

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his 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 archives.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Aviv Atzili, his wife, two children, and nephew were among the initial hostages from Kibbutz Nir Oz, abducted on October 7. In the past few days, Liat (originally feared dead) and the three children have been released, but Aviv ben Telma is still a hostage. We continue to pray for Aviv's speedy release and give thanks for the release of the rest of his family.

What happens when Jews have no other country to welcome them in case of attacks from an Anti-Semitic country? Study the story of Greek Jews under Nazi attack during World War II. Dr. Michael Matsas has spent much of his adult lifetime documenting this story. For the horrifying story, go to <https://illusionofsafetygreece.com/> and read his absorbing story. For a more complete presentation, read *The Illusion of Safety: The Story of the Greek Jews During the Second World War*, available from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Greece during World War II is one example of why we Jews and the world need a safe Israel.

As the Torah continues to focus on Yaakov's life, we continue to face danger. The struggles of Yaakov and his family preview problems that Jews have faced over centuries and still face today.

According to news reports, the hostage/prisoner exchange has so far led to approximately a hundred Israeli and foreign hostages (from up to a dozen different countries) being released – in exchange for three times as many terrorists released from Israeli jails. An editorial in the Wall St. Journal on November 30 briefly discussed the criminal acts and terrorist affiliations of some of the thugs released to exchange for hostages so far. Also on November 30, a Hamas terrorist, ignoring the pause in hostilities during the hostage/prisoner exchange, killed three Israelis and wounded six more people in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, anti-Israel rallies continue daily, especially in New York. Evil is active in our midst.

In my comments last week, I discussed the insights of Beth Lesch from alephbeta.org that demonstrate that Esav as an adult reformed and lived in peace with Yaakov. While living in peace with each other, the brothers did not engage socially. According to Midrash, earlier in their lives, when Yaakov left Canaan for Charan (Lavan's home), Esav sent his son Eliphaz to kill Yaakov. Because Yaakov and Eliphaz were friends, Yaakov told him to take his money and say that he had killed Yaakov (because a man without money is as good as dead). Unfortunately, many of Esav's descendants turned against B'Nai Yisrael. Eliphaz and his concubine Timna sired Amalek (Esav's grandson). Amalek and his descendants devoted their lives to attacking Jews, focusing on the weak and needy, and trying to wipe out all the Jews. (Haman, for example, was a descendant of Amalek.)

In more recent times, Edom evolved into Rome. The Greeks, Syrians, and Romans passed laws preventing Jews from bris and Kashrui. After the Romans became Christians, many European countries participated in Crusades (with murder of Jews as a highlight on the way to the holy land). In later generations, Edom/Rome practiced forced conversion and expelled Jews who would not convert. More recently, several European countries have tried to outlaw bris (circumcision) and Kosher slaughter of meat. In many parts of Europe today, Jews do not feel safe being identified as Jewish, and immigration to Israel from Europe is very large despite danger from Hamas and other terrorist groups.

Since the Hamas attack on Israel (October 7), anti-Semitism has become politically correct in almost all parts of the world. Rabbi Marc Angel examines how wickedness parades as justice. The Nazis strictly observed the laws of their country. The problem is that under Nazi control, Germany and its captured countries passed laws requiring active discrimination, isolation, and attacks on all Jews. After World War II, Nazis brought to trial used as a defense the statement that they were following the laws of their country. The international courts that tried the Nazis did not accept this defense. The UN, an international organization that promotes hatred of Jews and Israel all over the world, passes resolutions that are classic examples of immorality, injustice, and corruption – under a mandate to care for human rights. The Nazis and UN follow the majority interpretation of Yaakov's wrestling opponent – Esav's angel – the night before his reunion with Esav after an absence of more than twenty years. Rabbi Angel warns us of wicked individuals who come dressed as pious individuals.

Rabbi Aron Moss (Chabad) observes that those who hate others actually hate themselves. One root of the struggle Jews have living surrounded by enemies is how to deal with them. Shimon and Levi argued to Yaakov that they could only live safely among Canaanite nations if the non-Jews respected us and feared our anger. Yaakov hoped for a civilized relationship of peace with the other nations – something that did not work for Avraham or Yitzhak (both of whom ultimately had to move away from Avimelech and other nations to obtain peace) – and certainly has failed with Hamas and many Arab countries.

Rabbi Fohrman also ties Jews' struggles with other nations into the theme of family relationships. Throughout Sefer Bereishis, each generation features struggles among favored and disfavored wives, struggles that continue to later generations as favored and disfavored children struggle to find a positive relationship. Over time, the struggles of children become struggles of nations and various religions. These struggles continue in Israel today. How many current or future terrorists should Israel be willing to let out of jail to trade for hostages in Gaza? Families of hostages are likely to give different answers than families who do not have hostages but live near border communities and thus face higher than average danger from future terrorist attacks.

The struggles of our ancestors preview issues that we face in modern times. Anti-Semites are all over the world. Some are active and obvious in their feelings. Others seem friendly now, but they or their descendants may emerge with hatred in the future. A famous book from around half a century ago stated, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. Today, the book might say, *Your Rose Garden Will Always Have Thorns*.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Aviv ben Telma (hostage in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivya, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Vayishlach: A Spell of Brotherliness

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5771

Then he (Yakov) went on ahead of them and bowed earthward seven times until he reached him until his brother. Esau ran toward him, embraced him, fell on his neck, and kissed him; then they wept. (Breishis 33:3-4)

Yakov and Eisav wept and hugged like real friendly brothers! How did that happen? Did they suddenly become fast friends? Why did Yakov bow exactly seven times?

Here's a neat Gematria (look at letters as numbers)! Yitzchok, the father of both Yakov and Eisav, has the numerical value of 208. (Yud-10+Tzadik-90+Ches-8+Kuf-90=208) 208 is 7x's HASHEM's (26) Holy Name. (Yud-10+Heh-5+Vuv-6+Heh-5=26x8=208) Yakov adds up to 182 which = 7x26. (Yud-10+Ayin-70+Kuf-90+Beis-2=182/26=7) Eisav's name has the value of 376. (Ayin-70+Sin-300+Vuv-6=376) The word for spiritual contamination which is Tame' equals 50. (Tes-9+Mem-40+Alef-1=50) Seven times Tame' (50) is 350 plus 26 (THE NAME OF HASHEM) is 376. Now we can see that one part of holiness was directed to Eisav but it was covered with layers of corruption. Yakov who had seven part of holiness from his father bowed seven times. Each bowing penetrated or removed some outer layer until he reached him until he reached his brotherly point deep inside. Then they hugged and kissed!

How long did it last? Maybe not long at all! The rage may even have been present at the time of the kiss, but Yakov's multipronged strategy 1) preparing for the eventuality of war, 2) praying, 3) sending gifts, and 4) exercising extreme humility in front of him to shave away his ego at its desired effect. "Rabbi Shimon says, "It's known Hallacha, a Law of Life, that Eisav hates, Yakov, but at that moment his mercy awake and he really did kiss him wholeheartedly."

What are we to learn from all this? In either case, and in the best of scenarios, the love fest only lasted for a moment and Yakov managed to sidestep danger that day. That was his sole goal. Not to unite or reunite with Eisav but just not to be harmed by him and to escape whole!

There's an old time story about a Polish Jew Moishe who was living under the oppressive rule of a cruel porritz – landlord. The economy shrunk and Moishe like many others found it difficult to make a living. The porritz unyieldingly insisted upon his monthly rent. Moishe fell farther and farther behind. The porritz grew very impatient. The porritz came to Moishe's house and threatened him that if he did not pay the full amount by Wednesday, Moishe would be put into jail and his family would be made to suffer. Moishe knew his threat was real. Monday afternoon, in an act of desperation, he piled his family and all his possessions onto his wagon and he began to flee from home. On the single road leaving his village Moishe met the porritz himself.

Looking at Moishe with curiosity he asked where he was going. Moishe quickly and nervously told the porritz that they were going away for a Jewish holiday. Looking quizzically at Moishe, the porritz queried, "Which Jewish holiday?" to which Moishe answered, "Zeman Pleitaseinu" (Literally: The Time of Our escape.) Moishe edged by and the porritz continued on his way into town.

When he arrived in town he was surprised to find everyone going about their weekday business. The porritz asked one fellow, "Why aren't you getting ready for the Jewish holiday?" The man answered that he did not know of any Jewish holiday at this time of the year -- which touched off his suspicion. The porritz told him that Moishe was celebrating something called, "Zeman Pleitaseinu." "Ahhhhhhh," sighed the Jewish peasant, "that holiday is different than other Jewish holidays. Other Jewish holidays we all celebrate together but Zeman Pleitaseinu is different. Everyone celebrates it at a different time. This time it's Moishe's turn. Next it may be mine! Everyone has their own special time to celebrate, "Zeman Pleitaseinu!"

Yakov dodged a bullet when he skirted by Eisav. His strategy worked just long enough to escape, as it would for many generations, charming with a spell of brotherliness.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5771-vayishlach/>

When Wickedness Parades as Justice: Thoughts for Parashat Vayishlah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson took leave from the Court to serve as the U.S.'s chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals. He wrote that *"the most odious of all oppressions are those which mask as justice."* He sharply criticized the role of judges and legal systems which legitimized tyranny and oppression.

Judge Jackson understood that the atrocities of the Nazis were all purported to be *"legal."* Laws were passed depriving Jews of all rights. Laws were passed to round up, imprison, and murder Jews. All those who participated in these heinous actions were following the law of the land! The problem, though, was that the law itself was starkly immoral; the government that promulgated murderous laws was itself evil; the *"legal system"* which allowed such *"laws"* to be passed and implemented was the epitome of injustice, cruelty, and wickedness.

Moral people should have denounced such *"laws"* and should have resisted the *"legal system."* If enough good people had risen against the tyrannical laws and the murderous Nazi regime, millions of lives would have been saved. In our times, we also witness tendencies to legitimize immoral behavior by means of declaring such evil to be *"legal."*

The United Nations is perhaps the world's most nefarious example of this tendency. The UN routinely passes resolutions condemning Israel – not because these condemnations relate to moral and sound judgment, but because a malicious cabal of Israel-hating nations muster the majority to pass anti-Israel resolutions. There isn't even the faintest element of fairness to these resolutions, not the slightest effort to understand Israel's position, not a word of condemnation of groups

and nations who attack Israel in every way they can. The UN espouses resolutions and policies that are dressed in the garb of “*international law*” when in fact these resolutions and policies are classic examples of immorality, injustice and corruption of the value of law.

It's not just the UN that tends to cloak immorality in the dress of justice. There are groups of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic people who seek to undermine Israel; they insidiously pose as being interested in human rights, as guardians of international law. Yet, they operate with malice toward Israel and perpetrate the vilest propaganda against her; they support boycotts of Israel; they constantly rebuke Israel for any real or imagined shortcoming. For these people, justice is not just at all; rather they pervert justice to further their own unjust and immoral goals.

Many seemingly good-hearted people get swept up in the “*politically correct*” anti-Israel bashing. They are gullible in the extreme, and don't have the time or moral courage to try to find out actual facts. These people will condemn Israel for causing pain to Arabs in Gaza, but will never raise a word of protest when thousands of missiles are fired into Israel from Gaza. They will condemn Israel's intransigence, but will never call to account Arab and Muslim leaders who unashamedly call for the destruction of Israel. Thinking that they are standing for “*human rights*” and for “*international law*,” these people are in fact accomplices in immorally seeking to deprive Jews of their rights. They foster “*laws*” and “*resolutions*” and “*policies*” that are in essence criminal, unjust, immoral.

This week's Torah portion tells of Jacob's fight with a mysterious stranger/angel. A Midrash identifies Jacob's antagonist as the angel of Esav dressed in the garb of a rabbinic scholar. This Midrash is alluding to the dangers caused by those who are wicked but who dress in pious attire. These hypocritical individuals put on the external features of righteousness in order to disarm their opponents. They feign to be nice friendly people, concerned for law and decency; but this is simply a ruse to lull the opponents into complacency. Once they have seized their prey, they are mercilessly destructive.

We must always beware of enemies who declare their hateful intentions. But we must also be wary — very wary — of those who pretend to be upright citizens, loyal friends, and models of piety — who are in fact devising nefarious plots to undermine their victims. Justice Jackson believed that “*the most odious of all oppressions are those which mask as justice.*” We might add that among the most odious of human beings are those who have the wickedness of Esav but who hypocritically wear the mask of piety and innocence.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

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 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 during its year end fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/when-wickedness-parades-justice-thoughts-parashat-vayishlah>

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..

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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

Chanuka and Vayishlach: Letting Go of the Trinkets

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

We all know that Teshuva is important. The Talmud (Pesachim 54) tells us that Teshuva was created before the world was created; it was a prerequisite. After all, since the world was created to allow free choice, it makes sense that we sometimes make mistakes. Teshuva is the process of reconciliation that allows repair in relationships, most commonly in our relationship with Hashem.

The concept of Teshuva or reconciliation takes on a whole new meaning when it comes as part of a grand homecoming or special event. In this week's Parsha, Yakov prepared to return to the holy place that would become the Beis HaMikdash. He tells his family and all those who are with him, *"Discard the alien gods that are with you, cleanse yourselves... Let us go up to Beis-el. I will make there an altar to G-d who answered me in my time of distress."*

As we reflect on Yakov's statement, we realize that during the time that they lived in exile they had accumulated certain less-than-noble items. There were trinkets, perhaps gifts from the nations they encountered, and booty taken from Shechem. Yakov did not say that they worshiped these silly things. Yet these items were not becoming of them. A higher standard was expected as they prepared to come Home — as they prepared for a loving and heartfelt thanksgiving audience with Hashem.

In our time the Jewish people are in a process preparing for a grand audience with Hashem. It has been a long and challenging exile, but things are changing. We wait for Moshiach, as Jews have waited for centuries. But in our time, Hashem, in his kindness, has relocated a substantial part of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisroel, and has blessed us with phenomenal success. The Jewish people are building Torah momentum in all kinds of ways — from full time Kollelim to Jews in the home or workplace who study Torah and strive to implement its wisdom. We are, as Yakov was, in a stage of preparation. At such a time, Yakov taught, it is appropriate to strive for a higher standard. The message of Yakov calls to us, *"I know you don't worship these trinkets. But as we prepare for the Audience, they are unbecoming of you."*

There are many examples of this; I hope that each beloved reader will apply the idea appropriately in his or her personal life. But I can share some thoughts. Consider a smartphone. Even when it is properly filtered, used responsibly, and totally clean, somehow an accumulation of trinkets known as apps seems to develop. They may be games that were added when a family member was in the hospital, or some must-have news apps that a friend recommended. There might be nothing wrong. But gads of apps as we prepare for Moshiach just might be a bit unbecoming. It might be time, as we prepare for the Audience, to take the time and delete some.

If you are simply on email, there are email groups that might not need your continued subscription. As one mentor exclaimed, *"Even if there is nothing wrong, if you keep up with all those emails, when do you have time for family and Torah study?"*

Likewise, as Jews — People of the Book — we sometimes accumulate books, magazines, and newspapers, which might not all be included in the pride and joy of what we stand for. The unique Teshuva preparation before our Audience, calls upon us to get rid of some of the trinkets that we have accumulated.

It is said that the Chofetz Chayim had a Moshiach bag, a bag that he packed so that when Moshiach came he would be able to just grab that travel bag and be ready. Sometimes, when my children have a Shabbaton overnight, they pack their blankets and pillows in garbage bags and leave them by the front door as they await their ride. I always caution them that they should not seal the garbage bags so well that someone might not realize they contain their bedding. I am concerned

both that the bedding shouldn't be accidentally thrown out, and likewise, that they shouldn't accidentally take a bag of garbage with them thinking that it is part of their travel essentials.

The times we live in are times to prepare for our audience with Moshiach. There are many parts to that preparation. Themes of Teshuva and reconciliation are always good. But removing from our midst the trinkets that others worship is a unique facet of the preparation that we do as we prepare to ascend to the house of Hashem.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Vayishlach -- Respecting The Disrespectable

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

In the beginning of this week's Parsha, Yaakov reaches out to Eisav. He sends messengers to Eisav, updating him on Yaakov's life, telling Eisav of Yaakov's hard work and success in Charan and that he now wishes to make peace with Eisav. The Torah records the speech Yaakov sent to Eisav, and how Yaakov humbled himself by saying, *"So shall you say to my master, Eisav, 'So says your servant, Yaakov.'" (Bereishis 32:5)*

The commentaries discuss why Yaakov would fake humility and servitude before Eisav. Rabbeinu Bachye (ibid.) explains that Yaakov felt it was a matter of Derech Eretz, because Eisav was a king in Se'ir. Though Yaakov was respected, he was not himself in a position of power. He therefore felt it was appropriate to humble himself before Eisav and to refer to Eisav as his master. Rabbeinu Bachye notes that we learn from here that one should always give honor to a king. He describes how Rabi Yehuda Hanasi had once sent a letter to the Roman Emperor Antoninus and, following Yaakov's example, he began the letter by saying, *"So says your servant, Yehuda."* The Emperor Antoninus replied, *"Are you my servant? If only, I should be your servant in the World to Come!"* Rabi Yehuda Hanasi explained, *"I am not greater than my grandfather (Yaakov) and you are not less than your grandfather (Eisav)."* Although, Rabi Yehuda Hanasi was a greater human being than Antoninus, Antoninus was still an emperor, and Rabi Yehuda Hanasi had to show respect for the emperor.

Rabbeinu Bachye then adds a surprising nuance. He says that Yaakov would only refer to Eisav as his master when he was talking to Eisav. When he was talking to anyone else about Eisav, he would never show honor towards Eisav. (When Yaakov said, *"So shall you say to my master, Eisav"* this was also part of the speech. He was instructing the messengers that if anyone should ask them where they were going, they should tell them, *"To my master, Eisav."*)

This drastic change in Yaakov is difficult to understand. If Yaakov was insistent to give honor to Eisav when Eisav was present, then why was it so terrible to give honor when Eisav was not around?

In most circumstances, when we give honor to people, we are doing so because they deserve it. When we give them honor, this inspires us to be more like them and enables us to learn from their ways. Yaakov understood that this could never be true for Eisav. Yaakov was one of the most righteous people to ever live, while Eisav was one of the most wicked. As the Emperor Antoninus said to Rabi Yehuda Hanasi, *"If only I should be your servant in the world to come!"* It was, therefore, inappropriate for Yaakov to humble himself towards Eisav and conduct himself as though Eisav were somehow greater than him.

Nonetheless, Yaakov did show that honor when he was dealing with Eisav, simply because Eisav was a king. When dealing with a king, it is a matter of Derech Eretz to recognize their position. Although, I may feel this is one of the most disreputable people I know, G-d has decided – for whatever reason - to make them royalty, and I must accept G-d's decision. I must deal with them as royalty, even if they are not truly respectable.

Often in life we may find ourselves in circumstances we do not like and do not understand. We look at the people around us and wish other people were playing those roles in our lives. One aspect of proper Derech Eretz is to accept the reality we are given, to recognize and understand that every element of the world we live in was designed by G-d. Every individual in my life was put in their position because that is where G-d wants them to be. Be it a king, or a boss and a neighbor, G-d designated them for their role in my life. It is my responsibility to accept G-d's decision and treat them as their position deserves.

At the same time, just as Yaakov would never show honor to Eisav when he wasn't dealing with him, I too must be careful to remember my own morals; who I am and whom I want to be.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Vayishlach

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Note: Rabbi Hefter is traveling and unable to send me a Dvar Torah this week. As with all Israelis, Rabbi Hefter's first priority is the safety of his family and students in Israel. Please think of the Har-el Beit Midrash for donations during this time of war against our people.]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Face It!

On Apology and Forgiveness

By R. Haim Ovadia

[Ed. Note: *Rabbi Ovadia presents a novel and fascinating interpretation of Yaakov's struggle with an other-worldly creature the night before encountering his brother after an absence of more than twenty years. The Torah is unclear about who struggled with Yaakov – a man, Esav's angel, or some other creature. Rabbi Ovadia's interpretation is new to me, very modern, and compelling. For a very traditional view, from a hundred years ago, see Rav Kooh's Dvar Torah, below.*

Many people)particularly men(often find themselves in a state of confusion and bewilderment when other people)particularly their wives(recall incidents or offenses from times immemorial. "I can't believe that you still bring this up," a husband might say, "I thought we put it to rest long ago."

"I didn't put it to rest, you did" would be the answer. The perplexed husband tries to reconstruct events. His wife was upset because _____, then they didn't speak for a _____, he then bought her _____, and took her to _____, and since then everything was going smooth. Is he missing something here?)besides the blanks, of course.(

Yes. What is missing is an apology. He might not fully understand it, but he never apologized. True, he indicated that he was sorry, and acted in a way that showed his concern for his wife and his desire that their relationships will be restored to normality, but he never verbalized the words: "I am sorry for..." His wife preferred not to continue fighting at the time or perhaps accepted his actions as a semi-apology, but deep inside her a grudge remained, a feeling that the indirect message "I am sorry" could be interpreted in several ways. Is he genuinely sorry for being a jerk? Maybe he is sorry that I am so sensitive and that I take everything to heart and that other people would think that this whole thing is ridiculous and just because he loves me)or so he claims(he apologizes to make me feel good. Or maybe he feels uncomfortable with the current state of affairs and wants to put it behind him for totally selfish reasons.

The scenario described here involves a husband and wife, but such situations play out daily among siblings, friends, co-workers, and even governments. The biblical saga of the struggle between Yaakov and Esav provides another angle to the concept of incomplete or indirect apology, that of a person who goes through the process of apology and forgiveness internally, positioning himself as both the offender and the offended. After he emerges from the process innocent or not guilty, he proceeds to appease the person he offended, without feeling the need to issue a genuine apology.

The Torah highlights the problematic nature of Yaakov's "apology" by using the key word פָּנִים, which in Hebrew means face. It also means "ahead of" or "in front of," both originally in the sense of being in front of one's face or an extension of one's personality. The word is also closely related to the word פְּנִים, meaning inside. Here is an excerpt of the story of Yaakov's encounter with Esav, with the keywords in bold print:

*Yaakov sent messengers ahead]of his **face**[... he told his servants, pass ahead]of my **face**[... he thought "I will appease him]lit. wipe his **face** clean[with the offering sent ahead]of my **face**[, and then I will see his **face**,]this way[he might forgive me"] lit. will raise my **face** – the person who apologizes is usually bent down, and upon forgiveness is allowed to raise his head[.*

*The offering went ahead]of his **face**[, and he slept in the camp that night...]after he struggled with an anonymous attacker and persevered[Yaakov called the place **Face of God**, for]he said["I have seen God **face to face** and my soul was saved." The sun rose for him when he passed the **Face of God**, limping... Yaakov said]to Esav[: "please do not]turn down my offering[for I have seen your **face** as seeing the **face** of God and you forgave me..."]lit. wanted me[.*

The thirteen occurrences of the word פָּנִים tell us that Yaakov dreaded the encounter not because of the physical threat to his life, but rather because it was the first time, after running away and hiding for many years, that he is going to confront his past actions, face to face. His offerings are sent as an extension of his personality, of his face, and he wants to tell Esav that he is sorry. He seems to admit that what he did was not right, but at night he is embroiled in a subconscious battle between his own two faces, one representing him and the other his brother, Esav. The battle was a vision and not a reality, and Yaakov was not fighting the guardian angel of Esav but his own representation of his brother. The dreamtime struggle reveals his inner fears and tells us that he constantly doubted his actions.

