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

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

Vayishlach opens with two chapters concluding material from Vayeitzei. Yaakov splits and separates his camp to prepare for meeting Esav. An "ish" wrestles with Yaakov all night, and Yaakov insists that the ish bless him before releasing him. Esav and his party arrive, and the brothers reunite. Yaakov continues on his journey, reaches Israel, and purchases property in Shechem. He builds an alter to Hashem and then builds a home. His daughter Dina goes into the town. The prince of Shechem abducts and rapes her. He falls in love with Dina, and his father comes to Yaakov's family to propose having his son marry Dina and the two families live as neighbors. Yaakov's sons state that they will agree if all the men of Shechem circumcise themselves. The men perform the procedure, and then, when the pain is most severe, Shimon and Levi attack and kill all the men of Shechem. Yaakov is furious with the brothers. Some time later, God tells Yaakov to return to Beit-El, where he had promised more than twenty years earlier to build an alter to Hashem. The parsha ends with a chapter on the legacy (toldot) of Esav.

Most commentators seem to discuss the material through the meeting with Esav with Vayeitzei and then focus on material involving Yaakov's children starting with Vayislach. Looking at my brief summary above, the most significant new material obviously seems to concern Dina's rape and the consequences in Shechem.

When Hamor (prince of Shechem) comes to Yaakov, he proposes that Yaakov's family permit his son (Shehem) to marry Dina and live (and intermarry) with his people. Yaakov's sons respond for the family – a gross insult to Yaakov, because a child should not take a father's role in speaking for the family. (Lavan does the same when Eliezer asks whether Rivka will go with him to marry Yitzhak.) The people of Shechem accept the proposal, and all the men circumcise themselves. On the third day, Shimon and Levi go into the city, slaughter all the men, rescue Dina, and plunder the town.

Yaakov is furious with Shimon and Levi for their deception and violence – he does not forgive their behavior even to the end of his life (49:5-7). Shimon and Levi respond that the family must respond when the people of Shechem treat their sister like a harlot. What the Torah does not say explicitly is that Leah's sons respond to Yaakov's obvious favoring of Rachel over Leah. Would Yaakov have responded aggressively if Shechem had raped a daughter of Rachel instead of a daughter of Leah? Yaakov's favoring of Rachel over Leah is already poisoning relationships within his family. This jealousy will intensify in Vayeishev, when Leah's sons become furious with Yosef when he relates his dreams. When Yosef comes to check on his brothers, they put him in a position where he ends up being sold as a slave in Egypt. The dispute between the Leah and Rachel sides of Yaakov's family arises many times in Jewish history – with Yosef's manipulations when the brothers come to purchase food during the drought, after Yosef dies, and many times in post Biblical Jewish history.

Immediately after the story of Dina, the Torah turns to God's command to Yaakov to leave Shechem and move to Beit-El, where Yaakov had promised more than twenty years earlier to build a house for Hashem (28:16-22). Probably because this command comes immediately after the story of Dina, Rashi interprets that Dina's rape is God's punishment to Yaakov for delaying to fulfill his promise. During Yaakov's move from Shechem to Beit-El, Rivka's nurse (Deborah) and Rachel both die, and Yaakov buries both of them on the road. The Torah does not mention the deaths and burials of Rivka or Leah. Rabbi Marc Angel discusses a tradition that the Torah does not mention deaths and burials of people whose death does not bring closure. He states that Rivka and Leah do not receive fulfillment during their lives, so their deaths come

without bringing closure (see his discussion below). The ramifications of the rape of Dina and lack of mention of the deaths of Rivka and Leah are open to various interpretations – part of the multiple layers of meaning in the Torah.

Life is full of transitions, and the stories of births, deaths, and significant events (both good and bad) of our ancestors strike us differently depending on what is going on in our lives. This week we learned of the birth of a baby girl to our daughter-in-law's brother and sister-in-law – and then of the death of a close friend. We met Art and Debra Sapper forty years ago, when our son David and their daughter Sarah were very young. David and Sarah ended up in the same class in elementary school, but since seventh grade, the Yeshiva separated boys and girls into different schools. We have celebrated numerous simchas with the Sappers, most recently at their daughter Chaya's wedding in Israel in February 2020. Art Sapper was a distinguished attorney and leading member of the Kemp Mill community. He was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, and friend to all who knew him.

For many years, when issues involving family, friends, and serious issues would arise, my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was typically the first person I would call for advice or comfort. Did Yaakov's sons have someone outside their immediate family who could provide that kind of support to them? Perhaps if they had someone like Rabbi Cahan, an advisor who could listen, understand their problems, and help them see various ways to cope, perhaps the brothers might have resolved some of their issues coping with anger and feelings of favoritism. Of course, Yaakov could probably also have used this sort of help at times in his life. While Hashem now operates Hester Panim (behind the scenes, without direct or obvious interaction with humans), His influence on our lives is apparent to all who search. May we find ways to teach this lesson to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Vayishlach: The Job of the Av

by Rabbi Dovid Green © 2005

> *And they journeyed, and the fear of Elochim was on the surrounding cities and they did not pursue the Children of Jacob.* (Breishis 35:5)

The Children of Jacob are new settlers in the Land of Canaan. Shimon and Levi destroy an entire city to defend the honor of their sister Dina and miraculously they are not attacked by their neighbors. They are intimidated, not by their military might but by the fear of G-d! How did that happen? How did they dodge that bullet? We don't need too much guess work for this one. It's actually a pretty basic concept with a profoundly practical application.

A few years ago, I was getting ready to take a three week trip to Israel in January in the middle of the winter season. For years I had been going during the summer. I was used to taking light clothing. I knew I might need a sweater, but my wife

insisted I take winter boots. I refused! I reasoned, “Who needs to carry those clunky things around? There’s only so much room in my suitcase. I know it’s the rainy season. What use do I have for boots?” So I didn’t pack them!

The first week I was there, Jerusalem was hit for the first time in many decades with eighteen inches of snow. The city was paralyzed and it was beautiful beyond words but everyone was ill-prepared and under-equipped for the reality on the ground. As it turned out, my wife, bless her soul, without my knowing had tucked my fur-lines rubber insolated winter boots into a side pocket of my suitcase. My feet remained dry and warm and I was extremely grateful for her active concern and foresight!

The Torah records that when Avraham first set out on his journey, *“…And they went out to go to the Land of Canaan and they came to the Land of Canaan, and Avram traversed until the place of Shechem to Alon Moreh.*” (Breishis 12:5-6) Rashi comments on why he had zeroed in on that place: *“To pray for the Children of Jacob when they would come to battle in Shechem.”* Amazingly, Avraham did not even have any children at that point. All he had was a pocket full of promises, albeit from The Almighty. Yet, he intuits future needs and prays for their welfare before the moment of emergency. From this practice of Avraham the Talmud Sanhedrin teaches, *“A person should always pray before problems arise. For had it not been that Avraham had prayed prior to the problem, between Beit El and Ai, no survivors or remnants of Israel would remain.”* The Jewish Nation confronted 36 casualties in the city of Ai but who knows how much worse the losses might have been had they not had the protection of Avraham’s prayers in advance. The same was true with Shechem!

Two practical points emerge from this. The Talmud says*, “A person should always cry for the future and gratefully acknowledge the past!”* 1) Whatever success or survival we enjoy, as a nation or as individuals, is most probably due to the protective prayers of prior generations. It is likely not in the insufficient merit of our own goodness that the malevolent machinations of our numerous enemies are more often than not frustrated. 2) We as parents of future generations have a duty to pray for the health, welfare, and spiritual success of our children and grandchildren born and not yet… After all this is what Avraham, our common father, had done. That’s what makes him an Av -- a father.

The caring parent prepares and packs away for the future that which is needed for his children to find safety in world of unforeseen danger. So too the loving father casts a blanket of prayer to cover his sleeping children, shielding them from the cold winter night of exile, in ways they could never know, and that has always been **the job of the av!**

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5766-vayishlach/

“And He Was Limping on his Thigh” – Paying the Cost of Integrity

by Rabbi Dov Linzer * © 2009, 2022

Parshat VaYishlach opens with Yaakov preparing to confront Esav on his return to the Land of Canaan. We, as the reader, are eager to find out not only whether Yaakov will emerge unscathed, but how Yaakov will achieve this goal. Will this encounter differ in character from his last one with Esav, twenty years ago? Has Yaakov’s character changed? Will he be the same Yaakov who was willing to use deceit to achieve his goals, or has he somehow learned from his twenty years of hardship, having received his comeuppance and having himself been deceived by Lavan, first by the switching of the daughters and then by the switching of the wages? Has he learned these lessons, or is he the same Yaakov from twenty years past?

We already have a hint to the answer from the story of Yaakov’s shepherding of the sheep. On the one hand, Yaakov played the system and worked the loopholes, positioning the striped posts in front of the sheep at the time of copulation so that striped and speckled sheep would be conceived. However, such behavior, while not totally yasher, was still not deceitful, and was still playing by the rules. While less than ideal, such behavior is often the only way a person can survive when he is unprotected and in an inhospitable and foreign land. Such hostile environments have often been the reality of Jews in galut. We as a people have had to learn to survive and adapt, and we have excelled in this ability, learning how to play the system while keeping to its rules, no matter how unjust they may be.

They key in these situations has always been to do what we need to in order to survive, but do so while keeping one's integrity. And Yaakov, in his watching of the sheep, in no way "played the system" – he was the model of integrity and hard, honest work:

> *"That which was torn of beasts I brought unto thee; I bore the loss of it; of my hand did you require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. Thus I was: in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep fled from my eyes."* (Breishit 32:39- 40).

So this "playing the system" was a necessary, adaptive mode for galut, but it was not ideal. And Yaakov is alerted to this, I believe, in the dream of the angel which he relates to Rachel and Leah. In that dream, the angel informs Yaakov that it was only because of God's help – and not because of Yaakov's scheme – that the ewes bore speckled lambs. The scheming was not what led to success, it was God's watching over him that did so.

And now Yaakov comes to encounter Esav. A hard and powerful enemy, but one that he is meeting head-on and in the land of Canaan, not as a guest in another land. Will he be the Yaakov of twenty years ago, and engage in real deceit? Will he be the Yaakov of the house of Lavan, and try to secretly work the loopholes? Or will he confront the challenge directly?

The answer is not necessarily a foregone conclusion. Some people are never able to readjust to new situations and to abandon their old paradigms. As a case in point, we find that even today, some of our fellow Jews still approach the government, even the democratic government of the United States, as if they were living in the old oppressive regimes of Eastern Europe. When asked by certain yeshivot if they could deceive the United States government to get more funding for programs than they deserved, Rav Moshe Feinstein (HM 2:30) spends the majority of his response explaining that we live in a country that is not Tsarist Russia, and that in a country that protects its citizens, modes of deceit and trickery learned in previous generations, which were always problematic, are absolutely unethical and completely inconceivable.

Yaakov Aveinu, for his part, was able to learn these lessons on his own, and the path that he adopts is the straight and narrow one. While he prepares a gift, this is an act of appeasement, not of trickery. And he says so directly to Esav: "[It is] to find favor in the eyes of my master." When Esav tries to maintain a presence in Canaan, Yaakov politely but firmly begs off. There is no trickery – everyone knows the purpose of the gift, the meaning of Esav's accepting it (an accepting of Yaakov's apology) and the meaning of Yaakov's begging off of Esav's accompaniment and Esav's acquiescence to this (a waiving of Esav's rights to the land of Canaan). There is sophistication, intelligence and skill in this approach, but no trickery. And Yaakov has also not forgotten the angel's message. He knows that whatever he does, his success relies on God's help. Thus, before this momentous event he prays to God – the first time Yaakov talks directly to God – to beseech God for help and protection.

Yaakov has learned that to achieve his goals he need not use deceit, and he need not make use of loopholes. He can achieve his goals by confronting his challenges head-on, by using intelligence and skill, and by relying on God. This may be a harder path, it may be a riskier path, but it is the correct path. And to fully realize it, he must confront his old self and reject the Yaakov of the past. And thus, on the night before the encounter – "And Yaakov was left alone." He was left alone with himself. He had to look himself in the mirror and confront who he was and who he wanted to be. "And a man wrestled with him" – he had to struggle with his old self, and to reject who he was for who he could become. And when his old self saw that it could no longer define the new Yaakov, it engaged in its old trickery – "And he saw that he could not prevail against him" – when he – the man, the old Yaakov – saw that he could not achieve his ends through honest means, "he touched the curve of the thigh" – he used a dirty trick, touching the curve of the thigh, comparable to the curve of the heel, the ekev, the crooked path that is the old Yaakov. But the new Yaakov would not lower himself to this level. He refused to fight dirty, to give in to the old Yaakov, and he remained upright. And as such, he merited a new name: Yisrael. No longer Yaakov – the bent heel, but Yashar-El: Yashar, the straight one, El – who connects to God.

Yaakov became Yisrael, became the one who recognized that we must always remain straight and upright and rely on God, and that in this way – and not through self-reliance on trickery and deceit – will we achieve our goals. The path may be harder, we may have to sacrifice something as a result, we may come out limping a little in the end, but our integrity will be intact, and we will be better for it. That is why Bnei Yisrael – the descendants of Yisrael, not of Yaakov – will not eat the gid hanesheh that is on the thigh – that we reject the representation of the old Yaakov, and together with it give up some small degree of pleasure. This is a tiny sacrifice to make for being yashar and being with God, and for our meriting to be the true descendants of Yisrael, worthy of being called Bnei Yisrael.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School.

https://library.yctorah.org/2009/12/and-he-was-limping-on-his-thigh-paying-the-cost-of-integrity/

A Eulogy for the Uneulogized: Thoughts for Parashat Vayishlah

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"And Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died and she was buried below Beth-El under the oak; and the name of it was called Allon-bakhuth (the oak of weeping)." (Bereishith 35:8)

The Torah goes out of its way to report the death of Deborah, whose only claim to fame was having been the life-long nurse of Rebecca. The Torah not only tells us where she was buried, but also that her death evoked weeping.

It seems ironic that the Torah would highlight the death and burial of Rebecca's nurse…but never records the time of death and burial of Rebecca herself. The Torah does report on Jacob's words shortly before he died, when he requested to be buried in the cave that Abraham had purchased from Efron: *"There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife, and there I buried Leah."* (Bereishith 49:31)

The Torah reports on another woman besides Deborah who died and was buried while in the midst of travels: Rachel, Jacob's wife. While Rachel was buried and mourned, her sister Leah's time of death and burial are not mentioned in the Torah. Two women — Deborah and Rachel -- die, are buried and mourned; while the two women closest to them — Rebecca and Leah -- fade from the Torah without mention of burial or weeping.

The Torah teaches by its words…and also by its silence. If Rebecca and Leah are not suitably mourned in the text, a message is being conveyed.

A funeral and burial represent "closure." Mourners confront the death of loved ones, eulogize them, weep for them…and themselves. When the Torah describes the deaths and burials of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rachel and Jacob, it marks generational transitions. When it describes the death and burial of Deborah, it notes the passing of a long-time family attendant, the end of an era for the family.

But what about Rebecca and Leah? Why did the Torah omit description of their deaths and burials? Perhaps this was a way of indicating that their deaths did not entail "closure" for the mourners.

Leah was the less loved/unloved wife of Jacob whose clear favorite was Rachel. Leah's first born, Reuven, was passed over by Jacob who gave double portion to Rachel's son, Joseph. Leah always seemed unfulfilled, treated as second best. She died sad and unappreciated.

Rebecca, like Leah, suffered much. After years of being barren, she had a very difficult pregnancy that resulted in twin boys. But family life was not ideal. Her husband Isaac favored Esau, while Rebecca favored Jacob. In seeking to have Isaac's blessing bestowed on Jacob, she arranged for Jacob to trick the blind Isaac by pretending to be Esau. The result was that Jacob had to flee Esau's wrath, so that Rebecca's favorite lived far away. Esau must have resented Rebecca for her plot against him. And Isaac was a blind old man who probably wasn't much of a soul mate for her. Her only companion was her nurse, Deborah.

When Leah and Rebecca died, their families hardly needed "closure." They just buried the women without fanfare. The Torah doesn't mention their funerals because their funerals were pro-forma.

Leah and Rebecca were like so many human beings who pass through life without feeling fulfillment. No one seems to understand them or care about them or tend to their emotional needs. Such people grow old and simply fade away without the recognition and love they had craved throughout their lives.

Perhaps **the Torah is teaching us to be attentive to the Leahs and Rebeccas among us.** We should be sensitive to their emotional needs, care for them, value them. And perhaps the Torah is teaching the Leahs and Rebeccas among us to be more assertive of their own needs. No one should have to die feeling that their lives had been unfulfilled, second best, unimportant to those among whom they lived.

If the Torah highlights the funeral of Deborah, the nurse of Rebecca, perhaps it is pointing to her virtues, her loyalty to Rebecca, her serving as a model to us. Deborah was a genuine friend to Rebecca, maybe the only real friend that Rebecca had. Deborah seems to have understood what no one else did: Rebecca was a human being craving love, respect, companionship.

Leah and Rebecca: the Torah's silence about your deaths and burials provides a loud message. Through that silence, we learn to empathize with you…and with others like you whose needs and feelings are often overlooked.

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

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/eulogy-uneulogized-thoughts-parashat-vayishlah [*ed.*: **Emphasis added]**

When Wickedness Poses as Righteousness: Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

Judge Jackson understood that the atrocities of the Nazis were all purported to be "legal." Laws were passed depriving Jews of all rights. Laws were passed to round up, imprison, and murder Jews. All those who participated in these heinous actions were following the law of the land!

The problem, though, was that the law itself was starkly immoral; the government that promulgated murderous laws was itself evil; the "legal system" which allowed such "laws" to be passed and implemented was the epitome of injustice, cruelty, and wickedness. Moral people should have denounced such "laws" and should have resisted the "legal system." If enough good people had risen against the tyrannical laws and the murderous Nazi regime, millions of lives would have been saved.

In our times, we also witness tendencies to legitimize wicked and immoral behavior by means of declaring such evil to be "legal." The United Nations is perhaps the world's most nefarious example of this tendency. The UN routinely passes resolutions condemning Israel – not because these condemnations relate to moral and sound judgment, but because a malicious cabal of Israel-hating nations muster the majority to pass anti-Israel resolutions. There isn't even the faintest element of fairness to these resolutions, not the slightest effort to understand Israel's position, not a word of condemnation of groups and nations who attack Israel in every way they can. The UN espouses resolutions and policies that are dressed in the garb of "international law" when in fact these resolutions and policies are classic examples of immorality, injustice and corruption of the value of law.

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

Many seemingly good-hearted people get swept up in the "politically correct" anti-Israel bashing. They are gullible in the extreme, and don't have the time or moral courage to try to find out actual facts. These people will condemn Israel for causing pain to Arabs in Gaza, but will never raise a word of protest when thousands of missiles are fired into Israel from Gaza. They will condemn Israel's intransigence, but will never call to account Arab and Muslim leaders who unashamedly

call for the destruction of Israel. Thinking that they are standing for “human rights” and for “international law,” these people are in fact accomplices in immorally seeking to deprive Jews of their rights. They foster “laws” and “resolutions” and “policies” that are in essence criminal, unjust, immoral.

In Psalm 81, we read: “lo yihye bekha el zar,” let there be no strange god among you. The Talmud (Shabbat 105b) offers a more literal and more profound interpretation of this phrase – you shall not have within yourself a strange god. According to this interpretation, the verse is not warning us against worshiping external idols. Rather, it is telling us to look within ourselves for strange gods, for evil inclinations, for false divinities. It is demanding that we introspect, that we maintain truth, that we reject the false gods that mislead us into false beliefs and corrupt behaviors.

This is a message of utmost importance for all people. None of us should allow “false gods” to fester within us, to blind our eyes to our moral responsibilities. All humans must strive to root out the evil inclination that leads to discriminatory attitudes, to corrupt laws and resolutions, to following along with the “politically correct” but morally bankrupt anti-Israel chorus. We must remember the words of Justice Jackson that “the most odious of all oppressions are those which mask as justice.”

Hanukkah reminds us that the Jewish People have long faced enemies of all kinds…but that we have been able to prevail! With the help of the Almighty, and with our own personal commitment, we will continue to bring light, love and kindness to our world.

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

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https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/when-wickedness-poses-righteousness-blog-rabbi-marc-d-angel

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Book Review: Sephardim Sephardism and Jewish Peoplehood

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Imagine an authentic vision of Judaism fully rooted in tradition. A vision that properly represents the particularistic covenant between God and Israel through the Torah and halakhah. A vision that properly represents the universalistic aspect of God as Creator of the entire cosmos, where Israel has a role to play in the community of nations. A vision that learns from the best of traditional Jewish thinkers — Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and beyond, so that we may broaden our discourse in discussing complex contemporary issues. A vision that learns from the best of human wisdom. A vision that embraces the classical Jewish values of questioning, critical-mindedness, and diversity. A vision that demands that Jewish communal institutions be faithful to halakhah, while incorporating all Jews, regardless of background or level of observance. A vision entirely true to the axioms of Judaism, while being humble enough to recognize that the rest of humanity may pursue its own religious worldviews.

For over half of a century, Rabbi Marc D. Angel has taught that we can realize this vision. After a long and distinguished career as Rabbi at Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, he founded the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals in 2007 to promote his religious worldview to a much wider audience.

All but one of the essays in this volume have been published previously in various books and journals. This collection reflects many of Rabbi Angel’s “greatest hits” in representing his grand religious worldview, his Sephardic role models, and the central tenets of the ideology that animate us at the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

Jewish diversity is celebrated by Jewish tradition, which mandates the blessing Barukh Hakham HaRazim, the one who understands the root and inner thoughts of each individual, upon seeing throngs of Jews (Berakhot 58a). In contrast, the Talmud ascribes forced societal tyranny and conformity to the wicked City of Sodom, which used the notorious Procrustean bed on its visitors to ensure conformity (Sanhedrin 109b).

Teaching Sephardic thinkers, customs, and history to all Jews is vital on many levels. Halakhic decisors must consider the learned opinions of both Sephardic and Ashkenazic responsa before reaching conclusions on today's complex halakhic questions. Educators must be informed of Sephardic traditions and convey them as part of the wholeness of the Jewish people. Rabbis and teachers cannot be expected to know every custom or legal opinion throughout Jewish tradition, but certainly can be held to the standard of teaching an openness to diversity and willingness to learn new ideas and customs. On the negative side, Rabbi Angel cites several painful personal experiences from when he was a student, where several rabbis and teachers negated the validity of long-standing Sephardic practices and traditions.

When people shut down other valid opinions, Judaism itself is harmed and the Jewish community suffers. Overly dogmatic, authoritarian, or superstitious worldviews likewise compromise the grand religious tradition of the Torah which instills a pursuit of truth, embraces debate, teaches openness, critical-mindedness, and humility, and grows closer to God through arguments for the sake of Heaven.
Many of Rabbi Angel's articles were previously published in our own journal, *Conversations,* or in other publications largely of the Orthodox world. However, his reach extends far beyond that. One essay, entitled "Sephardim, Sephardism, and Jewish Peoplehood," was published in a collection of essays by the Central Conference of American Rabbis of the Reform Movement. Rabbi Angel expresses the need for all Jews to highlight the strengths of their respective communities and come together under the Sephardic communal model where institutions are committed to halakhah while people represent the range of observances. He even dares to dream that

The day will surely come when all Jews — of whatever background — will come to view each other as "us" — as one people with a shared history and shared destiny…I think that not only will ethnic divisions become increasingly irrelevant, but the division of Jews into religious "streams" will also decline. A century from now, I don't think it will be important for Jews to identify as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Renewal or any other subdivision (16).

Another essay, entitled "Theological Unity," is based on the remarks of Rabbi Angel at a conference at the United Nations on "Religious Pluralism and Tolerance" under the sponsorship of the Kingdom of Bahrain. We are part of one humanity, all created in God's Image, who have much to learn and appreciate from one another.

Through over 53 years in the rabbinate, Rabbi Angel has consistently advocated these principles and has articulated models of how the entire Jewish community can benefit from this worldview. This new collection of essays is a wonderful entry point into Rabbi Angel's vision — and with that an entry point into several of the great luminaries and ideas that Judaism ever has produced.

We thank all of our members and supporters at the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, for helping us promote and realize this vision in schools and communities worldwide.

* Professor, Yeshiva University and National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Son of Rabbi Marc Angel.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/book-review-sephardim-sephardism-and-jewish-peoplehood

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Vayishlach -- Gid Hanoshe and Levoya

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Yakov won. In a variety of encounters that seemed to be "no win" encounters, Yakov persevered and emerged the winner. In the delicate encounter when he stepped in for Esav to obtain the Brachos, he successfully obtained his father's blessings. When Esav threatened to kill him, he slipped out to safety. Dealing with Lavan, Yakov had to negotiate to obtain Rochel, and what a negotiation it was! After 14 years of dedicated work, he finally fulfilled Lavan's requirements to transfer his daughters from his house to the house of Yakov. But in this week's Parsha Yakov has an encounter which takes a toll.

Yakov encountered the angel of Esav, and they wrestled. The description of the Torah is that of a physical engagement. The word “Vayeiovek” comes from “Ovok,” the dirt that gets kicked up during a wrestling encounter. Surely, however, whatever wrestling there was also had spiritual overtones. Which would be the inheritor of the family legacy? Was Yakov truly as righteous as was claimed, compared to Esav the wicked? All of this was included in their engagement. Although Yakov won, Yakov was injured.

