

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Vayishlach 5771

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GIFTS, PRAYER AND WAR :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The Midrash teaches us that when our father Yaakov was aware of the impending confrontation with his erstwhile brother, Eisav, he prepared a number of options for himself as to how the scenario would play itself out. He was prepared to pay Eisav a large amount of wealth to leave him in peace. He prayed to the Lord for Divine intervention on his behalf. And he also mobilized his family and servants for armed battle if necessary. Many may look at this plan of Yaakov's as being composed of three individual and almost mutually exclusive options. One does not, in all good logic, bestow wealth upon an enemy that one feels one will have to fight in the near future.

Even though there have been such instances of monetary appeasement, in past human history most wars are preceded by embargoes, confiscations of the wealth of the perceived enemy and generally bellicose statements before the war actually breaks out.

Prayer is also universally invoked with each side convinced that the God of war is on its side in the conflict. Yet prayer also indicates the wish that the war be avoided somehow and that the Divine canopy of peace be spread over the contending powers. And the realm of prayer is usually left to the pious and the clergy (not always are they synonymous) and plays, at best, a secondary role in war preparations.

And finally, there is the option of battle itself with all of the uncertainty, mayhem and murder that accompanies this most brutal of human activities. Midrash seems to imply that Yaakov prepared himself for these three options in a manner that one of them would be the chosen course of behavior in dealing with Eisav.

Yet a closer examination of the words of the Torah indicates that Yaakov intended to employ all three options simultaneously. Yaakov's gift to Eisav, large and generous as it was, would be unsuccessful in deterring Eisav. Eisav's appetite would only be whetted for greater spoils. He would certainly misread Yaakov's generosity towards him as a sign of weakness and timidity and therefore become more determined to destroy Yaakov – and would now believe that he could so easily.

Yaakov is aware of the inherent weakness of the policy of appeasement of Eisav alone. He must therefore convince Eisav that he is not a pacifist at all costs. Eisav must see him as being prepared to wage war successfully and tellingly. Only when Eisav realizes Yaakov's warlike abilities will he see the gifts given to him in their true light – not as tokens of weakness but simply a method of accommodation of two different cultures and societies. And Yaakov also invokes prayer as a weapon in this struggle and informs Eisav of its presence in his arsenal of defense against Eisav's evil intent. Prayer is the explanation to Eisav of how Yaakov successfully survived the house of Lavan and, against all odds, emerged whole, mighty and wealthy from that twenty year ordeal. Yaakov, in essence, informs Eisav: "Don't disregard God's presence and will in the equation of our struggle."

Yaakov is the prototype of all later struggles of the Jewish people and is especially relevant to our current world and its attendant problems. The Jewish people have always given large gifts to our enemies to dissuade them from violence and hatred. Most of the time, the world looked at these gifts as signs of Jewish weakness, which in fact was what they really were. Our prayers were mocked and the world never believed that God was on our side no matter how miraculous and patently obvious our powers of resilience and survival were. And the world also never believed that the Jews would be able to successfully defend themselves and their country. Jews were supposed to be bankers, musicians and peddlers but not soldiers or warriors. This latter fallacy has been amply corrected by the Israel Defense Forces over nearly seventy years. Nevertheless our gifts and compromises offered are still evidently misinterpreted as being signs of weakness.

There is a blindness that envelops our foes that does not allow them to see us in true reality, void of all stereotyping and preconceived beliefs. It is

viewed as an insult to their faith that the Jews should somehow be entitled to belief in their God and observance of their ancient traditions. Therefore until our foes also recognize our three pronged answer to their threats as being legitimate and strong, we are reduced to following the maxim of Theodore Roosevelt: "Speak softly and carry a big stick."
Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: VAYISHLACH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Our father Yaakov sends emissaries to meet his brother Eisav and attempt to mollify him and to head off a possibly violent and even fatal confrontation. There are differing opinions in Midrash and the commentaries whether these emissaries were angels or humans. In any event it appears from the parsha that they were unsuccessful in their mission and were unable to deflect Eisav and his four hundred armed men from confronting Yaakov.

If we agree that his emissaries were mere humans then it is understandable that they could fail in their mission of dissuading Eisav and convince him to leave Yaakov and his family alone. However if we believe that Yaakov's emissaries were truly angels then how could they have failed in their mission? An angel never fails in his mission, right?

But we see from another incident in the life of Yaakov that human will and strength can even overcome an angel. Yaakov himself wrestles the angel of Eisav to a standoff. Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael because he was able to wrestle and struggle with angels and men and emerge triumphant. Never underestimate the power of a human being for good or to wreak havoc.

Eisav's determination to harm Yaakov is so intense and fixed that even a horde of angels cannot deflect him from his evil purpose. Angels have no freedom of will and action and are therefore inherently weaker than are human beings. Angels have no hidden resource of will and strength – they are what they are. Humans, when taxed, can be righteous or evil in the extreme.

Only when Eisav finally sees Yaakov and his family before him does his will waver and he now becomes much more conciliatory. He is naturally influenced by the vast amount of money that Yaakov showers upon him. That is also part of human nature for humans are always susceptible and are weakened by monetary corruption. It is not the sight of heavenly angels that softens Eisav's heart towards his brother as much as it is the material largesse that is bestowed upon him by Yaakov.

Over the long history of the Jewish people, many a decree conceived against Jews has been thwarted because of monetary considerations paid to the proposed enforcers. As distasteful as this may sound and feel it was always a method employed to aid Jewish survival in difficult times and places.

Angels are not subject to such tactics and temptations but humans are. Humans can overcome angels but rarely are they able to elude temptation and its resulting troubles. However the same strength of will that is necessary and is part of the human makeup to overcome angels is also present when humans face temptations and difficult choices in life.

There was a campaign against drug use by teenagers in the United States a few years ago. The campaign's slogan was "Just Say No." I realize that this is a very simplistic way to deal with the problem of drug use by young people but it has the ring of truth to it. The strength to say no to angels is the same strength to say no to harm and evil.

Shabat shalom.

TORAH WEEKLY :: Parshat Vayishlach

For the week ending 20 November 2010 / 12 Kislev 5771

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

OVERVIEW

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Eisav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Eisav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Eisav. That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the Angel of Eisav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Eisav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Eisav's offer that they should dwell together. Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dinah's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement; however, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo brit mila. Shimon and Levi, two of Dinah's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister. G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivkah nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Parsha concludes by listing Eisav's descendants.

INSIGHTS

M.T.V. = A.D.D.

"Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (32:25)

We live in an era of distraction. Television advertising and music video driven by big BPM (bucks-per-minute) have accelerated the cutting rates of film and video to the microsecond.

The ubiquitous cell phone interrupts us our thoughts, our conversations, our lives. We don't think anymore; we just surf through our thoughts.

Now this. Now this. Now this.

How long can you hold an idea in your head? Try it. Whoops! Try again! How long you can concentrate on an idea without any other thought intruding? Ten seconds? Twenty?

Two minutes of uninterrupted focus on one thought is pretty Olympic in my experience.

In this week's Torah portion, an incorporeal spiritual force (transl. 'angel') attacks Yaakov and wrestles with him until the dawn. This 'angel' was the protecting force of the nation of Esav. Why didn't the angel of Esav attack Avraham or Yitzchak? Why did he wait for Yaakov?

This world stands on three pillars: kindness, prayer and Torah. The three Patriarchs represent these three pillars. Avraham is the pillar of kindness, Yitzchak is the pillar of prayer and Yaakov is the pillar of Torah. The Torah is the unique possession of the Jewish people. No other nation in the world has the Torah. Thus the attack on Torah is the one that hits at the heart of Judaism.

The angel of Esav attacked Yaakov because he knew that the most effective way to destroy the Jewish People is to deter them from learning Torah.

Even though the angel of Esav was unsuccessful in his fight with Yaakov, he managed to damage him in the thigh. The thigh is place in the body that represents progeny and the continuation of the generations – Jewish continuity.

In the era before the coming of Mashiach, Esav will try to make it very difficult to educate our children with Torah. Torah demands commitment,

application and concentration. The essence of Talmudic thought is to be able to contain several ideas in one's head and to synthesize and counterpoint these ideas. You can't learn Torah if you are distracted. We live in an era where distraction has become an industry.

In the generation before the Mashiach in which we find ourselves, maintaining a minimal attention span will be a gigantic battle in itself.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Vayishlach

Yaakov sent messengers ahead of him to Eisav, his brother. (32:4)

The contrast between Yaakov Avinu and his brother, Eisav, as was evidenced on the day of their confrontation, continues to this very day. The dichotomy between these two brothers is a chasm that is as wide today as it was then. In his inimitable style, Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, paints a picture of these two brothers that aptly describes the observant Jew's encounter with the secular, materialistic society which surrounds him. Yaakov is the family man, blessed with children, a hard-working supportive husband and father, whose family ordeals weigh heavily on him. In contrast, Eisav is the accomplished man of substance. While it is true that Yaakov received his father's blessing, it took him over twenty years of toil and struggle to achieve what he considered his greatest prize, his tour de force: to be the independent father of a family.

