakov from running away at night so that he would meet Eisav; then as soon as dawn arrives his job is over (note that Eisav arrives immediately after sunrise - see 32:31-33:1!).

This also explains Yaakov's request for a blessing (which could also be understood as Yaakov looking for the meaning of this encounter). The angel blesses Yaakov by 'changing his name' from Yaakov to Yisrael. Considering that the name Yaakov implies some sort of 'trickery' [see Yirmiyahu 9:3 'ki kol ach akov yaakov'], while the name Yisrael implies the ability to 'stand up and fight' (see 32:28); then this 'blessing' is simply God's answer to Yaakov - don't run away, rather encounter your brother!

Finally, it explains what happens immediately after the angel leaves. Note how the next pasuk informs us that the sun rises, and - sure enough - Yaakov looks up and sees that Eisav and his four hundred men have already arrived [see 33:1]. What should happen now? It's too late to run!

As we would expect, still fearing his brother, he tries to save at least some of his family by splitting them into groups (see 33:1). Then, he runs to the front to encounter Eisav directly, bowing down seven times in a last effort to 'appease' his brother [see 33:2-3].

Most likely to Yaakov's total surprise, Eisav greets him with hugs and kisses - in what appears to be a very friendly (and brotherly) manner [see 33:4].

Was it Yaakov's efforts to achieve appeasement that caused Eisav to change his mind, or was Eisav planning all along for this friendly encounter? I suppose we'll never know, as the Bible is intentionally ambiguous in this regard. [Maybe those little dots over 'va-yishakehu' (see 33:4) are hinting to something. See Rashi & Radak who quote two opposite opinions in Breishit Rabba (which should not surprise us the least!).] In fact, Ibn Ezra (33:4) claims that the simple 'psbat' is that Eisav had never planned to harm Yaakov, as proven by the fact that he cried during this encounter.

Eisav even invites his brother to join him on his return trip to Se'ir. Yaakov prefers to travel slowly at his own pace, 'promising' to arrive in Se'ir at a later time (see 33:12-14).

THE PAST & THE FUTURE

What should we learn from this story? One could follow Rashbam's approach, and arrive at a very 'right wing' conclusion. But if one studies Ramban's interpretation to these events, one would arrive at a very 'left wing' conclusion (i.e. there are times when Am Yisrael must first attempt to appease their enemies in any manner possible).

One could suggest that the Bible's ambiguity is intentional, as there are times in Jewish History when a 'right wing' approach is correct, and there are times when a 'left wing' approach is preferable. Similarly, there are times when we must take action, even when we are in doubt in regard to the true intentions of our enemies. While at other times, it may be better to remain passive.

Just as life is not a 'fairy tale', neither is Chumash. Nevertheless, we should learn that in every encounter that we face, we must both act (i.e. turn to ourselves) and pray (i.e. turn to God). We must make every effort to understand our predicament in order to arrive at the approach that would best follow the path that God has set. However, when that path is not clear, we must pray that God will not only assist us, but that He should send some sort of an 'angel' to assure that we follow the proper direction.

Yaakov leaves this encounter not only limping, but also 'contemplating' and 'wondering'. But he continues on his journey, on his way to Bet-El, ready to face any future encounter with prayer, wisdom, action, faith, and resolve.

So too, in the history of the Jewish people - there are times that we must stand up and fight, and there are times that we attempt appeasement. There are also times when we struggle, and remain limping. Yet we continue to pray, to study, to contemplate, and persevere with an unyielding resolve to achieve our goals.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

In Part Two, iy"H we'll continue our discussion of Yaakov's name change to Yisrael,

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PARSHAT VAYISHLACH -

FROM YAAKOV TO YISRAEL - shiur #2

There must be something important about names in Parshat Vayishlach, for we find that Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael; and it happens twice!

In the following shiur, we attempt to understand why, by considering its connection to the theme of 'bechira' in Sefer Breishit.

INTRODUCTION

Yaakov's name change to **Yisrael** is very different than Avram's name change to **Avraham**. In regard to Avraham - a single letter ["heh"] is added to his existing name (see 17:1-5); in contrast - **Yisrael** constitutes an entirely **new** name. Furthermore, Yisrael serves as an alternate name for Yaakov, while the name **Avraham** serves as a replacement.

What is even more peculiar about Yaakov's name change - is that it happens twice:

Once, in the aftermath of his struggle at Pni'el, prior to his confrontation with Eisav (see 32:24-30);

And later, at God's revelation to him at Bet El (see 35:9-13).

With this in mind, we begin our study with a comparison of those two stories; afterward, we will discuss why Yaakov's name change is both similar and different than Avraham's.

YAAKOV'S RETURN TO BET EL

Let's begin our discussion with the second time when Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael; for it contains some rather obvious textual parallels to the key psukim that describe how Avraham Avinu was first chosen. Those parallels will help us understand how his name change relates to a key stage in the bechira process. Our conclusions will then help us appreciate the meaning of the first time Yaakov's name is changed, i.e. the site of Pni'el.

Yaakov's return to Bet El, as described in 35:9-15, could be considered as the prophetic 'highlight' of his return to Eretz Canaan. Recall that this it was at this very site where God first appeared to him, promising him that he was indeed the 'chosen' son (see 28:12-14). Furthermore, it was at Bet-El where God had promised to look after his needs during his journey to (and stay in) Charan.

[Recall as well from our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha that Bet El was also the focal point of Avraham's 'aliya', where he built a mizbeiach and 'called out in God's Name'.]

Let's take a look at the Torah's description of this 'hitgalut', noting how God not only confirms Yaakov's bechira but also changes his name to Yisrael:

"And God appeared again to Yaakov on his arrival from Padan Aram, and blessed him: You, whose name is Yaakov, shall be called Yaakov no more, but **Yisrael** shall be **your name**.

Thus He named him Yisrael, and God said to him: I am **Kel Shakai**, be fertile and increase... The **land** that I have given to Avraham and Yitzchak I give to **you** and to **your offspring** to come... (35:9-16).

God's confirmation of 'zera' [offspring] and 'aretz' (the Land) echoes His numerous earlier blessings of bechira to Avraham and Yitzchak. [See 12:1-7, 13:14-16, 15:18, 17:7-8, 26:1-5, 28:13.] In fact, these seem to be the key two words in just about every hitgalut when God discuss any aspect of the 'bechira' process with the avot.

However, this particular blessing carries additional significance, for it is the **last** time that we find it in Sefer Breishit, thus suggesting that the bechira process has finally come to an end!

Therefore, the fact that this blessing also includes Yaakov's

name change to Yisrael suggests a thematic connection between this name change and the **conclusion** of the bechira process!

If indeed the 'filtering' stage of the bechira process is finally over, then this name change reflects the fact that now **all** of Yaakov's children (and grandchildren etc.) are chosen.

[In contrast to the children of Avraham and Yitzchak, where only **one** child was chosen.]

In other words, from this point onward, all the children of Yaakov will become the nation of Israel- and hence the name change to Yisrael.

With this in mind, let's discuss the incident at Peniel, when his name is **first** changed to Yisrael - to appreciate the thematic significance of specifically this name - i.e. **Yisrael**.

THE EVENTS BEFORE THE STRUGGLE

Even though the Torah only tells us that a 'man' ['ish'] struggles with Yaakov at Peniel (see 32:25), the continuation of this story [when this 'man' blesses Yaakov etc / see 32:26-30] certainly supports the Midrashic interpretation that he was the 'angelic minister of Eisav' - intentionally sent by God to confront Yaakov.

[Note that the Hebrew word ish is often used to describe an important and/or powerful man, and not only the male gender / see Shmot 2:12 & Bamidbar 13:3.]

But why would God send this ish at this critical time?

To appreciate why, we must consider the events in the life of Yaakov that lead up to this final 'showdown' with Eisav.

1. Yaakov, using 'trickery', buys the 'bechora' from Eisav.
2. Yitzchak plans to bless Eisav with prosperity and power; using 'trickery', Yaakov 'steals' that blessing.
3. Yaakov must 'run away' to Padan Aram (in fear of Eisav).
4. Yaakov spends twenty years with Lavan; often suffering from Lavan's 'trickiness'.
5. Yaakov 'runs away' **from** Padan Aram (in fear of Lavan).
6. Yaakov prepares for his confrontation with Eisav.
7. God sends an ish to confront Yaakov.

While reviewing this progression, note how Yaakov's life was replete with a need to either employ trickery or 'run away' in order to either survive, or to attain what he felt was necessary (to become the 'chosen son'). Indeed, Yaakov had become an expert at survival; but appears to have lacked experience in 'frontal combat' - a trait that Eisav was best at.

As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Toldot, it may have been for this very reason that Yitzchak had originally intended to bless Eisav, for he understood that in order to establish a nation, the traits of an 'ish sadeh' are essential, i.e. the qualities necessary to provide leadership in worldly matters. In contrast to his brother, Yaakov, the 'ish tam', certainly lacked this character.

However, now that it had been divinely determined that Yaakov was to be the **only** chosen son, one could suggest that God found it necessary for Yaakov himself to develop those traits as well.

This may explain why upon his return to Eretz Canaan, God intentionally initiates a direct confrontation between Yaakov and Eisav. [Recall from the fact that Rivka never sent for him, it may be that Eisav is indeed still planning to take revenge.]

However, when we analyze Yaakov's apparent strategy - as he prepares to meet Eisav (see 32:13-21), we find once again that he was not quite ready for this direct confrontation.

One could even suggest (as Rashbam does), that Yaakov's original plan was to run away from Eisav, taking his own family in one direction, while sending several 'staged' messengers to Eisav as a decoy to 'slow his advance'! If so, then God's purpose in sending this ish to struggle with Yaakov, was to stop him from running away - stalling his retreat until Eisav arrives.

And when Yaakov does see Eisav at dawn (after his struggle with the 'ish'), again he plans 'capitulation' - bowing down profusely before his brother - showing him that in reality, he never received the blessing that he had tried to steal.

[By bowing down to Eisav, Yaakov wishes to show his brother

that the 'stolen blessing' of power and dominion over his brother ('hevei gvir le-achecha, yishtachavu lecha bnei imecha...27:29) was indeed awarded to Eisav. Ironically, Yaakov resorts to trickery once again; this time to show his brother that his original trickery used to 'steal' the brachot was meaningless.]

REALISM OR LAZINESS

Note how Yaakov's struggle with the ish takes place at a very critical point in his life; i.e. **after** his preparation to bow down to (or run away from) Eisav, but **before** the actual confrontation. Let's explain why this may be significant.

A controversy exists among the commentators as to whether Yaakov was correct in this total subjugation to his brother. Some hold that Yaakov should have openly confronted his brother while putting his total faith in God (see Rashbam on 32:29), while others maintain that due to the circumstances, his timid strategy was appropriate (see Seforno on 33:4). [Note how this 'hashkafic' controversy continues until this very day!]

Regardless of the 'political correctness' of his actions, the situation remains that Yaakov is unable to openly confront Eisav. Nevertheless, God finds it necessary that Yaakov prove himself capable of fighting, should such a situation arise in the future. Yaakov must now demonstrate that his subjugation to Eisav stems from political realism rather than spiritual laziness. He must prove that, when necessary, he will be capable of fighting.

[Sooner or later in Jewish history, confrontations with the likes of Eisav will be encountered when establishing a nation.]

Possibly for this reason, God must first 'test' Yaakov's potential to engage in battle with his enemy **before** he meets Eisav. Yaakov finds this struggle difficult, for he is untrained; the contest continues all night until the 'break of dawn'. [Possibly, night represents 'galut'; 'dawn' redemption. See Ramban 'al atar'.] Although wounded and limping, Yaakov emerges victorious from this confrontation, thus earning his new name:

"Your name shall no longer be Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have **fought** with beings divine ('Elokim') and human ('anashim') and **triumphed**" (32:29).

Thus, the name Yisrael may reflect the character of one triumphant in battle. Yaakov's new name is significant for it reflects his capability to engage head on in battle. In order to become a nation, this trait - represented by the name 'Yisrael' - is crucial.

Yet his name also remains Yaakov, for there may be times as well when 'passiveness' will be the proper avenue.

WHY TWICE?

For some reasons, receiving this 'new name' from this mal'ach did not appear to be sufficient; for God Himself found it necessary to later confirm that name - Yisrael, together with his bechira, at Bet El (the very site where he was first promised the bechira). Thus, it appears as though the blessings that Yaakov received throughout that entire episode of his trickery must now be bestowed upon him properly (and formally).

First, God names Yaakov - 'Yisrael', symbolizing the traits of worldly leadership (see 35:9- 10). Afterwards, God confirms the blessing that Yitzchak had given him (see 25:11-12 / compare with 28:1-4).

Note the obvious parallel between these two blessings:

FROM YITZCHAK
(before departing)
(28:3-4)

May "kel Shakai" bless you,
make you fertile and multiply,
to become an **assembly** of peoples
May He grant you the -
blessing of Avraham
to you and your offspring
that you may possess the Land

FROM GOD
(upon arriving)
(35:11-12)

I am 'kel Shakai':
Be fertile and multiply,
An **assembly** of nations
shall descend from you...
The Land I gave Avraham...
..to you and to your offspring
to come, I assign the Land.

This comparison clearly shows that God's blessing to Yaakov at

Bet El constitutes a confirmation of Yitzchak's blessing to him after the incident of the stolen brachot. Hence, we may conclude that the name of Yisrael marks the conclusion of the bechira process, as includes the necessary character that Am Yisrael will require to later become God's special nation.

THE FUTURE

Although Yaakov's worldly traits may lie dormant for several generations, it must be inherent to his character before his bechira receives final Divine confirmation. [Later, Yaakov will bless his two most able sons, Yehuda and Yosef, with the leadership in this realm (see 49:8-26).]

Throughout the rest of Chumash, the name Yaakov interchanges with Yisrael. This suggests that each name reflects a different aspect of his character. There are times when 'Am Yisrael' must act as Yaakov, the ish tam, and there are times when the more active and nationalistic characteristics of Yisrael must be employed. Ultimately, as the prophet Ovadia proclaims, the day will come when:

"Liberators shall march up on Har Zion to wreak judgement on **Har Eisav**; and the **kingdom** shall be that of **God**" (1:21).

Based on this understanding of the significance of the special name of Yisrael, one could suggest a reason for the necessity of the 'bechira' process to continue one generation past Yitzchak. [Or re-phrased, why was it necessary for Eisav to be rejected, given the importance of his worldly traits?]

Our original assumption, that both the traits of an ish sadeh and an ish tam are necessary in order to establish a nation, remains correct. Nevertheless, it is important that they are not perceived as equally important. As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Toldot, the fundamental character of Am Yisrael must be that of an ish tam (Yaakov). Only once that characteristic becomes rooted, the traits of an ish sadeh can be added. Had Eisav been included in Am Yisrael, our perception of the relative importance of an ish sadeh may have become distorted. A disproportionate emphasis on 'nationalism' and strength - despite their importance - would have tainted mankind's perception of God's special nation.