The Torah records on the one hand that Yakov was the victor, and the angel needed to ask Yakov permission to leave. Only after the angel acknowledged Yakov as worthy of the Brachos and as the successor of the family legacy, did Yakov give him permission to leave. After that acknowledgment, the angel was given permission to join the angels to sing praise to Hashem. On the other hand, the encounter took its toll and Yakov emerges, limping.

The Torah declares, “Therefore the children of Israel do not eat the Gid Hanoshe, the part of an animal that corresponds to Yakov’s injury.” Somehow the injury which Yakov sustained is so memorable that the Jewish people must — for all time — refrain from eating a part of an animal, an important consideration in the laws of Kashrus.

The Chizkuni commentary explains that Yakov’s children should never have left their elderly father alone at night, vulnerable to attack. Fortunately, Yakov survived; he even won the battle singlehandedly. But his children never should have left him alone. And so, a family custom was instituted, never to leave a traveler alone without reasonable escort. This is the observance that Yakov did when he sent Yosef on his fateful trip which ended up with Yosef in Mitzrayim. It is the observance that Yosef used to affirm his identity. Yosef’s message to Yakov, when he wants to prove his identity is, “The last Mitzva we discussed was about accompanying the traveler on his route.” It is an act of showing interest in the traveler’s welfare which emboldens the traveler and protects him. It is an act that Yosef remembered years later, an act that undoubtedly enabled him to feel strong and connected to the family legacy even during his difficult episodes in Mitzrayim. And it is an act which Yosef reciprocates by sending wagons for his father to provide for him for his travel to Mitzrayim.

This incident is memorialized forever in the observance of the Gid Hanoshe kashrus requirement. There is a part of the animal which corresponds to Yakov’s injury that we do not eat. On some level, Yakov’s children were seen responsible for that injury. They should have stayed with their elderly father and protected him. This incident is also the source for our diligent observance of “Accompaniment” or “Escort,” known in Hebrew as “Levoyo.” When a traveler leaves our home, we accompany him or her with care, bidding them well on their journey. We might even say, “Please call when you get to your destination,” indicating that they remain on our minds; we are concerned with their welfare.

Interestingly, the Jewish funeral is known as a “Levaya,” because it follows the same theme. Not only are we eulogizing the deceased, to praise them and learn from their good deeds. Most importantly, we are accompanying them and providing escort as we bid them well on their greatest journey, as they step from this world to the eternal.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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

Vayishlach – Don’t Forget the Masses

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

We are very well aware of the importance of gratitude and appreciating the kindness that people show us. There is a Medrash in this week’s parsha which teaches that appreciating the individual is not always enough. We must also appreciate the community within which the kindness was done.

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov parted ways with Eisav he arrived whole and unharmed in Shechem and stayed there for a time. The Torah uses an unusual phrase when describing Yaakov’s settling in Shechem saying, “and he camped on the face of the city.” (Berieshis 33:18) In one explanation, the Medrash explains that the word “and he camped” (ויחן) can

also mean “and he was gracious.” The Torah is telling us that Yaakov was gracious to the city of Shechem and set up shops to sell merchandise to the city at a good price. The Medrash learns from here that one must provide goodness to a place which he has benefit from.

The Medrash continues and shares that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazer learned this lesson from Yaakov. When the Romans had decreed to kill them, they hid in a cave for thirteen years. During that time their bodies developed sores from malnutrition. After the decree was annulled, they went to Teveriah and bathed in the bathhouses at the hot springs there to cure themselves. Rabbi Elazar suggested to his father that should purify Teveriah in return for the great benefit they had received. (There were areas in Teveriah where people had been buried, but no one knew where the graves were. Kohanim and anyone else who wished to remain ritually pure would have to circumvent many areas of the city.) Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai agreed with his son, saying that they should do so, just as Yaakov had done good for Shechem. They then proceeded to locate all of the graves and move them to proper burial grounds. (Bereishis Rabbah 79:6)

We can learn powerful lessons in gratitude from both stories. Yaakov arrived in Shechem as a wealthy individual. The Torah tells us that he purchased the land where he was staying, and presumably he participated in the commerce of the city. Having such a wealthy household move into the neighborhood must certainly have benefitted the community. Yet, Yaakov felt that natural benefit wasn’t enough. He wanted to give something actively to show his gratitude. He, therefore, chose to take a loss and sell merchandise at a lower rate to the town. Although, he had simply moved in and they did not specifically go out of their way for him, he had still benefitted from their town. He felt the need to actively express his gratitude.

From Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son we can learn another lesson in gratitude. Unlike Yaakov, they were not moving into Teveriah. They were simply coming as customers to use the bathhouses at the hot springs of Teveriah. They presumably had paid for their use of the bathhouse. However, for them this was far more than a regular bath. They had sores all over their bodies and had been healed by the famed hot springs of Teveriah. Recognizing the extent of their personal benefit, they felt the need to express gratitude to the city for opening up their bathhouses to the public. They, therefore, invested themselves in locating and removing graves, not resting until the city was declared ritually pure, to show how much they appreciated Teveriah.

The Maharz”u adds another layer to the lessons from these stories. He explains that the phrase “and he camped on the face of the city” mean that Yaakov did not live in Shechem proper. Rather, he lived outside the border looking in at the city. He notes that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son also did not enter the city proper, but only went to the hot springs. In both cases, they still felt the need to show gratitude to the local town. When one benefits from an area, one must show gratitude to those who live nearby.

We first must take stock and appreciate the individual acts of kindness people have done to us. But we can’t stop there. We must also remember the community which made that kindness possible.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Because I had to post my Devrei Torah early this week, I could not wait for Rabbi Singer’s new Dvar Torah. As a place saver, I am using a message from his archives.

Dinah Alert

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *****

The girl, tossing and turning in her bed, unable to fall asleep, hears her dad’s footsteps as he enters the house. She knows he is tired after a long day at work, yet she calls out to him:

- Dad, can you read me a bedtime story?

- But honey, you are a big girl now, freshman year; I haven’t told you a story in decades.

- I know, but still, I hear so many terrible things and I need some comfort, please!

- Ok, I understand. How about reading from the Parasha? Maybe you will learn how to face difficult situations if we examine how Jacob prepares for the encounter with his wicked older brother Esau, who wants to take revenge for being robbed of his blessing)Gen. 32:23(:

> *Jacob took his two wives, two maid-servants, and eleven children…*

- Eleven, wait a second, Dad, didn't he have twelve? Who is missing?

- Let's see. Rashi says that Dinah was missing.

- Oh Dad, come on, don't tell me that just because she is a woman she is not counted. This discrimination is everywhere!

- No dear, that's not it. Let me show you what Rashi says:

> *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.*

- That's even worse, Dad. You would have never locked me in box, why, not even in my room, just so someone wouldn't see me, this is so wrong!

- You are right, honey. As a matter of fact, Rashi says that Jacob was punished for it.

- Jacob? Our patriarch? The one who upholds truth and never errs? Rashi really says he was punished? That's scary. What was his punishment?

- Let's continue reading, dear:

> *Because Jacob prevented his brother from meeting her, not seeing that she could have caused Esau to repent, he was punished and she fell in the hand of Shechem!*

- I remember Shechem vaguely, Dad, remind me, what was the story?
- You know what? It's really late… How about we call it a night and continue tomorrow, maybe with a different Parasha?

- No! I want to know who Shechem is and what happened.

- Ok)sighs(. Shechem was the son of the city's governor, he saw Dinah and liked her so he kidnapped her, violated and tortured her, and then "fell in love with her")mockingly(and tried to convince her to marry him. There, I said it. Are you happy now?

- No. Of course I'm not. That's terrible. Why would men think that they have the right to treat women like that just because they are in a position of power? Wait, please tell me that no one blamed Dinah for what happened, saying that she was provocative or out in the streets or something, because then they would be blaming the victim. They didn't say that, right?

-)The father remains silent for a while, then sighs(I don't know what they said, or I knew and I forgot.

- Well, try to remember. It's really important to me!

-)reluctantly(Well, the Midrash does say that it was her fault:

> *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.*

- Unbelievable, Dad, nothing has changed. My campus' police says the same thing to rape victims, and as a result they are afraid to report it.

- Yes, it is horrible.

- Were they really learning in Beit HaMidrash?

- No, the Torah states clearly that they were in the field at the time.

- Ugh! What happened next?

- Jacob's children tricked the citizens of Shechem into believing they would let their leader marry Dinah if they all circumcise, but then they attacked them and slayed all the men, captured all children and women, looted the city, and freed their sister. As a result Jacob was afraid that he would be attacked by the neighboring tribes but they all feared his children and he emerged unscathed.

-)Seething(Unscathed? Her dad's punishment for hiding her is that SHE is traumatized for life *and* blamed for being assaulted. Not only that, the result of this "punishment" is that a whole city is destroyed, and women and children are taken captives, yet he is unscathed? Where is Divine Justice?

-)The father, now carried away and a little agitated himself(But wait, that's not all. The rabbis said that Shechem became a place destined for disaster)Sanhedrin 102:1(: It was in Shechem that the brothers sold Joseph to slavery, it was in Shechem that Abimelech son of Gideon started a rebellion which led to the murder of his 70 brothers and to a bloody war afterwards, and it was in Shechem that the kingdom of David was split… all as a result of hiding Dinah from Esau)his voice trails off, he sees that his daughter, her face twisted in anger, finally fell asleep; he turns off the light and tiptoes out of the room(.

Let us, the readers, also tiptoe out of the room and contemplate the Midrashic interpretation of Dinah's story, as mentioned by Rashi and retold here. Obviously the Midrash about the Rapunzelesque Dinah, locked in a box, was not meant to be taken literally, because the phrase about the eleven children is mentioned regarding the crossing of the Jabbok River. Jacob did not leave Dinah on the other side, so even though the reference to eleven children does indeed exclude Dinah, it is not because she in a box but rather because she is a female. Had the number eleven been mentioned in the actual encounter between Jacob and Esau, the story of Dinah in the box might have been plausible, but now that it is mentioned at the crossing of the river it is unacceptable, so we must search for a message here.

The Midrash is using Jacob as a metaphor to parents who deny their children choices because they fear for them, but their attempts lead to disastrous consequences. Jacob is described as a father so protective that he limits his daughter's knowledge and worldview. He could have spoken to her and asked her to hide or disguise herself in a way which would not attract Esau's attention, or better yet, promise her that he and his children would fight for her. If Esau represents the lure of foreign culture, then the parents should provide their children with the means to deal with that culture and appreciate their own, instead of locking them away.

The overprotective parents want to shelter their kids forever. They lock them in a physical or conceptual trunk and take the keys with them, leaving no exit way. But this method is temporary: sooner or later, they will be exposed to the real world, they will break out, just like Dinah.

When children are not properly educated and prepared to deal with the adversities of life, a trail of blood, animosity, and divisiveness follows. The ensuing mayhem can be traced to the initial moment of concealing knowledge. That's what the rabbis meant when they pointed out that the city of Shechem became an epicenter for wars and dispute, splitting the brothers from Joseph, Abimelech from Gideon, and the House of David from the Kingdom of Israel.

Let me give three examples of the dangers of overprotectiveness: in the personal, global, and religious realm.

Personal: A couple of weeks ago I hid from my son news about a family tragedy which had happened in Israel. I had been waiting for the right moment, thinking he would weather it better if he heard it after a month or so had passed. He ended up hearing it from one of the teachers, thus suffering a greater shock than the one I was trying to spare him from.

Global: Experts trace the terrible polio epidemic to extreme cleanliness practices in the Western world, which prevented children from exposure to agents of the disease at an early age. As a result, those children did not develop an immune system to protect them from the epidemic. By sheltering from them from the tiniest grain of dust, the parents unknowingly made their children susceptible to the full onslaught of the disease)See Naomi Rogers' book: *Dirt and Disease*(.

Finally, on the religious level, the message is to all Orthodox parents who want to censor what their kids read, hear, or know, a practice sometimes enforced by schools or tightknit communities. It is a cautionary tale to all overprotective parents, educators, and religious leaders: locking people away, or locking the world away from them, could lead to disastrous results. Some religious leaders believe that in order to protect the young generation from the influences of the evils of technology, science, and knowledge, they must shut them in a box. They should pay heed to the case of Yohanan Lowen, a Quebecoise who is suing his ministry of education for failing to supervise the private Hassidic school system he attended, from which he graduated with mastery of Yiddish and Aramaic, but abysmal English, French, and math skills. He is one of thousands who are denied basic secular knowledge and language skills as a measure of protection, but who in turn become disillusioned by Judaism and alienated from their communities.

The world today is more enticing, interesting, interconnected, fast, and yes, more dangerous than ever. The only way to prepare ourselves, and our children, to face our changing world is to step out of the box and embrace what it has to offer. If we do so, not only will we survive it, we will prosper and excel, all the while enhancing our Judaism and eternal values. And as the Midrash hints, in the process we will inspire the whole world, making it a better, friendlier place for all mankind.

Shabbat Shalom

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

Who's Fighting in YOUR Corner?

By Joel Dinin *

In this week's parsha, Vayishlach, Yaakov is scared, afraid. He is vulnerable. He is running from his brother Esav, even though he is the one who brought this situation on himself.

Yaakov has sent his family away, not sure that he is ever going to see them again. In the night, in the darkness, he faces off against an ish, perhaps a supernatural being. Many rabbinic commentaries focus on what this being is. Is it an angel, is it Esav's guardian angel as the midrash suggests? Perhaps it is a demon? Rambam suggests that maybe it is a metaphor for his own internal demons and struggles.

Regardless, the thing that Yaakov cares about most of all is not whether he can win this battle. Rather it is that when he fights and faces any challenge, he is not doing it alone. If we go back to the incident where Yaakov first comes into contact with God, in his dream with the sulam, he adds to his covenant inherited from his grandfather. He requests that God always be with him and protect him, whether he is on the run from his brother, facing off with his uncle or, in our parsha, wrestling with this mysterious ish)Gen 28:12-22(.

All of these struggles for Yaakov happen at the same time of day, night. The dream of the ladder is at night, he wrestles the ish at night, and when Yaakov finds out that his son Yosef is still alive, God comes to him in the night as Yaakov wrestles with his fear of leaving his home to travel to Egypt. He knows that there is darkness waiting there. God comes to him and says "Yaakov, Yaakov, do not be afraid, I will go with you")Gen 46:2-4(. Yet again in our parsha, God, through this mysterious messenger, affirms that Yaakov is not alone, albeit in a clever and non obvious way. When they have reached a stalemate this being asks "What is your name?" Yaakov tells him his name and he says "No. It is not your name anymore, your name is now Yisrael." Why? "Because you have struggled with — עִם — Gods")Gen 32: 29(.

Rather than read עִם)literally "with"(as being "against" this being)i.e. the two brothers fought with/against each other(, we can read עִם as "together." For example, I went to the store with my friend. So when Yaakov is fighting against this being,

this ish, he is not alone. Who is with him? God, just like he asked. When Yaakov was in one of the greatest struggles of his life, what was the realization he had afterwards? No matter what he was going through, no matter how angry or vulnerable or scared, God promised that He will always be with him.

A great rabbi, the Meshech Chochma, Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in nineteenth century Lithuania, emphasized that every time God comes to Yaakov, it is always at night. Perhaps the message there, says the Meshech Chochma, is that God is coming at night to remind Yaakov that just as God is with Yaakov in the darkness of night, so too will God be with him in the darkest moments of his life. That is the strength of their new covenantal relationship. Knowing that no matter what happens, the people we care about will be עם/with us in our darkest and most vulnerable moments.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Rabbi, Lake Park Synagogue, Milwaukee, Semikha from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah)2015(.

https://library.yctorah.org/2022/12/truth-and-oneness/

Shavuon Vayishlach

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Let's give homeless people the recognition they deserve.

I'm not saying we should encourage people to be homeless. I'm also not lumping all of them into one category. Some are homeless because of illness. Some because they don't have any money. And I of course know that they all would not choose to live this way. I hope all of them find the safe and secure homes that they want.

All I'm saying is that it takes real strength to survive on the streets, to just lay out a blanket and not know where they will be the next day, to surrender and be in the unpredictable chaotic flow of life without insulated walls, microwaves, and adjustable thermostats. Anyone who does that and still keeps living, moving, and walking this earth, has developed a superpower that this pampered Long Island Jewish boy knows nothing of.

I have the same admiration for nomads. People who just wander from town to town, country to country with just a little food in their packs and a whole lot of attitudes that say, "I will face the uncertainty of life everyday and not try to hide from it. I don't know what will happen or where I will be and I'm more than happy with that."

Could I do this if I had to? Could you do it?

Probably we could because Jews have a long historical record of having to move from place to place and constantly adapting to their new environments never knowing where they could end up. Maybe that's the secret of our strength? Is that the strength of a Holocaust survivor who went through that hellish uncertainty and came out the other end?

If I ever became a nomad, I would probably start relating better to Abraham, who left everything and wandered off to Israel.

And then I would go to Jacob, who put this quality front and center in his message to his brother Esav when he was coming to kill him. Jacob told him, "I lived with Laban for 20 years. I wandered over there with nothing and came out the other end. Do you think you can possibly win against someone who can still live in the face of losing everything? Someone who has the strength to wander in the sea of unpredictability?"

So while I have no plans to lay out a blanket and sleep on K-road, maybe a way to start is to go on different trails, multi day tramps, or sleep in the bush for a few weeks.

Or maybe I'll give a little extra to the next homeless person I see. With all that they don't have they do have something worth admiring.

P.S. I had the privilege of seeing this quality when I met local adventurer John Gluckman this week. He took me on another Piha hike showing me trails that I've never seen before. He climbed both Kilimanjaro, Everest, and even went to

the South Pole. To even attempt such feats you have to have this quality. You can prepare as much as you want but nothing is certain at 8,850 meters.

P.P.S. I'm not the only rabbi to muse on this topic. A colleague of mine from Atlanta named Rabbi Ilan Feldman did an experiment where he flew to a random place with no money to see whether he could survive for a week.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rabbi Rube recently moved from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he is Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation.

Rav Kook Torah
Vayishlach: Jacob's Journey to Holistic Living

Having survived the trickery of uncle Laban and the enmity of his brother Esau, Jacob finally returned to his homeland.

"Jacob arrived whole (shalem) to the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan" (Gen. 33:18)

In what way was Jacob shalem? The Talmud explains that he was *"whole in body, whole in money, whole in his Torah knowledge"* (Shabbat 33b).

According to the medieval commentator Rashi, these three areas are directly related to Jacob's previous ordeals. Physically — Jacob healed from the lameness the stranger had afflicted upon him in their mysterious struggle at Peniel. Financially — he did not lack money, despite the expensive gifts he had offered his brother Esau. And spiritually — he had not forgotten his Torah learning, despite the long years of intensive labor at Laban's house.

Jacob's Holistic Perspective

In truth, Jacob's wholeness was not to be found in any quantitative accomplishments. It could not be measured by how fast he could run, by the number of sheep he owned, or by the number of scholarly discussions he had memorized. Rather, Jacob's wholeness was in his holistic approach toward these diverse spheres.

People think that the pursuit of excellence in one field entails neglecting other areas. A person who seeks perfect health and physical strength will come to the realization that one needs money to attain this goal. But the pursuit of wealth can become such an all-absorbing goal that it may come at the expense of one's original objective – good health. Ironically, the anxiety to acquire wealth can end up ruining one's health.

It is clear that both good health and financial security help provide the quietude needed to refine character traits and attain intellectual accomplishments. However, these different areas, instead of complementing one another, often compete with each other. We suffer spiritually when our desire to strengthen the body and cultivate social living (which requires certain financial means) are not understood in their overall context.

The perfection of Jacob — the ish tam, *"the complete man"* (Gen. 25:27) — was in his ability to live in a way that no single pursuit of excellence, whether spiritual or material, needed to contradict or detract from other personal goals. On the contrary, when they are understood properly, each aim complements and strengthens the others.

This is the profound message of the Talmudic statement. Jacob was whole in body and wealth, and from both of these together, he found the inner resources to be whole in Torah. Jacob exemplified the trait of emet, truth — *"Give truth to Jacob"* (Micah 7:20). He demonstrated how, in their inner depths, all accomplishments are united together; all reflect different facets of the same inner truth.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 73-74. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, p. 209.)

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYISHLACH_65.htm

The Struggle of Faith (Vayishlach 5778)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then there were his transactions: the way he purchased Esau's birthright, took his blessing, and eventually outwitted his wily father-in-law Laban. In each case he seems to have won, but then his situation deteriorates. The episode in which, at Rebecca's request, he dressed up as Esau and deceived his blind father, forced him to leave home and – as we see in this week's parsha – left him traumatised with fear at the prospect of meeting Esau again. Almost the same deception he practised on Isaac, he suffered at the hand of Laban. Even his escape from Laban might have ended in tragedy, had God not warned him not to harm Jacob)Hence the passage in the Haggadah: "Go and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to our father Jacob"(. His life as portrayed in the Torah seems to be a constant series of escapes from one trouble to the next.

So who and what was Jacob?

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

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

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

It seems to me that the Torah is delivering, here as elsewhere, an extraordinary message: that if we can truly relate to God as God, in His full transcendence and majesty, then we can relate to humans as humans in all their fallibility. In every

other religious literature known to me, heroes are idealised until they no longer seem human at all. They are Divine or semi-Divine, perfect and infallible. There is no one like that in the whole of Tanach. Even Noah (righteous, perfect) is seen drunk and dishevelled. Even Job (blameless, upright) eventually curses his fate. The man who, more than any other, epitomises fallibility is Jacob.

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

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

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

That is Jacob.

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Bereishit Rabbah 63:6.

]2[Bereishit Rabbah 63:10.

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

]4[Bereishit Rabbah 65:17.

]5[Bereishit Rabbah 63:13.

]6[Bereishit Rabbah 65:8.

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

]8[Baba Batra 16b.

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

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

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

]12[Mishnah, Avot 5:23.

Life Changing Idea #8:

If you find yourself struggling with faith, you are in the company of Jacob-who-became-Israel,
the father-in-faith of us all.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayishlach/struggle-of-faith/ 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.

Why the Jews?

By Yossy Goldman * © Chabad 2022

In the 1930s, a Nazi confronted a Jew: "You Jews are the cause of all the world's problems!"

"Yes," says the Jew. "You're right. And the bicycle riders."

"The bicycle riders? Why the bicycle riders?" asked the Nazi.

"Why the Jews?!" responded the Jew.

Is Antisemitism logical? Of course not.

Over the centuries, numerous "reasons" have been advanced to explain the phenomenon of Antisemitism.
We "killed" their god, poisoned their wells, killed their children to use their blood for our Pesach wine or matzahs … the list of preposterous accusations goes on and on.

Are any of those fictitious so-called reasons really reasons? No. We know they were all just excuses.

A generation ago it was *"Jews, get out of Europe. Go back to Palestine!"*

Today, it's *"Jews, get out of Palestine. Go back to Europe!"*

Less than 80 years since the Holocaust, Antisemitism has become almost acceptable around the world.

So is there actually a "reason" for Antisemitism?

Rabbi Menachem Ziemba was one of the leading rabbis in pre-war Poland. He died in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he refused to abandon his flock. But some of his writings survived.

Let me share with you one of his Torah teachings, because it goes to the very core of the question of Antisemitism and whether there is, in fact, any reason for it.

This week's Torah reading tells the dramatic tale of two long-lost brothers, Jacob and Esau, who are about to meet after 20 years of separation. Esau is still gunning for his twin brother, who he claims stole his birthright and his father's blessings. He has murder on his mind.

Jacob prepares with a three-pronged approach:

Diplomacy. *He sends Esau a huge gift to pacify him.*

Military strategy. *He prepares to battle if diplomacy fails.*

Prayer. *He prays to G d for deliverance.*

In the end, Esau sees his brother's generous gift)entire herds of livestock(, and he sees his family, and seems mollified and ready to make peace. Instead of killing Jacob, he embraces him, and they have an emotional reunion:

And Esau ran towards his brother, and he embraced him. He fell on Jacob's neck, and he kissed him, and they wept]Genesis 33:4[.

Now, in the Torah scroll, there are dots written above the Hebrew word vayishakeihu, "and he kissed him," indicating that not all is as it appears to be. It is like an asterisk — a footnote is required to explain and qualify what is really meant.

Rashi offers two explanations:

> *"He didn't really kiss him with all his heart." It was more like a photo op. Like politicians running for election and kissing babies in the streets.*
>
> Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says, *"It is an established law)halacha(that Esau hates Jacob. But at that moment he was moved to mercy, and he did in fact embrace him with a full heart."*

Let's take a closer look at the language Rabbi Shimon uses. *"It is a halacha that Esau hates Jacob."* Why the word halacha? A rule or a principle, perhaps. But a law? Surely it seems out of place here!

This is what Rabbi Menachem Ziemba, powerful scholar and a holy martyr of the Warsaw Ghetto, had to say:

> *People don't always agree with or understand a halacha, a law. Do you understand and agree with every legal judgment handed down by the court? Of course not. But a law is a law and a fact of life. There's simply nothing we can do about it.*
>
> *Likewise,* says Rabbi Ziemba, *is the halacha of Esau hating Jacob. Antisemitism is a halacha, a law, a fact of life! We don't understand it. It makes no sense.*
> *Jews are nice people. We do so much for society, beyond our own communities. We are constantly contributing to the world around us, and the world still doesn't like us. It hurts. But it is what it is.*
>
> And to show just how illogical it is, he went on to say from his own personal experience: *"In Poland they hate the Jews because they are poor. Scum of the earth. In Germany they hate the Jews because they are rich, taking their money. In Russia they hate the Jews because they are bourgeois Capitalists. And in America they hate the Jews because they are Communists!"*
>
> *In other words, we can't win.*

In our times, the Antisemites say there was no Holocaust. And the very same people say Hitler didn't finish the job, he didn't kill enough Jews!

