

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 12 #8, December 13-14, 2024; 13 Kislev 5785; Vayishlach 5785

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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world – and may our hostages soon return from captivity. May the stunning collapse of the Assad regime in Syria and the cease fire with Lebanon be the beginning of better news for Israel and Jews in coming days.

Vayishlach (through chapter 33) continues the story of Yaakov's growth, an episode that starts with his departure for Lavan's home (chapter 28, near the end of Toldot). During this period, Yaakov meets and falls in love with Rachel, graduates from Lavan's University of Deception, marries Leah and Rachel, has several sons, then continues with sons from their hand maidens (Zilpah and Bilhah), and finally leaves Lavan's home with eleven sons and one daughter (Dina). (Binyamin is born later.)

Much of Vayishlach covers Yaakov's personal transformation. Yaakov as a youth manipulates his brother to gain the birthright and deceives his father to obtain his brother's intended bracha of wealth and power. He then trades deception for deception with his father-in-law for twenty years. By the end of Vayeitzei, Yaakov learns that deception will not earn him the right to claim family leadership, and he resolves to change. When Lavan overtakes Yaakov and his family, Yaakov finally tells his father-in-law that he is leaving largely because Lavan had cheated him for twenty years, and he draws a line in the land. Yaakov and his family will not cross the line to go east, and Lavan is not to cross to go to the west, toward Canaan, where the family will be living. Yaakov sends messengers to tell Esav that he is coming and wants to resolve their issues. The night before their meeting, a "man" (probably Esav's angel) fights with Yaakov all night, even using dirty tricks, and Yaakov fights honestly, ending with a draw. Yaakov gives Esav an enormous gift of animals (wealth), calls his brother "master," and bows (plus has his family bow) to designate that they consider Esav the one who deserves and now has their father's bracha of wealth and family leadership.

When Yaakov and his family settle in Shechem, the son of the prince of the region kidnaps and rapes Dina. When Yaakov does nothing about the rape immediately, Shimon and Levi take charge. Shechem asks to marry Dina and live in peace with Yaakov's family. Shimon and Levi insist that first all the men of Shechem circumcise themselves – and then on the third (most painful) day, they come and kill all the men of the town. Yaakov is furious at his sons, primarily for using deception and violence to punish the people of Shechem.

God next sends Yaakov to Beit El, where he builds an alter and calls out in Hashem's name. God then renames Yaakov as Yisrael and promises him land, descendants, and wealth – the brachot that He had previously promised to Avraham and Yitzhak. Rachel gives birth to Binyamin and dies during the birth. Yaakov buries her near Beit Lechem. At this point, the Torah's focus moves to Yaakov's children. First, however, the Torah records Esav's family and descendants – showing that God has kept His promise to make Esav the father of many nations, including numerous kings.

The stories in Vayishlach contain numerous connections backward and forward in the Torah (and later Jewish history). For example, the details of Yaakov's gifts to Esav repeat the details of Yaakov's deception in which he had stolen his brother's bracha from their father. Yaakov includes the fat from the land (animals, including many females to guarantee future generations), power and status (acting out treating Esav as lord and master – similar to the acting out that the Sephardic community uses during a Pesach Seder during the Magid). Yaakov and Esav cry and kiss each other on the neck, similar to the way that Yitzhak and Yaakov kiss during the bracha and the tears that Esav has after learning that Yaakov has the bracha. Yaakov's recreation reminds the reader of the way that the Mabul (flood) reverses the creation story in every detail and then, after the flood waters recede, the Torah recreates the new world in the same order and details (with some changes in man's role).

The role of Shimon and Levi horrifies Yaakov, because these sons repeat the deceptive behavior that causes their father so much grief. Yaakov wants his family to emulate the midot and behavior of Yisrael, not those of Lavan and Yaakov. From the view of the sons, however, they understand that Yaakov loves Rachel and "hates" (the Torah's word) Leah. Shimon and Levi see that Yaakov does not intervene when Shechem rapes Leah's daughter, and they believe that their father would have taken revenge if Rachel had a daughter who was raped.

Jealousy between the children of Leah and Rachel explodes as Yaakov's children grow older. Leah's sons cannot tolerate Yosef (Rachel's older son), and they capture him and put him in a pit. Years later, when Yosef becomes the equivalent of Agricultural Czar of Egypt and Leah's sons come seeking food during a famine, Yosef tests the brothers by seeing whether they will defend Binyamin when he accuses the youngest brother of stealing his divining cup. Yehuda's request to become the minister's slave in place of the youngest brother is the beginning of a tikkun, coming together, of the Leah and Rachel sides of B'Nai Yisrael. This conflict and incidents of reconciliation between Leah and Rachel's descendants continues at numerous times throughout Jewish history, at least as far as in Persia during the time of Queen Esther. (I have written about these issues at various times, and the topic is likely to arise again on occasions.) Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org discuss many of these and other insights involving Leah vs. Rachel descendants in greater detail.

As I write, we are all reacting to the implications of the fall of the Assad dictatorship in Syria and the fall of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hamas has accepted some of the key conditions of Israel in working toward an end of the Gaza horrors. Meanwhile, the political leadership in the United States changes in another month. Obviously we can all differ on our expectations of how the future will evolve. We can all, however, pray that the future will bring better news for our people, in Israel, Europe, and the United States.

For many years, my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was close by whenever Hannah and I had problems with our children. (There were many such occasions.) Obviously our Avot did not have the advantage of experienced Rebbeis and fathers to help them raise their children. In our tradition, a person's Rebbe is equivalent to his father – certainly a role that Rabbi Cahan served for our family for nearly fifty years. Hopefully we have used his love as we have raised our sons and as we take part in the lives of our grandchildren.

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 Shlema for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana,

Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, 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

Haftarat Parshat Vayishlach: Brothers Reunite

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5785 (2024)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

Yaakov's fear is palpable as Parshat Vayishlach opens. Eisav and his outsized militia are approaching, and the younger brother presumes the threat of murder from the past remains alive. He divides his camp, prepares gifts, offers heartfelt prayer, and (per Chazal) readies for the possibility of battle. Yet at the climactic moment of encounter, the Eisav that Yaakov meets is of a different mind from what he feared – the elder brother embraces his long-lost twin, admires Yaakov's family, and suggests that the two journey on together.

Strikingly, Yaakov chooses not to journey with Eisav. Rather, he voices concern for his children and flock who won't be able to keep up with Eisav's pace, and instead offers to continue on more slowly behind Eisav to Se'ir. Eisav accepts and sets out for Se'ir, while Yaakov, in perhaps yet another act of trickery against his brother, makes his way to Sukkot, rather than following Eisav.

Chazal are perturbed by the seeming untruth: Yaakov claims he will continue on to Se'ir, yet he never does so. How could he tell such a blatant lie? *"Said R. Abahu: We have reviewed all of the Scripture, but we cannot find when our father Yaakov ever went to Eisav at Mt. Seir. Could it be that Yaakov, despite being a truthful person, had tricked him]Eisav[? Rather, when will he]Yaakov[arrive? In the end days, as it says)Ovadia 1:21("And the saviors will ascend the mountain of Zion to judge]to be with[the mountain of Eisav, and dominion shall be God's.")Breishit Rabbah 78:14(*

This Midrash ties our parsha to the haftarah – Ovadia's one-chapter book of prophecy – to Edom, the descendants of Eisav. Ovadia harshly criticizes the people of Edom for their choice not to stand by the Jewish people at their moments of suffering (the Philistine attack in the days of King Yehoram or the Babylonian attack that led to the fall of the first temple; see Daat Mikra: Ovadia, "Introduction" for overview).

The Edomites not only remain at a distance when the Judean kingdom is in trouble; they ridicule their cousins, taking glee in their downfall. *"On that day when you stood aloof, when aliens carried off his]the Jewish people's[goods, when foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you]Edom[were as one of them. How could you gaze with glee on your brother that day, on his day of calamity! How could you gloat over the people of Judah on that day of ruin! How could you loudly jeer on a day of anguish!")Ovadia 1:11-12(*

The disappointment in Edom stems from the brotherly relationship which was meant to last through the generations, from the twin brothers born to Rivka and onwards through their descendants. The Torah forbids us from despising the people of Edom, and permits their descendants to convert to Judaism, "for they are your brethren.")Devarim 23:8(

We, the descendants of the patriarch Jacob, are meant to hold onto that Torah commandment and relationship with Edom, despite the challenges that have arisen over the years. In fact, it's hard to tell if there was really ever a time when we had things right with Eisav/Edom. Every interaction between Eisav and Yaakov, and every encounter between their descendants recorded in Tanach, is marked by tension at best, and violence at worst. Yet R. Abahu asks us to hear in the words of Yaakov and the embrace of Eisav that there can eventually be a day of reconciliation with Edom, even if it remains in the far-off future, in the end times whose character we can only imagine.

Today, it seems we are living in the early stages of the Messianic era. We must hold Edom accountable for their attacks on our people, due to the fact that as I write, there are still hostages in Gaza, and our sovereignty is still being challenged. Yet we also have witnessed a renewed engagement with other parts of Edom, as evidenced by the Abraham Accords with the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, as well as the potential interest of Saudi Arabia to establish relations with Israel. We must support this blooming relationship both in order to fulfill our mandated mission and to ensure a better future.

In the here and now, says Ovadia, Edom must be held accountable. Yet that accountability is a result of a brotherly relationship that was left forgotten, which can eventually be restored. By acknowledging our shared history, we can and must begin to build bridges instead of walls. And only then, we are taught, will God's sovereignty be complete.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Blander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Vayishlach: A Mountain of Scandal

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2017 (5778)

And Eisav settled on Mount Seir, that is Edom. And these are the generations of Eisav the progenitor of Edom, on Mount Seir...)Breishis 36:8-9(

Where Eisav eventually settles seems to have some significance since the Holy Torah found it worthy of mentioning multiple times. Why is it important at all to know the name of that place, Mount Seir?

Certainly there are many reasons, hidden and revealed, but one idea may find its natural home in Tractate Sukkah involving a futuristic window into the funeral of the Yetzer Hara, the Evil Inclination.

It states as follows: Rabbi Yehudah expounded: In the future – time to come – the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring the Evil Inclination and slay it in the presence of the righteous and before the wicked. To the righteous it will have the appearance of a high mountain, and to the wicked it will have the appearance of a strand of hair.

Both the former and the latter will weep; the righteous will weep, saying, *'How were we able to conquer such a huge mountain?'* The wicked also will weep, saying, *'How is it that we were unable to conquer this strand of hair?'* And the Holy One, blessed be He, will also marvel together with them...)Sukkah 52B(

A few questions must be asked about this surrealistic portrait. Who is right? Is it as the righteous imagine the Evil Inclination was actually a high mountain or are the wicked to be believed that that the Yetzer Hara is a mere strand of hair?!

Who has the correct perspective? We probably would and should trust the judgment of the Tzadikim, the righteous, because they are after all righteous and their vision must be the clearer picture of reality. However, let us not forget that the Yetzer Hara is dead at this point and everyone is suddenly sober. Can both be right? Perhaps!

This may be the relevant moment to insert the name of the place where Eisav settled. It was titled, *Har Seir*, literally, Hair Mountain. Esiav, who was the archetype of the Yetzer Hara for Yaakov-Yisrael, landed in a place that implies both a mountain and a hair. How is that helpful? The answer may well be that the Yetzer Hara, the Evil Inclination, is a hair. When the righteous burst out in tears and proclaim in wonder, *“How did we manage to conquer this mountain!?”*, they refer to a mountain of hairs.

When the Vilna Gaon concluded his life of learning, he collected a high-high mountain of hairs. He beat the Yetzer Hara time and time again, learning word after word. A marathon runner does his twenty-six miles by putting one foot in front of the other, again and again. The Tzadik overcomes that hair now and now again until he compiles a mountain of hairs.

The wicked are struck with the terrible realization that they were tripped up with minuscule matters. They may fail to keep Shabbos or make a Brocho, or learn Torah, or guard their tongue because of the imaginary fear of not being seen as cool. A tragedy to be tripped up by something so insignificant, the size and weight of a hair!

Here's another approach. To the Tzadik, the business of battling the Yetzer Hara is serious, like moving a mountain. With that amount of energy and resources apportioned and devoted to the war effort, the Yetzer Hara was reduced to the dimensions of a hair, and it became manageable thereby. That's how the mountain of hairs eventually came to be. To the wicked, the opposite was true. They're too relaxed about confronting the realities of the Yetzer Hara. Distancing genders from casually intermingling is outdated and old fashion. The Evil Inclination is a hair. They are way too sophisticated for this business. It eventually becomes impossible to move like a mountain. They wake up, but too late when it falls on their head like **a mountain of scandal**.

* <https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5778-vayishlach/>

Drasha: Vayishlach: Going Back for the Small Vessels

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2012, 2017

“And Yaakov was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day”
)Breishit 32:24.

Who was Yaakov struggling with? The story strongly hints that this *“man”* was actually an angel, a representative of God. Thus Rashi, quoting the midrash)Breishit Rabbah 77:3(, tells us that this angel was the *“prince of Esav,”* and that this struggle presaged the encounter that Yaakov would soon have with Esav.

It is possible to suggest another interpretation. For while Yaakov had to struggle against many outside forces throughout his life, perhaps his greatest struggle was within himself. Even for those inclined to have an idealized view of the Avot, the character of Yaakov presents major challenges. He takes advantage of Esav to buy the birthright at a moment of weakness and he misrepresents himself to his father to take the blessing intended for Esav)and even his protestations to his mother were more about being found out than about the wrongness of the act(. He even seems to bargain with God: *“If God is with me... and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear... then the Lord shall be my God”*)28:20-21(. And while Lavan is no paragon of virtue, Yaakov certainly seems to be using every scheme and loophole to get the better of him and maximize his profit from the tending of the flocks. In short, what we have seen up until now is that Yaakov has lived up to his name: *“This is why he is called Yaakov, for he has deceived me / schemed against me twice”*)27:36(.

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

He has already made some progress in this area. By the end of his stay with Lavan, we hear that -- regardless of how he may have tried to manipulate the birthing of the sheep -- nevertheless, his watching and shepherding of them was done

with great self-sacrifice. As he tells Lavan with full confidence and with justified anger: " *This twenty years have I been with you; your ewes and thy she goats have not miscarried ... That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto you; I bore the loss of it... Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.*" 31:38-40. His work ethic, his honesty and integrity were beyond reproach even when there was serious loss of money involved. He has certainly come quite far.

But perhaps not far enough. When this parasha opens, we don't know -- and perhaps even Yaakov does not know -- how he will act when he has to encounter Esav once again. Will he try some deception? Will he be honest, regardless of the consequences? So far, he has taken necessary precautions -- splitting the camp in case of war, and sending a peace offering in the hope of avoiding war. But what will happen if actual war breaks out? So much is at stake; it would be understandable if he fell back on his old ways. Who could blame him for doing whatever it would take to protect his family?

It is at this critical juncture - after the preparations and before the actual encounter - that Yaakov is left alone. Not just physically, but existentially. Alone with his own thoughts, his own character, his own complex personality. He must grapple with the different parts within himself, his tendency to scheme and his desire for integrity and honesty. The person he is grappling with is none other than himself.

Why, ask the Rabbis, was he alone in the first place? Why did he go back to the camp? He went back for the *pachim ketanim*, for the small vessels that he had left behind. Mostly, he was fine. He was no longer the schemer that he used to be. He had grown to be an honest, hard-working man. Mostly. But there were still some *pachim ketanim*, still some small parts of his personality, of himself, that could not be ignored. Were he to ignore these small vessels, these less than desirable traits, they would undoubtedly resurface, and particularly at times of great pressure or great danger. It was now, that he must go back for these *pachim ketanim*.

Yaakov in the end was victorious in his struggle, but it was not a victory in the simple sense of the word. He did not destroy those vessels, he did not eradicate those parts of his personality. How could he? They were part of himself. Rather -- "*you fought... and you were able*" -- he found a way to control this part of himself. To dictate how these character traits would be expressed rather than letting them dictate to him how he should act. As my dear friend and colleague Dr. Michelle Friedman has taught me, this is the goal of therapy: to learn to recognize those undesirable parts of oneself, to be able to predict when they may be triggered, to moderate these traits and, most importantly, to choose differently. To make the wise choice. The goal is integration and control, not eradication.

And so it is with Yaakov. For this hard work that he has done, this going back into himself for these small vessels, lead to his ability to change himself, to transform. He is able to confront his own problems head-on, and he is able to confront Esav head-on. He has become a new man. He is now Yisrael, no longer Yaakov. At least, that's what the angel says. But the very next verse and the ongoing narratives in the Torah continue to refer to him as Yaakov. So, **yes, he is a new man, but he is still Yaakov. A new and improved Yaakov, a Yaakov who is also a Yisrael, but a Yaakov nonetheless.** [emphasis added]

We are who we are. It is unhealthy and unrealistic to think that we can completely change our personality traits. What we can do is to have mastery over them. This is the name of Yisrael: not that you conquered, not that you destroyed, but sarita, from the word sar, master -- that you have had mastery. Mastery over all your adversaries, your external ones and, more importantly, you internal ones.

None of this can happen if we don't go back for those small vessels. Even if we are mostly okay, if we ignore those traits within us that are still troublesome, that still sometimes lead us to making bad choices, if we are happy with "good enough," then we will fall short. Yaakov's struggle was a heroic one; one that perhaps not all of us are prepared to undertake. But it is one that we should aspire to nonetheless.

There are, perhaps, some vessels that we should not go back for. Some things about us may never change, and we need to learn to make peace with those parts of ourselves. Yaakov's greatness was first recognizing that the vessels

were there. But his second greatness was knowing that this was something that he could deal with and change. To quote the serenity prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous: God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed / Courage to change the things which should be changed / and the Wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

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

We are about to enter into a holiday where, according to the Gemara, the people went searching for such *pachim ketanim* when they could have been satisfied with what they had. When the Hasmoneans rededicated the Temple, they could have used the impure oil for the menorah. It was good enough. That's who they were at that moment -- they were impure -- and they could have made their peace with that. But they went looking for the *pachim ketanim* and they found one with the purest oil. And then a miracle occurred. This little oil, found in this small vessel, burned far longer and far brighter than anyone could have imagined.

Chanukah is a holiday that embodies this extra striving. It allows someone to do a "*good enough*" job and just light one candle each night. But it encourages us to replicate the miracle and to strive to do more, to strive for the best, and the best of the best, so that the light will grow and spread. Let us all do the work that we need to do, going back for those *pachim ketanim* within us, that will allow us to become our better selves, and allow our inner light to shine forth.

Shabbat shalom!

From my archives.

Jacob, Esau and Us: Thoughts for Parashat Vayishlah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"Now these are the generations of Esau—the same is Edom" (Bereishith 36:1).