In the formative stage of our national development, our outward appearance as 'Yisrael' must stem from our inner character as 'Yaakov'. We must first speak with the 'voice of Yaakov' (see Rashi 27:22), only then may we don the 'hands of Eisav'.

shabbat shalom
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. There is a Midrash telling us 'Yaakov avinu lo met' - Yaakov never died. Relate this Midrash to the fact that the bechira process concludes with Yaakov, and that all of his offspring have been chosen. Relate this also to 49:33 in comparison to 35:29 and 25:8.

B. TOLDOT EISAV

Yitzchak was chosen. Therefore, we need to follow the toldot of Eisav, just as we needed to follow the toldot of Yishmael & Lot.

Based on this assumption, explain perek 36.

Based on the above shiur, why do you think there is an emphasis on the kings who ruled in Edom before a king ruled over Bnei Yisrael (see 36:31)?

C. BRIT MILA & GOD'S BLESSING TO YAAKOV

A quick analysis of God's final blessing to Yaakov at Bet El (35:9-15) immediately shows that it is reflective of brit mila (Breishit perek 17). The name of Kel Shakai; 'pru u-revu'; 'kehal goyim & melachim'; 'shem Elokim'; and the concept of 'lihiyot lecha le-Elokim' can all be found at brit mila. Note that the bracha of brit mila which began in perek 17 with Kel Shakai telling Avraham 'hithalech lefanai - ve-heyeh **tamim**' is being given now to Yaakov - the **ish tam**.

Try to explain the significance of this.

Carefully compare Yitzchak's bracha to Yaakov before he departs to Padan Aram (28:3-4) to God's blessing of Yaakov at Bet El (35:9-13)! Note that they are almost identical.

Relate this to the last two shiurim.

Note that God's name 'be-shem Havaya' does not appear unto Yaakov from the time that he arrives in Eretz Canaan! Note also God's promise to Yaakov at Bet El, before he left to Padan Aram, (28:13-15) which was given be-shem Havaya. Are any aspects of that bracha repeated in Bet El when Yaakov returned? If so, which?

Note the single use by Yaakov of shem Havaya in his prayer prior to his confrontation with Eisav (32:9-12). What promise does he remind God of at that time? Where is the source of that promise.

Relate to the relationship (be-shem Havaya) between brit bein ha-btarim, the bracha at the akeida, and this tefilla. Note - 'kochvei ha-shamayim' and 'asher lo yisafer me-rov'.

How does this relate to the nationalistic aspect of these revelations, i.e. the concept of 'yerushat ha-aretz'.

Could one consider from a nationalistic perspective that even though Yaakov returned from Galut Aram, his stay in Eretz Canaan was only a short stopover on his way down to Galut Mitzrayim? Relate this to 'arami oved avi, va-yered mitzrayim...' (Devarim 36:3-10). Compare the language there to brit bein ha-btarim! Why do Chazal interpret this pasuk as referring to Yaakov? Could the fact that Yaakov understood that the time for the fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim had not yet come, explain his timid behavior when he confronts Eisav?

FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Shiur #1

A. Chazal tell us that the mal'ach was the 'sar shel Eisav' - Eisav's guard angel. Explain this Midrash, based on the above shiur.

If this ish was actually a mal'ach, why do you think the Torah insists on referring to him as an ish? [Note the use of ish in Shmot perek bet.] Why, do you think, there is significance in the fact that Yaakov was wounded in this encounter? Why must we remember this encounter whenever we eat meat (mitzvat gid-ha-nasheh)? [Could this relate back to the traits of an ish sadeh?] See Rashbam 32:29.

Explain the argument between Yaakov and his sons regarding their militant reaction to the act of Chamor ben Shchem in relation to the main point of the above shiur.

PARSHAT VA'YISHLACH - additional shiur

YAAKOV'S RETURN TO BET EL

Upon his arrival in Eretz Canaan, why doesn't Yaakov go straight home to his parents in Hebron? After all, he has been away from his parents for over twenty years!

Secondly, why doesn't Yaakov return immediately to Bet-el to fulfill his "neder" [vow]? Hadn't he promised God that 'should he return home safely' he would establish a 'Bet Elokim' in Bet-el (see 28:21-22)?

However, instead of doing what we would have expected, it appears from Parshat Vayishlach that Yaakov prefers to settle down in Shechem. Then, only AFTER the incident with Dena, and only after God reminds him that he must do so, he finally returns to Bet-el. [See 33:18-35:1.

So what's going on in Parshat Va'yishlach?

In the following shiur we suggest a very simple (but daring) answer to these questions, based on a rather intricate analysis.

INTRODUCTION

To appreciate the analysis that follows, it is important to first pay attention to the division of 'parshiot' in Parshat Vayishlach. Using a Tanach Koren, or similar, note the topics of its first six 'parshiot' (i.e. up until the death of Yitzchak at the end of chapter 35).

The following table presents a short title for each section. As you study it, note the progression of topic from one 'parshia' to the next:

PSUKIM - GENERAL TOPIC
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- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (A) 32:3-33:17 | Yaakov's confrontation with Esav upon his return to Eretz Canaan. |
| (B) 33:18-20 | Yaakov's arrival in Shechem. |
| (C) 34:1-31 | The incident with Dena in Shechem. |
| (D) 35:1-8 | Yaakov's ascent to Bet-el to flee from Shechem, and his building of a mizbayach. |
| (E) 35:9-22 | God's blessing to Yaakov at Bet-el, followed by Rachel's death and Binyamin's birth. |
| (F) 35:23-29 | A summary of Yaakov's children, followed by the death of Yitzchak. |

We begin our shiur by making some observations concerning Yaakov's behavior in the progression of these events.

KEEPING PROMISES

When Yaakov first left Eretz Canaan on his way to Padan Aram, God promised to 'be with him' and see to his safe return (28:15). In response to this divine promise, Yaakov made a "neder" (vow) that should God keep His promise, he will return to Bet-el and establish a Bet-Elokim (see 28:18-22). Undoubtedly, Yaakov's safe return from Padan Aram requires his fulfillment of the neder. In fact, towards the end of last week's Parsha, God Himself mentions this promise when He commanded (and reminded) Yaakov that it was time to 'return home':

"I am the God of Bet-el, where you anointed a matzeyva, to whom you vowed a NEDER. Now get up and LEAVE this land and RETURN to the land of your fathers." (31:11-13)

Therefore, upon his return, we should expect Yaakov to go immediately to Bet-el to fulfill his "neder." However, for some reason, he first settles in Shechem.

HONOR THY FATHER...

Even more troubling is why Yaakov doesn't immediately go home to Hebron, at least to say 'hello' to his parents whom he hasn't seen in over twenty years! Recall how the Torah had earlier informed us that was his original intention:

"Yaakov got up and took his children and wives on the camels. Then he led his sheep... and everything he acquired in Padan Aram to GO TO YITZCHAK HIS FATHER in the land of Canaan." (32:17-18)

Nonetheless, when Yaakov arrives in Eretz Canaan, the Torah tells us he settles down in Shechem. In fact, we only learn of Yaakov's return to his father's house incidentally, in the final pasuk before Yitzchak's death (see 35:27-29)!

For some reason, the Torah never informs us of the details (or the date) of this reunion.

JUST FOR A 'SHORT STOP'?

At first glance, one could answer that Shechem was nothing more than a short stop along the way to Bet-el. As we know, Yaakov's young children and immense cargo forced him to travel slowly (see 33:12-15). He may very well have needed a rest. Thus, Yaakov's 'brief stay' in Shechem could be considered no different than his 'brief stay' in Succot (see 33:17).

[See further iyun regarding Yaakov's stay in Succot.]

But this approach is difficult to accept for two reasons:

First of all, recall how Yaakov had traveled from Padan Aram to Har ha-Gilad in only seven days (see 31:21-23, read carefully). Now that journey is much longer than the trip from the Gilad to Bet-el. [Check it out on a map.] Therefore, there seems to be no reason why Yaakov cannot complete the remainder of this journey in two or three days - a week at most!

Secondly, if Yaakov's plan is just to 'rest up' in Shechem for a few days, why would he buy a parcel of land? Furthermore, the overall impression from chapter 34 is that Yaakov's family has pretty much settled down in Shechem (see 34:7, 34:10, 34:21 etc.).

Therefore, it seems as though Yaakov had settled down in Shechem for quite a while. In fact, we can prove that Yaakov may have stayed even several years in Shechem - by simply

considering the ages of his children at that time. Let's explain:

BAR-MITZVAH BOYS OR GROWN UPS?

Recall that Yaakov left Lavan after working for him for twenty years (see 31:41). Therefore, when he began his journey back to Eretz Canaan, his oldest child could not have been more than 13 years old (see 29:18-23), for he first married Leah only after completing his seven years of work. That would make Shimon & Levi etc. 11 or 12 years old, etc.

Yet, from the Torah's description of the incident with Dena in Shechem (see 34:1-31) it appears that Shimon & Levi (and the rest of the brothers) must have been at least in their late teens. After all, they go to war against an entire city!

Furthermore, Dena - Leah's seventh child - could not have been older than six and most probably even younger! [Remember there was a break between Yehuda and Yisachar/ see 30:9.] However, from the story in chapter 34, Dena appears to be at least twelve, if not older. Even though Shechem does refer to her once as a "yaldah" (see 34:4), the Torah consistently refers to her as a "na'arah" (see 34:3,12).

If these assumptions are correct, then it appears that Yaakov remained in Shechem for at least several years prior to the story of Dena's abduction.

Even if Yaakov stayed in Succot for 18 months, as the Midrash claims (see Rashi 33:17), it still doesn't make sense that the incident with Dena have taken place when she is in 'first grade' and Shimon & Levi had just celebrated their 'bar-mitzvahs'?

Thus, according to "pshat", the incident at Shechem must have taken place at least five years later! This conclusion strengthens our original question. Why would Yaakov remain in Shechem for over FIVE years without first returning to Bet-el, and without going home to visit his elderly parents!

'A CALL TO ORDER'

Whenever we arrive at this kind of dilemma the temptation is to 'tamper' with the chronological order of the narrative. In Chazal, this is better known as the principle of "ein mukdam u'muchar ba'Torah" - the narrative in Chumash does not necessarily progress in chronological order. Clearly, the principle of "ein mukdam u'muchar" does not mean that the stories in Chumash are recorded in purely random sequence. Nor should it be understood as just a 'wildcard' solution for difficulties in "peshat". Instead, the Torah often records certain parshiot out of their chronological order for thematic considerations.

[It should also be noted that the principle of "ein mukdam u'muchar" usually only applies at the 'parshia' level. In other words, that events WITHIN a given 'parshia' are always recorded in chronological sequence. Only a 'parshia' in its entirety may be presented before an earlier event or vice-versa. [This style is sometimes referred to as "smichut parshiot."]

Let's see now if this principle can help us solve the problems raised in our shiur thus far.

We'll start by taking a closer look at the various stages of Yaakov's journey, and how they relate to the division into 'parshiot' of Parshat Va'yishlach.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF AVRAHAM AVINU

We really should have begun our shiur with a more basic question: why does Yaakov stop in Shechem at all? Why doesn't he go directly from Succot to Bet-el or Hebron?

The answer lies in the obvious parallel between Yaakov's return to Canaan and Avraham Avinu's initial journey from Aram to Eretz Canaan. He, too, first stopped in Shechem and built a MIZBAYACH:

"And Avram passed through the land, to the place of SHECHEM... and God appeared to Avram and said: I am giving this land to your offspring; and he built there a MIZBAYACH to the Lord who appeared to him." (12:6-7)

[Compare also 12:5 with 31:17-18!!]

Correspondingly, Yaakov also makes Shechem his first stop, and he builds a MIZBAYACH specifically in that region (see 33:18-20). In contrast to Avraham, however, Yaakov ALSO invests in some real estate - he buys a field (see 33:19). Soon we will suggest a logical reason for this purchase.

If Yaakov is indeed following his grandfather's footsteps (as his arrival in Shechem suggests), then he too should continue directly to Bet-el, just as Avraham Avinu did (see 12:7-8). Of course, Yaakov had another reason to proceed directly to Bet-el - to fulfill his "neder." Then, we would have expected him to continue from Bet-el on to Hebron to see his parents.

So why does he stay in Shechem?

One could suggest that exactly the opposite happened, i.e. Yaakov DID NOT STAY IN SHECHEM for more than several days! Instead, he stopped there only to build a MIZBAYACH, thanking God for his safe arrival, just as Avraham had done. To support this, note how the Torah describes his arrival in 33:18: "va'yavo Yaakov SHALEM". This most probably reflects the phrase in his original "neder" of: "v'shavti b'SHALOM et beit avi" (see 28:21).

Furthermore, in 33:20 he calls this mizbayach: "Kel Elokei Yisrael", most likely relating to the phrases in his "neder" of: "im y'hiyeh ELOKIM imadi..." (28:20) and "v'haya Hashem li 'ELOKIM" (28:21).

A WISE INVESTMENT

At that time, he also purchased a plot of land. This was a wise investment, for Yaakov is traveling with a large family, and realizes that sooner or later, he'll need to settle down in Canaan, and build a house of his own. Planning an option for his future, he buys a parcel of land, a 'security' investment should he decide one day to return.

At this point, we posit, Yaakov really does continue his journey from Shechem to Bet El - and then on to Hebron - after only a very short stay. However, the Torah records the details of this 'first' ascent to Bet-el - at a later time (see 35:9), while 'inserting' the details the Dena event in between (i.e. in chapter 34), even though that event took place at a later time! [Later in the shiur, we will suggest a reason why this story in 'inserted'.]

[To appreciate this theory, it is recommended that you review those parshiot, especially noting the new 'parshia' that begins in 35:9.]

Let's take a look at the special wording of the 'parshia' that begins in 35:9 - which we claim took place BEFORE the events in chapter 34:

"And God [had already /"od"? / or 'again'] appeared unto Yaakov UPON HIS ARRIVAL from Padan Aram, and blessed him ... then Yaakov set up a MATZEYVA at this site... and called the name of this site BET-EL. Then they traveled towards Efrat" [i.e. on the way toward Hebron], and Rachel gave birth with complications [& then died]..." (see 35:9-19)

Our contention is that this entire 'parshia' (35:9-22) actually took place immediately upon Yaakov's arrival from Padan Aram (as its opening pasuk suggests/ compare 33:18!), several years BEFORE the incident with Dena in Shechem (i.e. 34:1-35:8).

A very strong proof to this claim may be drawn from the words of Yaakov himself (to Yosef) before his death:

"... when I was RETURNING FROM PADAN, Rachel died on the road, while still a long distance from Efrat, and I buried her on the way..." (see 48:7)

Yaakov himself states that Rachel died during his original journey from Padan to Eretz Canaan. He would not have spoken of her death as having occurred "when I was returning from Padan" if she died only AFTER Yaakov had spent several years in Shechem.