Is this rational? Logical? Does it make any sense at all? No! Because Antisemitism is an immutable fact of life, just like a halacha. We don't get it, but it is what it is.

And because there is no logical reason, there is no logical solution either.

So, my friends, I'm sorry to tell you that despite the best efforts of the ADL, or the Simon Weisenthal Center, or the State Department's Envoy on Antisemitism, Antisemitism is not going away.

But don't become disillusioned, and don't become depressed when you see Antisemitism is still here and growing at an alarming rate all over the world.

Because while there may not be any logical reason for Antisemitism, there certainly is a response. And what response should that be? To continue to live as proud, practicing Jews, here on a mission to bring positive change to the world. To be confident and knowledgeable Jews, who live as Jews and raise our children and grandchildren as Jews. As the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks kept reminding us: *"Non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism!"*

And certainly, we should all learn from the Rebbe, whose approach David Suissa describes as *"Pro-Semitism."* Be pro-Jewish and proactively Jewish. Do a mitzvah today that you may not have done yesterday. And if you need further motivation to do it, let Antisemitism be your motivation. Do it davka! To spite the Antisemites.

Jewish pride, Jewish defiance, Jewish continuity, will lead to nothing less than Jewish eternity.

* Founded the first Chabad House in South Africa)1976(. Rabbi of the Sydenham Shul since 1986; now Life Rabbi Emeritus. President of the South African Rabbinical Association**.**

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5728475/jewish/Why-the-Jews.htm]Emphasis added[

Vayishlach: Home Away from Home

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Home Away from Home

> *Jacob sends*)Vayishlach, "he sent," in Hebrew(*an entourage of angels to conciliate Esau. He instructed them as follows, "Thus must you say to my master, Esau, 'So said your servant, Jacob, "I sojourned with Laban. I have delayed my return until now."'*)Gen.32:5(

Jacob emphasized to Esau that he only "sojourned" with Laban, always considering himself a foreigner in Laban's milieu. Even while Jacob was immersed in his work for Laban, Laban's materialism was "foreign" and secondary to him; Jacob's "home" and focus remained the Torah and its commandments.

This awareness enabled him to faithfully observe the Torah's precepts in an environment hostile to holiness. Not only was he not distracted or deterred by the physical reality that surrounded him, he was able to imbue that very reality with holiness.

Similarly, by retaining our focus on our Divine mission while involved with the material aspects of life – and proudly emphasizing this perspective to those who do not yet share it – we can not only remain impervious to the world's materialistic draw but refine and elevate it, as well.

– from *Daily Wisdom #3*

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

Thursday**,** the 14th of Kislev, marked the wedding anniversary of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, and Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, blessed memory, in 1928. Chasidim celebrate this auspicious and joyous day for the blessings it brought to the Jewish people with the Rebbe's eventual unparalleled leadership.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 29, Issue 8 **Shabbat Parashat Vayishlach** **5783 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

No Longer Shall You Be Called Jacob

One fact about this week's parsha has long perplexed the commentators. After his wrestling match with the unnamed adversary, Jacob was told: "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings Divine and human, and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:29, JPS translation). Or "Your name will no longer be said to be Jacob, but Israel. You have become great (sar) before God and man. You have won." (Aryeh Kaplan translation).

This change of name takes place not once but twice. After the encounter with Esau, and the episode of Dina and Shechem, God told Jacob to go to Beth El. Then we read: "After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.' So He named him Israel" (Gen. 35:9-10).

Note, first, that this is not an adjustment of an existing name by the change or addition of a letter, as when God changed Abram's name to Abraham, or Sarai's to Sarah. It is an entirely new name, as if to signal that what it represents is a complete change of character. Second, as we have seen, the name change happened not once but twice. Third – and this is the puzzle of puzzles – having said twice that his name will no longer be Jacob, the Torah continues to call him Jacob. God Himself does so. So do we, every time we pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How so, when the Torah twice tells us that his name will no longer be Jacob?

Radak suggests that "your name will no longer be called Jacob" means, "your name will no longer only be called Jacob." You will have another name as well. This is ingenious, but hardly the plain sense of the verse. Sforno says, "In the Messianic Age, your name will no longer be called Jacob." This, too, is difficult. The future tense, as used in the Torah, means the near future, not the distant one, unless explicitly specified.

This is just one mystery among many when it comes to Jacob's character and his relationship with his brother Esau. So difficult is it to understand the stories about them that, to make sense of them, they have been overlaid in Jewish tradition with a thick layer of Midrash that makes Esau almost perfectly evil and Jacob almost perfectly righteous. There is a clear need for such Midrash, for educational purposes. Esau and Jacob, as portrayed in the Torah, are too nuanced and complex to be the subject of simple moral lessons for young minds. So Midrash gives us a world of black and white, as Maharatz Chajes explained.[1]

The biblical text itself, though, is far more subtle. It does not state that Esau is bad and Jacob is good. Rather, it shows that they are two different kinds of human being. The contrast between them is like the one made by Nietzsche between the Greek figures of Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo represents reason, logic, order, self-control; Dionysus stands for emotion, passion, nature, wildness and chaos. Apollonian cultures value restraint and modesty; Dionysian ones go for ostentation and excess. Jacob is Apollonian, Esau, Dionysiac.

Or it may be that Esau represents the Hunter, considered a hero in many ancient cultures, but not so in the Torah, which represents the agrarian and pastoral ethic of farmers and shepherds. With the transition from hunter-gatherer to farmer-and-herdsman, the Hunter is no longer a hero and instead is seen as a figure of violence, especially when combined, as in the case of Esau, with a mercurial temperament. It is not so much that Esau is bad and Jacob good, but that Esau represents the world that was, while Jacob represents, if sometimes tentatively and fearfully, a new world about to be brought into being, whose spirituality would be radically different, new and challenging.

The fact that Jacob and Esau were twins is fundamental. Their relationship is one of the classic cases of sibling rivalry.[2] Key to understanding their story is what Rene Girard called mimetic desire: the desire to have what someone else has, because they have it. Ultimately, this is the desire to be someone else.

That is what the name Jacob signifies. It is the name he acquired because he was born holding on to his brother Esau's heel. That was consistently his posture during the key events of his early life. He bought his brother's birthright. He wore his brother's clothes. At his mother's request, he took his brother's blessing. When asked by his father, "Who are you, my son?" He replied, "I am Esau, your firstborn."

Jacob was the man who wanted be Esau. Why so? Because Esau had one thing he did not have: his father's love. "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob."

All that changed in the great wrestling match between Jacob and the unknown stranger. Our Sages teach us that this stranger was an angel in disguise. After they fight, he tells Jacob that his name would now be Israel. The stated explanation of this name is: "for you have wrestled with God and with man and have prevailed." It also resonates with two other senses. Sar means "prince, royalty." Yashar means "upright." Both of these are in sharp contrast with the name "Jacob," one who "holds on to his brother's heel."

How then are we to understand what, first the stranger, then God, said to Jacob? Not as a statement, but as a request, a challenge, an invitation. Read it not as, "You will no longer be called Jacob but Israel." Instead read it as, "Let your name no longer be Jacob but Israel," meaning, "Act in such a way that this is what people call you." Be a prince. Be royalty. Be upright. Be yourself. Don't long to be someone else. This would turn out to be a challenge not just then but many times in the Jewish future.

Often, Jews have been content to be themselves. But from time to time, they have come into contact with a civilisation whose intellectual, cultural and even spiritual sophistication was undeniable. It made them feel awkward, inferior, like a villager who comes to a city for the first time. Jews lapsed into the condition of Jacob. They wanted to be someone else.

The first time we hear this is in the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: "You say, 'We want to be like the nations, like the peoples of the world, who serve wood and stone.' But what you have in mind will never happen" (Ez. 20:32). In Babylon, the people encountered an impressive empire whose military and economic success contrasted radically with their own condition of exile and defeat. Some wanted to stop being Jews and become someone else, anyone else.

We hear it again in the days of the Greeks. Some Jews became Hellenised. We recognise that in the names of High Priests like Jason and Menelaus. The battle against this is the story of Chanukah. Something similar happened in the days of Rome. Josephus was one of those who went over to the other side, though he remained a defender of Judaism.

It happened again during the Enlightenment. Jews fell in love with European culture. With philosophers like Kant and Hegel, poets like Goethe and Schiller, and musicians like Mozart and Beethoven. Some were able to

integrate this with faithfulness to Judaism as creed and deed – figures like Rabbis Samson Raphael Hirsch and Nehemiah Nobel. But some did not. They left the fold. They changed their names. They hid their identity. None of us is entitled to be critical of what they did. The combined impact of intellectual challenge, social change, and incendiary antisemitism, was immense. Yet this was a Jacob response, not an Israel one.

It is happening today in large swathes of the Jewish world. Jews have overachieved. Judaism, with some notable exceptions, has underachieved. There are Jews at or near the top of almost every field of human endeavour today, but all too many have either abandoned their religious heritage or are indifferent to it. For them, being Jewish is a slender ethnicity, too thin to be transmitted to the future, too hollow to inspire.

We have waited so long for what we have today and have never had simultaneously before in all of Jewish history: independence and sovereignty in the state of Israel, freedom and equality in the diaspora. Almost everything that a hundred generations of our ancestors prayed for has been given to us. Will we really (in Lin-Manuel Miranda's phrase) throw away our shot? Will we be Israel? Or will we show, to our shame, that we have not yet outlived the name of Jacob, the person who wanted to be someone else? Jacob was often fearful because he was not sure who he wanted to be, himself or his brother. That is why God said to him, "Let your name not be Jacob but Israel." When you are afraid, and unsure of who you are, you are Jacob. When you are strong in yourself, as yourself, you are Israel.

The fact that the Torah and tradition still use the word Jacob, not just Israel, tells us that the problem has not disappeared. Jacob seems to have wrestled with this throughout his life, and we still do today. It takes courage to be different, a minority, countercultural. It's easy to live for the moment like Esau, or to "be like the peoples of the world" as Ezekiel said.

I believe the challenge issued by the angel still echoes today. Are we Jacob, embarrassed by who we are? Or are we Israel, with the courage to stand upright and walk tall in the path of faith?

[1] In the Mavo ha-Aggadot printed at the beginning of Eyn Yaakov.

[2] To read more on the themes of sibling rivalry in the Bible, see Jonathan Sacks, Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence, 2015.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Unheralded Heroes

You don't hear much about them, and sometimes you don't even know their names. But they are the true heroes and heroines in our lives and in our times.

As I hope to demonstrate, it was also true in biblical times that very important characters in the narrative are hardly mentioned, perhaps only hinted at.

I first became interested in this phenomenon shortly after the events of September 11, 2001. I was listening to one of my favorite radio talk shows while driving. The guest was a professor of sociology who was insisting, much to the chagrin of the talk show host, that the firemen who lost their lives saving others at the World Trade Center were not true heroes.

He maintained that a true hero does something very unusual, something neither he nor anyone else typically does. These firemen, he argued, were simply doing their duty. They showed up to work in the morning, went through their usual routine, and responded to this assignment as part of their job.

The announcer was horrified by this professor's opinion and pronounced it a typical example of "academic snobbery". My gut reaction was identical to the announcer's horror. Of course, those firemen were heroes, great heroes. And they were heroes by virtue of the very fact that they carried out their life-saving duties with such astounding courage.

Continuing to drive, I began to reflect upon the question of the definition of "hero" in the Jewish tradition. From the Jewish perspective, is a hero some kind of Superman who behaves in some extraordinarily dramatic fashion? Or is the true hero the person who, day in and day out, does what is expected of him in a faithful and diligent manner, humbly and anonymously, never making the headlines?

My research soon convinced me that the latter definition was the accurate one from a Jewish point of view. He or she, who dutifully and loyally does his or her job, be it in the mundane or the sacred sphere, is the true hero or heroine.

As an example, let me introduce you to a personage who is mentioned in this week's Torah portion, Vayishlach, although even if you read the portion carefully, you may not have noticed her name. Her name was Deborah.

Open your Bible with me and turn to Genesis 35:8. Jacob, his wives, and their many children have returned to the Land of Israel. They have reached Bethel, Jacob's original starting point. Jacob erected an altar there.

And then we read: "And Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died and she was buried... under the oak, and it was called the 'Oak of Tears.'"

Who was this woman, never mentioned by name before? Why did her demise evoke such grief? Why is she important enough to "make it" into the biblical narrative?

Now turn back a few pages with me to Genesis 24:59. Here we read that when Rebecca left her birthplace to journey to the Land of Israel and marry Isaac, she took her nurse with her. A nurse with no name, whom we know nothing about until we learn of her death in this week's Torah portion.

Our rabbis speculate that nurse Deborah was a major part of the entire epic drama of Rebecca's life with Isaac and Jacob. They suggest that she was the one sent by Rebecca to retrieve Jacob from his long exile.

Our rabbis tell us, too, that she was nurse to Rebecca's many grandchildren who shed those many tears under the old oak tree.

Jewish mystical sources even aver that nurse Deborah was reincarnated into the much later Deborah, who was a Judge and Prophet in Israel!

Deborah is an excellent example of someone who "just did her job", regularly and consistently, and who had an impact upon three generations of major biblical characters, including a matriarch, two patriarchs, and the forbearers of the 12 tribes.

She exemplifies the type of person that the Talmud refers to when it asks: "Who deserves a place in the world to come," and answers: "He who slips in silently and slips out silently."

Rabbi Akiva, one of the great Jewish heroes and sages, taught us a similar lesson. At a critical juncture in his life, he was inspired by the fact that a stone is impenetrable by ordinary means. But when a gentle waterfall drips upon stone for hundreds of years, it succeeds in boring a hole in stone.

Quiet consistency and persistence are the true ingredients of heroism and strength.

In the Bible, as in all of life, there are major figures who work behind the scenes but who are indispensable to the important events of history. They are unheralded and often anonymous. They are real heroes too.

In the words of the poet John Keats, they are the children "of silence and slow time". They help us see the truth in that poet's exquisite words:

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter."

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

Sincerely Yours

Hypocrisy is rightly a despised trait, and the word "hypocrite" a harsh and contemptuous epithet reserved for vile people. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that the popular condemnation of insincerity is not always

matched by a correspondingly universal abstention from this vice in the affairs of man in society. Every day many thousands of letters are written in which the writers employ varied devices ranging from subtle deviousness to outright deceit, and compound their crime by signing the letters, "I am, sincerely yours…."

What is a hypocrite? According to the dictionary definition it is one who pretends to be something other than what he really is (usually one who pretends to be better than he really is) or to feel what he does not really feel. Hypocrisy is feigning, acting a part, pretending. Perhaps a better word is the Hebrew tzeviut – literally: coloring, dyeing. Hypocrisy, then, is giving an impression which does not correspond with the facts. It is the incommensurateness of the inner fact and the outer appearance.

Our prophets stormed against hypocrisy. Our rabbis thundered against it. The Talmud quotes King Yannai advising his wife, Queen Salome, "Do not be afraid either of the Pharisees or of those who are not Pharisees; fear only those hypocrites who act like Pharisees, who behave like Zimri (an ignoble person), and who expect to be rewarded like Pinchas (the saintly priest of Israel)" (Sota 22b).

In that case, we are presented with a problem by the sidra. We read, in very few lines, that Reuben sinned with Bilha, the concubine of his father Jacob. If the Bible said so, it is the truth. Yet the Talmud (Megilla 25b) advises us that the story of Reuben should be read but not translated. It was once the custom that the Torah would be read as we read it, and then one person would be assigned to translate it publicly into Aramaic, the vernacular at that time. However, an exception was made of this story of Reuben, and when one rabbi insisted that it be read in the Hebrew but left untranslated, he was congratulated by his colleagues. But is this not insincere, even hypocritical? Is not the suppression of the truth hypocrisy, and is not every instance of hypocrisy deplorable?

The answer is no, it is not hypocrisy or insincerity, although it suppresses the broadcast of a true event. And, if one should insist that this is hypocrisy, then with full respect to all our honorable prejudices, certain forms of such insincerity are not malicious but wholesome and healthy. Not in all ways must one's appearances be thoroughly equivalent and correspond to his inner thoughts. To speak a conscious untruth aiming at personal gain or creating a favorable image and false impression is a foul act. But to refrain from telling all I know and consider to be true, either because I am unsure how that truth will be interpreted, or out of respect for the sensitivity and feelings of others – that is an act of civility, not insincerity.

Thus, in the affair of Reuben there were many mitigating factors, and varying interpretations are possible, as indeed many of them appear in the Talmud. A direct translation into the vernacular is, therefore, misleading and the cause of much misunderstanding. Furthermore, it is bad enough that the Torah preserves a sacred record of Reuben's misdeed, and there is no need to add salt to the wounds of a cherished forebear even if he is no longer in the world of the living.

It is a sin to lie; it is no mitzva to tell all I know, even if it is the truth. There is a law in the Shulchan Arukh that if a man has, heaven forbid, lost a close relative for whom he must mourn, but he is unaware of his loss, then one ought not to apprise him of it within thirty days of the death, for then he would be obligated to observe all of the shiva. One may not give a false answer upon interrogation, but one ought not to volunteer this kind of information, and if he does he is considered a kesil, a fool. A fool, indeed! Hypocrisy is not avoided and insincerity not served by mindless chattering and compulsive loquaciousness!

Too much cruelty has been practiced under the guise of honesty, too much frightful foolishness excused as frankness, too many assaults on the feelings of others carried out under the pretense of sincerity. Is it hypocrisy for a teacher to refrain from telling a slow student that he is unintelligent? Is it commendable sincerity to tell every homely person, "You are plain-looking and unattractive"? No, it is not. In fact, Hillel taught that one must even tell an unattractive bride that she is beautiful and charming!

The truth should be spoken, not blurted out. If you hear a performer or entertainer or artist, and have adverse criticism – even if it is constructive – then Jewish ethics and derekh eretz advise you: wait for a propitious time before offering your comments, do not offend the innermost feelings of another human being. If you apprehend a friend in embarrassing circumstances, performing an evil deed, it is a mitzvah to reproach him. You are not free to withhold your comment. But the rebuke must be administered gently, considerately, delicately. The Torah commands us, "You shall reproach your friend" (Leviticus 19:17). And the rabbis add, "Even a hundred times" (Bava Metzia 31a). On this, one of the great lights of the Musar movement commented: this means that the single rebuke must be broken into a hundred pieces and offered in tiny doses, lest the person you seek to correct should become the victim of painful insult.

Furthermore, there is a decent, beneficial, and honorable kind of hypocrisy which is not insincere, and without which society might well collapse. There are certain conventional fictions that are apparently untrue, but that suggest a kind of truth far beyond the reach of normal comprehension. Jewish law, for instance, aims at producing perfect individuals and a holy society, yet it knows full well, as King Solomon taught, that no person in the world is perfectly righteous and blameless.

Halakha grants each person a chezkat kashrut, a presumption of innocence and virtue; yet it knows full well that, as the Bible teaches, "Man's innate disposition is toward evil" (Genesis 8:21). Is this hypocrisy? If it is, then we should all be in favor of hypocrisy! For without it, all law and religion must progressively be reduced and diminished to the lowest level of common practice. This spells the death of all ideals. A child who errs and stumbles, yet who is trusted by a parent and feels that the parent's opinion of him is higher than his poor reality, is inspired by this discrepancy to fulfill the higher image. Likewise the Jew and his halakha: he is imperfect and faulted, yet because he is granted the chezkat kashrut and told that he incorporates the image of God, and is expected to live up to it, he will strive to do just that, lest he suffer inner embarrassment and shame.

This week the Supreme Court has been deliberating on the problems of censorship and pornography. This brings to mind a fascinating article by George P. Elliot I read in a national magazine, in which a principle similar to the one we have been discussing was put forth. The author believes that the law should banish pornography, but not enforce this regulation. He asks: is it not, however, hypocrisy to outlaw pornography if we know well that it will be sold surreptitiously? He answers: "The law should rest content with a decent hypocrisy," and ban obscene literature in the marketplace even if it knows that it will be sold under the counter, where the law will not and cannot bother with it. Law is the way that society approves and disapproves of certain acts. "A certain amount of official hypocrisy is one of the operative principles of a good society." Unenforced laws express society's goals, ideals, and visions. Law is meant not only to punish, but also to educate to higher standards. "Civilization behaves as though men are decent in full knowledge that they are not."

Judaism cannot take exception to this doctrine. When, at the beginning of the Emancipation, non-Orthodox Jews did adopt an opposite point of view, they began to prune the laws and cut down the halakha to fit current, prevalent practice. As a result, they discovered – as we well know in our days – that when you do this Judaism begins to crumble and Jews begin to vanish. If Jewish laws are abandoned because they are not universally observed, Judaism becomes nothing but a sanctimonious self-approval for spiritual failures, a vacuous "hekhsher" for not-so-kosher Jews.

That is why we ought not to be impressed or depressed at the cries of hypocrisy often hurled at Orthodox synagogues that disapprove of travel on the Sabbath, though many of its members violate that standard. We rightly insist upon full and meticulous observance of

kashrut, though some members in the privacy of their homes or when away from home do not live up to this ideal. If a standard is set, the congregation must live under the impression that the ideal is a reality; and all who fail to conform must suffer the pangs of guilt. If that is a fiction, it is a splendid and sublime fiction, on the way to becoming a luminous truth.
…
We live in an alma diperuda, an imperfect and fragmented world. For truth to be triumphant, it must proceed cautiously. We must give no quarter to falsehood, but we must remember that truth must often disguise itself in a thousand different garments – until that blessed day, the "day of the Lord," when man and society will be redeemed; when truth will be revealed courageously and fully; when this world will become transformed into an olam ha'emet, a world of truth; when God's unity will be expressed in living the whole truth and nothing but the truth; and when men will confront their own selves in truth, and be truly devoted to each other, so that each man will be able to address his brother and say, in full and genuine honesty, "I am, sincerely, yours!"
**For the full text of this sermon, see Rabbi Norman Lamm's 'Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Genesis. Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's 'Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Genesis' co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and Yeshiva University Press; Edited by Stuart W. Halpern*

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Torah Forbids Plowing With a Shor and a Chamor Together

This week's parsha contains the terrible story that happened to Dina bas Yaakov. She was captured and violated by Shechem, who then wanted to marry her. Rabbeinu Bachaye brings the following Medrash Tanchuma. Shechem told Yaakov: I know that your grandfather Avraham was a prince, as it is written "A prince of Elokim are you in our midst" (Bereshis 23:6) and I also am a prince in this land. Let the daughter of a prince marry a prince. It is a perfect match."

Yaakov responded that a Nasi (Prince) can only be a "Shor" (ox). Avraham is referred to as a "Shor" as it is written "And Avraham ran to the cattle" (Bereshis 18:7) and it is written "…and many crops come forth by the strength of an ox (rov tevuos b'koach shor)" (Mishlei 14:4). Yaakov insisted that it was not a good match. My grandfather was a prince who was a Shor (ox) and you are a Chamor (donkey)! (Shechem's father was named Chamor.) The Torah decrees "You shall not plow with a Shor and a with a Chamor together" (Devorim 22:10). In effect, Yaakov told his potential mechutan, "I'm sorry, the Torah forbids a combination of a Shor and a Chamor. We can't make this Shidduch."

In order to explain this rather perplexing Medrash, we need to introduce a concept that we mentioned in past years. In the beginning of Parshas VaYishlach, Rashi says that Yaakov instructed his messengers to tell Eisav, "I have been living with Lavan, and I tarried until now." Rashi famously elaborates: During this time, I did not become a distinguished officer but I have been a mere stranger. There is no justification for you to hate me based on jealousy of the blessing my father gave me that "You shall be a ruler over your brother."

"I know you still hate me for taking the Brochos that our father thought he was giving to you. But listen, they did not help me at all. Thirty-four years later, I am still a stranger living on the road. All these years later, and I have no dominion whatsoever over my brother. I am a nobody, and you have no reason to be jealous of the blessings I received."

Rashi elaborates on the words "And I have oxen and donkeys, cattle, male and female servants" (Bereshis 32:6) as follows: Father said I would be blessed with the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, but my property is neither from the heaven nor from the earth. Again, Yaakov emphasizes to Eisav that the blessings were not fulfilled, there was nothing for Eisav to be jealous about, and, in fact, it could be that Eisav got the better half of the deal by taking the lentil soup—at least that was something concrete.

There are several problems with this Rashi. For instance, Rav Moshe Feinstein asks that the Brochos that Yitzchak Avinu gave to Yaakov were a nevuah (prophecy). Is Rashi suggesting that Yaakov is denying the veracity of this nevuah? Is he saying that Yitzchak was wrong? Is he, Chas v'Shalom, accusing Yitzchak of uttering a false prophecy? Rashi cannot be saying that Yaakov was suggesting that these prophetic brochos were worthless.

Second, brochos are never fulfilled instantaneously. The fact that Yaakov has not yet seen the benefit of these blessings in no way diminishes their value or significance. The truth of the matter is that it took hundreds of years for them to be fulfilled. Yaakov's descendants were in Egypt for 210 years, and they were in the Wilderness for another 40 years. The Blessings were really not fulfilled until the time of Shlomo haMelech. What is Yaakov telling Eisav – the blessings are worthless because they were not fulfilled? Wait! They will yet be fulfilled in full!