At a certain point, when the struggle is so intense that it causes Yaakov real physical pain, Yaakov has an epiphany. His years of exile and suffering have expiated for his sin, and so he emerges victorious from the conflict and his brother must forgive him. In his dream, he gives himself an approval for the blessing he took from his brother and he renames himself Israel.

The possibility that it was Yaakov, and not God, who chose to change his name is supported by the fact that his old name, Yaakov, is still used throughout the bible, appearing 245 more times. That is despite the statement of the attacker: "*your name shall be Yaakov no more.*" In addition, seeing the struggle and the approval of the blessing an internal one refutes the argument that God Himself approved of Yaakov's actions.

On the following day, Yaakov faces the real Esav. He is servile and polite, even obsequious, but he never apologizes. He tells Esav: "*Please accept my offering, for I have seen your face as the face of God, and you have accepted me.*" He is not asking for acceptance. He is making a statement: "*It is a done deal. I have already seen you in my dream and solved the matter. All you need to do is take my offering as a token of good will.*"

Esav presses no more. When his offer to escort Yaakov is rejected, he returns home, only to pack up and leave, years later, because of competition with the flocks of Yaakov. His nation eventually becomes a bitter enemy of Israel, and we cannot help but ask whether a genuine apology could have written an alternative ending to this story.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria article includes Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Torah from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah:

Raising our Monuments

by Rabbi Michael Gordan *

Jacob's dilemma is summarized at the end of last week's parasha, when he finally separates from Laban. We are told that "*Laban returned to his place,*" whereas Jacob only "*went on his way.*" Laban has a "place" of his own, while Jacob at this point has only a journey to continue. Similarly, at the beginning of next week's parasha, we are told that Jacob "settled" in Canaan, but we know that this settlement will be no more permanent than any of the others in his life, and that he will eventually make his way to Egypt. And in between those episodes is our parasha, Vayishlach, which is filled with confrontations and crises almost without respite. The instability which is a theme of Jacob's life is given concrete expression when he is injured during his bout with the angel and must limp onward.

It is tempting to do some amateur psychologizing and to see Jacob's uncertainty about his place in the world as the source of his building mania. The man who lacks a permanent home tries to control his world through construction. There are two principle structures that Jacob favors – the matzeivah, a monument or pillar, which comes from the Hebrew root meaning stability, and the mizbeiach, the altar. Jacob begins his building career when he leaves Israel because of his fear of Esau's anger and sets up a pillar at the place where he had his famous dream)not coincidentally, about a ladder firmly established on the ground(.

The altars that Jacob built fit into an existing pattern. In the ancient world, the altar would have been known as a place of sacrifice, even if the god to whom the altar was dedicated might vary. An altar was well-known symbol of religion and religious ritual. In contrast, the purpose of a matzeivah is much more ambiguous. Consider a few of those built by Jacob: the monument at Beth El, which marks a holy place that Jacob hadn't recognized and the promise made to him by God. The monument at Gal-Ed, when he parts from Laban, which seems to mark a treaty and boundary point between Jacob and his father-in-law. And the monument at Rachel's burial site, which marks a personal tragedy, and is the first grave marker we hear about in the Bible.

From these different uses it becomes clear that the matzeivah is an inherently ambiguous form, one that's capable of taking on a variety of different meanings. Those meanings are dependent on the people directly involved to understand. A traveler who, following Jacob's route, came to Beth El and the monument Jacob built there, and then to Gal-Ed to the monument there, and then to the roadside monument marking Rachel's tomb, would have no way of discerning the purpose of each of these structures. If a need for stability drove Jacob, why did he rely upon matzeivot, whose meaning could so easily be lost or misconstrued?

I believe the matzeivot – unique to Jacob among the patriarchs – carry an important message for us in our own religious lives. Abraham and Isaac both dug wells, which symbolize both the universal human need for spiritual life, and an effort to try to slake that thirst. Control of these wells was a source of friction between them and their neighbors. All of the patriarchs built altars, which as we noted were well-known markers of religious ritual. Jacob's monuments, in contrast, represent unique events in Jacob's life. They do not reflect universal human experience but instead allowed Jacob to

memorialize the significant events of his life.

The wells and altars of the patriarchs represent formal religion. But the monuments, the matzeivot, established by Jacob are more personal. They represent the triumphs and the setbacks that we will inevitably face as humans on a religious journey. Jacob was not embarrassed by the personal nature of these monuments, and he did not see a need to either explain them or defend their creation. An authentic Jewish life acknowledges its commitment to ritual and to religion, but makes space, as Jacob did, for the personal moments that define each human's experience. They may not be universally accessible, but their importance to us is often decisive. Jacob's journey should lead us to respect our own need and the need of those around us for an approach to religion that addresses not only communal needs, but also allows us to express our individuality and our journey without self-consciousness.

* Semikha, YCT, 2023. **Note: Hebrew in the original omitted because of problems converting software.**

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/11/vayishlach5784/>

Vayishlach: Saluting Our Shul Volunteers

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Jacob returns home to Israel this week hoping that his 20 years of backbreaking labour and dealing with his chicanerous uncle Lavan can finally give way to him finding peace in his homeland.

However, it doesn't quite work out that way. As soon as Jacob steps foot in Israel, he hears that his brother Esau has raised an army and plans to seek revenge for the blessing Jacob stole from him. So Jacob must prepare for war.

Even after Jacob somehow makes peace with his brother, another issue rears its ugly head. A local prince named Shechem kidnaps and assaults his daughter Dinah. Jacob's sons Shimon and Levi trick Shechem and his townspeople to circumcise themselves in exchange for letting them keep Dinah (so they can attack them while they are weak, and rescue their sister. Jacob frets about this and the retaliation from other nations.

But even though the return home hasn't begun as Jacob planned, in the end he returns to his father Isaac and is able to give him the joy of his grandchildren for the last few years of Isaac's life.

As our Sages say, we receive the land of Israel through struggle. It's not possible without a struggle, as the Zionist pioneers have learned since they first landed on Israel's shores until the present day. And, as Jacob learned, the reward of Israel is worth it.

We should always look back on all the individuals who perished in the struggle and the battle to attain Israel as our greatest of Jewish heroes.

With heroes in mind, I look forward to seeing you at the Friday night service this week where we will acknowledge, thank and pay tribute to all our wonderful community volunteers.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah VaYishlach: The Conflict Between Jacob and Esau

The central theme of VaYishlach is Jacob's struggle for his unique path, especially vis-a-vis his brother Esau. This was not just a family feud. The Sages saw in Esau a metaphor for Rome, and in general, a non-Jewish worldview, one alien to the Torah's outlook. The high point of the narrative unfolds as Jacob battles in the dark with a mysterious stranger, identified by the Sages as Esau's guardian angel.

"Jacob remained alone. A stranger wrestled with him until daybreak. When he saw that he could not defeat him, he touched the upper joint of]Jacob's[thigh. Jacob's hip joint became dislocated as he wrestled with the stranger.")Gen. 32:25-26(

What is the significance of this unusual wrestling match? Why did Esau's angel decide to injure Jacob's thigh, and not some other part of his body?

Esau's World of Hedonism

Many years earlier, Esau chose to reject his birthright, selling it for bowl of lentil stew. *"I am going to die!"* he exclaimed. *"What good is a birthright to me?"*)Gen. 25:32(Why did Esau sell his birthright?

We must understand the significance of this birthright. It was a legacy from their father Isaac, a charge to live a life dedicated to serving God. For Esau, holiness was completely divorced from living a normal life. He saw the birthright as a death sentence, threatening the very foundations of his hedonistic way of life. It was because of his birthright that Esau felt that he was going to die.

Esau's viewpoint is expressed a second time during his reunion with Jacob. When Esau saw Jacob's family, he was amazed. *"Who are these to you?"*)Gen. 33:5(You, Jacob, who chose our father's birthright and its otherworldly holiness — what connection can you have to a normal life? How can you have wives and children?

Esau was unable to reconcile his image of a holy life of Divine service with establishing a family and raising children.

Esau's guardian angel, in his nocturnal struggle with Jacob, embodied this outlook. Where did the angel attack Jacob? He went for Jacob's thigh, dislocating it. His message was clear: if you wish to dedicate yourself to holiness and God, you must divorce yourself from family and all other aspects of a normal life. Your thigh, from where your children issue, must be detached from you.

Jacob's Elevated Torah

Jacob did not accept Esau's views on living a holy life. Jacob exemplified, in both outlook and life, the harmony of nature with holiness. And Jacob's Torah was revealed in the natural world.

The Midrash states that *"The Holy One looked inside the Torah and created the universe"*)Bereishit Rabbah 1:1(. In other words, the universe is a direct result of God's contemplation of Torah. If we examine the world carefully, we should be able to uncover the foundations of the Torah. Had Adam not sinned, there would have been no need for a written Torah. Life itself would be ordered according to the Torah's principles.

The Patriarchs sought to repair Adam's sin. Their Torah and mitzvot belonged to the era before the Torah needed to be written down. For them, the Torah was naturally revealed in the universe. This is also the Torah of the angels, whose sole function is to fulfill the mission of their Creator in the world. *"Bless God, His angels, mighty in strength, who fulfill His word"*)Psalms 103:20; see Shabbat 88a(.

Who were the messengers that Jacob sent to inform Esau of his arrival? The Midrash teaches that Jacob sent angels)Bereishit Rabbah 72:4(. A messenger takes the place of the sender; it is as if the sender himself accomplished the mission. Thus, the sender and the messenger must be connected on some basic level)see Kiddushin 41b(.

By utilizing these unusual emissaries, Jacob was sending a powerful message to Esau. You, Esau, claim that holiness and physical life are fundamentally contradictory. But my Torah is the Torah of the angels. For me, there is no division between holiness and the natural world. God Himself is revealed within His creation.

)Adapted from *Shemuot HaRe'iyah* 9, VaYishlach 5630)1929(.

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYISH64.htm>

Moral Dilemmas (5770)

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

Jacob, on his way home after an absence of 22 years, hears that Esau is coming to meet him with a force of 400 men. He is terrified. He knows that many years earlier, his brother was merely waiting for Isaac to die before he took revenge. His approach with so large a contingent of people suggested to Jacob that Esau was intent on violence. He prepares himself. As the Sages noted, he made three types of preparation. First, he made provisions for war, dividing his household into two camps in the hope that one at least would survive. Then he prayed to God to protect him. Then he sent gifts, hoping to allay Esau's anger.

One sentence in particular caught the attention of the Sages:

"Jacob was very afraid and distressed." Gen. 32:7

One of these two phrases is surely superfluous. If Jacob was afraid, he was distressed; if he was distressed, he was afraid. Why use two descriptions if one would do? This provided the springboard for a highly significant Midrash:

"Jacob was very afraid – lest he be killed. He was distressed – lest he kill. " Rashi

Jacob's fear was physical – the fear of death. His distress, though, was moral – the fear that he himself might be forced to kill his brother. But this, as the commentators note, is puzzling. There is a rule in Jewish law that if someone comes to kill you, you may kill him first)Sanhedrin 72a(. This is a basic principle of self defence, without which there can be no right to life.

Why then was Jacob distressed lest he kill? If, in the struggle, he was forced to kill Esau to protect his own life, he would be acting fully within his rights. This is the profound answer suggested by Rabbi Shabbatai Bass)Siftei Chachamim(:

One might argue that Jacob surely should have had no qualms about killing Esau, for]the Talmud[states explicitly: *"If one comes to kill you, forestall it by killing him."* None the less, Jacob did indeed have qualms. He feared that in the fray he might kill some of the Esau's men, who were not intent on killing Jacob but were merely fighting against Jacob's men. And even though Esau's men were pursuing Jacob's men, and every person has the right to save the life of the pursued at the cost of the life of the pursuer, none the less there is a provision: if the pursued could have been saved my maiming a limb of the pursuer, but instead the rescuer killed the pursuer, the rescuer is liable to capital punishment on that account. Hence Jacob was rightly distressed about the possibility that, in the confusion of battle, he might kill some of Esau's men outright when he might instead have restrained them by merely inflicting an injury.

The rules of defence and self-defence are not an open-ended permission to kill. One is limited to the minimum force

needed to protect yourself or another from danger. Jacob's distress was that he might kill someone when mere injury would have sufficed. This is the law restricting what is nowadays called 'collateral damage,' the killing of innocent civilians even if undertaken in the course of self-defence.

The Sages heard something similar in the opening sentence of Genesis 15. The previous chapter describes Abraham's victorious war against the four kings, undertaken to rescue his nephew Lot. We then read:

After this, the word of God came to Abram in a vision. He said, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward will be very great." Genesis 15:1

The question is obvious: of what was Abraham afraid? He had just been victorious in battle. He had no cause for fear. On this, the Midrash comments:

Another reason for Abram's fear after killing the kings in battle was his sudden realisation: "Perhaps I violated the Divine commandment that the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the children of Noah, 'He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.' Yet how many people I killed in battle." Tanchuma Buber, Lech Lecha 19

Another Midrash puts it slightly differently and more precisely:

"Abraham was filled with misgiving, thinking to himself, Maybe there was a righteous or God-fearing man among those troops which I slew." Bereishit Rabbah, 44:4

What is going on in these sources? For this we need to borrow a concept from philosophy, namely, the idea of a moral dilemma. This phrase is often used imprecisely, to mean a moral problem, a difficult ethical decision. In fact it means something more specific. Moral problems are often of the form: what is the right thing to do in the circumstances? A moral dilemma is different. It arises in cases of conflict between right and right, or between wrong and wrong – where, whatever we do, we are doing something that in other circumstances we ought not to do.

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* (Terumot 8) describes one such case, where a fugitive from the Romans, Ulla bar Koshev, takes refuge in the town of Lod. The Romans surround the town, saying: Hand over the fugitive or we will kill you all. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi persuades the fugitive to give himself up. This is a complex case, much discussed in Jewish law, but it is one in which both alternatives are tragic. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi acts in accordance with Jewish law, but the Prophet Elijah asks him: *"Is this the way of the pious?]Ve-zu mishnat ha-chassidim?]*

Jean-Paul Sartre, speaking of existential decisions, gave the example of a Frenchman during the war who has an elderly and ailing mother with no one else to look after her. Should he stay with her, or should he join the resistance?

Life presents us with many such decisions. They are particularly common among those in public life, who are sometimes faced with courses of action that are in the long-term public good, but with which they may feel profoundly uneasy as private individuals. There are no easy answers in such cases. If there were, they would not be dilemmas.

It is one of the tests of a moral code that it does not present moral choices as easier than they are. There are moral dilemmas. They are a fact of the moral life. There are times when a good human being, even if he or she does the right thing, will still experience not remorse but regret. We will still suffer pangs of conscience even though we know we are justified in what we do.

One of the most profound examples of this is the remarkable book, *The Seventh Day*, that emerged from discussions among Israelis after the Six Day War. Although they had achieved one of the most stunning military victories in history, the prevailing tone is one of distress that they had been forced to kill in order to defend their country and people. Never, I suspect, has a less militaristic work emerged from a victorious army.

That mood was born thousands of years earlier, when Jacob, father of the Jewish people, experienced not only the physical fear of defeat but the moral distress of victory. Only those who are capable of feeling both can defend their bodies without endangering their souls.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayishlach/moral-dilemmas/> Note: Footnotes have not been preserved for this Dvar Torah.

Why Is There Antisemitism?

By Aron Moss * © Chabad 2023

It seems like anti-Semitism is everywhere these days, and almost becoming acceptable again. Why do so many people hate Jews? Why is anti-Semitism still flourishing today, even in modern society? And what can we do about it?

Answer: The deepest analysis of anti-Semitism can be found in a deceptively simple Talmudic passage discussing the Purim story, and its wisdom still rings true today.

Haman was an anti-Semitic minister in ancient Persia who wanted to see the Jews annihilated. He approached King Ahasuerus and offered to pay him a hefty sum in return for permission to fulfill his vile wish. The King responded, *"Keep your money and do with the Jews as you please!"*

The Talmud uses a parable to explain the king's response:

A farmer had a problem. There was a big mound of dirt in the middle of his field. His neighbor had a different problem, he had a ditch in the middle of his field. The owner of the ditch saw the mound and thought, "I would pay money for his mound to fill my ditch." The owner of the mound thought, *"I would pay money to get rid of my mound in his ditch."* The two finally met, and the ditch owner asked to buy the mound. The mound owner said, *"Please take it for free!"*

In the same vein, when Haman offered to pay Ahasuerus to rid his kingdom of Jews, the king said, *"Go ahead! No need to pay."* Ahasuerus saw the Jews as a mound sticking out in his kingdom, but what Haman saw was a hollow ditch, a deep hole.

And that is the story of anti-Semitism.

Ahasuerus and Haman represent two layers of hatred, the conscious and the subconscious. On the surface, anti-Semites hate Jews because they are a mound. But deep down, they hate Jews because they hate the ditch.

Anti-Semites make all sorts of contradictory statements about why they hate Jews. Jews are rich and own everything, or Jews are poor and stateless; they are religious extremists or they are secular cosmopolitans; they assimilate or they stay separate. Jew-haters say, "Go back to Israel!" and they say, "Get out of Palestine!" They say, "The Nazis should have finished the job," and they say, "The Holocaust never happened."

All of these accusations are really saying the same thing: the Jews are a mound in our field. You are in the way. You don't belong here. You are an obstacle, an eye-sore, a blot on humanity. But these are all just pretexts and excuses. None of these is the real reason for anti-Semitism. The true cause of anti-Semitism is not the mound, it is the ditch.

At their core, those who hate others actually hate themselves. Beneath their macho exteriors lies a profound emptiness, a vacuous hole in their souls. They subconsciously sense that their ideology is false, their beliefs empty, their lives void of meaning. And when you are empty, you hate those who are full. When you lack meaning, you envy those who have it. And there is no people that represents higher purpose and eternal truth than the Jewish people. [emphasis added]

This is why there are anti-Semites who have never even met a Jew. It's nothing personal. Their hatred is a symptom of their anger at themselves, which they refuse to face, so they project it on another. And the ultimate other is the Jew, the eternal Jew who has watched civilizations come and go, who has outlived all the ditch owners that tried to wipe him out.

In every generation there are evil ideologies. They take on various facades, but they share one common feature: they all hate the Jews. If you want to know which ideology is the destructive force of the age, look at the ones that embrace anti-Semitism. No matter how cultured and intelligent they look, at their core lies a nihilistic ditch, and they are dangerous.

So what should Jews do about anti-Semitism? What can anyone do about someone else's existential emptiness?

We take our cues from the Purim story. The Jews of the time, under threat of annihilation, did not become less Jewish, but more so. We don't fight emptiness by becoming more empty, and we don't make someone else's problem into our problem. In the face of irrational hate, we stay proudly and defiantly Jewish, trusting in G d, and loyal to our people.

But the Jews of Persia also took political and military measures to protect themselves. Because while we hope that all those haters will one day find some meaning to fill their void, we will not sit by and be victims of those who haven't.

Haman never filled his ditch. But he gave us Purim. Every year Jewish children celebrate and make noise when they hear Haman's name read in the Megillah. Because we won't be swallowed into somebody else's dark ditch. We will continue to fight evil and emptiness, by bringing more light to the world.

Sources:

Talmud Megillah 14a

The Rebbe, *Sichot Kodesh Purim* 5725

* Rabbi of the Nefesh Community in Sydney, Australia.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2902/jewish/Why-Is-There-Antisemitism.htm

Vayishlach: Stinginess vs. Generosity

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

The Parsha records the death of Isaac and lists the descendants of Esau:

Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. All these are the descendants of Esau's wife Adah.)Gen. 36:12(

Timna can serve an object lesson in the dangers of being stingy. Her very name means "You will withhold," reminiscent of King Solomon's advice: "Do not withhold [al timna] good from one who needs it when the power is yours to bestow it." Timna's nature was to withhold even when she had nothing to lose by giving.

A member of a royal family, Timna sought to convert to the faith of Abraham, but she was rejected on account of her stinginess, which was deemed incompatible with the generosity that Abraham had instilled in his family. Rather than forsake her stinginess, however, she tried to have her way by becoming a concubine of Abraham's great-grandson Eliphaz. But by aligning herself with the wicked Esau, she perpetuated her own evil, giving birth to a son who inherited her heartlessness – Amalek, the cruel archenemy of Israel.

By practicing generosity and cultivating a generous spirit, we can, in contrast to Timna, be a part of Abraham's great enterprise of spreading goodness, making the world fit to be G-d's ultimate home.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

May G-d grant a swift, miraculous and complete victory over our enemies.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Shabbat Parashat Vayishlach

5784 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Feeling the Fear

It is one of the most enigmatic episodes in the Torah, but also one of the most important, because it was the moment that gave the Jewish people its name: Israel, one who "wrestles with God and with men and prevails."

Jacob, hearing that his brother Esau is coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men, was terrified. He was, says the Torah, "very afraid and distressed." He made three forms of preparation: appeasement, prayer, and war (Rashi to Gen. 32:9). He sent Esau a huge gift of cattle and flocks, hoping thereby to appease him. He prayed to God, "Rescue me, I pray, from the hand of my brother" (Gen. 32:12). And he made preparation for war, dividing his household into two camps so that one at least would survive.

Yet he remained anxious. Alone at night he wrestled with a stranger until the break of dawn. Who the stranger was is not clear. The text calls him a man. Hosea (12:4) called him an angel. The Sages said it was the guardian angel of Esau.[1] Jacob himself seems sure that he has encountered God Himself. He calls the place where the struggle took place Peniel, saying, "I have seen God face to face and my life was spared" (Gen. 32:30).

There are many interpretations. One, however, is particularly fascinating both in terms of style and substance. It comes from Rashi's grandson, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam, France, c.1085-1158). Rashbam had a strikingly original approach to biblical commentary.[2] He felt that the Sages, intent as they were on reading the text for its halachic ramifications, often failed to penetrate to what he called *omek peshuto shel mikra*, the plain sense of the text in its full depth.

Rashbam felt that his grandfather occasionally erred on the side of a midrashic, rather than a "plain" reading of the text. He tells us that he often debated the point with Rashi himself, who admitted that if he had the time he would have written further commentaries to the Torah in the light of new insights into the plain sense that occurred to him "every day". This is a fascinating insight into the mind of Rashi, the greatest and most famous commentator in the entire history of rabbinic scholarship.

All of this is a prelude to Rashbam's remarkable reading of the night-time wrestling match. He takes it as an instance of what Robert Alter has called a type-scene,[3] that is, a stylised episode that happens more than once in Tanach. One obvious example is young-man-meets-future-wife-at-well, a scene enacted with variations three times in the Torah: in the case of Abraham's servant and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, and Moses and Tziporah. There are differences between them, but sufficient similarities to make us realise that we are dealing with a convention. Another example, which occurs many times in Tanach, is birth-of-a-hero-to-a-hitherto-infertile-woman.