Furthermore, why was Yaakov traveling from Bet-el southward, towards Efrat? Most likely, he was on the way home to his father in Hebron! In other words, it may very well have been that Yaakov DID return immediately to visit his father, just as we expected him to.

[For some reason, the Torah never records the details of this encounter. But this question begs itself no matter how we explain the order of the 'parshiot.' Only in the final summary psukim (i.e. 35:27-19) are we told that Yaakov had returned to Yitzchak, and even there it appears to be only for Yitzchak's burial. It would only be logical to assume that Yaakov must have gone to visit his father much earlier.]

THE NEW ORDER

Before we continue, let's review the order of events (and hence the order of the 'parshiot') according to this interpretation:

After successfully confronting Esav, Yaakov continues on to Eretz Canaan, stopping first in Shechem to build a MIZBAYACH and thank God, just as Avraham Avinu had done. While in Shechem, he buys a parcel of land for 'future use,' planning possibly to later return to this area with his family. [Recall that Yaakov owns many sheep, and Shechem is a prime area for grazing cattle, just as Yaakov's children later return many years later to the Shechem area to graze their cattle (see 37:13).]

After buying a field in Shechem and building a mizbayach, Yaakov continues to Bet-el, where God appears to him, and Yaakov re-states his intention to ultimately fulfill his "neder" to make a 'bet Elokim' at that site (even though he isn't quite ready yet to begin its construction).

There, God confirms the blessing of "bechira" and changes his name from Yaakov to Yisrael (see 35:9-12). [According to this interpretation, Yaakov had been blessed and had his name changed by the "malach" only several days earlier! see 32:26-28]. Even though he cannot at this point build the actual Bet-Elokim that he promised, he re-affirms his promise by once again anointing the MATZEYVA and calling that site Bet-el (see 35:14-15).

Next, Yaakov travels toward Hebron to see his parents. Along the way, Rachel dies and is buried on the roadside. Yaakov then sets up tent in Migdal Eder (see 35:21). Even though we do not know its precise location, it would be safe to assume that Migdal Eder is located in an area not too far from Yitzchak's home in Hebron. It is here where the incident with Reuven & Bilha takes place. Although we may reasonably assume that Yaakov sharply criticized Reuven, the Torah for some reason abruptly curtails this story, right in the middle of a sentence! [See 35:22! / see also 49:4!]

Some time later, maybe a year or two (or even five) later, Yaakov moves with his family to Shechem - after all, he did purchase a parcel of land there specifically for that purpose. By now, the children are older - old enough for the incident with Dena (as detailed in chapter 34) to occur. It also stands to reason that at this point the people of Shechem see Yaakov as a permanent neighbor, rather than a transient; and therefore - they seek marital and economic ties with Yaakov's family. Finally, this also explains why specifically Shimon & Levi take leadership roles at this time. Reuven had most likely been 'demoted' from his position of 'family leader' after the incident with Bilha.

After the brothers wipe out Shechem, Yaakov fears the revenge of the neighboring population. God therefore commands him to MOVE from Shechem to Bet-el for PROTECTION (see 35:1-7, read carefully). Just as Bet-el had protected Yaakov when he was faced with the threat of his brother Esav, so will Bet-el protect Yaakov now from his latest crisis. [Note how specifically this point - danger from Esav - is mentioned over and over again in this 'parshia' (i.e. 35:1-8, see 35:1,3,7!).]

Note also that these psukim imply a recent, immense expansion of Yaakov's family and possessions (see 35:6 - "v'chol ha'AM asher imo" & 35:2 - "v'et kol ashe imo"). This may also explain why Yaakov must remind these 'newcomers' to rid themselves of their idols before ascending to Bet-el. (see 35:3-4).

So Yaakov now moves his permanent residence to Bet-el, which had already been established as the site for his future Bet Elokim, and accordingly builds a MIZBAYACH (see 35:1,3,7).

Let's use a chart once again to show the 'new order' of the parshiot:

PSUKIM - GENERAL TOPIC

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (A) 32:3-33:17 | Yaakov's confrontation with Esav upon his return to Eretz Canaan. |
| (B) 33:18-20 | Yaakov's arrival in Shechem [& buys a field]. |
| (E) 35:9-22 | Yaakov arrives in Bet-el, receives his blessing and fulfills his "neder"; Rachel dies along the way to see Yitzchak near Hebron. |
| (C) 34:1-31 | Yaakov returns to Shechem, Dena is abducted, and Shimon & Levi wipe out the city. |
| (D) 35:1-8 | Yaakov flees from Shechem to Bet-el, where he builds a mizbayach. |
| (F) 35:23-29 | A summary of Yaakov's children, followed by the death of Yitzchak. |

Thus, by simply changing the location of a single 'parshia,' nearly all our questions are solved. However, our approach raises a much bigger question: WHY isn't this 'parshia' (35:9-22) recorded where it belongs?

As stated above, the Torah will present events out of chronological sequence only when there is a compelling reason to do so. Therefore, we must look for a thematic reason for this 'change' in order.

As usual, we will return to the primary theme of Sefer Breishit - the process of "bechira" & "dechiya" - to suggest an answer to this question.

A THEMATIC REASON

Recall from previous shiurim that the theme of Sefer Breishit progresses with each set of Sifrei TOLADOT. Throughout the progression, someone from among the 'toladot' is 'chosen' while the others are 'rejected.' Recall also that in Parshat Va'yishlach we are still under the 'header' of "toldot Yitzchak" (see 25:19). The story of "toldot Yitzchak" clearly reaches its conclusion with the 'parshia' of 35:23-29 [(F) in the above chart], which describes Yitzchak's death. [Note also that "toldot Esav" (36:1) follow immediately afterward.]

This 'parshia' 35:23-29 (F) MUST therefore appear at the conclusion of "toldot Yitzchak."

But why was 'parshia' (E) transplanted from its chronological location to here, immediately preceding 'parshia' (F)?

One could suggest several 'thematic' reasons:

One answer could be alluded to in the somewhat innocuous though very telling statement that introduces (F):

"And the children of Yaakov were TWELVE..."

(see 35:23-26, noting the 'parshia' in the middle of a pasuk)

Unlike Avraham and Yitzchak, ALL of Yaakov's children are 'chosen' - EVEN his children from the maidservants, EVEN Reuven who had most likely been berated, etc. One could suggest that the Torah takes this entire 'parshia' (E) - which ends with the incident with Reuven & Bilha (which most likely had taken place much earlier) - from its chronological location and intentionally places it here - NEXT to the concluding statement of 35:23 - to stress that ALL of Yaakov's children are chosen - EVEN Reuven! [See Ramban 35:22! See also Rashi, Chizkuni & Radak 35:22.]

This interpretation may also explain why 35:22 ends mid-sentence. It would seem that the pasuk should end with Yaakov's curse of Reuven, which becomes apparent in 49:4. However, because the whole point is to show that Reuven remains part of the 'chosen family,' the second half of the sentence is 'cut off.' Instead, the entire 'parshia' is attached to the statement, "and the children of Yaakov were twelve - the children of Leah: the firstborn of Yaakov = REUVEN, and Shimon, Levi..." (35:23-24).

An alternate (and more simple) explanation could be that the Torah is simply keeping all of the stories relating to Shechem together. Hence, once the Torah informs us that Yaakov purchased a parcel of land in Shechem (33:19), Chumash continues with what later took place in Shechem as a result of this purchase (34:1-35:8). Then, after completing that story, Chumash returns to the story of Yaakov's first return to Bet-el (35:9-22), even though it in fact took place much earlier.

Finally, one could suggest a very significant thematic reason

for this 're-arrangement' of the 'parshiot'. Recall our explanation that Yaakov's naming of 'Bet-El' reflects his conviction to one-day establish a 'Bet-Elokim' [a house for God] on this site. The first time Yaakov stated this intention (see 28:19), he could not build a Bet-Elokim at that time for he was a fugitive on his way to Padan Aram. The second time he arrives at Bet-El (see 35:9-15), he once again only states his intention. It appears that it is still pre-mature to actually begin that project, as he has not yet established a name for himself in Eretz Canaan. After all, the success of his planned Bet-Elokim would depend on his ability to 'reach out' to the neighboring people, just as Avraham and Yitzchak had done when they built "mizbachot" and 'called out in God's Name'.

However, after the 'Dena incident' at Shechem, and the actions of Shimon and Levi, Yaakov's status among the neighboring people has dropped to an 'all time low'. As Yaakov himself stated in the aftermath of those events: "achartem oti..." - you have made me look ugly by embarrassing me in the eyes of inhabitants of the land..." (see 34:30). Given this situation, tragically Bet-El becomes a place a refuge for Yaakov, instead of becoming a Bet-Elokim. Certainly, in the aftermath of those events, Yaakov will be unable to establish a functioning Bet-Elokim in the foreseeable future.

From this perspective, one could understand the Torah's detail of the 'Dena incident' as a thematic explanation for why Yaakov was unable to ultimately fulfill his "neder" to build a Bet-Elokim.

Despite Yaakov's resolve to establish a Bet Elokim, unfortunately an opportunity for him to do so never materialized in his own lifetime. Instead, Yaakov would have to pass that goal on to his children, who would only have the opportunity to achieve it several hundred years later.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Rashi on 33:17 quotes the Midrash that Yaakov spent 18 months in Succot! This is based on the fact that the pasuk states that Yaakov built a HOUSE there, and set up tents for his sheep and cattle. Should this be true, then in any event, this pirush only strengthens the question of why Yaakov did not return earlier. It does, however, slightly raise the age of Yaakov's children by the time the Shechem episode occurs, rendering this story a bit more feasible.

B. It is unclear whether Yaakov ever builds the Bet-Elokim as he had promised in 28:21. See the meforshim on that pasuk who deal with this question, as well as the meforshim here on 35:14.

Nonetheless, anointing the MATZEYVA and calling that site Bet-el (see 35:14-15) clearly reveal Yaakov's intention to eventually build the Bet-Elokim, even though the final goal may not be realized until Bnei Yisrael conquer Eretz Canaan in the time of Yehoshua. See Devarim 12:8-12, "v'akmal".

C. In closing, it is important to note that there always remains the possibility that the parshiot are in chronological order. If so, we would either have to explain that these events indeed took place when Yaakov's children were indeed quite young, or that Yaakov intentionally did not return to Bet-el, either because he felt that the time was not yet ripe, or possibly because he was waiting for Hashem to command him to go there.

D. Note 34:30, and Yaakov's final statement in his rebuke of Shimon and Levi:

"And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi: 'Ye have troubled me, to make me odious unto the inhabitants of the land, even unto the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and, I being few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and smite me; **and I shall be destroyed, I and my house**'"

Even though simple "pshat" would explain that the phrase 'my house' in Yaakov's statement refers to his family, one could

suggest (based on the above shiur) that Yaakov is referring to 'his house' that he plans to build for God - for now that Shimon & Levi have made him look so bad, Yaakov's plans for building a House for God in Bet-el have now been 'destroyed'.

E. Comments from Rabbi David Silverberg, who has researched this topic, and found a number of sources which seem to explicitly indicate that Yaakov traveled to Beit-El before the story of Dina and Shekhem.

The Gemara in Masekhet Megila (17a) asserts that Yaakov reunited with his father in Chevron two years after his departure from Lavan. Along his return from Padan Aram, the Gemara claims, he spent eighteen months in Succot (see Bereishit 33:16), and another six months in Beit-El. Rashi, commenting on this Gemara, explains, "He spent six months in Beit-El when he left Shekhem..." Meaning, the six month-period to which the Gemara refers occurred after the story of Dina and Shekhem, and the Gemara held a tradition that when Yaakov traveled to Beit-El after the story of Dina (35:1), he lived there for six months.

Elsewhere, however, Rashi writes that Yaakov lived for a period in Beit-El before the incident of Shekhem. In his commentary to Avot (5:21), Rashi cites the Midrashic tradition that Levi was thirteen years of age when he and his brother Shimon killed the male population of Shekhem. To support this tradition, Rashi comments that "when you take into account the two years Yaakov spent in Beit-El," it indeed emerges that Levi was thirteen years old at the time of his attack on Shekhem. Yaakov left Padan Aram thirteen years after his marriage to Leah, and, according to *Seder Olam* (chapter 2), Leah delivered each of her children after just seventh months of pregnancy. Levi, Leah's third son, was thus born just about two years after her marriage to Yaakov, and hence Levi was eleven years of age when Yaakov left Padan Aram. After the two years that "Yaakov spent in Beit-El," Levi was thirteen years of age, and it was at that point, Rashi claims, that Shimon and Levi killed the people of Shekhem.

Rashi thus clearly held that Yaakov spent time in Beit-El before settling near Shekhem, as Rabbi Leibtag contended.

The Midrash Lekach Tov, commenting on the story of Shekhem (34:25), likewise calculates the age of Shimon and Levi at the time of their assault on Shekhem, and claims that Levi was eleven when the family left the home of Lavan. The story of Shekhem, the Midrash claims, occurred after the period of "two years when he [Yaakov] was offering sacrifices in Beit-El." Like Rashi, the Midrash Lekach Tov held that Yaakov first proceeded to Beit-El upon returning from Canaan, before settling near Shekhem, and he spent two years "offering sacrifices." Apparently, there was a Midrashic tradition that disputed the chronology espoused by the Gemara in Megila, according to which Yaakov spent eighteen months in Succot and then six months in Beit-El after the incident in Shekhem. This tradition, which Rashi appears to have adopted in his commentary to Avot, and was accepted by the author of the Midrash Lekach Tov, held that the Torah's narrative does not follow chronological sequence, and Yaakov's pilgrimage to Beit-El occurred before he settled near Shekhem. Immediately upon returning to Canaan, Yaakov proceeded to Beit-El and spent two years offering sacrifices in fulfillment of his vow. Only thereafter did he settle near the city of Shekhem.

We should note, however, one important difference between the position reflected in these sources and Rabbi Leibtag's theory. According to Rashi in Avot and the Midrash Lekach Tov, Yaakov spent two years in Beit-El and then settled near Shekhem before reuniting with his father in Chevron. Rabbi Leibtag suggested that Yaakov proceeded to Beit-El to fulfill his vow, and then continued southward to Chevron to see his parents. He remained there for several years, and then moved with his family to Shekhem, at which point Shimon and Levi were in their late teens. These sources provide a basis for the contention that Yaakov first visited Beit-El before settling near Shekhem, but not for the theory that he reunited with his parents before moving to Shekhem.