When someone starts a business, he should not expect to make his fortune within the first six months of opening the business. Bill Gates started Microsoft in a garage in Seattle, Washington. He did not become a billionaire overnight. It takes time. Everything takes time. It is only in our generation that we expect instantaneous results. Cooking is too slow, so we need to microwave our food. Postal services are too slow, so we need to send faxes. Faxes are too slow so we need to send email. Everything needs to be this instant. But that is not the way all of life works, and it is certainly not the way ruchniyus works.

So, we have two questions: 1) Theologically, how could Yaakov say that the prophetic blessings were not fulfilled, and 2) Of course they were not fulfilled YET – give them time to reach their historical moment of fulfillment!

The explanation is that Yaakov knew exactly with whom he was dealing—Eisav. The Sforno in Parshas Toldos shares a very important principle, not only about Eisav, but about wicked people in general. The Sforno interprets the pasuk "Sell to me like the day (ka'yom) your birthright" (Bereshis 25:31) as follows: You, Eisav, live for the day—for today. You put so much effort into today's work that you are now so exhausted so you can't even tell the difference between a bowl of soup and the color red. There is no doubt that you will not be able to perform in the function of the firstborn to minister before the L-rd Almighty, to do that which is appropriate for a bechor.

Yaakov tells his brother, "This job is not for you. You are a "ka'yom" man! You are a man that lives for today." The difference between tzadikim and reshaim is that reshaim live for the moment. They want instant gratification. They don't have the long view. Yaakov, on the other hand, had a long view of life. He knows that not everything is instantaneous. Some things take time. If you take the view that the bechora will eventually entail the Service of Hashem and a permanent job in the Beis HaMikdash, then it means something. This is how a tzadik views the matter. Yaakov tells Eisav "I know you have no interest in being the bechor, because you are only a "Ka'yom man."

This is the general approach of virtually all reshaim. They trade an Olam Kayam (a permanent world) for an Olam Over (a transitory world). When people are faced with the dilemma of choosing the pleasure of the moment or choosing the long-term view at the cost of deferring instant gratification, people that don't possess a sense of spirituality always choose the TODAY. They don't look at the long view.

Yaakov knew this facet of Eisav. He certainly knew very well that the brochos would take hundreds of years to be fulfilled. But that did not make a difference to him. He was willing to wait. On the other hand, he understood with whom he was dealing. He knew that if Eisav still did not see fruits of this blessing after 34 years, he would consider them worthless.

Yaakov was talking Eisav's language when he sent the message to Eisav: Look what happened to me… I am just a ger. I have no land. I have received neither blessings of heaven nor earth these past 34 years. However, Yaakov himself understood that he was in it for the long haul, and was in no way denying the value or validity of these blessings.

Rav Avrohom Bukspan of Miami uses this concept to suggest an interpretation of the Medrash that Rabbeinu Bechaye quotes. (I am a Shor and you are a Chamor and the Torah says a Shor and Chamor cannot plow together. Therefore, Dina and Shechem cannot marry each other.)

What is the difference between the avodah of a Shor and that of a Chamor? The work that an ox does is for the future. Oxen plow the field, making it fit for sowing. In the spring, a farmer plows his field to prepare it for planting. It takes months for wheat to grow but the oxen are out in the field long before the seeds are even placed into the ground. The avodah of the shor is for the future.

What is the avodah of a Chamor? A donkey schleps things. The farmer has a load he needs to take from point A to point B, so he puts it on the donkey who does the work of schlepping it for him. The difference between the ox and the donkey is the difference between the long view and the short view. The Shor is an animal whose whole function is to serve what is going to come in the future. The Chamor serves today's needs: I need to get this load to my house or to the barn or to the market right now!

This is what Yaakov Avinu said to Shechem ben Chamor: I am a Shor and you are a Chamor. We are not compatible and cannot be harnessed together because the Torah prohibits plowing with an ox and donkey under one yoke.

There is a second difference between an ox and a donkey. An ox chews its cud; a donkey does not chew its cud. Why does an animal chew its cud? It regurgitates the food over and over and over. It does not just eat a meal and that is the end of it. The food it consumes is a meal that goes on and on, by virtue of the constant regurgitation of the cow or ox or other kosher animals. This is also an aspect of looking at the long view.

Yaakov tells Shechem – we are not a match because I am a Jew and you are not a Jew. A Jew looks at life based on what is going to be down the road. We take the long view of life and history. You are a Chamor. Just like a donkey looks only at the present – that too is the way you view life. This is not a compatible Shidduch.

I heard that Rav Moshe Soloveitchik (from the famous Soloveitchik family), who was Rav in Zurich Switzerland many years ago, was once counselling a couple who were having marital problems. The husband came to Rav Soloveitchik and said "My wife is making a mistake. She just isn't right! We can't come to terms." Rav Soloveitchik responded, "Maybe your wife is not right. But if you have Shalom and the house is tranquil then your children and grandchildren will grow up in such an environment and will be different people – much better people! Take the long view of life. The view of a Jew is always the long-term view. "Granted, your wife may be wrong in this argument. But if you take the long view of things and consider the effects of long term Shalom Bayis, it is far more important than the short-term victory over your wife in proclaiming 'I was right!'"

The whole point of being a Jew is that we are not into it for instant gratification, or just for the here and now. We are in it for the future as well. Therefore, he advised this congregant to give in to his wife, because in the long run, it will be for the best.

That is the difference between Yaakov and Shechem. That is the difference between Yaakov and Eisav. That is the difference between a Yid and a non-Yid.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

I have always been saddened by the fact that Holocaust victims have no matzeiva. You can't visit a cemetery and see a tombstone over a grave for them as one does for all others. Yet I derive some chizuk, some support, from the beautiful teaching in Parshat Vayishlach. Here the Torah provides the details of the sad passing of Rachel. She was buried in Bethlehem, Beit Lechem, and one can visit her tomb to this very day. Indeed the Torah refers to the place of her burial by saying (Bereishit 35:20),

"Hi matzevet kevurat Rachel ad hayom," – "This is the memorial to the burial place of Rachel to this very day."
Burial Place

Now some of our commentators ask about a redundant word here. The Torah could have said, "Hi matzevet Rachel," – "This is the memorial of Rachel." Why does it say, "Hi matzevet kevurat Rachel," – "This is a memorial of the burial place of Rachel"?

The Sefer Chomat Aish explains beautifully. He cites the teaching of Chazal, our Sages, who say,

"Ein osin nefashot letzaddikim. Divreihem hein heim zichronam." – "There is no need to make a matzeiva, a memorial in stone, for outstanding people. Their words and their deeds, that is their everlasting memorial."

Indeed this is so very true, because the true impact, the legacy of such people continues to exist in people's hearts and in people's minds. In turn, they pass it on to the generations to come and that's how great people continue to live forever.

Now we can understand why the Torah does not say, "Hi matzevet Rachel," – "This is the memorial of Rachel." It is because Rachel has a far greater memorial than a memorial in stone. Rachel's legacy has endured within our hearts and our minds for all time and that's why the Torah says, "Hi matzevet kevurat Rachel."

The essence of that place is as a memorial in stone marking the place where she was buried, and that's the place which we can come to in order to pay our respects to her.
Legacy

With regard to the six million precious Jewish souls who perished in the Holocaust, it is beyond words to explain. But in truth, they continue to live on through us. The torch of their Judaism and their good deeds is borne aloft by us with pride, guaranteeing that despite the efforts of our enemies to destroy us, am Yisrael chai – through our efforts and our faith, the people of Israel live on forever.

Despite the fact that there are no matzeivas for them, nonetheless the victims of the Shoah, will remain alive within us for all time.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Collateral Damage

In our Torah portion of Vayishlach, every action and feeling felt by Yaakov should be analyzed carefully, since Nachmanides-Ramban stresses that all that occurred to our forefathers will occur to Jews later on, and Jews should try to emulate their behaviors (**Nachmanides, commentary to Genesis 12:6**). Thus, when Jacob prepares for war against his brother Esau, it is, in a sense, a lesson for Jews how to prepare for war as well. When confronted with the possibility of fighting his brother, Esau, the verse (**Genesis 32:8**) states that Jacob felt two emotions: he was both fearful and distressed. Any extraneous word, or, in this case, extraneous verb, requires explanation why the apparent redundancy. Rashi explains (**Genesis 32:8 Rashi commentary**) that Jacob was not only distressed that he may be killed (since he might be found unworthy to continue living), but he was also distressed that he might kill innocent people during the confrontation. Rashi super-commentary *Siftai Chachamim*, explains Rashi's words in greater detail (**Siftei Chachamim commentary on Rashi commentary to Genesis 32:7**): Jacob had no fear of killing Esau or anyone who had come to kill him (since this killing would be legitimate self-defense). However, Jacob was afraid that there were innocents within Esau's camp who had no intention of harming Jacob or his family. Jacob was afraid that he might kill them in the "confusion of war."

What may have been an unusual occurrence back then, takes front and center concerning armies fighting in all wars in the twenty first century, The killing of innocent civilians unintentionally in the battle is called "collateral damage". If the war is legitimate, is killing innocent civilians as part of war moral from a Jewish perspective? Soldiers confront

this every day, and Israeli soldiers in particular, confront this situation, as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza intentionally place weapons and military personnel among civilian populations, "daring" the Israelis to harm the civilians. Thus, this essay will discuss what Judaism has to say about such a situation, and how to resolve the inherent dilemma of fighting combatants who are located within civilian populations.

In order to make the dilemma more real and practical, let us describe a clear-cut scenario, based on actual circumstances, faced by soldiers in the past and present. in the past. Israeli intelligence has confirmed that a well-known terrorist, who has killed many Israelis, plans to blow up a bus of Israeli civilians within the next 24 hours. The man is hiding in Gaza City, in an apartment known to the Israeli army, but located in a building with ten other apartments that are filled with innocent women and children. The Israeli army is cognizant of exactly where he is hiding. However, in order eliminate the imminent terrorist threat he presents (since he will almost certainly kill many Israelis the next day), the army will necessarily have to kill between ten to fifteen women and children. Should they take the lives of these innocent people in Gaza in order to assassinate the terrorist and destroy the threat to the civilian Israeli population?

If killing fifteen civilians is indeed justified in order to eradicate this terrorist threat, then what if the situation required killing fifty people in that apartment complex? What if it might cost one hundred lives? If killing fifteen civilians, however, is considered immoral and does not justify killing the terrorist, then would killing five innocents be considered moral? One? Can innocent residents legitimately be "sacrificed" in order to slay a terrorist and prevent him from killing civilians? Are there reasons to allow this collateral damage? What are the reasons to allow the terrorist to live (so that Israeli soldiers will not kill innocent people in Gaza) even though that terrorist will almost certainly kill innocent people in the future?

Sensitivity & Precedent in Judaism for Preventing Civilian Casualties - From the fear by Jacob in our Parsha, it seems that he would have felt guilty and acted improperly had he killed innocents in Esau's party, and that it would indeed be immoral to kill these individuals, even if they associated with the evil Esau. Are there any other scriptural sources describing our dilemma?

Immediately after Abraham was victorious in his war against the Four Kings which freed his kidnapped nephew Lot, God appears to Abraham and tells him that Abraham's reward will be great. Rashi explains why God felt it necessary to reassure Abraham (**Genesis 15:1 with Rashi commentary**). Abraham was worried that he had "used up" any rewards due him because he might have killed people during the war, says Rashi, and God reassures Abraham that he need not be afraid of this. The Midrash explains in greater detail specifically what Abraham was afraid of (**Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 44:4**). Abraham was not fearful that he had killed the warriors that opposed him. Rather, says the Midrash, Abraham was afraid that he might have inadvertently killed civilians who may have been righteous, and for this immoral act, his rewards would be "used up". God tells Abraham that every person he killed was like a thorn – i.e., was destined and deserved to die. Thus, no innocent civilians were killed in the war. But the fact that Abraham was worried about this possibility again shows of Jewish concern for civilians who might accidentally be killed as part of war.

An even more explicit reference regarding this issue involved King Saul, who was commanded to kill all the Amalekites. When he approached the city which contained majority of Amalekites but also some people from the Kenite tribe, he warned the Kenites to leave city immediately, so that they would not be killed accidentally during the battle (**I Samuel 15:5-6**). Here, too, we see Jewish sensitivity to collateral damage. Unfortunately, this course of action is not available to resolve our dilemma, since a public warning, like King Saul's, to the innocent residents of that apartment house would also alert the terrorist to flee among the civilians, helping him escape injury. What cannot be inferred from Saul's incident, however, is what would have happened if the Kenites had refused to leave. Would King Saul have refrained from attacking the Amalekites knowing innocents would inevitably be killed?

In another Torah narrative, we may be able to infer that Moses himself was sensitive to the needless killing of innocents, even in wars mandated to capture the Land of Israel. After numerous wars in the desert against various nations, the Torah records that the Jewish people offered peace to the nation of Sichon if the Sichonites would simply let the Jewish people pass through their land unharmed. When they refused, the Jews battled with them and defeated them. But nowhere did God ever command Moses to first offer them peace (**Numbers 21:21-23 with Rashi commentary**). Elsewhere, the Torah itself says that it was Moses's own idea to offer peace as an alternative to war (**Deuteronomy 2:26-27 with Rashi commentary**). Why did Moses do it? The Midrash alludes to one possible reason (**Deuteronomy 2:26-27 with Rashi commentary**). It says Moses believed there were those among Sichon those innocents who had not sinned, and it was for this reason, apparently, that Moses decided to offer this specific nation the possibility of peace (which they refused). Thus, in order to avoid killing non-sinners, Moses preferred a peaceful alternative. The Midrash goes on to say that Moses "taught" God this concept, and it is for this reason that God later on in the Torah commands Moses (and all Jewish leaders) to always first offer peace to the enemy before going to war (**Deuteronomy 20:10-16**). It is possible that the reason behind this tactic is to avoid killing innocent people during warfare.

There is one more allusion to Jewish sensitivity to collateral damage in the Bible. In the last book of narrative, Chronicles, which reviews Jewish history up until that point, King David writes that the reason that he was not allowed to build the Holy Temple is that he shed blood in wars. Radak commentary explains that this specifically refers to acts of collateral damage, the innocent lives that had to be taken by King David in the course of war (**I Chronicles 22:8 with Radak commentary**). Thus, according to a modern decisor, Rabbi Asher Weiss, (**Rabbi Asher Weiss, Minchat Asher Deuteronomy 32:6**), he explains that while this action of killing civilians was sometimes necessary as part of waging war, Judaism did not attach enough guilt to this deed to actively punish King David for this necessary action, but did not hold him completely innocent, and denied him the merit of building the Holy Temple, which is the symbol of peace and atonement.

Jewish Law Also Seems To Be Sensitive To Collateral Damage - In the section of Midrash that discussed Jewish law (**Midrash Sifri, Shoftim 56-57**), Sifri describes proper Jewish behavior in times of war. In addition to the prohibition to intentionally defeat the enemy by tactics of starvation (unless they resist all peace overtures), it is also forbidden to kill the women and children in war, the "innocents." Thus, even in an obligatory war, a Jewish army should be sensitive not to cause collateral damage, wherever possible. It should be noted that this was written at a time where every other army in the world killed innocents indiscriminately, including women and children, in the course of war, unless they were later "saved" for slave labor or other future (generally nefarious) uses by the soldiers.

In accordance with the verses quoted above, Jewish law mandates that when fighting a conventional war, the Jews must first publicly declare their intentions to fight by sending public letters to the enemy (**Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 6:5**). This allows the innocent civilians and those who do not want to fight to escape the battle scene. Unfortunately, as noted above, this tactic could not possibly be used in our situation, since the element of surprise is a prerequisite for killing the terrorist. As soon as the Israeli army would warn the residents of an apartment house that it intends to kill the terrorist living there and that they should therefore leave the place, the element of surprise would be lost, and the terrorist would be able to escape along with the others. When fighting a Jewish war, Jewish law also forbids an army from completely surrounding the enemy (**Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 6:7**).

From the perspective of one Jewish authority, the terrorist is considered a *Rodef*. He is a "pursuer" who is about to kill innocent people and he may be stopped even if doing so necessitates killing him. Similarly, even the children in the apartment building may also be considered *Rodef*-Pursuers who are preventing the elimination of the terrorist. Shulchan Aruch already rule that if innocents, even children who are about to cause a person to be killed, however unintentionally and unaware of the impending damage, they are, nevertheless, considered a Rodef-Pursuer, and may be killed (**Shulchan Aruch, Chosen Mishpat 425:1**). Therefore, Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli (a 20th century Rabbi), rules that a Jew would be permitted or even obligated to kill such a child (who is preventing the death of the terrorist) in order to avoid the deaths of other innocents (**Responsa Amud Hayemini 16:4**). There are several other current-day Poskim-decisors who disagree somewhat on on this complex and nuanced issue, especially if today's terrorist has the Jewish law status of full-fledged war or not. This issue is too important to be decided in this limited space (it is suggested to see the complete chapter, if possible, in "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*", for a full discussion).

The Policy of the Israeli Army Regarding This Moral Issue - Most Rabbis would probably permit the killing of the civilians in Gaza if that were the only way to eliminate an imminent terrorist threat and kill the terrorist. Nevertheless, that is not the practiced policy of the Israeli army. Even when the army is aware of a known and wanted terrorist in an apartment complex, it does not generally bomb the apartment complex, since this bombing will necessitate the deaths of innocent civilians. Rather (when a terrorist threat is not imminent), the army patiently waits for the terrorist to exit the building (as long as it takes) and enters his automobile. Then it immediately bombs the car. The passengers of the car are also usually killed, under the assumption that anyone entering the car with this person is not an innocent civilian.

In addition, the Israeli army has done something amazing in Gaza, in each of the recent "wars", never before seen in war, in 2008, in 2014 and again in 2022, in order to help minimize civilian casualties. While the tactic of dropping leaflets from planes has been used for many years in the past in order to warn civilians to leave target areas, the Israeli army actually phoned and SMS'd each Palestinian family in Gaza in advance of bombing sites, where it knew that rocket launchers were hidden among civilians. This gave time for those civilians to flee and avoid injury, thereby minimizing unnecessary civilian casualties. Recently, in 2022, the United States forces killed Ayman al-Zawahri, assistant to Bin Laden, They were able to kill him with an advanced drone, that only killed and hurt only him, while standing on his porch, without damaging to anyone else in the apartment or in the populated area of Kabul.

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

A Dialogue Between Alienated Relatives and Historical Lessons

Rabbi Shuki Reich

Since time immemorial, the Torah has dealt with sibling rivalry and conversations of conflict. The Torah begins with the primal story of Cain and Abel which ends in murder. Later on, we are given the discourse which took place between the children of Noach; we meet Yitzhak and his brother Yishmael; and we even come upon a conversation between Avraham and Lot's people: "And Avraham said unto Lot: let there be no strife between me and you, and between my shepherds and your shepherds, for we are brethren. Behold the whole land is before you. Separate yourself, I pray thee, from me. If you take the left, I shall take the right; and if you take the right, I shall take the left."

Avraham says in so many words: we are brethren, so we must separate.

The same thing happens with Yitzhak and Esav. And if that is not enough – with Yosef and his brothers as well.

Nowhere in Bereshit do we find sibling affection; instead, there is plenty of jealousy and competition – competition which not only fails to bring the siblings closer together, but ultimately becomes the basis for all future tension throughout history.

The prophet Jeremiah warns us (9, 3): "Take you heed of thy neighbor, and trust not in any brother; for every brother acts deceitfully, and every neighbor goes about with slanders."

The expression used by Jeremiah – "for every brother acts deceitfully" – kol ach akov ya'akov – is reminiscent of our Patriarch's name – Yaakov. Perhaps this is the reason his name was changed to Yisrael, and the name Yaakov remained secondary (Berachot 13).

According to the Ramban, the encounter between Yaakov and Esav exemplifies future encounters. This is how he puts it: "We, too, should imitate the ways of this righteous person [Yaakov], and prepare ourselves on three different dimensions, in much the same way that he had prepared himself – by praying; by preparing gifts; and by readying himself for war, for the purpose of escaping and saving himself."

However, the Ramban does not view Yaakov's acts of flattery, expressed by the gifts he sends, in a positive light at all:

"Our Sages have already criticized [Yaakov] for this act. As is written in Bereshit Rabbah (85, 3) – 'He that passes by, and meddles with strife not his own, is like one that takes a dog by the ears' (Proverbs 26, 17). The Holy One, blessed be He, said unto Yaakov: [Esav] was going about his business, and you were the one who sent out messengers to him saying 'So says your servant Yaakov'. In my humble opinion this suggests that we were the ones who caused our own downfall at the hands of Edom. After all, the kings of the Second Temple were the ones who made covenants with the Romans (Maccabees 1, 8), while some others even traveled to Rome, which ultimately led to their defeat. This idea has already been stated by our Sages and written in our scriptures…"

The Seforno has a very different take on Yaakov's act of sending out messengers to Esav:

"'And Esav ran' – he immediately had a turn of heart when he saw Yaakov so subdued. As our Sages have said: [The prophet] Achiya HaShiloni cursed Israel that it may be like a stalk that succumbs to every wind. Had the zealots of the Second Temple behaved in this subdued fashion, the Second Temple would not have been destroyed, as attested to by Rabi Yochanan ben Zakkai himself (Gittin, Perek HaNizakin): The zealots refused to leave and succumb, and so the Temple was destroyed."

Both the Ramban and the Seforno base their interpretation on an analysis of the destruction of the Second Temple. The Ramban contends that the Temple was destroyed because of the desire to forge ties with Rome; while the Seforno claims that the destruction of the Second Temple was the result of the zealots' refusal to forge relations with outsiders.

These are two very different historical readings, both of which are enlightening, in that they teach us that any person can look back at historical events and find that which s/he wishes to find.

The Netziv of Volozhin, in his exegesis on the Torah, pauses the encounter between the two brothers on the word "vayivku" – "and they cried". This is what he says:

"And they cried. Both of them cried. This teaches us that at that moment, Yaakov's heart was also infused with love for Esav. The same holds true for all generations to come. When Esav's descendants become infused with a pure, unblemished spirit and acknowledge the People of Israel and its virtues, we, too, shall attain the awareness that Esav is our brother. In much the same way that Rabi [Yehuda HaNassi] truly loved Antonius, and there are many other such examples."

Learning important lessons from the stories of the Torah

The Torah instructs us: "Remember the days of old, contemplate the years of many generations; ask thy father, and he will declare unto thee, thine elders, and they will tell thee." We have a clear obligation to remember past events and understand history.

However, in our attempt to learn from the encounter between Esav and Yaakov, we seem to be left with two contradicting messages. How then can we learn from the days of yore?

When taking lessons from history, one cannot simply impose the past on the present. By learning the past, we gain insight and wisdom – binu is the word the Torah uses for this type of contemplation. But this insight, or wisdom, can only be achieved if we take a broader and more spiritual view of things – not by drawing a straight line from past to present, or by copying-pasting. As the Sefat Emet put it: remembrance is an internal point void of any forgetfulness.

It is also the point of faith, which means there we do not attempt to find a straightforward, instant lesson for the present.

To use the words of the Sefat Emet yet again:

"Remembrance lies deep in one's heart. In a place where there is no forgetfulness. And when there is remembrance down below, in the heart of every Jew, then remembrance is also evoked in the Heavens above."

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org
Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg
The Effect of Our Actions

"And Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him" (Vayislach 32:8.) Rashi explains that Yaakov had two different emotions. On the one hand, he was frightened that Esav might kill him, while at the same time, he was also distressed that perhaps he might have to kill others in order to save himself. Why was Yaakov so concerned that he might kill others? After all, the posuk says, "When the wicked perish, there is joyful song" (Mishlei 11:10.) Moreover, Yaakov knew that Eisav wanted to kill him. Chazal say, "If someone is coming to kill you, preempt him and kill him first" (Sanhedrin 72a.) Why then was Yaakov so distressed?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) suggests that Yaakov was pained by the prospect that he might have to kill others to save himself because such an outcome was not truly necessary. Yaakov knew that Hashem could easily save him without forcing him to harm other people. Eisav could simply decide to leave Yaakov alone and not attack him and his family. But if Hashem were to save Yaakov only by having him kill other people, that would demonstrate that Yaakov Avinu was deficient in some way and did not deserve to be saved in a more pleasant manner. It distressed Yaakov to consider such a possibility.

This is similar to one who finds tzara'as in his home. The Torah says that when Klal Yisrael come into Eretz Yisrael, Hashem will place a nega tzara'as on the walls of their homes (Vayikra 14:34). Rashi comments that this tzara'as is actually a positive development because by demolishing the home as part of the purification process, the homeowner will uncover treasures that the previous non-Jewish owner hid in the walls of the home. But there is also a negative element in this tzara'as because if the Jewish owner were not guilty of a sin, then Hashem could have given him wealth by other means. The fact that he receives his wealth through a tzara'as affliction proves that he is somewhat guilty and in need of an atonement. Similarly, if Yaakov Avinu would have to resort to saving himself by killing other people, that would show that he was not worthy of being saved in a more pleasant way. And that may have been the cause of his distress.