Eisav, as well as those who ascribe to his way of life, take this blessing for granted from birth. Indeed, Eisav, the accomplished man of substance, already possessed it in full measure before Yaakov left home. Eisav had his family. Yaakov toiled for his family. The difference is in the happiness Yaakov felt with his achievement. His family was his goal, his raison d'être, his crowning achievement in life. To Eisav, and those like him, family is a part of life, it is a means, but certainly not a goal. Eisav had become a political personality, a leader of an army, a general who stood at the helm of his troops.

This confrontation between the Eisavian way of life - and the society it spawns - and Yaakov's Torah-oriented way of life - with its focus on family, the future, the spiritual dimension - has continued throughout the generations. The struggle between them and the outcome of this external clash is among the forces that have shaped world history. Yaakov represents family life, inner and outer happiness, with the goal of making others happy. Eisav requests the glitter of political power and false might. The eternal question that sparks and continues to fuel this dispute is: Whether it is sufficient to be merely a human being; or whether all social organization and political power have significance only when it serves to promote the objective of attaining this lofty goal of all human endeavor. Alternatively, is it the other way around, with everything that is human in mankind and in family life existing for one purpose: to serve as the underpinning for the prizes of politics, power and material success?

Rav Hirsch was up against a solid brick wall, as he attempted to infuse German youth with the significance of family and community, Torah and scholarship. They had been exposed to the glitter of politics, secular scholarship, with its concomitant laxity in morals, ethics and virtue. The Haskalah, Enlightenment movement, preached that it was about time that the "Yaakov" left his proverbial tent. He was getting nowhere in the world. They did not understand that the world is there to serve Yaakov in his tent - as long as he remains there. The world is a means, not an end.

It is, therefore, remarkable that shortly after our Patriarch's meeting with his brother, Yaakov's maxim for Jewish life came under attack - when his own sons acted in a manner which was incongruous to his family-oriented, laid-back perspective on life. Yaakov's daughter, Dinah, "went out" for a stroll among the daughters of the land and fell into the hands of Shechem ben Chamor, a pagan prince, who was obsessed with her physical appearance and demeanor. Rather than acting with respect and dignity by asking for her hand, he violated her, thereby tainting the chaste Dinah forever.

Shimon and Levi were angry beyond reason. Two words are used by the Torah: etzev and nevalah. Etzev is sadness, a reference to the pain of being

forced to give up something precious, a painful sense of loss. Dinah was no longer the same. In addition to their personal feelings of sadness, the wicked deed fired them with anger over the nevalah, scandalous/abomination, against the family of Yaakov. To defile a daughter of Yaakov was a defamation of a Jewish maiden and a calumny of the entire family. It was a tragedy of epic proportion, because it drove home a frightening message: the goyim out there neither respected nor feared the Jew. Why? The Jews were outwardly a physically weak group. They had no visible means of protection. Thus, they could be secure only when others recognize their moral and spiritual nobility. In other words, when Jews act as Jews are supposed to act, we get respect! It is in our material weakness that we reveal our true strength, the Divine element which transforms "Yaakov" into "Yisrael," the name of strength. The brothers reasoned that Shechem would not have dared to do this to a native pagan daughter. It occurred because she was a "weak" Jewess. Thus, they were prepared to take the "sword of Eisav" into their hands and mete punishment where necessary.

Shimon and Levi's motivation, its propriety or lack thereof notwithstanding, is expressed with their reply to their father after the fact, Ha'k'zonah yaaseh es achoseinu, "Shall he treat our sister as a harlot?" They felt that Shechem would never have taken such liberties if the girl in question had not been some foreign girl, some friendless "Jew." They felt that while "Yaakov's" place is in the bais ha'medrash, sometimes even the family of Yaakov must raise the sword in defense of their purity and honor. Regrettably, the men that roam this earth respect only one code: the law which condones and protects violence. Yaakov will have to know how to wield the sword, even though he will hopefully rarely need to do so.

We now come to a new concept: the Yaakov/Yisrael Jew. From the brief phenomenon of the sword of Eisav being used by Yaakov, we learn a clarification of the perspective for the future. In the course of time, we have developed a reputation as a gentle, family-oriented, tender-hearted, non-violent people. This, however, in no way bespeaks cowardice, weakness or insecurity on our part. When necessary, we have displayed bravery and military prowess in such an awesome manner that Eisav's minions have cowered like the true cowards that they are. We can, if we must, wield the sword, but it is not part of our nature. Our gentleness and humanness are the products of our spiritual education and relationship with the Divine. These are our hallmarks and should always be our most distinguishing characteristics.

I have sojourned with Lavan... I have acquired oxen and donkeys. (32:5,6)

Rashi quotes the Midrash which notes that the gimatria, numerical equivalent, of garti is 613, the same as taryag, which is the number of mitzvos we have. This implies that Yaakov Avinu was intimating to Eisav, "Yes, I did live in Lavan's proximity for quite some time. Nonetheless, I did not falter in my commitment to Hashem. I observed all 613 mitzvos. I was not adversely influenced by Lavan." Eisav got the message: Yaakov had not changed. He was as righteous now as he had been when he was forced to leave home, due to Eisav's murderous hatred for him.

Let us attempt to analyze Yaakov. He lived his entire life in kedushah, holiness. He was forced to leave Yitzchak and Rivkah's home, a home suffused with sanctity. On his way to Lavan, he stopped off at the yeshivah of Shem and Ever for fourteen years to do "a little learning." He then went to Lavan's home, where he married and raised his family. Clearly, Lavan's home must have been a culture shock. To descend from the sublime level of Yitzchak's home to the depravity of a Lavan, the man who redefined the meaning of swindling, was quite difficult for Yaakov. How was he able to maintain his spiritual status quo in such a base environment? How was he able to ignore Lavan?

The Brisker Rav, zl, quoted that he had once heard from a rav in Germany that the key to Yaakov's success lay in the words, "I have acquired oxen and donkeys." This is not a reference to material wealth but, rather, to his opinion of Lavan! He viewed the evil Lavan as being nothing more than an ox or a donkey. In Yaakov's opinion, Lavan did not rate human-being status. He was nothing more than a crude animal in the guise of a human!

Will a person act like a cow if he lives in a barn? Certainly not! A cow is a cow - and a person is a person. Animals do not influence humans.

The Brisker Rav added, that while this Rav's exegesis is not p'shat, the explanation of the pasuk, it is, however, a proper perspective to maintain vis-?-vis a wicked person. When we face-off with an individual whose lifestyle is reprehensible, whose demeanor is reproachable, whose ethics are scandalous and whose morals are non-existent, we should view them as a sub-human. To acknowledge such people as having equal status with us is a travesty and an insult. This is not meant to promote elitism but, rather, to encourage us to maintain a semblance of dignity and common sense.

Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him. (32:8)

Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu was frightened for himself, lest he be killed, and distressed that, in defending his family, he might kill others. Rashi's commentary is well-known, but when we think about it, as pointed out by Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, it teaches us a powerful lesson about our Patriarch. How often do we think about the damage we might do to others? We get into a car, and we are in a rush. Do we think of the repercussions to others if we do not apply ourselves carefully to the road? Do we bother to look at the speedometer - if we are in a hurry? In short, we rarely think about anyone but ourselves.

Rav Shimshon relates an incident in which this dichotomy was readily apparent. Shortly after he received his driver's license he was driving down the highway, when he lost control of the car and flipped over. He was taken to the hospital for observation. Other than some cuts and scratches, he was fine. A policeman "visited" him in the hospital to get a statement about the accident. Rav Shimshon explained that he was a relatively new driver, and the car was hit by a wind shear, causing him to lose control. The officer wrote this down and bid him farewell.

A week later, he related the same incident to his Rebbe, Horav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zl, who, upon hearing the story, gave a loud groan and said, "Oy! You could have hurt someone!" This is the difference between a "person" and a gadol, Torah leader. When the policeman heard that the driver was not at fault, he was done with the incident. Next case. When Rav Yosha Ber heard the exact same incident, he looked at his student incredulously as if to say: "How could a Jew ever be in a situation where he might maim or kill another person?" This is the perspective of a gadol.

Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav. (32:12)

Yaakov Avinu seems concerned specifically as a result of his filial relationship with Eisav. The Chida, zl, explains that this is because of Eisav's z'chus avos, merit of his ancestors. After all, Eisav had the same yichus, pedigree, as Yaakov. When we think about it, Yaakov had some reason to be concerned. Perhaps some insight into the concept of z'chus avos will help us to explain this.

What is the secret of z'chus avos? Is it some form of protectzia? Hashem's decision cannot be swayed. He cannot be bribed. "Favorites" do not play a role before Him. In an unrelated shmuess, ethical discourse, Horav Shabsi Yudelevitz, zl, quotes from the Radal, an understanding of the meaning of z'chus avos, which can be applied to Yaakov's prayer.