Rashbam sees this as the clue to understanding Jacob's night-time fight. He relates it to other episodes in Tanach, two in particular: the story of Jonah, and the obscure episode in the life of Moses when, on his way back to Egypt, the text says that "When they were in the place where they spent the night along the way, God confronted Moses and wanted to kill him" (Ex. 4:24). Tziporah then saved Moses' life by giving their son a brit milah (Ex. 4:25-26).[4]

It is the story of Jonah that provides the key to understanding the others. Jonah sought to escape from his mission to go to Nineveh to warn the people that the city was about to be destroyed if they did not repent. Jonah fled in a boat to Tarshish, but God brought a storm that threatened to sink the ship. The prophet was then thrown into the sea and swallowed by a giant fish that later vomited him out alive. Jonah thus realised that flight was impossible.

The same, says Rashbam, applies to Moses who, at the Burning Bush, repeatedly expressed his reluctance to undertake the task God had set him. Evidently, Moses was still prevaricating even after beginning the journey, which is why God was angry with him.

So it was with Jacob. According to Rashbam, despite God's assurances, he was still afraid of encountering Esau. His courage failed him and he was trying to run away. God sent an angel to stop him from doing so.

It is a unique interpretation, sobering in its implications. Here were three great men, Jacob, Moses, and Jonah, yet all three, according to Rashbam, were afraid. Of what? None was a coward.

They were afraid, essentially, of their mission. Moses kept telling God at the burning bush: Who am I? They won't believe in me. I am not a man of words. Jonah was reluctant to deliver

a message from God to Israel's enemies. And Jacob had just said to God, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faith that You have shown me" (Gen. 32:11).

Nor were these the only people in Tanach who had this kind of fear. So did the Prophet Isaiah when he said to God, "I am a man of unclean lips." So did Jeremiah when he said, "I cannot speak: I am a child."

This is not physical fear. It is the fear that comes from a feeling of personal inadequacy. "Who am I to lead the Jewish people?" asked Moses. "Who am I to deliver the word of God?" asked the prophets. "Who am I to stand before my brother Esau, knowing that I will continue the covenant and he will not?" asked Jacob. Sometimes the greatest have the least self-confidence, because they know how immense is the responsibility and how small they feel in relation to it.

Courage does not mean having no fear. It means having fear but overcoming it. If that is true of physical courage it is no less true of moral and spiritual courage.

Marianne Williamson's remarks on the subject have become justly famous. She wrote: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." [5]

Shakespeare said it best: "Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve

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greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em." Twelfth Night

I sometimes feel that, consciously or subconsciously, some take flight from Judaism for this very reason. Who are we to be God's witness to the world, a light to the nations, a role model for others? If even spiritual giants like Jacob, Moses, and Jonah sought to flee, how much more so you and me? This fear of unworthiness is one that surely most of us have had at some time or other.

The reason it is wrong is not that it is untrue, but that it is irrelevant. Of course we feel inadequate to a great task before we undertake it. It is having the courage to undertake it that makes us great. Leaders grow by leading. Writers grow by writing. Teachers grow by teaching. It is only by overcoming our sense of inadequacy that we throw ourselves into the task and find ourselves lifted and enlarged by so doing. In the title of a well known book, we must "feel the fear and do it anyway."

Be not afraid of greatness: that is why God wrestled with Jacob, Moses, and Jonah and would not let them escape. We may not be born great, but by being born (or converting to become) a Jew, we have greatness thrust upon us. And as Marianne Williamson rightly said, by liberating ourselves from fear, we help liberate others. That is what we as Jews are meant to do: to have the courage to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to be true to our faith while seeking to be a blessing to others regardless of their faith.

For we are all children of the man who was given the name of one who wrestles with God and with men and prevails. Ours is not an easy task, but what worthwhile mission ever was? We are as great as the challenges we have the courage to undertake. And if, at times, we feel like running away, we should not feel bad about it. So did the greatest.

To feel fear is fine. To give way to it is not. For God has faith in us all even though, at times, even the best of us lack faith in ourselves.

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 77:3.

[2] He sets this out in his commentary to Genesis 37:2.

[3] See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

[4] Rashbam to Gen. 32:29. Rashbam also includes the episode of Bilaam, the donkey and the angel as a further instance of this type-scene.

[5] Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*, HarperCollins, 1992, p. 190.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Search for God and the Search for Self

"And he said, 'Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.' And Jacob asked him and said, 'Tell me, if you would, your name.' 'Why do you ask after my name?' And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel because I have seen God face to face and I have survived." [Genesis 32:29-31]

Is it religiously valid to attempt to find one's own God – or is it sufficient to accept the God idea handed down by parents and/or tradition? Certainly, if the individual can develop his own unique contact with God, his divine service will be genuine and spontaneous, rather than mechanical and formal. But a search, after all, is fraught with pain and anguish. And what if the Almighty still remains elusive, even after a lengthy quest?

We begin the Amida prayer with the words: 'Praised art thou, our God and God of our fathers.' Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov explains that it is preferable and worthy to attempt to discover one's own God and to establish a personal relationship with Him. Until that occurs, however, one must still serve the God of one's fathers.

In studying the biblical portions of Toldot, Vayetze and Vayishlach, we can trace an undeniable pattern which reveals that the underlying theme in Jacob's life is his search for God – his God, and not only the God of his father.

One might suggest reasons as to why, at least in Jacob's case, the mere acceptance of his father's God would be difficult, if not impossible. If Jacob truly felt unloved, even rejected, by Isaac, it would be problematic for him to connect with his father's God. And when his mother's ploy deceives his father, this would only serve to intensify the anguish of separation from the patriarch that Jacob must feel. Jacob wasn't sure who he really was, or more importantly, who he wished to become. After all, if his father loved Esau, perhaps he should become more fork-tongued and aggressive, more Esau-like. Perhaps then he would gain his father's love and God's love!

Jacob's jealousy and guilt vis-a-vis Esau certainly got in the way of his ability to establish a meaningful relationship with the God of his father Isaac. It is certainly the wrath of his brother Esau that forces the underlying purpose of Jacob's journey to become a personal search for God and – if only subconsciously – the God of his mother in her birth-place. After all, if his father had rejected him, at least his mother accepted him. Moreover, his mother's family was much more Esau-like – cunning and smooth-tongued – than his father's.

The first episode recorded when he leaves home is the dream of the ascending and descending angels in which God suddenly appears to Jacob. The words God chooses are significant: 'I am the Lord, God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac...' [Gen. 28:13]. But not yet the God of Jacob.

How does Jacob respond when he awakes? 'Surely God is in this place, and I did not know' [Gen. 29:16]. The general understanding of this verse is that Jacob, not

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realizing that God is in this place, is taken by surprise. But the simple meaning of 'lo yodati' is that Jacob does not yet know Him, his God. He knows what he must do to serve Him and he knows what to say in order to pray to Him, but he has not yet experienced his own personal God. We see this point underscored when Jacob makes his vow, which is usually understood to mean that if God will feed and clothe him, then Jacob will accept the Lord as his God [Gen. 28:20, 21]. Obviously it is difficult to accept such a materialistic 'deal' with the divine. Perhaps we must view the phrase in question as belonging to the 'if' clause of the oath; 'if God will... guard me, give me bread to eat... and I return in peace to my father's house and if the Lord will become my (li) personal God, then this stone will... become a House of God...' Jacob is asking for a personal God, that the Lord become his God. Jacob is asking, in addition to his physical needs, that God provide him with his most sought after spiritual need, that he experience a personal God. Then Jacob will know that his search shall have borne fruit, and he will be able to truly build a house for God and give tithes.

But in order for Jacob to find his personal God, he must first come to grips with his own personality, with his own inner and truest self and identity. He must discover who he is before he is to find his God.

For the next twenty years Jacob lives with Laban's household. In the process of raising a family and establishing a financial foothold, he loses sight of his earlier spiritual vision. He is more Esau than Esau, more Laban than Laban. Not only does he not find his own God, he runs the risk of even losing the God of his father. Although he is very successful and aggressive, he has lost, and deeply misses, his earlier dream of uniting heaven and earth. He knows he must return to his father's land and home, to his true self. When we next find him making an oath, it is with Laban upon his departure. But he still cannot speak of his own God, the God of Jacob; he can only take an oath by 'the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac' [Gen. 31:53]. Now he knows who he once was and must once again become – but he isn't there yet.

Ultimately, Jacob understands that he cannot successfully find God without first being himself – and that requires frontal confrontation with Esau. Will Esau stand in the way of God's promise to Jacob and his seed? Can Jacob atone for the guilt he feels vis-a-vis Esau, and exorcise the jealousy he feels towards this favored brother? Addressing God, Jacob says, 'O God of my father Abraham, and the God of Isaac...' [Gen. 32:10], but still no mention of the God of Jacob.

And because of what follows, it becomes clear that the wedge between Jacob and himself, between Jacob and his God, was Esau. Only after Jacob can successfully separate himself from Esau will he be able to confront his own

God. On the night before he is scheduled to meet his brother in the flesh, the Torah records how Jacob remained alone and wrestled with an unidentified stranger over whom he prevailed. Identified by our Sages as the spirit of Esau, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch suggests that it may well have been the Esau within Jacob who is haunting the patriarch with guilt and jealousy.

Jacob receives the victory name Yisrael (Israel) from the stranger; he has prevailed against men and God. In what way? He has finally confronted the twin personality within himself: the Esau he desired to become in order to try and gain his father's favor and achieve momentary materialistic enjoyment – and succeeded in removing Esau and Esauism from within himself. He is ready to take the wealth he received from Laban during his Esau stage and return it to Esau when they meet on the morrow: 'take my blessing' (which I received under false pretenses) he will say – and he is ready to accept himself as he was even vis-a-vis his father. He is therefore ready to return home not as Jacob-Esau but as Jacob-Israel.

And only after he has successfully wrestled with the stranger – exorcising the pain and guilt created by his jealousy and deception – is Jacob finally rewarded by seeing God face to face. Apparently it was Esau, or the spiritual struggle he symbolized, that had previously stood in his way. After his mastery over the spirit of Esau, Jacob calls the place of the encounter Peniel, 'because I have seen the Lord face to face, and my soul has been saved' [Gen. 32:31]. Jacob exorcised Esau – and in the process found both himself and his God. His struggle and search ended in victory.

If what we've been describing is correct, we should now be presented with Jacob's personal God. The text describes that Jacob '...came in peace [shalem] to the city of Shekhem...' [Gen. 33:18]. The verse can also read 'whole' – and indeed he is now his whole, complete and independent self. And so he erects an altar to his own God, indeed calling it 'Kel Elokai Yisrael' [Gen. 33:20] God, the God of Israel. Finally God is not just the God of his grandfather and of his father, but He is also the God of Israel, the God of the pristine and purified Jacob, his own personal God, whom he has discovered after many travels and through much pain. The circle is complete, the search for his own God is over. Thus empowered, Jacob is ready to face the third stage of his life, the transformation of twelve sons into twelve tribes of Israel. And now we can pray in the Amida to the personal God of each of our patriarchs, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
See You Later

There is an expression that we often use when we say goodbye. Most of us pay no attention to

what we are saying. I doubt that very many of those who use the expression really mean it.

I refer to the words, "See you later." I am quite confident that everyone reading this column has said these words of farewell to someone whom he wished he would never see again.

Seldom do we consider, "See you later" as a promise of a reunion or a commitment to a subsequent encounter.

I find it fascinating that this expression has its equivalent in other languages. In Hebrew, for example, we say, "Lehitra'ot," which implies that we anticipate seeing each other again in the future. The German, "Aufwiedersehen," conveys an even stronger degree of intention to meet again.

It is not surprising that we ordinary folk occasionally use language loosely and do not literally mean to fulfill every casual remark that we make. But it is surprising to find a biblical character using the same expression. Surely, the Bible does not trouble itself to record casual remarks.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:43), we find the patriarch Jacob using just such an expression. The careful reader of this week's parsha faces the dilemma of either viewing his remarks as mere empty words, or worse, seeing in them a deliberate attempt at deception.

I refer to the passage at the very end of the narrative of the dramatic encounter between the Esau and Jacob after a separation of many years. Surprisingly, the encounter concludes on a peaceful note, in which Esau suggests, "Let us take our journey, and let us go together..."

Jacob responds, and rendering his language into contemporary conversational English, he says, "You go first, and because of the kids and the cattle, I'll follow slowly. I'll see you later, in Seir, your mountain retreat."

The reader of this passage cannot help but anticipate that we will read, at some point in the narrative, of how Jacob indeed sees Esau later, in Seir. After all, he promised to follow, albeit slowly, and to reunite with Esau at Mount Seir, his home base.

But we never read of such a reunion; not in this week's Torah portion and not anywhere else in the entire Bible. Jacob says, "See you later," but that "later" never occurs.

Our Sages were troubled by this seeming gap in the narrative. They provide us with several explanations.

Rashi suggests that Jacob was trying to avoid any further encounters with his brother, assuming that he would treacherously abandon his feigned brotherly façade. In other words, he told Esau to go ahead with no intention of following him all the way to Seir.

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Jacob's "See you later" was thus a ruse. He was justifiably resorting to deception in the interests of self-defense.

The Talmud in the tractate of Avoda Zara 25b actually advises all who find themselves threatened by suspicious companions while on the road to resort to Jacob's tactic. The Talmud counsels that when one is confronted by such a companion, he should inform him that his destination is far off and not disclose that his true destination is a much closer one. This is not an uncommon example of the practical advice that the Talmud often gives to those who face the difficulties that Jews have faced throughout our history.

But the rabbis have an alternative approach to Jacob's "See you later." This approach insists that Jacob used those words in all sincerity, with no guile whatsoever. Rather, he was predicting that whereas a true reunion of Jacob and Esau was not likely to happen in their lifetimes, there would come a time when that reunion would happen.

That time will be in the distant future. Then, the descendants of Jacob, the Jewish people, and the descendants of Esau, the historical enemies of the Jews, will indeed meet again, at the time when the Esaus of the world will be judged, finally and fairly.

This ultimate "reunion" was foretold by the Prophet Obadiah in the very last verse of his Book: "For liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau; and dominion shall be the Lord's" (Obadiah 1:21).

In this light we come to see that Jacob was not using the expression "See you later" loosely or casually, and certainly not deceptively. Rather, he was peering into the messianic future and envisioned a time when Jacob and Esau would come together, if only for a final reckoning.

Does this final reckoning mean victory for Jacob and defeat for Esau? It is often assumed that this is exactly what is meant, and such a conclusion is warranted by a literal reading of some of the concluding verses of the book of Obadiah; for example, verse 18: "The House of Jacob shall be fire... And the House of Esau shall be straw..."

But Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz, in his (regrettably underutilized) commentary on the Pentateuch, suggests otherwise and makes the following hopeful statement:

"There is no record that Jacob went to Seir to see his brother. But, add the rabbis, Jacob will yet visit Esau on the day of the Messiah, when the reconciliation between Israel and Edom will be complete."

The medieval commentator Rabbenu Bachya finds a hint in the Hebrew words which Jacob uses to say "See you later (until I come unto my lord unto Seir)," which suggests the

messianic meaning behind the words. He points out that the final letters of the words which constitute that phrase spell out the name Elijah, who, in our tradition, is the herald of the Messiah.

It is safe to conclude with the assumption that most uses of the term “See you later” have no significance. However, Jacob’s use of the term had great significance. It gives us occasion to reflect upon the millennia of hostility that existed between Jacob and Esau, and upon the prophecy that that hostility would eventually end.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

I Truly Deserve the Bechora

Yaakov tells the messengers to say to Eisav, “With Lavan I dwelt (garti), and I stayed there until now.” (Bereshis 32:5). Rashi famously comments that the Hebrew word garti (I dwelt) equals 613 in gematria, as if to tell Eisav, “even though I lived with the wicked Lavan, I kept the 613 commandments there and did not learn from his evil ways.” Yaakov telegraphs a message to his brother, “You should know, I was living with uncle Lavan. He is a wicked person. I had to put up with all of his shenanigans all this time. I was away from any support system. Who knows what could happen to a person spiritually under those circumstances? But you should understand that I lived with him all this time and it did not affect me. I remained an Erliche Yid (honest Jew), despite the fact that no one was watching. I learned nothing from him!”

The question that must be asked is the following: When you want to impress someone, you must speak that person’s language. If you want to impress someone who is wealthy you need to indicate to him how wealthy you are. When you are speaking to a sports hero, don’t tell him that you know the Talmud by heart. “You play football at MetLife Stadium. I finished Shas at MetLife Stadium.” That will have no credibility to someone who is a linebacker for the New York Giants or Jets!

Eisav is the prototypical Rasha. He violated the three cardinal sins in a single day. If Yaakov wants to impress his brother, why is he telling him “I kept the 613 mitzvos?” Eisav will be totally unimpressed by such a statement. Let Yaakov tell him that he is rich or that he cheated somebody. Spiritual accomplishments have no value to Eisav.

I saw an interesting approach to dealing with this question in the sefer Darash Mordechai from Rav Mordechai Druk.

Yaakov had an agenda over here. His agenda was first and foremost to try to mollify Eisav so that he should not hate him. Yaakov tries many tactics. He calls Eisav “my master”. He says about himself “your servant”. He is trying to convey that in his own eyes, Eisav is still the bechor. But he is also trying to make

another point. Eisav was thinking to himself “Yaakov deserves the bechora less than I do. He is also a Rasha.”

Ay, Yaakov sat the whole day in the Beis Medrash? Eisav is thinking: “We both know that that was fake. I am also a faker. I ask my father queries like ‘How does someone tithe salt? How does someone tithe straw?’ I can also put on an act and I did put on an act. I know that all of Yaakov’s ‘frum shtick’—sitting in the Beis Medrash the whole day—is all an act. There is really no difference between him and me.” Eisav’s attitude is: “You are a Rasha and I am a Rasha. I am a faker and you are a faker. I can put on a good show and you can put on a good show.”

Yaakov Avinu is saying to Eisav, “No. For you it may be a façade, but for me it is not a façade.”

Rav Druk gives an example. He says that he used to say a shiur in a certain Yeshiva for twenty or thirty years. One day, he was running late and was about to walk into the Yeshiva. Across the street was a shul. The Shamash of the shul came out looking for a tenth man for their Mincha minyan. He approached Rav Mordechai Druk and asked him to come inside and make the minyan. Rav Druk apologized, “I am sorry. I say a regular shiur here. I am late for the shiur as it is, I can’t come in. People are waiting for me.” The Shamash said to him, “Ach! Have you ever done anything in your life for free? You are going to say the shiur because you get paid for it. Come to daven Mincha and nobody is going to pay you. That is why you are passing up Mincha and going to say your shiur.”

Rav Mordechai Druk responded to the Shamash: “I never took a dime for saying this shiur.” What was the Shamash thinking? He was thinking in his mind that the only reason anyone does anything in this world is for a buck. Therefore, he thinks to himself “What I do, I always do for a buck, therefore what you do, you also likely only do for a buck.” The first thing that comes to the mind of the Shamash is “You must be doing this for money, therefore do something once in your life not for money.”

The world has a well-known expression that sums up this idea: What Peter says about Paul says more about Peter than it does about Paul.” Here too—what the Shamash (Peter) says about Rav Mordechai Druk (Paul) says more about the Shamash than it says about Rav Mordechai Druk.

This is exactly what happened here with Eisav. Yaakov says to Eisav, “I lived with the wicked Lavan for twenty years and kept the 613 mitzvos without learning from his evil ways. You think a person cannot really be a Shomer Mitzvos (someone who observes mitzvos). You think it is all a fake. That is because in your mind, sincerity in being a Servant of Hashem does not exist. So, in your mind, I am

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not better than you.” You are thinking “Why should Yaakov get the bechora? He is a faker and I am a faker. He is no better than me.”

Yaakov tells his brother: “Eisav, you may be a faker and may just be putting on an act, but not me. I was with Lavan for twenty years. There was not another Jew within hundreds of miles. I could have acted like a heathen. Lavan would not have cared if I did not study Torah. None of the neighbors would have cared if I did not daven Maariv. Nevertheless, I kept the 613 commandments because I am in truth an Erliche Yid.”

“That is why I rightfully deserve the bechora and not you, and therefore don’t hate me!”

As Much as We May Be Oppressed, We Will Never Be Eradicated

This week’s parsha contains the prohibition of eating the gid ha’nashe (the sciatic nerve) of an animal as a result of the Angel of Eisav attacking Yaakov Avinu and wounding him in his thigh. We commemorate this by refraining from eating this sinew on the animal’s thigh. This law has major impact on halachic meat consumption. Because of this halacha, at least in America, we only eat the fore portion of an animal because the process of removing the gid ha’nashe from the hind quarter of an animal is too labor-intensive. The “good part of an animal”—the porterhouse steaks and the sirloin steaks—are from the hind quarter of the animal, which we have never eaten as observant Jews.

The Sefer HaChinuch writes that the reason for this mitzvah is to provide a hint to Bnai Yisroel that even though they experience many troubles in their exile at the hands of the non-Jewish nations, they should confidently remember that they will not be eradicated. The Jewish people will be around forever, and eventually a redeemer will come and rescue them from their oppressors. The hint is that this Angel that wrestled with Yaakov Avinu, who represented the Guardian Angel of Eisav, wished to eradicate Yaakov and remove the Jewish people from the world. However, he was unsuccessful. At most, he was able to wound him by touching his sciatic nerve. This is the way it is going to be throughout history. At the end, there will be salvation just as there was with Yaakov, as it says “the sun shone for him.”

I would like to tell over a very interesting story I saw about Rav Matisyahu Solomon, which was written up by Rav Mordechai Finkel:

Rav Matisyahu learned in Gateshead (England) many years ago when it was still a very small Yeshiva. The Yeshiva was located in a small house, which was very crowded. It was so crowded, that there literally was not enough space for every student to put down his Gemara in front of him. Each student’s Gemara was lying on top of part of his neighbor’s Gemara. Since only one amud of Talmud was studied at a time, they were able

to manage with “half a Gemara” spread out in front of each student. Today, Gateshead is the biggest Yeshiva in all of Europe.

Wallsend is a town in England about ten miles from Gateshead. The significance of the city and the source of its name are the fact that Hadrian conquered all of England when he was the emperor of Rome, but at that time Scotland was an independent country. In order to prevent the Scots from attacking, the Romans who had taken over England built a wall. This protective wall which Hadrian built to keep out the Scots ended in this city. That is why it was called Wallsend.

Today Wallsend is a tourist attraction because it is the last remnant of the wall that Hadrian built. Today, it is just a pile of moss-covered stones, but people go there to see the historically significant artifact of the Roman Empire.

A Jewish American journalist went to Wallsend to write a story. In the middle of the day, he realized that he had Yahrzeit for his father that day. Although he was not observant, many non-observant Jews observe their parents' Yahrzeit (commemorating the anniversary of the death of a parent by reciting Kaddish with a minyan). He asked around, “Is there any place I can find a minyan in the middle of nowhere?” Gateshead is located in Northern England and it is quite isolated. He was told that a small Yeshiva existed about ten miles from Wallsend where he could find a minyan to say Kaddish.