The Torah devotes thirty verses informing us of the extended family of Esau, including lists of the various chiefs of the family divisions. Why would we need to know this genealogical listing since Esau was the rejected son of Isaac and Rebecca? The Torah will, of course, devote its full attention to Jacob and family, but why bother with the family and chiefs of Esau?

Perhaps we can gain some insight by considering the verse that precedes the Esau list. *"And Isaac died and was gathered unto his people, old and full of days; and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him"* (35:29). Esau and Jacob, twin brothers, come together to bury their father. In spite of the longstanding enmity between them, they were both sons of Isaac. Although the Torah's story is ultimately about Jacob/Israel and family, it wants us to remember that Esau is also part of our family and part of our story. The togetherness of Jacob and Esau at Isaac's burial is reminiscent of the togetherness of Isaac and Ishmael at the burial of their father Abraham.

In Midrashic typologies, Esau and Jacob are arch antagonists. Esau is portrayed as violent and wicked, the antithesis of the Godliness that Jacob typifies. They seem to represent an endless and non-reconcilable hatred. They seem to be engaged in an eternal zero sum battle: if one wins, the other loses.

It seems that way.

But the Torah, by devoting so much attention to Esau's family and chiefs, is offering another way of seeing things. Jacob and Esau are brothers. They come together as family to bury their father. There is a great rift between them...but there is also the possibility of reconciliation.

The Torah wants us — the family of Jacob — to look more carefully at the family of Esau. It wants us to see that Esau's clan also have virtues; they have leaders, family solidarity, traditions. They are still our relatives, in spite of all our differences.

By listing the clans of Esau, the Torah is suggesting that the ancient and deep antagonism doesn't have to be forever. It is not a zero sum situation where one must win and one must lose. Rather, reconciliation is possible if both sides respect each other and see each other's humanity. Both can win. There's no reason for endless strife and competition.

Esau and Jacob standing together at Isaac's burial symbolize the possibility of peace between brothers. In spite of all the enmity that plagued their relationship, they were able to come together as brothers. The Torah's listing of Esau's family means that they continue to be important to us.

Old rivalries and hatreds can be overcome. We can win together. With all our differences, we can find common ground. The Torah points the way.

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3298>

Convivencia Achieved? Jews and Non-Jews in Haifa

By Dr. Rivka Kellner and Professor Menachem Kellner *

Convivencia is the term often used to describe the coexistence of Jews and Muslims (and Christians) in the so-called Golden Age of Spain. Jews in Haifa have not yet produced figures like Bahya ibn Pakudah, Judah Halevi, or Maimonides, nor have the Arabs of Haifa produced figures like Averroes, but, withal, Jews and Arabs do get along pretty well in Haifa. We are here to report on that.

Last Simhat Torah we were blissfully unaware of what was happening down South. We heard in synagogue that Hamas had fired a few rockets at Tel Aviv, but nothing more. Since that day, our lives have been consumed by little else. After a day or so, we were led to expect that Hezbollah would fire on Haifa, and people in my Rambam class were talking about buying generators in case the electricity went out...in the event, I do not think any of them actually did buy a generator.

Overall, aside from the scores of thousands of refugees from Israel's North living in hotels around the city (and our attempts to help them, Menachem with laundry and Rivka with English lessons and packing toys), there was very little sense in Haifa that Israel is at war. Glued to the news, of course, horrified at our losses and the undeniable Hamas-caused suffering of Gazans, endlessly frustrated by our useless government (and all too often embarrassed by it), daily life went on much as before. This includes the remarkably good relations between Jews and Arabs in Haifa. Menachem used to joke that it is no surprise that Jews and Arabs get along in Haifa. The real surprise was that Jews and Jews got along as well. Jews and Arabs continue to get along well in Haifa, despite the war (or perhaps even because of it, on that more below), thank God, but the anger at the Haredi community grows day by day.

Rivka and Menachem wrote the above a month ago. Then the other shoe dropped. Consciously or unconsciously, we are now constantly listening for missile and drone alerts. When entering any enclosed space, be it a mall or a synagogue, we

scan our surrounding for the nearest shelter. Our building, ten stories, forty apartments, was erected in the early 70's. We are therefore lucky enough to have a safe room on every floor. Our building was certainly advanced when it was built. New buildings have safe rooms in every apartment. Older buildings usually have no safe rooms and no shelters.

It turns out that we have several new neighbors on our floor. We have usually seen them bleary-eyed, confused, sporting the latest pajama attire, in our floor's safe room in the middle of the night after an air raid alert has most rudely ripped us out of our beds. More than once Menachem was caught in the middle of shaharit if the alert came in the morning; he zoomed into the safe room in tallit and tefillin (photos available on request). Our new neighbors are recent immigrants from Ukraine who probably never saw tefillin before (and do not know Hebrew or even English) -- the Tower of Babel has reached our safe room.

Having brought you up to date, as it were, we want to write about Haifa's unique spread of religions, and the way in which we all get along, despite the war, the alerts and the rockets (which do not distinguish Jews from Arabs). On an unremarkable day (as if any day during this war can be unremarkable), Rivka got into a cab and noticed what was clearly a Muslim prayer book. She asked if she could look at it (as a sign of respect to the driver) and, when she put it back down, she treated it like a siddur, kissing the cover. She explained to the driver that halakhah mandates respectful treatment of Jewish religious texts, and Rivka felt it appropriate to show respect to the texts of other religions. This took place during Sukkot, and Rivka wished the driver a chag sameach (happy holiday). She realized that he might have been offended since it was not his holiday, and she said as much. He replied: *"Why should I be offended? It is my holiday too -- I am also Israeli."* (This is not the sort of story one will read concerning Haifa in the New York Times.)

In our experience Jews and Non-Jews in Haifa get along fine. Thus, for example, our favorite neighborhood (kosher) coffee shop is jointly owned by a Jew and an Arab, staffed by a variety of people, and enjoyed by the entire neighborhood. Did we not know his name, we would not know that the Arab co-owner was an Arab (his Hebrew is certainly better than Menachem's!). Although the coffee shop is kosher, the clientele is diverse, including Arabs of various types (although once we noticed that four of the patrons were members of our synagogue).

Our family doctor has an Arab partner. Menachem's rheumatologist is a Muslim woman (no hijab, but she observes Ramadan and thinks that two 25-hour Jewish fasts are harder than Ramadan). Almost all our pharmacists are Arabs.

Unlike taxis in Jerusalem (or New York), getting into a cab driven by an Arab does not make Rivka nervous at all. Rivka freely engages these drivers into sometimes riveting conversations about life, politics, and weather. Despite that, it seems to Rivka that occasionally Arab "feminism" lags decades behind that of Jewish cabbies. Rivka suspects that behind the rare examples of sexual harassment to which she was subjected, lay more than "simple" sexism, but was also anti-Jewish honor-based overtone to the violence. Rivka discussed these events with a different (Arab) cabbie, who thought that she was over reacting and should be flattered.

One of Rivka's cabbies told her that his relatives in Lebanon were not doing well (as is the case with Palestinians there). Rivka handed him a 20 shekel note and asked him to try to find a way to alleviate their suffering. He was moved beyond words.

But neither Rivka nor Menachem ever felt that the Arabs with whom they dealt (in medical contexts, in malls, at the beach) harbored anti-Jewish prejudice. We have no idea what people feel in their hearts, but so far as outward behavior is concerned, we have never seen evidence of such prejudice.

Rivka has been laughingly called a JAP (Jewish American Princess). She always makes it clear that she is a JIP (Jewish Israeli Princess). As such, she is an expert on the many malls in Haifa. In these malls she sees Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze working and shopping. Recently she came across a cute little toddler who was being coaxed by his bemused mother in Arabic to get up. Rivka crouched down next to the child and in Hebrew, English and broken Arabic tried to get him to get up. The little angel smiled, got up, and gave Rivka a hug she will never forget. She put her hand on his head and blessed him -- and earned a smile from the mother, who was clearly pleased.

Rivka teaches supplementary English to school children of all ages in a community center here in Haifa. Yesterday, one of her breaks between lessons was rudely interrupted by a siren. Rivka was pleasantly surprised by the way in which children and teachers all filed down to the bomb shelter in an orderly fashion. When the mandatory 10 minutes were over, and HKBH took care of them all, and nothing blew up, class resumed as if nothing had happened. Rivka was impressed by the calm of her students and saddened that they appear unfazed by the experience. No child should be used to such an event. It was clear to Rivka that we protect our children, and do not use them as human shields.

Not long ago, Menachem stopped at a convenience store to pick up some milk. A customer with a complicated issue was there before him. The customer told Menachem to go ahead of him, since all he wanted was a liter of milk. Menachem complimented the customer for allowing an older person to get ahead of him. Mustafa (as his name turned out to be) replied: *"it all depends on how one is raised at home."*

Why do matters work so well in Haifa? For one thing, we have a huge number of Russian olim, strongly secular and usually very cultured, who help balance the growing Haredi presence. For another thing, our Arab population is largely Christian and highly educated (one of them, Prof. Mouna Maroun, a neuroscientist and expert in post-trauma stress disorder, was recently elected to be the university's rector). There are several varieties of Christians, several of whom we know from our years at the University of Haifa. Among the Muslims, very few of them appear to be Shi'ites and there is a large population of Ahmedi Muslims whose religion commits them to peaceful coexistence (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmadiyya>). Rivka and Menachem were invited to their annual convocation twice, and we were given kosher food! There are also Druze, most of whom are fervent Israeli patriots, and of course Bahai (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%C4%8D%C4%8C%C3%AD_World_Centre). All of the Arabs in Haifa know well that they would be murdered by Hamas and Hezbollah. This mosaic of non-Jewish religions and their relative assimilation helps explain Haifa's unique success.

We do not want to give the impression that all is hunky dory here in Haifa. We both find the war enervating and feel that we are suffering from Pre-Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. We are also living through an old (once almost amusing) joke: 1/3 of Israelis pay taxes, 1/3 of Israelis do army service, and 1/3 of Israelis work for a living. The problem is that it is the same 1/3! Our shambolic government is trying to sell out that 1/3 in order to keep Haredim in the government. Meanwhile, Convivencia between Jews and Arabs in Haifa is strong. However, Convivencia between those Jews who serve (and die) and contribute to Israeli society and those Jews who feel no obligation whatsoever to do so is getting weaker by the day. That may be another cost of the war.

* Rivka Kellner, PhD, is an English teacher. Menachem Kellner is her proud father and Wolfson Professor Emeritus of Jewish Thought at the University of Haifa and founding chair of the Shalem College Dept of Jewish Thought and Philosophy.

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Vayishlach – Laughing All the Way to the Bank

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

Yakov spent 22 years in the house of Lavan tending Lavan's sheep. The first years were to earn the hands of Rachel and Leah in marriage. The next years were to provide for his family. As Yakov returned home, he observed the contrast between what was in his past and how it was for him now. Yakov said, *"When I crossed the Yarden it was with a walking stick. But now I have become two encampments."*

When we reflect on Yakov's comment, we realize that the contrast is not merely one of quantity — i.e., previously he had just a walking stick and now he has much more. There is a dramatic contrast in the quality and relationship that Yakov has with his walking stick of the past and what now "belongs" to him. The walking stick of the past was an item that serviced him. Now he had a family which he was responsible to service. Yakov commented with appreciation at the life journey with which Hashem had blessed him. He had become a family man with responsibilities, and for this he was grateful.

In our time, the general population is very cautious regarding marriage commitment. To marry is to take responsibility in the relationship. Marriage requires that we give up some autonomy for the purpose of commitment and self-development. Yakov is a quintessential example of a person who took on great responsibility to build a family. He labored long and hard to earn the hands of his righteous wives and to provide for his family. As he surveyed the encampments which were the result of his commitments, he was proud and he was satisfied.

Rav Yeruchim Levovitz was once walking with his students outside the Yeshiva in Mir on a very hot summer day. As they walked, the students noticed a worker on the top of a house working on a fire with molten tar as he patched the roof. The student pointed in the direction of the worker and commented with sympathy that the worker was working in such heat on the summer day.

Apparently, the worker noticed the gesture, because as they got closer to the house the worker called, "Rabbiner..." and asked Rav Yeruchim, "What did your student say about me?" Rav Yeruchim kindly explained that the student was just expressing sympathy that you are working in the heat on such a hot day. The worker replied with a jolly smile, "Don't pity me. I have a job!"

Rab Yeruchim used this incident to illustrate a healthy attitude to taking responsibility. Sure, taking responsibility requires us to do things that we wouldn't normally do, and might even limit our choices to keep us focused. But, like a job, taking responsibility gives us many benefits such as a salary and success in that which we have invested. When we feel like questioning commitment and responsibility, we would do well to remember the worker's comment, "Don't pity me. I have a job!" He was working hard, but he was glad to have a salary. At the end of the day, he would laugh all the way to the bank.

Interestingly, studies find that taking responsibility is beneficial even if there is no salary or personal gain. When people take on responsibility, they are gifted with the sense that there is someone who needs them. Volunteering is great for seniors (and for everyone) because taking responsibility on a regular basis produces happiness, life satisfaction, and increases life expectancy.

In the application of marriage, Yakov appreciated what his efforts of commitment produced. He felt that he got a good deal.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky once asked his grandchild, still young in his marriage, how he was doing. Regarding his sleepless nights with crying children, the young man good naturedly used the expression, *"Tzaar Gidul Bonim -- The pain of raising children."* Rav Yakov responded, *"This is not Tzaar Gidul Bonim. You should never know from that. What you are experiencing is the responsibility of raising a family."*

Recently, I had to go to MVA to have my van inspected. The attendant noticed the car seats in the van and commented thoughtfully, *"You have children."* I said, *"Yes, thank G-d."*

Before I could ask him or say anything more, the attendant asked longingly, *"What is it like to be a dad?"*

I replied, “*It is very special. It is special to take responsibility and to know that there are people that are relying on you.*”

He continued working in thoughtful silence. As he handed me my paperwork, he said thankfully and with great fervor, “*G-d bless you, Sir. G-d bless you.*” I had the sense that the simple words I shared about taking responsibility were a perspective that he wasn’t hearing anywhere else.

Yakov is not just a lofty personality, a Patriarch of our people. Yakov is also a real person from whom we can gain inspiration. He had become a leader of a fledgling people, a mentor to set the tone for generations. He was responsible, and for this he was grateful.

With heartfelt blessings 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.

Parshas Vayishlach – A Torah Identity

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * (© 5781)

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

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

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

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

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

The gift of Torah is far, far more than a history of our people and a set of laws. Torah is the gift of the guidebook to understanding how to function within the world G-d has created for us. It is the handbook for the world and for life itself. Hidden within the stories and laws are the philosophies, meaning and lessons to grow and achieve, to accomplish and succeed and live life to its fullest. As complex as real life is, that is how subtle and complex the Torah's guidance must be and indeed is. In truth, the complexity and depth of Torah is so profound that the Gemara tells us (Chagigah 3a) that in any proper session of Torah study there will always be a new level of clarity and knowledge that did not exist before. There are so many lessons and so many nuances, that it is impossible even to review one's own learning without realizing some new level of clarity.

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

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

* Rosh Kollel, Savannah Kollel, Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Vayishlach - Where is Dinah?

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

The Torah tells us about Yaakov's preparations for the encounter with his brother:

Jacob took his two wives, two maid-servants, and eleven children.

As a matter of fact, Yaakov had twelve children: Reuven, Shimon, Levy, Yehudah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Yisakhar, Zevulun, Dinah, and Yosef. It is obvious whom the Torah excludes: Dinah. Women are usually not mentioned in the Torah's censuses or genealogical lists, and when they are, it is a source of endless speculations. The lesser significance of Dinah within the family circle is evident from the way she was named. In chapters 29 and 30, Leah makes a statement with each name she gives her sons, and even the sons of the maid-servant who was used as a surrogate mother. Her explanations revolve around the recognition she will get from her husband, from other women, or her own joy. Reuven: God saw my misery; Shimon: God heard that I am not loved; Levy: My husband will now choose me over Rachel; Yehudah: I truly have to thank God; Gad: Good luck befell me; Asher: I am joyous, women will praise me; Yisakhar: I was rewarded for giving my maid-servant to my husband; Zevulun: My husband will dwell with me in a palace because I have given him six sons)Gad and Asher were surrogate sons(. Then, finally, a baby girl is born, but her name is not explained or celebrated. Leah doesn't say that her husband will be thrilled with having seven children, but simply calls her Dinah.

The Midrash, which also assumes that Dinah is the one omitted, comes up with a different explanation for the number eleven:

And his eleven children – and where was Dinah? He hid her in a trunk and locked her, so Esau will not lay his eyes on her.

Rashi quotes this Midrash, and I fear that some of our children learn it in school. There is no hint to that ludicrous idea in the Torah, and it portrays Yaakov in a negative light. Had he wanted to hide Dinah from whom he thought would be a sexual predator, he could have done so without locking her up. Putting a woman in a trunk and locking her is not protection but imprisonment, and it reminds us of grim tales, from Rapunzel to Bluebeard. In defense of that segment of the Midrash, it is not meant to be taken literally. The phrase about eleven children is mentioned when Yaakov crosses the

river, and he obviously did not leave Dinah on the other side. The reference to eleven children probably excludes Dinah, not because she was locked in a box, but rather because she is a woman.

I believe that the Midrash is using Jacob as a metaphor to parents who deny their children choices because they fear for them, leading to disastrous consequences. Yaakov is so protective that he limits his daughter's knowledge and worldview. Instead of teaching her of possible dangers and how to avoid them on her own, he locks her out of the world. Esau might represent here the lure of foreign culture. The Midrash suggests that parents should provide their children with the means to deal with other cultures and appreciate their own, instead of locking them away. Overprotective parents want to shelter their kids forever. They lock them in a physical or conceptual trunk and take the keys with them, but sooner or later, they will be exposed to the real world, and they will have no immunization system.

Though I can search for a message in the first segment of the Midrash, the second, also quoted by Rashi, is unforgivable:

Because Jacob prevented his brother from meeting her, not seeing that she could have caused Esau to repent, he was punished, and she fell victim to Shechem!

Before we continue reading, we utter a silent prayer, especially in light of the horrible stories about sexual harassment exposed daily, that no one blamed Dinah for what happened. Please tell us that no one said that she was provocative or inviting or that she should not have been out in the streets. After all, many women kept quiet for years because of the same and because they knew that they can easily be painted as predator and not prey, perpetrators and not victims.

But we will have to admit, reluctantly, that this is exactly what the Midrash does:

While Dinah's father and brothers were sitting in the Beit HaMidrash, she went out to meet the local girls, and caused herself to be violated.