In the Midrash Eichah, Chazal relate a dispute that took place between the wise men of Athens and a young Jewish boy. The wise men of Athens were considered the smartest people of that generation. This indicates how obtuse the people of that generation were. The story goes that one of the wise men placed two slices of cheese in front of the young boy and asked him, "Tell us which slice of cheese came from a white goat, and which slice came from a black goat." In response to this impossible question, the young boy placed two eggs in front of the wise men and asked, "Which egg came from a white hen and which came from a black hen? When you answer my question, I will answer yours." Certainly, this Midrash has some metaphorical undertones. The wise men of Athens must have been capable of a greater display of acumen than a dialogue about cheese and eggs.

HoRav David Luria, zl, explains that, indeed, their dialogue had profound meaning. When the wise men of Athens presented the cheese and asked if the child could detect from what color goat it was derived, they were alluding to a powerful question: How does Hashem distinguish between

people, in the sense that Yehudim are granted a preferential relationship with Him due to their z'chus avos? While a great difference does exist between a black goat and a white goat, it surely is not discernable in the cheese that is produced. The cheese has the same outward appearance regardless of its source. Thus, what difference should there be because the Patriarchs of the Jewish nation were true to Hashem? In the end, their conviction is not noticeable in their progeny. Who cares who the ancestors were, what were their beliefs, and to whom they were committed? We are far-removed from yesterday. Today is today - a new generation - a new world!

The question made sense, but the young Jewish lad was wise beyond his years, and his response indicated a profound understanding of the principles of Judaism and what it means to be a Jew. The young boy presented the wise men with two eggs that appeared to have similar external features, except that one was the offspring of a white hen, while the other was the product of a black hen. "Clearly, you see no difference between these eggs," the boy said, "but you know quite well how we can determine the origins of each egg: Allow the mother hens to rest on top of the eggs until they hatch, and then we will see the stark difference that exists between them. One egg will produce a white chick, while the other egg will produce a black chick."

"A similar idea applies with regard to z'chus avos, notes Rav Shabsi, "Although it is regrettably true that the Jewish People today have the same outward appearance as members of the gentile nations, it is evident that the sublime spiritual levels achieved by the saintly Patriarchs is not readily noticeable in the present Jewish countenance or demeanor. Internally, however, they are suffused with a national heritage that stems from the Patriarchs Their DNA is patriarchal. A white hen will always produce a white chick, and a black hen will always produce a black chick. There will always be a distinct dichotomy between the Jew and gentile. At first it might not be evident, but when the Jewish neshamah, soul, is 'warmed up', when it is placed in a spiritual incubator, its real colors emerge and shine. That Jewish spark within must be ignited, and the difference will become readily apparent The gentile, on the other hand, will remain a gentile forever. The 'warming up' process will be to no avail, just like the cheese; there is no way of discerning from which color goat it is derived."

Returning to our original question concerning Yaakov Avinu's entreaty, Hatzileini na mi'yad achi, "Rescue me, please, from my brother." Our Patriarch was anxious; Eisav was Yitzchak Avinu's son - just as Yaakov was. The fact that Eisav was no ordinary stranger to the Jewish People was disconcerting to Yaakov. Perhaps he had z'chus avos. Perhaps his neshamah could be "warmed up."

The answer to Yaakov's question is in the continuation of the pasuk - mi'yad Eisav. True, that he is Yitzchak's son, but, at the end of the day, he is still Eisav. From the earliest moments in his mother's womb, Eisav was showing his true "colors." As the archetype of evil, the ancestor of most of our enemies throughout history, Eisav showed that he did not have an iota of Jewish DNA. In order to have z'chus avos, one has to be part of the "family." Eisav excluded himself, dating from the time he shared his mother's womb with his brother, Yaakov. Thus, he received no opportunity to share in their merit.

And he bowed earthward seven times until he reached his brother. (33:3)

Yaakov Avinu completed his preparations. He was now ready to confront Eisav, not knowing what the result of this encounter would be. Would it be a bloody battle, or brotherly reconciliation? Despite all of his military stratagem, when Yaakov came towards Eisav, he bowed down seven times and referred to Eisav as adoni, my master, the same number of times. He was later chastised for referring to Eisav as "master," since a Jew has only one master: Hashem. Bowing down does not seem to be a problem. Indeed, if this could in some way play to Eisav's perverted ego, he did the right thing. A Jew must be prepared to fight - when absolutely necessary - but he must do everything to circumvent any physical confrontation.

It is not as if we do not acknowledge the ghetto fighters, the partisans, and all those brave Jews who have taken up the sword to protect our people. There is, however, another form of bravery which transcends that of the

fighter: the silent soldier who is willing to die quietly, so that others shall live. While the plaudits are given to the heroes of the ghetto, the courageous commandos and guerillas who risked their lives to save others, we tend to ignore the other, often ignored, heroes of the ghetto, the individuals that had the burning desire, the opportunity and the ability to cause physical damage to their oppressors, but at what expense? How many other Jews would die as a result of their act of vengeance? These people died quietly so that others could live, who would rather be shot than give up the names of Jews in hiding.

In a halachic treatise, Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, author of the Seridei Eish, cites Rabbi Akiva, who opines that Chayeicha kodmin l'chayei chaveirecha, "Your life takes precedence before the life of your friend." In other words, if one's life is threatened unless he gives up or kills another Jew, his life takes precedence. This law is only a r'shus, discretionary. If he was machmir, stringent, and gave up his life to save another Jew, he is considered a chasid, pious. These are Klal Yisrael's true giborim, strong ones. If by bowing down and deprecating oneself we might save another Jew, if by acting obsequiously it might spare a Jew pain, we do it. We circumvent confrontation. We do not seek it.

Having said the above, I will be bold and tread upon sacred ground in order to offer the Torah world's response to comments made years ago by secular Zionists in reference to the way the martyrs of the Holocaust died: "like sheep to the slaughter," or "like rags - not men." These are charges and accusations that paint observant Jews as enslaved to an "exile mentality," an ingrained spirit to gentile mastery. Regrettably, such harmful diatribe leaves its influence on secular youth, who make a point to distinguish between Yom Hasho'ah v'hagevurah, between those who died in the Holocaust, and those who were the "true heroes," who fought back, regardless of the toll - both personal and collective.

There is not enough space allotted to give this subject the necessary treatment. I will, however, share some thoughts as expressed by Horav Yoel Schwartz, Shlita, in his perspective on tragedy in the context of the Holocaust. First, the faintheartedness of some - or the helplessness of others - was in itself part of the terrible curses enumerated in the Tochachah, Rebuke, both in Bechukosai and Ki Savo. According to Ibn Ezra, the Jews' fear of the Egyptians, the fact that they did not fight for their and their children's lives, resulted from the decree of galus Mitzrayim, the Egyptian exile, declaring that the Jews would feel subservient to their masters. It was not as the secularists opine an outgrowth of the exile but, rather, part of the exile. This was the pronouncement only an individual who has no inkling of Torah, who lives by the superficial faith in kochi v'otzem yadi, "My strength and might of my arm," can utter, reflecting a ludicrous understanding of the "exile mentality."

Let us continue. Even if the martyrs could be accused of timidity, is this to be considered a character flaw? Perhaps by those whose adulation of heroism is postulated on cultural values totally alien to Torah Judaism. Today's culture defies physical strength; so did the Nazis'. Timidity is not a moral failing. It is a character trait like any other. The Torah acknowledges that some people are just plain fainthearted. They are not flawed. Regrettably, today's secularists would rather determine the moral fibre of the Jewish martyrs through the lens of Nazi-oriented morals.

Chazal teach us that a strong man is one who controls his desires (Pirkei Avos 4:1). His might is not an external, but an internal, strength. He does not use force unless absolutely necessary. Physical prowess belongs in Eisav's domain. He does not fight terror with terror, murder with murder; for fear that he might lose his own sensitivity to human life. In addition, the desperate clarion call to "die with honor" is one that is very distant from Torah dictate. We believe in life. We believe in hope until the very last second. The call to "die with honor" is a desperate attempt that indicates a lack of hope. To lose hope is to lose one's conviction in Hashem. In the darkest moments in the death camps, Jews did not lose hope. Jews who stood before the firing squads, who were shoved into the gas chambers, did not lose hope. I know. My father was one of those Jews. In the merit of this enduring hopefulness, many Jews survived the clutches of death, which only moments earlier appeared imminent.

The true Jewish hero is the master of internal fortitude. His ability to persevere with patience and calm is the mettle through which true bravery and courage are manifest. Knowing that by killing one Nazi hundreds of Jews would die a brutal death as payback, was a powerful deterrent for those true "strong ones." "They" ask where G-d was during the Holocaust. The question that should be asked is: "Where was 'man' during the Holocaust?" The answers are all there for those who are interested, but those people do not have any questions. On the other hand, for those who question and accuse, no answer will suffice.