He came into the Beis Medrash in Gateshead and saw—as is typical in a Yeshiva—that the Chavrusas were going at it with one another. One Chavrusa yelled to his study partner, “Rabbi Akiva holds just the opposite!” This American journalist recognized the name Rabbi Akiva. He knew that there was once such a person.

Suddenly, it struck him: How did Rabbi Akiva die? He was put to death by the Romans. Which Romans? Hadrian! Hadrian was the Roman Emperor who killed Rabbi Akiva. What is left of Hadrian? A pile of stones that is nothing today. They are covered with moss. And what about Rabbi Akiva, who Hadrian put to death? Two thousand years later, people are still saying over Rabbi Akiva's Torah, and still spending quality time analyzing his every statement and opinion.

When the journalist went back to America and wrote his article, he wrote “the mighty Hadrian, who led massive armies to great victories, has nothing remaining of all his triumphs and conquests other than a pile of stones that was once a wall. Conversely, the teachings of Rabbi Akiva, which Hadrian sought to eradicate, are being studied and debated almost two thousand years after Rabbi Akiva's death.

This is the message of the *gid ha'nashe*. They will try to defeat us. They will try to eradicate us. But *Netzach Yisrael lo Y'Shaker*. The Jewish people are forever. We may suffer. We may limp. But at the end of the day, we will survive and they won't.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is the best way to describe God? Reb Meir Shapira of Lublin contrasts the way in which Jacob described Hashem and the way in which Abraham described Him. In Parshat Vayishlach we read how Jacob established an altar and gave it a name: “*Kel Elokei Yisrael*,” meaning, “God is the God of Israel.”

In Parshat Vayeira however we read how Abraham proclaimed the name of God and it was, “*Kel Olam*,” – “God of the Universe.”

So whereas for Jacob, Hashem is the God of the People of Israel, for Abraham He is the God of everyone.

But that's not all. At the beginning of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, God introduces Himself to our people for all time by saying, “*Anochi Hashem Elokeicha*.” – “I am the Lord your God,” in the singular, meaning the God of each individual person.

So from here therefore we see that there are three different descriptions of Hashem in the Torah. And I believe that they all relate to our responsibility.

First of all I have a responsibility to myself because God is my personal God and I need to be responsible for my own spiritual connection with the Almighty. That connection will enhance my life and enable me to have a sacred existence of happiness and meaning always.

In addition I have a responsibility to my people, because God is the God of my people. I am responsible for giving a contribution of great value to my people at all times.

But that is not all. Hashem is the God of all of humankind and my people exist for the sake of everyone in this world. Therefore, as a nation, we have a responsibility to give a contribution of inestimable value to all of humankind, to enrich our societies and to help to make this into a better world.

So what's the best way to describe Hashem? He's my God; He's the God of my people; He's The God of everyone. And these descriptions should make all the difference to the lives that we lead.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Fight or Flight

Rabbi Aharon and Hodaya Lemberger

In the portion of Vayishlach we read of Yaakov's extraordinary encounter, one which would produce two significant outcomes for

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the People of Israel: the birth of the name “Israel” and the prohibition to eat the *gid hanashe* – the thigh tendon.

In order to better understand the inherent change that Yaakov undergoes, we must first recall Yaakov's situation when he initially set out on his journey. “A quiet man dwelling in tents” is the Torah's first description of Yaakov, in direct contrast to Esav, who was “a man of the field”. This quiet and innocent young man suddenly finds himself on the run, penniless and far away from home. However, at the end of this very long journey, he finally returns to his homeland as the head of a large family.

In our portion, Yaakov finds himself in a difficult situation, to say the least. He must face the unknown – the reunion with Esav – and is very fearful of what awaits him, as the verse tells us: “Then Yaakov was greatly afraid and was distressed” (Bereshit 32:8).

Subsequently, Yaakov employs three different tactics: He divides up his family, which is already a little nation unto itself – “And he divided the people that were with him” (ibid.); he prays to God – “Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav” (32:10-13); and he prepares a gift – “... and he took of that which he had with him, a present for Esav his brother” (32:14).

The exegetes are divided as to whether Yaakov's numerous preparations for his encounter with Esav should be viewed favorably, or whether Yaakov should not have given Esav gifts, but placed his trust in God instead. A literal reading of the Torah verses does not reveal any explicit criticism pertaining to Yaakov's preparations. Furthermore, we are all familiar with the notion that “one should not rely on miracles” – all the more so in times of war, when one is required to take any necessary measure to ensure one's safety.

However, the Torah mentions the fact that Yaakov slept in the camp not once – but twice. This goes to show that even once all the preparations had been made, something else happened: “And he rose up on that night, and he took his two wives, and his two handmaids and his eleven children... and he sent over that which he had” (Bereshit 34:23-24). Yaakov takes an additional step, and takes his entire family to the other side of the river. His fear of the encounter gives him no peace, and he gets up in the middle of the night, taking one more precautionary step, going over and above any reasonable measure.

The line between the need to calculate one's every step, while taking the necessary precautionary measures, and the faith one must have in God, was seemingly not clear to Yaakov. After engaging in so many preparations, Yaakov should have left some room for simple faith, placing his trust in the Almighty as well. Instead, fear crept into his

heart, the consequence of which was – “And Yaakov was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day” (32:25).

What was the nature of this fear? It was not a physical fear. Rabbi Sacks z”l believes it was a fear of his own mission, quoting the Rashbam who likens Yaakov to Moshe and Yonah the prophet, both of whom were wary of the mission on which they were sent: “Those who choose a mission which is not the will of the Lord, or those who refuse to embark on the mission on which they were sent, are punished.” Yaakov was afraid of the encounter with Esav although God had promised the former that he would return home safely. In fact, Yaakov tried running away, but God sent an angel to stop his escape. The fear stemmed from a personal feeling that he was not worthy. But instead of placing his trust in God, he tried running away and was almost overcome by his fear.

But Yaakov – now being the head of a nation, with a mission to fulfill – may not run away, no matter how frightening this mission may be. And, indeed, Yaakov fights his fear, which took the form of a mysterious “man” who wrestled with him. Following this episode, he is given the name “Yisrael”, which means “you have wrestled with God and with men and have prevailed” (32:29). The Hebrew word sarita (wrestled), which is the root of the name Yisrael, denotes a struggle, a confrontation. Henceforth, this is the name Yaakov’s descendants will go by.

Yaakov, who was born after Esav, holding onto the latter’s heel, and had bought Esav’s birthright by means of trickery and deception, can run away no longer. The man who brought forth the Twelve Tribes, and who was the Patriarch of the People of Israel, can no longer conduct himself with cunning, or choose to sit quietly in his tent. The time had come for him to take action and fulfill his mission in the world, by facing his fears, placing his trust in God and having full faith in God’s promise. The new name he receives expresses an inherent change, which will continue to reverberate in his sons after him, who will not only bear the new name, but will also internalize its new essence.

Yaakov pays a price for this moment of weakness – when he allowed fear to sneak in – and comes out limping. “Therefore, the children of Israel eat not the tendon of the thigh... because he touched the hollow of Yaakov’s thigh in the tendon of the thigh” (32:33). From that moment onwards, Yaakov and his sons are no longer allowed to eat the tendon of the thigh, a constant reminder of the fear that had entered Yaakov’s heart, and which could equally enter anybody’s heart at any time; the fear that whispers to us – “Perhaps we are not worthy of our mission.”

We must do all we can to overcome the obstacles in our way and make the necessary

preparations. However, we must also leave room for faith in the Almighty and believe in the mission that we have been given – to rectify the world, to engage in Tikkun Olam and glorify God’s name. Rather than dwell on our fear, we must confront it so that we can fulfill our calling.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mayer Twersky: Rallying for Israel - The Halachic Perspective[1]

Hashem runs the world.[2] The Torah guarantees that whenever we repent and cry out wholeheartedly, He answers our prayers.[3]

These realities and fundamentals of faith notwithstanding, it is a sacred, categorical obligation that (in addition to prayer) we also vigorously defend ourselves by natural means. Specifically, we are obligated to defend ourselves militarily and diplomatically.

This episode (of Ya’akov’s encounter with Esau) . . . teaches us that he (the patriarch Ya’akov) did not (passively) rely on his righteousness; instead, he exerted himself to the maximum in pursuing all avenues of rescue. What transpired between Ya’akov and Esau foretells what will happen throughout history between us and the descendants of Esau; in its detailed account of Ya’akov’s actions the Torah provides a blueprint for future generations. We ought to emulate our righteous forebearer and prepare ourselves for prayer, diplomacy (literally, sending gifts), and war, to escape and be rescued. Our Sages have already recognized this eternal lesson, as I shall subsequently mention. (Ramban, introduction to Bereishis, 32:4)[4]

Everyone recognizes that the support of the United States in Israel’s defensive, existential war against Hamas is crucial. America provides vital armaments and billions of dollars of financial aid; additionally, it serves as a bulwark against international pressure. Everyone also knows that it is imperative to demonstrate widespread support amongst the electorate for such support. Tuesday’s rally did just that.

We are not more deserving or righteous than Ya’akov; we too must exert ourselves to the maximum in pursuing avenues of rescue. Indubitably, Tuesday’s rally comprised one aspect of that effort.

Without unstinting American support, there is a very real danger that, ר”ל, the IDF will be constrained in a way that presently endangers our soldiers and, in the future, endangers the civilian population in the State of Israel. Rallying to sustain and expand such support was thus unquestionably also a fulfillment of (Vayikra 19:16), “לא תעמד על דם רעך,” (“Do not stand idly while your friend’s blood is spilled”).

At the rally religious and not yet religious Jews stood side by side. Jews who believe and those

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who do not yet believe stood shoulder to shoulder. The existential threat in 1967 similarly galvanized Jews from across the spectrum. (In fact, in 1967 all Yeshiva students participated in the rally.) Wonderful! If only all Jews already appreciated the gift of Torah and were believers and religious. Tragically, that is not yet the case. In the interim it is wonderful that myriads of Jews, to a degree, embraced their identity and shared destiny and overwhelmingly came to support the Jewish people, their people.

Of course, we can never act or speak in a way that legitimizes or validates inauthentic forms of Yahadus (Judaism), which is why in some other contexts inter-denominational activities are proscribed. Attending the political rally, however, simply expressed unwavering support for our brethren in the State of Israel in their battle for survival and security; it clearly did not affirm or validate anyone else’s beliefs.

Attending the rally condemned Hamas’ savage butchering, massacre, and mutilation of Jews (and some non-Jews) and called for their (Hamas’) eradication; it obviously did not endorse any aspect of the program, the choice of speakers, their respective beliefs or lifestyles.

The prophetic verse (Zechariah 4:6), “לא בחיל, ולא בכח כי אס־ברוּחַי אִמְרֵי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת” (“neither with army troops nor with strength rather with My spirit, said Hashem Tzevakos”), narrowly refers to the building of the second Temple. Even as a figure of speech it is irrelevant and inapplicable in the present context wherein our מִסֻּרָה (tradition) demands that we exert ourselves to the maximum in pursuing all avenues of rescue.

May Hashem answer our prayer כְּרַגַּע וְכָל אוֹיְבֵי עַמְּךָ מִהֵרָא יִכְרֹתוּ (May all evil instantaneously perish and all Your nation’s enemies be speedily excised) and may there be no need for any further rallies.

[1] An edited transcript of remarks delivered to students in Yeshiva University on November 16, 2023. A slightly expanded Hebrew version, קראו עצרה, is also available.

[2] אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו הוא" (בורא ומנהיג לכל הברואים והוא לבדו עשה ועושה ויעשה "לכל המעשים")

[3] כי מי גוי גדול אשר לו אלהים קרבים אליו כיהוה" (אלהינו בכל קראנו אליו) (דברים ד:ז). " אבל צבור כל זמן שעושים תשובה וצועקים בלב שלם הם נענין שנאמר (כה"ל אלהינו בכל קראנו אליו) (רמב"ם הל' תשובה ב:ו)

[4] נכתבה הפרשה הזאת . . . ללמדנו עוד שהוא לא בטח בצדקתו והשתדל בהצלה בכל יכלתו. ויש בה עוד רמז לדורות כי כל אשר אירע לאבינו עם עשו אחיו יאירע לנו תמיד עם בני עשו, וראוי לנו לאחוז בדרכו של צדיק שנזמין עצמנו לשלשת הדברים שהזמין הוא את עצמו, לתפלה ולדורון ולהצלה בדרך מלחמה, לברוח ולהנצל, וכבר ראו רבותינו הרמז הזה מן הפרשה הזאת כאשר אזכיר

See also *ibid.* 33:15: Our sages discerned (in Ya'akov's response) (normative) counsel. They related that R. Yanai, before traveling to intercede with the (Roman) government, would study this section (of the Torah) . . . because our Sages had a tradition that this section teaches the *modus vivendi* in exile. When R. Yanai would travel to the royal court in Rome, he would (first) study this section to follow the counsel of the sagacious elder, because all generations look to him to follow his example.

ורבותינו ראו עוד בזה עצה, אמרו (ב"ר עה טו) רבי ינאי כד הוה סליק למלכותא הוה מסתכל בהדא פרשתא וכו'. מפני שהיתה קבלה בידם שזו פרשת גלות. כשהיה בא ברומה בחצר מלכי אדום על עסקי הצבור היה מסתכל בפרשה זו ללכת אחרי עצת הזקן החכם, כי ממנו יראו הדורות וכן יעשו

Torah.Org Dvar Torah **by Rabbi Label Lam**

MALACHIM MAMASH - Real Angels

Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to his brother Eisav, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, "So shall you say to my master Eisav, 'So said your servant Yaakov, 'I have sojourned with Lavan, and I have tarried until now. (Breishis 32:4-5)

Yaakov sent angels: מלאכים ממש: literally angels! – Rashi

I have sojourned: Another explanation: גָּרַתִּי has the numerical value of 613. That is to say: I lived with the wicked Lavan, but I kept the 613 commandments, and I did not learn from his evil deeds. -Rashi

This is interesting! Yaakov has command over actual angels. These are mere messengers. Rashi tells us they are authentic angels. How does one attract an army of angels? Where did they come from?

It may sound strange to say so but my wife and I have a phrase we repeat often, but it's not just a phrase. It's a fact of life. "HASHEM always sends us angels!" I could fill a book with stories. It doesn't happen only to us. It happens with everyone but we are paying attention and we take note as often as possible. We have a particular pressing need and after some good Davening, and confidently declaring, "HASHEM always sends us angels", an agent of some sort, an angel appears from seemingly nowhere and performs this unusual service.

Years ago, I took my oldest son to Israel before his Bar Mitzvah to put on Tefillin for the first time at the earliest hour at the Western Wall. The first morning after we woke up in Neve Yaakov, we took a cab to Yerushelaim proper to meet up with a bus going to Kever Rochel and Maares HaMachpela. That morning I jumped into a conversation with the cab driver and he told me his name was Shmuel. When we got to our stop, I realized I didn't have any Israeli currency so I asked if I could pay him with \$20 American. Days later we were up at

4:00 AM to catch a cab to the Kossel for the big Tefillin event but there was a phone strike and we could not call a taxi. We went into the street to hail a cab. Twenty minutes went by and the chances of getting there on time seemed bleak. There were no cabs to be found.

I told my son emphatically, "HASHEM always sends us angels!" At that moment a cab sped by in the opposite direction and we watched it whizz by and then do a U turn. He pulled up to us and said that he was heading home after driving all night but something told him to stop and pick up these two people. I peaked in and I said, "Shmuel!?" He asked, "How do you know my name?" "You took us the other day. Remember, I gave you a \$20"! He pulled it out of his pocket! Yes, the angel Shmuel in action!

The Midrash tells us that Avraham merited being visited by three angels because of the three parts of the Bris Mila that he performed. Later Avraham was halted by the Akeida by a Malach HASHEM. The Malbim explains the seemingly extra phrase "from me" proved that he was that angel created from his being willing to give up his son. That is what HASHEM had asked him to do. He did it. The angel was the product of that completed deed. Mitzvos produce Malachim -angels.

Yaakov intimates to Eisav that he lived with the wicked Lavan and still he kept 613 Mitzvos. Yaakov had a huge army of angels that resulted from his performance of Mitzvos and his study of Torah. Where did these angels come from? The Kuzari says that Mitzvos make angels.

It has occurred to us over time that the way to hope for and expect a timely angel is to be an angel for someone else. Other people also need angels. When we are angels for others HASHEM sends us angels.

It's an open Rashi in Re'eh on the verse (Devarim 16:11), "And you shall rejoice before HASHEM, your G-d, -you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite who is within your cities, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are among you..."

Rashi comments, "These are My four, corresponding to your four, "Your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant." If you shall gladden Mine, I will gladden yours." You take care of MY kids! I'll take care of yours! If you will be an angel for others, I will send, not heavenly angels but MALCHIM MAMASH – Real Angels.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Directing our Own Lives

In the choice of the haftarah, we see one of the most incredible examples of the power of personal choice. How we can choose to direct

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our own lives, no matter what the circumstances.

We see it in this week's parasha, which is juxtaposed to the haftarah from the prophet Ovadia, who is a descendant of Eisav (Esau). You can be a son of two of the greatest and most righteous people – Yitzchak and Rivka – and you can turn out to be Eisav. Yet, you can be a descendant of Eisav while in the palace of one of the most wicked king and queen of Israel, and turn out to be an incredible righteous person, Ovadia.

It was Eisav who had every opportunity, like Ya'akov, to become a tzaddik. But he ended up as one of the arch-enemies of the Jewish people. He represents so much of what is not good in humankind.

Ovadia for two reasons could have turned out so differently, but look at the choices he made. He was a descendant of Eisav and a prophet at the time of Izevel (Jezebel) and Achav (Ahab), two of the worst kings and queens of Israel, who killed prophets and sages. Ovadia, who was head of the royal court, hid one hundred prophets in order to save them, in spite of the difficulties involved in doing so, ultimately becoming a prophet himself and meriting his own book in Tanach.

The home you grow up in has an impact. Your circumstances have an impact. Your surroundings have an impact. But ultimately, nothing stands in the way of personal choice.

You can be the son of Yitzchak and Rivka and turn out to be an Eisav, and you can be a convert from the descendants of Eisav in a most wicked environment and be a prophet and a great tzaddik.

May we all know that we are not entirely victims of our circumstances, but can be victors, decision-makers, proactive, and ultimately decide the course our lives can take.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's **Derashot Ledorot**

A History of the Future?

In times of stress, there is a natural tendency to look for solutions in the occult. In periods of crisis and uncertainties, we try to lift the curtain of time and peer into the future by unearthing in ancient texts of hoary prophecies the secrets of events that have not yet occurred.

This is an understandable feeling, but I am not happy with it. In the last several weeks I have received several letters from friends and family in Israel, reporting to me about (or including newspaper clippings of) a book recently published which predicted the Yom Kippur War, and later developments which have not yet taken place. Also, a number of Hasidic teachers have made predictive announcements about current events in Israel.

My answer to all of them was: abandon your naivete! True bitahon or emunah (faith or confidence) does not need arcane hints or mysterious allusions. It is not necessary to interpret every crisis and imminent confrontation between superpowers as the biblically prophesied מלחמת גוג ומגוג (the fateful War of Gog and Magog). I remember in my own lifetime how the theme of this biblical war of “the end of days” was applied in contemporary fashion, successively, to the wars between Germany and America, Germany and Russia, Russia and the United States, Russia and China, China and the United States, and this past month, between Russian and the United States. One imagines, from all this speculative talk, that the Messiah is about to call his first press conference... It is interesting that the author of the book I mentioned, on the basis of his exegesis of several difficult verses in Daniel, predicted that Israel would achieve a stunning victory in the month of Heshvan. Well, unfortunately, Heshvan has come and gone and we are now in Kislev, and Israel still has won no astounding victories.

Yet I would not want it to be thought that I in any way deny prophecy, or the ability of prophetic texts correctly to predict future events. It is just that I am distrustful of the tendency to rely upon our imaginative interpretations implicitly, as if our salvation will come from speculative commentaries. But I do believe that there are certain historic patterns that tend to repeat themselves throughout human history. Moreover, I accept fully what our Rabbis said: מעשה אבות סימן לבנים, the biographies of the fathers anticipate the history of their descendants.

The best place to look for such historic patterns is in the life of the Patriarchs, and it indeed happens that specific events of our own days reveal the contours of occurrences of long ago.

So, despite my own skepticism – or, perhaps, because of it, since I feel more confident when I approach such a difficult task critically – let me invite you to explore with me one such pattern of מעשה אבות in biblical history, and wonder with you if this is not סימן לבנים, a history of the future; whether or not the story of Jacob is a parable for Israel today.

The biblical tale is simple and austere in the outlines of its drama. Esau has sworn to kill Jacob for supposedly stealing from him the blessings of their father Isaac. Esau was now marching against his brother, and Jacob was afraid. He divided his family, preparing for a massacre, and hoping that at least part of them would survive. Jacob then crossed the river and ויותר יעקב לבדו, Jacob remained alone. He is then attacked by a mysterious antagonist who struggles with him until dawn and injures Jacob in the thigh, so that he leaves the battles limping.

The unknown assailant wishes to leave, but Jacob will not let him go כיאברכתני, until you will give me your blessing. The blessing is given, and Jacob is told that his name would henceforth be not “Jacob” but “Israel.” The next day, Jacob proceeds to his encounter with Esau, and there is no bloody massacre, but instead, they meet and part in peace.

The Rabbis flesh out this story by adding a number of details. For instance, on the Biblical verse that וירא עקב מאד וייצולו, that Jacob was very frightened and sorely afraid, the Rabbis say that two synonyms for fright are used in order to indicate that not only was Jacob afraid of being killed, but he was equally afraid of killing others.

They say that the general strategy of Jacob included preparation for three policies: לדורון, להפילה ולמלחמה, he prepared himself to give gifts to appease Esau; he prayed to God; and he made all preparations for war in case the two previous approaches failed.

Who was this assailant? The Rabbis answer that it was שר שלעשו, the guardian angel of Esau; as it were, the spiritual cause of Esau. What did this angel look like? There are many answers. Some say כרועה צאן נדמה לו, he appeared to Jacob like a shepherd. Others answer: כארכיליסטים, an arch-thief. Others say בדמות חכם, a magician. And yet others say תלמיד חכם נראה לו, he appeared to him in the guise of a scholar.

Why did Jacob request a blessing from this stranger? The Rabbis answer: the whole battle was over the legitimacy of the blessings that Isaac had given to Jacob. And these blessings primarily concerned the right to Eretz Israel. The angel of Esau argued that the blessings of Jacob were illegitimately obtained, and therefore the Land of Israel belongs to Esau. Jacob was willing to settle in the battle if at least Esau would concede the justice of Jacob's claim, his cause, the right of his title to the Holy Land.

I have told the story as simply as I can. Let us now go to the dangerous part -- the drawing of parallels.

To me, Esau is represented by today's Arabs. I know that many people will object and maintain that the appropriate biblical symbol for the Arabs is Ishmael. However, that is not necessarily so. Some anthropologists maintain that Palestinians are ethnically different from other Arabs, and hence not, in all probability, descended from Ishmael. Furthermore, if one wishes to play on names, Esau is identified as Edom, the “red one,” and clearly Red Russia is behind the Arab cause today. Moreover, and more seriously, in the prophets, such as Obadiah, and much more explicitly in the medieval commentators such as Ramban, Esau always represents whoever it is who seeks to destroy Israel, no matter what his ethnic descent.