They were not in Beit HaMidrash, they were in the field, and as the following chapters show, there were many pagan items in their possession. But the Midrash chooses to describe a deviate young woman who abandons the Torah-steeped environment of her home to wander the streets, and sort of blurts at her: *"Don't complain! you deserve it."*

Let us return now to the previous segment, the one about Yaakov's punishment. Again, Dinah is perceived as a property of her father and not as an intelligent, independent woman. Her father's punishment for hiding her is that she is raped? She is the one suffering, she is the one traumatized for life, she is blamed for being assaulted, and you tell me that that is his punishment?

To conclude, we can draw a message from the first part of the Midrash, a message which appeals to all parents who want to censor what their kids read, hear, or know. This is a practice which is common in orthodox families, and often enforced by schools or tightknit communities. The Midrash warns parents, educators, and religious leaders that locking people away, or locking the world away from them, could lead to disastrous results.

The second and third segments, however, represent a worldview which we must eschew. This is where we follow the rule coined by Rav Shemuel b. Hophni Gaon (~940-1010): Of that Midrashic material, we accept only that which makes sense, and we reject all the rest.

In cases such as that of Dinah, we should examine and solve the problem at its core, and never blame the victim.

Shabbat Shalom

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/ham-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on

Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Remembering Our Ish Tam Yoshev Ohalim

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Not all heros build skyscrapers, lead revolutions, or sit at the helm of ostentatious initiatives. Some heros just show up.

Last week, we at AHC lost Morris Kun, a man who showed up for Auckland Hebrew Congregation for 40 years. Day in and day out, Morris showed up to every service and became an integral part of the fabric of this community and our lives. The Torah describes our forefather Jacob as an "*Ish Tam Yoshev Ohalim*," a wholesome man who dwelled in tents. An apt description of Morris, a wholesome man who dwelt in the tent of the AHC for so long.

We remember Morris not only for the number of years he spent with us but for his humility. He showed up for all of us at services, for the Chevra and other initiatives, but always in a quiet way. He didn't do all this service for the community for any reason other than this is who he was. He never sought honor for what he did. Anyone speaking with or spending time with Morris always felt an instant calm in his presence. He was truly a humble and wholesome man who will be missed by the greater whole, of which he played an important part.

Thank you Morris for the many things you have done over all the years we were privileged to know you. Your memory will live on at every service we have and in everything we do.

May the wonderful soul of Moshe Ben Eliahu Hakohen rest in peace.

On a bright note, I wish Summer Kruyer and her family a hearty Mazel Tov on the very exciting occasion of her Bat Mitzvah this Shabbat. May her Simcha reflect both her English and Hebrew names!

Shabbat Shalom.

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

Rav Kook Torah

Vayishlach: The Service of Pillars and Altars

Returning to Beth El

Having survived the confrontation with Esau and his private militia, the mysterious nighttime struggle at Penuel, the abduction of his daughter Dinah, and the battle against the city of Shechem, Jacob finally made his way back to Beth El. Twenty years earlier, Jacob had stayed overnight in Beth El, dreaming of angels and Divine protection as he fled from his brother Esau. Now he would fulfill his decades-old promise to worship God in that holy place.

In preparation for this spiritual journey, Jacob instructed his family:

"Remove the foreign gods that are in your midst. Purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then we will rise and ascend to Beth El. There I will construct an altar to God, Who answered me in my hour of trouble, and Who accompanied me in the path that I took.")Gen. 35:2-3(

The first time Jacob had come to Beth El, he erected a matzeivah, a pillar with which to worship God. Now, Jacob built a

mizbei'ach, an altar. What is the difference between worshipping God with a pillar or with an altar?

The Torah later prohibits erecting a matzeivah, even if it is to be used to worship God (Deut. 16:22). The Sages explained that the matzeivah “*was beloved in the time of the Patriarchs, but abhorred in the time of their descendants*” (Sifri Shoftim 146).

What brought about this change in status?

Service of the Klal

The difference between a matzeivah and a mizbei'ach is primarily a physical one. A matzeivah is a single large stone, while a mizbei'ach is an altar constructed from many stones. The switch from pillar to altar indicates a paradigm shift that took place in the way God was to be served in the time of the Patriarchs and in the time of their descendants.

Each of the three Avot — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — had his own unique way of serving God. Abraham served God with his overriding traits of love, kindness, and hospitality. Isaac served God with awe and submission, traits he acquired at the Akeidah. And Jacob, “*the scholarly man who dwelled in tents of Torah*,” served God through Torah study.

In the time of the Patriarchs, each of the Avot was the leading light of his generation. His special trait dominated the era; his path of serving God was the appropriate path for that time. This period was aptly represented by the metaphor of the matzeivah: a single stone, a single way of serving God.

When Jacob returned to the Land of Israel, however, the situation had changed. He arrived at Beth El with twelve sons, the twelve tribes of Israel. No longer was there a single spiritual path for the generation. This was the start of a new era: the service of the klal, the collective, in which each individual fills a particular role in order to reach a common national goal. Each of Jacob’s sons developed his own way of serving God, based on a unique combination of the spiritual paths of the three Avot.

To fully function, the Jewish nation requires a variety of talents and fields of expertise. Spiritual leadership, in the form of teachers of Torah and kohanim, came from the tribe of Levi. Kings and national leaders arose from Judah. Issachar excelled in producing scholars and judges. Other tribes specialized in commerce, agriculture, and national defense.

The altar Jacob built from many stones upon his return to Beth El embodied the new paradigm of serving God. This was no longer a time of a single, uniform service of God. There were now many paths to serve God, which joined together in one altar, as all aspired toward the common goal of Divine service.

“Change Your Clothes”

With these divergent paths to serve God, however, a new problem arose. Each group may come to believe that its path is the most important and belittle the efforts of others. As they prepared to worship God with the multiple-stone mizbei'ach at Beth El, Jacob realized that it was necessary to take special measures to unite his family.

Jacob therefore instructed his family, “Remove the foreign gods in your midst.” The Sages taught that the evil inclination is a “*foreign god*” (Shabbat 105b). Jacob pleaded that they remove the evil inclination which convinces us that others are “*foreign*.” He wanted his family to recognize that, on the inside, the disparate members of the Jewish people are united in purpose and soul. For this reason, the Torah refers to Jacob’s family as “*seventy soul*” (Ex. 1:5), in the singular, emphasizing that the souls of Israel are united at their source.

It is only the externals — our deeds and actions — that separate us. Therefore Jacob requested that his family purify themselves by changing their clothes, by removing the superficial exterior which conceals our true inner unity.

Then, Jacob announced, we will be ready to ascend to Beth El and worship God together. There we will serve God using a mizbei'ach, composed of many stones and many paths — but all working together toward the same ultimate goal of serving God.

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Midbar Shur*, pp. 74-75.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/VAYISHLACH-73.htm>

Lessons in Leadership: Be Thyself (Vayishlach 5774, 5781)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Great leaders have the courage to live with unpopularity. Abraham Lincoln was reviled and ridiculed during his lifetime. In 1864 the New York Times wrote of him: *"He has been denounced without end as a perjuror, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler over the last agonies of an expiring nation."*⁵ Winston Churchill, until he became Prime Minister during the Second World War, had been written off as a failure. And soon after the war ended, he was defeated in the 1945 General Election. He himself said that *"Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm."* When Margaret Thatcher died, some people celebrated in the streets. John F. Kennedy, Yitzchak Rabin and Martin Luther King were assassinated.

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

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

]3[Shakespeare, "Sonnet 29."

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

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

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

Life Lessons from the Parsha: Raising Jewish Kids to Be Jewish

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 5785

The Torah portion of Vayishlach opens with the dramatic narrative of Jacob being pursued by his hostile twin brother, Esau. Although not new to being pursued by his nemesis, this time, after spending two decades with Laban, his circumstances were quite different. Jacob now had a large family and had amassed tremendous wealth.

Upon learning that Esau was once again coming after him, Jacob took swift action. He dispatched messengers (who were, in fact, angels, according to the commentaries) with the following message: *"I have lived with Laban ... and I have accumulated great wealth: oxen, donkeys, flocks of sheep, servants Let's make peace."*¹

Sadly, the messengers returned to Jacob with bad news. *"Esau is coming towards you with 400 terrorists, armed to the teeth!"*

Terrified, Jacob prepared for the confrontation. In a last-ditch attempt to avoid battle, he sent an enormous gift to Esau, a substantial collection of valuable animals. Miraculously, Esau was moved by the gesture, became calm, and upon finally seeing Jacob, greeted him with a hug and a kiss.

Observing Jacob's extensive family, including his 11 sons, Esau inquired, *"Who are these to you?"*

"These are my children," responded Jacob, *"with which G d has graced me, your servant."*

By delving deeper into the narrative, we gain a profound appreciation for the life lessons derived from this story.

Living With Laban

Upon learning that his wicked brother, Esau, was heading his way, what message did Jacob send? *"I've been living with Laban!"*

What was Esau supposed to do with that information?

The answer lies in Rashi's commentary, which encourages us to read between the lines. Jacob said, *"Im Lavan garti – I lived with Laban."* The Hebrew word garti has the numeric value of 613, representing the 613 commandments in the

Torah. This was Jacob's message to Esau. *"I lived in the house of Laban. I lived in the city of Aram Naharayim, where everyone is morally bankrupt and wicked. And even there, I kept all of Torah's laws. I did not adopt Laban's evil ways. I didn't compromise even one iota of my Jewish way of life."*

But why would Esau be impressed that Jacob remained faithful to the Torah?

The explanation lies in the fact that Esau wanted to do more than just eliminate Jacob; he wanted to annihilate the Jewish people. He intended to make sure that there would be no Children of Israel. A deeper conversation was unfolding. Esau, from whom the Roman Empire descended, was saying to Jacob, *"I am going to kill you. And without you, your children will grow up to be good Romans."*

And Jacob responded, *"You won't kill me, and you won't influence my children. You may be a superior warrior, but I'm a tougher guy! I lived with Laban. I lived in a hotbed of immorality, and yet, look at the children I raised there — nice Jewish kids! Each of my sons wears a kippah. My daughter lights Shabbat candles!"*

Resilience, Programmed Into Our DNA

Esau was shocked.

"How could you possibly raise children like that in such a place?" he asked. *"You had no Jewish infrastructure — no synagogues, no day schools, not a single kosher restaurant! What's your secret?"*

"G d graced me with these children," Jacob answered, using the Hebrew word chanan. The three letters that spell the word chanan — chet, nun, nun — form an acronym for the three central mitzvot of a Jewish home: challah, representing the laws of kosher; niddah, representing the laws of family purity; and ner, representing Shabbat candles.

When we raise our children in observance of kosher, in observance of family purity, and in observance of Shabbat, no Esau — no physical or spiritual enemy of the Jewish people — can successfully exert power over us.

Wrestling Angels

This week's parshah also contains the riveting narrative of Jacob's battle with Esau's angel, during which the angel dislocated Jacob's thigh. One might ask, why didn't the angel go for a knockout punch to the face?

There is deep symbolism here. Esau's angel realized that he could not overpower Jacob directly, so instead, he targeted the *"loins of Jacob"* — his children.²

"I cannot defeat you," admitted the angel, *"victory is beyond my reach. Instead, I will target your children. I will attempt to lead them astray through assimilation, to entice them to abandon the teachings of the Torah and the observance of mitzvot."*

Thus, Jacob and the angel engaged in fierce battle, culminating with the angel conceding and acknowledging Jacob's victory.

And so, until Moshiach comes, the Jewish people will be here, recognizably Jewish, proudly Jewish, despite Esau's 400 terrorists.

Saved by Association

My father, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, served as the rabbi of Congregation Ahavath Zion, the largest Orthodox congregation in Newark, N.J.

A member of the synagogue's board once approached my father with a serious problem. His young daughter had come

home one day and declared, “*Dad, I’m becoming Shabbat observant!*” The father nearly fainted. “*Are you crazy?!*” he exclaimed. “*Shomer Shabbat? Shabbat observant? You’re signing up for a life of poverty! You’ll never make a living.*”

Utterly devastated, he came to my father in desperation, seeking his help. “*Rabbi,*” he said, “*I’m your friend. I need you to do me a big favor. You’ve got to save my daughter from certain doom! She decided to be shomer Shabbat! Her brother is a doctor, and her sister works for the State Department – and she’s going to become shomer Shabbat?!* Please, rabbi, talk her out of it.”

“*Let me get this straight,*” said my father. “*You want me, the rabbi, to convince your daughter not to observe Shabbat?!*”

Then, utilizing his fantastic sense of humor, my father shared a teaching of the Midrash: Esau approached Jacob with the intention of harming him and instead they ended up hugging and reconciling.

What caused this sudden change of heart? The Midrash explains that a group of angels approached and began beating Esau. “*Don’t hit me!*” cried Esau, “*I am the grandson of Abraham!*” But the chief angel insisted on continuing. “*I am the son of Isaac!*” cried Esau, yet the chief angel persisted. “*I am the brother of Jacob!*” wailed Esau, and upon hearing that, the chief angel ordered, “*Stop the beating. He is Jacob’s brother; he gets full protection.*”

That was the story, according to the Midrash, behind Esau’s attitude adjustment.

“*After 120 years,*” continued my father, “*when you come up to heaven for judgment day, the angels will review your life, see that you weren’t perfect, and start hitting you. ‘Stop!’ you’ll shout, ‘My son is a doctor!’ But they will keep hitting. ‘Stop!’ You’ll plead, ‘My daughter works at the State Department!’ but they’ll keep hitting. ‘Stop hitting me!’ you’ll cry, ‘My daughter is shomer Shabbat!’ and the beating will immediately stop.*”

“*Do you really want me to take away your source of protection? I won’t do that.*” With his trademark humor and his wise approach, he brought that negotiation to a wonderful conclusion. The girl grew up to be a God-fearing young woman who went on to build a beautiful, traditional Jewish family.

This was the message that Jacob was sending to his brother, Esau. “*I’m a tough guy; your 400 terrorists don’t scare me. In the toughest conditions, I kept true to the Torah and raised a generation of children who do the same!*”

Divine Prescription for Peace

In 1977, my father came to Encino, Calif., to celebrate the birth of our son Eli. During that visit he shared a powerful message with our community. At the time, Egypt and Israel were taking the initial steps that eventually led to the Camp David Accords, and the Jewish world was filled with a spirit of optimism.

“*Shaking hands with your enemy and singing Hava Nagila on the White House lawn certainly feels very good,*” remarked my father, “*but, the Torah teaches us what truly brings about everlasting peace for Israel.*” For that, he said, we need only take to heart the verse in Psalms: “*And may you see children [born] to your children — peace upon Israel.*”³

Said my father, “*Bringing another Jewish child into this world and raising him as a Jew will do more for peace in the Middle East and bring more peace to Israel than anything else possibly can.*”

We must raise Jewish children wherever we are, even in the most spiritually desolate environments. We must be strong, resilient, and fearless.

While there will always be an Esau, God will always be there for us, sending an attitude-adjusting message. Our responsibility is to ensure the creation of one generation after another, with children and grandchildren connected to the Source.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 32:5.
2. See, for example, Radak, Zohar and others.
3. Psalms 128:6.

* * * Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6187930/jewish/Raising-Jewish-Kids-to-Be-Jewish.htm

Vayishlach: Division vs. Unity by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Division vs. Unity

These are the kings who reigned in Edom before any king reigned over the descendants of Israel.
)Gen. 36:31(

Although Esau's descendants tried to establish an organized kingdom with a local, native monarchy, they never succeeded in doing so. The Torah informs us that the eight kings who ruled Edom were not Edomite kings; the Edomites had to invite foreigners to impose order among the competing clans since they were incapable of doing so themselves. The Torah then tells us that after the last of these foreign kings died, the Edomites abandoned their attempt to unite, separating into eleven tribal groups.

All this is not surprising; Esau was the very embodiment of haughtiness and arrogance, and his descendants inherited these traits. They could never achieve true unity, since unity requires self-effacement and dedication to the long-term good of the whole, even at the expense of the short-term good of the individual. True self-effacement and dedication to the good of the whole, in turn, is possible only when it stems from our acknowledgment that G-d is the only true reality.

Unity born of true selflessness and dedication to G-d and His vision for our world is the key to peace, harmony, and receiving the fullness of G-d's blessings.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Good Shabbos.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on the parshah, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Collective Responsibility

By any standards it was a shocking episode. Jacob had settled on the outskirts of the town of Shechem, ruled by Hamor. Dina, Jacob's daughter, goes out to see the town. Shechem, Hamor's son, sees her, abducts and rapes her, and then falls in love with her and wants to marry her. He begs his father, "Take this girl as a wife for me" (Gen. 34:4).

Jacob hears about this and keeps quiet, but his sons are furious. She must be rescued, and the people must be punished. Hamor and his son come to visit the family and ask them to give consent to the marriage. Jacob's sons pretend to take the offer seriously. We will settle among you, they say, and intermarry, on condition that all your males are circumcised. Hamor and Shechem bring back the proposal to the people of the town, who agree.

On the third day after the circumcision, when the pain is at its height and the men incapacitated, Simon and Levi, Dina's brothers, enter the town and kill every single male (Gen. 34:26).

It was a terrible retribution. Jacob rebukes his sons: "You have brought trouble on me – you have made me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and Perizzites. I am few in number, and if they join forces and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." Gen. 34:30

But Simon and Levi reply: "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?" Gen. 34:31

There is a hint in the text that Simon and Levi were justified in what they did. Unusually the Torah adds, three times, an authorial comment on the moral gravity of the situation:

Jacob's sons, having heard what had happened, came back from the field. They were shocked and furious, for Shechem had committed an outrage in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter. Such a thing cannot be done! Gen. 34:7

The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their

sister. Gen. 34:27

Yet Jacob condemns their action, and although he says no more at the time, it remains burningly in his mind. Many years and fifteen chapters later, on his death-bed, he curses the two brothers for their behaviour: Simon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence their wares. Let me never join their council, nor my honour be of their assembly. For in their anger they killed men; at their whim they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is most fierce, and their fury, for it is most cruel. I will divide them up in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. Gen. 49:5-7

Who was right in this argument? Maimonides vindicates the brothers. In his law code, the Mishneh Torah, he explains that the establishment of justice and the rule of law is one of the seven Laws of Noah, binding on all humanity: And how are the Gentiles commanded to establish law courts? They are required to establish judges and officers in every area of habitation to rule in accordance with the enforcement of the other six commands, to warn the citizenry concerning these laws and to punish any transgressor with death by the sword. And it is on this basis that all the people of Shechem were guilty of death (at the hands of Simon and Levi, sons of Jacob): because Shechem (their Prince) stole (and raped) Dina, which they saw and knew about, but did not bring him to justice... Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 9, 14

According to Maimonides, there is a principle of collective responsibility. The inhabitants of Shechem, knowing that their prince had committed a crime and failing to bring him to court, were collectively guilty of injustice.