Va'ani Tefillah

Az yashir Moshe u'Bnei Yisrael. Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael sang.

The Midrash teaches us that whoever recites the Shirah will have his sins forgiven by Hashem. Sefer Chareidim adds that this applies only under such circumstances that the person senses himself standing at the banks of the Red Sea and experiencing Krias Yam Suf, the Splitting of the Red Sea. As he "stands there," he is amazed by the incredible miracles and wonders which Hashem has wrought for the Jewish People. Then, his sins are forgiven.

Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, takes it to the next level. In order for one's sins to be expiated, he must understand and apply himself to the text of the Shirah. He must cogently be able to interpret into his heart and mind the depth of the meaning of the miracles described in the Shirah. He must sense the meaning of "Pharaoh and his riders drowning in the Sea." Why was Pharaoh not overcome with fright? How could a sane man, knowing what Hashem had done to Egypt, allow his army to go into the sea - and he with them?! This teaches us about Hashem's Providence, how He watched over us and made miracle after miracle for us. Hashem relieved Pharaoh of his bechirah chafshis, free-will, so that he would defy Him and be punished. All this was done for us. If we acknowledge and think about this during our recitation of the Shirah, Hashem will forgive our sins. It is as simple as that, because we are thereby establishing a bond with the Almighty.

in memory of Rabbi Louis Engelberg z"l nifter 8 Kislev 5758 Mrs. Hannah Engelberg z"l nifter 3 Teves 5742 t.n.tz.v.h.; Etzmon and Abigail Rozen and Family

Rabbi Mordechai Willig The TorahWeb Foundation Confrontations and Tribulations

I. Emes L'Yaakov

Parshas Va'yishlach opens with Yaakov Avinu's message to Esav (Bereishis 32:4-6). As explained by Rashi, Yaakov refers to the berachos he received from Yitzchak Avinu many years before. Claiming to have not benefited from them, Yaakov professes that there is no reason for Esav to hate him or kill him for taking the berachos (27:36,41). He goes on to allude to his keeping 613 mitzvos in Lavan's house, and concludes that he seeks Esav's love.

Yaakov's honesty and forthrightness in his message to Esav reflect his character trait, truth, emes L'Yaakov (Micha 7:20). Nonetheless, his message seems quaint, even naive. After all, Esav is a swordsman (27:40), and it would be wiser to sneak past him than to chance awakening his potentially fatal hatred. The Medrash Rabbah (75:3) compares Yaakov to one who seizes a dog's ears (Mishlei 26:17) instead of letting sleeping dogs lie.

In the end, Yaakov is forced to deceive Esav. To avoid Esav's offer to accompany him (33:12), he responds that he will join Esav in Se'ir (33:14). While Rashi cites the Medrash Rabbah (78:14) that Se'ir can refer to the messianic era, Yaakov's deceit seems to run counter to his trademark, emes.

This Rashi reminds us (see Sapirstein Edition fn. 10) of a similar statement Yaakov made when deceiving his father Yitzchak in order to receive the berachos. "I am Esav your first born" (27:19), an outright lie, is reinterpreted midrashically (Rashi, Tanchuma): "It is I; Esav is your firstborn." These attempts to make Yaakov's words technically true only highlight the fact that emes L'Yaakov is being trampled.

Yaakov's relationship with Lavan parallels his confrontation with Esav. He begins, characteristically, with truth and honesty to a fault. He guarded Lavan's flock faithfully through blisteringly hot days and frigid, sleepless nights (31:40). He is the paradigmatic honest and righteous employee, serving Lavan with all his might (31:6; Rambam Hil. Sechirus 13:7).

In the end, Yaakov engages in practices that appear less forthright (30:31-43, see Ha'amek Davar and Harchev Davar 30:42), which some have compared to insider trading. As with Esav, he separates himself from Lavan deceitfully by fleeing (31:20). Once again, emes L'Yaakov seems compromised.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky (Emes L'Yaakov 27:12) explains that our forefathers were tested by being challenged to serve Hashem in a manner diametrically opposed to their nature. Yaakov abhorred lies. His entire being was repulsed by dishonesty. Therefore, his tribulations, nisyonos, required that he operate against his lifelong, uncompromising adherence to truth.

"The signet (chosam) of Hakadosh Baruch Hu is truth" (Shabbos 55a). Yet Hashem changed (shina) Sara's statement, by commission or omission (18:13, see Rashi and Ramban), for the sake of marital peace, and we are commanded to do likewise (Yevamos 65b, see Rif). Similarly, "with the crooked You [Hashem] act perversely" (Tehillim 18:27). Yaakov did likewise in dealing with Esav and Lavan. It was a nisayon precisely because he did Hashem's will in an untruthful way. In reality, Yaakov's behavior was consistent with Divine Truth.

II. Chesed L'Avraham

Avraham Avinu was tested ten times and passed all of them (Avos 5:3). Rav Yaakov (ibid.) explains that Avraham's attribute was chesed, kindness. The tests demanded that he serve Hashem out of character. He is told to leave his aging father and to chase away his son Yishmael, acts that appeared insensitive and cruel. The akeida, sacrificing his son Yitzchak, was the total opposite of Avraham's nature and his lifelong mission of teaching that Hashem is merciful and does not demand human sacrifice as practiced by idolaters. Only by serving Hashem against his nature did Avraham pass the tests.

While Rav Yaakov mentions only these three nisyonos, other tests (see Rashi and Rav op cit.) also conflict with chesed. As an outgoing activist, Avraham was sorely tested by thirteen years of hiding from Nimrod underground. As a man with plans for a life devoted to chesed, it was more difficult to give up his life when Nimrod threw him into a fiery furnace.

As war is the antithesis of chesed, Avraham's decision to wage war against the four kings who captured Lot was particularly challenging. The prophetic knowledge that his descendants would be oppressed was especially painful to a man of Avraham's compassion. [If he had a choice that his descendants be spiritually deficient and not oppressed, see Bereishis Rabba (44:21), this nisayon is even greater.]

Finally, bris milah, even now, is viewed by some as barbaric, the opposite of chesed. Avraham may have been concerned that knowledge of his and his son's bris would compromise his lifelong chesed mission of promulgating monotheism (Michtav MeiEliyahu, II. p.162).

While Avraham's tribulations required that he suppress his innate instinct to do chesed, ultimately, as the fulfillment of the Divine Merciful Will, they were acts of chesed. Avraham, like Yaakov, passed his tests by serving Hashem against his natural inclination.

III. Pachad Yitzchak

Yitzchak Avinu differed from the other patriarchs. As Rav Yaakov notes (25:19), despite Yitzchak's greater longevity, very little is written in the Torah about his life. Even his passing is chronologically misplaced in Parshas Vayishlach (Rashi 35:29). This difference is echoed in the Rambam (Avoda Zara 1:3). He describes at length the widespread activity and influence of Avraham and Yaakov. Yitzchak is mentioned only briefly as having taught and appointed Yaakov.

Avraham's hospitality and kindness attracted tens of thousands. Yaakov's truth and Torah, while not as popular, attracted numerous adherents, as well. Yitzchak represented the uncompromising self-sacrifice of the

akeida. In the long term, his contribution equaled that of Avraham and Yaakov, ingraining into his descendants the self-sacrifice indispensable to our survival. In his lifetime, however, Yitzchak's nature limited his activity and precluded widespread influence. His strength (gevura) and "service out of fear" (avoda miyirah, as in "Pachad Yitzchak" (31:42)) were not popular.

What, then, was the nisayon of Yitzchak? Not the akeida, says Rav Yaakov. A test must require going against one's nature. The akeida is the ultimate self-sacrifice, the very characteristic of Yitzchak. He personified serving Hashem with fear and strength. How is he challenged in the manner of the other avos?

According to Rav Yaakov, the test will come at the end of days (Shabbos 89b). When told by Hashem, "your children sinned," Avraham and Yaakov respond: "Let them be erased and thereby sanctify Your Name." Yitzchak overcomes his penchant for strict justice and defends his people: "They are Your children, too. Of seventy years of life, only twelve and a half are punishable. Please shoulder them all, or we'll split them, or I'll shoulder them."

This remarkable and creative suggestion still makes Yitzchak completely different from the other avos who passed their tests in their lifetimes. Let us, therefore, explore two other possibilities.

First, normally, an uncompromising attitude of strict justice leads to fighting. When wronged, Yitzchak's instinct would be to fight back with strength. Indeed, Esav extended and perverted Yitzchak's gevura and became a murderer [Similarly, Yishmael perverted Avraham's chesed, improperly channeling it into immorality. Yaakov combined the chesed of Avraham and the gevura of Yitzchak to achieve the proper combination, tiferes, and balance, emes. (Michtav Me'Eliyahu II p.164-165)]

In fact, Yitzchak was wronged when his wells were fought over by other shepherds. Instead of fighting back, he dug a different well. When they fought over the second well, he moved to a different place and dug a third well (26:18-22). These concessions for the sake of peace were against Yitzchak's nature. His tribulation was to avoid confrontation.