David Silverberg [S.A.L.T. 5767]

Parshas Vayishlach: Shim'on and Levi, Brothers of Dinah

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. "CURSED BE THEIR WRATH"

Chapter 34 of Sefer B'resheet records what is undoubtedly one of the most violent and morally troubling chapters in Biblical history. Here is a brief recap of the events which transpired in Sh'khem:

The family of Ya'akov enters the city of Sh'khem and Dinah, the one sister among eleven brothers, is forcibly taken by Sh'khem, the prince of the city-state after which he is named. Sh'khem rapes her and, through the august agency of his father, appeals to her brothers to allow her to become his proper wife. The brothers speak *b'Mirmah* (deceitfully? cunningly?) with Sh'khem and Hamor, his father, and convince them that the only way for Dinah to marry Sh'khem is if the prince and all of his townsfolk become circumcised. The townsfolk are convinced to undergo this painful operation - evidently motivated by economic gain (vv. 21-24). On the third day, with all the males in pain, Shim'on and Levi kill all of the males in town, after which the brothers pillage the town and take their sister back to safety. Ya'akov chastises them for their actions, which they defend on grounds of concern for their sister's honor.

As mentioned, this narrative is troubling on many levels. To paraphrase a contemporary writer, whereas Ya'akov's children had a golden opportunity to begin to fulfill their mission of teaching the world "the way of Hashem, to do justice and judgment;" (B'resheet 18:19), they squandered this chance and sullied their reputation in the eyes of the neighboring peoples by acting both deceitfully and violently, destroying an entire city in response to a crime committed by one citizen - albeit the prince. Avraham's protests of "will you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (ibid. v. 23) seem to have been inverted by his elect progeny. In addition, if we look further into the Torah, we see that rape of an unmarried woman is not considered a capital crime - rather it is a case of criminal assault (along with a fine, represented here by the word *Mohar*). How could Shim'on and Levi act in this manner?

Conventional understanding holds that Ya'akov's chastisement was directed against all of their actions - the deceit, the polis-cide and the pillage of the town. We are even more confident that Ya'akov was violently opposed to their behavior when we read of his deathbed charge, given to them nearly fifty years later in Egypt:

Shim'on and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are their swords. O my soul, do not come into their council; to their assembly, let my honor not be united; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their wanton will they lamed an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Ya'akov, and scatter them in Yisra'el. (B'resheet 49:5-7)

If we look into the analyses of the Rishonim, we will find that a much more complex picture unfolds before us; indeed, a careful read of both texts (Chapters 34 and 49) provides us with ample reason to reexamine our assessment of the behavior of Shim'on and Levi in Sh'khem. Due to space limitations, we will limit our reassessment of "the tragedy in Sh'khem" to information which can be inferred from the text itself. Interested readers are encouraged to look at the comments of the Rishonim through Ch. 34 (notably the Ramban at 34:13; note his critique of Rambam's explanation).

II. "HAKH'ZONAH...?"

There are several indications that Ya'akov was not opposed - in principle - to the decision (and its implementation) taken by Shim'on and Levi. In addition, we have several textual indications that the Torah itself gives their approach the stamp of approval.

First of all, let's look at Ya'akov's deathbed charge to these two brothers:

"... for in their anger they slew a man, and in their wanton will they lamed an ox..."

Although there are opinions in the Midrash which interpret this statement as a reference to Sh'khem, simple "P'shat" does not support this read. How could Ya'akov be referring to the death of dozens (or hundreds) of people as "they slew a man"? In addition, what is the reference to an "ox" here?

There is one statement in the Midrash which addresses this problem - but the solution offered there is hardly a critique of the brothers' behavior:

"Did they only slay one man? Doesn't Scripture state: 'they slew all the males'? Rather, they were only considered by haKadosh Barukh Hu as one person." (B'resheet Rabbah 99:6) In other words, if this is a reference to the slaying of the entire male population of Sh'khem, it isn't as grievous as all that, as their lives weren't worth much in the eyes of God (see the additional prooftexts brought in that selection).

Again, the straightforward reading is a reference to the killing of one man and an ox. We will soon discover who these might be.

"...Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel..."

Note that Ya'akov does not curse their actions - rather, he curses their anger (or so it seems - but see the first comment of Hizkuni to 49:7.). If he were morally opposed to their behavior in Sh'khem, doesn't the actual slaying and pillage pale in significance next to their anger? Why mention that here?

[There is one other problem here, one which is beyond the scope of this shiur. Subsequent to Ya'akov's deathbed charge to his sons, the Torah states:

"All these are the twelve tribes of Israel; and this is it what their father spoke to them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them." (49:28) How can we understand Ya'akov's words to Shim'on and Levi - along with his harsh words for Re'uven - as part of a "blessing"? Perhaps we will take this up when we get to Parashat VaY'chi.]

Indeed, one comment in the Midrash Rabbah contrasts the violent act which earned them this curse (?) with their valor in Sh'khem!:

"...[Ya'akov] began calling out 'Shim'on and Levi are brothers...' you acted like brothers to Dinah, as it says: 'two of the sons of Jacob, Shim'on and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took each man his sword..' but you did not act like brothers to Yoseph when you sold him." (B. Rabbah 99:7 - this Midrash can be associated with the comment in Midrash Rabbati of R. Moshe haDarshan, to wit: the 'each man to his brother' mentioned in 37:19 at the sale of Yoseph refers to Shim'on and Levi; not coincidentally, Yoseph's abduction and sale took place in the Sh'khem region.)
Indeed, many Mefarshim maintain that the entire deathbed-charge of Ya'akov to Shim'on and Levi is only a reference to their role in the sale of Yoseph - who is also known as an "ox" (see D'varim 33:17).

BACK TO CHAPTER 34:

Now, let's look at Ya'akov's words when he confronted the brothers in the immediate aftermath of the events in Sh'khem:

And Ya'akov said to Shim'on and Levi, You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. (v. 30)

Is there moral outrage here? Is there a challenge to their religious sensitivities? Ya'akov's response seems to be disapproval of their strategies, to wit: "As a result of your actions, I will now have problems with the locals. We will now be attacked by the surrounding K'na'ani and P'rizzi peoples."

Furthermore, the Torah seems to lend support to the brother's actions throughout the narrative, as follows:

Twice within the description of the brothers' interaction with the people of Sh'khem, the phrase *asher timei/tim'u et Dinah ahotam* is added to the objects of the verse. In verse 13:

And the sons of Ya'akov answered Sh'khem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, (*asher timei et Dinah ahotam* who had defiled Dinah their sister);

In verse 27:

The sons of Ya'akov came upon the slain, and plundered the city (*asher tim'u et Dinah ahotam*).

Why is the Torah twice repeating something which we already know?

In the second instance, we could argue that the text is anticipating a severe criticism of the brothers' behavior (addressed by nearly all Mefarshim): If Sh'khem was guilty for the rape of Dinah, why did all of the townsfolk have to die? By equating their culpability (*asher tim'u* - in the plural - v. 27) with his own (*asher timei* - in the singular - v. 13), we get one of two pictures of the participation of the citizens of Sh'khem in this heinous crime:

a) Either they all participated physically in the defilement of Dinah, either by a S'dom-like orgy or else by abetting the criminal prince, (see the comments of R. Hayyim Paltiel on v. 31);

b) Since they had the wherewithal to censure and/or punish him for his behavior - and failed to do so - it is considered their crime as well. (This seems to be the assumption underlying Rambam's approach, cited above). This seems to be borne out by the record of the plea of Sh'khem to his townspeople to accept the conditions of the sons of Ya'akov:

And Hamor and Sh'khem his son came to the gate of their city, and talked with the men of their city, saying, These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them live in the land, and trade in it; for the land, behold, is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters. Only thus will the men consent to live with us, to be one people; if every male among us is circumcised, as they are circumcised. Shall not their cattle and their wealth and every beast of theirs be ours? only let us consent to them, and they will live with us. And to Hamor and to Sh'khem his son listened all who went out from the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city. (vv. 20-24)

If Sh'khem was truly an oligarch, would he need the people's consent - and would he have to appeal to their mercenary sensibilities - to forge this agreement? (see the insightful read of Rashi on this point in the Mishnat haLevi, p 307).

Besides these two (seemingly superfluous) pejorative references to the citizens of Sh'khem, note how the dialogue between Ya'akov and his sons is presented in the Torah:

And Ya'akov said to Shim'on and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house."

And they said, "*hakh'zonah ya'aseh et achoteinu?*" ("Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?" - vv. 30-31)

The Torah gives the brothers the "last word" in their dispute with father Ya'akov. Furthermore, this "last word" is so terse and direct that it seems to leave Ya'akov "speechless" - indication that their argument held sway. The Torah seems to be giving approval to their actions - an observation strengthened by comparing the gist of Ya'akov's opposition with the "facts on the ground" in the subsequent narrative:

Compare:

"You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." (a pragmatic concern that the violent vengeance wreaked by the brothers will lead to a lynching of Ya'akov's family)

With:

And they journeyed; and the terror of God was upon the cities that were around them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Ya'akov.

(35:5 - only 5 verses after the dispute).

The Torah is emphatically assuaging Ya'akov's fears - the local people did not rise up in anger against his family as a result of their actions in Sh'khem; rather, they stood in fear of them and did not even pursue them. There is one more piece of support for the contention that Ya'akov was not morally opposed to the action taken by the brothers. Just before the deathbed "blessing" given in Egypt to the brothers, Ya'akov accepts both of Yoseph's sons as members of his own family (earning them each a full portion in the Land) and then declares to Yoseph:

"And I have given to you one *Sh'khem* above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." (48:22)

This *Sh'khem* could mean portion, as Onkelos renders it. Alternatively, it may be a reference to the city of Sh'khem itself (see Rashi and Ibn Ezra ad loc.). If so, Ya'akov is not only accepting of the brothers' actions, he even "adopts" their war as his own. There are several Midrashim which indicate that Ya'akov himself participated in the war (see e.g. B. Rabbah 80:13). That would certainly take us very far from our original assumptions as presented at the beginning of this shiur.

[I am indebted to Binyamin Malek for his fine research which was utilized extensively in preparing the foregoing sections of the shiur - his article can be found in Megadim 23:9-29]

III. *AKHARTEM OTI*

If Ya'akov was not morally opposed to the slaying and pillage of the citizens of Sh'khem, catalyzed by an act of deception, we are left with three questions:

a) Why didn't he himself lead the charge against the citizenry? As we pointed out in the recent two-part shiur, Ya'akov was a master at knowing how to utilize deception when appropriate.

b) After the fact, why did he register opposition to their behavior - even if it was later dispelled?

c) Once we have put Ya'akov and his sons on the same side of this moral dilemma, how can we make sense of their conclusion? Why were Sh'khem, his father and all of the townsfolk liable for murder and pillage? (While we are assessing their behavior, it is instructive to reflect on the size of the population of Sh'khem. See Avrabanel's comments here - he notes that the population was small. Documents uncovered at recent digs at Tel al-Amarna suggest that there were under one hundred citizens - male and female- all told - *vakma"l*)

A crime for which the Torah mandates payment to the young woman's family should certainly not warrant this sort of treatment? In addition, as noted above, such behavior would seem to regress the cause of the Avrahamic tradition. How do we justify their behavior?

IV. YA'AKOV AND HIS SONS

We will first address the dispute between Ya'akov and his sons regarding the proper tactics in response to the rape of Dinah; resolving this question will provide us an approach to the other two.

Although a full treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of this shiur, we have to approach any differences in attitude which surface between Ya'akov and his children against the backdrop of their substantially different backgrounds and experiential matrices.

Whereas Ya'akov grew up knowing grandfather Avraham (Yitzhak was 60 when Ya'akov was born; hence Avraham was 160 at the time; therefore Ya'akov was 15 when Avraham died) and, of course, knowing father Yitzhak (according to Seder Olam, Ya'akov was 63 when Yitzhak sent him away to Lavan). Conversely, Ya'akov's sons never knew great-grandfather Avraham - nor did they even meet Yitzhak until he was quite aged and, from all textual and Midrashic evidence, quite incapacitated (see, inter alia, Rashi at B'resheet 28:10).

Ya'akov grew up in Eretz K'na'an, but had to spend the last twenty years (at least - see BT Megillah 17a) "on the run". In addition, before his fleeing to Aram, his life seems to be one of isolation, save his relationship with mother Rivkah. Our story (Ch. 34) rests somewhere along the continuum from *Galut* (exile) to *Shivah* (return) - and therein lies the rub. Ya'akov's children, although born and raised in what proved to be an environment of enmity, had a full family support system, as well as being brought up as the children of a wealthy and powerful member of Lavan's household.

In sum, Ya'akov was an Eretz-Yisra'eli who had been in *galut* for a substantial time - and who had a clear and direct connection with Avraham and Yitzhak. His children were born in Aram and had never tasted the pain and loneliness of exile - and they had had no direct encounters with the first or second generations of the clan.

As such, Ya'akov's response to the rape of Dinah has to be understood against this background. Both grandfather Avraham and father Yitzhak had experienced similar difficulties with local chieftains: Sarah was taken to Pharaoh's palace (Ch. 12) and to Avimelekh's rooms (Ch. 20). Rivkah, although never taken from Yitzhak, was presented as his sister out of the same fear of the local ruler and the general lack of morality (Ch. 26).

Here, Ya'akov, who had not yet encountered such a threat, was faced with a hauntingly familiar scenario - with some significant differences. Dinah was not falsely presented as a sister - she really was an unmarried sister! She was taken to the house of the local ruler, just as in the cases with Avraham - but here's where the similarities end. Whereas God had intervened on behalf of Avraham both in Egypt and in G'rar, the rape of Dinah was carried out with bestial success.

Ya'akov had every reason to consider as follows:

If father Avraham, for whom God was prepared to intervene to spare Sarah, and who was only wandering through that land, was prepared to "play the game" and not belligerently confront the locals - how much more so in this case. After all, God has not intervened to help us here; and these are my permanent neighbors, with whom I must be able to get along. If it was important to exercise restraint in galut - as I have with Lavan and, just now, with Esav - how much more so in the Land where I intend to establish my roots.

The brothers (note that Shim'on and Levi are only singled out in describing the slaying; all of the brothers participated in the cunning negotiations as well as the pillage of the city), coming from their critically distinct upbringing and experiences, viewed the situation and the appropriate response quite differently. The non-confrontational attitude which both Avraham and Yitzhak had adopted while traveling (see our analysis of the role of deception while traveling in the last two shiurim - available in the B'resheet archives at <http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra>) was only appropriate for a land you intend to leave - ultimately, if the locals think you weak, it will have no deleterious effect on your own well-being. That is not the case, they argued, in a land which you intend to settle. If the local peoples think of our daughters as "fair game", we will never gain their respect - or fear. Our lives will be a long series of attacks and oppression. It is better, goes the argument, to make our stand here and now and let everyone know that we are not to be trifled with.

We now understand why Ya'akov did not originally take up arms - and why he was perturbed by their approach. It was not a moral opposition, rather a disapproval of their tactics which lay at the heart of his chastisement.

Both of their positions are easily in their respective arguments:

Ya'akov:

You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.

The brothers:

Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?

When we are talking about an individual who violates a young woman, the Torah does not consider it a capital offense; it allows for recompense and amelioration of the situation with a large fine as appropriate for a case of criminal assault. When, on the other hand, we are dealing with an attack which challenges the dignity and honor of the people of Yisra'el, that is a different matter entirely.