Nachmanides disagrees. The Noahide command to institute justice is a positive obligation to establish laws, courts and judges, but there is no principle of collective responsibility, nor is there liability to death for failure to implement the command. Nor could there be, for if Simon and Levi were justified, as Maimonides argues, why did Jacob criticise them at the time and later curse them on his death bed?

The argument between them is unresolved, just as it was between Jacob and his sons. We know that there is a principle of collective responsibility in Jewish law: Kol Yisrael arevin zeh baze, "All Jews are sureties for one

another." But is this specific to Judaism? Is it because of the peculiar nature of Jewish law, namely that it flows from a covenant between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai, at which the people pledged themselves individually and collectively to keep the law and to ensure that it was kept?

Maimonides, unlike Nachmanides, seems to be saying that collective responsibility is a feature of all societies. We are responsible not only for our own conduct but for those around us, amongst whom we live. Or perhaps this flows not from the concept of society but simply from the nature of moral obligation. If X is wrong, then not only must I not do it. I must, if I can, stop others from doing it, and if I fail to do so, then I share in the guilt. We would call this nowadays the guilt of the bystander. Here is how the Talmud puts it:

Rav and R. Chanina, R. Yochanan and R. Habiba taught [the following]: Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, is seized for [the sins of] his household; [if he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is seized for [the sins of] his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is seized for [the sins of] the whole world. Shabbat 54b

Clearly, however, the issue is a complex one that needs nuance. There is a difference between a perpetrator and a bystander. It is one thing to commit a crime, another to witness someone committing a crime and failing to prevent it. We might hold a bystander guilty, but not in the same degree. The Talmud uses the phrase "is seized." This may mean that he is morally guilty. He can be called to account. He may be punished by "the heavenly court" in this world or the next. It does not mean that he can be summoned to court and sentenced for criminal negligence.

The issue famously arose in connection with the German people and the Holocaust. The philosopher Karl Jaspers made a distinction between the moral guilt of the perpetrators and

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what he called the metaphysical guilt of the bystanders:

There exists a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially if a crime is committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can to prevent them, I too am guilty. If I was present at the murder of others without risking my life to prevent it, I feel guilty in a way not adequately conceivable either legally, politically, or morally. That I live after such a thing has happened weighs upon me as indelible guilt.[1]

So there is real guilt, but, says Jaspers, it cannot be reduced to legal categories. Simon and Levi may have been right in thinking that the men of Shechem were guilty of doing nothing when their prince abducted and assaulted Dina, but that does not mean that they were entitled to execute summary justice by killing all the males. Jacob was right in seeing this as a brutal assault. In this case, Nachmanides' position seems more compelling than that of Maimonides.

One of Israel's most profound moralists, the late Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903-1994), wrote that though there may have been an ethical justification for what Simon and Levi did, "there is also an ethical postulate which is not itself a matter of rationalisation and which calls forth a curse upon all these justified and valid considerations." [2] There may, he says, be actions which can be vindicated but are nevertheless accursed. That is what Jacob meant when he cursed his sons.

Collective responsibility is one thing. Collective punishment is another.

[1] Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, Trans. E. B. Ashton. New York: Fordham University Press 2000, p. 26.

[2] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *After Kibiyeh: Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State* 1953-4, <http://www.leibowitz.co.il/leibarticles.asp?id=85>.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Esau Revisited – Identity Without Continuity

"And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept." (Genesis 33:4)

Years ago, a college classmate provocatively announced that he planned to name his first son after the most maligned figure in the entire Torah: Esau. And the truth is that on the basis of a literal reading of the biblical text (p'shuto shel mikra) a case could be made to defend Esau. In fact, we're doing Jacob, his twin brother, a disservice by ignoring Esau's positive behavior. Only by presenting the best possible portrait of Esau, and then probing

where the cracks lie, can we achieve an authentic portrait of Jacob.

Let's consider Esau's defense. After we are introduced to Esau as Isaac's favorite son since 'the hunt was in his [Isaac's] mouth' (Gen. 30:28), we are immediately taken to the fateful scene where Jacob is cooking lentil soup when Esau came home exhausted from the hunt. The hungry hunter asks for some food, but Jacob will only agree to give his brother food in exchange for the birthright. Who is taking advantage of whom? Is not a cunning Jacob taking advantage of an innocent Esau?

Then there is the more troubling question of the stolen blessing. Even without going into the details of how Jacob pretends to be someone he's not, Esau emerges as an honest figure deserving of our sympathy. After all, Esau's desire to personally carry out his father's will meant that he needed a long time to prepare the meat himself. Indeed, it was Esau's diligence in tending to his father that allowed enough time to pass to make it possible for his younger brother to get to Isaac's tent first. Surely, Rebecca must have realized the profound nature of Esau's commitment to his father, for she masterminded Jacob's plan.

Additionally, Esau possessed qualities that many people admire, particularly in America where the spirit of the Wild West lives on. Esau was a hunter and was not afraid to go out into the unknown. He spoke the language of the buffalo and the Apache. He was a frontiersman: reading tracks, smelling the wind and listening with a sensitive ear. In nineteenth-century England he would have explored Africa. Had he lived in Spain, he would have been at the right side of Columbus. Esau may not be a scholar, but he is nevertheless a larger-than-life, self-made man whose exploits are the stuff of legends.

On his return from the field, Esau realizes that Jacob has already received the blessing originally meant for him. His response cannot fail to touch the reader. Poignantly, Esau begs of his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept" (Gen. 27:38).

Does this sound like someone whose name should be shunned forever? We all know the pain of arriving somewhere a moment too late, begging for the door to be reopened. But we've missed our chance. We walk away, disappointed and heartbroken, and in Esau's plea for a blessing we feel his immense pain, and hear our own pain. At this moment, Esau is Everyman and we all weep with him.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Isaac does give him a blessing that ensures he eventually becomes the head of Edom, a powerful nation identified by our Sages as the progenitor of Rome; and, in the final forty-three verses of *Vayishlach*, we find the civilization created by Esau: its wives, children, grandchildren, chiefs and generals, are meticulously recorded by our Bible.

But it is the beginning of *Vayishlach* that clinches our pro-Esau case. Jacob finally returns to his ancestral home after an absence of twenty years. Understandably, Jacob is terrified of his brother's potential reaction, and so in preparation, Jacob sends messengers ahead with exact instructions as to how to address Esau. Informed of the impending approach of Esau's army of four hundred men, he divides his household into two camps, so that he's prepared for the worst. But what actually happens defies Jacob's expectations: Esau is overjoyed and thrilled to see him. The past is the past. "And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept" (Gen. 33:4). Even if Esau is the villain, shouldn't this moment of reconciliation redeem him? And what a redemption: the two halves of Isaac coming together in an embrace of peace and love and hope. Jacob accepts a cool reconciliation, refusing Esau's offer of their traveling together. Jacob is somehow constrained to travel a different path. At Jacob's behest, the brothers separate once again.

The defense rests. Thus described, Esau hardly seems worthy of the official censure of Jewish history as the personification of the anti-Jew. In fact, my college friend had good reason to name his son after Esau. So, why are our Sages so critical of him?

I would suggest our analysis so far overlooks something central in Esau's character. Yes, there are positive characteristics of Esau to be found in many Jews across the Diaspora. Many are aggressive, self-made people who weep when they meet a long-lost Jewish brother from Ethiopia or Russia. They have respect for their parents and grandparents, tending to their physical needs and even reciting – or hiring someone to recite – the traditional mourner's *Kaddish* for a full year after their death. Financial support and solidarity missions to the State of Israel, combined with their vocal commitment to Jewry and Israel, reflect a highly developed sense of Abrahamic (Jewish) identity, just like Esau seems to have. Esau feels Abrahamic identity with every fiber of his being.

But when it comes to commitment to Abrahamic (Jewish) continuity, to willingness to secure a Jewish future, many of our Jewish siblings are found to be wanting – just like Esau. Undoubtedly, one of the most important

factors in keeping us 'a people apart', and preventing total Jewish assimilation into the majority culture, has been our unique laws of kashrut. Refusing to break bread with our non-Jewish work colleagues and neighbors has imposed a certain social distance that has been crucial for maintaining our identity. But Esau is willing to give up his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. Hasn't the road to modern Jewry's assimilation been paved with the T-bone steaks and the lobsters that tease the tongues lacking the self-discipline to say no to a tasty dish? Like Esau, the overwhelming majority of Diaspora Jewry has sold its birthright for a cheeseburger.

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

And what's true for a bowl of soup is true for his choice of wives. Esau marries Hittite women. And that causes his parents to feel a 'bitterness of spirit' (Gen. 27:35). No wonder! The decision of many modern Jews to 'marry out' has reached an American average of 52%! The 'bitterness of spirit' continues to be felt in many families throughout the Diaspora. Even those who marry out and continue to profess a strong Jewish identity cannot commit to Jewish continuity. Perhaps Esau even mouthed the argument I've heard from those I've tried to dissuade from marrying out. 'But she has a Jewish name! She even looks Jewish! 'He may have said, 'Her name is Yehudit [literally, a Jewess, from Judah]; she has a wonderful fragrance [Basmat means perfume]' (Gen. 26:34).

On the other hand, Jacob's name is a future-tense verb meaning 'he will triumph at the end.' Jacob is constantly planning for the future, anticipating what he must do to perpetuate the birthright. Similarly, if we want to continue as a people we have to realize two things from the lesson of our almost-forefather Esau: don't sell the birthright cheap, and to guarantee a Jewish future, one has to plan strategically.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Chochmas Adam Shares Wisdom of a (Former) Businessman

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 Cholov 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 Dudaim, 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 Dudaim 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 Dudaim "Taryag mitzvos shamarti" does not mean I kept the 613 mitzvos. The truth of the matter is that

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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 Chaye 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 Gaon Explains that Cheshek is Spiritual and Chafetz is Physical

I wish to share an observation from the Vilna 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 Rebbi 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 bochur who wants a nice Bais Yaakov girl....” But the truth is chafetz b’vas Yaakov — that is what Chamor really wanted.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig Jewish History and Jewish Unity

Yaakov said, “If Esav comes to the one camp and strikes it, then the remaining camp will survive” (Bereishis 32:9). Rashi adds: He readied himself for three things: for a gift, for tefillah and for war. The Medrash (Raba 76:3) states that these two camps existed at a later date. “The one camp that Esav/Edom/Rome attacked: these are our brothers in the south. The camp that survived: these are our brothers in exile. Even though they survived, they fasted for us, those under Roman rule, on Monday and Thursday.” The Ramban cites the Medrash and adds that this parsha alludes to future generations (see Ramban 32:4, 33:15). The Ramban writes explicitly that a doron, a form of shtadlanus, must be utilized in all future generations, in addition to tefillah and war, as Yaakov did in his time. Esav will never destroy us. They will kill or rob us in one land,

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and another ruler will have mercy and save the refugees.

The Ramban’s prescient words describe Jewish history since the time of the Ramban. Massacres, pogroms and expulsions occurred numerous times, in Europe and beyond. Each time, the survivors found refuge in a different land. The Meshech Chochma (Vayikra 26:44) adds that the survival of our small and weak nation, despite the travails in the diaspora for thousands of years, is an amazing miracle. We establish ourselves in one place for a century or two, only to be destroyed mercilessly and dispersed to faraway lands. This pattern repeats itself in order to preserve the nation and the purity of Torah. When Torah thrives, the new generation is prone to try something new, and abandon its religion. They will think that Berlin is Yerushalayim! Then a great storm will arrive and drive them to a faraway land. There they will rebuild, and their youth will excel in Torah. They will spread it in places where it had been forgotten. This is the way of Am Yisroel from the time of their wonderings in galus. These prescient words, anticipating (reportedly in 1860 see A Suraski, Demuyos Hod p. 123) the Holocaust based in Berlin, must give us pause as American Jews, particularly now that antisemitism has reared its ugly head. Sadly, it can happen here, even in this kingdom of kindness (see Igros Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 4:29), as Jewish history often repeats itself. Perhaps the words of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, uttered more than two hundred years ago, that America will be the last bastion of Torah before the coming of the Moshiach, (See The American Jewish Archives Journal Vol. LXXII p. 87 ff. by Zev Eleff) will spare this country from the fate of its European predecessors.

II. The Kingdom of Yishmael, father-in-law of Esav (Bereishis 28:9), is included in the last, longest and worst of the four kingdoms, namely Edom (Ramban, Bamidbar 24:20, Chavel Ed; Artscroll Daniel 2:40). On Simchas Torah, they attacked and murdered our brothers in the south, eerily recalling the phrase of the Medrash (in context, it is said to refer to Beitar and its environs, see Medrash Hamevuar citing Tanna D’bei Eliyahu Raba 10). All of Eretz Yisrael suffered, then and now, at the hands of Edom/Yishmael. In the relative calm of Bavel then, and America now, we fast and cry out to Hashem. In all generations, Jews in peaceful and prosperous lands help those in lands of crisis with tefillah and all types of assistance (Ibid).

Jews everywhere have responded to the worst pogrom since the Holocaust, and the ongoing battle against Hamas in Gaza, with heartfelt tefillah. The Rambam (Hilchos Ta’aniyos 1:1-3) considers this a Torah commandment. “When you wage war in your land against an

enemy who oppresses you, you much cry out and blow trumpets. You will be recalled before Hashem and saved from your foes (Bamidbar 9:9). When a crisis besets the tzibbur and they cry to Hashem, all know that their misdeeds caused the punishment. This teshuva will lead to the end of the crisis. But if they do not cry out, but rather attribute the crisis to happenstance, this is cruelty, and causes them to cling to their misdeeds. This worsens the crisis, as it is written (Vayikra 26:27,28), "If you walk with me as if the suffering by the sword (25) happened by chance, I will walk with you with a fury of chance." Throughout the world, Tehillim is recited after each tefillah. In our community, under the guidance of Moreinu Harav Schachter shlit'a, Avinu Malkeinu is said at Shacharis and Mincha.

The Rambam continues (1:4): by rabbinic law one must fast when a crisis besets the tzibbur until they are saved by Hashem's mercy. This does not apply when most of the tzibbur cannot do so (1:5). While the Rambam refers to consecutive fasts, today's rabbanim are reluctant to call for any fast, presumably for this reason. Again following Harav Schachter shlit'a, many in our community fasted on erev Rosh Chodesh Kislev, a full day or at least half a day. In some shuls, such as ours, a minyan of fasters gathered for Mincha, with kryas haTorah, haftora, and Aneinu. This accords with the Medrash that the camp that does not suffer the attack fasts on behalf of those who are suffering. In addition, as the Medrash Hamevuar notes, all types of help must come from prosperous lands. The economic needs of families of victims, and of displaced persons and communities, are staggering. Thankfully, American Jews have contributed generously. Much more is needed, and those who are able should give more. Many have gone to Israel to volunteer, helping practically in army bases and farms, and offering chizuk - encouragement, to our beloved brothers and sisters. Kol hakavod!

III. Jewish unity emerged on and since Simchas Torah in Israel, in stark contrast to the sad disunity of the previous year. The war sparked increased interest in religion in the so-called secular population. Soldiers, especially, asked for tzitzis and tefillin. Many citizens who survived miraculously started keeping Shabbos and/or other mitzvos. Many Chareidim volunteered to serve in Tzahal. Others performed acts of chessed for and in non-religious communities. Every tefillah and Perek Tehillim, every moment of learning Torah, every act of chessed is a merit to help save the lives of our soldiers, who are in constant danger. Their cries, both religious and secular, of Shema Yisroel and Ana Hashem Hoshia Na, are undoubtedly heard in Shomayim.

Here, there Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of American Jewish Organizations called for a major rally in Washington on Rosh Chodesh Kislev, November 14th. Close to 300,000 Jews of all persuasions and from numerous locations converged on the National Mall to march for Israel, to free hostages and against antisemitism. The rally was endorsed by Orthodox organizations, and their constituents comprised a significant percentage of the attendees.

The support of the American government is critical to the war effort in Israel. Experts in this area, both here and in Israel, felt that a strong showing at the rally would help in gaining and maintaining that support. As such, the halachic obligation of pikuach nefesh required attending the rally for those able to do so. This is my strongly held personal view, which was shared by my colleagues at Yeshiva. Certain objections were raised to the idea of rallying or to the details of this rally. It is critical to refrain from maligning others who act l'shem Shomayim, even if we strongly disagree, even in the absence of reciprocity.

May Hashem look down at all of His people, in Israel and abroad, who are all participating in the war effort by fighting, Davening, fasting, and rallying, each in his and her own way. We are all soldiers.

The Yerushalmi (Pe'ah 1:1) teaches that when soldiers are unified there are no casualties, even if united by avoda zara, as in the days of Achav. Infighting causes casualties, even in the days of David Hamelech. As such, unity is a matter of pikuach nefesh, saving lives of soldiers and citizens in Eretz Yisrael.

As we pray daily to our Father and King: nullify all harsh decrees against us, the designs of those who hate us, thwart the plot of our enemies, destroy every foe and accuser, shut the mouths of our accusers and attackers. Avinu Malkeinu, atz mach lanu yeshua b'karov.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

Yaakov Truly Had Everything!

But Essav said, "I have a lot, my brother; let what you have remain yours." Then Yaakov said, "Please no! If indeed I have found favor in your eyes, then you shall take my gift from my hand, because I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of an angel, and you have accepted me. Now take my gift, which has been brought to you, for G-d has favored me, and I have everything." ... (Breishis 33:9-11)

I have everything: All my necessities. Essav, however, spoke haughtily, "I have a lot," – much more than I need. — Rashi

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We have a transcript of an actual dialogue, a "face to face" discussion between Yaakov and Essav. Some stunning distinctions between the thinking of these two are revealed in this brief exchange. Essav, in reference to his possessions declares, "Yeish li Rav" – "I have a lot". In contrast, Yaakov's attitude about what he possesses is expressed with the words, "Yeish Li Kol" – "I have everything". There is a world of difference implied there.

Rashi detects in Essav's words an attitude of haughtiness. He is speaking, not atypically in terms of the quantity of his possessions. The Talmud tells us that if someone has 100 he wants 200. Rabbi Yonason Eibshitz pointed out a percentage point difference in another statement from the sages. It says, "A man does not die having fulfilled half of his desires." One implies that a person has reached 50%, 100 is half of 200, while the other statement indicates that a person does not quite reach that 50% marker during his lifetime. How do we account for the differential?

One of my daughters was asking me all the time to take her to Marshals to get a new pair of shoes. One time I actually took a look at all the shoes in her shoe bag. She had more shoes than Marshals and yet she still insisted on getting more. Then I understood Reb Yonason Eibshitz's answer. He said, "The half that he doesn't have is more-dear than the half that he has!" The shoes in Marshals are more-dear and attractive than the shoes in the shoe bag. The quantity may be one half but qualitatively the heart is always desiring more and more.