But perhaps Yaakov Avinu was upset for a different reason, namely that even if killing others in self-defense is justified, nevertheless the act of murder itself, even when warranted, has a negative effect on a person. The Sefer HaChinuch (#16) writes that the Torah prohibits the breaking of the bones of the korban Pesach because "ha'adam nif'al k'fi p'ulosav - a person is affected by his actions." A prince does not break bones when eating. If Klal Yisrael were to break bones when eating the korban Pesach, that might ingrain within them a lowly spirit. The Torah therefore prohibits breaking the bones of the korban Pesach to ensure that Klal Yisrael will act like royalty, and that will reinforce within them an appreciation of their elevated status.

The Torah, in a different context, alludes to the powerful effect that negative behavior can have on a person. After the Torah dictates that an ir hanidachas (a city which worships avodah zara) must be destroyed, it adds that one may not derive any benefit from the rubble of the city "so that Hashem will turn back from His anger, and He will give you mercy" (Devarim 13:18) Why does the Torah emphasize that Hashem will give you mercy? The Chofetz Chaim explains that it is only natural that one who murders, even when he is obligated to do so, will become more cruel and insensitive. The Torah promises that this will not happen to those who obey the command to destroy the ir hanidachas. They will not be adversely affected by their actions, rather Hashem will reinforce within them a sensitivity for human life, and He will ensure that they remain merciful and compassionate people.

Perhaps Yaakov Avinu was distressed that he might have to kill in order to save himself because he feared that without special protection from Hashem, he would be negatively affected by the act of murder. Even if he were technically permitted to kill Eisav and his men, going through that process would make him a more callous and inconsiderate person. Yaakov davened that Hashem should save him not just from the hands of Eisav, but from any negative effect to his character that an encounter with Eisav might generate. This is the way of a righteous person. Not only is he careful with his actual deeds, but he exhibits a heightened sensitivity to the secondary ramifications of his behavior as well.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam
The One for Whom the Sun Shines

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

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

It's a fascinating, even shocking statement here. The sun rises for everybody, every day! How can the Torah declare that the sun rose for Yaakov?!

I was driving on the Brooklyn Bridge a few weeks ago on my way to a Chasuna, a wedding when I reminded myself of something I heard from one of my Rabbeim many years ago when we were together on the Brooklyn Bridge on our way to a Chasuna.

The traffic was jammed and we were essentially parked in the direction we were heading. No one was moving on our side. We could feel the sway of the bridge as the cars and trucked zoomed on the other side. My Rebbe took a long look behind us and craned his neck to look ahead and then he said, "Of all the people on this bridge right now, we are probably going to do the most important thing!"

I remember thinking at the time, "How could he possibly know what other people are going to do!? How can he make such a bold declaration like that!?" I was bewildered for a while but later it dawned on me that he was treating me to an important window into his mindset.

How did he get to be such an important person!? How did he become such a giant Talmud scholar?! What's the difference between him and I?! I realized that he realized and felt the importance of whatever he was doing. If he's learning now then that's the most important thing to do! If he's saying Tehillim for a sick person then that's the most important thing.

If he's helping a child then that must be the mandate of the moment and that too is the

most important thing. When he was collecting Tzedaka he approached it with the tenacity of someone who was doing something very important.

Sometimes a person can hide behind a veil of false modesty, that is really born from a fear of failing or caring over much what other people think.
We can feel that what we are doing is not enough or that we should be doing something else. Life is happening someplace but it's not happening here.

This Rebbe always felt that life is happening here as the Hillel HaZaken said, in all his extreme humility, "If I am here then everything is here!" Now isn't that actually haughtiness!?

Ben Zoma would say: A good guest, what does he say? How much effort did the host expend on my behalf, how much meat did the host bring before me. How much wine did he bring before me. How many loaves did he bring before me. All the effort that he expended, he expended only for me.

However, a bad guest, what does he say? What effort did the host expend? I ate only one piece of bread, I ate only one piece of meat and I drank only one cup of wine. All the effort that the homeowner expended he only expended on behalf of his wife and children. (Brochos 58A)

Is Ben Zoma teaching us about good guests and bad guests at a Shabbos table? Yes, for sure, and more too. Who is a good guest in this world?

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

The answer is stunning! "Because a person has an obligation to say, 'The world was created for me!'" That means that when Adam opened his eyes and saw the light running towards him at 186,000 miles per seconds, and he felt the green carpet beneath his feet, and the sweet smells of Garden of Eden fruits entering his olfactory glands, he could actually and factually declare that the whole world was created for him. And so it is with every subsequent person who would stride upon the plant.

Yaakov, and guests like him, who are more grateful in realizing that everything was truly created for them, prove with their attitude that they are in fact, the one for whom the sun shines!

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Power of Personal Choice

In the choice of the haftarah, we see one of the most incredible examples of the power of personal choice.

How we can choose to direct our own lives, no matter what the circumstances.

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

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

Ovadia for two reasons could have turned out so differently, but look at the choices he made. He was a descendant of Eisav and a prophet at the time of Izevel (Jezebel) and Achav (Ahab), two of the worst kings and queens of Israel, who killed prophets and sages. Ovadia hid 100 prophets to save them, in spite of the difficulties involved in doing so, ultimately becoming a prophet himself and meriting his own book in Tanach.

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

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

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

BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Dec 8, 2022, 7:06 PM

Rav Yissocher Frand
Parshas Vayishlach

I Truly Deserve the Bechora

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1140 – Twins: Must The Younger One Be Me'chabaid The Older One? Good Shabbos!

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

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

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

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

Yaakov had an agenda over here. His agenda was first and foremost to try to mollify Eisav so that he should not hate him. Yaakov tries many tactics. He calls Eisav "my master". He says about himself "your servant". He is trying to convey that in his own eyes, Eisav is still the bechor. But he is also trying to make another point. Eisav was thinking to himself "Yaakov deserves the bechora less than I do. He is also a Rasha."

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

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

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

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

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

This is exactly what happened here with Eisav. Yaakov says to Eisav, "I lived with the wicked Lavan for twenty years and kept the 613 mitzvos without learning from his evil ways. You think a person cannot really be a Shomer Mitzvos (someone who observes mitzvos). You think it is all a fake. That is because in your mind, sincerity in being a Servant of Hashem does not exist. So, in your mind, I am not better than you." You are thinking "Why should Yaakov get the bechora? He is a faker and I am a faker. He is no better than me."

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

"That is why I rightfully deserve the bechora and not you, and therefore don't hate me!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayishlach is provided below: ...A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

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from: The **Rabbi Sacks Legacy** <info@rabbisacks.org> to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Dec 8, 2022, 11:15 AM subject: Feeling the Fear (Vayishlach)

Feeling the Fear

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

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

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

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

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

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

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

make us realise that we are dealing with a convention. Another example, which occurs many times in Tanach, is birth-of-a-hero-to-a-hitherto-infertile-woman.

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

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

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

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

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

They were afraid, essentially, of their mission. Moses kept telling God at the burning bush: Who am I? They won't believe in me. I am not a man of words. Jonah was reluctant to deliver a message from God to Israel's enemies. And Jacob had just said to God, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faith that You have shown me" (Gen. 32:11).

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

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

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

Marianne Williamson's remarks on the subject have become justly famous. She wrote:

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

Shakespeare said it best:

"Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em." Twelfth Night

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 77:3.

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

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

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

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

Previous Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net date: Dec 8, 2022, 11:03 PM

When You Encounter a Lost Soul, How Do You React?

A Tale of Two Angels

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Brother's Keeper

One day the zookeeper noticed that the orangutan was reading two books, the Bible and Darwin's Origin of Species. Surprised, he asked the ape, "Why are you reading both those books?" "Well," said the orangutan, "I just wanted to know if I was my brother's keeper, or my keeper's brother." The Contrast Sometimes, the contrast is too conspicuous to ignore. In both stories, the Torah employs the same term: "Ish," which means, a man. (The term is already used in Bereishis, to describe the first man, Adam.) In two consecutive portions, Vayishlach and Vayeishev, the same term is used. Yet Rashi, based on the tradition of our sages, changes his commentary from one extreme to the other.

In the portion of Vayishlach, we find the term "ish," a man. And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. Rashi explains that this "man" was the spiritual angel of Esau. In other words, this battle in the middle of the night between Jacob and this mysterious "man," was part of the ongoing struggle between Jacob and his brother Esau. Yet, in Vayeishev, we have the same exact term used. But there everything changes.

Joseph was sent by his father Jacob, to go visit his brothers and seek their welfare. Despite his brothers loathing him, Joseph embarked on the journey and he got lost on the way. The Torah tells us: Then a man found him, and behold, he was straying in the field, and the man asked him, "What are you

looking for?" And he said, "I am looking for my brothers. Tell me now, where are they pasturing?" Who was this mysterious man, "ish," who encountered Joseph at that vulnerable moment? Rashi says it was angel Gabriel, who we see is defined elsewhere in Scriptures as Ish. Strange. In Vayishlach it says that Jacob remained alone, and a man wrestled with him. In Vayeishev, Joseph is alone, lost in the field, and, again, a man encounters him and asks him what he is searching for. The same exact word is used in both cases to describe this person: Ish. Yet in Vayeishev, Rashi sees him as the angel Gabriel, and in Vayishlach as Esau's angel? A Tale of Two Men The Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1887-1979), shared the following explanation in the name of Rabbi Chaim Halberstam, the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz (1793-1876).[1] Context is always the key. The word may be the same, "ish," but the question is what does this "ish," this man, do? In both stories, there is a person who is vulnerable. In Vayishlach, "Jacob remains alone," in the middle of the night. He has been away from home for 34 years, and has been dealing with a world-class crook. In Vayeishev, Joseph, a young 17-year-old lad, is also lost and vulnerable. He has left his father, he was an orphan from his mother, and how he was on the way to brothers who despised him. He does not know it, but this journey would take him to slavery, prison, and complete alienation from his family. In both stories, two people are deeply vulnerable. Father and son. Jacob and Joseph. Both of them meet a stranger. A man who appears out of the blue. The question is what does this "ish," this man, do? Here is the difference. In Jacob's case, the man sees a lonely man in the middle of the night and pounces on him. There is lonely Jacob in the middle of the night? Let me attack him. What about in the second story? Here too Joseph is alone. And a man encounters him. But what does the man say and do? "Then a man found him, and behold, he was straying in the field, and the man asked him, saying, "What are you looking for?" Do you see the difference? He does not pounce on Joseph. He does not exploit his vulnerability, manipulate his moment of weakness toward his own goals. Instead, he sees it as an opportunity to help. He asks the young lad: What are you looking for? You are a dreamer. I see you are searching for something. What is it that you seek? How can I help you? And Joseph tells him: "I am searching for my brothers!" I want a relationship. I am searching for love. For belonging. For understanding. For comradery. For attachment. So Rashi is simply mirroring the context of the narrative. When a man, encountering a vulnerable person, seizes the opportunity to attack him, that man, Rashi says, is an angel of Esau. But when a man, encountering a vulnerable person, seizes the opportunity to offer a loving hand, a guiding heart, to see how he can be here for you in your search for love and family, this person, Rashi says, must be the angel Gabriel! The Lesson We all encounter a person, a child, a teen, an adult, who is "alone," vulnerable, lonely, lost, confused, bewildered, and pained. We see them in their vulnerability. And we make a choice. Some of us seize the opportunity to use exploit them. Some people even utilize the opportunity to use them in immoral ways, to abuse them, to pounce on them, to attack them, to hurt them, willingly or unwillingly. Even just to judge them. But some of us encounter the same vulnerable people. And our response is: My dear boy, my dear girl, my dear friend, tell me what are you looking for? Let me find out what you are searching for, what you yearn for. We each have to make a choice about what type of "man" we will be. I can either become a force of Esau, or I can become the angel Gabriel. When the Rebbe Went to Warm Up Soup It was the night of Yom Kippur, the holiest night of the year. The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, also known as the Alter Rebbe (1745-1812), was praying. Wrapped in his talis and his kitel, he was immersed in his davening, in intimacy with G-d. Suddenly, he removed his talis and left the shul. It was shocking. The Rebbe went to the home of a mother who had just given birth. The rest of the family went to the synagogue to pray, so nobody was present. The Rebbe kindled a flame, warmed up a soup on the stove, and fed it to the young mother who desperately needed the food. I once heard the Lubavitcher Rebbe share this story.[2] And he added: The greatness in the story is not that the Alter Rebbe went on Yom Kippur to save this mother. After all, saving a life override Yom Kippur. The uniqueness of the story is the Rebbe, in the midst of his Yom Kippur prayers, experiencing oneness with the Divine, felt the pain and anguish of the young mother.

Many spiritual people, when they are immersed in transcendence, they become deaf to the cry of a mother and a baby. In contrast, the Alter Rebbe, as he spoke to G-d on the holiest night of the year, his soul could not calm down till he went to comfort a young mother who yearned for help.

[1] Moshian Shel Yisroel. vol. 2, p. 210

[2] 19 Kislev 5744 (1983), at a farbrengen celebrating the liberation day of the Alter Rebbe, on 19 Kislev, 1798.

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https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/the-eternal-flame-2/2022/12/08/

Pearls of Wisdom

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser - 14 Kislev 5783 – December 8, 2022

The Eternal Flame

"Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn… he struck the socket of Yaakov's hip …" (Bereishis 32:25-26)

Who was this "man" who fought all night with Yaakov Avinu and only capitulated at the break of dawn, dislocating Yaakov's hip-socket as he wrestled with him? Rashi states that it was the angel of Eisav, or the koach hatumah (ruler of impurity). Our sages cite R' Yehoshua ben Levi (Chulin 91a) that the encounter was so intense that the dust from their feet ascended to the Throne of Glory.

The commentaries expound that various details of the Torah's account allude to the exile, and the confrontation represents the spiritual struggle between the powers of holiness and the powers of ritual impurity that will continue throughout the generations until the "break of dawn," i.e. ad bias goel tzedek – until the arrival of the redeemer.

The Chofetz Chaim asks: Why did the koach hatumah wait to attack Yaakov? Why didn't he confront Avraham or Yitzchak? The Chofetz Chaim explains that each of the forefathers had a unique personal characteristic representing the three pillars of the world. Avraham Avinu symbolized chesed, loving kindness, benevolence, and charity. Yitzchak symbolized prayer, devotion, and service of Hashem. Yaakov was the pillar of Torah.

Although the koach hatumah, which is really the evil inclination, opposes the principles of chesed and service of Hashem, he can condone their practice. They are unlike Torah, which is eternal and guarantees the survival of the Jewish nation. The evil inclination cannot endure in the face of the ultimate truth of Torah, as it says (Micha 7:20), "You will give the truth to Yaakov …" The Torah is our defense against the evil inclination, as it says (Kiddushin 30b), "I created the evil inclination and I created Torah as its antidote." It is for that reason that throughout the generations our adversaries have waged war against the Torah. The Greeks had one goal, as we say in al hanissim on Chanukah, "l'hashkicham Torasecha – to make them [the Jewish nation] forget your Torah…." In Spain, in Eastern Europe, in countries around the world decrees were issued to repress Torah study. Cognizant of the immortality of the Torah and its extraordinary effectiveness, the evil inclination is vigilant in its battle to thwart Torah study.

The Baal Shem Tov once remarked that one can assess the value of a person's possessions by observing how many thieves are out to rob him. If a person is merely carrying bundles of clothes very few will be scheming to rob him. However, if the individual is carrying a priceless diamond all the thieves will be after him.

Indeed, the fact that we are confronted with so many challenges in the area of chinuch, Torah education, illustrates how precious Torah study is. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) teaches that the first 2,000 years of creation were "years of chaos" until the Torah was given. The purpose of the existence of those generations was solely in preparation for the event of Kabbalas haTorah.

An interesting halachic query was presented to the great posek, HaGaon Harav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv. A man who faithfully and consistently

attended a daily shiur on the Talmud after davening shacharis with the morning minyan, was faced with a dilemma a few days during the year. On those infrequent days, when his company was audited by the government, he was obligated to be in his office early in the morning. He had to choose between praying with a minyan on those days and missing his shiur, or attending the shiur and praying in private – both important mitzvos.

R' Elyashiv instructed him that if these were only sporadic occasions throughout the year, then he should rather attend his daily Talmud shiur and opt to daven b'yechidus (in private).

The Talmud tells us (Shabbos 88a) that at the time of Kabbalas haTorah Hashem placed the mountain above the Jewish nation like a vat and said to them: "If you will accept the Torah good; if not, there will be your burial place." The Jews had already willingly accepted the Torah when they proclaimed naaaseh v'nishma – we will do and we will listen. What is the meaning of this warning? The Gerer Rebbe explains that the key word is "there." Hashem was cautioning them that "there" – in later generations – there would be dark days, times when circumstances would make it difficult to keep the Torah. But, the flame of Torah needs to be kept alive under all conditions, even under the threat of death.

Amid the tragedy and unspeakable horrors of Auschwitz during the Holocaust, accountings of many poignant incidents have emerged.

At 3:00 one frigid snowy winter morning, the sirens blared in the camp. All the prisoners were ordered to remove their clothing to be checked for lice as they stood outside in the frosty cold. Many did not survive the hours-long ordeal. When they were finally granted permission to return to the barracks, not only had their clothing been removed, but also the straw and the few thin blankets with which they covered themselves were gone. Yet after this exhausting suffering, the inmates could not lie down on the cold boards to sleep, for fear that they would surely not wake up.

As the men huddled in groups to keep each other warm, one of the inmates called out with a suggestion. "I would like to make you an offer. You don't have to accept it, but if you do I will be very happy."

He explained that he knew one tractate of the Shas by heart, and each day he would review it as he lay in bed. "I will learn the daf of today out loud from memory, and you can all join in the learning with me."

The men all agreed, and so, under the most inhumane conditions, without clothes and numbed from the penetrating cold, everyone became completely immersed in learning. It helped them to survive that bitter night and gave them hope for the future.

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, a prominent rav and Torah personality, is a daily radio commentator who has authored over a dozen books, and a renowned speaker recognized for his exceptional ability to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide.

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Ya'akov Meets Esav, In Multiple Ways

by R. Gidon Rothstein

In Parshat VaYishlach, Rashi interprets im Lavan garti in ways Kli Yakar thinks are contradictory. Rashi first says Ya'akov was assuring Esav he had not become important or powerful, just a ger, a stranger, to Kli Yakar a sign Ya'akov had chosen to approach his brother with humility; Rashi's second option was that Ya'akov was indicating he had observed the 613 mitzvot all his time with Lavan, a statement of seeming confidence Esav will not be able to hurt him. Yitzhak had blessed Esav with the ability to overthrow Ya'akov's superiority only when Ya'akov or his descendants fail in their service of God (a traditional understanding of Bereshit 27;40, ve-hayah ka'asher tarid, u-farakta ulo), and that time was not now.

Complementary, Not Contradictory

Kli Yakar says his heart tells him the two interpretations are both true, not separate options, the way Rashi presented them. He argues Ya'akov's message of not having achieved power or prominence told Esav his father's blessings had not been realized. Esav might have counterclaimed the blessings only hadn't come true because Ya'akov had not kept the Torah, so Ya'akov proactively informs him his spiritual standing with God was intact.

Not that Ya'akov was insulting Yitzhak by saying his blessings had failed. Rather, Kli Yakar thinks Ya'akov was claiming the ruse failed, that extracting a blessing under false pretenses had not successfully moved what Yitzhak intended for Esav over to Ya'akov. It was his way of telling Esav the blessings clearly would benefit whomever Yitzhak really meant them to, not he who fooled Yitzhak into articulating them in proximity to him.

Kli Yakar doesn't tell us if he thinks Ya'akov was sincere, indeed doubted whether the blessings were his, or was saying it to assuage Esav.

He adds a fascinating addendum. But for Kli Yakar's fears of overconfidence , he would excise the words davar aher in Rashi, unite the two readings as one. He felt so sure Rashi wanted us to read im Lavan garti both to mean "and did not become important and powerful," and "I kept all the mitzvot," the two together conveying Ya'akov's message.

His certainty suggests to me he may really have thought this was peshat, the simple reading of Rashi, that Rashi thought Ya'akov used a word with two implications and intended Esav to catch both. Or he knew it was derash, less simple, more homiletic, but did not care.

Either way, it adds another interesting possibility to how Ya'akov sought to allay Esav's anger.

Bidding Farewell to the Vilna Gaon

Aderet Eliyahu comments on the eight Edomite kings listed at the end of this week's parsha. I could not find the way to share his view here either comprehensibly or concisely enough. As I concede I will not be able to include him in our discussions, I did not want to "ghost" the Vilna Gaon, wanted to admit openly I am not yet able to translate his ideas as they deserve. Moving on to what I do feel able to do…

Wrestling with His Own Wrongs

Hatam Sofer sees multiple layers to Ya'akov's incident with the angel, whom tradition identified as the representative of Esav. First, he uses an idea from Hullin 91a, found also in Rashi to 32;25: Ya'akov was left alone because he went back across the stream for pachim ketanim, small jars. The Gemara said they mattered to Ya'akov because the righteous do not steal, so every small jar counts.

Ya'akov in particular is known as an ish emet, a man of truth; if we add the numerological value of pach (the word for jar) to emet, truth, we get Yisrael (Israel). Ya'akov was spending time alone, Hatam Sofer is saying, to push beyond being a man of truth to achieving the quality of Yisra'el .

The angel of Esav, seeking to stop it, wrestles with him, hurts the hollow of his thigh . In one pretty insight, Hatam Sofer notes the word for "hollow" is kaf, the reverse of pach, the singular of the jars Ya'akov had gone for. The angel didn't randomly strike a part of Ya'akov's body, he is suggesting, the angel went for a part that has the numerological value Ya'akov had sought to add to his emet qualities to produce Yisra'el. Had he succeeded, Ya'akov would be left with only emet, the pach he had added negated by the kaf the angel had wounded.

Ya'akov won anyway and extracted the new name.

Marrying Two Sisters—Was Ya'akov Ever Out of Israel?

His next idea turns the word levado, alone, into a reverse acronym for the words the Torah uses to introduce the Dinah story, va-tetzei Dinah bat Le'ah, Dinah the daughter of Le'ah went out. Hatam Sofer says the wound the angel inflicted on Ya'akov led to the upcoming troubles in the parsha, the Dinah tragedy, Reuven's sin with Bilhah, and the death of Rahel. Since Rivkah had promised her son she would take upon herself any curse he received, Ya'akov also heard of her death at this juncture, an idea Rashi tells us.

Rivkah seems to have promised Ya'akov only to take those curses Yitzhak might issue should he catch Ya'akov trying to take his brother's blessing. Hatam Sofer is assuming that since Yitzhak promised Esav he would overthrow his brother's rule when Ya'akov sinned—the ve-hayah ka'asher tarid we saw in Kli Yakar, too—and these troubles stem from a sin of Ya'akov's, see below, Rivkah was implicated, too.

The sins that enabled the angel to hurt Ya'akov, Hatam Sofer suggests, were the two sisters he married, and his delay in fulfilling his vow to God. The second idea I leave for some other time, but the first surprises us because Ramban addressed the issue, said that when the Gemara says the Patriarchs observed the Torah, it was only in Israel; Ramban even thought it a reason Rahel died on her way into the Land.

Hatam Sofer appends a comment from Hullin 91a, where R. Shmuel bar Nahmani says the angel appeared in the form of a non-Jew, and R. Shmuel b. Abba thinks he took the form of a Torah scholar. He relates the two to the sins of Ya'akov, the Torah scholar idea being an issue of Ya'akov's deficiencies in honoring his parents, but the non-Jew being his having married two wives. For all that he was indeed outside of Israel, and the Patriarchs did not keep the Torah outside Israel, Hatam Sofer says wherever Ya'akov was, the Divine Presence was with him (Kli Yakar had said the opposite, leaving Israel was leaving the Divine behind), and therefore it was like he was in Israel, and should not have married two sisters.

Another bombshell from Hatam Sofer: "in Israel" really means "with the Divine Presence," and if Ya'akov always had the Divine with him, he was "in Israel," and sinned—somewhat—in marrying sisters.

A Surprising But Sincere Moment of Rapprochement

Part of the reason Ha'amek Davar is popular, I think, is that many of his ideas articulate a tolerant version of Judaism that resonate with moderns. His reading of Esav's hug and kiss of Ya'akov offers an example. He notices the verbs for the hug and kiss are one-sided, to his reading Esav doing all the hugging and kissing, because Ya'akov could not find it in him to reciprocate to "Esav adono, his master." I think he means Ya'akov was too awestruck by the powerful Esav to be so comfortable with him, because he gives another example, Shmu'el's kiss of Shaul after he anointed him king. This was a kiss of declaring position, so Shaul did not return it. Sometimes, physical acts only make sense in one direction.

But they do both cry. Where Ha'amek Davar certainly knows traditional sources that deny Esav's sincerity, he refuses to believe it. He says Ya'akov was moved to true love by his brother's actions, saw Esav's honest interest, in that moment, in a good fraternal relationship. Then he generalizes: throughout history, when the descendants of Esav awake themselves to a pure and better self, to recognizing the value and significance of the Jewish people, we too awaken ourselves to remember Esav is our brother, as we see with Rebbe, the revered, legendary, editor of the Mishnah, whom tradition thought had a true friendship with Antoninus, a high-ranked Roman official (possibly emperor).

Ve-chen harbeh, he says, and many others, too. We struggle with Esav often, probably usually, but whenever they remember what they should, we respond in kind, Ha'amek Davar is sure.