The Torah not only provides support for the brothers' position in the description of the ensuing travels which were "trouble-free", the Halakhah itself seems to lend support to this position:

Rav Yehudah stated in the name of Rav: If foreigners besieged Israelite towns... with the intention of taking lives the people are permitted to sally forth against them with their weapons and to desecrate the Shabbat on their account. Where the attack, however, was made on a town that was close to a frontier, even though they did not come with any intention of taking lives but merely to plunder straw or stubble, the people are permitted to sally forth against them with their weapons and to desecrate the Shabbat on their account. (BT Eruvin 45a)

POSTSCRIPT

Much ink has been spilt over the analysis of the "double-identity" of Ya'akov/Yisra'el - perhaps we will, one day, add our own input to that discussion. In any case, it is curious to note that throughout this narrative, our patriarch is referred to by his "galut-name", Ya'akov. Yet, when he "adopts" the conquest of Sh'khem, he speaks as Yisra'el:

And Yisra'el said to Yoseph, "Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. And I have given to you one *Sh'khem* above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow. (48:21-22)

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Vayishlach

Air Thin

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother."

Seeing is believing, but there is far more to see in this world than meets the human eye. Take the air that surrounds you, for example. The air seems empty enough, but take a not-so-powerful microscope and you'll be amazed at how the emptiness of the air teems with all manner of minute particles.

And if you could go further than that, beyond the microscopic, if you'd go beyond the limits of human vision itself, you'd be even more amazed and possibly more than a little frightened.

The fact is that we are all surrounded by myriad incorporeal spiritual beings. Some of these beings are benevolent and others, well, let's just say, they're less than benevolent.

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother."

Why does the Torah include the phrase *"before him"*? Ostensibly, the sentence could have equally well been, *"And Yaakov sent angels to Esav, his brother."*

The Mishna (*Avot, Chapter 4*) tells us that if we do even one mitzvah, we acquire for ourselves a defending angel, and if we do one transgression we acquire a prosecuting angel. The mitzvah itself creates that spiritual entity (so inadequately translated into

English by the word "angel"). Every mitzvah literally begets a holy angel.

As in the world beneath, so too it is in the world above.

A defense lawyer will do everything he can to show off his client in a good light, and, similarly, the angel born of a mitzvah pleads for his "client" before G-d's throne in the Heavenly Realms. This angel tries his hardest to advance his client's welfare, not only spiritually but materially too. This angel is really more like a son pleading on behalf of his father, for, like a son, he was created by his "father."

Rabbi Yosef Karo, the *Beit Yosef* and author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the standard compendium of Jewish law, would regularly learn the entire six orders of the Mishna by heart. It is well known that, as a result of this prodigious achievement, an angel would come and learn Torah with him. The book *"Magid Meisharim"* (lit. *The Speaker of Straight Things*) details what the angel taught him, and more. This book is still readily available to this day.

The *Shelah Hakadosh* in his commentary on Tractate Shavuot recounts an amazing story. One Shavuot, he and nine other Torah sages stayed up all night on both nights of Shavuot and they witnessed how the

angel spoke with the Beit Yosef. It started speaking as follows: "I am the Mishna speaking in your throat."

The name of that angel was "Mishna," since that was the mitzvah that gave it life.

At the end of this lengthy testimony, all ten Sages, including Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (the composer of the famous Shabbat song *Lecha Dodi* that is sung in

synagogues every Friday night the world over) signed an authentication of what they had seen and heard.

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother"

Yaakov didn't want to employ the services of those angels who stand before G-d's throne. He sent only angels that were the offspring of his good deeds, the ones that were "before him."

- Source: *Lev Eliyahu*

Chanukah

The Dreidel's Secret

The Dreidel

A children's game, played in the firelight of a cold winter night, the Chanukah Menorah silently glowing in the window... The dreidel. Its four sides spinning around the still point in the turning circle; spinning so fast that its sides blur into nothingness... The dreidel. So seemingly insignificant - and yet this little dreidel contains the story of the Jewish People; the history of the whole world...

Our story starts not with the miracle of Chanukah, but 1,437 years earlier, with Jacob's ladder. Jacob had a prophetic dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder that reached from the ground to the heavens. These angels weren't Hollywood extras with fluorescent tubes over their heads - they were, in fact, incorporeal spiritual messengers - the protecting forces of four great kingdoms. Four kingdoms that would in the future dominate and exile the Jewish People: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

At first, Yaakov saw the angel of Babylon ascend the ladder 70 steps and then he came down: The Jewish People were in the Babylonian exile for 70 years. The protecting angel of the Empire of Persia and Media then climbed up the ladder 52 steps before he descended: The Jewish People were in exile in Persia 52 years. Then the angel of the Empire of Greece climbed 180 rungs - the domination of Greece lasted 180 years. Finally, the protecting angel of the Roman

Empire climbed up the ladder, but *he didn't come down*. Yaakov feared that this final exile would never end, until Hashem promised Yaakov - *If he will rise up like an eagle and make his nest among the stars - even from there I will bring him down*.

We are still in that final exile, in the softly asphyxiating embrace of Rome's spiritual heirs....

The Four Kingdoms

BABYLON

In the year 3338 (587/6 BCE), the first of our Holy Temples was razed to the ground by the Babylonian Emperor *Nebuchadnezer*, and the majority of the Jewish People led into exile by the Assyrian Emperor *Sanheriv*. Why was it such a tragedy that the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple) was destroyed? The Beit Hamikdash represents a unique pipeline between Hashem and Man. When it was destroyed, this flow of spiritual energy was severed. The level of this connection is linked to the word "*nefesh*" - soul ("*When a soul will bring an offering*"... *Vayikra* 2:1). *Nefesh* begins with the letter *Nun*, and *Nun* represents the kingdom of Babylon.

PERSIA

As we know from the story of Esther, Haman was interested in finding the final solution of the Jewish

problem - genocide. The exile of Persia and Media represents the threat to the "*guf*" - the body of the Jewish People, the physical threat of annihilation. *Guf* begins with *Gimmel*, which stands for the kingdom of Persia and Media.

GREECE

Greece, on the other hand, represents the attack on the Torah itself - *the sechel* - the wisdom of Israel. The Greeks weren't interested in the physical destruction of the Jewish People; rather they wanted to destroy the spiritual core of Judaism - the Torah - and leave a Hellenized hulk that would conform to the Greek norms of aesthetics - drama and the superficial wisdoms. *Sechel* begins with the letter *Sin* - that's the letter of the kingdom of Greece.

ROME

The fourth kingdom, Rome, is a summation of all the other exiles. At the beginning of their domination, the Romans, like the Babylonians, stopped the bringing of offerings in the Temple. Then, they destroyed the second Holy Temple and inflicted unthinkable carnage on the "*guf*," the body of Jewish People: After the massacre of Betar, they used Jewish blood as fertilizer for seven years.

At first, Rome was the intellectual scion of Greece, but with the conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity in 313 CE, the Catholic Church became the spiritual heir of the Roman Empire. After the demise of the influence of the Church, the mantle of Rome was subsequently worn by secularism and materialism - the spiritual incarnation of Rome in our own times. Rome is all the exiles rolled into one and thus it is represented by the Hebrew word "*HaKol*," meaning "all." Its first letter is the letter *Heh*.

Where is the point at the center of a circle?

Can you define it? And yet it exists. Just like the letter '*yud*' in the Hebrew alphabet - a single dot - from which the whole universe was created - the threshold of existence. The still point in the turning circle - and around that dot turns the whole world.

The Jewish People are that little dot - so infinitesimally small, and yet around this dot, the world turns. What is the opposite to that little dot?

What is the opposite of the central point that occupies no space? Direction. North, South, East and West. Expansion in four directions. Four is the antithesis of the One. Four is the number of the kingdoms who stand eternally opposed to the Jewish People. Eternally opposed to He who is One. And to His reflection in this world - the Jewish People.

Take another look at our dreidel spinning.

What do you see? Four sides. Spinning around a central point that occupies no space. And when those sides spin - they themselves cease to have direction anymore. Now, in the blur of their whirling - *they are a circle, a reflection of the still small point at its center.*

What is it that is carved on the sides of our dreidel?

Nun, Gimmel, Sin, Heh... On the surface, those letters stand for "*Nes Gadol Hayah Sham - A great miracle happened there*" - the commemoration of a miraculous victory of a faithful few over the might of the Greek Empire. But on a deeper level, the dreidel is a microcosmic representation of the four kingdoms, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome spinning around the center, the Jewish People.

And the Hand that spins the dreidel comes from Above...

Every empire thinks that it will last forever, but the Hand that spins only spins the dreidel of history for predetermined time. And then each Empire, despite its vainglorious boasting, falters on its axis... finally crashing.

Sources:

- *Ramban, Ber. 28:12*
- *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 35*
- *Maharal, Ner Mitzvah*
- *Bnei Yisasschar, Kislev/Tevet, Essay 2:25*
- *Ibid. - Commentary on Bnei Yisasschar; Rav Nachman Bulman, zatzal*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Vayishlach and Vayeshev

Pesachim 16-22 and 23-29

Is Almost Good Enough?

We learned in a beraita: Shimon Ha'Amsoni, and others say it was Nechemia Ha'Amsoni, would explain the meaning of every appearance of the word 'et' in the Torah. When he reached, "Fear [et] Hashem, your G-d," he stopped. His students asked him, "Rebbi, all appearances of the word 'et' in the Torah that you already explained, what is their fate?" He answered, "Just as I received reward for explaining them, likewise I receive reward for stopping to explain them." Rabbi Akiva came and explained: In the verse "Fear [et] Hashem, your G-d," the word 'et' comes to include Torah scholars.

In our Hebrew language studies nowadays we are accustomed to understand the word *et* as a part of speech without real meaning, but as serving the purpose of introducing a definite direct object. However, in Torah studies it is assumed that everything in the Torah has meaning. Every word, every letter and even the crowns on the letters. So what does the word *et* mean in the Torah? The simple answer is that the word *et* appears in the Torah to include something that is not explicitly mentioned in the verse, but is similar in nature to the definite direct object that follows it in the verse.

With this in mind, one of our Sages (Rabbi Shimon Ha'Amsoni or Rabbi Nechemia Ha'Amsoni) initially explained the meaning of the word *et* in various places in the Torah. In one place, he said, it means one thing and in another place it means something else – but each time the attributed meaning is similar to the definite direct object word that appears explicitly in the verse. However, the word *et* in the verse, "Fear [et] Hashem your G-d," posed an impasse. The Sage rhetorically asked, "What can be included by the word *et* that should also be feared in the same way that Hashem is to be feared?" Therefore, he did not assign the word *et* in this verse any special meaning.

When his students asked him regarding the status of every other *et* in the Torah that he had already successfully explained, he told them, "Just as I received reward for initially explaining their meanings, likewise I will now receive reward for retracting my original teachings", concluding that nothing new is included from any *et* in the entire Torah.

Rabbi Akiva, however, reasoned otherwise. He taught that every *et* in the Torah includes something new, including the one in the verse that teaches the mitzvah of fearing Hashem. Here, says Rabbi Akiva, the word *et* comes to include Torah scholars. This means that just as there is a mitzvah to fear Hashem, there is likewise a mitzvah to fear Torah scholars. Although, of course, the equation of Torah scholars to Hashem is not exact, we should be in awe of their greatness in a manner that is similar to – but not equal to – our awe and fear of Hashem. As the Mishna in Pirkei Avot (4:12) teaches, "Rabbi Eliezer the son of Shamua would say: The

dignity of your student should be as precious to you as your own; the dignity of your colleague, as your awe of your Torah teacher; *and your awe of your Torah teacher as your awe of Heaven.*” (Rashi)

Maharsha explains the different views of the first Sage and Rabbi Akiva in the following manner. The impetus for first Sage to offer interpretations for every *et* in the Torah was to honor Hashem and His Torah by showing that not even one word in the Torah is superfluous. Since this Sage’s purpose was to honor Hashem in this way, he reasoned that he would achieve that same goal by avoiding any interpretation of the word *et* that would include anyone in the same category with Hashem.

Rabbi Akiva, explains the Maharsha, reasoned that it was indeed correct and appropriate to include Torah scholars from the word *et* – not in the sense of fear of retribution, but rather in the sense of awe and respect. He viewed this not as disrespect to the honor of Hashem, but rather as a tribute to Torah scholars, who learn Hashem’s Torah.

• *Pesachim 22b*

With All Your Might

Rabbi Eliezer says, “If the Torah says ‘[And you will love Hashem, your G-d...] and with all your life,’ why does the Torah also say, ‘And with all of your might’? And, if the Torah says, ‘And with all of your money,’ why does the Torah also say, ‘And with all your life’? Rather, the Torah is saying to you: If there is a person whose life is more dear to him than his money, therefore the Torah says, ‘And with all your life;’ and if there is a person whose money is more dear to him than his life, therefore the Torah says, ‘And with all your money?’”

The basis for this teaching is a verse in the Torah that is part of our daily prayers in the first paragraph of the Kriat Shma: “And you will love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul (i.e. life) and with all your might (i.e. money). This is one way that *Chazal* explain the words in the verse. There is a mitzvah to love Hashem, even in certain situations – such as being faced with choosing idol worship or sacrificing his life or all of his money. Rabbi Eleizer explains why the Torah specifies this expression of love as being willing to part with both his life and his wealth, and does not just state the greater sacrifice (presumably giving up his life), from which we would logically know that he would of course need to make the lesser sacrifice in order to show his love for Hashem by not transgressing.

He explains that the Torah addresses a person of any mindset: A person who values his life more than his money must choose to forfeit his life, and a person who values his money over his life must be prepared to forgo all of his money to show his love for Hashem, if needed.

It may perhaps sound strange to some people to hear that there are people (or even one sane person) who values his money more than his life. However, the commentaries explain this value system of life versus money is not necessarily a general one, the way a person thinks throughout his life. Rather, the verse deals with only one relevant point for making the ultimate sacrifice that is required by this verse to fulfill the mitzvah of loving Hashem without a limit. This point in time is the moment if and when a person is faced with the choice of giving up all of his money (or his life, depending on the specific demand) in order not to worship the idol. What is more important to him *then*?

Perhaps he is *very* elderly and *very* infirm and he greatly desires to leave his wealth to his wife, children, charitable organizations, places of Torah study, and other worthy and needy causes? If, at that moment and under those circumstances in his lifetime, he is given the choice of relinquishing all his wealth or be killed, it is not unreasonable that he would find his money dearer to him than his life. At that point in time, the money might very well be his priority – perhaps by a long shot. In this case, the mitzvah to love Hashem requires him to part with his money, despite it being that which is truly what is most dear to him.

[*Note: Please skip the following paragraph if you are not a fan of renowned Jack Benny stories. One of the longest laughs in radio history occurred during the Jack Benny show. Mr. Benny, who was notoriously parsimonious, was late in arriving at the studio. His sidekick asked him why he was so late. He told him that he was mugged on the way. The questioner continued to wonder how that accounted for his extreme lateness. “Does it really take that long to be robbed?” Jack Benny answered in his deliberate manner, “The robber threatened me with the ultimatum, ‘Your money or your life’?! And, I was thinking...”]