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The Arabs of today, like Esau of old, swear vengeance against Israel. The fear of the Israelis in our day, like that of Jacob, is not only that they will be killed, but equally their revulsion against killing others.

That stark biblical phrase, ויותר יעקב לבדו, “and Jacob was left alone,” was never more true than it is today, when we are isolated from all the world.

We too have a triple approach. We are prepared, no matter how hawkish our views, to give Esau his doron (gift) – some of the occupied territories. We approach the future, despite our depression, with tefillah or hope; and we are, of course, prepared for milhamah (war).

Our struggle with the angel of Esau is the core of all our current entanglements and difficulties. All the wars we have fought in the past 25 years have concerned the right of the Jews to the Land of Israel, assured us by the blessing of Abraham transmitted to Jacob through Isaac.

The claim of our antagonists is that Jacob stole that blessing, with stealth and deceit, and therefore it is not rightly ours.

Our Arab-Esau enemy appears and has appeared in various guises. For some he is the כרועה צאן, the shepherd; this is the romantic image of the bucolic Arab or the bedouin, reminiscent of Lawrence of Arabia or Hollywood's Sheik of Araby. Many of us see the Arabs as ארכיליסטים, a murderous figure, looking collectively somewhat like Arafat, with the sneer of Ibn Saud. Yet others see them as magicians, פרמקוס, who can dig their fingers into the dirty sand of the desert and pull out infinitely rich oil wells. And now we have learned, to our great regret and at our expense, that כדמות תלמיד חכם נראה לו, Arabs are not all fools, are not all primitive, that they can be shrewd diplomats who know how to isolate Israel by concerted action.

We emerged from this most recent encounter צועלעלירכו, injured and hurt, having lost our finest and our best, the young men who were killed or wounded or missing.

Thus far, it certainly seems as if the story of Jacob is the history of the future. What of the rest of the story?

I do not know, nor can anyone know. But if the rest of the story does follow true to the Patriarchal pattern, and one certainly hopes that it will, if life will follow the script of Scripture, then somehow or other our right to the Land of Israel, to our autonomous existence as a free State, will be legally acknowledged and morally confirmed by all the world. שרושלעשו, the Angel of Esau, will recognize us. The Arabs themselves will declare that our home is not “Jacob” but

“Israel,” that is, that our rights to the Holy Land are beyond moral reproach.

believing in and hoping for in the future. And we add one word: הלוואי!

Indeed, that is already partly the case as the Arab nations declare, for the most part, that they are willing to accept the existence of Israel. Although all of us who have lived through the Holocaust recognize that when they speak about pushing Israel back “to the borders of 1967,” that is only the first step to pushing us back to the borders of 1947, nevertheless there has been some movement. And the encounter with Esau may yet turn out to be not another bloody war, but, after all, a peace conference!

Admittedly, there are many differences between the story of Jacob and our contemporary condition. Certainly Jacob was much more of a dove than a hawk, too much for the taste of most of us. Indeed, the later Jewish tradition castigates Father Jacob for being overly deferential to Esau. And yet, the same plot may hold its general outlines. We may have to give Esau his *doron* or *minhah*, his gifts of occupied territory. We may emerge from this encounter limping. But we must never despair! We will survive and our right to Statehood will be recognized. Such is the pattern of Jacob’s life. Is it a paradigm for us? Dare we hope so? I think we may, although we may never feel any certainty about events of the future.

It is true that we may have to give more of a *doron* or *מנחה* לעשו, more of our territories, than we want or certainly ought to. Nevertheless, listen carefully to the following Midrash, the report of what one great Sage told us. His words are recorded in the Midrash called *תנחומא* (to וישלחיא):

אמר ר' הושעיא אמר לי זקן אחד, אומר לך טיבו של מדרש, וכשתהא דורשו אמור אותו משמי, עתיד עשו מנחה יביאו אין(תהלים עב י) להחזיר ליעקב כל מה, שנטל מיעקב, שנאמר מלכי תרשיש ואיים מנחה ישיבו כתיב כאן, אלא מנחה ישיבו, אמרתי לו הוא זה הדבר הטוב, ומשמך אני דורשו, א"ל ומה אם שנתן לו מדעתו הוא מחזיר, דברים שנטלו(בראשית לג ט) ודחק עליו, שלא היה מבקש ליטול, שנאמר ויאמר עשו יש לי רב מישראל באונס, על אחת כמה וכמה, באותה שעה הודיתי לו.

Rabbi Hoshiah said: I met an old man who told me, “I will relate to you a beautiful Midrash, and when you preach it, mention it in my name. And that is, that Esau will some day return to Jacob all that he had taken from Jacob. How do I know this? Because the prophet said that “the Kings of Tarshish and Iyyim will return a gift to Jacob.” It does not say that they will bring a gift, but that they will return a gift.” I replied to the old man: “that is a beautiful thing, and I shall repeat it in your name.” He then concluded by saying to me: “Now, if Esau will return to Jacob that which Jacob gave him willingly, how much more so is it certain that those things that he took from Israel by force will he return to him!”

To which we may respond: זהו הדבר הטוב, that indeed is a good word, something worth



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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog VAYISHLACH

Many commentators over the ages have seen in the two confrontations between Yaakov and Eisav – first the struggle with Eisav's angel and then the meeting with Eisav in the flesh – the two-front war that Judaism and the Jewish people have been forced to fight over millennia in order to simply survive.

The struggle with Eisav's angel, as described in the parsha, represents a spiritual and intellectual fight, a contest of ideas, beliefs and debate. The meeting with the physical Eisav in turn represents the struggle of the Jewish people to simply stay alive in a bigoted, cruel, and nearly fatal environment. Yaakov does not escape unscathed from either confrontation. He is crippled physically and somewhat impoverished financially. Eisav's "evil eye" gazes upon his children and Yaakov is relieved to escape alive, even if damaged in body and purse, separating himself from Eisav physically and from his civilization and worldview.

The scenario is pretty much set for the long dance of Jewish history, with the Jews always attempting to survive in a constantly challenging and brutal society governed by Eisav. The rabbis of Midrash discussed the possibilities of coexistence and even cooperation with Eisav.

Though this debate did not result in any permanent or convincing conclusion, the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai that Eisav's hatred of Yaakov is completely irrational and implacable seems to be borne out by history, past and present. The anti-Semitism in today's seemingly enlightened world is so pervasive as to be frightening. And we seem to be powerless to do anything about it.

As is painfully obvious to all, these struggles for continued Jewish existence are ongoing and seemingly unending. All of the foreign ideas and current fads of Western society stand almost unanimously opposed to Torah values and traditional lifestyle. The angel of Eisav changes his program from time to time, but he is always opposed to Torah and moral behavior.

He wavers from totalitarian extreme conservatism to wild liberalism but always is able to wound the Jewish psyche and body no matter what philosophy or culture he now advocates. We limp today from this attack on Jewish values and Torah study and practice.

Jewish parents in America sue school boards for anti-Semitic attitudes, policies and behavior. Yet they would not dream of sending their children to

a Jewish school or giving them an intensive Jewish education. The lawsuit is the indicator of the limp inflicted upon us by Eisav's cultural angel. All agree that Europe is currently a lost continent as far as Jews are concerned. The question most asked of travel agents by Jews today is "Can I wear a kippah on the street there?" Billions of dollars of Jewish treasure pillaged during World War II and immediately thereafter still lie in the hands of Eisav.

And yet we certainly would be satisfied if the world just let us alone but that seems to be a forlorn hope. So our struggle continues but the Lord's promise to us that we will somehow prevail remains valid and true. And that is our hope for continuing on as loyal and steadfast Jews.

Shabat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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<https://jewishlink.news/israel-version-3-0/>

Israel, Version 3.0 -- By Rav Moshe Taragin

November 30, 2023

Being part of the "third" generation is difficult. The first generation innovates. The second generation consolidates. The third generation often squanders the achievements of the previous two. It is never easy being third. A well-known study discovered that financial wealth is generally squandered by the third generation. Through hard work and entrepreneurship, the first generation accumulates wealth. Appreciative of these efforts, the second generation preserves wealth. By contrast, the third generation, taking its privileges for granted, squanders wealth. The curse of the third generation. Sefer Bereishit showcases the religious challenges of the third generation. Avraham was a revolutionary who introduced bold new ideas to the human imagination. He discovered a one God who was responsible for the diversity and dichotomy of our vast world. Additionally, by discovering that Hashem was compassionate, Avraham transformed religious thinking. His life was dramatic and his impact was astonishing.

His son Yitzchak was tasked with locking in these revolutionary ideas and translating them into daily life. In contrast to his father, his life was unremarkable. While Avraham was a nomadic preacher, traveling from location to location, Yitzchak was a sedentary farmer who never traveled beyond the boundaries of Israel. Living a humdrum life without any wars and without visitations from angels, he formed a homestead, excavated deep wells and cemented his father's revolutionary ideas. Living through the first and second generation is straightforward and uncomplicated.

Steering the third generation, Yaakov is challenged to protect these ideas and to sustain historical and religious thrust. Often, the third generation loses its momentum and the revolution grinds to a halt. Taking ideas and success for granted, the third generation often descends into petty rivalries and personal animosities. Far removed from the energy and idealism of the founding generation, the third generation can easily sink into apathy and aimlessness. Though his family is threatened by power struggles and personality conflicts, Yaakov heroically battles to preserve both family unity and Jewish destiny. He does not allow the third generation to deteriorate into dysfunction. As the popular saying goes "hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, and weak men create hard times." As the third generation inherits good times, they can easily become weak men. Yaakov works hard to keep making his children "strong men" so that they can continue to build history.

Fallen Kings

Throughout Jewish history, monarchs of the third generation were haunted by this curse. Jewish monarchy was launched through the exciting and dramatic rise of Dovid Hamelech. His son, Shlomo Hamelech institutionalized his father's gains by constructing a Mikdash and by globalizing Jewish influence. However, by the third generation our unity began to fray, as our state was split into two warring factions under the reign of Shlomo's son, Rechavam. Our people were badly divided into two hostile kingdoms, a split from which we never recovered.

Hundreds of years later, Jewish monarchy, once again, faced the curse of the third generation. In the second Temple era, during the Chanukah miracles, heroic Hasmonean warriors defied mighty Greek armies, while valiantly defending Jewish sovereignty against all odds. We don't know much about the second Hasmonean generation, but the third generation was badly flawed. The Hasmonean successor, John Hyrcanus defected to the Tzedukim faction and adopted policies which incited national discord. His successor, Alexander Jannus, launched a bloody civil war and executed scores of Tanaim. The curse of the third generation struck again.

The Third Generation of Israel

We are the third generation of the modern state of Israel. The first generation of pioneers fought numerous wars to reassert our rights to our national homeland. The first round of wars defended our basic rights to a homeland, while the second wave of wars solidified our borders and returned us to the biblical territories of Israel, including Yerushalayim.

The second generation of Israel achieved financial stability and, subsequently, built an economic superpower. In addition, the second generation advanced worldwide aliyah, beckoning Jews to return to the land of history, which had now started to flow with milk, honey, and with economic prospects. Finally, the second generation began the arduous process of forging peaceful relations with those Arab neighbors willing to embrace our presence in our rightful homeland.

Many doubted whether the third generation of Israel could sustain the idealism of the first two generations. The current "Tik Tok" generation was born into a prosperous country, and they didn't face existential struggles. How would this generation respond to adversity? Would they display selflessness and dedication to Jewish history? Were they too comfortable for patriotic spirit and too addicted to screens to care about long-term ideals? Would Israel suffer the curse of the third generation?

Though we faced a horrific tragedy, the current war has debunked most of these worries. Evidently, the third generation of Israel is more than capable of driving Jewish destiny.

So many people questioned whether this new generation would sacrifice personal comfort for national needs or for historical mission. Our enthusiastic response to the war effort has allayed these worries. The 150% enlistment rates of reserve soldiers and the images of Israeli travelers streaming home to join the war, signal that the spirit of sacrifice still beats loud in Israeli hearts. We are first encountering the countless stories of "first responders," soldiers, policemen and average citizens who initially and heroically fought off the assault by hundreds of terrorists preventing them from invading the heart of Israel and causing even greater casualties. Despite the false narratives which our enemies ceaselessly parrot, this third generation possesses moral and historical clarity. Our war is not a struggle between colonialists and suppressed indigenous populations. This is an existential battle over our homeland and a just war to eradicate murderers and barbarians. The third generation is prepared to sacrifice for the larger arc of Jewish history.

So many wondered whether this generation could preserve national unity. During the awful past year of public discontent our social fabric was gradually torn apart. One by one the clasps which held our people together began to break. One by one we abandoned the unifying narratives which had united us. Jews accusing other Jews of being "Nazis" signaled that the Holocaust was no longer a unifying narrative. Hopefully, after facing real modern-day Nazis, no Jew will ever, ever, hurl that term at another Jew. After Oct 7., that behavior is unthinkable.

Similarly, the scene of Yom Kippur prayers in Tel Aviv being rudely interrupted for political motives signaled that the Yom Kippur experience was no longer a unifying narrative for both secular and religious.

As our fabric began to rupture, we feared that we had lost all unity and togetherness. This war has demonstrated that, deep down, our unity still runs strong. Our mass volunteerism, and our support for the victims, the hostages and our soldiers, has reassured us that what unites us is far greater than what divides us.

Finally, we wondered whether a secularized society had abandoned religious interest. Could secular and religious Israel still coexist side by side? This war has awakened Jewish spirit. For some that spirit is religious, for others it is traditional and for others it is historical. Either way, the resurgence of Jewish spirit is overwhelming, and it isn't limited to Israelis. Across the world, Jews, facing venomous antisemitism, are looking back to our shared past and our national spirit to fend off the so-called "enlightened world."

The third generation of Israel is doing just fine.

The writer is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has smicha and a BA in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a masters degree in English literature from the City University of New York

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Rav Soloveitchik on Vayishlach: A Model Penitent

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters (Ktav, 2023)

Following the death of Leah, her eldest son Reuven seems to commit a disturbing act: "It was when Yisrael was living in that land that Reuven went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine. Yisrael heard, and Yaakov's sons were twelve" (Genesis 35:22). Could Reuven have truly done something so despicable? According to Rashi, Reuven did not literally do this: When Rachel died, Yaakov took his bed which had always been placed in Rachel's tent and no others and placed it in Bilhah's tent. Reuven came and resented the insult to his mother and said, "If my mother was subordinate to her sister [Rachel], must she also be subordinate to her handmaid [Bilhah]?" Therefore, he mixed up [the bed.]¹ Reuven moved his father's bed to Leah's tent to express indignation at his father Yaakov's treatment of her. Unintended Consequences Although less offensive than what the literal words say, Reuven's act is still reprehensible. In the verse quoted above, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik notes that the third Patriarch is twice called Yisrael, and then once Yaakov. Since the name Yisrael represents the free and powerful Jew, and Yaakov the subservient Jew, the verse appears to suggest that Reuven's brazen conduct brought about a terrible change. Prior to Reuven's act, our forefather was a man who commanded the honor he deserved; afterwards, he was reduced to a shell of his former dignified self. "Reuven's actions altered a historical trajectory that was to be victorious, as represented by the name Yisrael, to one of servitude and dependence, as represented by the name Yaakov."² With Yaakov's authority in his own household undermined by his firstborn, the Rav argues that the rest of the brothers could run riot. Without a strong father figure to respect, they could entertain the unthinkable notion of killing their own brother and actually sell him into slavery.³ This can explain why Reuven was not present during the sale of Yosef. The Midrash says that "he was busy with his sackcloth and fasting for mixing up his father's bed."⁴ When he discovered that his brothers had murder on their minds, he realized now that his disrespectful conduct had a domino effect.

Dishonor for Dishonor? Reuven's act of dishonor brought dishonor upon himself. As the firstborn, both kingship and the priesthood would have been rightfully his. Yaakov could now see that Reuven was not suited for either and characterized him as being "like water" (Genesis 49:4), which as a free-flowing liquid is very unstable. Reuven behaved impulsively and without counsel, when a leader must act calmly, deliberately, and wisely under pressure. The Rav suggests that being "busy with his sackcloth and fasting" at the critical moment of Yosef's sale was a mistake. Someone made of leadership material would have been present and protected Yosef.⁵ Despite this huge demotion, Reuven never loses his place within the family. The very verse which describes his transgression concludes with the phrase "and Yaakov's sons were twelve" (Genesis 35:22). Although Yaakov knows what Reuven has done, he does not banish or disinherit him. To the contrary, Reuven continues to be listed first among his brothers, as emphasized by the very next verse: "The sons of Leah, the firstborn of Yaakov, Reuven" (Genesis 35:23).⁶ Reuven's standing is reaffirmed at the time of Yaakov's

death. Not only does he receive the first blessing, but after the final blessing the Torah emphasizes that “all these are the tribes of Israel, twelve” and that each was blessed according to his appropriate blessing (Genesis 49:28). At the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, when Moshe offers his final blessings to each tribe, he addresses the tribe of Reuven with a striking expression: “May Reuven live and not die, and may his people be numbered” (Deuteronomy 33:6). This curious blessing seems to indicate that Reuven’s legacy was still in question. The Midrash says that this was because of the long shadow cast by the “episode of Bilhah” centuries earlier. Moshe affirms that Reuven is part of the Children of Israel like the rest of the tribes.⁷

A Model Penitent Considering the serious nature and repercussions of Reuven’s transgression, why wasn’t he cast out of Yaakov’s household or his tribe stigmatized? Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, mashgiach ruchani of Mesivta Torah Vodaas, cites a Midrash: The Holy One said to [Reuven], “No one has ever sinned before Me and repented, and you are first to repent. On your life, one of your descendants will be first to repent. And who was that? Hoshea, as it is written, “Return, Yisrael, unto Hashem your God [for you have stumbled in your iniquity]” (Hoshea 14:2).⁸ God rewarded Reuven for his quick penitence by placing the prophecy of repentance on the lips of his descendant Hoshea. His prophecy was chosen as the haftarah read on Shabbat Shuvah, the last Shabbat before Yom Kippur, at the height of the penitential season. Rabbi Wolfson further quotes the Peri Tzadik of Rebbe Tzadok ha-Kohen Rabinowitz of Lublin, who says that the Torah publicizes Reuven’s sin only because he is a role model for all who seek to repent. He sought to right his own wrongs, to contain the damage wrought by his own rash doings. Reuven opposed the fraternal cabal, and though he failed to protect Yosef in the event, he did make an effort. The Torah tells us that “he returned” (וַיָּשׁוּב) to the pit and then “he returned” (וַיָּשׁוּב) to his brothers (Genesis 37:29-30), the repeated word being from the same root as repentance (הִתְפַּלֵּט). Apparently, the Sages saw in this repetition an intimation of Reuven’s true legacy—his efforts to repair relationships and make amends.⁹

Exploring the Rav’s Insight Unfortunately, Reuven’s miscalculations and failures had a detrimental effect on his own life and personal destiny. The Rav shows that, tragically, he lost all three coveted positions that were within his reach: priesthood, kingship and firstborn rights. He had to live with the ramifications of his mistakes. However, Reuven also possessed remarkable resilience. His sincere intentions and impressive determination to correct his faults had a purifying effect not only on his life but on his future generations. The Torah details his failings, but it also beautifully spotlights his redeeming qualities. Rabbi Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik, the Rav’s namesake and great-grandfather, writes that what set Reuven’s repentance apart was his recognition that from a single sin a long, unforeseeable causal chain unfolds. Reuven’s descendant Hoshea imparted this precise message. In Rabbi Soloveitchik’s reading, Hoshea says “Return, Yisrael” from your present sins, “for you have stumbled in your iniquity” far beyond your original misstep.¹⁰ Having established this understanding, we will always look up to the oldest brother, the tribe of Reuven, “the first to repent,” in seeking to properly right past wrongs. The eldest of the tribes of Israel will forever be a paradigm for perseverance and for what the Midrash attests was his most magnificent accomplishment, complete and thorough repentance.

[1] Rashi on Genesis 35:22. [2] Chumash Mesoras Harav, 1:265. 8 YUTORAH IN PRINT • Vayeitzei 5784 Download thousands of audio shiurim and articles at www.yutorah.org [3] Even according to the commentaries that claim that the brothers had convened a court and found Yosef guilty and deserving of capital punishment, the brothers were guilty of not conferring with their father and turning to their elder for guidance and direction. See Schachter, *Mi-Peninei ha-Rav*, 358–359. [4] Genesis Rabbah, 84:19 cited by Rashi on Genesis 37:29. [5] Chumash Mesoras Harav, 1:358. [6] Ramban on Genesis 35:22-23 and Seforno on Genesis 35:23, s.v. בָּנָיו. [7] Rashi on Deuteronomy 33:6, quoting Sifrei, 347. [8] Genesis Rabbah, 84:19. [9] Tziyon ve-Areha, 21–22. [10] Beit ha-Levi, Vayeshev, s.v. Vayeshev Reuven el Habor.

<https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/9180/essay-vayishlach-the-meaning-of-chosen-people> Rabbi YY Jacobson November 30, 2023

Are Jews the Chosen People? Why the Obsession with Israel and Jews? Why the Obsession with Israel?

I do not see a way of rationally explaining the obsessive hatred to Israel and Jews without the faith that Jews are G-d’s chosen people to make the world a place of goodness and kindness.

The obsession with Jews, a people that does not even constitute a quarter of a percent of humanity, is going on for almost 4000 years. It makes no sense. 500,000 people were murdered in Syria, including tens of thousands of children, and I did not hear of one demonstration. Israel is trying to protect its children from being slaughtered, fighting an enemy that wants its own children to die, so Israel can be demonized, and yet the Jews are condemned. Traumatized self-hating Jews and anti-Semites even have the chutzpah to call Gaza a Jewish “concentration camp,” when Israel expelled every last Jew from Gaza in 2005. Had the Gaza population not voted in Hamas in 2006 and chosen to spend all its resources to murder Jews, Gaza could have been the Singapore of the Middle East. They blame Israel for having checkpoints, which only exist because without them, there would be terrorists’ attacks on a daily basis. They want an airport in Gaza, so that planes can murder tens of thousands of Jews daily?

The obsession with Israel makes no sense unless you can appreciate the truth that we are G-d’s people. We were chosen to serve as a light unto the nations, a Divine flame lit on the cosmic way, hence we trigger the world in unimaginable ways.

But this is not easy for Jews to accept, even though the world knows it. Virtually every other nation has perceived itself as chosen or otherwise divinely special. For example, China means “Middle Kingdom” in Chinese – meaning that China is at the center of the world; and Japan considers itself the land where the sun originates (“Land of the Rising Sun”). The British thought they were chosen, and the Muslims and Christians of course see themselves as chosen. And they would love hearing it. But when you tell a Jew you are chosen, he says: “Me? Never. I am just a human being.” Of course, Jewish chosen-ness cannot be racist because Jews are not a race; there are Jews of every race. What is more, any person of any race, ethnicity, or nationality can become a member of the Jewish people and thereby be as chosen as Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, Maimonides, or the chief rabbi of Israel.

