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To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com
From: crshulman@aol.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON VAYISHLACH - 5765

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RABBI HERSCHEL SCHACHTER

NATIONAL PRIDE

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

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

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

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

G-d considers "arrogance" to be an abominable trait. But Binyamin who was born in Eretz Yisroel was a "sabara", and he had "national pride." This "national pride" was what was needed to have the mizbeach built in his section. Arrogance pushes one away from G-d; but a healthy sense of

independence and national pride brings one closer to G-d. The individual who is subservient to other human beings can not fully be subservient to G-d.

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

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

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www.vbm-torah.org/salt.htm SALT!! ("Surf A Little Torah")

RABBI DAVID SILVERBERG

[from several years ago]

The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Surf A Little Torah Yeshivat Har Etzion

PARASHAT VAYISHLACH

Parashat Vayishlach tells of Yaakov's successful confrontation with the mysterious attacker. Recall that Yaakov suffered a serious wound to the leg over the course of the contest, which we commemorate, as the Torah writes, through the prohibition of eating the "gid hanasheh" (thigh muscle) of an animal.

Rav Moshe Feinstein raises an interesting question: why do we commemorate this miracle of Yaakov's victory over the angel through inaction, by refraining from a given activity? In two weeks we will celebrate the Hasmonean defeat over the Greeks through the observance of Channuka. This observance entails the recitation of hallel, lighting candles to publicize the miracle, and modes of festivity. On Purim, too, our commemoration of the miracle requires several rituals and active festivity. Why do we commemorate Yaakov's struggle with the angel by simply refraining from eating the "gid hanasheh"?

Rav Moshe suggests that this mitzvah commemorates a specific kind of miracle: overcoming challenges and trying circumstances. Although Rav Moshe does not elaborate, he implies that Yaakov's wrestle with the mysterious assailant symbolizes his struggles in exile and ultimate triumph. This type of miracle warrants a less enthusiastic commemoration. We pray every day (towards the end of "birkhot hashachar"), "Do not bring us to tests." We much prefer not to confront exile and grueling conditions, even if we eventually overcome these obstacles. Our ultimate triumph over adversity and trying times deserves commemoration, but a much different type of commemoration than other miracles involving the overthrow of our enemies. Yaakov's successful struggle with the angel is thus commemorated passively and somewhat subtly, through restraint and inaction, rather than active celebration.

The disturbing story of Dina's rape by Shekhem has occupied many commentators throughout the ages. Among the issues raised by this incident is a halakhic one: did the entire city of Shekhem deserve annihilation and, if so, on what grounds?

The Rambam (Hilkhot Melakhim 9:14) writes that the entire population of Shekhem deserved capital punishment for having violated one of the seven Noachide laws: "dinim" - establishing a judicial system. The government of Shekhem had no judicial system that could try and

reprimand Shekhem for his heinous crime. Given the principle known as, "azharatam zo hi mitatam" - that gentiles are liable for capital punishment for willful violation of any of the seven Noachide laws (when they live under Jewish rule during a period when Jewish courts had the power to administer capital punishment), Yaakov's sons sentenced the population of Shekhem to death for their neglect of this important law.

The Ramban, in his commentary on our parasha, sharply disagrees. He claims that according to the Rambam's approach, Yaakov had no reason to condemn his sons' violence; it was legally mandated. Furthermore, the Ramban notes that the provision calling for capital punishment for a gentile's violation of one of the Noachide laws applies only to active transgressions, sins involving actual misconduct. They are not to be punished for inappropriate inaction, refraining from fulfilling a given obligation. Therefore, the residents of Shekhem did not deserve capital punishment for their failure to bring Shekhem to trial.

One answer suggested for the first challenge against the Ramban is between the punishment deserved by the population of Shekhem and manner in which Yaakov's sons administered it. Namely, Yaakov accused his sons of the same crime for which they killed the people of Shekhem: lawlessness. Rather than themselves conducting formal, legal proceedings to charge and sentence the population of Shekhem, Yaakov's sons recklessly stormed the city and killed its inhabitants. We may thus uphold the Rambam's explanation for their having deserved punishment while understanding full well Yaakov's objection to their conduct.