The Mishne in Pirke Avos asks, "Who is the wealthy person? The one who is happy with his portion!" We might easily understand that this person is so busy celebrating what he has, the shoes on his feet and his feet that he has little appetite for another pair of shoes or feet. That is how we would imagine Yaakov's mind is working and it may be true. I would like to propose another approach, as well.

Years back I would travel with an Israeli friend, Yossi, who set up speaking events and drove me there and back. He had his little idiosyncrasies. One was that he would only fill his car with Jersey gas which was cheaper. One evening we set out for Long Island with an empty tank. As much as I urged him, he refused to get gas. Somehow, miraculously, we made it all the way out to Long Island without gas.

On the way back we stopped at a gas station before taking the long ride home. We just got some Snapple and potato chips. When crossing the George Washington Bridge into New Jersey there was a gas station on the other side and a sign that read no U turn. He made the U

turn and we pulled up in time. It was 1:30 AM and the outside temperature was well below zero. An African man stepped out of his warm booth. My friend cracked the window open a quarter of an inch to tell him to fill it up.

I stepped out and I told Yossi I was going to make his day. He told me emphatically not to tip him. I asked if Snapple bottles should go into the garbage or recycling. He answered, "It all goes to the same place!" This was my opening. I told him, "We all come from the same place and we all go to the same place. We come from G-d and we go back to G-d! If we understand that then we understand everything and if we understand everything else but we don't understand that then we don't understand anything. If we have that then even if we don't have anything else we have everything and if we have everything else and we don't have that we don't have anything." We shared a deeply human moment and he was very pleased with this valuable tip! In that way Essav really had nothing but an appetite for more while Yaakov truly had everything!

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

The Ways of Esau - At the beginning of this morning's Sidra, we find Jacob awaiting the fateful confrontation with his brother Esau. Jacob is apprehensive – even terrified – as he prepares for Esau who is advancing upon him with four hundred armed men, with vengeance and murder in his heart. At this point, Jacob decides to divide his retinue into two separate camps. His reason, according to the Torah, was that should Esau destroy one camp, at least the other would escape and survive.

Allow me to bring to your attention an additional reason for Jacob's strategy, one suggested by the eminent Hasidic master, the author of the *Sefat Emet*, in the name of his renowned grandfather, the Kotzker Rebbe. He bids us read a bit further, when Esau and Jacob finally do meet. Esau ran towards Jacob, embraced him, fell upon his neck – *va-yishakehu*, and he kissed him. The word *va-yishakehu* is written with a series of dots on the top of it. This is rare in the Torah, and when it does occur, it indicates that there is a deeper meaning that must be searched out. That our Rabbis did, and Rabbi Yanai taught: *melamed she-lo bikesh le'nashko ela le'nashko* – Esau did not intend to kiss Jacob, to give him a neshikah or kiss. He did intend to give him a neshikah – a bite, a mortal wound. He embraced him, and then fell upon his neck in his characteristically wild, bestial manner in order to kill him. But, by a miracle, Jacob's neck turned hard as marble, and so Esau – kissed him. It was a hypocritical kiss; a kiss not of love but of death, not of affection but of affliction.

These are the two ways Esau always tries to overcome Jacob: the ways of neshikah and

neshikhah. Sometimes Esau acts directly and openly like a wolf. At other times he is devious and sly – like a fox. At such times the neshikah hides the deadly neshikhah, and honey drips about the inner poison.

Jacob, knowing of the approaches by Esau, therefore divides his own camp into two, training each of them how to cope with one of the alternate strategies that Esau might be expected to use. He teaches one camp how to resist Esau's neshikah, his bite or direct physical onslaught. He teaches the other how to oppose the neshikah or kiss of Esau, his inviting manner which intends only to throw Jacob off guard.

Therefore, the Kotzker concludes, Jacob prayed to G-d: *hatzileni na mi-yad achi, mi-yad Esav*, save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau. In other words, save me both from Esau when he appears undisguised, as Esau my sworn enemy who aims but to destroy me; and save me from Esau when he appears to me as a brother, in the guise of fraternal affection. Deliver me both from his bite and from his kiss.

In our own days we have suffered grievously from the bite of Esau. One third of our people were the victims of the vicious neshikah. But we have begun to develop the capacity to resist it. From the ghetto resistance fighters to the Haganah, from the Israel Defense Army to the various efficient agencies combating anti-Semitism in America and abroad, we have learned how to withstand the noxious bite of the Esaus of our day.

The great, overwhelming problem of our day, however, is not the bite. It is the kiss of Esau. Where twenty centuries of Christianity have failed to budge us by sword or by stake, by exile or by persecution, the alternative policy of smiling sweetness, of the neshikah, has begun to show the first signs of success. No longer are we threatened with forced conversions. No longer do ex-Jewish priests challenge us to public debates and slander the Talmud as a pack of anti-Christian lies. Now the ex-Jew first praises the Talmud as a very fine book indeed – but one that has been surpassed. Nowadays a missionary to the Jews first writes a book against anti-Semitism. Then he writes a book about "building bridges." Then he invites us into a "dialogue." And so on.

Most recently we have witnessed the most incredible, embarrassing kind of situation where Jewish organizations have been competing for the honor of Esau's dubious kisses. It is something we Orthodox Jews must study deliberately and calmly, but that we must not dare overlook or neglect.

The press recently reported that Dr. Nahum Goldman, President of the World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress, had been in contact with a very important Cardinal (a German) to arrange for a single Jewish delegation to attend the forthcoming

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Ecumenical Council at the Vatican. An Ecumenical Council is a world-wide assembly of high church officials, under the presidency of the Pope, convoked to discuss matters of Catholic Law and Doctrine. At this coming Council the main business will be an understanding with Protestantism and the ultimate merger of all Christian churches.

Reform Rabbis, at least certain prominent ones, have heartily endorsed the plan. In recent years, incidentally, there has been a pronounced tendency on their part to take a positive, affirmative, and even affectionate approach to the founder of Christianity. Reform preaching and writing in this direction has increased noticeably of late.

What should be the reaction of Orthodox Jew? The very first reaction is, I believe, that of speechlessness at the enormous audacity of self-appointed Jewish "leaders" who dare to speak on behalf of all Jewry on matters of such moment to our faith. There is really little that one can say, because there is so much that one should say. Twenty centuries of experience with Esau's bites are to be discarded as Jewish leaders vie for the kiss of the same Esau! They are so flattered by the affectionate attentions of Esau that, in their spiritual sycophancy and religious obsequiousness, they are willing to forget all that Jacob stands for.

But speak we must, for to be silent in the face of such gross insult to the whole Jewish historic experience would be sinful. We must expose the massive folly of this unfortunate move.

First, they have shown a lack of self-respect and have delivered a heavy blow to Jewish dignity by not waiting for an invitation. They have invited themselves, and now stand hat in hand waiting breathlessly for the host's confirmation. A party-crasher is reprehensible whether the party is social or religious, private or international. One has the uncomfortable feeling that much of this has been said with an eye on the headlines, indicating once again how widespread is the poison secreted by the demon of public-relationalism and the press release. Imagine the chagrin and embarrassment that all of us will suffer it, as rumor has already indicated, Rome rebuffs these Jewish leaders because it does not wish to offend the Arabs or the Catholic countries which are anti-Semitic.

Second, this represents an ungracious, distasteful, ignominious intervention in somebody else's religion. What business do Jews have in a Christian religious conference called to discuss Christian fellowship? How dare any Jew presume to tell Christians how to worship or what to believe: Of course, we agree that Christianity is the source of most of anti-Semitism. Some action should be taken to urge liberal Christians to recognize the source of so much human misery and do something constructive about it. But it is never to be done as part of "negotiations," as the Jewish

politicians would have it; much less as a result of "dialogue" as the Reform would have it.

Third, who is the President of the World Jewish Congress to speak on behalf of religious Jewry? It is a sad commentary on American Jewry that only here would such a scandalous situation be tolerated, whereby an avowed secularist and political figure arrogates to himself the prerogative of representing one religious community vis-à-vis another: It is true that Dr. Goldman consulted Orthodox leaders – but only after his ill-fated meeting with the German cardinal. This is not consultation. This is a salvage attempt. The difference is that between saving souls and saving face.

Fourth, we must acknowledge soberly and proclaim publicly that, despite all disclaimers, this conjures up the old, dreaded Hebrew word: shemad! Of course these Jewish leaders do not want to lead us into mass conversion! But they are the blind and unwitting tools of just that – a campaign of shemad. The shemad Esau could not achieve by a couple of hundred centuries of biting, he now wants to achieve with a light kiss – assisted by love-starved Jewish leaders!

This is the end result of a secularism which regards Judaism as only a cultural backdrop for a nation or people, and which regards Torah as only a vestige. This is the end result of a Reform which denies the uniqueness of the Jew and reduces our faith to a few well-intentioned liberal phrases in poor imitation of our non-Jewish environs.

And as if these deeds were not enough, one party to all this maneuvering had the ill grace, the temerity, and the spiritual obtuseness to suggest to Catholics that as a gesture to Jews they increase the number of their saints from amongst Old Testament heroes! What an ill-advised, vulgar, gross meddling with another's religion! And more important: are they so naïve as not to realize that Catholics will ask a price for all this?

Orthodox Jews ask: what is the price we are expected to pay for this kiss of Esau? What, especially, is the price demanded of us by this German cardinal's French assistant who is openly using all this tumult to advance his missionary aims?

What is Judaism that it can be so lightly dealt with? Is it the private domain of a few Reform leaders who can cut, shape, and form, add, subtract, and divide it at will? Is it but a plastic lump of meaningless rituals?

What is Judaism to the Goldman? Is it but another item that can be traded in negotiations at a conference table?

In addition to the usual meaning of Jacob's prayer, and the one given to it by the Kotzker Rebbe, I would interpret it directly: hatzilenu na mi-yad achi! Almighty G-d, please – help us from the hands of our own Jewish brothers! Our Jewish brethren can prove far more

dangerous to us than mi-yad Esav. Deliver us from achi; then we shall not have to fear Esav.

We must warn these Jewish leaders to desist from their perilous plans lest they jeopardize what precious little unity we do have in American Jewry. We plead with them to remember that the survival of Judaism is more important than a momentary public relations triumph. Remember what the English philosopher George Santayana said: a man ignores the lessons of history at his own peril; he who disregards history is doomed to relive it. And two thousand years of Jewish history have proved to us that the main interest of Christians as Christians in Jews as Jews is nothing more or less than: shemad, conversion. We plead with both Jewish secularists and Reformers: do not sell us. Do not buy for us new heroes or new prophets. We have enough. Do not be taken in by sweet words and kisses.

We want to live in peace with all our non-Jewish neighbors, even as Jacob was willing to go to all lengths to pacify and appease Esau. But, again like Jacob, we are not willing to sell our souls for it. The price is too high.

Remember what Judaism really is: As David put it, Torat ha-Shem temimah, the Torah of the Lord is complete, pure, uncorrupted. It is not a relativistic document that changes in every generation and climate. No one has a warrant to toss it about like a football. No one has the mandate to lay his hands on it – especially if they are spiritually soiled hands. Torat ha-Shem temimah.

Almighty G-d! We face critical times. May we be privileged to receive the blessing of Jacob, about whom it is written, after his encounter with Esau, that va-yavo Yaakov shalem ir Shekhem, that Jacob came to Shechem shalem, perfect, whole. Our Rabbis explain: shalem be'gufo, be'mammono, be'torato – whole physically, financially, and spiritually. May all of Israel attain these perfections. Above all: may all of us, without exception, attain the shalem be'torato, religious wholeness. For shalem must lead to the great, universal, prophetic vision of Shalom. Amen.

לע"נ

יוחנן בן יקוטיאל יודא ע"ה
שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה

Home Weekly Parsha VAYISHLACH

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

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

The Jewish Journey

Vayishlach

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Why is Jacob the father of our people, the hero of our faith? We are "the congregation of Jacob", "the children of Israel." Yet it was Abraham who began the Jewish journey, Isaac who was willing to be sacrificed, Joseph who saved his family in the years of famine, Moses who led the people out of Egypt and gave it its laws. It was Joshua who took the people into the Promised land, David who became its greatest king, Solomon who built the Temple, and the prophets through the ages who became the voice of God.

The account of Jacob in the Torah seems to fall short of these other lives, at least if we read the text literally. He has tense relationships with his brother Esau, his wives Rachel and Leah, his father-in-law Laban, and with his three eldest children, Reuben, Simon and Levi. There are times when he seems full of fear, others when he acts – or at least seems to act – with less than total honesty. In reply to Pharaoh, he says of himself, "The days of my life have been few and hard" (Gen. 47:9). This is less than we might expect from a hero of faith.

That is why so much of the image we have of Jacob is filtered through the lens of Midrash – the Oral Tradition preserved by the Sages. In this tradition, Jacob is all good, Esau all bad. It had to be this way – so argued Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes in his essay on the nature of Midrashic interpretation – because otherwise we would find it hard to draw from the biblical text a clear sense of right and wrong, good and bad.^[1] The Torah is an exceptionally subtle book, and subtle books tend to be misunderstood. So the Oral Tradition made it simpler: black and white instead of shades of grey.

Yet perhaps, even without Midrash, we can find an answer – and the best way of so doing is to think of the idea of a journey.

Judaism is about faith as a journey. It begins with the journey of Abraham and Sarah, leaving behind their "land, birthplace, and father's house" and travelling to an unknown destination, "the land I will show you."

The Jewish people is defined by another journey in a different age: the journey of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt across the desert to the Promised Land. That journey becomes a litany in Parshat Masei: "They left X and they camped in Y. They left Y and they camped in Z." To be a Jew is to move, to travel, and only rarely, if ever, to settle down. Moses warns the people of the danger of settling down and taking the status quo for granted, even in Israel itself:

"When you have children and grandchildren, and have been established in the land for a long time, you might become decadent."

Deut. 4:25

Hence the rules that Israel must always remember its past, never forget its years of slavery in Egypt, never forget on Succot that our ancestors once lived in temporary dwellings, never forget that it does not own the land – it belongs to God – and we are merely there as God's gerim v-toshavim, "strangers and sojourners" (Lev. 25:23).

Why so? Because to be a Jew means not to be fully at home in the world. To be a Jew means to live within the tension between heaven and earth, creation and revelation, the world that is and the world we are called on to make; between exile and home, and between the universality of the human condition and the particularity of Jewish identity. Jews don't stand still except when standing before God. The universe, from galaxies to subatomic particles, is in constant motion, and so is the Jewish soul.

We are, we believe, an unstable combination of dust of the earth and breath of God, and this calls on us constantly to make decisions, choices, that will make us grow to be as big as our ideals, or, if we choose wrongly, make us shrivel into small, petulant creatures obsessed by trivia. Life as a journey means striving each day to be greater than we were the day before, individually and collectively.

If the concept of a journey is a central metaphor of Jewish life, what in this regard is the difference between Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Abraham's life is framed by two journeys both of which use the phrase Lech lecha, "undertake a journey", once in Genesis 12 when he was told to leave his land and father's house, the other in Genesis 22:2 at the Binding of Isaac, when he was told, "Take your son, the only one you love – Isaac – and go [lech lecha] to the region of Moriah."

What is so moving about Abraham is that he goes, immediately and without question, despite the fact that both journeys are heart-wrenching in human terms. In the first he must leave his father. In the second he must let go of his son. He has to say goodbye to the past and risk saying

farewell to the future. Abraham is pure faith. He loves God and trusts Him absolutely. Not everyone can achieve that kind of faith. It is almost superhuman.

Isaac is the opposite. It is as if Abraham, knowing the emotional sacrifices he has had to make, knowing too the trauma Isaac must have felt at the Binding, seeks to protect his son as far as lies within his power. He makes sure that Isaac does not leave the Holy Land (see Genesis 24:6 – that is why Abraham does not let him travel to find a wife). Isaac's one journey (to the land of the Philistines, in Genesis 26) is limited and local. Isaac's life is a brief respite from the nomadic existence Abraham and Jacob both experience.

Jacob is different again. What makes him unique is that he has his most intense encounters with God – they are the most dramatic in the whole book of Genesis – in the midst of the journey, alone, at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next, from Esau to Laban on the outward journey, from Laban to Esau on his homecoming.

In the midst of the first he has the blazing epiphany of the ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, moving him to say on waking, “God is truly in this place, but I did not know it . . . This must be God's house and this the gate to heaven” (Gen. 28:16-17). None of the other patriarchs, not even Moses, has a vision quite like this.

On the second, in our Parsha, he has the haunting, enigmatic wrestling match with the man/angel/God, which leaves him limping but permanently transformed – the only person in the Torah to receive from God an entirely new name, Israel, which may mean, “one who has wrestled with God and man” or “one who has become a prince [sar] before God”.

What is fascinating is that Jacob's meetings with angels are described by the same verb – עָגַף -'p-g-'a, (Gen. 28:11, and Gen. 32:2) which means “a chance encounter”, as if they took Jacob by surprise, which clearly they did. Jacob's most spiritual moments are ones he did not plan. He was thinking of other things, about what he was leaving behind and what lay ahead of him. He was, as it were, “surprised by God.”

Jacob is someone with whom we can identify. Not everyone can aspire to the loving faith and total trust of an Abraham, or to the seclusion of an Isaac. But Jacob is someone we understand. We can feel his fear, understand his pain at the tensions in his family, and sympathise with his deep longing for a life of quietude and peace (the Sages say about the opening words of next week's Parsha that “Jacob longed to live at peace, but was immediately thrust into the troubles of Joseph”).

The point is not just that Jacob is the most human of the patriarchs but rather that at the depths of his despair he is lifted to the greatest heights of spirituality. He is the man who encounters angels. He is the person surprised by God. He is the one who, at the very moments he feels most alone, discovers that he is not alone, that God is with him, that he is accompanied by angels.

Jacob's message defines Jewish existence. It is our destiny to travel. We are the restless people. Rare and brief have been our interludes of peace. But in the dark of night we have found ourselves lifted by a force of faith we did not know we had, surrounded by angels we did not know were there. If we walk in the way of Jacob, we too may find ourselves surprised by God.

[1] The Maharatz Chajes explains this traditionally 'black and white' view of Jacob and Esau in the Mavo ha-Aggadot printed at the beginning of Eyn Yaakov.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand Parshas Vayishlach

The Key to Yaakov's Gratitude is Hayarden HaZEH

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1315 – Did The Gadol Make A Mistake? Good Shabbos!

Yaakov thanked Hashem for his “rags to riches” success over the past twenty years of his life by saying, “I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done for Your servant; for with my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps”

(Bereshis 32:11) One word in Yaakov's statement seems rather strange. Yaakov notes that he crossed Hayarden hazeh (this Jordan River). Whenever the word zeh is used in Chumash, it connotes that the speaker is pointing at the object in question, for example, zeh K-eli v'avneihu (This is my G-d and I will glorify Him). Unless we assume that Yaakov was standing on the banks of the Yarden now and was pointing at “this Yarden,” why does the pasuk over here use the word zeh?