Can reason alone explain how a hodgepodge of ex-slaves was able to change history — to introduce the moral Creator we know as G-d, to devise ethical monotheism; to write the world’s most influential book, the Bible; to be the only civilization to deny the cyclical worldview and give humanity belief in a linear (i.e., purposeful) history; to provide morality-driven prophets; and so much more — without G-d playing the decisive role in this people’s history? But we are still uncomfortable. Why did it have to be this way? Who needs this idea that one people is chosen? It seems unenlightened. To suggest that as Jews we are somehow closer to G-d than all other nation smacks of arrogance, elitism, and prejudice.

It’s because we don’t understand what “chosen” means.

The Rebbe’s 1798 Letter

This story takes us back some two centuries ago. In 1798, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), founder of Chabad, known as the Alter Rebbe, was arrested and charged with treason, on the basis of petitions to the Czar by opponents of Chassidism. It was a devastating moment in Jewish history. He could have been given capital punishment, heaven forbid—and that would have been the end not only of Chabad, but of much of the Chassidic movement, as he was its chief defender, intellectual advocate, and most influential figure. After 53 days of imprisonment, he was exonerated of all charges and freed. The event—celebrated to this day on the 19th day of Kislev, this Shabbos December 2 —marked the decisive victory of the Chassidic movement and the onset of a new, expanded phase in the

exploration and dissemination of the infinite spiritual depth of Judaism, embodied in Chassidism.

Upon his release, Rabbi Schneur Zalman dispatched a short but powerful letter to all his followers. It is one of the most extraordinary letters one can read. (It is published in Tanya, Igeres Hakodesh, chapter 2). The Rebbe suffered so much as a result of his opponents; they persecuted him and his followers even before the arrest; then came the arrest and his terrifying trial. Yet in this letter he warns his disciples against any display of haughtiness as a result of their victory. He instructs them not to denigrate, tease, and show disdain to those who craved their downfall.

The letter opens with the verse stated by Jacob in Genesis: "I have become small by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant." (This verse appears in the beginning of the Torah section of Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:43), which was the Torah reading for the Shabbat preceding the day of Rabbi Schneur Zalman's release, Tuesday, 19 Kislev, 5759-1798). The Alter Rebbe is perturbed by the obvious question. Why was Jacob humbled by all the kindness he was shown? Why did it not bolster his pride? If G-d gave this all to me, I probably deserve it!

תניא אגרת הקודש סימן ב: פ'י שבכל חסד וחסד שהקדוש ב"ה עושה לאדם צריך להיות שפל רוח במאד, כי חסד דרועא ימינא. וימינו תחבוקני. שהוא בחי' קרבת אלהים ממש ביתר שאת מלפנים. וכל הקרוב אל ה' ביתר שאת והגבה למעלה מעלה, צריך להיות יותר שפל רוח למטה מטה כמ"ש מרחוק ה' נראה לי. וכנודע דכולא קמ' דווקא כלא חשיב. וא"כ כל שהוא קמ' יותר הוא יותר כלא ואין ואפס וזו בחי' ימין שבקדושה וחסד לאברהם שאמר אנכי עפר ואפר. וזו היא ג"כ מדתו של יעקב... משא"כ בזול"ה הוא ישמעאל חסד דקליפה. כל שהחסד גדול הוא הולך וגדל בגובה וגסות הרוח ורוחב לבו.

The Alter Rebbe conveys a profound idea.

Who Chose You?

In the Jewish understanding, chosenness leads not to arrogance, but rather to humility. If it were some human king that chose us to be his special people, then your assumption would be correct — we would become elitists. When a mortal power shows favoritism towards a subject, that subject will become more arrogant as a result — the closer you are to the king, the more significant you are, and the more significant you are the higher respect you feel you deserve.

But we were chosen by G-d. And the closer you are to G-d, the more you sense your insignificance. While being buddy-buddy with a human leader inflates your ego, a relationship with G-d bursts your selfish bubble. Because G-d is an infinite being, and all delusions of petty self-importance fall away when you stand before infinity. Being close with G-d demands introspection and self-improvement, not smugness.

In Judaism, G-d is the core of reality—the entire reality of existence. We are all part of reality, we are all in reality; we are all part of G-d, in G-d, in reality. There is an organic oneness that unites all of existence, all of humanity, all of the cosmos—and that organic unity is what we call G-d.

"Hashem Echad," G-d is one, does not only mean there is one G-d and not twenty gods; it means that G-d is synonymous with oneness. The word G-d is another way of saying that "there is only one." There is oneness that pervades all of existence. We are all reflections of One reality; One core. We are all manifestations—diverse expressions—of a singular reality.

To be conscious of G-d means to never allow your ego to wrap you in its superficial imagination. "Ego" stands for Easing G-d Out. When I do not realize my true greatness and value, as a reflection of G-d's infinite oneness, I must resort to my ego to feel good about myself and to put you down.

Becoming G-d conscious means that at every moment I need not protect my ego, as I become completely comfortable with my true reality, as an expression of Divine light. The more G-d conscious I am, the smaller I become and the greater I become: On one level I become nothing, as there is nothing but the organic oneness, the absolute infinity of G-d, which pervades all. At the same time—I become the greatest, as my life becomes a full and seamless expression of the higher, unifying, integrating, eternal consciousness of the eternal core of all reality.

Being close to G-d summons you to respect others more, not less. The more G-d conscious, the more loving and charitable you become, as you are aware

that G-d's light pervades every person and every creature. When in the name of chosenness a person becomes bigoted, disrespectful, elitist and arrogant—they missed the boat. When you become aware of G-d choosing you, it eliminates judgementalism we resort to in order to protect our egos and feel better about ourselves and our place in the world. Your success never equals my failure. I reflect one aspect of G-d, as you reflect another one.

This is the idea of the Chosen People — a nation of individuals who have been given the opportunity to sense G-d's closeness, hear His truth and relay His message to the world. All agree that it was the Jews that introduced the world to monotheism and a system of ethics and morals that has shaped the modern view of life and its purpose. And it is the survival of Judaism to this day that attests to the eternal value of this system.

Anyone from any ethnic background can convert to Judaism and become chosen. Jewish chosenness is not a gene, it is a state of the soul. Anyone wishing to take it upon themselves is welcome -- as long as they are ready to have their bubble burst. Anyone can join this group of "chosen people" as long as they are ready to experience themselves as nothing...

And that is a Jew.

And that is why so many people loathe the Jewish people.

We have been chosen to teach each and every person alive that each of them has been chosen—to serve G-d and become an ambassador of love, light, and goodness to His world.

What Did Chosen-ness Do To Us?

When I look at our people, I ask myself one question: Has our belief that we are the chosen people turned us into murderous people who feel they have the right to abuse, persecute, target, and annihilate other cultures and peoples who are different? Or has it made us feel responsible to share, give, contribute, and help others? Has the idea of Chosen People turned us into people who are never introspective, or perhaps into the most self-critical and introspective nation on earth? (Often, the worst critics of Israel are Jews!)

The true test of chosenness is how humble you are. Most Jews today have passed this test with flying colors. Their humility is so deep, it doesn't allow them to accept that they are chosen. While most other religious groups are quite comfortable claiming that they are the best, we Jews will do anything to say that we are nothing special. Now that's what we call a Chosen People! Katonti!

This, explained Rabbi Schneur Zalman, was the hallmark of Jacob. To the self-absorbed person, a kindness from G-d is proof of his own significance and worth. To the spiritually mature person, however, a kindness from G-d is, first and foremost, an act of divine love: G-d is drawing the person closer to Him. And the closer one comes to G-d, the more one realizes one's own insignificance in the face of the divine infinity.

This is what it means to think as a Jew. When you were blessed with a gift, when you were showered with a blessing—the first instinct of the Jew is: Katonti! I am humbled.

This, the Alter Rebbe taught, must be the response of his followers to the grace they have seen: to become far more humble, authentic, and Divine. To suspend their egos and become channels for Divine oneness.

When we realize we have been chosen, we cultivate a healthy confidence that comes not from ego but from humility. It is about respecting our role as Divine ambassadors for goodness and truth. Then we never duck to pressure of those who want us to compromise our eternal mission to eliminate evil and cultivate goodness.

(My thanks to Rabbi Aron Moss for his article on the topic:

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/160993/jewish/Are-the-Jews-the-Chosen-People.htm).

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Nov 30, 2023, 8:48 AM subject: **Rav Frand - The Chochmas Adam Shares Wisdom of a (Former) Businessman**

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayishlach The Chochmas Adam Shares Wisdom of a (Former) Businessman

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1271 – The Postponed Bris: Never On A Thursday? Good Shabbos!

Yaakov instructs the messengers that he sends to his brother Eisav to deliver the following message: "Thus says your servant Yaakov: Im Lavan gartee (I have dwelt with Lavan) and I have tarried there until now." (Bereshis 32:5). Rashi cites two interpretations for the expression "Im Lavan gartee". Rashi's second interpretation is that the word gartee (Gimmel Reish Taf Yud) is numerically equivalent to the number taryag (Taf Reish Yud Gimmel), six hundred and thirteen. According to this interpretation, the message Yaakov sent to his brother was, "although I lived with Lavan, I kept the 613 mitzvos of the Torah throughout that time and was not influenced by his evil ways." In effect, Yaakov told Eisav, "Don't start up with me!"

Many meforshim ask: Given who Eisav was, why would he care in the least that Yaakov kept the 613 mitzvos and did not learn from Lavan's evil ways? It is as if we were speaking to a heretic and we said to him "You should know, throughout my time with my evil uncle, I kept the laws of Chof Leif Yisrael and I kept the laws of Pas Yisrael." What effect will it have on Eisav that Yaakov kept the 613 mitzvos in Lavan's house?

The Sefer Ateres Duda'im, written by Rav Dovid Zucker, the head of the Chicago Kollel, seeks an answer to this question based on a comment of the Kli Yakar. The pasuk says, "...and Eisav said in his heart, 'the time of mourning for my father will soon be here, and I will then kill my brother Yaakov.'" (Bereshis 27:41) The Kli Yakar writes that Eisav was waiting for the moment when Yaakov would not be occupying himself with Torah, and that would be the propitious moment to kill him. Since a mourner is forbidden to learn Torah, Eisav planned to wait until Yitzchak died and Yaakov became an avel. At that time, Yaakov's merit of occupying himself with Torah would not protect him.

The sefer Ateres Duda'im says that this helps explain what Yaakov Avinu is trying to tell Eisav here as well. Yaakov is telling his brother "You know that when I was in my father's house I was a 'tent dweller' who learned day and night. When I left my home and went to the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, I also learned day and night." Now Yaakov has returned from his sojourn with Lavan. What has he been doing for the last 22 years? He has been raising cattle. He has been working for a living. Eisav thinks to himself, "Maybe my brother learned by Shem and Ever and maybe he learned in my father's house, but for the last 22 years, he has been in business. He is in the cattle business and has done very well for himself in the cattle business. Now is my chance."

According to the Ateres Duda'im "Taryag mitzvos shamarti" does not mean I kept the 613 mitzvos. The truth of the matter is that Yaakov did not keep the 613 mitzvos. He married two sisters. There are other things he could not fulfill living outside of Eretz Yisrael. The word shamarti is similar to the expression "V'Aviv shamar es haDavar" (Bereshis 37:11) (and his father anticipated the fulfillment of the matter, he longed to see the time when Yosef's dreams would be fulfilled). Yaakov acknowledged that while in the house of Lavan he spent time out in the fields, tending to sheep day and night. But that entire time, I anticipated, I longed for the time that I could get back to the Beis Medrash.

When a person is in the workplace but he anxiously awaits getting back to the Beis Medrash, that gives him the merit of Torah as well. Rabbi Zucker, in this connection, cites the introduction that Rav Avram Danzig wrote to his sefer Chochmas Adam. Rav Avram Danzig was a mechutan to the Gaon of Vilna. He was a businessman until he went bankrupt. At that point he acquiesced to the demands that he become a dayan (judge) in Vilna. Much of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch by Rav Shlomo Ganzfried is based on Rav Danzig's earlier works the Chayei Adam and the Chochmas Adam.

The author of the Chochmas Adam, thus, was a businessman. He was born in the city of Danzig, Poland, but he did his business in the city of Leipzig. He writes as follows in his introduction to the Chochmas Adam:

I know that people are going to whisper about me and ask "Is Shaul also one of the prophets?" (Shmuel I 10:11) We know this fellow is a businessman for

the past 15 years who sold his wares in Leipzig and in Frankfurt. When did he possibly learn Torah (that he now feels qualified to write Halachic compendiums on the laws of Orach Chaim and Yoreh Deah)? After all, the Torah testifies about itself "It is not found on the other side of the river" (Devorim 30:13). The Torah says about itself that it is not to be found by merchants and by businessmen. You should know my brothers, that my travelling great distances (from home) was not, Heaven forbid, to accumulate wealth. The Master of All will testify for me. I was only trying to support my family.

This is the fact with every Jewish man: If a person abandons Torah, distances himself from it, and gives up the practice of intensive Torah learning, then Torah will also distance itself from him and he will no longer possess the ability to be innovative in Torah. But if a person's intent is not to leave Torah but due to circumstances beyond his control, he cannot cling to it with the same intensity that he once could, then Heaven forbid that the Torah should leave him! One who in the midst of his business dealings longs for the opportunity to return to his Torah learning and be married once again to it, that power of Torah creativity will remain in his soul.

This is what I say about myself. Even though it is true that I traveled to faraway places while engaging in my business dealings, my Torah wisdom has remained with me. Whenever I traveled on my routes, my thoughts were with Torah. When I was in the store my thoughts were with Torah. Let me be given credit for the fact that even while engaged in buying and selling, many times my thoughts were in fact involved with Torah. My fellow businessmen will testify about me that even while travelling to Leipzig, I never failed to take with me a Gemara, Mikra, and Mishna. Even during the times of the Great (trade) Fairs, I learned a daf and a half of Gemara daily, besides Mishnayos.

Therefore, that is how I can write these Halachic compendiums – because "Taryag mitzvos shamarti," because I longed to go back to the Beis Medrash. Whenever I travel and I see people taking out their ArtScroll Gemaras or putting on their headsets and listening to shiurim on a plane or a train, I recall what Rav Avraham Danzig writes in his introduction to the Chochmas Adam. A person may need to be in the business world, but as long as he longs for Torah and uses every moment of down time or free time to connect with Torah, then Torah will not leave him.

This is what Yaakov was telling Eisav. "Eisav, you think that now you can 'get me' because I have been wasting my time for the last twenty plus years? You are wrong. The whole time 'shamarti' – I was longing and looking forward to come back to the Beis Medrash and therefore, the merit of Torah stood with me and still stands with me, and you should not think that you can now start up with your brother!"

The Goan Explains that Cheshek is Spiritual and Chafetz is Physical

I wish to share an observation from the Vilan Gaon on the varying nuances of two almost-equivalent words in the story of Dinah with Shechem.

Chamor, the father of Shechem tells Yaakov and his sons: "Shechem my son loves your daughter (chashka nafsho b'vitchem); please give her to him as a wife." (Bereshis 34:8) Eleven pesukim later (Bereshis 34:19), the Torah writes "the lad did not tarry in carrying out the matter (of the circumcision), for he desired the daughter of Yaakov (ki chafetz b'vas Yaakov).

Rav Chaim of Volozhin, the talmud muvhak (prime disciple) of the Gaon of Vilna, asked his Rebbe why the Torah switches verbs between these two pesukim. In pasuk 8, it says "chashka nafsho" and in pasuk 19, it says "chafetz b'vas Yaakov".

The Gaon answered that the verb cheshek (ches-shin-kuf) is used in connection with a spiritual matter (davar ruchani) while the verb chafetz (ches-fay-tzadee) is used in connection with a physical matter (davar gashmi).

When Chamor tried to sell Yaakov on the idea of Shechem marrying Dina, he tells him "My son – chashka nafsho – he is not lustful, wanting her for improper reasons. He wants her for the most pristine of reasons." Chashka implies that he was interested in her yichus of being Yaakov's daughter, a

“good Bais Yaakov girl,” a “tzanua” (someone who is modest and refined), etc.

But then when the pasuk talks about Shechem himself, it says “he did not tarry in the matter, for he desired Yaakov’s daughter (Chafetz b’vas Yaakov). He was not interested in the Bais Yaakov part. He was not interested in the tzinyus part or the tzadekes part. He was interested in the chafetz part – chafetz being an ‘object’.

We don’t know whether Chamor was deluding himself or he was just trying to do a sales job to Yaakov and his sons. But the truth came out in pasuk 19, which says “the lad did not tarry in carrying out the matter, for he desired Yaakov’s daughter (chafetz)” That is what Shechem was really interested in. His father may have thought “I will tell Yaakov my son is a good Yeshiva bochor who wants a nice Bais Yaakov girl....” But the truth is chafetz b’vas Yaakov — that is what Chamor really wanted.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

Vayishlach 5784: Sacred & Profane

Michal Horowitz <contact@MichalHorowitz.com> Thu, Nov 30, 11:03 AM
Vayishlach 5784: Sacred & Profane

In Parshas Vayishlach, Yaakov Avinu travels back to the land of Canaan, after working for Lavan for twenty years. Fourteen years of servitude were for his wives, and six more years for his flocks. En route home, he fears the wrath of his brother Eisav who had sworn to kill Yaakov (Bereishis 27:41). To prepare for this historic confrontation, Yaakov divides his family into two camps, so that if one were to be decimated by Eisav, the other would survive (Bereishis 32:8-9). He prays to Hashem for Divine salvation and deliverance from the hand of his brother, Eisav (32:10-13). And he sends many gifts of appeasement to Eisav, in the form of hundreds of animals (32:14-20).

In regard to the sending of the gifts, the pasuk says: וַיִּשְׁלַח מִן־הַבָּקָר בָּנִיּוֹ מִנְחָה לְעִשָׂו, אֶחָד, and he took from that which he had in his hand as a gift for his brother, Eisav (32:14). Rashi, quoting the Medrash, teaches: what were the gifts he had in his hand that he sent to Eisav? שְׂאֵנִים וְכִנֹּרִים, שְׂאֵנִים וְכִנֹּרִים – precious stones and jewels which a person binds in a packet and carries in his hand.

Why does the pasuk make a point of telling us מִן־הַבָּקָר בָּנִיּוֹ, that the gifts were those things ‘he had in his hand’? Whether the verse is referring to animals or precious gems, why does the Torah emphasize these were matters he had in his hand? Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt”l, the Rav, teaches, “‘And he took from that which he had in his hand a gift from his brother Eisav.’ When Yaakov wanted to impress Eisav, he sent him everything he had: jewels, he-goats, she-goats, ewes and rams, bucks, camels, kine (cows collectively) and bulls.

“The Jew is willing to give away all his possessions to avoid an edict or an expulsion, to free the head of the community from prison, and such like. But as our Sages have wisely noted, ‘that which he had in his hand’ refers to profane things, not sacred ones. All the gifts, all the sacrifices, all the tributes which the Jew brought to the lords of Eisav during that long night, consisted of profane objects: everyday possessions, goats and sheep, precious stones, political rights. As long as Eisav received only מִן־הַבָּקָר בָּנִיּוֹ, goods which can be bought and sold, Israel (Yaakov) exhibited submissiveness and inferiority.

“But when Eisav wanted a gift of Yaakov’s sacred objects – the holiness of family life, Shabbos, kashrus, beliefs and traditions; when Eisav demanded that Yaakov compromise his Torah way of life – a remarkable

transformation occurred within Yaakov. Suddenly, the quiet, unassuming Jew became a hero, full of strength and stubbornness. The crooked back straightened, the pitiful eyes began to spit fire, and Yaakov refused Eisav’s request withchutzpah and determination... Yaakov told those who represent him in that dark Diaspora night, in the kingly palaces of Germany, Poland, and Russia: Eisav will begin to debate with you, to ask you about your beliefs, hopes, and ideals. He will propose, ‘let us take our journey together’ (Gen.33:12). He will suggest that his religion and Judaism can easily merge, that all can live peacefully. Tell him that we can cooperate, as long as we are dealing with profane matters, with business, with politics, with science, with goats, camels and mules, with precious stones and pearls. If he wants a gift of ‘that which he had in hand,’ he can have it; ‘it is a gift sent to my master, to Eisav’ (v.19).

“But the moment he demands more and begins to ask for souls, for the purity of my family, my Shabbos, my G-d, you must give a different response... You should answer sharply and with pride [32:19]. I myself, my soul, my heart, my feelings, my hopes, and my beliefs belong not to you, but to Judaism. This is what Yaakov announced throughout the generations to all his representatives and politicians. And when Eisav persisted and demanded things that were sacred, then the passive man, the coward, the man who said three times a day ‘and to those that curse me let my soul be silent, let my soul be unto all as the dust,’ became a fighter who resisted Eisav with great stubbornness” (Chumash Masores HaRav, Bereishis, p.243-245).

Amichai Shindler of Kibbutz Kerem Shalom miraculously survived the October 7th massacre but was left with severe injuries. Kerem Shalom is a mixed religious-secular kibbutz that is less than 100 meters [.06 miles] from the Gaza Strip. That Shabbos/Simchas Torah morning, Amichai, 33, and his wife and six children went into their safe room when they heard rocket sirens blare early in the morning. When they heard the sound of terrorists shouting in Arabic inside their home. Amichai ran to the door and held it shut, while his wife and small children huddled inside. Amichai held the door shut for hours, fending off the terrorists but eventually, the Hamas animals threw an explosive device at it. The resulting blast seriously injured Amichai, blowing off one of his forearms, breaking his other arm, and crushing his face and jaw. Amichai fell to the floor of the room – still conscious but bleeding profusely. He lay there for three and a half hours until IDF soldiers reached the kibbutz and evacuated Amichai to the hospital. His wife and children were physically unharmed.

Amichai is now undergoing rehabilitation at Sheba Hospital, learning to live with his severe injuries, with one arm cut off right below the elbow and the other severely injured. One of his first requests after regaining consciousness was to meet with Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein shlita. Once Amichai was in rehabilitation, he had two more requests – to meet the Gerrer Rebbe, HaGaon HaRav Shaul Altar, whose Torah he’s enjoyed in recent years, and to start using Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin. HaRav Altar went to visit Amichai last week and told him “וַיְהִי יְדִיו אֲמוֹנָה” (Shemos 17:12) – you can learn emunah from your hands.”

They also spoke about tying tefillin and how Amichai will light Chanukah candles – Amichai related that he asked the physical therapists to practice lighting candles with him. The Rebbe was moved, saying that it’s a “מִצְוָה לְפָרֶסֶם” that these are the requests of a Jew in such a situation.

Regarding Amichai’s injuries, the Rosh Yeshivah said: “It’s not an individual tza’ar – it’s a tza’ar of all of Klal Yisrael. But we know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge.”

<https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/israel-news/2241882/a-jews-request-after-arm-blown-off-rabbeinu-tam-tefillin.html>

When Eisav wants chattel, that which one ‘holds in his hands’, he can have it and to save a life the Jew will freely part with such goods. But when he wants the emunah that defines us, Shabbos, kashrus, masorah, kedusha, the same Jew becomes a courageous warrior who will never concede defeat. “וַיְהִי יְדִיו אֲמוֹנָה” (Shemos 17:12) – you can learn emunah from your hands.”