As for the Ramban's second challenge, that gentiles are not culpable for passive violations, the Chatam Sofer (Shut, vol. 6, 14) offers an innovative, albeit questionable, resolution for the Ramban. He draws a subtle distinction between the formal, legal status of "chayav mita" - deserving of the death penalty, and the court's empowerment to carry out the sentence. The Chatam Sofer argues that violation through inaction does, in fact, afford the gentile the official status of "chayav mita." The Jewish court, however, cannot administer the punishment. The Ramban agrees, suggests the Chatam Sofer, that Yaakov's sons acted improperly by killing the people of Shekhem. All he meant is that they did not violate the formal prohibition of murder. Since the city's population had acquired the formal status of one sentenced to capital punishment, their violence did not, strictly speaking, constitute a violation of the prohibition of murder.

Incidentally, this approach clearly resolves the first question, as well. (Many later Acharonim have disputed the Chatam Sofer's analysis. See Yehuda Nachshoni, Haggot Be-parshiyot Ha-Torah, vol. 1, pp. 138-140.)

Among the many episodes related in Parashat Vayishlach is Yaakov Avinu's nighttime wrestle with the angel, identified by Chazal as the angel of Esav. The Gemara in Chullin 91a cites two opinions as to how this mysterious being appeared to Yaakov: either as an idolater or a Torah scholar. What does this mean?

One explanation is cited in the name of the Avnei Nezer (by his son, in "Haggadah Shem Mi-Shmuel"). He views Yaakov's assailant as representative of the yetzer ha-ra (evil inclination). The two disguises mentioned in the Gemara correspond to the two primary tactics employed by the evil inclination that works within each and every one of us. The more straightforward confrontation occurs by the yetzer ha-ra that appears to us in the form of an idolater. Like Adam and Eve long ago, we are often tempted by that which we know is forbidden and religiously foreign. The shrewder strategy of the evil inclination is its disguise as a Torah scholar. Knowingly or otherwise, we so often delude ourselves into turning the forbidden into laudable conduct; we confuse

the contemptible with the praiseworthy. This is the second form of struggle that we, the descendants of Yaakov, confront on a daily basis.

The Pardes Yossef suggests another interpretation of the Gemara. He suggests that the two masks worn by the angel represents the two methods our enemies employ in their campaign to destroy us: the sword and the intellect. The disguise of the idolater symbolizes the oppression Yaakov and his offspring had suffered at the hands of the pagan world. The image of the scholar points to a different type of warfare: the battle of the minds. Enemies of the Jews have frequently attempted to undermine our commitment to our faith through rational argumentation and debate. As the prophet Yeshayahu tells us, neither approach will succeed in destroying the Jewish people: "No weapon formed against you shall succeed, and every tongue that contends with you at law you shall defeat" (54:17).

Parashat Vayishlach opens with Yaakov's dispatching of "malakhim," identified by Chazal as angels (see Rashi) to attempt to pacify his brother, Esav. One subtle peculiarity in the verse caught the attention of the great Rebbe of Kotzk (in "Ohel Torah"). The Kotzker observes the seemingly superfluous term, "lefanav" - "ahead of him." Why must the Torah add this word? Where else would Yaakov send his messengers, if not ahead to Esav?

The Kotzker uses this expression to arrive at a rather daring interpretation of this incident. He associates the word "lefanav" with the term, "milefanav." This second word generally refers to sending someone or something not for any specific purpose, but simply to dismiss the person or object, to send him or it away. The recorded words of the rebbe appear in characteristic brevity, but he seems to imply that although Yaakov charges the angels with a mission, he intends primarily to discard them. The Kotzker explains that Yaakov "had no use for their assistance, being that Hashem can assist without angels and without any reason." Yaakov had no need for angels; he turned to the Almighty directly to save him from his brother.

This approach relates to a common theme of the Kotzker Rebbe: don't look for shortcuts. Yaakov Avinu understood that he cannot rely upon any force other than G-d Himself; even angels could not guarantee his protection from his enemies! Instead, as Chazal emphasize, Yaakov did whatever he could - sending an appeasement gift to Esav and preparing for possible military confrontation - and turned to G-d in prayer. There is no other way to deal with adverse or threatening situations.

This perhaps brings to mind the common tendency to look for "segulot" - deeds or words with some mystical power - to solve all types of problems. While many "segulot" may be well documented and valid, the Kotzker teaches us that ultimately, we may never rest our faith upon anything in the world besides the Almighty Himself. People speak about all kinds of "segulot" to help find a suitable mate, bear children, success in learning, etc. But, as we have seen, even angels weren't good enough for Yaakov Avinu, for there is no substitute for exerted effort and genuine prayer to help us through difficult times.