The answer to this question is the following: The key for a person to be makir tova (recognize when a favor has been done for him) is remembering the situation before he merited this favor. A person should never take what he has for granted and think “this is what I have now and this is the way it has always been.” It behooves us to try to think back and remember “what it once was like.”

A person may have been suffering terribly. He went to the doctor and had a successful operation. Now he is a new person. In the beginning, he is appreciative of the doctor – the surgeon who saved him from all his pain and suffering, significantly improving his quality of life. But with the passage of time, a person may forget how it was before the operation.

Consider knee replacement surgery. When people get older, it often becomes necessary to have their knees replaced. Knees can become arthritic and can get to a point where the person cannot walk. It is simply too painful to walk. Today, Baruch Hashem, people can have knee replacement surgery, where surgeons can put in an artificial knee and the person can go from not being able to walk to even playing tennis again. After the operation, a person feels: “Ah! Gevaldik!” But one, two, or three years later, he may take for granted his ability to walk normally again. The key to maintaining a sense of gratitude is to remember “I was not able to walk and now I can even play tennis.” That is how a person is makir tova.

Yaakov Avinu could say “for with my staff I crossed this Jordan River” even when he was not standing next to the Yarden because he always remembered “what I was like before.” “I was a fugitive. My brother wanted to kill me. I literally had nothing to my name. I came to Rochel empty handed. All I had was my walking stick!” That image was permanently imbued in Yaakov's memory, so much so, that it was as if he was standing by the Yarden, as he was about to leave Eretz Yisrael. Yaakov replayed that scene over and over, such that he could always feel “Katonti m'kol hachasadim...” (I am unworthy of all the kindness...)

Why Did the Brothers Wait Until Parshas Vayeshev to Become Jealous of Yosef?

The pasuk says, “Yaakov raised his eyes and saw, and behold, Eisav was coming, and with him, four hundred men – so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two handmaids. He put the handmaids and their children first, and Leah and her children later, and Rachel and Yosef last.” (Bereshis 33:1-2). Eisav is approaching Yaakov. Yaakov splits the camps. He positions the handmaidens and their sons first, followed by Leah and her children, followed in the rear by Rochel and Yosef. It would seem that the most expendable members of his entourage were placed first and the most cherished were placed in the back.

The Vilna Maggid asks the following question: Next week's parsha contains the famous story of Yaakov showing favoritism towards Yosef by giving him a kesones passim. This led to Yosef's brothers becoming jealous of him, and it ultimately led to the entire Galus Mitzrayim (Egyptian Exile). The Gemara learns out from this incident that a father should never show favoritism towards any of his children.

The Vilna Maggid asked, why were the brothers jealous when Yosef received his kesones passim but they were apparently not jealous when he was placed last in the family configuration to best protect him from Eisav and his approaching army? No one said, “Hey, what am I – chopped liver?” “What am I – cannon fodder?” We don't see them objecting to this here. This would appear to be a much bigger deal. A person can live just fine without a kesones passim. However, the configuration when they met Eisav was potentially a matter of life and death!

The Vilna Maggid gives three answers to this question. For my purposes today, I am only going to mention one of these answers: The brothers understood that since Rochel, the prime wife of Yaakov, only had one child, it was necessary to afford maximum protection to an “only son.” Similarly, in the Israeli Army today, an “only son” is not placed in a combat unit. This is a long-practiced and well-understood plan of action. The brothers were not going to protest Yaakov’s urge to protect an “only son.”

However, the situation “next week” in Parshas Vayeshev is a different story. There was no excuse for Yaakov to single out Yosef and dress him in a special garment that he felt that only this son and not his other sons deserved to wear. This is the answer of the Vilna Maggid.

I saw that the sefer Me’Orei Ohr raises the same question and offers a different answer. He says as follows: Yaakov Avinu had just come back from Lavan, where he had his eleven children. He knew that the environment in the house of Lavan was spiritually toxic. Yaakov did everything in his power to make sure that his children would not be influenced by Lavan’s home. That was his goal in life – to create the “Shivtei K-ah” (Tribes of the Almighty) – and he would do everything under the sun to inoculate them not to be influenced by their grandfather, Lavan.

Now Yaakov meets Eisav with his four hundred men. Yaakov does not know what is going to happen. He does not know whether Eisav is going to insist that they stay together. Yaakov realized that his children were all facing potential danger because he was going from a toxic environment to another environment that was also hostile to them. He feared that the twenty years he invested in creating the “Shivtei K-ah” and protecting them may all go down the drain.

At this point, the other shvatim were already older children. However, Yosef was still a little child, perhaps four or five years old. Most of Yaakov’s sons were already teenagers, who already knew how to take care of themselves. Yosef was a little kid. “What is going to be with my poor little Yossele? Yossele doesn’t know any better. He is a kindergarten baby.”

That is why Yaakov put Yosef last – to protect him. He was not being protected from being killed. Regarding the physical danger, Yaakov relied on his promise from Hashem that “I will be with You wherever you go.” (Bereshis 25:21). However, regarding “ruchniyus” (spirituality), Hashem does not make any promises. “All is in the hands of Heaven – except for fear of Heaven” (Berachos 33b). Ruchniyus is up to us. Yaakov felt that he needed to protect his little Yosef from the spiritual dangers that contact with Eisav and his army might present. As a little child, Yosef was most vulnerable to being spiritually contaminated by outside influences. Therefore, the other shvatim had no problem with their youngest brother being placed at the back of the camp.

Content of the Divine Revelation

Revivim

Rabbi Melamed

All Divine revelations to the patriarchs dealt with establishing the people of Israel – that they would multiply, inherit the Land, and bring blessing to all peoples * Blessed are the soldiers fighting with self-sacrifice and defending the people and the Land * The Levites and priests participated in Israel’s wars * Being holders of Clal-Israeli roles, they also served as an army rabbinate, education corps, and military police * Just as it is permissible to greet with blessings accepted in all other languages, so too, it is permissible to bless with ‘Namaste’

Jacob our forefather merited to witness one of the greatest and most awesome revelations ever granted to a human on earth. He saw a ladder set on the ground with its top reaching the heavens, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And suddenly, beyond the ladder, and beyond the angels – “And behold, the Lord stood beside him! And He said: I am the Lord, God of Abraham your father and God of Isaac.” And we await to hear what important, foundational, essential thing the Lord will say to Jacob.

If we pause for a moment and ask members of the various circles of our time, what they think the Lord should have said in one of the most important revelations, we would likely receive different answers. Lithuanians would say: “Study Gemara in depth, until you become a Torah scholar.” Hasidim would say: “Cleave to God, and serve Him with joy.” Followers of Maran Beit Yosef would say: “Learn Jewish law in Maran’s method.” Zealots would say: “Hate the

wicked, and those who draw near to them.” Those devoted to kindness would say: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Modern religious would say: “Derech Eretz (dignified behavior) precedes Torah.”

However, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: “The land on which you are lying, I will give it to you and your descendants. And your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south,” and through this “all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you.” This is the Divine revelation. And indeed, Jacob our forefather recognized through this, the great holiness of the Land, and this is what he said: “Surely, the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. And he was afraid, and said: How awesome is this place, this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven” (Genesis 28:13-17).

Content of All Revelations

From my experience, I know that many Torah scholars from the various circles, who have read the Torah many times, did not pay attention to the Divine revelations and their importance, and therefore, tend to argue, and claim: Indeed, in this instance, God spoke about the people and the Land, and bringing blessing to all peoples, but there are other revelations on various topics, etc. However, their words are incorrect; all Divine revelations to the patriarchs dealt with establishing the people of Israel, so that they would multiply, inherit the Land, and bring blessing to all peoples.

There were sixteen revelations to the patriarchs in the book of Genesis. In five of them, these three ideas were stated together: to establish a great people, to inherit the Land, and to bring blessing to all peoples. In nine revelations, a promise was made about inheriting the Land, and in three more revelations to Jacob, guidance was given regarding his return from Haran to the Land, about descending to Egypt, and God returning his descendants to the Land. In eleven revelations, a blessing and promise were given about the proliferation of Israel – that they would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and as the dust of the earth, that cannot be counted. More than any of the earlier and later Torah scholars, Rabbi Judah Halevi in his book ‘Kuzari,’ emphasized and explained these foundations. Therefore, the Vilna Gaon said about the ‘Kuzari,’ that the essentials of Jewish faith and Torah are contained within it, and subsequently, our teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, of blessed memory, would greatly speak in its praise, as the first and most important book of emunah (faith).

Blessed are the Righteous

Blessed are the soldiers, fighting with self-sacrifice, and defending the Nation and the Land; blessed are the women who strengthen their husbands, serving long months at the front; blessed are the mothers who raised such heroes; blessed are the Rabbis and Rebbetzins, teachers and educators, who educated the heroes at the frontlines, and the heroines in the home front.

May it be His will that the soldiers, together with all their family members, merit abundant blessing in all their endeavors, and merit to see sons and daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, engaged in Torah and mitzvot. Through this, we will all merit – through self-sacrifice and by the light of the Torah – to continue building the Nation with justice and righteousness, with kindness and mercy, and through this, blessing will continue to flow for Israel, and all peoples. The Levites and Priests Led the Army of Israel

Q: In your previous column, the honorable Rabbi wrote that Torah students are obligated in army conscription; however, I heard it said that Torah students are considered like the tribe of Levi, who were dedicated to matters of holiness and Torah, and therefore, did not enlist in the army. As Rambam (Maimonides) wrote: “Why did the Levites not receive a portion in the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael in the spoils of war like their brethren? Because they were set aside to serve God and minister unto Him and to instruct people at large in His just paths and righteous judgments, as written: ‘They will teach Your judgments to Jacob, and Your Torah to Israel.’” Therefore they were set apart from the ways of the world. They do not wage war like the remainder of the Jewish people, nor do they receive an inheritance, nor do they acquire for themselves through their physical power. Instead, they are God’s legion, as written: “God has blessed His legion” and He provides for them, as written: “I am your portion and your inheritance. Not only the tribe of Levi, but any one of the inhabitants of the world whose spirit generously motivates him” (Shemittah and Jubilee 13:12-13).

A: There is no basis for this view, because the Levites and Kohanim (priests) participated in Israel’s wars. And what Rambam wrote: “Not engaging in war like the rest of Israel” (ibid.), means that since the tribe of Levi did not inherit like the other tribes, they did not participate in wars of each tribe when needed to defend its specific inheritance. But when there was a war for all of Israel against the enemy, the tribe of Levi was obligated in war like all of Israel. As explained by Maran Rabbi Kook (in his book ‘Shabbat Ha’aretz’ on Rambam, there). And as we have learned from explicit verses in Divrei Hayamim [Chronicles] (1 Chronicles 12:25-28), when they crowned David and counted the army’s vanguard, 4,600 were from the Levites, 3,700 from the Kohanim, and 6,800 from Judah.

In addition to this, the Levites were the police, as we have learned from numerous verses (1 Chronicles 23:1-4; 26:29; 2 Chronicles 19:11; 34:13). And as our Sages

have said: "Initially (in the First Temple period), they would only appoint police from the Levites, as it is said: 'And Levites shall be before you as police'" (Yevamot 86b). In the Second Temple period, since only a few Levites ascended from Babylon, police were appointed from all the tribes.

Since the Levites were intended to be police, during war time, they served as the military police. As it is said: "And the police shall speak to the people saying... And it shall be, when the police finish speaking to the people, the army commanders shall review the people" (Deuteronomy 20:5-9). In other words, in a milchemet reshut (voluntary war), the role of the Levite police was to exempt those who built a house and did not dedicate it, planted a vineyard and not harvest it, married a wife and had not been with her for a year. In a milchemet mitzvah (obligatory war), such as a defensive war against an enemy threatening Israel, all these were required to go to war, and the police would only exempt the sick and disabled who were unable to fight.

After this, when they began to go into battle, the police would stand behind the soldiers, encouraging the weakened, and punishing those seeking to flee the battlefield. For this, they appointed strong police with spears, to cut the legs of those trying to escape, because fleeing is liable to lead to defeat (Mishnah Sotah 8:6; Rashi on Numbers 26:13).

Additionally, the Kohanim and Levites played important roles in shaping Israel's army, and served as an army rabbinate, education corps, and police. A select group of Levites and Kohanim carried the Ark of the Covenant that went out with the fighters, and before battle, a Kohan Mashuach Milchama (Kohan anointed for war) would encourage the soldiers, and some would blow trumpets and sing, as commanded by the Torah (Numbers 10:8-9; Sotah 42b; Sefer Yerei'im 532).

In summary, not only did the Levites fight like other tribes, but being holders of Clal Yisrael roles, they served as an army rabbinate, education corps, and military police. Some of them also established the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit, meaning, the reconnaissance unit of the fiercest fighters, who guarded the Ark and the command. And when army commanders failed, the responsibility for leading the campaign was placed on the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit, as in the days of the Hasmoneans (see, Ramban's commentary on Numbers 8:2).

Namaste

Q: Is it permissible for Jews to bless with the 'Namaste' blessing, which is customary in Indian culture when meeting or parting from a person, with a slight bow, and pressing the palms together. Is there a concern of Chukot Ha'goyim (imitation of non-Jewish religious practices) or Avodah Zara (idol worship)?

A: Just as it is permissible to bless with greetings accepted in all other languages, so it is permissible to greet with 'Namaste'. And this is not considered Chukot Goyim, because the prohibition of Chukot Hagoyim is to imitate a custom that has been established and sanctified in one people's culture, and has no reason or benefit, other than it expresses their custom. But when there is a reason for the greeting, there is no prohibition. The literal translation of "Namaste" is "I bow to your feet", and its meaning in ancient Vedic literature is: "I bow to the holiness within you". There is no idolatrous meaning in this, rather, a truth – that in every person, there is a divine spark, worthy of honor.

However, it is preferable for Jews to greet with "Shalom", which is the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He (Shabbat 10b), and with which Jews are accustomed to greet their fellow Jews. And even decent non-Jews should be greeted with 'Shalom,' but one should not double "Shalom, Shalom" (Gittin 62a; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 148:10). The meaning of the "Shalom" greeting is that through the meeting between two human beings, with body and soul, mutual enrichment and complementarity are created, and consequently, God's name is revealed in the world. In other words, not just recognition of the sacred value of the other as an individual, but rather, recognition that the meeting itself adds revelation and mutual enrichment, and therefore, God's name is revealed through it.

Shambhala and Mandala

Q: Is it permissible to wear a 'shambhala' bracelet (ed., Buddhist prayer bead created by Tibetan monks to help them meditate), or hang a 'mandala' picture, (ed., a picture with geometric lines and shapes to repeat a circular pattern, intended to embrace a sense of wholeness and purity in Hindu and Buddhist culture), or decorate one's house with a plant pot called "Lucky Bamboo" (said to bring good luck and prosperity to the place where it is grown)?

A: It is permissible, and even if idol worshippers believed that using them grants peace and healing through mystical forces, as long as they are thought of as nice decorations, there is no prohibition. And even one who believes they grant peace, if he believes the peace comes from their visible influence, that is, through the combination of their colors and proportions, there is no prohibition.

Voodoo Dolls

Voodoo dolls are used in certain African countries for witchcraft, mainly to harm others, and sometimes to heal. Anyone who uses them for these purposes transgresses a Torah prohibition. One who does not believe in the ability to cast spells with them does not transgress a Torah prohibition by keeping them, but it is proper not to keep them as decorations, because it is not appropriate to decorate one's house with something that is forbidden for use.

Parshat Chayei Sarah: The Significance of a Grave

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"My lord hearken to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me." (Genesis 23:14)

A significant part of this Torah portion deals with Abraham's purchase of the Hebron grave-site from the Hittites in order to bury Sarah, his beloved wife. In painstaking detail, the text describes how the patriarch requests to buy the grave, how the Hittites wish him to take it for free, and – when Efron the Hittite finally agrees to make it a sale – he charges Abraham the inflated and outlandish sum of four hundred silver shekels. The Midrash seems perplexed: why expend so much ink and parchment – the entire chapter 23 of the book of Genesis – over a Middle-Eastern souk sale? Moreover, what is the significance in the fact that the very first parcel of land in Israel acquired by a Jew happens to be a grave-site? And finally, how can we explain the irony of the present day Israeli-Palestinian struggle over grave-sites – the Ma'arat HaMakhpela in Hebron where our matriarchs and patriarchs are buried and Joseph's grave-site in Shekhem – which were specifically paid for in the Bible by our patriarchs?

In order to understand our biblical portion, it is important to remember that throughout the ancient world – with the single exception of Athens – the only privilege accorded a citizen of any specific country was the 'right' of burial, as every individual wanted his body to ultimately merge with the soil of his familial birthplace. Abraham insists that he is a stranger as well as a resident (ger toshav) of Het; he lives among, but is not one of, the Hittites. Abraham is a proud Hebrew; he refuses the 'right' of burial and demands to pay – even if the price is exorbitant – for the establishment of a separate Hebrew cemetery. Sarah's separate grave-site symbolizes her separate and unique identity. Abraham wants to ensure that she dies as a Hebrew and not a Hittite.

Interestingly, the Torah uses the same verb (kikha) to describe Abraham's purchase of a grave-site and to derive that a legal engagement takes place when the groom gives the bride a ring (or a minimum amount of money).^[1] Perhaps our tradition is suggesting that marriage requires a husband to take ultimate responsibility for his wife – especially in terms of securing her separate and unique identity – even beyond her life and into her grave.

This parsha reminds me of two poignant stories. First, when I was a very young rabbi, one of the first "emergency" questions I received was from an older woman leaning on a young Roman Catholic priest for support. She tearfully explained that her husband – who had died just a few hours earlier – was in need of a Jewish burial place. He had converted to Catholicism prior to having married her, and agreed that their children would be raised as Catholics. The Roman Catholic priest was, in fact, their son and she had never met any member of her husband's Jewish family. Even though they lived as Catholics during thirty-five years of their married life, his final deathbed wish had been to be buried in a Jewish cemetery....

Second, when my good and beloved friend Zalman Bernstein z'l was still living in America and beginning his return to Judaism, he asked me to find him a grave-site in the Mount of Olives cemetery. With the help of the Chevra Kadisha (Sacred Fellowship) of Jerusalem, we set aside a plot. When he inspected it, however, he was most disappointed: "You cannot see the Temple Mount," he shouted, in his typical fashion. I attempted to explain calmly that after 120 years, he either wouldn't be able to see anything anyway, or he would be able to see everything no matter where his body lay. "You don't understand," he countered. "I made a mess of my life so far and did not communicate to my children the glories of Judaism. The grave is my future and my eternity. Perhaps, when my children come to visit me there, if they would be able to see the holiest place in the world, the Temple Mount, they will be inspired by the Temple and come to appreciate what I could not adequately communicate to them while I was alive..."