Tidbits in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz Ztl • Parashas Vayishlach

Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

Parashas Vayishlach • December 1st • 18 Kislev 5784

This Tuesday, December 5th at Maariv, we begin saying V'sain Tal U'matar in Bareich Aleinu (those in Eretz Yisrael previously began on 7 Cheshvan). If one forgets V'sain Tal U'matar there, he can make it up by saying it in Shema Koleinu. If one remembers his omission after passing Shema Koleinu, one must go back to the berachah of Bareich Aleinu. If one has already finished Shemoneh Esrei, he must repeat Shemoneh Esrei. If one is unsure what he said, until thirty days have passed (Maariv on Thursday, January 4th, 2023), we assume that he did not say V'sain Tal U'matar.

However, one who repeats the phrase “V'es Kol... V'sein Tal U'matar” ninety times (ideally 101 times) is thereafter - in case of doubt - halachically presumed to have said it properly and thus would need not repeat if unsure.

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Kamma 29 • Yerushalmi: Shevi'is 55 •

Mishnah Yomis: Yevamos 11:1-2 • Oraysa: Next week is Yoma 36b-38b.

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Chanukah begins next Thursday evening, December 7th.

Shabbos Chanukah is next Shabbos, Parashas Vayeishev, December 9th.

VAYISHLACH: Yaakov sends Malachim to Eisav who is approaching with 400 men • Yaakov prepares for his confrontation with Eisav with gifts, prayer, and readying for war • Left alone on one side of the Yabok River, Yaakov battles and defeats the ministering angel of Eisav • Yaakov is given the name Yisrael • Yaakov encounters Eisav and they part in peace • Dina ventures out into the city of Shechem, and is assaulted by its leader's son, Shechem • The Shevatim are outraged and plot revenge • Shechem and his people agree to be circumcised • Shimon and Levi annihilate the male inhabitants of the city of Shechem • Yaakov builds an altar in Bais-El • Rachel passes away during the birth of Binyamin • Reuven moves Yaakov's bed to Leah's tent • Yitzchak passes away at 180 years of age, and is buried by Yaakov and Esav • The descendants of Eisav and the kingdoms of Edom. Haftarah: Ovadiah (1:1-21) relates the prophecy about the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Edom, the descendants of Esav. Ovadiah was himself a convert from Edom.

Parashas Vayishlach: 154 Pesukim • 1 Prohibition

1. It is forbidden to eat the Gid Hanasheh (the sciatic nerve) of a kosher animal.

Mitzvah Highlight: Yaakov was saved from the Malach of Eisav, escaping with merely a wound to his thigh. This mitzvah reminds us that despite the constant and ongoing persecution by Esav's descendants, our nation will ultimately be spared and redeemed (Sefer HaChinuch).

“וַיִּקְרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁמוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל” “And I acquired an ox and a donkey” (Bereishis 32:6)

Rashi explains that it is “Derech Eretz” to reference many oxen in a singular form. Rav Moshe Feinstein z”l explains that when a person references his own possessions, it is proper to be modest and not needlessly boast about them. Thus, Yaakov modestly used the singular form “ox,” although he had many oxen.

We find as well that Eisav proclaims to Yaakov “Yesh Li Rav,” “I have an abundance,” and Yaakov replies to Eisav, “Yesh Li Kol,” “I have everything.” An “abundance” is measured relative to what is common in society. Eisav looked to the world around him to measure his success and was only content when he exceeded societal standards. Yaakov, however, confidently proclaimed “I have everything,” as he was satisfied that all his needs were met. Yaakov saw no need to boast about his abundance, as he attached little importance to the status associated with material success and instead focused on everything he was given.

This concept can be illustrated by a true incident which occurred in a ballroom in the United Kingdom. In attendance at the event were many of the UK's dignitaries, including the Queen of England herself. Suddenly, a commotion erupted, as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher entered the hall. The reason for the commotion? Madam Thatcher was wearing a dress identical to the Queen's! The very next day, the Prime Minister's office sent a

letter to the Queen expressing her apologies over the incident. The response from the Queen's secretary was curt and quick in coming: “The Queen of England does not notice what other people are wearing.” Similarly, when we are aware of our own inherent importance and dignity, we are not threatened by the successes, possessions or achievements of others.

Halachos of Chanukah Menorah: How to Light?

Common practice is to light the candle in the rightmost position on the first night. From the second night and on, the candles are added from right to left; lighting begins with the newest candle and moves to the right. The neiros mitzvah should not be used to light one another; rather the shamash or another flame source should be used to light all the neiros. One should have a lit candle in his right hand prior to reciting the berachos, and should position his hand so that the lit shamash is positioned closest to the night's new ner (so that he does not ‘pass over’ any other neiros when lighting the newest ner). Those who light adjacent to a doorway may light the rightmost candle first as it is closest to the doorpost. The berachos of L'hadlik Ner Shel Chanukah and She'asa Nissim are recited, as well as Shehecheyanu on the first night. Following the Hadlakah, Haneiros Hallalu and Ma'oz Tzur are recited or sung. One should be sure that one wick is reliably aflame before reciting Haneiros Hallalu (so as not to create a hefsek between the berachos and the lighting). One may not derive benefit from the menorah lights; for this reason the additional shamash is left lit adjacent to the Menorah lights. Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org

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Rav Kook on VaYishlach: The Conflict Between Jacob and Esau

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> U Thu, Nov 30, 2:

VaYishlach: The Conflict Between Jacob and Esau

The central theme of VaYishlach is Jacob's struggle to find his unique path, especially in relation to his brother Esau.

This was not just a family feud. The Sages saw in Esau a symbol for Rome, and more broadly, a non-Jewish worldview alien to the Torah's outlook. The high point of the narrative unfolds as Jacob engages in a nighttime battle with a mysterious stranger, identified by the Sages as Esau's guardian angel. “Jacob remained alone. A stranger wrestled with him until daybreak. When he saw that he could not defeat him, he touched the upper joint of [Jacob's] thigh. Jacob's hip joint became dislocated as he wrestled with the stranger.” (Gen. 32:25-26)

What is the significance of this unusual wrestling match? Why did Esau's angel decide to injure Jacob's thigh, and not some other part of his body?

Esau's World of Hedonism

Many years earlier, Esau rejected his birthright, selling it for a bowl of lentil stew. “I am going to die!” he exclaimed. “What good is a birthright to me?” (Gen. 25:32) What motivated Esau to sell his birthright?

We must understand the significance of this ancestral birthright. It was a legacy from their father Isaac, a spiritual charge to lead a life dedicated to serving God. For Esau, holiness is incompatible with a conventional lifestyle. He saw the birthright as a death sentence; it threatened the very foundations of his hedonistic way of life. It was because of this birthright and its responsibilities that Esau felt that he was going to die.

Esau's viewpoint resurfaces during his reunion with Jacob. When Esau saw Jacob's family, he was astounded. “Who are these to you?” (Gen. 33:5) You, Jacob, who chose our father's birthright and its otherworldly holiness – what connection can you have to a normal life? How can you have wives and children?

Esau was unable to reconcile his image of a life dedicated to Divine service with establishing a family and raising children.

In the nocturnal struggle between Jacob and Esau's guardian angel, the attack on Jacob's thigh symbolizes this clash of viewpoints. The angel's message was unmistakable: if Jacob wanted to pursue holiness and devotion to God, he must detach himself from the realm of family and the ordinary

aspects of life. The dislocation of the thigh, the source of progeny, signified this separation.

The Elevated Torah of the Patriarchs

Jacob rejected Esau's views on living a life of holiness. Jacob exemplified, in both outlook and actions, the harmony of nature with holiness. And Jacob's Torah was revealed in the natural world.

The Midrash teaches that "The Holy One looked into the Torah and created the universe" (Bereishit Rabbah 1:1). This implies that the universe is a result and a manifestation of God's contemplation of the Torah. If we examine the world carefully, we should be able to uncover the underlying principles of the Torah. If Adam had not sinned, there would have been no need for a written Torah; life itself would be ordered according to the Torah's principles.

The Patriarchs endeavored to rectify Adam's sin. Their Torah and mitzvot belonged to the era before the Torah needed to be written down. For them, the Torah was naturally revealed in the universe. This is also the Torah of the angels, whose sole function is to fulfill the mission of their Creator in the world. "Bless God, His angels, mighty in strength, who fulfill His word" (Psalms 103:20).

Who were the messengers that Jacob sent to inform Esau of his arrival? The Midrash interprets the word malachim literally: Jacob sent angels to his brother. A messenger is regarded as an extension of the sender; it is as if the sender himself accomplished the mission. If so, the sender and the messenger must share a connection on some basic level (see Kiddushin 41b).

By utilizing these unusual emissaries, Jacob sent a powerful message to Esau. You, Esau, claim that holiness and physical life are fundamentally contradictory. But my Torah is the Torah of the angels. For me, there is no division between holiness and the natural world. God Himself is revealed within His creation. (Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah 9, VaYishlach 5630 (1929))

From: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com> date: Nov 30, 2023, 11:17 PM

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman's Chumash Shiur

Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Vayishlach 5784

1 – Topic – A Dvar Halacha and a Remez that comes from the Posuk

As we prepare for Shabbos Parshas Vayishlach and prepare for the upcoming Yom Tov of Chanukah which we hope will be a time of great Ohr for all of Klal Yisrael. In this week's Parsha we find in 35:26 after the list of the children of Yaakov Avinu, the Posuk says (אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב, אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לוֹ בְּפָדֵן אֲרָם). These are the children of Yaakov that were born to him in Padan Aram. A Peledik Posuk. What are you talking about? Binyamin was not born in Padan Aram, Binyamin was born in Eretz Yisrael! Rachel died in childbirth. We know where Rachel is buried. What do you mean (אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לוֹ בְּפָדֵן אֲרָם), it is a Davar Pele! It must be that some of the Meforshim talk about it.

I did see in the Taima Dikra (page Mem Daled), that Rav Chaim Kanievsky writes that it seems that the Torah considers (אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לוֹ בְּפָדֵן אֲרָם) because she was expecting and she became pregnant with him in Padan Aram. Rav Chaim Kanievsky is Maskim that it doesn't fit with all of the Chazals to say that that is what happened, but nevertheless it is a Pshat. If we can understand that from when they left Padan Aram until his birth was 9 months or less, then it makes sense (אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לוֹ בְּפָדֵן אֲרָם). This is a Pshat in the Posuk. It is more than a Pshat in the Posuk.

If we go with such a Pshat, then we have a Mekor for a Mechudush'dika idea that is brought in the Poskim. What is that? Normally I would understand that a person is alive from the time that he is born. The rest of time he is not considered to be a separate person. There is a Lashon in Chazal that U'ber Yerech Imo, that the U'ber is a piece of the mother. It is a Safeik L'halacha if we even Pasken that way. Yet, we do find in Halacha certain Halachos for a baby where the mother became pregnant still as a non-Jew and the birth was as a Jew. We do find different Halachos. The language that the Roshei Yeshiva use in the case of such a person, is a language of Yichus Yisrael B'li Kedushas Yisrael. The idea that when the pregnancy begins as a non-Jew the baby needs Geirus because he is missing Kedushas Yisrael. But since he is born to a Jewish mother he has Yichus Yisrael, he has Dinim of Yichus Yisrael. You are going to say what is the Nafka Mina?

One Nafka Mina is, that he is related to his mother. Even if the Geirus takes place later, if the mother is Megayeir too, and that is what it means Lai'daso B'Kedusha, that the mother was Megayeir. Even though the child's Geirus is not complete until the Bris Milah, but he is related to his mother. Not only that, if twins are born, Chazal say that the twins are related to each other. But they need Geirus?

That is a riddle, how can you have somebody who is born and needs a Bris Milah for Geirus and yet is related to his brother? If twins are born, and they have to have Bris Milah to complete their Geirus, nevertheless, they are related to each other. How could that be? Ger Shenisgayeir K'koton Shenolad Dami?

The answer is the person has Yichus Yisrael, a person who is born to a Jewish mother, the mother is his mother. The brother is his brother. He is missing Kedushas Yisrael. It could be that the pregnancy began in Chutz L'aretz so the beginning of the pregnancy is when Kedushas Hav'lad begins. This is a concept we find in Chazal, and this would be a nice source for it or at least an Asmachta for it. That is says that Binyamin was born in Padan Aram although he was born in Eretz Yisrael and he wasn't born in Padan Aram. So we see that L'gabey Kedushas Hav'lad the fact that the pregnancy began in Chutz L'aretz is still missing something in the full Kedusha of somebody that has the pregnancy in Eretz Yisrael and Lai'da in Eretz Yisrael, perhaps this is a Remez or an Asmachta for that concept.

2 – Topic – The Chashivus in Saying Nefillas Apaim

As you know, by Tachnun the main point of Tachnun is when we fall on our arm and say Tachnun. The Minhag of Ashkenazim is to say the 6th Perek of Tehillim and the Minhag of Sefardim is to say the 25th Perek of Tehillim when they say Nefillas Apaim, but one Minhag is the same. That is, before we start we say (רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן הָאֱלֹהִים לְפָנֵינוּ) (רחום וחנון). That is not a Posuk anywhere. It is a Memra of Chazal of Techina that goes back a very long time.

Rabbeinu Chananel Derech Agav in Maseches Megillah 24b mentions that we say (רחום וחנון) by Nefillas Apaim. So this must be a very Yesodosdika sentence that we say, and I think that maybe we skip over it to callously. We should try to understand what is this (רחום וחנון) that we say.

Al Pi Zohar, a person has to say Viduy between Shemoneh Esrei and Nefillas Apaim. That is the source of the Minhag of Nusach Sfard to say (אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לוֹ בְּפָדֵן אֲרָם) before we say Nefillas Apaim and that is based Al Pi Zohar to say Viduy before Nefillas Apaim.

In one of the earliest Siddurim, the Siddur of Rav Shabsi which was a Talmid of the Levush who wrote one of the earliest Siddurim, he said that saying (רחום וחנון) is based on the Zohar. It is a type of a Viduy that we say. (רחום וחנון) is a Hakdama for Nefillas Apaim. Even if you Daven Nusach Ashkenaz it is a type of a Viduy. This is what it says there and this idea of the Viduy is a significant one.

I have a Kasha. One of the rules of Viduy is that you say it only standing. In Hilchos Yom Kippur it says that when you say Viduy you shouldn't even be leaning on something and if you are leaning fully on something it is not good. Viduy has to be said M'umad. We all stand when we say the Al Cheits. It is supposed to be said standing. Yet, in that Rabbeinu Chananel who introduces (רחום וחנון), he says that it is said B'nefila. Why is it said B'nefila? It is a Shver Kasha.

The Mekor Chaim of the Chavas Yo'ir in Siman Kuf Lamed Aleph, S'if Vav asks this Kasha. Why is it said B'nefila. That is something that really needs a satisfactory explanation to really have a good understanding of it. Perhaps, if we understand Nefillas Apaim and appreciate it better, we would understand it.

I would like to explain as follows. The Radak in Perek Vav of Tehillim, on this Kappital, says that Dovid wrote Tehillim in general and he is writing about what we say in Nefillas Apaim, he is saying that it was written by Dovid to be said by any individual about himself. Dovid wrote the language about himself, he said it regarding his feelings and (לְמַנְעָה בְּגִיטוֹת, עַל-הַשְׂמִינִית: מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד) is how Perek Vav starts. When we say Nefillas Apaim we leave that out. Why do we leave out the first Posuk? When we say Ashrei – Uva L'tzion we say (לְמַנְעָה, מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד). Why over here shouldn't we start the whole Kappital?

The Emes is that the Radak says that that is supposed to be said as a personal Tefilla. Dovid wrote it that anybody can say it as his own Tefilla. When you say Nefillas Apaim you are supposed to say it as your own personal Bakasha to HKB"H. not as Dovid's Tehillim.

I once said publicly that you are allowed to add personal Bakashos into Nefillas Apaim and people were very surprised. You can add your own personal Bakashos in Nefillas Apaim? The Tur's language is Noflim Tzibbur Al P'neiheim, Mevashkim Rachamim V'shoel Kol Echad Bakashaso. It is amazing, the Ikkur Nefillas Apaim is that it should be a personal Tefilla. It should be said Kol Echad Bakashaso. Every person his own Lashon. Therefore, Nefillas Apaim is a personal Tefilla. It is not a Tefillas Hatzibbur. Shemoneh Esrei is a Tefillas Hatzibbur. Nefillas Apaim is a Tefilla of an individual.

It is no surprise that as a personal Tefilla it is said as Nefillas Apaim, it is said in a very private way and in a way that underscores the privacy of it. Therefore, we really have to double down on the opportunity. Shemoneh Esrei is long and very often it is a challenge to have Kavana. Nefillas Apaim is a very short Tefillah, so it should be easier for a person to be able to have Kavana in Nefillas Apaim. If you want to make personal Bakashos, it is a good place to make those personal Bakashos. That idea, that Chashivas Hadavar, the Chashivas Ha'nyan of a person being able to say his own

Tefillos in a Tefilla that is Mekubal B'ezras Hashem by the Ribbono Shel Olam, that tremendous opportunity, don't miss the opportunity by Nefillas Apaim. If you have a Shul where they don't say Tachnun by Mincha or someplace Chas V'shalom where they skip it callously by Shacharis, you are missing an opportunity. Chap a' Rein. It is a Chashuve Tefilla, a Tefilla that will be answered. And so, two significant thoughts. One is a Halachic thought regarding Horaso Shelo Bik'dusha, V'laiduso Bik'dusha. Which literally means when someone's pregnancy was as a non-Jew and birth as a Jew, and a second thought regarding the Chashivus of Nefillas Apaim. Let's use it, let's understand it, and let's make the most of it

TORAH STUDIES: Parshat Vayishlach

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Kislev 17, 5784 · November 30, 2023 Vayishlach Print this Page

Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

In this week's Sidra Jacob, after his struggle with the angel, is told that his name is now to be Israel. And yet we find him still referred to, on subsequent occasions in the Torah, as Jacob. Yet after Abraham's name was changed from Abram, he is never again called in the Torah by his earlier name. What is the difference between the two cases? The Rebbe explains the meaning of the names of "Jacob" and "Israel," of the two stages in the religious life that they represent, and of their relevance to us today.

1. Why Jacob Remains

Concerning the verse, "And your name shall no longer be Jacob: Instead Israel shall be your name,"¹ the Talmud² poses the following problem: Anyone who calls Abraham, Abram transgresses the command, "And your name shall no longer be called Abram."³ If so, surely the same applies to one who uses the name Jacob to refer to Israel, for it is written, "And your name shall no longer be Jacob?" The Talmud concludes that the name Jacob is different from the name Abram in this respect, that after G-d gave Abraham his new name, the Torah never thereafter refers to him by any name other than Abraham. Whereas Jacob is so called in the Torah even after he has been given the name of Israel.

Why does the name Jacob remain?

There is a Chassidic explanation⁴ that the names "Jacob" and "Israel" denote two stages in the service of G-d, both necessary at different times in the religious life of every Jew. "Israel" denotes a higher achievement, but it does not supplant or remove the necessity for the service signified by "Jacob."

2. The Inner Meaning of "Jacob" and "Israel"

The difference between them is this. The name "Jacob" implies that he acquired the blessings of Isaac "by supplanting and subtlety"⁵ (the name in Hebrew, Ya-akov, means he supplanted"). He used cunning to take the blessings which had been intended for Esau. "Israel," on the other hand, denotes the receiving of blessings through "noble conduct (Serarah, which is linguistically related to Yisrael, the Hebrew form of Israel), and in an open manner."⁶

However the Torah is interpreted, its literal meaning remains true. And the blessings of Isaac referred to the physical world and its benefits: "G-d give you of the dew of the heaven and the fatness of the earth."⁷ Jacob and Rebecca made great sacrifices and resorted to deceit to acquire them. Jacob had to dress himself in the clothes of Nimrod,⁸ whose kingdom turned the whole world to rebellion,⁹ in order to take and transform the elements of the physical world to holiness (to release their "buried sparks of holiness").

The deeds of the Fathers are a sign to their children.¹⁰ And the implication for us of Jacob's act is that we have to use cunning in our approach to the acts of our physical nature. The cunning man does not reveal his intentions. He seems to be following the path of his opponent. But at the crucial point he does what he had all along intended. The Jew in his involvement with the material world appears to be preoccupied with it. He eats, drinks, transacts business. But he does so for the sake of heaven. His objectives are not material ones. He wears the "clothes of Esau," but his implicit purpose is to uncover and elevate the "holy sparks."

But the way of "Israel" is to attain the blessings of "the dew of the heaven and the fatness of the earth" by "noble and open conduct." In worldly conduct he has no need to conceal his intention of serving G-d. He experiences no tensions. The world has no hold on him. It does not hide from him its intrinsic G-dliness.

This distinction can be seen in the difference between a Shabbat and a weekday meal. Eating a weekday meal embodies the tension between a physical act and its spiritual motivation for the sake of heaven. This discrepancy between outward appearance and inner intention is a form of cunning. But eating a Shabbat meal in itself fulfills a commandment. The holiness of the physical is manifest.

In the light of this we can understand the meaning of the verse, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have contended with G-d (Elokim) and with men and you have prevailed."¹¹ "Elokim" in this context means "angels,"¹² and generally

connotes the "seventy heavenly princes" through whom flow the Divine emanations which sustain physical existence, and who thereby act to conceal G-dliness.¹³ "Men" signifies a still greater concealment, for men are capable of denigrating the Jew for performing G-d's will, and this is a harder concealment to bear. For this reason, the first paragraph of the entire Shulchan Aruch warns us "not to be ashamed of men who ridicule." And this is the basis of the whole of a Jew's service—to break down the concealment of G-d.

This was the virtue of Israel, to have "contended with Elokim and with men" and to have prevailed over their respective concealments of G-d. They are no longer barriers to him; indeed they assent to his blessings. He not only won his struggle with the angel (the guardian angel of Esau) but the angel himself blessed him. This is the achievement of which the Proverbs speak: "He makes even his enemies be at peace with him."¹⁴

3. The Struggle

This distinction accords with the explanation given in Likkutei Torah¹⁵ of the verse, "He has not seen sin in Jacob nor toil in Israel."¹⁶ At the level of "Jacob" the Jew has no sin, but he still experiences "toil"—his freedom from sin is achieved only by tension and struggle for he has concealments to overcome. This is why he is called "Jacob, my servant"¹⁷ for "service" (in Hebrew, avodah) has the implication of strenuous effort to refine his physical nature (his "animal soul"). He does not sin but he still experiences the inclination to sin, which he must overcome. But "Israel" encounters no "toil," for in his struggle "with Elokim and with men" he broke down the factors which conceal G-dliness and silenced his dissenting inclinations. Israel no longer needs to contend with those forces which oppose the perception of G-dliness. His progress lies entirely within the domain of the holy.