Second, when Rivka saw Yitzchak for the first time, she asked, "Who is this awesome, frightening man?" From then on, she feared him and was unable to express her opinions and disagreements with Yitzchak. Therefore, she was forced to gain the berachos for Yaakov surreptitiously (Ha'amek Davar 24:65).

Yitzchak wanted to grant Esav physical blessings, so that he would help Yaakov, the spiritual heir of Avraham (27:28; 28:4). Rivkah disagreed. Esav could not be trusted, and Yaakov needed the physical berachos, as well. In fact, this is the Divine plan for Am Yisrael.

Unable to persuade Yitzchak, Rivka tricked him. When Yitzchak discovered the ruse, he was flabbergasted (27:33). His parenting plan went awry, with untold consequences for both of his sons.

Yitzchak's uncompromising strength and strict justice would lead to a retraction of his beracha to Yaakov or its automatic cancellation, since it was a case of mistaken identity. Instead, Yitzchak overcame his nature and acquiesced to Rivka's plan. He agreed and blessed Yaakov knowingly (Rashi).

All of us are challenged uniquely to serve Hashem in a manner which goes against our natural inclinations. We look to our forefathers as examples inspiring us to pass our respective tests. May their heroic deeds be a siman l'bonim as we confront the challenges of life.

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A Chassidic Approach: Vayishlach

by Rabbi Hershel Reichman (Israelnationalnews.com)

As Yaakov nears the land of Israel, he sends angels as messengers to his brother Esav. The Shem MiShmuel finds several aspects about this incident puzzling. Why did Yaakov tell Esav, "I had an ox and a donkey in the house of Lavan?" Additionally, since he was met by the angels of Israel while the angels of Chutz L'aaretz were still with him, he selected angels from both groups to go to Esav. Why did he need both types of angels and what was the difference between them?

The Shem MiShmuel explains that there are seven inhabited continents that comprise the world. The land of Israel is at the center with three continents on each side. Shabbat, similarly, is the focal point of the week. We prepare for Shabbat during the three days that precede it, and we bask in the glow of the previous Shabbat for the three days that follow.

The Gemara says there are weekday angels and Shabbat angels. The Shabbat angels correspond to Eretz Yisrael, and the weekday angels relate to the other six continents.

The midrash on Breishit discusses a disagreement about the day on which G-d created angels. Rabbi Yochanan maintains that they were created on the second day, while Rabbi Chanina states that they were created on the fifth day. The Shem Mishmuel suggests that both opinions are correct. An angel's mission is to be a conduit between the spiritual world of Hashem and the physical realm of man. An angel is supposed to connect Hashem's infinite being with our finite world. Hashem sends his spirituality down to us. We elevate our physical world, delivering it back to Him. The angels participate in this process.

The angels who were created on the second day were very close to Hashem. The physical world was just beginning to take shape. These weekday angels were charged with the mission of transporting spirituality to the physical world. On the fifth day, Hashem created the Shabbat angels who would serve man, who would be created the following day.

Man's purpose is to activate the spiritual dimension found within the physical world, and return it to Hashem. During the week we benefit from the spiritual power brought down by the weekday angels. On Shabbat, we take all the physical struggles of the week, and with the assistance of the Shabbat angels, create a holy gift for Hashem.

This movement from spiritual to physical also applies to our world. In the six continents, the weekday angels work to bring the life giving force from the higher spheres to the lower world. In the land of Israel, where there is a yearning to connect to Hashem, the Shabbat angels help transform the physical back into spiritual.

This pattern is also found with tzaddikim. One kind of tzaddik excels in serving Hashem through prayer and kind deeds. He elevates his physical existence to spirituality. There is another kind of tzaddik who is outstanding in Torah learning. He uncovers Hashem's manifestation of spirituality as found in the Torah, and internalizes it within his physical form.

This is what Yaakov meant when he told Esav that he had an ox and a donkey. The ox symbolizes Yosef Hatzadik, who elevated physical to spiritual. The donkey refers to Yissachar, who excelled in Torah.

There are also two types of evil. The ox corresponds to the evil person who will destroy anyone blocking his path to power. This is psychological energy, derived from the ego, flowing from above downwards. The donkey represents immorality and unbridled pleasure. This is physical energy moving up.

The Eved Hashem fights the evil of power. The Torah scholar battles the evil of immorality. Esav, whose fundamental evil was tyranny, joined hands with Yishmael, who signified physical pleasure. Therefore, Yaakov sent him a message, "I had an ox and a donkey." In a sense he was saying, "I have Yosef and Yissachar," who can counteract your dual evil.

Yosef and Yissachar are typical of Jews throughout the ages. As we read the parsha describing the encounter of Yaakov and Esav we can discern what our purpose is – to bring heaven to earth and earth to heaven. May we merit to succeed in our mission

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand Parshas VaYishlach

A Counter-Intuitive Reading of A Difficult Pasuk

The Torah describes Yaakov's positioning of his family in preparation for the meeting with Esav: "He put the handmaids and their children first, and Leah and her children later, and Rochel and Yosef last" [Bereshis 33:3]. Although obviously there had to be some kind of arrangement, seeing the

Torah explicitly spell out this sequence seems problematic. It is as if Yaakov considers Bilhah and Zilpah and their sons to be expendable - putting them on the "front lines of battle" with Eisav so to speak. L'havdil, it seems as if they were treated like cannon fodder - the first line infantry who are chewed up by the enemy's attack.

In a similar vein, Leah and her children are also treated as second class family members. Leah was never Yaakov's favorite wife and now her branch of the family are similarly positioned in a more vulnerable position than that of Yaakov's favorite wife (Rochel) and son (Yosef).

How are we to read this pasuk so it doesn't seem like the cynical calculation of an army general putting his privates in the front row to face enemy fire?

Rav Schach offered a novel interpretation which he felt was "amita shel Torah" - the absolutely true interpretation of this Torah pasuk. Rav Schach said, Heaven forbid that the strategy of placement should show cynical callousness toward the handmaids and their sons. Just the opposite was the case.

As we learn in next week's Parsha, Yosef brought evil tidings about his brothers to his father. Rashi explains that he told them that Leah's children were bullying and abusing the sons from the handmaidens (Gad, Asher, Dan, Naftali). We have to put this in the proper perspective, but the fact is that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah suffered emotionally and psychologically from the teasing of their half-brothers. When a person suffers pain (yisurin) that itself achieves atonement, wiping out the debit so to speak of the debt this person owes in Heaven. By virtue of this fact, the sons of the handmaids had the greatest merit in the family. Since they had to suffer anguish at the hands of their brothers, Heaven looked most favorably on these down-trodden individuals. It was for this reason that they earned the first place in the welcoming party. The people with the most merit always lead the Jewish people into battle.

After that, it was Leah and her sons because Leah also suffered. She suffered greatly by the fact that she felt Yaakov did not love her. Her sons also sensed that tension in the family and they too suffered. Again, it was this suffering that earned them the "second spot in the line-up" to meet Eisav.

Ironically and counter-intuitively from the way we would read the pasuk, Rochel and Yosef precisely because they were so beloved and the apple of the eye of Yaakov Avinu, had no special claim to the cleansing affect of psychological suffering and therefore they had to be at the end of the line of the welcoming party.

Rabbi Schach felt this was the true interpretation of this pasuk.

We know that it is very difficult when people suffer misfortune. But people should keep this idea in mind -- a person who has suffered qualifies to receive more merit than one who has not suffered. Suffering removes "debts," leaving people who have suffered have the cleanest of slates. This should be a consolation to any of us who have suffered difficulties during the course of our lives.

Succoth: What Kind Of A Name Is That For A Nice Jewish City?

Later in the parsha, the pasuk says, "Then Yaakov journeyed to Succoth and built himself a house and for his livestock he made huts (Succoth); therefore he called the name of the place Succoth" [Bereshis 33:17] There is something glaringly difficult about this pasuk. Yaakov calls the name of the city Succoth (huts) for all eternity because he made huts for his livestock there. This is not the way things work in the Torah. Names always have great significance. What is the significance of the name Succoth?

We have mentioned in previous years that the Chida writes (a similar idea is expressed by the Ohr HaChaim haKodosh) that up until this point in time no one cared about their animals. Animals were left outside in the cold, in the heat, in whatever the climate would bring. Yaakov Avinu was aware of the concept of animal pain (tzar baalei chayim) and did not want his animals to suffer. He was the first human being to create covered huts for his animals and he eternalized the city by the name "Succoth" to take note of that revolutionary action.

[Of course mankind has carried this idea ad absurdum and from the first person to build huts for his cattle we now have "Save the whales" and

"Save the elephants" and save some little bug in Oregon. Such is the way of society.]