For each individual, their personal grave-site represents the past and the future. Where and how individuals choose to be buried speaks volumes

about how they lived their past lives and the values they aspired to. Similarly, for a nation, the grave-sites of its founders and leaders represent the past and reveal the signposts of the highs and lows in the course of the nation's history. The way a nation regards its grave-sites and respects its history will determine the quality of its future.

Indeed, the nation that chooses to forget its past has abdicated its future, because it has erased the tradition of continuity which it ought have transmitted to the future; the nation that does not properly respect the grave-sites of its founding patriarchs will not have the privilege of hosting the lives of their children and grandchildren. Perhaps this is why the Hebrew word, kever, literally a grave, is likewise used in rabbinical literature for womb. And the Hebrew name Rvkh (Rebecca), the wife of Isaac who took Sarah's place as the guiding matriarch, is comprised of the same letters as hkvr, the grave and/or the womb, the future which emerges from the past. Is it then any wonder that the first parcel of land in Israel purchased by the first Hebrew was a grave-site, and that the fiercest battles over ownership of the land of Israel surround the graves of our founding fathers and mothers? And perhaps this is why our Sages deduce the proper means for engagement from Abraham's purchase of a grave-site for Sarah – Jewish familial future must be built upon the life style and values of our departed matriarchs and patriarchs. The grave is also the womb; the past is mother to the future.

[1] Cf. Kiddushin 2a-b

Shabbat Shalom

[CS This is the latest

<https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/category/5/torah/parsha>

Rachel's Last Lecture - Essay by Rabbi YY

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Rachel's Last Lecture

Why Did Jacob and Rachel Argue about a Name Moments Before Her Death?

The Final Moments

It is not unusual for a husband and wife to have an argument. But all would agree that for everything, including a dispute, there is a proper place and time.

Jacob and Rachel have enjoyed profound kinship. Jacob worked laboriously seven years for her father, Laban, to obtain Rachel's hand in marriage. After being cheated and receiving Leah as his wife, he reluctantly agreed to give Laban another seven years of labor so he could marry Rachel. The Torah attests that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.[1]

For years Rachel was childless. When she finally mothered a child, she named him Yosef, proclaiming "May G-d add another son to me." [2] Her wish was granted. She conceived another child. But, as she was about to give birth, tragedy struck. The Torah relates:[3]

And they traveled from Beit-El, and there was a little way left to go before reaching Efrat, and Rachel gave birth, but had difficulty in the birth. When her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Have no fear, for it is another boy for you."

But as she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named him Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin.

Rachel died. She was buried on the road to Ephrath—now Bethlehem. Why, when Rachel was in such a condition, did Jacob argue with her over the name to be given to the newborn child? Was this the right time and place to argue over such a matter? Wouldn't Jacob at such a time wish to convey words of comfort?

What is more, we have never observed such an argument with any one of the other children. Each of Jacob's twelve sons and his daughter were named by their mothers and Jacob never gave another name. Here, as Rachel is dying, Jacob intervenes and changes the baby's fresh name?

Rashi's Perspective

There are many interpretations suggested by the commentators over the generations. Rashi says that the name "Ben Oni," the son of my sorrow, given by Rachel, refers to the grief and pain endured by her during this baby's birth, while the name "Bin Yamin" given by Jacob means "son of the south," and refers to the fact that Binyamin was the only child

("Ben") born in the land of Israel, which is in the south ("yamin") relative to the direction from which Jacob was traveling (Aram Naharaim, Harran, which is to the north of Iraq and Canaan). Jacob was attempting to highlight the uniqueness of this child—as the only one born in the Holy Land.[4]

Rashi adds another possible interpretation, that Ben Yamin means a child born after many days and years, signifying he was born as Jacob grew old.[5]

But why the argument?

I will present three interpretations.

The Silence

Let us recall the episode of Jacob's hasty departure from Laban. Prior to fleeing with Jacob, Rachel had stolen her father's "terafim" (idols).[6] Upon learning of their disappearance, Laban chased Jacob and accused him of stealing his gods. Jacob reacts angrily, and responds:

But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! In the presence of our kinsmen, point out what I have of yours and take it." Jacob, of course, did not know that Rachel had stolen them.[7]

Rashi quotes the Midrash that this curse caused Rachel to die in childbirth. This is why the Torah emphasizes that "Jacob was unaware that Rachel had stolen the idols," suggesting that he would not have uttered such a curse had he known that Rachel stole them.

Now, sometime later, Rachel is about to breathe her last. She and Jacob loved each other deeply, and it is time to bid farewell. Not a word is spoken between them.[8]

This is strange. The death of Rachel is contained in five verses, containing fifty-eight words. The narrative is conveyed almost without any direct speech (other than the reassurance of the midwife, in verse 17). A great silence envelops this episode. The text refrains from describing Jacob's emotional response to the death of his beloved wife either indirectly (through a description of his actions) or directly (by quoting his words or prayers directly).

They do say one thing: they argue about a name. What was this about?

Husband and Wife Think of Each Other

Imagine what Jacob was feeling when he realized that he cursed his wife to die not knowing that she was the one who stole the gods of her father? How would any husband feel? Never mind Jacob who loved Rachel with every fiber of his being, and watched his last son being born as his mother was perishing?

How did Jacob feel about himself at that moment? How did Rachel feel? Husband and wife must have endured a tremendous rush of emotions as they looked into each other's eyes knowing that Jacob's curse was coming true. Imagine the tremendous guilt that Jacob must have felt, knowing that he condemned the most beloved of his wives to premature death due to a single curse. How tragic!

Rachel peered into his eyes, and knowing what her husband is going through, names the baby Ben Oni, which can be translated as "the son of my deception." [9] Rachel was saying: It was my fault. I was the one who acted inappropriately. I deceived my father—not you.

To which Jacob responded: Bin Yamin, which can be translated "the son of an oath." [10] (Yamin means an oath since traditionally we lift the right hand (yad yamin) during an oath). Jacob was saying: The critical condition caused by the birth of this son is the result of my oath to Laban that the one who stole his idols shall not live. It was my oath that led to this tragedy.

As they said goodbye to each other, Rachel was ensuring that Jacob does not live for the remainder of his life with guilt; Jacob was ensuring that Rachel does not blame herself for her death. It was his fault, not hers.

There is no outburst of emotion displayed in this story. Because even deeper than Jacob emoting as a result of his own pain, the Torah described his last words to his wife, trying to make her feel at ease. And the last words of Rachel, trying to make Jacob feel better.[11]

At those moments, each of them was thinking of the other.

The Fate of a Child

But there was perhaps more. The argument about the names represented a final exchange between Jacob and Rachel, not about themselves, but about this newborn child.

Rachel knew that her life in this world was ending, and she worried about what would happen to her child growing up without a mother. As Jacob was sitting at her bedside, she expressed her feelings: "I am very concerned about my child. Since he is growing up without a mother to take care of him. I pray that when I am gone from this world and in my heavenly abode, his behavior should not cause me grief." (Ben-Oni means the child of my grief).

Jacob, wanting to comfort his dying wife, told her not to worry. He promised her that he would take extra care of him and assured her that he would be a "Ben Yamin," "a right son," one who would conduct himself in a righteous and holy way, and be a source of delight and nachas to his mother in the world to come.

From Pain to Strength

Yet a third powerful insight comes from 12th-century Nachamanides, the Ramban. "Oni" he says has a dual meaning: "My grief," and "my vigor."^[12] Rachel called the infant, "the son of my grief;" Jacob chose to give the very same name a different interpretation.

In the words of the Ramban: "It seems to me that his mother called him 'Ben-Oni,' meaning to say, 'Son of my mourning'... but his father converted the 'Oni' to mean 'my strength,' as in the verse, 'My power and the beginning of my strength (oni).'^[13]... Therefore he calls him Binyamin, or 'Son of strength,' for the right side (yamin) is the seat of might..." He wanted to call him by the name given to him by his mother, for so it was with all his sons: they were called by the names given to them by their mothers. So he converted it into goodness and strength."

Ramban has Jacob accepting the name selected by Rachel ("oni"), but changing it to something else that captures the positive connotation of "oni."

Jacob was communicating to himself, to his wife, to his newborn baby, and to his children ever since one of the most important messages of Judaism. The same word in Hebrew used for grief and pain is the word used for strength and vigor. How? All sorrow and pain must bring forth a new birth of awareness, insight, and love.

Jacob ensured that his son will not see himself as a product of sorrow. Yes, he would grieve for the pain and the void, but he would never become a victim of it. Instead, he would transform his pain into a springboard for a new source of strength and empowerment.^[14]

[1] Genesis 29:30. [2] Ibid. 30:24. [3] Genesis chapter 35. [4] See Ramban who differs at this point. [5] Chizkunu says that Jacob was indicating that he was the child who would help him during his older years, since he would be home with him. [6] Genesis 31:19 [7] Genesis 31:32 [8] When Abraham lost his wife Sarah, in her old age, there is a detailed description at the beginning of Chaye Sarah of Abraham's mourning and eulogy, and his involvement in burying his wife. Unlike Sarah's death, regarding Rachel there is no mention of her husband coming to eulogize her and mourn for her, nor are we told that he buried her. In verse 19 we read only that "she was buried" (only at the end of the description does the text reveal that Jacob placed a monument over her grave.) Of the three forefathers, Jacob is the one who gives the greatest verbal expression of his emotions of grief. See, for example, the description of Jacob's reaction to what he believes is the sudden death of his beloved son Yosef (37:33-35). The description contains two extremely emotional utterances, expressing his profound mourning, as well as three different descriptions of prolonged acts of mourning that he performed. Against this background, Jacob's silence in our story, and the silence of the narrative itself, are all the starker. We hear neither a broken-hearted cry nor any description of an act of mourning. [9] See Psalms 94:23. Isiah 10:1, and numerous times in the Tanach. [10] See Psalms 144:8, and numerous times in the Tanach. [11] I saw this interpretation here:

<http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/betmikra/veaviv.htm> [12] He cites Hoshea 9:4 and Devarim 26:14 where the term "oni" means mourning, as the term "onen" describing someone on the day of his loved one's death. It also denotes vigor, see Genesis 49:3 and Isiah 40:29." [13]

Genesis 49:3 [14] This may be the deeper meaning in Rashi as to why Jacob wished to highlight the fact that Benjamin was born in the Holy Land.]

[Added by CS

From: Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

9:19 PM (53 minutes ago) BS"D December 13, 2024

Potomac MD Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #8, December 13-14, 2024; 13 Kislev 5785; Vayishlach 5785

Vayishlach (through chapter 33) continues the story of Yaakov's growth, an episode that starts with his departure for Lavan's home (chapter 28, near the end of Toldot). During this period, Yaakov meets and falls in love with Rachel, graduates from Lavan's University of Deception, marries Leah and Rachel, has several sons, then continues with sons from their hand maidens (Zilpah and Bilhah), and finally leaves Lavan's home with eleven sons and one daughter (Dina). (Binyamin is born later.)

Much of Vayishlach covers Yaakov's personal transformation. Yaakov as a youth manipulates his brother to gain the birthright and deceives his father to obtain his brother's intended bracha of wealth and power. He then trades deception for deception with his father-in-law for twenty years. By the end of Vayeitzei, Yaakov learns that deception will not earn him the right to claim family leadership, and he resolves to change. When Lavan overtakes Yaakov and his family, Yaakov finally tells his father-in-law that he is leaving largely because Lavan had cheated him for twenty years, and he draws a line in the land. Yaakov and his family will not cross the line to go east, and Lavan is not to cross to go to the west, toward Canaan, where the family will be living. Yaakov sends messengers to tell Esav that he is coming and wants to resolve their issues. The night before their meeting, a "man" (probably Esav's angel) fights with Yaakov all night, even using dirty tricks, and Yaakov fights honestly, ending with a draw. Yaakov gives Esav an enormous gift of animals (wealth), calls his brother "master," and bows (plus has his family bow) to designate that they consider Esav the one who deserves and now has their father's bracha of wealth and family leadership.

When Yaakov and his family settle in Shechem, the son of the prince of the region kidnaps and rapes Dina. When Yaakov does nothing about the rape immediately, Shimon and Levi take charge. Shechem asks to marry Dina and live in peace with Yaakov's family. Shimon and Levi insist that first all the men of Shechem circumcise themselves – and then on the third (most painful) day, they come and kill all the men of the town. Yaakov is furious at his sons, primarily for using deception and violence to punish the people of Shechem.

God next sends Yaakov to Beit El, where he builds an alter and calls out in Hashem's name. God then renames Yaakov as Israel and promises him land, descendants, and wealth – the brachot that He had previously promised to Avraham and Yitzhak. Rachel gives birth to Binyamin and dies during the birth. Yaakov buries her near Beit Lechem. At this point, the Torah's focus moves to Yaakov's children. First, however, the Torah records Esav's family and descendants – showing that God has kept His promise to make Esav the father of many nations, including numerous kings.

The stories in Vayishlach contain numerous connections backward and forward in the Torah (and later Jewish history). For example, the details of Yaakov's gifts to Esav repeat the details of Yaakov's deception in which he had stolen his brother's bracha from their father. Yaakov includes the fat from the land (animals, including many females to guarantee future generations), power and status (acting out treating Esav as lord and master – similar to the acting out that the Sephardic community uses during a Pesach Seder during the Magid). Yaakov and Esav cry and kiss each other on the neck, similar to the way that Yitzhak and Yaakov kiss during the bracha and the tears that Esav has after learning that Yaakov has the bracha. Yaakov's recreation reminds the reader of the way that the Mabul (flood) reverses the creation story in every detail and then, after the flood waters recede, the Torah recreates the new world in the same order and details (with some changes in man's role).

The role of Shimon and Levi horrifies Yaakov, because these sons repeat the deceptive behavior that causes their father so much grief. Yaakov wants his family to emulate the midot and behavior of Yisrael,

not those of Lavan and Yaakov. From the view of the sons, however, they understand that Yaakov loves Rachel and “hates” (the Torah’s word) Leah. Shimon and Levi see that Yaakov does not intervene when Shechem rapes Leah’s daughter, and they believe that their father would have taken revenge if Rachel had a daughter who was raped.

Jealousy between the children of Leah and Rachel explodes as Yaakov’s children grow older. Leah’s sons cannot tolerate Yosef (Rachel’s older son), and they capture him and put him in a pit. Years later, when Yosef becomes the equivalent of Agricultural Czar of Egypt and Leah’s sons come seeking food during a famine, Yosef tests the brothers by seeing whether they will defend Binyamin when he accuses the youngest brother of stealing his divining cup. Yehuda’s request to become the minister’s slave in place of the youngest brother is the beginning of a tikkun, coming together, of the Leah and Rachel sides of B’Nai Yisrael. This conflict and incidents of reconciliation between Leah and Rachel’s descendants continues at numerous times throughout Jewish history, at least as far as in Persia during the time of Queen Esther. (I have written about these issues at various times, and the topic is likely to arise again on occasions.) Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org discuss many of these and other insights involving Leah vs. Rachel descendants in greater detail.

As I write, we are all reacting to the implications of the fall of the Assad dictatorship in Syria and the fall of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hamas has accepted some of the key conditions of Israel in working toward an end of the Gaza horrors. Meanwhile, the political leadership in the United States changes in another month. Obviously we can all differ on our expectations of how the future will evolve. We can all, however, pray that the future will bring better news for our people, in Israel, Europe, and the United States.

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 Shlema for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, 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: Pillars and Sanctuaries

Rav Kook Torah

After twenty years of hard labor working for his treacherous uncle, Jacob returned safely to the Land of Israel. Jacob was successful in appeasing his brother Esau, and finally made it back to Beth El.

Beth El was the place where, as he set out to leave the Land of Israel, Jacob dreamt of a ladder reaching to the Heavens, of angels and God’s promise to watch over him. Now Jacob fulfilled his twenty-year-old promise and erected a matzeivah, a pillar in God’s Name, in Beth El.

From the Torah’s account, it appears perfectly acceptable for Jacob to erect a pillar. Later on, however, the Torah specifically prohibits all pillars of worship, even if they are used to worship God:

“Do not erect a sacred pillar, which the Eternal your God hates” (Deut. 16:22).

What about Jacob’s pillar? The Sages explained that serving God through pillars “was beloved in the time of the Patriarchs, but abhorred in the time of their descendants” (Sifri, Shoftim 146).

Why did the status of pillars change?

The Mountain, the Field, and the House

To answer this question, we need to examine the difference between a pillar and a sanctuary. A pillar is a large single stone, a focal point of Divine service, around which all may gather. A sanctuary, on the other hand, is a house of worship, a building in which worshippers gather.

Why does it matter whether the worshippers gather around or inside? The prophet Isaiah envisioned a future time when many nations will say, “Let us go up to God’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob” (2:3). Why will they be attracted to the God of Jacob, as opposed to the God of Abraham or the God of Isaac?

The Sages noted that the unique spiritual service of each of the Avot (Patriarchs) was expressed by the different spatial contexts in which they connected to God:

Abraham — served God on the mountain of Moriah during the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac.

Isaac — reached his own spiritual heights in the field where he meditated (Gen. 24:63).

Jacob — promised that the location of his lofty dream would become a house of God (Gen. 28:22).

The Sages interpreted Isaiah’s prophecy as follows: The nations will seek neither the “mountain of Abraham” nor the “field of Isaac,” but rather the “house of Jacob” (Pesachim 88). What does this mean?

When Abraham began introducing the concept of one God into the world, he did not lecture about detailed, organized forms of worship. Abraham did not instruct his followers to observe the 613 mitzvot that govern all aspects of life. Rather, he taught the overall concept of one Creator. The “mountain of Abraham” and the “field of Isaac” are a metaphor for this spiritual message, which, like a mountain or an open field, is accessible to all.

This is also the type of service that is associated with a pillar — a central point around which all may gather.

Jacob, on the other hand, vowed that he would establish a house of worship. While pillars were an acceptable way to worship God in the time of the Avot, Jacob envisioned a future era when the Jewish people would be ready for a higher form of Divine service. The open, accessible service of Abraham would prepare the way for an all-encompassing and detailed service of Torah and mitzvot. The metaphor for Jacob’s service is a house, with walls that enclose and surround the worshippers, binding them to a specific form of worship.

A second aspect of a house is that it serves to differentiate between those who are inside of it and those who are not. Once the Jewish people merited access to this loftier service and entered the elevated sanctuary, it was no longer appropriate for them to relate to God through the abstract service represented by pillars.