When Ya'akov met Esav, Kli Yakar thinks he tried to convince Esav he had failed to take his blessings, Hatam Sofer thought he was at risk because of two personal failures, the more surprising one being his having married sisters, and Ha'amek Davar sees a true reconciliation, a reminder we should always be open to when non-Jews do honestly want a good relationship with us.

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from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>
date: Dec 8, 2022, 6:59 AM subject: Pshuto Shel Mikra in Vayishlach

PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA

From the Teachings of Rav Yehuda Copperman zt"l

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

The Source for Gid Hanasheh —
Matan Torah or Parshat Vayishlach?

עַל כֵּן לֹא יֹאכְלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה:

Therefore, the Children of Israel will not eat the gid hanasheh. (Bereishit 32:33)

In discussing this sugya of gid hanasheh, the Rambam lays down a fundamental principle regarding Torah Min HaShamayim, which is based on the following Mishnah in Masechet Chullin (perek 7 mishnah 6):

נוהג בטהורה ואינו נוהג בטמאה, ר' יהודה אומר אף בטמאה. אמר ר' יהודה, והלא על בני יעקב נאסר גיד הנשה ועדיין בהמה טמאה מותרת להם! אמרו לו: מסיני נאסר אלא שנכתב במקומו.

(The prohibition of gid hanasheh) applies to a kosher animal, but not to a non-kosher animal. R' Yehudah says, even to a non-kosher animal. Said R' Yehudah, "Behold, the gid hanasheh was prohibited to the sons of Yaakov, when non-kosher animals were still permissible to them!"[1] They said to him, "It was stated at Sinai, but was written in its place."[2]

The Rambam's Principle The final words of the Mishnah teach us than when we speak of "Sinai" in terms of whether something preceded it, we need to differentiate between the event of Matan Torah at Sinai, and the parshah dealing with that event as written in the Torah. The Rambam writes in his Peirush HaMishnayot (Chullin ibid.):

Pay careful attention to this fundamental principle, namely, when (Chazal) say "It was prohibited at Sinai." You need to know that all the things we do or refrain from doing[3] are based solely on Hashem's command through Moshe, not on His command to any of the Nevi'im who preceded him.[4] For example, when we refrain from eating ever min hachai,[5] it is not because Hashem forbade Bnei Noach to eat ever min hachai, but because Moshe forbade ever min hachai to us based on the command he received at Sinai that ever min hachai should remain forbidden.

Similarly, we do not perform milah because Avraham performed milah on himself and the members of his household, but rather because Hashem commanded us through Moshe to perform milah as Avraham did. The same is true regarding gid hanasheh. We do not refrain from eating it by virtue of a prohibition to Yaakov Avinu, but rather on account of the command of Moshe Rabbeinu. Indeed, you will note that they (Chazal) said (Makkot 23b), "Six hundred and thirteen mitzvot were said to Moshe at Sinai," and all of these[6] are included in those mitzvot.

Let us indeed endeavor to pay careful attention to this major principle taught to us by the Rambam. It is true that we are descended from Avraham Avinu who was commanded with the mitzvah of milah. Moreover, Hashem praised Avraham over the fact that he would "וְצִוָּה אֶת בָּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶּרֶךְ ה' — command his children and household after him that they keep the way of Hashem" (Bereishit 18:19). Indeed, Avraham's children, grandchildren, and subsequent generations until Matan Torah all performed milah based on the command that he received from Hashem. However, the source which obligates us today in that mitzvah is Ma'amad Har Sinai, where we personally witnessed Hashem telling Moshe to command us regarding the Taryag Mitzvot, among which was the mitzvah of milah.

In this respect, the term "Sinai" represents a certain event at a certain time, where we received the mitzvot. Thus, when we speak of "Torah MiSinai," we are referring to the contents of the mitzvot that we received at Sinai.

Torah MiSinai and Torah Min HaShamayim It is worthwhile clarifying that alongside the concept of "Torah MiSinai," we have the concept of "Torah min HaShamayim." When we speak of the entire Torah being given at Sinai, there is no way we can be referring to the text of the Chumash in its entirety, for many of the sections written in the Torah describe episodes that had not yet happened when we were at Sinai,[7] and it is impossible that we would have access to the Torah's account of these things at that time. Rather, what was given to us in its entirety at Sinai was the body of Taryag Mitzvot.[8] The giving over of the text of Torah was something that took place later on, either in stages or all at the end.[9] This process of "dictation" is described by the Ramban in his introduction to his peirush on the Torah, "However, this is true and clear, that the entire Torah, from the beginning of Sefer Bereishit until "לְעֵינֵי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל," came from Hashem's "Mouth" to Moshe's ear." In this sense, we could say that the term "Torah MiSinai" refers to Torah SheBaal Peh — the contents of the mitzvot, and "Torah min HaShamayim" refers to Torah Shebichtav — the written text of the Torah.

Before Matan Torah vs. Before Parshat Yitro We return now to the words of the Rambam, that what obligates us in the mitzvah of milah is not Hashem's command to Avraham, but His command to us through Moshe at Sinai. Here we ask the following question. If this is the case, why does the Rambam

(Sefer HaMitzvot, mitzvat aseh 215) quote as the source in the Torah for the mitzvah of milah the pasuk in Parshat Lech Lecha (Bereishit 17:10) “ הִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל זָכָר — circumcise for yourselves every male,” which was said to Avraham before Matan Torah, and not the pasuk in Parshat Tazria (Vayikra 12:3) “וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתוֹ — and on the eighth day the flesh of his orlah shall be circumcised,” which was said after Matan Torah?

The answer to this question is that we need to distinguish between “before Matan Torah” as an event in our history, and “before Parshat Yitro” in the text of the Chumash. Both Parshat Lech Lecha and Parshat Tazria are part of Matan Torah!

It is true that “we do not learn halachah from prior to Matan Torah,” (Yerushalmi Moed Katan 3:5). However, we do learn halachah from a pasuk that is written before Parshat Yitro. The full concept of “Matan Torah” encompasses both the Taryag Mitzvot given to us baal peh at Sinai and the Torah from “בְּרֵאשִׁית” until “לְעֵינֵי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל” which was given to us subsequently in the Midbar. Thus, the source for a mitzvah can also be traced back to a pasuk in a parshah that is dealing with the period before Matan Torah, for that pasuk was also given to us as part of Matan Torah!

As long as something is written as a tzivui — command, it can be the source for a mitzvah, even if it appears before Parshat Yitro. Conversely, something that is written in narrative form cannot be the source of a mitzvah even if it is written after Matan Torah, for example, the Torah’s description of Pinchas killing Zimri (Bamidbar 25:1–8). The determining factor is thus signon (form), not location. To borrow the words of the Rambam, “Pay careful attention to this fundamental principle!”

In this regard, it is most interesting to consider the words of the Sefer HaChinuch concerning the source for the prohibition of gid hanasheh:

Mitzvah number three; Not to eat from the gid hanasheh, as it says “Therefore Bnei Yisrael will not eat the gid hanasheh.” These words “ לֹא יֹאכְלוּ — they will not eat” were not said as a narrative, as if to say, since this episode happened to the father, the children refrain from eating the gid hanasheh. Rather, they are Hashem’s command that it not be eaten.

We see that the Sefer HaChinuch is more interested in the signon of these words — that is, that they are a tzivui — and less so in their location.[10]

[1] [In which case the prohibition, when initially stated, certainly applied to both types of animals.] [2] [Which means that the prohibition applies specifically to animals that are permitted to Bnei Yisrael at the time of Matan Torah, that is, kosher animals only.] [3] That is, positive and negative mitzvot. [4] Such as Noach or the Avot. [5] [A limb from a live animal, one of the seven mitzvot of Bnei Noach] [6] Mentioned above: ever min hachai, milah, gid hanasheh. [7] For example, the Chet Ha’Egel and the Chet HaMeraglim. [8] See Masechet Zevachim 115b where the Gemara quotes a machloket between R’ Akiva and R’ Yishmael as to whether the details of the mitzvot were also given at Sinai, or just the general aspects of the mitzvot. [9] See Masechet Gittin 60a where the Gemara discusses if the text of the Torah was given “מגילה מגילה — scroll by scroll” or “חתומה — as one unit.” [10] In this respect, perhaps we may suggest that the pasuk can be understood on two levels. On the level of pshat we can understand that the words “לֹא יֹאכְלוּ — they will not eat” are a description of the practice of “ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל,” which in this sense refer to Yisrael’s (that is, Yaakov’s) sons prior to Matan Torah. On the level of Midrash, the words “לֹא יֹאכְלוּ” constitute a prohibition for “בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל,” the People of Israel after Matan Torah. As we will discuss (see the opening chapter in Parshat Mishpatim), it is possible to learn the same pasuk in terms of halachah on both a pshat and drash level, provided they do not contradict each other. This is the case here, where the pshat refers to the time before Matan Torah, and the drash to the time afterward.

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from: **Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig** <rabbizweig@shabbatshalom.org>
date: Dec 4, 2022, 9:01 AM
subject: **Amalek: Rejection and Disaffection**
Vayishlach (Genesis 32 - 36)

GOOD MORNING! It is quite remarkable to me that here we are in the “enlightened” 21st century and one can still wake up to headlines in national Jewish news outlets like “Kanye goes full Nazi.” Here you have an internationally known personality who proudly makes outrageous statements like, “There’s a lot of things I love about Hitler,” “I see good things about Hitler,” and “The holocaust is not what happened.”

It is quite obvious to me (and most people paying attention) that he is deranged. Not that I have any background in mental health, but seeing him make all of our politicians look sane by comparison allows me to feel comfortable with diagnosing him as “completely unhinged.” While mental illness is not something we should take lightly, we have to hold people responsible for overt acts or comments that are just beyond the pale. Being “off meds” is a thoroughly unacceptable excuse.

Of course this whole craziness (yes, pun intended) reminds me of the following joke. Two Jewish men sat on a park bench reading newspapers. One man, reading the Jewish Telegraph, was astonished to see his friend reading the Nazi Press. “How can you, a Jew, read that garbage?” he questioned.

"Why not?" replied the other. “When I read Jewish newspapers, all I read about is antisemitism, the political infighting in the State of Israel, acts of vandalism on Jewish institutions, and how everybody generally hates us. Reading them makes me depressed. But when I read the Nazi newspaper, I see only good things. We Jews own Hollywood, we control the media and banks, and we are all doctors and lawyers. It makes me feel really good!”

Crazy as it seems (again, intended), there is an amazing connection with Kan“Ye” and this week’s Torah reading. But first I need to explain the difference between an archenemy and a nemesis. An archenemy is someone who seeks your absolute destruction; think Joker vs. Batman or Lex Luther vs. Superman (or, unfortunately, Iran vs. Israel and most of the rest of the world). On the other hand, a nemesis can be a rival who motivates you to succeed and excel; think Magic Johnson and Larry Bird or Coke and Pepsi.

Rivalry should motivate one to grow in ways that he wouldn’t have otherwise achieved organically. A prime example is when Nike, desperate for an advantage over a surging Reebok, signed a college basketball player named Michael Jordan and, as they say, the rest is history.

The same is true for individuals. Research shows that long-distance runners are about 5 seconds per kilometer faster when one of their top rivals is in the race. Competing against a rival fires up your motivation and pushes you to greater heights. Building a supportive relationship with that rival can further elevate your performance.

Conversely, an archenemy is so focused on total annihilation that there’s no room for growth. If the distinction still seems confusing, just ask a woman in your life to explain it to you. Men often fail to grasp this concept and thus remain mired in mediocrity.

Women, however, have always intuitively grasped the nemesis/archenemy dichotomy. Most women have had at least one person in their lives whose seemingly sole purpose in life is to criticize her actions, compete for the attention of others, and generally drive her crazy. Often this is the woman’s best friend. Seriously.

Historically, the Jewish people have also had an archenemy; the nation of Amalek. The Torah recounts a surprise attack that Amalek used to blindside the Jewish people as they left Egypt.

Our sages mention a very interesting insight regarding the Amalekite attack. In retelling the incident, the Torah uses the Hebrew word “korcha – attacked you.” The sages point out that this word has its etymological roots in the Hebrew word “kor,” which means cool.

In other words, through this attack the Amalekites “cooled off” the Jewish people. Meaning, after hearing and seeing all the incredible miracles that

God had done for the Jewish people as they left Egypt (the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the utter defeat of the Egyptian army), all the other nations feared the Jewish people and wouldn't consider fighting them. However, Amalek's attack "cooled them off" and showed the other nations that it was possible to mount a war against the Jewish nation.

The sages continue with the following analogy: There was a bath that was scalding hot to the point that it was unusable. One fellow came along and jumped into the bath and got severely burned. Nevertheless, once he jumped in he succeeded in cooling it sufficiently to be usable for others.

Likewise, Amalek's suicidal attack on us was done with the express intent of "cooling us" to the point where other nations were able to conceive of the idea that they too could fight us. Thus, their purpose was the destruction of the Jewish people, even at the cost of their very own lives.

This brings us back to Kan"Ye" – a 21st century example of the same behavior. Here you have someone who is willing to destroy himself, his reputation, and the last twenty years of hard work. Because of his ongoing antisemitism and antisemitic diatribes, his business partnerships have all but evaporated. This has resulted in his estimated personal net worth falling precipitously – reportedly already down over 75% and continuing to plummet. However, this financial self-immolation hasn't even slowed his continuing crusade of antisemitism, and it has cooled the water for others to follow, like Kyrie Irving.

Still, nations aren't merely born archenemies and yet the Amalekites attacked the Jewish people in a suicidal manner. What is the source of Amalek's deep antipathy and hatred that drove them to attack, even at the very cost of their very lives? In this week's Torah reading we find the answer.

"And Timnah was a concubine of Elifaz, son of Eisav, and she bore to Elifaz Amalek" (Genesis 36:12).

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 99b) relates that Timnah, who eventually became a wife to Elifaz (son of Eisav), was of royal lineage. Timnah was the daughter of kings, but she rejected her royal position in order to marry into the family of Abraham. (A modern equivalent would be King Edward VIII of the United Kingdom who rejected his royal position to marry an American divorcée.)

The Talmud goes on to explain that Timnah originally wanted to convert and marry into the house of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but was repeatedly turned away. Undeterred, she declared, "It is preferable to be a handmaiden to this nation than to be a noblewoman in any other nation."

Thus, she became a concubine to Elifaz who was from the house Abraham; he was Isaac's grandson and Jacob's nephew. Ultimately, her union with Elifaz led to the birth of Amalek. The Talmud seems to make a stunning criticism of our forefathers; "Why did she give birth to Amalek who caused such suffering to the Jewish people? Because they should not have rejected her."

Yet, it is still difficult to fathom how someone who professed such admiration of the Jewish nation could birth a child who would grow up to be the archenemy of the Jewish people. In addition, Elifaz, who was the father of Amalek, was "raised on the lap of Isaac," which was why he refused to do his father's bidding and kill Jacob (Genesis 29:11).

How is it possible that a mother who gave up everything to connect with the Jewish people and a father who was the best of Eisav's children could beget a child whose nation would seek the destruction of the Jewish people throughout the ages?

The most basic element of humanity is the need to connect. Rashi (Sanhedrin 99b) explains that the mistake of the forefathers was that they "pushed her (Timnah) away from the (sheltering embrace) of the Almighty and that they should have converted her." In other words, even though they didn't want her to marry into the family they should not have rejected her desire to be connected to Hashem.

This concept is key: The most basic element of humanity is the need to connect. This is what drives the search for love and the search for a relationship with a "higher power." Elementally, everyone desires to "belong." This is the basis for being a part of a community, a club, or a certain clique. It is critical to the development of mankind because being connected as individuals allows for a much greater whole.

This strength is expressed on the Great Seal of the United States: E Pluribus Unum – out of many, one. This means that the strength of the country stems from diversity becoming a unified entity.

This foundation of mankind, that of acceptance and connection, is vital to our emotional well-being. The flip side – being rejected – is devastating to our emotional well-being. Rejection leads to intense surges in anger and aggression. In 2001, the Surgeon General of the U.S. issued a report stating that rejection was a greater risk for adolescent violence than drugs, poverty, or gang membership.

This is why ideals that are often nearly identical in their source, once they have rejected one another (such as the Shiite and Sunni varieties of Islam), become mortal enemies – constantly trying to wipe each other out. The very existence of the other is a constant and debilitating reminder of the original rejection.

Our forefathers' rejection of Timnah was so devastating to her that it far overwhelmed any appreciation she had for them. As Rashi points out, they should have at least encouraged her to be connected to Hashem, as this would have seemingly mitigated part of the rejection.

They did not, and therefore her only child, Amalek, made it his life's mission to avenge that rejection and repay those who caused his mother pain. The seemingly minor act of rejecting Timnah is the source of 3500 years of Jewish persecution and suffering perpetuated by the nation of Amalek.

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Gid ha-Nashe or not, Here I come!

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Dec 4, 2014)

One of the most intriguing episodes in this week's Parsha is va-ye'avek ish imo—when Yaakov struggled with the Malach. And in the end that Malach injures Yaakov in his thigh, at the place of the Gid ha-Nashe. Ve-hu tzole'a al yareicho—and Yaakov ends up limping. Our commemoration of that is, Al kein lo yochlu Venei Yisroel es Gid ha-Nashe asher al kaf ha-yareiach ad ha-yom ha-zeh ki nogah be-chaf yerech Yaakov be-Gid ha-Nashe. We don't eat the Gid ha-Nashe ad ha-yom ha-zeh to remember that incident. There are numerous pshatim that the meforshim give as to the symbolism of avoiding the Gid ha-Nashe. What are we supposed to learn and take away from that?The Seforno has a fascinating answer. He says that the Malach actually hurt Yaakov. He left him with a disability, as we can see from the fact that he was left limping. So Seforno says:

Why do we not eat the Gid ha-Nashe? The Malach injured Yaakov's Gid ha-Nashe. Therefore, we throw the Gid ha-Nashe in the garbage to show that this injury was not chashuv, as we can live without it anyway. The enemy damaged the Gid ha-Nashe. So we say, ok, we can manage and eat meat without the Gid ha-Nashe. And the point of this Seforno is, it seems, that you can't be sure that nothing bad will ever happen. In life, there are always challenges and problems. There are real evil forces out there in the world that could indeed hurt someone. They an take away part of them—damage their Gid ha-Nashe, so to speak. What's the point? We say to these forces: You know what? You can damage my Gid ha-Nashe. But I can live without it! I can take what I have left, eat it, and be satisfied. It's not up to us what circumstances Hashem deals us. What happens to us is not up to us. What is up to us is how we react to it. Some people let it demoralize them when something bad happens. There are people who get hurt and internalize that. And then, there are people who overcome it. We overcome our challenges by not saying that everything will be perfect, that we will not lose anything, and that our enemies have no power over us. Rather, we say that whatever circumstance we face, we are going to do the best of it, and whatever we are missing, we will do without. Whatever did not work out the way we want—

you know what—we can live our lives anyway and make do with what we have. And perhaps that's what Seforno is telling us. Al kein lo yochlu Venei Yisroel es Gid ha-Nashe. We say to our enemies throughout our history: You can do whatever you want, but whatever you take away from us, not only can we live without it, but we can also flourish without it. We can make the best of our situation instead of crying over what we don't have. If we take this approach, we can succeed like Yaakov, overcome any difficulty, and ultimately emerge victorious.Shabbat Shalom

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In the Land of Curiosity

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

He looked out at a city of lights and searched for its unseen designer. Noticing that a human being finally discerned Him, the divine architect of this grand city looked back and revealed Himself to Avraham. For thousands of years people were too engrossed in survival mode to probe their world and pursue its Creator. By following his spirit of curiosity Avraham was first to discover a supreme being.

Four hundred years later that divine architect had receded from view and, once again, needed to be discovered by a human. The chosen and favored children of Hashem had been enslaved in a dark Egyptian exile.

Who would liberate them from slavery, march them to the mountain of Hashem, and deliver the divine will? Only someone whose imagination was ignited by curiosity. This shepherd, named Moshe, passed a blazing bush which was not incinerated by the red-hot flames. Halting to examine this strange marvel, Moshe heard the voice of Hashem dispatching him to a historical mission. Many had passed that bush before Moshe, but few had paused or taken interest of this abnormal spectacle. Most were either too intellectually lazy or too preoccupied to notice this physics-defying bush. Once again, it was human curiosity which brought Hashem into our dark world

About nineteen hundred years later, curiosity once again revolutionized religious history. The Beit Hamikdash had been demolished and dark clouds of exile were swirling over Yerushalayim. In a dreary world without miracles or prophecy, we needed a great sage who could master the entire sweep of Torah and transmit it to future generations. We desperately needed Torah to be distilled for the torturous exile which awaited our people.An uneducated but curious farmer passed by a waterway, whose soft rushing stream carved out rock formations. His curiosity was piqued by watching soft water sculpt solid rock so he reasoned that Torah study, which is exhausting and difficult, could powerfully forge religiousidentity. Convinced of the strength of Torah study, he altered his own life in mid-stream becoming Rabbi Akiva, one of our greatest Torah sages.Three times in history Hashem was discovered through human curiosity, a basic trait which Hashem Himself imbued within us. We possess a thirst and a desire for knowledge and we utilize our curiosity to better study our world, engage new information, and find Him. We possess both instinctive curiosity as well as analytical curiosity. When we encounter something new, we instinctively approach it, explore it and try to better understand it. Additionally after we are familiar with an idea but we sense inconsistency or a gap in our knowledge, we feel compelled to explore resolve that gap.Without intellectual curiosity human progress would be stalled. During the scientific revolution between 1500-1700 humanity exhibited uncommon curiosity in analyzing, organizing and dramatically transforming our world. Curiosity allows us imagine a better world, rather than the fallen one we currently inhabit. As George Bernard Shaw remarked 'Some men see things as they are and say why, I dream things that never were and say, why not' We idolize curiosity but don't always pay enough attention its perils. What are the religious risks of unhealthy or excessive curiosity? Adam, Eve and Pandora Man's original sin was caused by Adam and Eve's uncontainable curiosity. The glistening tree at the center of the garden was too enchanting and even though consuming the fruit would incite divine punishment, they could not contain their curiosity and their catastrophic decision wrecked human history. Drawing in part upon the Torah, Greek mythology describes a similar fall caused by uncontrollable curiosity. Pandora, the first woman created by the gods, could not contain her own curiosity, opened a sparkly box which she knew contained pernicious contents, and unleashed misery upon humanity. Based upon this myth we refer to our own curiosity-driven miscues as opening a Pandora's box.Like all human desires, curiosity overwhelms our better judgement compelling foolish behavior even when we are aware of its unfortunate consequences. Like any uncontrolled desire, curiosity counters our better moral judgement causing moral weakness or even actual sin.Vertical thinking and horizontal thinking Curiosity also distracts our focus, causing our minds to wander and lose concentration. Our modern, noisy, and overstimulated world fascinates our curiosity, making it almost impossible to "live in the moment" and bring our full presence to our relationships. "Distracted thought" muddles our prayer, as we struggle to concentrate our wandering minds upon our dialogue with Hashem. Mental distraction obstructs our ability to deeply concentrate upon a single-minded issue. In the late 18th century, the great mussar school of Chelm emphasized mental focus as the source of moral development. Thinking deeply about life and values would, they contended, lead Man to a religiously directed lifestyle. Students actively worked to condition mental discipline and to avoid mental distraction. Mental exercises included thinking uninterruptedly about one particular item for lengthy periods of time. As curiosity always open new mental pathways, it constantly shifts our focus to new ideas, thereby preventing more penetrating analysis of any one idea. Curiosity induces horizontal thought, but depth demands vertical thinking. When we think wide, we don't always think deep. The addiction Curiosity is also addictive. Content providers in the media are skilled at tapping into our curiosity, tempting us with clickbait and leading us down endless internet trails of nothingness. We innocently click on a curious story and slowly wander off into hours of meaningless content. Curiosity only excites greater curiosity leading us on a journey which often feels like Alice in Wonderland. We awaken hours later realizing how much time we have wasted on nothingness. Curiosity, though initially innocent, ensnares us into the realm of the forbidden. It begins harmlessly enough, but we quickly discover that we have "innocuously" entered forbidden territory. This was precisely the pathology of Eve, who began by innocently touching the tree, but soon found herself innocently consuming prohibited fruit. Curiosity always poses the danger of "one thing leading to another ". Social curiosity We crave relationships and we desire to learn more about our surroundings and about the lives of other people. Social curiosity helps us build healthy interpersonal relationships, but it can also be morally destructive. Too much social curiosity about people's lives leads to shameful gossip and slanderous badmouthing. Even if conversation about people's lives isn't slanderous it is still inelegant. As Eleanor Roosevelt commented " great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events and small minds discuss people." The more we speak about people and their lives the more our minds contract. Unhealthy Social curiosity consumes discussion about people in place of more meaningful discussion about ideas. It provides a constant menu of mental junk-food. Worse, unbridled social curiosity can lead to voyeurism and delighting in viewing private matters of people's lives. The popularity of reality-shows brings out our worst voyeuristic tendencies Finally, our social curiosity takes us to 'places' we should not be visiting. It was Dinah's curiosity which led to her assault and eventually to the murder of an entire city. Her family had just faced a terribly tense encounter with Esav and, looking to release that tension, she tours the neighboring city of Shechem, looking for some adventure or distraction. The midrash asserts that Dinah was physically hidden from Esav for her own protection. When our access to the world is stifled and our horizons are diminished, we become even more curious about the world around us. She passes through Shechem visiting her new neighbors but exposing herself to uncouth elements. Her social curiosity takes her places she shouldn't be visiting, and leads to her abduction. Curiosity is Hashem's gift to human and the trait we use to decipher our

world and to disclose its Creator. Yet, as with every gift, it must be delicately balanced, especially in a world filled with shiny metal objects and a highway of distraction known as the internet.