I would like to offer a different approach to the question of why Yaakov called the city Succoth. The question is strengthened by a comment of the Tur [Orach Chaim 417]: The Tur writes that each of the 3 Pilgrimage Festivals was enacted to correspond to one of the 3 Patriarchs. Pessach corresponds with Avraham, who told Sara to knead dough and make Matzo [Bereshis 18:6] (the reason being that it was Pesach when the Angels arrived). Shavuot corresponds with Yitzchak, for the Shofar blown on Mt. Sinai represents the Shofar of the ram sacrificed in place of Yitzchak. Succoth corresponds with Yaakov, as it says, "He made Succoth for his livestock."

Here again, we are left to wonder: How can the huts Yaakov made for his cattle equate with the Matzo Avrohom made for his guests and the Shofar of the ram of Yitzchak in terms of religious symbolism and significance? The former two are seminal events in Jewish history. There is obviously something very profound in the expression "and for his livestock he made huts", but what is it?

Rav Simcha Zissel makes an observation based on a unique reading of the above-cited pasuk by the Targum Yonasan ben Uziel. The Targum does not translate the words "vayiven lo bayis" as commonly translated "And built himself a house". Rather, the Targum translates those words to mean "and he built himself a house of study (Beis Medrash)". Although Yaakov himself lived in a tent and his cattle lived in huts, he saw to it that a Yeshiva was constructed in the locale as the one and only permanent structure.

Why then was the city called "Succoth" instead of "Yeshiva"? The reason is that Yaakov wanted to convey an important point: Everything in this world is temporary. We are living in temporary dwellings and our cattle are living in temporary dwellings. If everything is so temporary and in 18 months you will be leaving Succoth to the Land of Israel, why not just pitch a tent for your Yeshiva as well? The answer is that regardless of how temporary everything else in life is, there is one thing we need to establish firmly and make permanent - even if it is only for a year or two. What is that? It is the Yeshiva.

Yaakov Avinu wanted to convey that everything lacks permanence. They were living in tents, the animals were living in huts, and they were living out of suitcases, almost on the run. Yaakov wanted to record that idea for all of history and thereby named the place "Succoth" to memorialize the concept of the temporary dwelling. Within all this transience however, one thing was lasting: Vayiven lo Bayis. He built a permanent House of Torah study. If there is going to be any kind of future existence to one's family and one's community, no matter how transient everything else is, a Yeshiva must be built as a permanent and distinguished institution. Only by first accomplishing this can one hope to eventually move on to Eretz Yisrael and have success raising his family in the ways of Hashem.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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פרשת השבוע - פרשת וישלח

מאמרו של הגאון רבי זבדיה הכהן שליט"א, חבר בית הדין הרבני בתל אביב, עבר הלכה יומית

השבת נקרא על פגישתם של יעקב ועשו, כאשר יעקב פחד מאוד פן יבוא עשו "והכני אם על בני", אך אז קרה הבלתי יאומן, כשעשו רץ לכיוון של יעקב, "ויפול על צוואריו וישקוהו ויבכו". קדמה לכך המנחה ששלח יעקב לעשו, 200 עיזים, 200 תישיים, 200 רחלים, 200 אילים, 30 גמלים, 40 פרות, 10 פרים, 20 אתונות, 10 עיירים, מתנה גדולה ללא ספק. כשלבסוף עשו שואל את יעקב, מי לך כל המנחה הזו אשר פגשתי? ויעקב עונה לו, "למצוא חן בעיני אדוני", עשו אומר ליעקב, "אחי יש לי רב, יהי לך אשר לך", אך יעקב אינו מוותר ואומר לעשו, "קח נא את ברכתי אשר הובאת לך, כי חנני אלקים, וכי יש לי כל". עשו מסכים, ולוקח את המתנות, וכמו שנאמר, "ויפצר בו ויקח"

אם נתבונן, נראה הבדל בין דברי עשו לדברי יעקב, בעוד שעשו אומר, "יש לי רב", דהיינו, יש לי הרבה, אך אני עדיין לא מרוצה, כי זה עדיין לא "כל" מה שאני רוצה. הרי שיעקב אומר, "יש לי כל", דהיינו ברוך השם, יש לי "כל" מה שאני רוצה, ואף שאפשר להגיע ליותר, הרי שאני שמח בחלקי ולא שואף ליותר, אלא במה שיש לי אני מרגיש שיש לי הכל

על כך נאמר במסכת אבות, "איזהו עשיר? השמח בחלקו!" אדם שמחנך את עצמו להיות שמח במה שהקדוש ברוך הוא חננו, ואין בו קנאה וצרות עין על אחרים, הרי שזהו העשיר האמיתי שזוכה גם לחיים יותר בריאים ורגועים

מעשה במלך חכם ונבון, שבנה במרכז עיר הברירה, ארמון נהדר ומרהיב עין. סביב הארמון נטע המלך גן נפלא של עצי פרי נדירים, שושנים וורדים מרהיבים ביופיים, אשר כל מי שעבר בדרכו סמוך לגם המלך, עצר לרגע ליהנות מהיופי והריח של גן נפלא זה. לימים, תלה המלך שלט גדול בשער הארמון, ועליו כתב: "הארמון והגן שמסביבו ינתנו במתנה על ידי המלך לאדם שהוא מצהיר כי הוא שמח בחלקו". עברו בני אדם, ראו את הארמון והשלט שעליו, זכר כל אחד מהם בצרותיו שלו, נאנח ואמר, הרי אני עם כל צרותי, איני שמח בחלקי, ולא לי מגיע ארמון נפלא זה במתנה. אחר זמן מה, עבר שם עשיר גדול נכבד ובעל בעמיו, מאושר ומדושן עונג, וכלום לא חסר לו, עושר וכבוד, מעמד ומשפחה, התפעל מאוד מהארמון ומהגן שסביבו, וכשקרא את השלט התלוי בשער הארמון, מיד אמר בלבו, למי זה נועד? ולמי התכוון המלך אם לא אלי? הרי לי לא חסר כלום, ואני מאושר ושמח במה שיש לי, ודאי שלי מגיע ארמון זה! נטל רשות ונכנס למלך, השתחוה לפניו וסיפר לו על עשרו הרב, מעמדו הבכיר, ומשפחתו הנפלאה. חנני ה' יש לי כל! אני שמח בחלקי! סבורני כי על המלך לעמוד בדיבורו, לקיים את הפסוק "מוצא שפתיך תשמור ועשית", ועל המלך לתת לי מיד את הארמון ואת הגן שסביבו, שהרי אני עומד בתנאים של המלך! חייך המלך ואמר לו, שטוה שבועולם! אם אתה שמח בחלקך, כפי דבריך, אם כן, מדוע לטשת עיניך על הארמון והגן שסביבו, הרי לטעתך אתה שמח בחלקך, ואל לך לחמוד את ממונך של אחרים. אם חפץ אתה בארמון ובגן, אם כן אינך שמח בחלקך, ולא מגיע לך ארמון זה!

ישמע חכם ויוסף לקח!

שבת שלום!

Rav Kook List
Rav Kook on the Torah Portion
VaYishlach: Reuben's Sin

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

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

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

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

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

Two Perspectives on One Event

Rav Kook wrote that the Torah describes events in a particular way so that they will make a certain desired impression. Every detail in the Torah is carefully measured, so that the narrative will suitably affect us.

Sometimes a story, when written in a straightforward fashion, cannot be properly appreciated by those reading it, especially if they are greatly removed from the incident in time and place. From afar, we may not be properly sensitive to the moral outrage that took place. In such instances, divine wisdom dictates the precise fashion with which to clothe the story, in order that it should make the appropriate impression on the reader.

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

The activities of the Patriarchs deeply influenced, and continue to influence, the Jewish people. The spirit of Jacob's house lives with us to this day; the light of his family will forever illuminate our hearts. Any dimming of that light, any inner strife or moral imperfection, will also be felt by us. In fact, even more so: any minor eclipse of light from that time will reach us from afar as a serious and deeply disturbing darkness.

For us, the true extent of Reuben's offense - upsetting the delicate balance in his father's household and eroding Jacob's authority in his own home - is as if Reuben had actually committed incest with Bilhah. The literal account of the written Torah corresponds to our natural feelings of hurt and indignation.

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

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 75-77. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 43-44) Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

Weekly Halacha
by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt
Parshas Vayishlach
Medications on Shabbos * Part 1 of 3

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

Explanation of the rabbinic prohibition

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

However, the prohibition against using medication on Shabbos is also governed by a rabbinic decree against using medication on Shabbos even when no forbidden Shabbos Labor is performed. The Rabbis prohibited unrestricted use of medication on Shabbos for fear that it would lead to the violation of one of the thirty-nine Shabbos Labors. The Labor which

concerned the Rabbis most was Grinding, since grinding some substance is a prerequisite for almost every medicinal preparation[1].

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some modern-day medication may lead to other Biblical Labors, such as Smoothing, Kneading, Cooking or Carrying.

In spite of the above, there are some poskim who feel that nowadays we can be somewhat more lenient when interpreting the rabbinic decree. Although all the poskim agree that we may not do away with the rabbinic decree altogether, we may, nevertheless, find some room for leniency in case of severe distress or pain (even if the pain is localized and does not require bed rest)[16].