• *Pesachim 25a*

*Ohr Somayach wishes all of our
friends, alumni and readers of Ohrnet
Torah Magazine a festive and
luminous Chanukah that will light up
our lives with good health, much
happiness and success.*

Chanukah Somayach!

VAYISHLACH

Questions

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Esav?
2. Why was Yaakov both "afraid" and "distressed"?
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Esav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov's leg?
8. Why did Esav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Esav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word *nisa* in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Esav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states, "The sons of Yaakov were twelve." Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Esav changed his wife's name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Esav's decision to leave the land of Canaan?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Esav wouldn't see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Esav from gazing at her.
10. 33:12 - It means "travel". It does not mean "we will travel." This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean 'we' as it sometimes does.
11. 33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
12. 34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
13. 34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
14. 35:17 - His two triplet sisters.
15. 35:18 - *Ben-Yemin* means "Son of the South." He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
16. 35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
17. 35:29 - One hundred and eight.
18. 36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
19. 36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
20. 36:6 - Esav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be "foreigners in a land not their own." Therefore Esav said, "I'm leaving. I don't want the Land if it means I have to pay the bill of subjugation in Egypt."

Q & A

VAYESHEV

Questions

1. *"These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...."* Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "*hand*" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

Answers

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

Q & A

CHANUKAH

Questions

1. Which miracle do we celebrate with the lighting of candles?
2. How did they know that the oil found was uncontaminated?
3. Who led the battle against the Hellenites?
4. During which of the "four exiles" did the miracle of Chanukah take place?
5. Name two non-halachic customs connected with Chanukah.
6. How many blessings are made before lighting candles?
7. Why do we light the extra candle known as the "shamash"?
8. What is added to our regular prayers at least three times a day?
9. What is the special reading of the Torah each day?
10. Is it obligatory to eat a meal like on Purim?
11. When do we have occasion to use three Sifrei Torah on Chanukah?
12. What three *mitzvot* did the Hellenites decree against?
13. What damage did the Hellenites do to the Beit Hamikdash?
14. What two military advantages did the Hellenite army have over the Jews?
15. Is it permissible to do work on Chanukah?
16. Why is there no Mussaf prayer on Chanukah except for Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh?
17. How does the name Chanukah indicate the date when this holiday begins?
18. What special prayer do we add to the morning services?
19. What did the Jews do after victory that explains the name Chanukah?
20. Which regular prayers in the morning service do we omit on Chanukah?

Answers

1. The oil for lighting the menorah in the Beit Hamikdash after the victory over the Hellenites was only enough for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight days until a new supply of pure oil was available. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
2. Its container had the seal of the *kohen gadol*. (*Mesechta Shabbat* 21b)
3. Matityahu, the *kohen gadol* and his sons. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1, and the "Al Hanissim" prayer in the Siddur)
4. The third exile under Hellenite oppression during the era of the second Beit Hamikdash. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
5. Eating either donuts or potato pancakes made with oil and playing with the *sivivon* (dreidel).
6. Three blessings the first night and two the other nights. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:4)
7. Since it is forbidden to benefit from the light of the candles we light an extra one so that if we do benefit it will be from that one called the *shamash* because it is sometimes used to serve as the lighting agent. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 673:1)
8. The prayer "Al Hanissim". (Ibid. 682:1)
9. The gifts of the *nesi'im* (heads of the twelve tribes at the inauguration of the Sanctuary as recorded in *Bamidbar* 7:1-8). (Ibid. 684:1)
10. No. But if the meal is accompanied by songs of praise to Heaven it is considered a *seudat mitzvah*. (Ibid. 670:2)
11. When Rosh Chodesh Tevet is on Shabbat and we read selections for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Chanukah. (Ibid. 684:3)
12. Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Chodesh. (*Midrash*)
13. They made breaks in the walls and contaminated the sacred items. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
14. They were stronger and more numerous. ("Al Hanissim" Prayer)
15. It is permissible to work but women have a custom of refraining from work for the first half hour that the candles are burning. (*Mishna Berurah* 670:1)
16. Because there were no additional sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash during Chanukah. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 682:2)
17. If we break up the word into two parts — *Chanu*, and the letters *chaf* and *hei*, we read that they rested from the war on the 25th day of the month.
18. Hallel. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)
19. They rededicated the altar in the Beit Hamikdash, which the Hellenites had defiled. ("Chanukah" means inauguration.)
20. Tachanun and Psalm 20 before *Uva Letzion*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayishlach - Chanukah

Pick your Wax

With Chanukah just around the corner, people are already thinking about how exactly they will light their Menorah and what sort of candles they will use. Of course, ideally one should opt for using olive oil to light Chanukah lamps, but, nonetheless, for various reasons, using wax candles remains a popular choice as well (see *Rema to Orach Chaim* 673:1). In this essay we will encounter four different words for “wax” — *donag*, *shaava*, *kira*, and *nechot*. In doing so we will seek out the etymologies of these words to figure out if/how they differ from one another.

The word *donag* appears four times in the Bible (Mic. 1:4, Psalms 22:15, 68:3, 97:5), but never in the Mishna or Talmud — except for the fact that Rav Nachman’s wife was named Donag (*Kiddushin* 70a). Whenever *donag* appears in the Bible it denotes “wax” as something that easily melts in fire.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 29:20) connects the word *donag* to the Biblical Hebrew word *tenuch* (“ear lobe”), ostensibly invoking the interchangeability of DALET and TAV, as well as GIMMEL and KAF. Rabbi Hirsch explains that wax is similar to an ear lobe because wax is malleable and pliable, just like the fatty ear lobe is.

Rabbi Yehoshua Steinberg writes in *Shorashei Leshon HaKodesh* (Warsaw, 1897) that the word *donag* is a portmanteau of the words *dei* (“enough”) and *nogah* (“light”), an allusion to wax’s usefulness in lighting candles and providing light.

More scholarly-oriented etymologists are at a loss to explain the origins of the word *donag*. The prominent linguist Avraham Even-Shoshan (1906-1984) suggests in his dictionary that this word is derived from the Akkadian word *dumqu*, which means “clear” or “shiny” — a clear reference to wax’s translucence. Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) concludes that *donag* is of uncertain etymology, mentioning Even-Shoshan’s theory as just a possibility. He then cites Dr. Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801-1888) who compares the Hebrew *donag* to the Arabic word *danj* which means “the remainder of the honeycombs.”

In Mishnaic Hebrew the common word for “candle wax” is *shaava* (typically pronounced *shayva* in more Yeshivish circles). This word appears six times in the Mishna, thrice in *Shabbat* (2:1, 8:4, 22:3) and thrice in *Keilim* (10:2, 17:17, 24:7), but it never appears in the Bible. When the Talmud (*Shabbat* 20b) discusses the Mishnaic word *shaava*, it explains that *shaava* refers to the “refuse of honey” (*pesulta d’dwsha*). In other words, the Talmud explains that *shaava* refers to the honeycomb, which is the source of bees’ wax — a by-product of the honey-making process.

All three times that the word *donag* appears in Psalms, the Targum renders the term in Aramaic as *shaava*. However, the one place it appears outside of Psalms (Mic. 1:4), the Targum translates it into a slightly different word, *she’ei’ita* (which Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur in *Metrugaman* suggests is actually a mistake and should really say *shaavita*). Either way, both *shaava* and *she’ei’ita* seem to be

derived from the two-letter root SHIN-AYIN, which means “smooth” (see our essay “Smooth Sliding & Glad Gliding” about the word *shua/shiia*). This, of course, relates to the silky smooth texture of hardened wax.

When the Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 85:4) teaches that Judah’s father-in-law Shua (Gen. 38:2) was a prominent figure in his locale, it highlights this point by referring to him as a “The Candle of the City.” Rabbi Matisyahu Strashun (1817-1885) explains that this appellation is actually a pun on the name Shua, which is spelled with the same letters as *shaava* – the material from which the best candles are made.

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 20b) actually translates the Mishnaic word *shaava* into the seemingly Aramaic word *kerosa*. However, the truth is that this word and its variations, such as *kira* (*Bava Metzia* 40a, *Berachot* 56b, *Shabbat* 110b, 133b) and *kiri* (*Pesachim* 8a, *Yevamot* 76a) are not actually Aramaic words, but rather are loan-words derived from *cera* in Latin and/or *keros* in Greek.

Interestingly, according to some commentators there might be another word for “wax” in Biblical Hebrew. When the Torah describes Joseph’s brothers seeing an Ishmaelite caravan heading to Egypt, it mentions that this caravan was transporting, *inter alia*, *nechot* (Gen. 37:25). Later in the Joseph story, when Jacob sent his sons with gifts to appease the Egyptian viceroy, one of the special delicacies from Canaan that Jacob sent was *nechot* (Gen. 43:11). Now, the word *nechot* is generally understood to be a sort of spice, often identified as “ladanum” (although Ibn Janach writes that *nechot* are “carobs”). However, according to the Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 91:11), *nechot* is *shaava* – “wax.” Professor Zohar Amar adds that in the list of things that Jacob sent the viceroy, the item that immediately precedes *nechot*

is “some honey” (*me’at dvash*), which may have led to the supposition that *nechot* is something related to honey (i.e. beeswax).

In fact, Targum Jonathan and Targum Neophyti (to Gen. 37:25, 43:11) translate *nechot* as *shaava*. Moreover, Rashi (to Gen. 37:25) cites Targum Onkelos (there) as also rendering *nechot* as *shaava*. This assertion is somewhat difficult because our editions of Targum Onkelos (Gen. 37:25, 43:11) actually translate *nechot* as *shaaf*, which apparently means “smear” (see *Chullin* 111b). Nachmanides (to Ex. 30:34) takes Onkelos’ translation to mean that *nechot* refers to “olive oil.” The Vilna Gaon’s son, Rabbi Avraham Vilner, reads Onkelos as saying *saaf*, which he connects to the Biblical Hebrew word *seif* (“branch”) that appears in Yechezkel 31:8. Despite all of this, we can validate what Rashi writes in the name of Targum Onkelos, based on what Rabbi Yosef Teomim-Frankel (1727-1792) suggests in *Iggros Pri Megadim*, that *shaaf* is just a variant of *shaava* – presumably because the letters PEH and VAV represent phonetically similar sounds and can thus be interchangeable.

To summarize: Everybody agrees that there are two Hebrew words for “wax”: *donag* in Biblical Hebrew and *shaava* in Mishnaic Hebrew (and Targumic Aramaic). These two words seem to focus on different properties of wax. *Donag* focuses on either wax’s malleability, its role in bringing light or its translucent appearance; while *shaava*, on the other hand, seems to emphasize wax’s smooth texture. The word *kira* and the variations thereof are not really Hebrew or Aramaic words, but come from Greek/Latin. Finally, the Biblical word *nechot* is typically understood to refer to “spices,” but some commentators explain it as another term for “wax.”

*We wish all of Ohrnet Magazine’s readers - and all of
Ohr Somayach’s alumni and friends - a healthy
winter.*

WHAT'S IN A WORD? cont.

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayeshev — Chanukah

To Be a Wise Guy (part 1 of 2)

Jewish tradition has long viewed the Menorah — eternally associated with the holiday of Chanukah — as a symbol of wisdom (see Bava Batra 25b). The Menorah illuminates and enlightens us both in the literal sense and in the proverbial sense. It therefore befits us to offer a discussion of the different forms of knowledge and wisdom as an ode to the festival of lights. In this essay we will explore three Hebrew words associated with knowledge (*chochmah*, *tevunah/binah*, and *daat*), and explain how altogether these three words form the basis of Jewish epistemology.

We begin our discussion with the term *chochmah* (“wisdom”), a form of knowledge associated with a *chacham* (“wise man” or “sage”). The Mishna (*Avot* 4:1) asks, “Who is a *chacham*?” before answering, “One who learns from all people.” Thus, the *chacham* casts a net as wide as possible, looking to accrue wisdom from all possible sources of information. The Talmud (*Tamid* 32a) says that a *chacham* is somebody who can foresee future consequences that had not yet come to fruition. In this explanation as well, the *chacham* holds wide-ranging wisdom, which allows him to be sensitive to all possible consequences of a given course of action. The Talmud (*Chagigah* 14a) further asserts that a *chacham* is defined as a student who makes his teachers wiser, again showing that the *chacham* typifies broadening one’s scope of wisdom.

Rabbi Avraham Bedersi HaPenini explains that *chacham* denotes the opposite of “simpleton,” as *chacham* can refer to anyone who has mastered as certain body of knowledge. That body of knowledge could be something as trivial as

carpentry (Isa. 3:3, 40:20), snake-charming (Psalms 59:6), or other technical/engineering skills (see Ex. 31:6). Even cunningness and political ingenuity can be considered a form of *chochmah* (see II Sam. 13:3) — even if used negatively (Jer. 4:22). That said, Rabbi Bedersi clarifies that when the Bible speaks of a *chacham* (especially in the Book of Kohelet), it refers specifically to a *religious scholar* — a sage who has mastered the Torah and the Divine Arts.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the words *chacham* and *chochmah* to the two-letter root CHET-KAF, which refers to “waiting” or “delaying.” The word *michakeh/choche* (“waiting” or “anticipating”) in Hebrew (see Isa. 30:18, Hab. 2:3, Dan. 12:12, Iyov 32:4) is derived from this root, as is the word *chakah* meaning “fish net” (Iyov 40:25, Isa. 19:8, Hab. 1:15), a trap which one sets and then “waits” for the fish to enter. In the same way, a *chacham* is a wise man who is not hasty or rushed in his studies, but rather patiently “waits/delays” to deliberate over the material more thoroughly. (Rabbi Pappenheim also argues that the word *cheich*, “palate,” comes from the word *chakah*, because the open fish net resembles a person’s mouth opened wide in anticipation of food.) The Aramaic verb *chayach* (“to smile”) and the Modern Hebrew noun *chiyuch* (“smile”) are likely also derived from the word *cheich*.)

The term *tevunah/binah* refers to the form of knowledge acquired by the *navon*, whom the Talmud (*Chagigah* 14a) says is *meivin davar m’toch davar* (“understands one matter from within [another] matter”). This connotes a deep comprehension that allows the learner to derive

new ideas from a lesson he or she had previously learned.

Rabbi Bedersi relates *tevunah/binah* to the word *bein* (“between”). This is because a *navon* must equally be able to apply relevant data to whatever he is considering, and, at the same time, exclude irrelevant information. The discerning *navon* is thus expected to be able to tell the difference “between” this datum and that datum, allowing him to efficiently analyze all relevant data and derive new conclusions.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the term *tevunah/binah* to the biliteral root BET-NUN, which refers to “building.” The verb *boneh* (“builds”) refers to building a physical structure; *even* (“rock”) and *teven* (“straw”), to materials used for building a physical edifice; *ben* (“son”) and *bat* (“daughter”) are the result of building one’s progeny; *avnayim* (“birthing stool”), to the place on which that building can come, and so on. *Binah* relates to this core meaning because it essentially refers to the ability to “build” on a given idea by applying it to something else and extrapolating further. (The English word *maven* in the sense of “expert” actually derives from the Hebrew *meivin*, “he understands,” by way of Yiddish.)