Isaiah prophesied that, in the future, the nations will recognize the beauty and depth of a service of God that encompasses both the spiritual and physical realms. They will recognize the importance of good deeds, mitzvot, and Halachic discipline. Then they will declare: simple faith in God and abstract theology are not enough. Let us enter into the sanctuary, into “the House of the God of Jacob.”

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayishlach

All... Most

Yaakov prepared himself to confront his brother — a man who 22 years ago set out in a rage to kill him. Yaakov had no idea what this encounter would yield. All he knew was that his brother Esav was fast approaching with 400 armed men. And the prospects for peace were dim.

There was little to do. He prepared for war, but he also prepared to avert war by offering gifts to appease the wrath of his mighty kin. He sent messengers laden with sheep, cattle, donkeys and camels all as offerings of peace to Esav.

The bribe worked and the encounter that ensued was not confrontational at all. Yaakov greeted his older brother with great dignity. He bowed and called him, “my master.”

At first, Esav declined Yaakov’s generous gifts. “I have much, let what you have remain yours.” (Genesis 33:9)

Yaakov urged Esav to accept the offering. “Please accept my gift,” he pleaded, adding that “G-d has been gracious to me and I have everything.” (Genesis 33:11)

Ultimately Esav agreed, accepted the gifts and made a counteroffer. He asks Yaakov to join him or at least let his men accompany Yaakov and his family on their journey. Yaakov refused the magnanimous offer from his former enemy and the brothers parted ways. Esav left toward his destiny — Seir — while Yaakov traveled to a town he named for its symbolic transience — Sukkoth, meaning tents.

What are the roots of these brothers' ideological differences. One refused generous offers from his former nemesis; the other accepted. One travels with an entourage, and the other only with family and some servants. One traveled toward his permanent home and the other names the resting place with a word that means huts.

The Rebbe, Reb Ber of Mezritch, was once approached by a chasid who had a very common problem.

"Rebbe," he pleaded. "I never seem to have enough. The more I get, the more I want. I know it is improper to think this way and I need help."

The rebbe told the man to visit Rebbe Zusia of Anipoli. "He can guide you with your difficulty."

The man was shocked as he approached Reb Zusia's residence. He saw a ramshackle wooden hut with boarded windows. Upon entering, the poverty was overwhelming. The man figured, "surely this is a man who is in constant need. He hardly has what he needed, and must grapple with new desires on a constant basis. He surely will be able to counsel me on my longing for the articles that I lack."

The man discussed his problem with Reb Zusia, but Reb Zusia looked at him in amazement.

"What are you coming to me for? How can I advise you? I have absolutely everything I need!"

There is a distinct difference in how Yaakov and his brother Esav perceived their lot. Yaakov said he had everything. He needed no favors, wanted neither gifts or help from Esav, and was very happy to live in a tent city named Sukkoth. Esav only had most of what he wanted. If you push the right buttons, he could be bought, cajoled and swayed for a little more.

The vision of one's future is determined by the essence of one's present. One who believes he has only most of what he can acquire will not be satisfied until he has it all and he will never have it all. But one who feels he has it all, will be most happy — always.

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Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Vayishlach

The Real Fight

WHICH WAS THE real fight, the one with the "stranger" the night before, or with Eisav the next day? Clearly the one with the stranger since the confrontation with Eisav lasted very little time, was only a short conversation, and Ya'akov was on his way in peace in no time. He struggled with the stranger the entire night, and walked away limping.

Why were there two fights in the first place? Who was this stranger, why was he so violent, and what right did he have to change Ya'akov's name, or least prophesy that it would later be changed? But we already know the answer to those questions, don't we, after Rashi explained it all. The stranger was none other than Eisav's ministering angel who had come to admit the blessings belonged to Ya'akov and not to Eisav, and that his name would be changed because he "fought with an angel and with men, and prevailed."

That makes the name Yisroel a warrior name, doesn't it? Yes, but not in the classical sense of the term, evident by how the angel put himself first before Eisav, Lavan, and Shechem. The way the angel phrased it, he said, "You not only fought with an angel and won, but you also fought with bad guys too, and yet you still prevailed! That makes you Yisroel!" But is it really easier to fight with an angel of God than with human beings? Perhaps not physically, but spiritually? For sure, if victory is defined in terms of spiritual success, not physical achievement. It's not hard to remember that an angel works for God and has no power of its

own. It is easy to forget that human beings also work for God, since they have free will and tend to get away with things we would have thought God would have stopped.

For example, we have little problem calling the Sitra Achra, despite all the evil he has caused, an agent of God. It is not so easy however to also call Hitler, et al, ysv"z, agents of God. We tend to look at the evil they do as their own, things that God Himself does not support, and for which they will later be punished but good...even though in the back of our mind a little voice might be saying, "a person doesn't even hurt their finger if it is not first decreed in Heaven" (Chullin 7b).

How much more so when what happens it is so much worse.

I recently saw in a sefer based upon the teachings of the Mussar giant, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, zt"l, that when the Torah says, that God placed before us blessing and curse for us to choose one of them, it really means that a Jew can never except mediocrity. Either choose blessing, which means excelling spiritually, or curse, which means failing miserably. We may try to find some kind of balance between the two, but it doesn't really work because it is not meant to work, at least for a Jew.

A large part of how far a person is willing to go to be their spiritual best or, God forbid, the opposite, depends on how spiritually astute they are at seeing God in everything and behind all that happens. Walking with God doesn't just mean getting everything right. It means literally walking with God by never losing touch with the reality of God everywhere you go, no matter how distracting events can be, and how convincing people are that they act independent of God.

It's a struggle. When Avraham had to deal with the Hittites, and especially with Ephron, he had to deal with them as people while never forgetting that God was using them to do His will, not their will. When Yitzchak was confronted by Avimelech, he had to act as if Avimelech was his own man, while never losing sight of the fact that he too worked for God. The same was true of Ya'akov with Eisav and Lavan, and especially with Shechem who even violated Ya'akov's own daughter. It's hard to see God behind all of that.

And when Moshe couldn't quite do it with Pharaoh, questioning God about His management of the redemption process, God berated him saying:

"It's too bad about the ones who are lost and can no longer to be found. Many times I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov as El Shaddai, and they never questioned Me, nor did they ask, 'What is Your Name?' I told Avraham, 'Arise, and walk the length and width of the land that I am giving to you.' (Bereishis 13:17). Yet when he wanted a place to bury Sarah, he couldn't find anything until he purchased land for 400 shekels!" (Sanhedrin 11a)

We don't need to ask how Moshe took the criticism. His personal greatness and life accomplishments tell the story on their own. He was no longer fooled by the people of this world, or the events of history. He saw God at all times, and recognized every challenge as an opportunity to be even greater than he already was, bringing him fulfillment in this world and a heck of a large portion in the next world.

That's what it means to be part of the Jewish people. That is what it means to be a Yisroel. It's not about fighting against others, but about using those "fights" and struggles that do come as stepping stones to even greater personal greatness, and an awesome portion in the World to Come. It's not just about being a different people, but about living on a different, higher spiritual track in life.

I Didn't Know How Much They Love Us

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Antisemitism is the world's oldest hatred. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l described it as follows:

Antisemitism is not a unitary phenomenon, a coherent belief or ideology. Jews have been hated because they were rich and because they were poor; because they were capitalists and because they were communists; because they believed in tradition and because they were rootless cosmopolitans; because they kept to themselves and because they penetrated everywhere. Antisemitism is not a belief but a virus. The

human body has an immensely sophisticated immune system which develops defenses against viruses. It is penetrated, however, because viruses mutate. Antisemitism mutates.

Jews comprise only 2.4% of the US population but in 2023 were the targets of 68% of religiously motivated hate crimes, a 63% increase from 2022. Following October 7, 2023, hate incidents against Jews spiked 400%.

Just this week, Hadassah published the results of a two-year survey on antisemitism. It found that 64% of those polled reported that hate and discrimination have directly impacted their lives, relationships, and professional environments; additionally, more than half felt compelled to conceal their Jewish identity.

As Jews, we have always known that there are people who hate us, but it isn't until this past year that we realized how much they hate us. That hate is so strong, so loud, and so threatening, that it is easy to not appreciate how many love us.

This week, I had the privilege of offering remarks and a prayer at a large gathering that was overwhelmingly attended by a non-Jewish audience. I concluded by saying:

Master of the Universe - do not allow us to remain apathetic or silent. Grant us the faith in You, and the faith in ourselves, to believe that we can make a difference in securing a bright future for the United States and for Israel.

Our Father in Heaven, let the hostages, Americans and Israelis be released and return home. Let Israel be victorious over her enemies. Guard the courageous members of the United States military and the Israeli Defense Forces as they guard us and protect freedom and democracy around the world.

Dear God - We ask that you grant peace and prosperity to the United States, to the State of Israel and to the entire world, and let us respond, Amen.

I received a few handshakes on my way back to my table, but what happened the rest of the evening truly surprised me. When I made my way around the room, I was stopped over and over again by people telling me how much they pray for Israel, for the release of the hostages, and for the Jewish people as a whole. Non-Jews from all over the country sincerely and genuinely expressed their care and their concern for our people.

One young man who was attending with his mother found me to share that though he isn't Jewish, he feels connected to Israel and desperately wants to help. He took my contact information and asked if it would be alright to follow up and if I could introduce him to an organization or effort in Israel that he can work on from his home in Houston. A member of the security team at the event saw my yarmulka and said "Shalom." He shared that he has been to many parts of the world providing protection but the place he really wants to go is Israel. A veteran of the United States Army who fought for many years for our country came over to proudly share that when he was first training, he went to Israel to practice with the IDF and told me about the gratitude he has had for the many years since.

The examples could go on and on, but they all left me with a feeling that while we know there are people who hate us and have come to learn how much they hate us, we also need to know that there are people who love us and just how much they love us.

During his recent visit to our community, when Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik was asked about his concerns regarding the state of antisemitism in American and particularly on college campuses and among academic elites, he responded that he is steadfastly optimistic. While he agreed that rising antisemitism is cause for legitimate concern, he explained that there is no time in Jewish history where we have had more support from the non-Jewish world and we should recognize and appreciate that.

When that care and concern are communicated, when we are strengthened by a simple sentence or supportive gesture, we should think to ourselves, how can I pay it forward? Is there a community, a nationality, or a people who are feeling hated and to whom I can communicate some camaraderie and concern? Are there individuals

who are feeling abandoned, forsaken, or forgotten to whom I can express support, and heartfelt prayers?

Commenting on our Parsha and the complicated relationship between Esav and Yaakov, our rabbis predict and foretell that "Esav sonei es Yaakov," the descendants of Esav will hate and haunt the offspring of Yaakov. Interestingly, the Talmud introduces this observation with the words, "Halacha b'yaduah," it is a well-known halacha.

Commenting on this phrase used only once in rabbinic literature, Rav Moshe Feinstein in a teshuva in the 1970's writes:

I have already explained concerning Rashi's language in his Torah commentary... on the word **וְהַרְפָּא**: Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says: "It is a well-known halacha that Esau hates Jacob." And why is the word halacha relevant here? It is because just as halacha never changes, so also Esav's hatred of Yaakov never changes. Even in those [nations] that behave well [toward Jews], their hatred [of Jews] is actually strong.

Essentially, antisemitism is a fact that they hate us—it is a given that will not change. The fact that some love us, though, is not and should never be taken for granted. We should recognize it, appreciate it and pay it forward in showing love to others who could use it.

A study conducted a few years ago concluded that casually reaching out to people in our social circles means more than we realize. As one of the researchers explained, "Even sending a brief message reaching out to check in on someone, just to say 'Hi,' that you are thinking of them, and to ask how they're doing, can be appreciated more than people think."

Hearing people I didn't even know tell me, "I'm thinking about Israel and I'm praying for your people," filled me with comfort and delight. Contacting someone you know, even if you don't know them well, to tell them they are on your mind can make an impact you could not have imagined.

https://torahweb.org/torah/1999/parsha/rsob_vayishlach.html

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Yaakov and Yisrael - A Dual Destiny

Throughout Sefer Bereishit there is great degree of significance associated with names. A name is not merely a way to call someone but, rather, it encapsulates the essence of the individual. Both Avraham and Yaakov received names at birth, yet their names were changed later in life as certain events unfolded. Chazal in Masechet Berachot (13a), draw a distinction between the change in the name of "Avram" to "Avraham" and the change of "Yaakov" to "Yisrael".

Once Avraham received his new name no one was permitted to refer to him by his previous name "Avram", whereas Yaakov is constantly referred to as both "Yaakov" and "Yisrael". Avraham received a new mission, to be "av hamon goyim", a father to many nations, and as such, his previous title, "Av leAram", the father of his own home, is inappropriate. What is it about the name "Yaakov" that it remained alongside "Yisrael"?

The dual name "Yaakov-Yisrael" reflects two aspects of Yaakov's life. He entered the world be hind his brother, grabbing his heel, being stepped on by Esav. The name "Yaakov" is synonymous with all the difficulties he would endure while dealing with his brother. When Yaakov was victorious in his fight with the angel, who chazal interpret to be the Angel of Esav, Yaakov was given a new name, "Yisrael", meaning, one who has overcome his foes. There are times when he was victorious and as such referred to as "Yisrael", yet he endured many hardships, and was constantly reminded that he was also "yaakov".

The most poignant expression of this appears in Bereishit (46:1-2) when Yaakov was traveling to mitzrayim to see Yosef. It was the highpoint of his life, going to greet his son that for 22 years he had thought was dead. The Torah describes the triumphant Yisrael going to Mitzrayim: G-d appeared to him and called him "Yaakov, Yaakov", you are going to galut, your descendants will be enslaved. This is the beginning of a dark chapter in the history of the Jewish people. You may be personally experiencing the emotions of "Yisrael", but be aware that this is the beginning of the period of "Yaakov".

The duality that exists within "Yaakov" repeats itself throughout the history of his descendants. The Sefer haChinuch, in Mitzvah 3 explains

that the prohibition of eating the gid hanasheh is symbolic of our entire history. Yaakov is victorious in his struggle against Esav, but he is wounded in battle.

Esav succeeded in injuring Yaakov's leg even though he could not defeat him. This is true throughout Jewish history. Ultimately the Jewish people will emerge victorious from all of its struggles, but there will be costly sacrifices along the way. We are constantly wounded as a people yet we survive and prosper and will ultimately emerge from exile.

"Maaseh avot siman lebanim," - the lives of the forefathers foreshadow events in the lives of their descendants. Just as Yaakov emerged from his battle with Esav victoriously, so should we merit redemption from our exile, and reach the heights of Yisrael.

Tidbits • Parashas Vayishlach 5785

Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org

In memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

Parashas Vayishlach • December 14th • 13 Kislev 5785

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levanah is this Motzaei Shabbos Parashas Vayishlach, December 14th.

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bayli: Bava Basra 172

The siyum on Daf Yomi - Bava Basra & Mishna Yomi - Bava Basra is this Wednesday; mazal tov!..

Chanukah begins on Wednesday evening, December 25th.

Shabbos Chanukah is Shabbos Parashas Miketz, December 28th.

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 (see Taryag section) • 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 plan their 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 Eisav • 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 Eisav. Ovadiah was himself a convert from Edom.

Parashas Vayishlach: 154 Pesukim • 1 Prohibition

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 just a wound to his thigh. This mitzvah reminds us that despite the constant and ongoing persecution by Eisav's descendants, our nation will ultimately be spared and redeemed (Sefer HaChinuch). "נָהָיְלִ שׂוֹר וְמַמְרֵ"

"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 zt"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 Ray," "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 an incident which occurred in a ballroom in the United Kingdom. In attendance were many of the UK's dignitaries, including the Queen of England. 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.

Ira Zlotowitz – Founder Ahron Dicker – Editor

לע"נ

יוחנן בן יקוטיאל יודא ע"ה
שרה משא בת ר' עקיבא אליעזר ע"ה
ביליא בת (אריה) ליב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל

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:

- 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);
- 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'a'seh 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 (Yitzchak 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 Kha'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'rар, 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 Israeli 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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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) or each story, based on its details. However, when the story itself is difficult to understand, then it becomes even more difficult to uncover its message.

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

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

WAS THE 'COAST CLEAR' YET?

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

"Your brother Eisav is consoling himself by planning to **kill you**. Now, my son - listen to me, get up and run away to Charan - to Lavan my brother. ...Until your brother's anger quells, and **he will forget what you did to him** - [then] I will send someone to call you to return..." (see 27:42-44).

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

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

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

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

Years pass, but Rivka never sent for Yaakov.

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

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

Does this imply that Eisav is no longer a threat?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YAAKOV SENDS AN ENVOY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT SHOULD YAAKOV DO?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT DIRECTION IS HE CROSSING?

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

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

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

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

THE STRUGGLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Note how he plans a total subjugation to his brother.]

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 'capitalization' - 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 rephrased, 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. TOLDOT EISAV
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'; 'kehul 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 guardian 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 at thought 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'hiyah 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 of 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 is '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' reflected 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 Padam 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 Cana'an. 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 Cana'an.

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 "artz 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 Cana'an. 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 VaYetzei. 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 Cana'an, 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 [akhaper panav] with the gift which precedes me [le-fanai], and then I will see his face [panav], so that perhaps he will forgive me [yisa panai]."

The gifts passed before him [al panav]

A friend of mine, Rabbi Assaf 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 became 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 Beresheit. 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 goes 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 Cana'anites), 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 Cana'an, 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 Cana'an 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-l Shad-dai renamed Avraham and Sara! -- he is desperate to know whether the angel comes in the name of Ke-l 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-l Shad-dai. We will soon see what that work is, and then we will see that Ke-l 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-l, "face of the powerful one," or "face of God"], "For I have seen a powerful one face to face, and my soul was saved."

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

A BROTHERLY REUNION: THE SAME OLD YA'AKOV?

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

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

BERESHIT 33:10 --

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

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

PLEASE TAKE MY BRIBE?

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

BERESHIT 33:11 --

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

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

walk away not only with his life intact, but also his conscience restored. Eisav understands the gesture and accepts the gift. He forgives Ya'akov.

All that remains is for Ya'akov to perform an act of leadership, guiding others to discover what he has discovered: that challenges must be faced, no matter how how painful. The opportunity to demonstrate this arrives with the rape of Ya'akov's daughter, Dina: Shekhem, prince of a Cana'anite 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 Leivi massacre the town. Ya'akov reacts in horror:

BERESHIT 34:30 --

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

Shimon and Leivi 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-l Shad-dai; be fruitful and multiply. A nation, a throng of nations shall come from you, and kings shall emerge from your loins. And the land I gave to Avraham and to Yitzhak, to you I shall give it, and to your children after you, I shall give the land."

Hashem changes Ya'akov's name to Yisrael ["One Who Struggles with the Powerful," or "Powerful Righteous One"], symbolizing the finality of Ya'akov's personal transformation, and then informs him that He comes as Ke-l 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]