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

1. Mishnah Berurah 327:1.
2. O.C. 328:42 and Beur Halachah, s.v. kedei.
3. If the purpose of the exercise is to work up an appetite, it is questionable if it is permitted; see Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 301:9. If the exercise is for pure enjoyment, it may be permitted according to the basic halachah, although it may be considered *uvda d'chol*, “a weekday activity”; see Shulchan Shlomo 328, note 110, and Chut Shani, vol. 4. 89:2. Physical therapy is also permitted; Shulchan Shlomo, 328:66-2; Ohr l'Tziyun 2:36-12.
4. Mishnah Berurah 328:130.
5. O.C. 328:23, as explained by Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 35, note 20). [See Tzitz Eliezer 11:37, who permits drinking certain oils (like castor oil) to aid in the elimination process.]
6. O.C. 328:27. See Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:54.
7. Note, however, that the purpose of many vitamins is not to serve as a food supplement but rather to strengthen a weak body or to relieve certain symptoms. In the opinion of many poskim, those vitamins may not be taken on Shabbos; see Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:54, Minchas Shlomo 2:37 and Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 34, note 86, quoting Rav S.Z. Auerbach. See, however, Tzitz Eliezer 14:50, who takes a more lenient approach concerning vitamins on Shabbos.
8. Entire paragraph based on O.C. 328:17 and 37 and Mishnah Berurah, *ibid*. [Note that although Shulchan Aruch rules that a *shinui* is required for rabbinic prohibitions to be suspended, the general consensus of the poskim is that this restriction is waived when taking oral medication. When using other medications, however (such as ointment), it is proper to employ a *shinui*; see Mishnah Berurah 328:85 and 130.]
9. See Tzitz Eliezer 14:50-7 and 17:13.
10. Chazon Ish, O.C. 59:3, Rav S.Z. Auerbach in Nishmas Avraham 328:54, and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv in Eis Laledes, pg. 57, quote the age of 2-3.
11. Tzitz Eliezer 8:15-12.
12. Minchas Yitzchak 1:78. In the final analysis, it all depends on the strength and maturity of the child.
13. Rama, O.C. 328:17. Note, however, that not all of a baby's needs are exempt from the prohibition against medication; see, for instance, Mishnah Berurah 328:131. See Tehillah l'David 328:24 and Minchas Yitzchak 4:124 who deal with this difficulty.
14. The complex preparation that manufacturing modern medicine entails is another reason for leniency, since it may be argued that the Rabbis were fearful that “simple” and quick Labors such as Grinding would be transgressed; they did not fear that someone would engage in the lengthy and involved processing required today.
15. See Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:100 for a general explanation of this rule.
16. See Minchas Shabbos 91:9; Ketzos ha-Shulchan 134:7; Chelkas Yaakov 4:41; and Tzitz Eliezer 8:15-15. See also Minchas Yitzchak 3:35, who permits taking aspirin for a headache when one is in severe distress.
17. Chazon Ish (oral ruling, quoted in Imrei Yosher on Moed 97); Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 34, note 76). See a dissenting opinion in Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:53.
18. Rav S. Kluger (Sefer ha-Chayim 328:10 and Shenos Chayim 1:152); Minchas Shabbos 91:9; Tzitz Eliezer 8:15-15:15; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (Koveitz Teshuvos, O.C. 1:40, and oral ruling, quoted in Refuas Yisrael, pg. 14).

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Can the Hechsher HACK it? What is behind the kosher symbol?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

“My rav discreetly told me to avoid using a particular hechsher which I see is very popular. I am curious why this should be so. I know that there are negligent hechsherim out there, but don’t all reliable hechsherim follow the same Shulchan Aruch?”

Question #2:

“Some of my friends use specific hechsherim, and do not use others. Is there something halachic behind these distinctions, or is this simply politics?”

Answer:

“And Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man realized that he was unable to defeat Yaakov, he struck the “kaf” of Yaakov’s thigh, which became dislocated as a result of the wrestling. And the sun rose as Yaakov passed Peniel and he was limping because of his injured thigh. Therefore, the descendants of Yisroel do not eat the sciatic sinew to this very day, for the man struck Yaakov on that sinew, dislocating it” (Breishis 32:25-26, 32-33).

With these words, the Torah introduces us to the first kashrus mitzvah. Ever since, availability of kosher food has remained an ongoing concern. Nevertheless, modern life has changed who is responsible for overseeing and controlling the “kosher food chain.” Whereas in earlier generations, governance of the local kosher standard was the province of the town’s rav, modern production and distribution has placed much control hundreds or even thousands of miles away. Yes, it is true that the local rav or vaad hakashrus may still decide the standards maintained by the caterers, restaurants, and local bakeries who accept its authority, but even here, the local rabbinate is dependent on others for the halachic quality of the raw materials. Often local hechsherim do not have the ability, budget, or resources to perform their own independent review of the sources and instead rely on the organization overseeing the production.

In addition, contemporary food manufacture has created new areas of responsibility for the local rabbinate. The old-time rav was chosen because of his Torah knowledge, his yiras shamayim (fear of G-d), and his common sense. These factors allowed the rav to successfully oversee the kashrus of the community. Today’s complex world of food production, however, requires additional skills and knowledge, including familiarity with modern manufacture, to ensure proper kashrus.

Although most consumers are very curious why some hechsherim are used and others are not, nevertheless, the average kosher shopper is almost clueless why a particular product is deemed usable or not. Most people make their day-to-day food shopping decisions on a sociological basis – they purchase items based on whether the kashrus of the particular product or hechsher is trusted by “their crowd.” The kosher customer is eager for more information.

The goal of this article is to appreciate the incredible work that hechsherim assume to provide us with kosher food. At the same time, we will analyze why different rabbonim have different standards even though all are following their understanding of the halacha. This will make us better educated consumers, which is always an advantage.

WHAT MAKES A HECHSHER?

In addition to the absolute requirement that everyone involved in reliable kashrus must be G-d fearing, we can categorize the dynamics involved in maintaining proper kashrus under three main headings:

I. Halachic Knowledge

Every person in the chain of a good hechsher must have adequate knowledge of halacha to fulfill his responsibility so that the hechsher can maintain quality kashrus standards.

II. Awareness of Modern Manufacturing

Kashrus in the contemporary world requires extensive knowledge of modern manufacturing procedures and the processing of raw materials.

III. Control of the Product

The hechsher must establish proper methods of control so that the desired standards indeed exist.

When the hechsher can successfully HACK these requirements, the product is reliably Kosher.

Let me explain briefly what these three categories entail.

I. HALACHIC KNOWLEDGE AND STANDARDS

The kashrus control department of a supervisory organization can be divided into three units:

- (1) Deciders -- Those in charge of making the decisions. Their responsibility includes all halachic decision making.
- (2) Administrators -- Those with the administrative responsibility to oversee the actual day-to-day running of the operation.
- (3) Field Personnel -- The field personnel, sometimes called mashgichim, who serve as the eyes and ears of the organization in order to maintain its kashrus standard.

A proper hechsher must staff each of these three units with personnel who have the halachic and practical knowledge necessary to adequately fulfill their roles. There must be a talmid chacham or talmidei chachamim available to paskin any shaylos that occur, scholarly and well-trained yirei shamayim administrators who understand what is involved in the factories from both a halachic and a technical vantage point, and well-trained erlich field personnel who oversee and check the actual facilities.

II. AWARENESS

Assuming responsibility for kashrus in the contemporary world requires not only extensive halachic knowledge, but also expertise in modern manufacturing and raw materials, much of it specialized information. For example, granting certificates that flavors are kosher requires a tremendous amount of technical, chemical and manufacturing background. Providing a hechsher for cholov yisroel products necessitates significant acquaintance with the details of factory operation and equipment. Checking a factory entails not only familiarity with all ingredients and understanding how the equipment works, but also what other products may be heated in the entire facility. Similarly, someone supervising a modern abattoir must be aware of how the equipment may affect the ability to perform proper shechitah and whether the equipment or the processing may conceal the possibility that the animal is treifah.

III. CONTROL

In addition to comprehending all of the above, proper kashrus means that a hechsher has proper means to guarantee that the desired standards indeed exist. Some of the items included under this broad heading are:

- A. Does the hechsher have a system to ascertain that each facility it oversees is appropriately supervised? Does the visit guarantee that the kashrus standard is being kept by the company?
- B. How often do field personnel visit a facility?
- C. Are the field personnel properly trained and supervised? Is it possible that the factory will know of upcoming visits in advance and conceal evidence?
- D. How does the hechsher guarantee that its symbol is not used on products that it does not supervise? Among many other things, this requires that the kashrus agency monitors the labels that use its emblem and keeps guard against unauthorized use.

APPRECIATE THE HECHSHER

We can now appreciate the extensive job that responsible hechsherim perform to guarantee reliably kosher products. Inadequate supervisory agencies lack these factors.