Most authorities use the term *tevunah* and *binah* almost interchangeably. While Rabbi Pappenheim admits that he has not seen other sources that address the difference between these two words, he proffers his own explanation, based on his understanding of the implications of an initial TAV. In a nutshell, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that *binah* refers to the ability to understand the big picture even if it is comprised of many different components, while *tevunah* refers to the ability to break down the overarching big picture into its smaller components.

The Vilna Gaon (to Proverbs 2:2-3, 2:6) differentiates between *binah* and *tevunah* by explaining that *tevunah* refers to the “reflection” that qualifies one’s *chochmah* or *binah*. The Vilna Gaon in *Chemdah Genuzah* (to Proverbs 1:1) writes that *binah* refers to understanding something on

one’s own terms, while *tevunah* refers to understanding something so thoroughly that one can explain it to others (see also Zohar, *Vayakhel* 201a). Rabbi Shlomo Brevda (1931-2013) points out in *Leil Shimurim* (p. 26) that this latter source runs counter to the aphorism often cited in the “Yeshiva World” in the name of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk (1853-1918): “A deficiency in being able to explain something is a sign of a deficiency in one’s actual understanding.”

Let’s summarize what we have learned until now. *Chochmah* refers to the intake of knowledge or raw data as it comes from many different sources. On the other hand, *tevunah/binah* refers to the intellectual acumen required to process that knowledge and the ability to understand information in such a way that one can induce further. In the next article, part 2, we will learn how *daat* is the offspring of the “marriage” between *chochmah* and *tevunah/binah* (see Ramchal’s introduction to *Klach Pischei Chochmah*). For now, we will focus on sharpening the differences between *chochmah* and *tevunah/binah*.

The Malbim explains that *chochmah* refers to a practical form of wisdom, while *tevunah/binah* connotes a more abstract form of understanding. He explains that the term *chochmah* applies only when the opposite of *chochmah* is also a possibility. In other words, when there is something that can be done in two ways, such that one way is the “smart” way of doing it while the other way is the “dumb” way of doing it, the intelligence needed to choose the “smart” approach is called *chochmah*. In line with this, the Malbim explains that *chochmah* primarily refers to that which can be experienced. It refers to the “smart” way of acting/behaving.

That said, the Malbim explains that true *chochmah* can come only by way of Divine revelation, because with anything less it cannot be known for certain that it is the “smartest” of all options. When we speak of non-revelatory *chochmah*, it is only a borrowed term to refer to what we can only assume to be the “smartest” possibility.

By contrast, the Malbim explains that *binah* refers to a more abstract form of cleverness. When a person can understand complex allegories or solve riddles, this draws on his or her *binah*. One who acquires *binah* has the ability to take into account everything that he or she has perceived – either through their senses or intellect – and use all of that information to arrive at intelligent, logically sound conclusions. *Binah* is thus the ability to think through and process what one has beheld. In the Malbim's model, the term *daat* refers to the “certainty” of the resultant knowledge and conclusions that come through *binah*.

Another way of putting it: *Chochmah* represents the raw information found in the Written Torah and its limitless planes of interpretation, *binah* represents the Oral Torah that processes and elucidates that information, and *daat* is the careful balance between the infinite wisdom of the Written Torah and the more concrete lessons of the Oral Torah. This approach is found in the *Zohar* (see *Matok M'Dvash* to *Yisro* 85a), the Vilna

Gaon's *Biurei Aggados* (*Bava Kama* 92b), and the Vilna Gaon's commentary to Proverbs (1:8, see also the glosses to his comments on Proverbs 10:13).

Using this paradigm, Rabbi Eliyahu Tzion Sofer explains that the Hellenistic Syrian-Greeks specifically opposed the concept of *binah*, because they denied the significance of the Oral Torah. They essentially had the Written Torah in front of them in the form of the Septuagint, but to them the Oral Torah was nothing worth pursuing. We may add that this is why the poem *Maoz Tzur* refers to the Jewish People as “the Children of *Binah*” when describing their victory over the Greeks and the establishment of Chanukah as a special holiday. The Jewish People's commitment to the Oral Torah (*binah*) turned the tide against Hellenism and led to the Hasmonean victory.

To be continued....

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu



COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

COMING BACK TO LIFE EVERY DAY – PART 2

“My G-d, the soul You placed within me is pure. You created it, You fashioned it, You breathed it into me, You safeguard it within me, and eventually You will take it from me, and restore it to me in Time to Come. As long as the soul is within me, I gratefully thank You, Hashem, my G-d and the G-d of my forefathers, Master of all works, L-rd of all souls. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores souls to dead bodies.”

The text of our blessing is acknowledging that our souls belong to G-d. Not just that, but each soul is unique and it has been embedded within us by G-d. Its function is to give us the capability to fuse the disparate concepts of spirituality and physicality together during our time in this physical world. But the blessing also reminds us that our time here is transient and that at some point we will return our precious soul to its Maker. It is as if the blessing is imploring us to use our time wisely and not allow ourselves to become distracted by the physical to the point that we lose sight of our spiritual selves.

The words, “You safeguard it within me” are a stark reminder that the soul is able to coexist with the body only because G-d allows it to. And that we are in this world to fulfill a purpose. Additionally, we have each been allotted a specific amount of time in this world by G-d. The blessing is reminding us that we must endeavor to maximize our lives, so that when the time comes to return our souls to our Maker we are able to do so in the most accomplished way possible.

Therefore, the blessing emphasizes the fundamental idea that we must spend our time in the pursuit of spiritual goals because, ultimately, it is only the spiritual that can make the transition from this world to the next.

In 1920 in communist Russia, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson was hauled up in front of the “All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption” – commonly known as the Cheka, the precursor to the dreaded and loathed GDU – for his religious activities. All religious endeavors were regarded as being anti-establishment, and, therefore, seditious. It was an especially serious accusation, which carried with it a punishment of exile or even execution, depending on the whims of the “judges” who heard the case. When confronted by a “court” that was comprised of rabidly atheist communists, Rabbi Schneerson was not in the least bit intimidated and he would not back down from his intent to continue teaching Torah. He stated, absolutely and clearly, that he would not abandon his goal regardless of any threats they made against him. One of the “judges” was so enraged by his remarks that he drew his pistol and pointed it straight at the Rabbi. “This little toy has made many a man change his mind,” he said with an arrogant sneer. Rabbi Schneerson looked at him and calmly replied, “Your little toy can only intimidate the kind of man who has many gods and but one world. I, however, have only one G-d and two worlds, and, therefore, I am not impressed by your little toy!” *To be continued...*

*Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet on
The Morning Blessings
by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
www.ohr.edu/morning-blessings*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Vayishlach

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav.

That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the Angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together.

Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit milah*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister.

G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Torah portion concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

Vayeshev

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers.

In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the Mashiach.

Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In prison, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Vayishlach

Humanity Prevails

Already in the womb, Yaakov and Esav had drawn out their battle lines. Their vigorous movements in utero, which propelled Rivka to seek answers from G-d, gave expression to a struggle that would endure for the rest of time. Rivka is told *there are two nations in your womb, and two states; they will be different from each other, starting from your innards one state will become mightier than the other, and the mighty one will serve the lesser.*

Rivka is informed that she carries two nations who represent two different social systems. One state will be built on spirit and morality, on man's human soul. The other will be built on cunning and power. Spirit and strength, morality and power will oppose each other. From the day of their birth, the two will go their separate ways. When one state will strengthen, the other will weaken, the scales constantly rising and falling between these two states. All of history is but one struggle to determine who will gain the upper hand: the book or the sword.

In this week's Torah portion, the fateful encounter between the now adult brothers — each with a tribe of wives and children — teaches us more about this struggle. Yaakov has spent the last twenty years raising his children. He is the hard-working family man. Esav has spent this time becoming a political force, the leader of an army, a chief of his tribe. Yaakov represents family life, serving others, and seeing to their welfare and happiness. Esav represents the glitter of political power and might. The struggle between them and the outcome of this struggle foreshadow a raging battle that has haunted humanity for thousands of years. In the words of Rav Hirsch:

Is it sufficient just to be a human being, and are political power and social creativity of no significance unless they lead to the loftiest of all human aspirations, or, on the contrary, does everything that is human in man, in home, and in family life exist only to serve the purposes of political triumph?

The night before this fateful encounter, Yaakov experiences an even more fateful encounter — with his brother's angel. This adversary wrestles with Yaakov the entire night, as Yaakov attempts to protect himself. The angel realizes that he cannot prevail against Yaakov, and he is able only to injure his thigh. The angel then asks to be released, for the dawn is breaking, but Yaakov refuses let him go until the angel blesses him: "You will no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have become the commanding power before G-d and men, since you have prevailed."

The goal of history — realized at daybreak — is the recognition that happiness and progress depend on those principles which Yaakov has lived by throughout the ages. No longer shall he be known as "Yaakov" — he who holds on to the heel — but rather, "Yisrael" — he who shows the world that G-d towers above all.

There is one highlight of the brothers' encounter which hints to Yaakov's ultimate triumph. After sending several delegations with gifts, Yaakov himself sees Esav from the distance, approaching with 400 men. Yaakov arranges his wives and children and goes ahead of his camp to greet his brother and bows to

him. Esav ran to meet Yaakov, *embraced him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him; and they [both] wept*. Here we see that Esav was overcome by genuine human emotion. A kiss can be an affected gesture; not so tears that flow at such moments. The kiss *and* the tears show that Esav too is a grandson of Avraham.

These tears foretell that Esav too will gradually and eventually lay down his sword. Brute force will give way to humaneness. Yaakov will be the one to provide him with the opportunity of showing to what extent the principle of humanness has prevailed in his heart. When the strong respects the rights of the strong, this is merely discretion, but when the strong, as Esav here, throws himself on the shoulders of the weak and casts away the sword of aggression, it is clear that justice and humanness have prevailed in his heart. The *mightier* will serve the *lesser*, as Rivka was told.

▪ Sources: Commentary, Ber. 25:23; 32:8; 32:27-32; 33:4

Vayeshev

Chanukah: The Power of Minority

We Jews represent a mere .02% of the world population. A minute minority indeed. Not for naught has this been the case since the inception of our history. The fact of our minority was revealed as an essential feature of our mission. *Not because you are more numerous than any other peoples did G-d take delight in you and choose you; for you are the smallest among all the peoples.* (Devarim 7:7).

What better time than Chanukah, when we celebrate the victory of the few over the many, to reflect on this unique aspect of our nationhood?

Our minority status begins way back with our forefather Avraham the *Ivri*. He was called *Ivri* – the one from over there – our Sages note, because the entire world stood at one side, championing polytheism, and Avraham stood alone, on the other side, resolute in His monotheistic truth and piety. Within our people too, it was the minority that preserved Hashem's Will against rebellion of the masses. After the debacle of the golden calf, Moshe called out, "Whoever is for G-d, join forces with me!" Only a single tribe, the Levites, responded to the call. Out of the twelve spies sent to assess the Land, only Yehoshua and Calev remained loyal to G-d, standing firm against a panicked people prepared to return to Egypt. The events recorded in the books of the Prophets repeat this phenomenon over and over again. One man, with firm conviction and passionate commitment, stood up for the Law of G-d and saved the people: Gidon, Ovadiah, Eliyahu, Elisha – each resisted the misguided masses and set the nation straight.

In the Chanukah story, this hallmark of our history is most apparent. The nation was rapidly assimilating to the Hellenistic culture surrounding it. One man, Matisyahu, raised five sons so mighty in spirit and so staunch in their commitment that they took on G-d's cause *alone*. It is the victory of these few great and pure souls – the victory won for the loyalty to G-d's Law – that we celebrate on Chanukah.

Our history of three-and-a-half millennia attests time and again to the triumphant perseverance of a tiny, powerless minority. Every page of our history reminds us: the fate of truth and right can never be hopeless, even if their cause is supported only by a minority.

But what *advantage* does a minority confer? Is there no merit and power in numbers?

A minority is likely the most fertile ground for cultivating spiritual truth. A victorious majority will all too often become unfaithful to its own cause. Once its struggle is a matter of the past, the members of the majority lend their minds and spirits to new aspirations. The core values which were once the fuel of its life, now immune from challenge, are left to wither – no further development or nurturance are pursued. A majority often imagines that its cause owes its victory to its numbers, when in fact its numbers were once won on account of its cause. Because the focus is on numbers, a majority is often content to preserve its numbers, or perhaps increase them. But the underlying cause remains just that – underlying. It lies, buried under new ambitions, often of a different character. This may explain why some of the largest religions are underdeveloped theologically.

Not so for the minority. By virtue of its continuing struggle, it perpetually breathes new life into its cause. Survival of the minority depends on its ability to keep awake within it a vibrant spiritual reserve. Because the numbers and power of the majority always beckon, the minority is impelled to immerse itself, over and over again, in the content of its cause. A minority must educate its ranks not only to the truth of its cause, but to the character required to defend its cause. This, in turn, requires that each individual have access to knowledge and research – to make these truths personal ones. There can be no mindless masses if a minority is to survive. Hence, in our Jewish minority, the teaching and dissemination of our cause – the Torah, G-d's truth – occupies the most splendid and prominent place in life. The mind and spirit of the Jew are so immersed in this fountain of truth that there is not one house of study without new insight. The result is a rich and ever-growing reservoir of spiritual thought and strength. And, precisely because membership in the minority often requires sacrifice – material wealth and prosperity usually reside in the majority – the minority will likely be composed of more purely motivated supporters.

The fact of our minority is hardly a cause of despair. Its unique features have enabled us to live a noble existence for millennia. We are assured:

There is still within it a tenth consecrated to G-d; even though it will be destroyed again and again, as the oak and the beech tree whose trunk remains though they shed their leaves, still the trunk will remain holy seed.
(*Yeshayahu* 6:13)

- Sources: *Collected Writings II, Kislev IV*, pp. 233-248



THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 6 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

Generally speaking, there are several separate “Unknown Days” that occur during the month of Iyar. I refer to them as such as they do not seem to have much in the way of observance, and even that observance is minimally observed by much of Klal Yisrael.

Pesach Sheini

The 14th of *Iyar* is dubbed *Pesach Sheini*, “a second *Pesach*.” This commemorates the day when those who were unable to bring the annual *Korban Pesach* (special *Pesach* sacrifice of a Pascal lamb) at its proper time, on *erev Pesach*, were given a second chance to offer this *Korban*. Although technically not considered a true holiday, and despite the fact that it is (astonishingly!) not listed in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days when *Tachanun* is not recited, nevertheless, the custom for many is not to recite *Tachanun* on *Pesach Sheini* in order to ‘tap into’ the merit this particular day had during the times of the Beit Hanikdash. Although the *Pri Megadim* maintains that *Tachanun* should be recited on *Pesach Sheini*, as the original day it commemorates was meant only for individuals in unique circumstances, and its absence of mention in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days that *Tachanun* is not recited speaks volumes – nevertheless, most later authorities rule that one should not say *Tachanun* on this day.