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from**: TorahWeb** <torahweb@torahweb.org>
date: Dec 8, 2022, 10:05 PM
subject: Rabbi Yakov Haber
A Noble, Penitent, and Forgiving Spirit
Rabbi Yakov Haber
A Noble, Penitent, and Forgiving Spirit

"...And when he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to the children of Joseph [no longer] to be considered for the birthright" (Divrei Hayamim I 5:1). Reuvein, originally destined for greatness on three planes, the leadership role awarded to the firstborn, priesthood and kingship (Rashi to Bereishis 49:3) lost all of them (but see Rashi Bereishis 35:23) in a moment of indiscretion. To be sure, Rashi quotes the words of Chazal (Shabbos 55b) who testify that the sin was not as literally related in the text but rather entailed inappropriate meddling in his father's personal affairs when, after Rachel's death, he removed his father's bed from the tent of Bilhah, Rachel's former maidservant, to the tent of his mother, Leah, in order to protect her honor (see Rashi to Bereishis 35:22). His punishment was harsh and not long in coming.

Notwithstanding his grave miscalculation, Reuvein's noble personality emerges in several ways. Firstly, he soon after repents of his misdeed (see Rashi ibid. 37:29). Chazal testify that Reuvein was the very first person to do teshuva (Bereishis Rabba 84:19). Questioning this assertion in light of the fact that Adam and Kayin repented before Reuvein did, the commentaries on the Midrash answer that unlike Reuvein's predecessors who only repented after they were punished, he was "posei'ach b'teshuva" - initiating the process before Ya'akov Avinu (on his deathbed) wrested away the endowments of kingship and priesthood. Mori v'Rabi Rav C. Y. Goldwicht zt"l, the founding Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem b'Yavneh, presents a comprehensive analysis of the nature of Reuvein's repentance, illuminating for us how Reuvein's actions should serve as a model to emulate (Asufas Ma'arachos, Vayesihev, "Segulas haTeshuva v'Hatzalas Yosef"). Rav Goldwicht elaborates on the answer of the aforementioned commentaries on the Midrash explaining that Reuvein repented out of love not just fear of punishment. This was his uniqueness over his predecessors. Famously, Reish Lakish teaches (Yoma 86b) that concerning one who repents out of love, "zedonos na'asos lo kizchoyos," his former sins become sources of merit. Rav Goldwicht explains this seemingly paradoxical statement as follows: Each person has enormous reservoirs of abilities to serve Hashem with great zeal, creativity, energy, and determination. However, often these resources remain untapped since motivation might be lacking. Sometimes the natural desire for sin serves as the catalyst through which these qualities are actualized. Once the sinner is aware that he contains these newly-revealed resources through his misdeeds, he has the ability then to challenge them for service of his Creator. Reuvein did exactly that. Feeling a sense of responsibility precisely as the firstborn, he felt duty-bound to protect his mother's honor. This was the first recorded example of his utilizing his leadership role as the firstborn, but his action was a grave miscalculation. But a positive benefit emerged from this tragic episode. Reuvein now channeled these newly developed leadership skills to rescue his brother Yosef. In the words of the Midrash quoted by Rashi (ibid. 37:22), "He said, 'I am the firstborn and the oldest of all of them; the blame will only be placed on me!'" His leadership role, originally discovered through a rash, intemperate act prompted him to rescue his brother. His repentance now rose to the level of teshuva mei'ahava, consisting of active channeling of all of one's talents - including the newly-found ones as a result of former sins - for the performance of courageous, lofty deeds in the service of G-d. These dual accomplishments, repentance and the saving of Yosef are lauded together by the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 13:18):

And because he sought two proper actions, saving Yosef and repentance, he was included in the count [of the tribes] as it is written, "And the children of Ya'akov were twelve" (ibid. 35:22). Because of these two actions, Moshe was able to pray for Reuvein that he should not be separated from his brothers, as it is written, "May Reuvein live and not die!" (Devarim 33:6). "May Reuvein live" - as a result of his preserving Yosef's life; "And not die" because of the action concerning Bilha - as a result of his repentance.

Rav Goldwicht explains that there is a direct link between these two actions. The repentance initially done out of fear was transformed into one done out of love as demonstrated by his channeling his leadership qualities to save his brother.

B'nei Yissaschar (by Rav Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov) (Tishrei, 4:3:9) presents a different explanation as to the uniqueness of Reuvein's teshuva. The Zohar seemingly maintains that concerning sins connected to shmiras habris, those involving misuse of the physical drive, teshuva does not help. Many explain, in light of the central teaching of Chazal that אין לך דבר שעומד בפני התשובה, no sin is so great that teshuva is ineffective for it, that the meaning of this Zohar is that for sins of this nature, teshuva ila'a, a higher form of teshuva is required. One could suggest that this "higher form" of repentance refers to one rooted in love and not just fear. Reuvein, although he did not sin in the way the Torah states, nonetheless, because of his high level, was "charged" by the heavens with the crime of adultery because of his interference in his father's intimate matters. Since a higher form of teshuva is required to achieve atonement for such a sin, Reuvein also had to repent on a level befitting the sin attributed to him even though he committed a lesser sin.

Rather than feeling resentment toward his earthly father or His Father in Heaven for his loss of his leadership roles, Reuvein enthusiastically repents in order to recapture his former pure state even if he had to forfeit his former glory. This recalls the famous statement of another towering figure who sinned in a lesser manner than that which was attributed to him, Dovid Hamelech - who guided generations with the power of repentance (see Avoda Zara 9a) and spent the rest of his life returning to His Creator - " שבטך ומשענתך המה ינחמוני", "[Both] your rod [of punishment] and your staff [of support] comfort me!" Punishment atones; suffering brings us back to Hashem.

An even greater testament to Reuvein's character is how he saves his brother Yosef, the very one who receives one of the three endowments destined for him, his birthright. Foreseeing this event, Leah, according to Chazal's tradition, includes this noble act in his very name. Reu - bein - see the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law. When the latter (Esav) sold his birthright and suffers the consequences of his actions, he threatened his brother's life. But when my son had his birthright taken away from him and given to his brother Yosef, he attempts to save him from the other brothers (Rashi, Bereishis 29:32, from Chazal). The Midrash beautifully comments that Reuvein felt eternal gratitude to Yosef for envisioning eleven bundles of wheat in his dream bowing down to him. The fact that there were eleven and not ten confirmed that Reuvein had not been expelled in Heaven from the tribes of Israel! This further inspired him to argue with his brothers in order to save Yosef (Bereshis Rabba 84:15). This sense of gratitude even toward one who eventually would receive his birthright serves as a noble example for all of us.

Rav Moshe Cordovero, in his important work, Tomer Devorah, presents the lengths to which a person should strive to benefit others under all circumstances. Even toward someone who has caused him harm, one should direct kindness for, in so doing, one emulates his Creator. We often utilize the very talents that Hashem has graciously granted us to defy his will. This is analogous to someone granting someone a loan to open a business which the latter then utilizes to crush his competition, the one giving him the loan! Even though we similarly rebel against Hashem with the tools which he gave us, nonetheless, he still continues to give us those very gifts. An exemplary story is told about Rav Mordechai Eliyahu zt"l whose son had been libeled. When the case came to court, the libeler came crying to Rav Eliyahu that he could not afford the fees for a lawyer. After rebuking him for the libel, Rav

Eliyahu then proceeded to pay for the petitioner's legal expenses - telling him to keep this secret from his son!

May Hashem grant us the will to follow in the footsteps of Reuvein, an often overlooked hero, by lovingly and diligently channeling all of our talents in the service of the One Above, feeling gratitude to all who have helped us even in small ways and in assisting all of Hashem's children.

More divrei Torah from Rabbi Haber

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from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> date: Dec 8, 2022, 2:31 AM subject: Rav Kook on Vayishlach: Finding Balance - Jacob's Journey to Holistic Living

Rav Kook Torah

Vayishlach: Jacob's Journey to Holistic Living Having survived the trickery of uncle Laban and the enmity of his brother Esau, Jacob finally returned to his homeland.

"Jacob arrived whole (shalem) to the city of Shechem in the land of Canaan" (Gen. 33:18).

In what way was Jacob shalem? The Talmud explains that he was "whole in body, whole in money, whole in his Torah knowledge" (Shabbat 33b).

According to the medieval commentator Rashi, these three areas are directly related to Jacob's previous ordeals. Physically — Jacob healed from the lameness the stranger had afflicted upon him in their mysterious struggle at Peniel. Financially — he did not lack money, despite the expensive gifts he had offered his brother Esau. And spiritually — he had not forgotten his Torah learning, despite the long years of intensive labor at Laban's house.

Jacob's Holistic Perspective In truth, Jacob's wholeness was not to be found in any quantitative accomplishments. It could not be measured by how fast he could run, by the number of sheep he owned, or by the number of scholarly discussions he had memorized. Rather, Jacob's wholeness was in his holistic approach toward these diverse spheres.

People think that the pursuit of excellence in one field entails neglecting other areas. A person who seeks perfect health and physical strength will come to the realization that one needs money to attain this goal. But the pursuit of wealth can become such an all-absorbing goal that it may come at the expense of one's original objective – good health. Ironically, the anxiety to acquire wealth can end up ruining one's health.

It is clear that both good health and financial security help provide the quietude needed to refine character traits and attain intellectual accomplishments. However, these different areas, instead of complementing one another, often compete with each other. We suffer spiritually when our desire to strengthen the body and cultivate social living (which requires certain financial means) are not understood in their overall context.

The perfection of Jacob — the ish tam, "the complete man" (Gen. 25:27) — was in his ability to live in a way that no single pursuit of excellence, whether spiritual or material, needed to contradict or detract from other personal goals. On the contrary, when they are understood properly, each aim complements and strengthens the others.

This is the profound message of the Talmudic statement. Jacob was whole in body and wealth, and from both of these together, he found the inner resources to be whole in Torah. Jacob exemplified the trait of emet, truth — "Give truth to Jacob" (Micah 7:20). He demonstrated that, in their innermost depths, all accomplishments are united together; all reflect different facets of the same inner truth.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 73-74. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. III, p. 209. Illustration image: 'Jacob Wrestling with the Angel' by Rembrandt (1659)).

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Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

ויעקב נסע סכתה ויבן לו בית ולמקנהו עשה סכת. על כן קרא שם המקום סכת

Yaakov journeyed to Succos and built himself a house, and, for his livestock, he made shelters. He, therefore, called the name of the place Succos. (33:17)

Vayishlach 5783

According to the simple p'shat, explanation, of the pasuk, Yaakov Avinu built a house for himself and succos, temporary housing/pens, for his cattle. Targum Yonasan ben Uziel explains the words, Va'yiven lo bayis, "And he built for himself a house"; u'banah lei bei midrasha, "he built for himself a bais medrash." In other words, Yaakov built for himself a place to study Torah – this was his house, his domicile. For his sheep and cattle, he built succos. This seems unbelievable. Why should Yaakov give a name to a place based upon the temporary housing that he made for his cattle? Why did he not give a name that would somehow incorporate the bais hamedrash that he had built. After all, this was his primary home. Yaakov's yeshivah was his home! In Emunah Shleimah, Horav Tzvi Nakar, Shlita, suggests that Yaakov gave the name Succos in order to emphasize that he was satisfied with temporary housing. For his personal use, the bais hamedrash where he would spend most of his waking hours, he built a permanent abode. Succos is a message: Anything material/physical is temporary. The only entity which has endurance is that of the spiritual dimension, because it connects to nitzchiyus, eternity. A person must be aware what is ikar, primary, and what is taful, secondary.

When the boundaries of Russia, Poland and Ukraine were redone in order for people to survive the economic upheaval, it was necessary to move products from country to country in the most "creative" manner. The taxes that had to be paid for most merchandise were prohibitive. One day, a Jewish fellow pulled up to the new border with a barrel laden with sand. "What do you have there?" the inspector asked. "Nothing, just sand" was the Jew's reply. "I do not believe you." The inspector pulled out a sieve and sifted through the sand. He was certain that diamonds were hidden within. When he could not find anything, he let the fellow pass. Two hours later, the man was back with another wheelbarrow filled with sand. This time the inspector was certain that the Jew was attempting to pull a fast one on him. He searched and searched and came up with nothing.

This continued all day and the following day. After two weeks had passed, and the Jew had transported 250 barrels full of sand, the inspector asked, "Listen, I will grant you a pass and not charge you taxes, but you must tell me your trick. What are you hiding?" The Jew replied, "I am transporting barrels for sale. The sand just takes your mind off my true objective."

We, too, fall prey to this ruse. The yetzer hora attempts to convince us to follow the money, focus on the material, devote our lives to physical pursuits. All of this is done in order to turn our hearts and minds away from what is primary: ruchniyus, spirituality. We are too busy searching through the sand for the diamonds. Meanwhile, the barrels are passing by under our noses.

Horav Nesanel Reisman, zl, father of Horav Yisrael Yitzchak Reisman, zl, Dayan in the Eidah HaChareidis, lived in one of the tiny villages on the outskirts of Warsaw. He had an overwhelming desire to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael. In those days, travel across the high seas was fraught with danger and difficulty. In addition, the poverty and deprivation which the intrepid settlers who came to Yerushalayim confronted were daunting. Nonetheless, the opportunity to live in our G-d-given Land made the trip all the more acceptable. At first, a group of compatriots wanted to join him, but they had too many hurdles to surmount. They did ask that Rav Nesanel write to them describing his living quarters and life in the Holy Land, so that they could make an educated decision concerning following him.

Rav Nesanel arrived, and shortly thereafter he to wrote his friends, singing the country's praises. He wrote, "My home has windows that are three meters high; the house is roomy and stunning. The inhabitants of Yerushalayim want nothing and live in total calm and joy." The letter impressed the community that remained in Poland, but, before they committed themselves to such a change in their lives, they wanted one of

their own to see for himself and report back to them the country's extraordinary features. The agent left for Eretz Yisrael and immediately upon arrival went in search of Rav Nesanel. It was a small community in which everyone knew one another. He was directed to a small corner of Meah Shearim. He walked down the steep steps to the basement of a house that had seen better days. He searched for a while until he was able to locate the "hole in the wall" that served as home to Rav Nesanel and his family. He entered to see a number of young children playing on a sheet spread out on the floor. The poverty that reigned in the home was evident. The joy that he saw on the faces of the children, however, was something to behold. He asked the children to direct him to Rav Nesanel. They pointed to a shul across the street. He entered the shul to hear Rav Nesanel learning in his singsong voice. After greeting one another, Rav Nesanel asked, "Have you made the move?" "No, actually I am here to check out the community to see if everything that you wrote about your house is true. Sadly, I have to say that it could not be further from the truth."

Rav Nesanel looked at the man incredulously. "Look at the windows; are they not three meters high? Look how roomy and airy the shul is. I did not bend the truth." "But I saw where you live, and it is nothing like what you intimated," the man countered. "That is where I sleep at night. The shul is my house. It is the home in which I spend most of my day. This is truly my house."

It is all a matter of perspective. Some erect mansions with more rooms than they will ever fill. Unfortunately, this is their home which bespeaks their value system. True, they "visit" the shul upon occasion, but it is nothing more than a casual visit. Their home is their mansion, or whatever home or villa they inhabit during their vacation. We, by our actions, determine the value of a given entity. A farmer is not interested in diamonds. He needs fertilizer to make his crops grow. Are we any different?

A man who suffered from abject poverty came to the holy Apter Rav, zl, bemoaning his sorry state of affairs. His daughter was engaged, and he had no money with which to marry her off. The Rebbe listened intently, then asked, "How much money do you need?" "One thousand ruble" was the immediate response. "How much do you have?" "One ruble is all that I can spare."

The man was presenting the Rav with a tall order. The Apter, however, was used to tall orders. "The first business appointment that comes your way – take it, regardless of its judiciousness." The man left and stopped by an inn for the night. There he met a group of wealthy diamond merchants who were having dinner with their drinks. One of them, who had imbibed more than he should have, decided to play a little game at the expense of the poor fellow.

"Would you like to purchase a diamond?" Remembering the Rebbe's advice that he accept the first business opportunity, he agreed to purchase a diamond. "How much money do you have?" the merchant asked. "One ruble." When he heard this, the man laughed. "Do you have any idea what this diamond is worth? One ruble could perhaps buy a small sliver of this diamond." The poor man stood his ground, "I understand, but all I have is one ruble."

The man then thought of an idea, "I will sell you my chelek, portion, of Olam Habba, the World to Come for one ruble." What could the poor fellow do? The Rebbe had given explicit instructions to settle for the first business opportunity, even if it meant buying this man's Olam Habba for a ruble. "I agree." The poor man immediately put together a contract, had two witnesses affix their signatures, and the deal was made. He now owned the merchant's Olam Habba, and the merchant had his sole possession: one ruble.

A short while later, the merchant's wife returned from her own shopping trip and heard what had transpired. "You foolish man!" she screamed at her husband. "How could you have sold your Olam Habba? I will not stay married to you. I am going to the Rav and ask for a divorce!" The merchant saw that his wife was implacable. She would not remain with him unless he reclaimed his Olam Habba. The man returned to the poor man and offered him ten rubles for the Olam Habba. "Absolutely not. I will not sell for less than one thousand ruble." The merchant was stuck between a rock and a hard place. His wife was demanding a divorce unless he retrieved his Olam Habba, and the poor man had imposed the exorbitant sum of one thousand ruble for its return. With no other recourse, the merchant extracted a thousand ruble from his wallet and purchased back his Olam Habba. The poor man could now marry off his daughter, and the merchant had his Olam Habba and his wife.

The woman now said she wanted to speak with the Apter Rav concerning whether, in fact, her husband's Olam Habba was worth one thousand ruble. The Rebbe listened to her question and replied, "Truthfully, when your husband agreed to sell his Olam Habba for one ruble, its value dropped down to even less than a ruble. What Jew would sell his Olam Habba? Can he even begin to imagine its value? By his actions and attitude, however, one determines and sets the value of his Olam Habba. Afterwards, when he paid out one thousand ruble to recover it, he showed that it was very valuable in his eyes. Furthermore, since, as a result of his payment, the poor man could now marry off his daughter, his Olam Habba increased in value."

Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl, supplemented this. The value of any noble action is measured by how much the person who executes it values it. Every mitzvah is valued in accordance with a person's understanding of its infinite worth. Sadly, some just do not understand the mitzvos and good deeds that they perform, hence devaluating their spiritual worth.

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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 in changed, i.e. the site of Pni'el.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Therefore, the fact that this blessing also includes Yaakov's name change to Yisrael suggests a thematic connection between this name change and the **conclusion** of the bechira process!

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

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

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

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

THE EVENTS BEFORE THE STRUGGLE

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

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

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

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

1. Yaakov, using 'trickery', buys the 'bechora' from Eisav.
2. Yitzchak plans to bless Eisav with prosperity and power;. using 'trickery', Yaakov 'steals' that blessing..
3. Yaakov must 'run away' **to** Padan Aram (in fear of Eisav).
4. Yaakov spends twenty years with Lavan; often suffering from Lavan's 'trickiness'.
5. Yaakov 'runs away' **from** Padan Aram (in fear of Lavan).
6. Yaakov prepares for his confrontation with Eisav. [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 'capitulation' - bowing down profusely before his brother - showing him that in reality, he never received the blessing that he had tried to steal.

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

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

REALISM OR LAZINESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY TWICE?

For some reaons, 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)	**FROM GOD** **(upon arriving)** (35:11-12)
May "**kel Shakai**" bless you,	I am '**kel Shakai**':
make you fertile and multiply,	Be fertile and multiply,
to become an **assembly** of peoples	An **assembly** of nations
May He grant you the -	shall descend from you...
blessing of Avraham	The Land I gave Avraham...
to you and your offspring .	..to you and to your offspring
that you may possess the Land	to come, I assign the Land.

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

THE FUTURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. There is a Midrash telling us 'Yaakov avinu lo met' - Yaakov never died. Relate this Midrash to the fact that the bechira process concludes with Yaakov, and that all of his offspring have been chosen. Relate this also to 49:33 in comparison to 35:29 and 25:8.

B. TOLDOT EISAV

Yitzchak was chosen. Therefore, we need to follow the toldot of Eisav, just as we needed to follow the toldot of Yishmael & Lot.

Based on this assumption, explain perek 36.

Based on the above shiur, why do you think there is an emphasis on the kings who ruled in Edom before a king ruled over Bnei Yisrael (see 36:31)!

C. BRIT MILA & GOD'S BLESSING TO YAAKOV

A quick analysis of God's final blessing to Yaakov at Bet El (35:9-15) immediately shows that it is reflective of brit mila (Breishit perek 17). The name of Kel Shakai; 'pru u-revu'; 'kehal goyim & melachim'; 'shem Elokim'; and the concept of 'lihiyot lecha le-Elokim' can all be found at brit mila. Note that the bracha of brit mila which began in perek 17 with Kel Shakai telling Avraham 'hithalech lefanai - ve-heyeh **tamim**' is being given now to Yaakov - the **ish tam**.

Try to explain the significance of this.

Carefully compare Yitzchak's bracha to Yaakov before he departs to Padan Aram (28:3-4) to God's blessing of Yaakov at Bet El (35:9-13)! Note that they are almost identical.

Relate this to the last two shiurim.

Note that God's name 'be-shem Havaya' does not appear unto Yaakov from the time that he arrives in Eretz Canaan! Note also God's promise to Yaakov at Bet El, before he left to Padan Aram, (28:13-15) which was given be-shem Havaya. Are any aspects of that bracha repeated in Bet El when Yaakov returned? If so, which?

Note the single use by Yaakov of shem Havaya in his prayer prior to his confrontation with Eisav (32:9-12). What promise does he remind God of at that time? Where is the source of that promise.

Relate to the relationship (be-shem Havaya) between brit bein ha-btarim, the bracha at the akeida, and this tefilla. Note - 'kochvei ha-shamayim' and 'asher lo yisafer me-rov'.

How does this relate to the nationalistic aspect of these revelations, i.e. the concept of 'yerushat ha-aretz'.

Could one consider from a nationalistic perspective that even though Yaakov returned from Galut Aram, his stay in Eretz Canaan was only a short stopover on his way down to Galut Mitzrayim? Relate this to 'arami oved avi, va-yered mitzrayim...' (Devarim 36:3-10). Compare the language there to brit bein ha-btarim! Why do Chazal interpret this pasuk as referring to Yaakov? Could the fact that Yaakov understood that the time for the fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim had not yet come, explain his timid behavior when he confronts Eisav?

FOR FURTHER IYUN - for Shiur #1

A. Chazal tell us that the mal'ach was the 'sar shel Eisav' - Eisav's 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'hiyeh ELOKIM imadi..." (28:20) and "v'haya Hashem li l'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 a land, a 'security' investment should he decide one day to return.

At this point, we posit, Yaakov really does continue his journey from Shechem to Bet El - and then on to Hebron - after only a very short stay. However, the Torah records the details of this 'first' ascent to Bet-el - at a later time (see 35:9), while 'inserting' the details the Dena event in between (i.e. in chapter 34), even thought that event took place at a later time! [Later in the shiur, we will suggest a reason why this story in 'inserted'.]

[To appreciate this theory, it is recommended that you review those parshiot, especially noting the new 'parshia' that begins in 35:9.]

Let's take a look at the special wording of the 'parshia' that begins in 35:9 - which we claim took place BEFORE the events in chapter 34:

"And God [had already /"od"? / or 'again'] appeared unto Yaakov UPON HIS ARRIVAL from Padan Aram, and blessed him ... then Yaakov set up a MATZEYVA at this site... and called the name of this site BET-EL. Then they traveled towards Efrat" [i.e. on the way toward Hebron], and Rachel gave birth with complications [& then died]..." (see 35:9-19)

Our contention is that this entire 'parshia' (35:9-22) actually took place immediately upon Yaakov's arrival from Padan Aram (as its opening pasuk suggests/ compare 33:18!), several years BEFORE the incident with Dena in Shechem (i.e. 34:1-35:8).

A very strong proof to this claim may be drawn from the words of Yaakov himself (to Yosef) before his death:

"... when I was RETURNING FROM PADAN, Rachel died on the road, while still a long distance from Efrat, and I buried her on the way..." (see 48:7)

Yaakov himself states that Rachel died during his original journey from Padan to Eretz Canaan. He would not have spoken of her death as having occurred "when I was returning from Padan" if she died only AFTER Yaakov had spent several years in Shechem.

Furthermore, why was Yaakov traveling from Bet-el southward, towards Efrat? Most likely, he was on the way home to his father in Hebron! In other words, it may very well have been that Yaakov DID return immediately to visit his father, just as we expected him to.

[For some reason, the Torah never records the details of this encounter. But this question begs itself no matter how we explain the order of the 'parshiot.' Only in the final summary psukim (i.e. 35:27-19) are we told that Yaakov had returned to Yitzchak, and even there it appears to be only for Yitzchak's burial. It would only be logical to assume that Yaakov must have gone to visit his father much earlier.]