With this background, we can now explore the first question above:

“My rav told me to avoid using a particular hechsher although other people I know use it, and I am curious what might be wrong.”

The rav who told you to avoid a certain hechsher may interpret the requirements of kashrus supervision differently from the way the hechsher does. Here are some specific reasons why your rav may recommend avoiding a particular hechsher or product:

(1) He may disagree with the kashrus standard that the rabbonim of the hechsher feel is adequate.

There are hundreds of examples that I can provide of disputes concerning kashrus standards. Here are some examples:

(a) The authorities of the last generation disputed to what extent one needs to supervise fish after the removal of its skin, most contending that any fish product left unsealed outside the control of a Torah observant Jew is regarded non-kosher. According to this standard, kosher whitefish salad requires an observant Jew to be present from the skinning of the fish until the sealing of the container. On the other hand, some supervisory agencies accept a more lenient approach that permits use of the fish with only occasional spot inspection of such a facility. Thus, although an otherwise recognized hechsher approves this product, your rav may tell you not to use it.

(b) Most large hechsherim in North America certify dairy products that are not cholov yisrael, relying on the psak of Rav Moshe Feinstein, the Pri Chodosh and others who permitted them. However, your rav may not accept this psak, or he may feel that you should be stringent about this practice.

(c) Your rav may not be comfortable with the approach used by the certifying agency to guarantee that the product has no problems of insect contamination, called tolayim.

(2) Your rav may feel that the method of control used by the particular hechsher is not as adequate as it should be. How often should one send a mashgiach to spot-check that a factory is maintaining the required standard? Obviously, this depends on the product and what else is manufactured at the facility. However, there is a wide discrepancy of standards concerning what is considered adequate supervision of a facility, and the hechsher may feel that their frequency of inspection is sufficient whereas your rav may feel that it is not.

Here is an example of such a circumstance: In the past, I was once responsible for the supervision of a variety of local businesses including a large bread and rolls bakery. I personally made sure that someone representing the hechsher could enter the bakery at any time of the day or night so that the owners and employees had no idea when we might make the next spot inspection. I also had access to the bakery's computerized inventory so that we knew exactly what the bakery had in stock. Although these should be standard practices in all kashrus facilities, they are not, and your rav may feel that one should not eat from any factory where this approach is not followed. He may feel that a system must be in place whereby all raw materials are approved by a mashgiach before they are used, a practice followed in very few facilities.

INADEQUATE CERTIFICATIONS

Until now, I have been discussing situations in which there is dispute among different kashrus agencies, all of which assume fidelity to halacha and supervision. Unfortunately, I have often come across completely reckless "supervision agencies" which assume little responsibility to guarantee that the consumer is indeed eating kosher. Some of these situations would be humorous were they not so tragic.

Here are a few anecdotes, all drawn from my firsthand experience. Once, when checking a meat supplier, I visited a particular abattoir as a guest of the supervising rabbi. As we entered, the shocheit offered the supervising rabbi the opportunity to examine his knife, which is halachically correct etiquette. However, I noticed that the rabbi did not know how to check the knife properly, although he pretended that he did. Obviously, it was beyond his competence to give hechsherim on shechitah.

KOSHER ELASTICITY?

On another occasion, I visited a wine factory, whose kashrus reputation was far from pristine, to see whether one mashgiach could possibly

maintain proper kashrus controls of the sprawling, three-story, city-block-sized plant. Indeed he could not, and I discovered many kashrus concerns. Shortly thereafter, I met the certifying rabbi who asked me for my impressions of the operation. I respectfully noted some of the shortcomings that I had observed, some of which he denied, while regarding another, he claimed that halacha permits it. When I pointed out that halacha permits such a product only bishaas hadechak (under extenuating circumstance), he replied "shaas hadechak is an elastic term." You could well ask, were his unfortunate consumers aware that they were purchasing and drinking questionably non-kosher wine when they had better alternatives? Did they realize how rubbery their wine was?

MAGNIFICENT RESORT, MEDIOCRE KASHRUS

Another true and curious anecdote occurred when my shul was conducting a fundraising auction of donated items. One contributed item was a week in a well-known resort hotel, which, however had a poor kashrus reputation. In order to determine whether our shul could auction this prize, I called the hotel, seeking out the supervising rabbi, and reached the gentleman on the phone.

After identifying myself and explaining the reason for my call, I asked my colleague on the other end of the line what sources of meat the hotel used. He mentioned certain high production meat packers with less than sterling kashrus reputations. I then noted to the certifying rabbi that these packers do not butcher or soak and salt (kasher) the meat.

"The hotel has its own staff of butchers, who butcher and kasher the meat."

"Do you have personal expertise in kosher butchering and removing veins and forbidden fat?"

"No, I have never learned the trade."

Further questioning revealed that both the rabbi providing the supervision and the mashgiach knew nothing about kosher butchering, and the butchers employed by the hotel were all either non-observant or non-Jews. Thus, there was absolutely no supervision on the proper butchering of the meat, one of the many reasons the hotel well earned its glamorous kashrus reputation!

On another occasion, I conducted the initial inspection of a factory on behalf of a well-respected hechsher to discover labels bearing the logo of a different supervisor. When I inquired whether the other rabbi was still certifying this facility, I was told that they had given up his certification many years before, notwithstanding that they were still using his labels!

At this point, we can answer the second asked above:

"Do people avoid certain hechsherim because of political reasons, or are there valid halachic reasons for avoiding them?"

Although there are indeed occasional political reasons why people shun certain hechsherim, usually, a hechsher is avoided for valid halachic reasons. Some organizations are disorganized, for example. I have seen many situations where although the people involved are erliche yiddin, they run their kashrus supervision in too haphazard a fashion to maintain a proper standard. Others send mashgichim to kasher plants without adequately instructing them what to do. Other hechsherim do not even bother sending mashgichim to check at all, and I have found more than one instance where the "hechsher" never bothered to send someone to check a plant even once!

WHAT IS A CONSUMER TO DO?

Just as you make yourself knowledgeable before buying a couch or a refrigerator, so you should try to be more knowledgeable about kashrus. Ask questions. If you feel you are receiving inadequate responses, keep asking until your questions are satisfactorily answered.

I have often discovered serious problems involving caterers that "everyone uses." When invited to a wedding or other simcha, double check to ensure that there is proper supervision. Ask to meet the mashgiach, and ask him questions. Of course, your questions should give the impression that you know what you are talking about. Once you begin asking, it will not take long to become a knowledgeable and inquisitive consumer. Hopefully, you

will not find the types of problems I mentioned above, but if you do, you will be able to write your own article!

If you are making a simcha, investigate the possibility of hiring your own experienced mashgiach.

Tour groups are especially notorious for lack of proper kashrus arrangements. Among problems I have discovered were tours advertised as glatt kosher chassidishe shechitah only, while the person overseeing all kashrus arrangements was married to a non-Jewish woman!

Your rav should be a good source of up-to-date kashrus information. A well-educated consumer asks. Often asking one's rav forces him to research the matter more carefully and he discovers issues of which he was unaware. I have discovered this many times myself, not only in areas of food kashrus, but also in such diverse areas as tefillin and shofar manufacture, and the kashrus of mikva'os.

Based on the above information, we can gain a greater appreciation as to how hard it is to maintain a high kashrus standard. We certainly have a greater incentive to become better educated kosher consumers who better understand many aspects of the preparation of kosher food, and why it is important to ascertain that everything one consumes has a proper hechsher. We should always hope and pray that the food we eat fulfills all the halachos that the Torah commands us.

TALMUDIGEST :: Zevachim 9 – 15

For the week ending 20 November 2010 / 12 Kislev 5771

from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

A MINI-MOVEMENT IS ENOUGH * Zevachim 14b

The blood of a sacrifice must be received by a kohen in a sacred vessel and brought to the altar for application, which must also be performed by a kohen.

How about the transporting of this blood from the reception stage to the application one – must it also be performed by a kohen actually walking to the altar?

This question is discussed at length in our gemara and the conclusion stated by Rabbi Yochanan is that if there is no movement made by the one transferring the blood from the receiver to the applier the sacrifice is disqualified.

A challenge to this approach is presented from a mishna in Mesechta Pesachim (64a). In describing the process of offering the korban Pesach the mishna states that after the kohen received the blood from the throat of the slaughtered animal, he passed it to a kohen standing next to him, who would then repeat this step, and this would go on from kohen to kohen until the blood reached the one who would apply it to the altar. This would seem to indicate that the blood was transported without any movement on the part of the kohen involved.

The response to this challenge was that even though there was a long line of kohanim involved in passing the blood in order to accommodate the large number of Jews offering that sacrifice, each of them made a slight movement towards his neighbor in order to fulfill the requirement of walking with the blood.

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

“Akiva, leaving you is like leaving life.”

Rabbi Tarfon to Rabbi Akiva after he solved his problem – Zevachim 13a

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