There is an interesting common custom associated with *Pesach Sheini*: eating matzah. But this is not something noticeable in a *shul*, and many simply take it on as an addition for the day, but certainly not as a mandated observance.

BeHa”B

There is a semi-annual period of three days of fasts that many are not aware of: a series of “Days of *Tefilla*” colloquially known as *BeHa”B*. This acronym stands for Monday (*Beit*, referring to the 2nd day of the week), Thursday (*Hei*, the 5th day of the week), and the following Monday (*Beit*). These days are generally observed on the first Monday, Thursday, and Monday following the earliest Rosh Chodesh after *Pesach* (Rosh Chodesh *Iyar*), and likewise after *Succot* (Rosh Chodesh *Marcheshvan*).

The custom of utilizing these specific days for prayer and supplication is already mentioned almost 900 years ago by the *Baalei Tosafot* and its importance is reiterated by the *Tur*. Unbeknownst to many, this practice is actually codified in halacha by the *Shulchan Aruch* as a proper *minhag* custom.

Whose Minhag Is It, Anyway?

Both the Tur and the Rema refer to *BeHa”B* as a German-French custom, and the *Shulchan Gavoah* (and seconded by the *Kaf Hachaim*) writes that this was not the *minhag* in Spain, implying that Sefardim are not beholden to keep *BeHa”B*. Although the *Shulchan Aruch* dedicates an entire, albeit brief, chapter to *BeHa”B* in Orach Chaim 492, in other writings he refers to public fasting on *BeHa”B* as an “Ashkenazic *minhag*.”

Yet, it is not just the general Sefardic populace who does not recite *BeHa”B*. Already in his time the Taz noted that even among Ashkenazic communities *BeHa”B* observance was not widespread. But, nowadays, among many Yeshiva communities, and especially in Eretz Yisrael, reciting *BeHa”B* twice annually is de rigueur.

Why Now?

The reason most commonly mentioned by the *Poskim* for these days of prayer following the holidays of Pesach and Succot is that over the extended holidays, when there is a mitzvah of feasting and *simcha*, it is more likely that people may have “stumbled” in some area due to improper behavior and inadvertent sin – and *BeHa”B* is meant to help rectify any possible offense. This idea is based on *Iyov* (in Ch. 1:5) who would offer sacrifices after “*Yamei Mishteh*,” or “Days of Feasting.” These sins might be due to a variety of probable offenses, including: mingling at a festive meal or even at a Torah lecture in the Shul (!), Yom Tov and Chol Hamoed related transgressions, *Chillul Hashem*, or the overabundance of merriment and gastronomical pleasures.

Other explanations offered to explain why *BeHa”B* was established include:

1. To entreat Hashem to strengthen our bodies, especially at the time of changing seasons when many are likely to get ill.
2. To beseech Hashem that we should have abundant harvests after Pesach and plentiful rains after Succot.
3. To commemorate Queen Esther’s original 3-day fast (which actually was at Pesach time, and not Purim time). This is pushed off until the first opportunity after Chodesh Nissan. (The *Taanis Esther* that we observe before Purim is not really due to Esther’s actual fast as recorded in the Megillah, but rather to commemorate that when the Jews went to war against the anti-Semites of their day, they fasted.)

Yet, interestingly, although *BeHa”B* is traditionally meant to be a fast day, still, very few actually fast due to the fact that in our generations people are considered weaker. Instead, we make do with *Selichot* supplication prayers (and perhaps words of *Mussar*), with the majority also reciting *Avinu Malkeinu*. This rationale is cited in many authoritative *sefarim*. This certainly holds true with *BeHa”B*, as it is based on a *minhag* and not an actual Biblical source.

Monday, Thursday, Prayer Days...

Monday and Thursday are considered especially potent days for prayer, as Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah on a Thursday and returned with it on a Monday. A mnemonic to showcase this is the first verse read on a public fast day *Haftara* (Yeshaya 55:6), “*Dirshu Hashem **B’H**matzo*” – “Seek out Hashem when He is to be found.” The letters *Beit* and *Hei* show that an auspicious time when Hashem may be found is on Monday and Thursday. Therefore, Mondays and Thursdays are preferable for fasting and prayer. For whichever reason *BeHa”B* was established, we certainly should not let this golden opportunity for *tefilla* pass us by.

But what happens when there is a convergence of Pesach Sheini and *BeHa”B*? During this exceptional year, 5781, the third and final day of the “Chodesh Iyar *BeHa”B*” is on Pesach Sheini. So what does Klal Yisrael do? Which holiday do we observe?

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To be continued...

Written l’zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzecha l’yeshua sheleimah teikif u’miyad.

This author wishes to acknowledge Rabbi Shea Linder’s excellent article on this topic.



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WEEKLY PARASHA

By Rabbi Dov Linzer

Norman and Tova Bulow Rosh HaYeshiva Chair

Vayishlach | December 4, 2020 | 19 Kislev 5781

Catching Our (Collective) Breath

Sometimes we need to just stop and catch our breath.

Esav moves with his 400 men towards Yaakov and his family, and Yaakov fears for all of their lives. Through a combination of stratagem and diplomacy, Yaakov emerges from the encounter safe and unharmed and is now prepared to continue to Canaan. And yet, the verse tells us that he did not go there straightaway, but that he stopped in a place called Sukkot. “וַיָּבֹן לוֹ בַּיִת; וַלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֹכֶת, עַל-כֵּן קָרָא שְׁם-הַמָּקוֹם סֹכֶת” And Yaakov journeyed to Sukkot, and built for himself a house, and made huts for his cattle; therefore the name of the place is called Sukkot.” ([Gen 33:17](#)). It is only after this stop that Yaakov travels to Shechem in the land of Canaan. The stay in Sukkot seems quite irrelevant to the larger narrative of Yaakov’s journey home. What, then, is the purpose of mentioning it altogether?

This question is sharpened by another story in which a people – the descendants of Yaakov – narrowly escape harm, and where they too stopped in a place called Sukkot. At the moment of the exodus from Egypt, the verse tells us “וַיֵּסְעוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִרַעְמֶסֶס,”

And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Sukkot, about six hundred thousand men on foot, beside children.” ([Ex. 12:37](#)). The parallel of the two places called Sukkot, and their roles as stopping places before the journey continues to Canaan, can surely not be just a coincidence.

What’s more, some of our rabbis go out of their way to underscore the religious significance of this place. According to them, the verse that is the basis for the mitzvah of sitting in sukkot on the holiday of Sukkot – “כִּי בְסֻכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל,”

For I have caused the Children of Israel to dwell in sukkot when I took them out of the land of Egypt” ([Lev. 23:43](#))- refers not to our living in huts, but to the fact that God brought us from Rameses to a place called Sukkot. Why was arriving at such a place religiously meaningful and what does it have to do with dwelling in huts?

A sukkah, a hut, is a symbol of protection. While not as

protective as a house, it is built solely for that purpose. A classic sukkah is made by someone who is out in the fields, guarding the crops or watching the flock, and who constructs a lean-to to provide him shade and protection from the beating sun and the harsh winds. It is not a home – it is not a place to raise a family or set down roots. It is a shield, a screen. It is something that says: you are safe, you are protected.

In the two stories of Yaakov and of the Children of Israel, we see people running away from a challenging and potentially violent situation who feel the need to pause, to stop even briefly, before returning on their journey. They need to be held and protected. They have to be comforted and told “You can calm down now, everything is ok, you’re out of the trouble.” Only once they have taken a breath and regrouped, given themselves time to transition and reorient, can they then proceed on to the land of Canaan. To rush from one experience to the other without stepping back and reflecting would not only be harmful to them and their own psyche and emotional well-being, it would also be harmful to their success in the journey to which they are about to return.

Thank God, we are now seeing the end to this long period of Coronavirus in the offing. At this time, we have to ask ourselves: what is our Sukkot? Where are we going to dwell, be held, and feel safe, before transitioning back to a life that looks like it once did? Will we give ourselves the opportunity to step back, to think about the last year, to reflect on its challenges and how we navigated them, the joys, the difficulties, the things we want to remember and those that we would rather forget? Will we ask ourselves: what were the lessons that we learned that we want to hold onto and apply as we go forward? What are the relationships that we want to continue to nurture? If we can spend a little time tarrying in our Sukkot, we will be able to fully venture forth, with confidence, growth and security, into the larger world, with all of its new challenges and opportunities.

Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School

What Does Tein Tal u'Matar Have to Do with Julius Caesar and the Secular Date?

This Saturday night, December 5th, we will begin to add “וְתֵן טַל” (וְיִמְסַר לְבָרְכָהּ) the prayer for rain in its right time, into our weekday *Shmoneh Esrei*. The key halakhot that one must know regarding this are as follows: if one forgets to add this prayer in during בְּרִךְ עֲלֵינוּ, they may add it in later during שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ. If one forgets to add it in שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ, they must go back to בְּרִךְ עֲלֵינוּ, as long as one hasn't concluded *Shmoneh Esrei*. If one has concluded *Shmoneh Esrei* and not said it, then *Shmoneh Esrei* must be repeated. If one isn't sure if she said it or not, she must go back for the first 30 days of the addition. After that, we assume that she has said it out of habit.

This is almost the only halakha which is connected to a secular date – the evening following December 4th in a normal year or December 5th this year (as December 4th is Shabbat and this addition is only added to the weekday prayers). Why is the reason for this linkage to a secular date, and why December 4th in particular?

The answer starts with the Talmud. This addition is made as a special prayer for rain, which was much needed when Jews were farmers and their lives revolved around agriculture. The Talmud tells us that in Israel, the time that the rain was needed was a few weeks after Sukkot. But in Babylon, the correct time for rain was 60 days after the *'tekufa* – autumnal equinox.' The autumnal equinox falls out around September 21st, and 60 days after that is November 21st. So far, so good. But then how do we get to December 4th?

A prior and related question to ask is – why do we even care when Babylon needs the rain, if we are not living in there? Rosh, the 13th century Spanish halakhist, said as much, arguing that this is not an instance of ruling like the Babylonian Talmud, it is simply a question of when you need rain where you are living. The Jews of Spain needed rain much earlier, and there were times where they would fast and pray for rain weeks before they began saying בְּרִךְ עֲלֵינוּ. Rosh fulminated against this and called on the people to start adding this phrase at an earlier date, yet his protests fell on deaf ears. The people's practice remained, and our halakha is, that one adds *vin tal u'matar* based solely on the date that rain is needed in Babylon! Rosh's position only finds echo in the ruling that if a person accidentally added בְּרִךְ עֲלֵינוּ earlier than indicated, they need not repeat *Shmoneh Esrei* if they made this addition during a time when rain is normally needed in their country. The upshot of this is simply that the Talmudic date stuck, even when it stopped carrying the original meaning.

The story about December 4th is a similar one. It is first necessary to understand the difference between the Julian and Gregorian calendars. The Julian calendar, created by Julius Ceaser around the year 46 BCE, understood that a solar year was 365 and $\frac{1}{4}$ days long, and had leap years every 4 years. In the late 16th century, however, Pope Gregory realized that a solar year is in fact slightly shorter than 365.25 days, and that to have the calendar in sync with the actual solar year, it would be necessary to cut three additional days every 400 years. He thus modified the calendar so that there would be no leap year on a year divisible by 100 (e.g., 1700, 1800, 1900) but that there *would* be a leap year on a year divisible by 400 (e.g., 2000). So, in the year 1700, someone following the Julian calendar would have a Feb. 29, while someone following the Gregorian calendar would go straight to March 1. Thus, over 400 years, those following the Gregorian calendar were 3 calendar days ahead of those following the Julian one. It is for this reason that October Revolution in Russia occurred in November – at that time Eastern Europe [being Eastern Orthodox] did not accept Pope Gregory [a Catholic] so while it was October in Russia on the Julian calendar, it

was November in the rest of the world, which was following the Gregorian calendar.

By the time of Pope Gregory, and the day loss based on the old calendar had added up to about 10 days. In order to realign the calendar to the solar cycle, the Gregorian calendar took a 10 day leap – people went to sleep on Thursday night October 4th, 1582, and woke up on Friday morning, October 15th 1582 (talk about changing the clocks!).

In the present day, 2000 years from the time of Julius Caesar, we are about 15 days off from the original Julian calendar (5 units of 400 years, 3 days per 400 years). Now, the Talmud's date for saying בְּרִךְ עֲלֵינוּ was based on the Julian calendar. So, add 15 days to Nov. 21, and you discover that Nov. 21, Julian = December 4, Gregorian. Although the Gregorian calendar accurately reflects the seasons, we continue to recite *vin tal u'matar* based on the seasons as defined by the less accurate Julian calendar.

What all of this shows is that, at times, even as the world around us changes, we hold onto our old ways of doing things. We left Babylon to live in Spain, France and Germany, and yet we would say בְּרִךְ עֲלֵינוּ based on the time that rain is needed in Babylon. We corrected our calendar to be in sync with the solar year, yet our prayer remains anchored to the older calendar.

Now, there is something very beautiful about this practice – about traditional Judaism holding fast to its venerable traditions even as the world around us changes. Still, one can assume that what made that more possible in this case is that fact that we see the issue of the date for adding בְּרִךְ עֲלֵינוּ as a purely technical one, a question which doesn't affect our lives very much; we aren't farmers and we don't pray for rain to sustain our livelihoods. We can imagine, however, that if we had continued to be farmers and need rain at a different time, that the opinion of Rosh would have prevailed. Namely, that people would have adapted to the current realities and started saying the *bracha* when they needed it where they lived, and according to the calendar that accurately reflected the seasons.

This is the challenge that we are now faced with. We've lived now with the Coronavirus for the better part of a year. With a vaccine on the horizon, we can pray that we will be returning in the not-too-distant future to something that is akin to our old reality. Akin, but unquestionably different. We will be living, even then, in a new reality. How will we respond when the issues are bigger than technical questions of an addition to the *Shmoneh Esrei*? Will we continue to use the Julian calendar even then? Or will we adopt the principle of the Rosh and learn how to adapt to our new realities, remaining all the time deeply rooted in our traditions and halakhic commitments? For the foreseeable future we will continue say בְּרִךְ עֲלֵינוּ on the night of December 4th (or 5th), until such a time as Jews return to farming. Yet as we think about the reality we are in and the changed reality we will be arriving at, let us take seriously Rosh's position and the challenge he presents to us all: to simultaneously hold onto tradition as it was and to respond to the world as it now is and how it has become.



For more of Rabbi Linzer on the parsha, tune in to Parsha in Progress, where he discusses and debates the parsha with noted author Abigail Pogrebin.

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