Petitioning G-d to save him from his revengeful brother, Yaakov recalls what he considers the undeserved kindness bestowed upon him by the Almighty: "I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have steadfastly shown Your servant... " (32:11). The Gemara in Masekhet Shabbat, cited by Rashi, explains that Yaakov feared the diminishing of his merits on account of the blessings he had enjoyed. Whereas he did not deserve - in his mind - the wealth and prestige he had acquired, his account has become depleted, perhaps leaving too little to earn protection from Esav. In this context, the Kotzker Rebbe calls our attention to a clause in our daily tefilot, from the paragraph of "ezrat avoteinu," recited before shemoneh esrei: "mashpil ge'im u-magbi'ah shefalim." We acknowledge G-d's quality of "lowering the haughty and raising the humble." The

Kotzker notes that the haughty remain haughty even after having been lowered, while the humble retain their humility even after the achievement of glory. The arrogant will fail to acknowledge their shortcomings even in the advent of failure and ruin. Instead, they will attribute their downfall to external forces and stubbornly insist upon their inherent greatness. Yaakov Avinu well represents the second half of the clause, the humble person's maintenance of humility even after his rise to fame. Yaakov never takes credit for his accomplishments, be it his impressive victory over Lavan's financial warfare, his accumulation of wealth and honor, or, most of all, his piety. Instead, he recognizes the Hand of G-d that has led him throughout his journey into exile and provided him with all his needs. No matter how great their achievements, the truly humble deny any credit for themselves and attribute their successes to the Almighty.

Yeshivat Har Etzion Alon Shvut, Israel, 90433 office@etzion.org.il

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

RABBI DR. JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

27th Nov. 2004 14th Kislev 5765

Vayishlach Jacob's Destiny, Israel's Name

It is the moment the Jewish people acquired its name. Nothing could have been more unexpected or mysterious. Jacob is about to meet the brother he had not seen for twenty two years - Esau, the man who had once vowed to kill him. Alone and afraid at the dead of night, he is assaulted by an unnamed stranger. They wrestle. Time passes. Dawn is about to break:

Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go until you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with G-d and with men and have overcome."

So the people Israel acquired its name, surely the strangest and most haunting in all the religious experience of mankind.

Religion, faith, spirituality - these words conjure up many ideas and associations: peace, serenity, inwardness, meditation, calm, acceptance, bliss. Often faith has been conceived as an alternative reality, a "haven in a heartless world," an escape from the strife and conflict of everyday life. There is much to be said for this idea. But it is not Judaism.

Judaism is not an escape from the world but an engagement with the world. It is not "the opium of the people," as Karl Marx once called religion. It does not anaesthetise us to the pains and apparent injustices of life. It does not reconcile us to suffering. It asks us to play our part in the most daunting undertaking ever asked by G-d of mankind: to construct relationships, communities, and ultimately a society, that will become homes for the Divine presence. And that means wrestling with G-d and with men and refusing to give up or despair.

Wrestling with G-d: that is what Moses and the prophets did. They said, in effect: G-d, your demands are great but we human beings are small. We try, but often we fail. We make mistakes. We have moments of weakness. You are right: we have much to feel bad about in our lives. But we are your children. You made us. You chose us. So forgive us. And G-d forgives. Judaism is a religion of repentance and confession, but it is not a religion of guilt.

Wrestling with men: since the days of Abraham, to be a Jew is to be an iconoclast. We challenge the idols of the age, whatever the idols, whatever the age. Sometimes it meant wrestling with idolatry, superstition, paganism, magic, astrology, primitive beliefs. At other

times it means wrestling with secularism, materialism, consumerism. There were times, in the Middle Ages, when Europe was largely illiterate and Jews alone practised universal education. There were others - the twentieth century, for example - when Jews became the targets of Fascism and Communism, systems that worshipped power and desecrated the dignity of the individual. Judaism is a religion of protest - the counter-voice in the conversation of mankind.

Jacob is not Abraham or Isaac. Abraham symbolises faith as love. Abraham loved G-d so much he was willing to leave his land, home and father's house to follow him to an unknown land. He loved people so much that he treated passing strangers as if they were angels (the irony is: they were angels. Often people become what we see them as. Treat people like enemies and they become enemies. Treat them as friends and they become friends). Abraham dies "at a good age, old and satisfied." A life of love is serene. Abraham was serene.

Isaac is faith as fear, reverence, awe. He was the child who was nearly sacrificed. He remains the most shadowy of the patriarchs. His life was simple, his manner quiet, his demeanour undemonstrative. Often we find him doing exactly what his father did. His is faith as tradition, reverence for the past, continuity. Isaac was a bridge between the generations. Simple, self-contained, pure: that is Isaac.