THE NEW ORDER

Before we continue, let's review the order of events (and hence the order of the 'parshiot') according to this interpretation:

After successfully confronting Esav, Yaakov continues on to Eretz Canaan, stopping first in Shechem to build a MIZBAYACH and thank God, just as Avraham Avinu had done. While in Shechem, he buys a parcel of land for 'future use,' planning possibly to later return to this area with his family. [Recall that Yaakov owns many sheep, and Shechem is a prime area for grazing cattle, just as Yaakov's children later return many years later to the Shechem area to graze their cattle (see 37:13).]

After buying a field in Shechem and building a mizbayach, Yaakov continues to Bet-el, where God appears to him, and Yaakov re-states his intention to ultimately fulfill his "neder" to make a 'bet Elokim' at that site (even though he isn't quite ready yet to begin its construction).

There, God confirms the blessing of "bechira" and changes his name from Yaakov to Yisrael (see 35:9-12). [According to this interpretation, Yaakov had been blessed and had his name changed by the "malach" only several days earlier!/ see 32:26-28]. Even though he cannot at this point build the actual Bet-Elokim that he promised, he re-affirms his promise by once again anointing the MATZEYVA and calling that site Bet-el (see 35:14-15).

Next, Yaakov travels toward Hebron to see his parents. Along the way, Rachel dies and is buried on the roadside. Yaakov then sets up tent in Migdal Eder (see 35:21). Even though we do not know its precise location, it would be safe to assume that Migdal Eder is located in an area not too far from Yitzchak's home in Hebron. It is here where the incident with Reuven & Bilha takes place. Although we may reasonably assume that Yaakov sharply criticized Reuven, the Torah for some reason abruptly curtails this story, right in the middle of a sentence! [See 35:22! / see also 49:4!]

Some time later, maybe a year or two (or even five) later, Yaakov moves with his family to Shechem - after all, he did purchase a parcel of land there specifically for that purpose. By now, the children are older - old enough for the incident with Dena (as detailed in chapter 34) to occur. It also stands to reason that at this point the people of Shechem see Yaakov as a permanent neighbor, rather than a transient; and therefore - they seek marital and economic ties with Yaakov's family. Finally, this also explains why specifically Shimon & Levi take leadership roles at this time. Reuven had most likely been 'demoted' from his position of 'family leader' after the incident with Bilha.

After the brothers wipe out Shechem, Yaakov fears the revenge of the neighboring population. God therefore commands him to MOVE from Shechem to Bet-el for PROTECTION (see 35:1-7, read carefully). Just as Bet-el had protected Yaakov when he was faced with the threat of his brother Esav, so will Bet-el protect Yaakov now from his latest crisis. [Note how specifically this point - danger from Esav - is mentioned over and over again in this 'parshia' (i.e. 35:1-8, see 35:1,3,7!).

Note also that these psukim imply a recent, immense expansion of Yaakov's family and possessions (see 35:6 - "v'chol ha'AM asher imo" & 35:2 - "v'et kol ashe imo"). This may also explain why Yaakov must remind these 'newcomers' to rid themselves of their idols before ascending to Bet-el. (see 35:3-4).

So Yaakov now moves his permanent residence to Bet-el, which had already been established as the site for his future Bet Elokim, and accordingly builds a MIZBAYACH (see 35;1,3,7).

Let's use a chart once again to show the 'new order' of the parshiot:

PSUKIM	**-**	**GENERAL TOPIC**
(A) 32:3-33:17		Yaakov's confrontation with Esav upon his return to Eretz Canaan.
(B) 33:18-20		Yaakov's arrival in Shechem [& buys a field].
(E) 35:9-22		Yaakov arrives in Bet-el, receives his blessing and fulfills his "neder"; Rachel dies along the way to see Yitzchak near Hebron.
(C) 34:1-31		Yaakov returns to Shechem, Dena is abducted, and Shimon & Levi wipe out the city.
(D) 35:1-8		Yaakov flees from Shechem to Bet-el, where he builds a mizbayach.
(F) 35:23-29		A summary of Yaakov's children, followed by the death of Yitzchak.

Thus, by simply changing the location of a single 'parshia,' nearly all our questions are solved. However, our approach raises a much bigger question: WHY isn't this 'parshia' (35:9-22) recorded where it belongs?

As stated above, the Torah will present events out of chronological sequence only when there is a compelling reason to do so. Therefore, we must look for a thematic reason for this 'change' in order.

As usual, we will return to the primary theme of Sefer Breishit - the process of "bechira" & "dechiya" - to suggest an answer to this question.

A THEMATIC REASON

Recall from previous shiurim that the theme of Sefer Breishit progresses with each set of Sifrei TOLADOT. Throughout the progression, someone from among the "toladot" is 'chosen' while the others are 'rejected.' Recall also that in Parshat Va'yishlach we are still under the 'header' of "toldot Yitzchak" (see 25:19). The story of "toldot Yitzchak" clearly reaches its conclusion with the 'parshia' of 35:23-29 [(F) in the above chart], which describes Yitzchak's death. [Note also that "toldot Esav" (36:1) follow immediately afterward.]

This 'parshia' 35:23-29 (F) MUST therefore appear at the conclusion of "toldot Yitzchak."

But why was 'parshia' (E) transplanted from its chronological location to here, immediately preceding 'parshia' (F)?

One could suggest several 'thematic' reasons:

One answer could be alluded to in the somewhat innocuous though very telling statement that introduces (F):

"And the children of Yaakov were TWELVE... "

(see 35:23-26, noting the 'parshia' in the middle of a pasuk)

Unlike Avraham and Yitzchak, ALL of Yaakov's children are 'chosen' - EVEN his children from the maidservants, EVEN Reuven who had most likely been berated, etc. One could suggest that the Torah takes this entire 'parshia' (E) - which ends with the incident with Reuven & Bilha (which most likely had taken place much earlier) - from its chronological location and intentionally places it here - NEXT to the concluding statement of 35:23 - to stress that ALL of Yaakov's children are chosen - EVEN Reuven! [See Ramban 35:22! See also Rashi, Chizkuni & Radak 35:22.]

This interpretation may also explain why 35:22 ends mid-sentence. It would seem that the pasuk should end with Yaakov's curse of Reuven, which becomes apparent in 49:4. However, because the whole point is to show that Reuven remains part of the 'chosen family,' the second half of the sentence is 'cut off.' Instead, the entire 'parshia' is attached to the statement, "and the children of Yaakov were twelve - the children of Leah: the firstborn of Yaakov = REUVEN, and Shimon, Levi..." (35:23-24).

An alternate (and more simple) explanation could be that the Torah is simply keeping all of the stories relating to Shechem together. Hence, once the Torah informs us that Yaakov purchased a parcel of land in Shechem (33:19), Chumash continues with what later took place in Shechem as a result of this purchase (34:1-35:8). Then, after completing that story, Chumash returns to the story of Yaakov's first return to Bet-el (35:9-22), even though it in fact took place much earlier.

Finally, one could suggest a very significant thematic reason

for this 're-arrangement' of the 'parshiot'. Recall our explanation that Yaakov's naming of 'Bet-El' reflection his conviction to one-day establish a 'Bet-Elokim' [a house for God] on this site. The first time Yaakov stated this intention (see 28:19), he could not build a Bet-Elokim at that time for he was a fugitive on his way to 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 "artza Se'ir, sedei Edom" -- all the way to Eisav's doorstep -- because Eisav has no inkling of Ya'akov's whereabouts and his impending arrival in 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 makes sense to ask for something and keep emphasizing that you really don't deserve it?

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

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

Note also that this tefila is not Ya'akov's first recorded tefila: that prayer took place at the beginning of VaYeitzei. Back then, during Ya'akov's dream of the ladder ascending heavenward, Hashem promised him that he would produce a great nation, inherit the Land of 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 [akhapera panav] with the gift which precedes me [le-fanai], and then I will see his face [panav], so that perhaps he will forgive me [yisa panai]."

The gifts passed before him [al panav] . . . .

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

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

HEDGING HIS BETS:

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

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

Hazal suggest that Ya'akov went back over the river to get some small things he had left there from the previous trips. But the Torah itself says nothing about this at all. The simple reading of the Torah tells us that Ya'akov put his wives and children in one camp, and he himself "remained alone" -- he HIMSELF was the other camp! Ya'akov puts himself in the forward camp, the one more exposed to Eisav's approaching forces. And, as we all know, Ya'akov is indeed the first to clash with the forces of Eisav -- but not his *physical* forces. Ya'akov is attacked by a mysterious "ish," an unnamed "man," who wrestles with him through the night. Again, we see Ya'akov, the "heel," turning to "face" a challenge. He no longer squirms to avoid facing the consequences of his actions; instead, he courageously risks his own safety to protect his family, putting himself in the vanguard.

THE ANONYMOUS WRESTLER:

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

BERESHIT 32:26-30 --

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

Clearly, we have a lot of explaining to do:

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

NOT JUST FOR SPORT:

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

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

NAME GAMES:

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

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

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

BERAKHOT FROM HASHEM:

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

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

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

BERAKHOT OFFERED BY PEOPLE:

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

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

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

BERESHIT 49:28 --
This is how their father spoke to them and BLESSED them, each man according to the BLESSING that he BLESSED them.

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

BERESHIT 49:1 --

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

AND NOW BACK TO OUR SHOW:

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

The berakha really meant for Eisav:

BERESHIT 27:28-29 --

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

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

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

BERESHIT 28:3-4 --

"E-l 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-l 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 spritual 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-l Shad-dai" would come to Ya'akov and bless him with the blessing of Avraham -- the Land, Eretz Cana'an, naationhood, 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-l 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-l Shad-dai.

AN UNUSUAL NAME OF GOD:

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

The first time Ke-l Shad-dai appears is in Parashat Lekh Lekha, in chapter 17. Hashem comes to Avraham and says, "I am Ke-l 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 cicumcision.

"Ke-l 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-l 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]

Parshas Vayishlach: Shim'on and Levi, Brothers of Dinah

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. "CURSED BE THEIR WRATH"

Chapter 34 of Sefer B'resheet records what is undoubtedly one of the most violent and morally troubling chapters in Biblical history. Here is a brief recap of the events which transpired in Sh'khem:

The family of Ya'akov enters the city of Sh'khem and Dinah, the one sister among eleven brothers, is forcibly taken by Sh'khem, the prince of the city-state after which he is named. Sh'khem rapes her and, through the august agency of his father, appeals to her brothers to allow her to become his proper wife. The brothers speak *b'Mirmah* (deceitfully? cunningly?) with Sh'khem and Hamor, his father, and convince them that the only way for Dinah to marry Sh'khem is if the prince and all of his townsfolk become circumcised. The townsfolk are convinced to undergo this painful operation - evidently motivated by economic gain (vv. 21-24). On the third day, with all the males in pain, Shim'on and Levi kill all of the males in town, after which the brothers pillage the town and take their sister back to safety. Ya'akov chastises them for their actions, which they defend on grounds of concern for their sister's honor.

As mentioned, this narrative is troubling on many levels. To paraphrase a contemporary writer, whereas Ya'akov's children had a golden opportunity to begin to fulfill their mission of teaching the world "the way of Hashem, to do justice and judgment;" (B'resheet 18:19), they squandered this chance and sullied their reputation in the eyes of the neighboring peoples by acting both deceitfully and violently, destroying an entire city in response to a crime committed by one citizen - albeit the prince. Avraham's protests of "will you also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (ibid. v. 23) seem to have been inverted by his elect progeny. In addition, if we look further into the Torah, we see that rape of an unmarried woman is not considered a capital crime - rather it is a case of criminal assault (along with a fine, represented here by the word *Mohar*). How could Shim'on and Levi act in this manner?

Conventional understanding holds that Ya'akov's chastisement was directed against all of their actions - the deceit, the polis-cide and the pillage of the town. We are even more confident that Ya'akov was violently opposed to their behavior when we read of his deathbed charge, given to them nearly fifty years later in Egypt:

Shim'on and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are their swords. O my soul, do not come into their council; to their assembly, let my honor not be united; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their wanton will they lamed an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Ya'akov, and scatter them in Yisra'el. (B'resheet 49:5-7)

If we look into the analyses of the Rishonim, we will find that a much more complex picture unfolds before us; indeed, a careful read of both texts (Chapters 34 and 49) provides us with ample reason to reexamine our assessment of the behavior of Shim'on and Levi in Sh'khem. Due to space limitations, we will limit our reassessment of "the tragedy in Sh'khem" to information which can be inferred from the text itself. Interested readers are encouraged to look at the comments of the Rishonim through Ch. 34 (notably the Ramban at 34:13; note his critique of Rambam's explanation).

II. "HAKH'ZONAH...?"

There are several indications that Ya'akov was not opposed - in principle - to the decision (and its implementation) taken by Shim'on and Levi. In addition, we have several textual indications that the Torah itself gives their approach the stamp of approval.

First of all, let's look at Ya'akov's deathbed charge to these two brothers:

"... for in their anger they slew a man, and in their wanton will they lamed an ox..."

Although there are opinions in the Midrash which interpret this statement as a reference to Sh'khem, simple "P'shat" does not support this read. How could Ya'akov be referring to the death of dozens (or hundreds) of people as "they slew a man"? In addition, what is the reference to an "ox" here?

There is one statement in the Midrash which addresses this problem - but the solution offered there is hardly a critique of the brothers' behavior:

"Did they only slay one man? Doesn't Scripture state: 'they slew all the males'? Rather, they were only considered by haKadosh Barukh Hu as one person." (B'resheet Rabbah 99:6) In other words, if this is a reference to the slaying of the entire male population of Sh'khem, it isn't as grievous as all that, as their lives weren't worth much in the eyes of God (see the additional prooftexts brought in that selection).

Again, the straightforward reading is a reference to the killing of one man and an ox. We will soon discover who these might be.

"...Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel..."

Note that Ya'akov does not curse their actions - rather, he curses their anger (or so it seems - but see the first comment of Hizkuni to 49:7.). If he were morally opposed to their behavior in Sh'khem, doesn't the actual slaying and pillage pale in significance next to their anger? Why mention that here?

[There is one other problem here, one which is beyond the scope of this shiur. Subsequent to Ya'akov's deathbed charge to his sons, the Torah states:

"All these are the twelve tribes of Israel; and this is it what their father spoke to them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them." (49:28) How can we understand Ya'akov's words to Shim'on and Levi - along with his harsh words for Re'uven - as part of a "blessing"? Perhaps we will take this up when we get to Parashat VaY'chi.]

Indeed, one comment in the Midrash Rabbah contrasts the violent act which earned them this curse (?) with their valor in Sh'khem!:

"...[Ya'akov] began calling out 'Shim'on and Levi are brothers...' you acted like brothers to Dinah, as it says: 'two of the sons of Jacob, Shim'on and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took each man his sword..' but you did not act like brothers to Yoseph when you sold him." (B. Rabbah 99:7 - this Midrash can be associated with the comment in Midrash Rabbati of R. Moshe haDarshan, to wit: the 'each man to his brother' mentioned in 37:19 at the sale of Yoseph refers to Shim'on and Levi; not coincidentally, Yoseph's abduction and sale took place in the Sh'khem region.)
Indeed, many Mefarshim maintain that the entire deathbed-charge of Ya'akov to Shim'on and Levi is only a reference to their role in the sale of Yoseph - who is also known as an "ox" (see D'varim 33:17).

BACK TO CHAPTER 34:

Now, let's look at Ya'akov's words when he confronted the brothers in the immediate aftermath of the events in Sh'khem:

And Ya'akov said to Shim'on and Levi, You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. (v. 30)

Is there moral outrage here? Is there a challenge to their religious sensitivities? Ya'akov's response seems to be disapproval of their strategies, to wit: "As a result of your actions, I will now have problems with the locals. We will now be attacked by the surrounding K'na'ani and P'rizzi peoples."

Furthermore, the Torah seems to lend support to the brother's actions throughout the narrative, as follows:

Twice within the description of the brothers' interaction with the people of Sh'khem, the phrase *asher timei/tim'u et Dinah ahotam* is added to the objects of the verse. In verse 13:

And the sons of Ya'akov answered Sh'khem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, (*asher timei et Dinah ahotam* who had defiled Dinah their sister);

In verse 27:

The sons of Ya'akov came upon the slain, and plundered the city (*asher tim'u et Dinah ahotam*).

Why is the Torah twice repeating something which we already know?

In the second instance, we could argue that the text is anticipating a severe criticism of the brothers' behavior (addressed by nearly all Mefarshim): If Sh'khem was guilty for the rape of Dinah, why did all of the townsfolk have to die? By equating their culpability (*asher tim'u* - in the plural - v. 27) with his own (*asher timei* - in the singular - v. 13), we get one of two pictures of the participation of the citizens of Sh'khem in this heinous crime:

a) Either they all participated physically in the defilement of Dinah, either by a S'dom-like orgy or else by abetting the criminal prince, (see the comments of R. Hayyim Paltiel on v. 31);

b) Since they had the wherewithal to censure and/or punish him for his behavior - and failed to do so - it is considered their crime as well. (This seems to be the assumption underlying Rambam's approach, cited above). This seems to be borne out by the record of the plea of Sh'khem to his townspeople to accept the conditions of the sons of Ya'akov:

And Hamor and Sh'khem his son came to the gate of their city, and talked with the men of their city, saying, These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them live in the land, and trade in it; for the land, behold, is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us

for wives, and let us give them our daughters. Only thus will the men consent to live with us, to be one people; if every male among us is circumcised, as they are circumcised. Shall not their cattle and their wealth and every beast of theirs be ours? only let us consent to them, and they will live with us. And to Hamor and to Sh'khem his son listened all who went out from the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city. (vv. 20-24)

If Sh'khem was truly an oligarch, would he need the people's consent - and would he have to appeal to their mercenary sensibilities - to forge this agreement? (see the insightful read of Rashi on this point in the Mishnat haLevi, p 307).

Besides these two (seemingly superfluous) pejorative references to the citizens of Sh'khem, note how the dialogue between Ya'akov and his sons is presented in the Torah:

And Ya'akov said to Shim'on and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house."

And they said, "*hakh'zonah ya'aseh et achoteinu?* ("Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?" - vv. 30-31)

The Torah gives the brothers the "last word" in their dispute with father Ya'akov. Furthermore, this "last word" is so terse and direct that it seems to leave Ya'akov "speechless" - indication that their argument held sway. The Torah seems to be giving approval to their actions - an observation strengthened by comparing the gist of Ya'akov's opposition with the "facts on the ground" in the subsequent narrative:

Compare:

"You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." (a pragmatic concern that the violent vengeance wreaked by the brothers will lead to a lynching of Ya'akov's family)

With:

And they journeyed; and the terror of God was upon the cities that were around them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Ya'akov. (35:5 - only 5 verses after the dispute).

The Torah is emphatically assuaging Ya'akov's fears - the local people did not rise up in anger against his family as a result of their actions in Sh'khem; rather, they stood in fear of them and did not even pursue them.
There is one more piece of support for the contention that Ya'akov was not morally opposed to the action taken by the brothers. Just before the deathbed "blessing" given in Egypt to the brothers, Ya'akov accepts both of Yoseph's sons as members of his own family (earning them each a full portion in the Land) and then declares to Yoseph:

"And I have given to you one *Sh'khem* above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." (48:22)

This *Sh'khem* could mean portion, as Onkelos renders it. Alternatively, it may be a reference to the city of Sh'khem itself (see Rashi and Ibn Ezra ad loc.). If so, Ya'akov is not only accepting of the brothers' actions, he even "adopts" their war as his own. There are several Midrashim which indicate that Ya'akov himself participated in the war (see e.g. B. Rabbah 80:13). That would certainly take us very far from our original assumptions as presented at the beginning of this shiur.

[I am indebted to Binyamin Malek for his fine research which was utilized extensively in preparing the foregoing sections of the shiur - his article can be found in Megadim 23:9-29]

III. *AKHARTEM OTI*

If Ya'akov was not morally opposed to the slaying and pillage of the citizens of Sh'khem, catalyzed by an act of deception, we are left with three questions:

a) Why didn't he himself lead the charge against the citizenry? As we pointed out in the recent two-part shiur, Ya'akov was a master at knowing how to utilize deception when appropriate.

b) After the fact, why did he register opposition to their behavior - even if it was later dispelled?

c) Once we have put Ya'akov and his sons on the same side of this moral dilemma, how can we make sense of their conclusion? Why were Sh'khem, his father and all of the townsfolk liable for murder and pillage? (While we are assessing their behavior, it is instructive to reflect on the size of the population of Sh'khem. See Avrabanel's comments here - he notes that the population was small. Documents uncovered at recent digs at Tel al-Amarna suggest that there were under one hundred citizens - male and female- all told - *vakma"l*)

A crime for which the Torah mandates payment to the young woman's family should certainly not warrant this sort of treatment? In addition, as noted above, such behavior would seem to regress the cause of the Avrahamic tradition. How do we justify their behavior?

IV. YA'AKOV AND HIS SONS

We will first address the dispute between Ya'akov and his sons regarding the proper tactics in response to the rape of Dinah; resolving this question will provide us an approach to the other two.

Although a full treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of this shiur, we have to approach any differences in attitude which surface between Ya'akov and his children against the backdrop of their substantially different backgrounds and experiential matrices.

Whereas Ya'akov grew up knowing grandfather Avraham (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 K'na'an, but had to spend the last twenty years (at least - see BT Megillah 17a) "on the run". In addition, before his fleeing to Aram, his life seems to be one of isolation, save his relationship with mother Rivkah. Our story (Ch. 34) rests somewhere along the continuum from *Galut* (exile) to *Shivah* (return) - and therein lies the rub. Ya'akov's children, although born and raised in what proved to be an environment of enmity, had a full family support system, as well as being brought up as the children of a wealthy and powerful member of Lavan's household.

In sum, Ya'akov was an Eretz-Yisra'eli who had been in *galut* for a substantial time - and who had a clear and direct connection with Avraham and Yitzhak. His children were born in Aram and had never tasted the pain and loneliness of exile - and they had had no direct encounters with the first or second generations of the clan.

As such, Ya'akov's response to the rape of Dinah has to be understood against this background. Both grandfather Avraham and father Yitzhak had experienced similar difficulties with local chieftains: Sarah was taken to Pharaoh's palace (Ch. 12) and to Avimelekh's rooms (Ch. 20). Rivkah, although never taken from Yitzhak, was presented as his sister out of the same fear of the local ruler and the general lack of morality (Ch. 26).

Here, Ya'akov, who had not yet encountered such a threat, was faced with a hauntingly familiar scenario - with some significant differences. Dinah was not falsely presented as a sister - she really was an unmarried sister! She was taken to the house of the local ruler, just as in the cases with Avraham - but here's where the similarities end. Whereas God had intervened on behalf of Avraham both in Egypt and in G'rar, the rape of Dinah was carried out with bestial success.

Ya'akov had every reason to consider as follows:

If father Avraham, for whom God was prepared to intervene to spare Sarah, and who was only wandering through that land, was prepared to "play the game" and not belligerently confront the locals - how much more so in this case. After all, God has not intervened to help us here; and these are my permanent neighbors, with whom I must be able to get along. If it was important to exercise restraint in galut - as I have with Lavan and, just now, with Esav - how much more so in the Land where I intend to establish my roots.

The brothers (note that Shim'on and Levi are only singled out in describing the slaying; all of the brothers participated in the cunning negotiations as well as the pillage of the city), coming from their critically distinct upbringing and experiences, viewed the situation and the appropriate response quite differently. The non-confrontational attitude which both Avraham and Yitzhak had adopted while traveling (see our analysis of the role of deception while traveling in the last two shiurim - available in the B'resheet archives at http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra) was only appropriate for a land you intend to leave - ultimately, if the locals think you weak, it will have no deleterious effect on your own well-being. That is not the case, they argued, in a land which you intend to settle. If the local peoples think of our daughters as "fair game", we will never gain their respect - or fear. Our lives will be a long series of attacks and oppression. It is better, goes the argument, to make our stand here and now and let everyone know that we are not to be trifled with.

We now understand why Ya'akov did not originally take up arms - and why he was perturbed by their approach. It was not a moral opposition, rather a disapproval of their tactics which lay at the heart of his chastisement.

Both of their positions are easily in their respective arguments:

Ya'akov:

You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizzi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.

The brothers:

Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?

When we are talking about an individual who violates a young woman, the Torah does not consider it a capital offense; it allows for recompense and amelioration of the situation with a large fine as appropriate for a case of criminal assault. When, on the other hand, we are dealing with an attack which challenges the dignity and honor of the people of Yisra'el, that is a different matter entirely.

The Torah not only provides support for the brothers' position in the description of the ensuing travels which were "trouble-free", the Halakhah itself seems to lend support to this position:

Rav Yehudah stated in the name of Rav: If foreigners besieged Israelite towns... with the intention of taking lives the people are permitted to sally forth against them with their weapons and to desecrate the Shabbat on their account. Where the attack, however, was made on a town that was close to a frontier, even though they did not come with any intention of taking lives but merely to plunder straw or stubble, the people are permitted to sally forth against them with their weapons and to desecrate the Shabbat on their account. (BT Eruvin 45a)

POSTSCRIPT

Much ink has been spilt over the analysis of the "double-identity" of Ya'akov/Yisra'el - perhaps we will, one day, add our own input to that discussion. In any case, it is curious to note that throughout this narrative, our patriarch is referred to by his "galut-name", Ya'akov. Yet, when he "adopts" the conquest of Sh'khem, he speaks as Yisra'el:

And Yisra'el said to Yoseph, "Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. And I have given to you one *Sh'khem* above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow. (48:21-22)