4. Partial and Complete Victory

There is a story told by the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, about the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Rebbe): Once in the middle of a Chassidic gathering the Tzemach Tzedek jumped onto a table in great excitement and said: "What is the difference between something which is killed completely and something which is only partially killed? (This refers to a statement in the Talmud:¹⁸ that to have 'partially' killed something is to have killed it.) The Tzemach Tzedek giving the halachic point a Chassidic meaning, applies it to the 'killing' of the inclination to sin. Even a 'partial' killing is a killing, but at the very least we must partially kill it." After some time had passed in speaking and dancing, he continued: "At the moment that one has reached the point of 'killing' (the moment of which the Psalms¹⁹ speak in the words, 'My heart is void within me') one's life has taken on a new character."

These two statements of the Tzemach Tzedek refer to the two levels of "Jacob" and "Israel." At the level of "Jacob" there is still a struggle against one's inclinations, a life of tension—a partial killing. But at the level of "Israel" when the killing is "complete," life is transformed into a new serenity and spiritual pleasure.

5. Levels in the Life of the Tzaddik and the Benoni

These two stages of service pertain to two levels within the "G-dly soul." "Jacob" can be analyzed into the letter Yud and the word ekev (the heel). Here the perception of G-d (symbolized by the letter "Yud") has reached only the lowest levels of the soul, creating the possibility of a concealment which has to be broken down. On the other hand "Israel" contains the same letters as "Li Rosh" ("The head is mine"). The whole soul, to its highest capacities, has been permeated by the awareness of G-d, and no concealment is possible, no struggle necessary.

In general terms, "Israel" denotes the Tzaddik (the stage of complete righteousness) and "Jacob" the Benoni (the intermediate level, attainable by every man²⁰). And in particular, within this intermediate level, that "Jacob" represents the weekday service, and "Israel" the service of Shabbat. Even within the stage of complete righteousness, there are still analogues of both "Jacob" and "Israel." This is clear from the fact that Israel himself was still occasionally called Jacob after his change of name. Within him, and indeed in every Jew, "Jacob" remains as a necessary element in the service of G-d.

6. The Contemporary Meaning of "Jacob"

From the fact that, as we mentioned before, the level of Jacob is without sin, and yet involves continual effort, it follows that the Jew—though his struggle with contending desires is difficult and fraught with risk—has the power to achieve victory and remain free from sin. For he is "a branch of My planting, the work of My hands,"²¹ and "a part of G-d above."²² As nothing can prevail over G-d, so can nothing prevail over the Jew against his will. And he has been promised victory, for we are told, "His banished will not be rejected by Him"²³ and "All Israel has a share in the world to come."²⁴ This promise (like all the words of Torah) is relevant to our present spiritual concerns. The assurance of ultimate victory should strengthen our joy in the act of service, and this joy will itself contribute to the victory over our physical natures, and shorten the battle. The previous Rebbe said:²⁵ though a soldier confronts danger, he goes with a song of joy, and the joy brings him victory.

This is why we say, after the end of Shabbat, "Do not fear, My servant Jacob." For, as we explained above, during Shabbat the Jew stands at the level of Israel; beyond the

Shabbat, when we return to the level of “Jacob, My servant,” and to the toil of the weekday service, we are told, “Do not fear.” This is not merely a command but also a source of strength and of the joy that will shorten the work and hasten its reward—to the point where we are worthy of the time which is “an eternal life of Shabbat and rest.”(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. III pp. 795-9) FOOTNOTES 1. Bereishit 32:29. 2. Berachot, 13a. 3. Bereishit 17:5. 4. Cf. Likkutei Torah on Balak. Sefer Hamaamarim-Yiddish, p. 122. 5. Rashi, on Bereishit 32:29. 6. Ibid. 7. Bereishit 27:28. 8. Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, ch. 24. Bereishit Rabbah, 65:16; cited in Rashi, on Bereishit 27:15. 9. Eruvin, 53a. Rashi, Bereishit 10:8. 10. Cf. on this theme, supra, p. 13 ff. 11. Bereishit 32:29. 12. Cf. Targum Yonathan, ad loc. Chullin, 92a. 13. Cf. Tanya, Part IV, ch. 25. 14. Proverbs 16:7. 15. Parshat Balak, 72b. 16. Bamidbar 23:21. 17. Isaiah 44:1. 18. Baba Kama, 65a. 19. 109:22. Cf. Tanya, Part I, ch. 1. 20. Tanya, Part I, ch. 14. 21. Isaiah 60:21. 22. Job 31:2 (Tanya, Part I, ch. 2). 23. II Samuel 14:14. Shulchan Aruch Harav, Hilchot Talmud Torah, 4:3; Tanya, Part I, end of ch. 39. 24. Sanhedrin, 90a. 25. Sefer Hamaamarim 5710, p. 191.

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Haftarat Vayishlach: Esav: From Edom to Rome Dr. Moshe Sokolow (From From Within the Tent: The Haftarat, Essays on the Weekly Haftarah from the Rabbis and Professors of Yeshiva University, YU Press, 2011)

The book of Ovadiah is an anomaly among the books of Tanakh: It is only one chapter long! It is also anomalous in an additional sense: While we have few of the actual prophecies of such well-known prophets as Shmuel and Eliyahu, here we have the verbatim record of a prophet so little-known that exegetes cannot even agree on who he was or when he lived. We shall attempt, first, to establish the literary and historical context of Ovadiah, and, in the process, make a significant point about the provenance of prophetic oratory. Following that identification, we will address the association between the prophecy of Ovadiah and the clash between Yaakov and Esav that evolves, typologically, throughout talmudic, midrashic, and medieval literature. Part I: Dating Ovadiah Two views dominate the exegetical discussion of Ovadiah: Rashi and Ibn Ezra. (a) Rashi shares the talmudic-agadic view of Ovadiah: Why did Ovadiah [prophecy] uniquely on Edom and have no other prophecy? Our Sages said: Ovadiah was an Edomite proselyte (Sanhedrin 39b). God said, I shall undo them from within: Let Ovadiah – who lived among two wicked people, Achav and Izevel, and yet was not influenced by them – come and exact what is due from Esav – who [in contrast] lived among two righteous people, Yitzchak and Rivka, and yet was not influenced by them. According to Chazal and Rashi, then, Ovadiah the prophet is one and the same as “Ovadiah the majordomo” of Achav (Melakhim Aleph 18:3), ruler of the Northern Kingdom of Israel c. 869–850 bce. (b) Ibn Ezra, however, rejects this identification, arguing: We cannot say that he is the one mentioned in the book of Melakhim during the era of Achav, because that Ovadiah is called “God fearing,” but if he were the prophet himself, how could he be called [only] “God fearing” and not “a prophet” since prophecy is the nobler of the two [epithets]? Instead, Ibn Ezra offers an alternative identification: In my opinion, “We heard a rumor” refers to this prophet, Yirmiyahu, Yeshayahu, and Amos, who [all] prophesied on Edom. Hence the use of [the plural]: “We heard.” While Ibn Ezra’s opening remark: “lo yadanu doro” – “we know not his era,” indicates a reservation of some sort, it is clear, nevertheless, that he would have us situate Ovadiah within the larger historical context of the other prophets he mentions, all of whom lived considerably later than the Ovadiah of Achav. Yeshayahu and Amos were roughly contemporary (c. 750–700 bce), while Yirmiyahu was even later (c. 625–586 bce).

An Independent Approach: We propose, here, to take an independent approach to determining the date of Ovadiah, which we will then merge with the exegetical record. We will compare the text of Ovadiah with a very similar Biblical text and evaluate their correspondences, situating Ovadiah within the literary and historical context that both of these texts reflect. The most striking correspondences to the text of Ovadiah occur in the book of Yirmiyahu, chapter 49. The striking overall similarity, underlined by significant verbal and literary nuances, is highly reminiscent of the correspondences enjoyed by the texts of Hoshea, Yeshayahu, Amos, and Michah, four prophets who lived at relatively contemporaneous times. Logic dictates that just as the correspondences between Hoshea, Yeshayahu, Amos, and Michah are best understood as the result of their contemporaneity, so should the correspondences between Ovadiah and Yirmiyahu be accounted for by the assumption that they were contemporaries. Treating Similarities in Prophetic Literature The assumption of contemporaneity is borne out by a significant observation of Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508) that appears, not coincidentally, in his commentary on Yirmiyahu 49:19: Behold! The text of this prophecy is the same as that of Ovadiah. How can this be? Did not our Sages teach that, “No two prophets use the same style”? Rather this means that the other prophets did not prophesy in the same manner as Moshe. For Moshe received, prophetically, from God, not the subjects alone but the actual words as well. Just as he heard them, so he wrote them, verbatim, in the Torah. Other prophets, however, in their prophecies, would see only the general outlines that God instructed them and they would transmit and record them in their own words. 15 Consequently, upon witnessing the same phenomenon they would often knowingly phrase it in the same words and style as had been employed by other prophets. According to Abarbanel, then, the fact that Ovadiah and Yirmiyahu utilized

“the same words and style” indicates that they were “witnessing the same phenomenon.” Just what phenomenon was that?

The Historical Context If we knew nothing more about Yirmiyahu and Ovadiah than what we can extract from the two chapters we excerpted above, where would we place them chronologically? The answer is: We would situate them in the context of a war that was being waged against Israel (לַיִלּוּץ הַמָּלְכָה הַזֶּה כְּנִגְזָרָא) in the course of which, Edom, shamefully disregarding its fraternal relationship to Israel, joined in the attack on Jerusalem. Adding insult to injury, the Edomites joined in the celebration over Israel’s defeat, participated in the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem and stood at the crossroads to either kill the survivors () or to hand them over to their enemies (). Such events are consistent with the Biblical narratives of the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem in 586 bce in the books of Melakhim and Yirmiyahu, as well as with the poetic references found in Eikhah (4:22): “[God] will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, He will uncover your sins.” and, somewhat curiously, in Psalm 137 verse 7, “Recall, O Lord, on account of the Edomites, the day of Jerusalem; how they said ‘raze it raze it unto its foundation.’” We may then conclude this section by asserting that Ovadiah was a contemporary of Yirmiyahu, prophesying at the close of the era of the First Temple and may, like Yirmiyahu, have been an eye-witness to the Edomite perfidy he describes. We shall next observe how the Sages extended that perfidy through their identification of the destroyers of the First Temple with those who were later responsible for the destruction of the Second Temple.

Part II: Ovadiah, Esav, and Yaakov “Saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mount of Esau and sovereignty shall be the Lord’s.” (Ovadiah 1:21) The Biblical and rabbinic worldview saw the elimination of evil as a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of the dominion of God. Just as that is symbolized in Ovadiah by Mt. Zion’s (Israel’s) judgment of Mt. Esav (Edom), so too, it is symbolized in Talmud and Midrash by the termination of the fraternal conflict between Yaakov and Esav. The reunion confrontation between Yaakov and Esav narrated in Vayishlach – to which our text serves as a haftarah – triggered a clutch of historical and legendary associations for the Sages of the Talmud and Midrash: Yaakov as Israel and, subsequently, Judaism; Esav/Edom as Rome, Byzantium and, subsequently, Christendom. In light of this, it is not difficult to imagine the Sages considering the destruction of the Second Temple as a reiteration of the destruction of the First Temple and casting the Romans in the role of the Edomites. “Scripture named Edom, and history pointed at Rome. By the most elementary syllogism, the two became one.”

Rome: The earliest explicit evidence we have for this association appears in the wake of the Roman emperor Hadrian’s defeat of the forces of Bar Kokhba towards the middle of the second century CE. The Jerusalem Talmud reports: R. Yehudah bar Ilai said: Rabbi would expound on the verse: “The voice is Yaakov’s voice but the hands are Esav’s hands” [as follows]: The voice of Yaakov cries out on account of what Esav’s hands did to him at Betar. (Ta’anit 4) R. Akiva, in designating Bar Kokhba the messianic king, invoked the verse: “darakh kokhav mi-Yaakov” – “a star will step forth from Jacob” (Bemidbar 24:17), whose continuation includes the prognosis: “he will annihilate the survivors of Ir.” To the Sages, Ir, a city par excellence, was none other than Urbs Roma, the city of Rome, capital of the evil empire. His disciples followed suit. R. Meir punned on the word דאמיס (Yeshayahu 34:7, wild oxen) to produce מייסר (Romans) and read מנירמשא (Rome) for משמהנה (Dumah) in Yeshayahu 21:11. Another student, R. Shimon bar Yochai, referring to “calling to me from Seir” in the same verse, designates Edom as Israel’s final exile. More significantly, however, he is cited as coining a proverb: “It is a well-known axiom: Esav hates Yaakov.” (Sifrei Bemidbar 69) Other Tannaim adduced homilies supporting similar associations. On the Torah’s description of an infant Esav as “admoni” – “ruddy complexion” (Bereishit 25:25), R. Abba bar Kahana states: “kulo shofekh damin” – “they are all bloodthirsty” and R. Elazar bar Yosi treats the Latin word “senator” as an abbreviation for three Hebrew words: טרונג, קסנ, אנקס (hostile, vindictive, and vengeful).

Byzantium: When the Roman Empire in the fourth century, under Emperor Constantine, adopted Christianity, the identification of Esav as Rome extended to encompass Byzantium. A striking example of this identification occurs in a passage from the Nistarot Shel Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, a medieval apocalypse, which has been dated to the era of the Arab conquest of the Land of Israel in the early seventh century. Here is the pertinent passage from that work: The second king of Yishmael will conquer all the kingdoms. He will come to Jerusalem and there he will bow [to the God of Israel]. He will wage war against the Edomites [Byzantines] who will flee before him, and he will rule stoutly. He will be a lover of Israel; he will seal their breaches and the breaches of the Temple; he will excavate Mt. Moriah and level it all off; [he will summon Israel to construct] the Temple. In his days, Judah will be saved and the flower of the son of David will blossom upon it. A similar identification is made in the liturgical poetry of that era. In a piyyut by Shimon bar Magus (Israel; seventh century), we find the following closing lines, which take Yitzchak’s blessing to Yaakov (Bereishit 27:28 ff.) as a prophetic prognosis. [Yaakov] heard, “they will

serve you” and “bow before you” those apparitions “Be the master” of the arrogant Edomites. May “those who curse you be cursed” refers to the Agagite And “those who bless you will be blessed” refers to the Benjaminites. Here, in addition to the “standard” identification of Edom with Rome, we are invited to make yet another insidious identification: Esav as Amalek. Just as Haman the Agagite [Agag was the King of Amalek during the reign of King Shaul (Shmuel Aleph ch. 15), who foolishly spared his antagonist’s life] was brought down by Mordechai the Benjaminite [ostensibly, a descendant of Shaul], so will contemporary Edom be humbled by Israel.

The Holy Roman Empire: Following the earlier paradigms of Edom=Rome and Edom=Byzantium, Ashkenazi Biblical exegetes in the Middle Ages identified Edom with the Holy Roman Empire. Rashi (France, 1040–1105), for instance, interprets Eikhah 4:22: “[God] will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, He will uncover your sins” (see supra.), as follows: Yirmiyahu prophesied about the destruction of the Second Temple, which would be destroyed by the Romans. In the same spirit, Rashi also identifies the “fourth kingdom” of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision (Daniel 2:40 ff.), whose downfall would usher in the Messianic Age, with Rome: “In the days of these kings:” While the kingdom of the Romans is extant. Manoach ben Chizkiyah (Chizkuni; France, thirteenth century), who continued in the exegetical tradition of Rashi, notes similarly (Devarim 28:50): “A nation of fierce countenance:” This is the Kingdom of Rome, to wit: “At the End of Days, when evildoers perish, there will rise up a king of fierce countenance.” Nachmanides (1194–1270), too, is heir to this exegetical tradition. Witness his commentary on Bereishit 47:1, locating his own contemporary situation within the typological framework recognized by Rashi in Daniel: I have already noted (Bereishit 43:14) that Yaakov’s descent to Egypt [foreshadows] our present exile at the hands of the fourth creature (Daniel 7:7): evil Rome. While acknowledging the typology of Edom=Rome, Nachmanides seems somewhat ambivalent about the historical implications of that equation. On the one hand, he extends the equation backwards into an historical period that even precedes the birth of Esav! In commenting on the battle waged by Avraham against four Mesopotamian kings (Bereishit 14:1), he identifies the “מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן,” literally: “the king of the Nations,” as follows: He was the king over various nations who made him their chief and officer. This is an allusion to the king of Rome who was set to rule over a city assembled from among many nations: Kitim, Edom, and others. On the other hand, he is critical of Rashi’s blanket assertion of that equation. In the genealogical lists and “king lists” of Edom, he has the following to say about “Magdiel” (Bereishit 36:43): Magdiel is Rome. This is Rashi’s interpretation, but I find it unintelligible. If we were to say that it is a prophecy for the distant future, there were many kings who ruled over Edom until the Roman Empire. [Furthermore,] Rome is not a chieftain [of Edom], but a large, fearsome and extremely powerful empire, with no peer among kingdoms.

Epilogue: The continuing association of the Biblical Esav/Edom with imperial Rome, classical Byzantium and the medieval Holy Roman Empire attests to the power of exegesis to transform the current and contemporary into the timeless and perpetual. Here, to close the main part of our study, are the opening lines from a famous poem by Yehudah Ha-Levi (1075–1141) that reflects the status of the Land of Israel as part of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. They indicate that even in countries ruled by Islam, the equation of Edom with Rome, and the anticipated destruction of Rome as the signal of the ultimate redemption, remained vibrant.

My heart is in the East – and I am at the edge of the West. How can I possibly taste what I eat? How could it please me? How can I keep my promise or ever fulfill my vow, when Zion is held by Edom and I am bound by Arabia’s chains?

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu> date: Nov 30, 2023, 1:40 PM subject: Talmud Tips - **Bava Kama**

Greeting the Shabbat

Rabbi Chanina had the custom of announcing, “Let us go out to meet the queenly bride”. Rabbi Yannai would wear a special garment, and stand in his place, saying: “Come to me, my bride, come to me, my bride.”

The manner in which our great Torah Sages would welcome the beginning of Shabbat are the source of central words and themes that are incorporated into the prayer/song of “Lecha Dodi”, which is part of the Kabbalat Shabbat prayer service on Shabbat eve. The Maharsha explains a number of key lessons that we learn from these Sages: Why is Shabbat called our “bride,” why it is called a “malka” (queen), why did Rabbi Chanina “go out” (quickly, in the context of the gemara) to greet the Shabbat bridal queen, whereas Rabbi Yannai called to “her” to come to him, and why did Rabbi Yannai repeat his call to the Shabbat bride?

Shabbat is the bride of the Jewish People. The Midrash states that when Hashem created the world and established seven days in a week, “Shabbat” complained that each day of the week had a “mate” (the next day), but Shabbat was without a mate. Hashem replied that Shabbat would be the mate and “bride” of the Jewish People, her “groom.” And since all Jews are considered “royalty,” our “bride” is a “queen.” Rabbi

Chanina felt that just as it is customary for a groom to go out to greet his bride at the marriage ceremony, so too we should “go” to greet and welcome our Shabbat bride. Rabbi Yanai, however, thought and taught otherwise. From the place where he stood, he called out with an invitation to the Shabbat bride to come to the wedding chupa, and then afterwards to come to his home. And just as every bride is welcomed twice in this manner to complete the marriage, likewise Rabbi Yannai would say twice say to the Shabbat bride “to come” — “Come to the chupa and then come to our home.”

Bava Kama 32 a, b

from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> date: Nov 29, 2023, 10:02 AM subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 11/29/2023 **Unicycles on Shabbat by R. Daniel Mann**

Question: Is it permitted to use a unicycle on Shabbat?

Answer: We have, in the past, discussed bicycles (forbidden) and tricycles (permitted), and the sources on the two can help us analyze the less common unicycle, which we have not found discussed by the poskim. We will refer to riding indoors or within an eiruv. Otherwise there are serious carrying issues (see Living the Halachic Process VI, C-12, regarding the similar but not identical case of a rickshaw).

When bicycles became popular, poskim discussed their use on Shabbat, and almost all forbade it, for one or more of the following reasons. 1) Uvadin d’chol – This is a weekday-like activity, for, amongst other reasons, it is a mode of transportation that takes people to places, often for purposes that are not appropriate for Shabbat (see Tzitz Eliezer VII:30). 2) Bicycles often need repairs, notably including fixing the inflatable tubes of the tires, which a rider might perform while forgetting about Shabbat (see ibid. and Yaskil Avdi III, Orach Chayim 12). 3) One might ride outside the techum Shabbat (boundaries of travel outside the city). 4) When riding on ground, one makes grooves (Shut R. Azriel Hildesheimer I:49). While Rav Yosef Chayim of Bagdad (Rav Pe’alim I, OC 25) dismissed the issues and permitted riding a bicycle (some say he later changed his mind), the consensus of both Ashkenazi (see Shemirat Shabbat K’hilchata 16:18) and Sephardi poskim (see Kaf Hachayim 403:8) and the broad minhag is to forbid it. While, in theory, Rav Ovadia Yosef did not consider the halachic issues formidable, he agreed that one should not ride a bicycle on Shabbat (see Yabia Omer, OC 55:29 and Chazon Ovadia IV, p. 40).

Shemirat Shabbat K’hilchata (ibid.) says that children can be allowed to ride tricycles – but not bicycles. He cites two distinctions between the two (see fn. 53). 1) Tricycle wheels do not have an inflatable tube. 2) A tricycle is clearly a form of recreation, as opposed to serious transportation. It is also likely that he factored in that the average tricycle rider is a child.

How should we view a unicycle? A classic unicycle shares features with a bicycle, including an inflatable tire, so reason #2 to forbid bicycles applies. However, when it is used as a hobby or for non-professional exhibition, elements of uvadin d’chol and going out of techum Shabbat would not apply. (We are not referring to use for the uncommon sport of unicycles on mountain trails, where #4 could apply.) Also, unicycles did not exist when the original bicycle minhag began, and they are not used interchangeably with a bicycle. Therefore, one could argue against extending the bicycle minhag/ruling to unicycles. In Bemareh Habazak (IX:8), albeit under circumstances that include significant need, we entertained the possibility of distinguishing even between clearly different models of bicycles, based on the different likelihood of problems in one versus the other.

On the other hand, given similarities in name and design and given that some of the explanations of the prohibition on bicycles do apply to it, it is likely that poskim would not allow it, especially since the need for it on Shabbat is rarely significant. If a child under bar mitzva wanted to use it, that would be significantly more lenient because of his lower level of obligation in mitzvot, which encourages leniency (see this column, Vayeira 5777).

My basic research indicates that “unicycles” are nowadays also used for transportation, which can make the issues for bicycles of uvadin d’chol and techum Shabbat applicable. On the other hand, that is apparently mainly with electric unicycles (which are anyway forbidden because of the electric element) that are used for transportation. It is doubtful, though, that we must be more machmir due to the existence of electric unicycles, especially since their design is totally different. In the final analysis, we do not recommend allowing unicycle riding on Shabbat, but for someone (especially a child) who uses it only for private recreation, leniency is conceivable. לעילוי נשמת יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

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 quiets, 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 'pshat' 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
=====

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| (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' reflection 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 Sukkot (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 Sukkot 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]

Parshat Vayishlach: How We Struggle

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PREPARATION QUESTIONS:

1. Parashat 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 "artzat 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-fana], 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 Bednarsh, 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 ["elohim"], 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 Canaanite and the Perizite, 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 E-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]

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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