But Jacob is faith as struggle. Often his life seemed to be a matter of escaping one danger into another. He flees from his vengeful brother only to find himself at the mercy of deceptive Laban. He escapes from Laban only to encounter Esau marching to meet him with a force of four hundred men. He emerges from that meeting unscathed, only to be plunged into the drama of the conflict between Joseph and his other sons, which caused him great grief. Alone among the patriarchs, he dies in exile. Jacob wrestles, as his descendants - the children of Israel - continue to wrestle with a world that never seems to grant us peace.

Yet Jacob never gives up and is never defeated. He is the man whose greatest religious experiences occur when he is alone, at night, and far from home. Jacob wrestles with the angel of destiny and inner conflict and says, "I will not let you go until you bless me." That is how he rescues hope from catastrophe - as Jews have always done. Their darkest nights have always been preludes to their most creative dawns.

Zis schwer zu sein a Yid, they used to say. "It's hard to be a Jew." In some ways, it still is. It is not easy to face our fears and wrestle with them, refusing to let go until we have turned them into renewed strength and blessing. But speaking personally, I would have it no other way. Judaism is not faith as illusion, seeing the world through rose-tinted lenses as we would wish it to be. It is faith as relentless honesty, seeing evil as evil and fighting it in the name of life, and good, and G-d. That is our vocation. It remains a privilege to carry Jacob's destiny, Israel's name.

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [mailto:office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Nov. 24, 2004 To: yhe-parsha@etzion.org.il Subject: PARSHA65 -08: Parashat Vayishlach By Rav Yaakov Medan

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

PARASHAT HASHAVUA

This parasha series is dedicated in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l.

<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha65/08-65vayishlach.htm>

In memory of Chana Friedman z"l (Chana bat Yaakov u'Devorah) on her ninth yearzeit.

This shiur is dedicated in memory of Esther Schreiber Maidenbaum z"l, whose love, warmth and time were dedicated to the Jewish community and to her friends and family. May the extended Schreiber-Maidenbaum family be comforted among the mourners of Tzion veYerushalayim.

"ANYONE WHO SAYS THAT REUVEN SINNED..."

BY RAV YAAKOV MEDAN

I. PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

The standard rabbinic interpretation of Reuven's sin concerning Bilha, his father's concubine, poses two fundamental questions. A. There are assumptions which, for reasons that are not always clear to us, become fundamental to our faith, after a process of refining in yeshivot throughout the generations. How far can exegesis be pulled away from the literal meaning of the text on the basis of these assumptions? B. Does our desire to see the great figures of our nation in a favorable light not sometimes come at the expense of the rules of faith and logic - which are no less important than the merits of those great people?

We have proceeded ahead of ourselves; let us start at the beginning. The Torah recounts Reuven's sin concerning Bilha in clear and straightforward language which seems difficult to interpret in any way other than its simple meaning: "Yisrael journeyed and erected his tent beyond Migdal Eder. And it was, while Yisrael dwelled in that land, that Reuven went and lay with Bilha, his father's concubine, and Yisrael heard. And the sons of Yaakov were twelve..." (35:21-22) Nevertheless, Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachmani - representing many other opinions among the Tannaim - explains:

"Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: Anyone who says that Reuven sinned, is mistaken, as it is written: 'The sons of Yaakov were twelve' - this teaches that all were equally worthy. What, then, is the meaning of the verse teaching that he 'lay with Bilha, his father's concubine'? It teaches that he moved (upset) his father's bed, and the text regards him as though he had lain with her. We learn [in a baraita]: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: That righteous one [Reuven] was protected from committing that sin, and he did not perform that act. Is it possible that his descendants were destined to stand upon Mount Eival and to declare, 'Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife' - while he himself did this? What, then, are we to learn from the verse teaching, 'he lay with Bilha, his father's concubine'? He wanted to protest his mother's honor. He said: My mother's sister troubled my mother - shall the maidservant of my mother's sister than also trouble my mother? He stood up and moved her bed..."

The Tannaim disagreed: 'Unstable (pachaz) as water, you shall not excel' (Ber. 49:4) - Rabbi Eliezer interpreted: '[Pachaz] is a mnemonic for:'] You were hasty, you were guilty, you did disgrace. R. Joshua interpreted: You did overstep the law, you did sin, you did fornicate. R. Gamaliel interpreted: You did meditate, you did supplicate, your prayer shone forth. Said R. Gamaliel: We still need [the interpretation of] the Moda'i, for R. Eleazar ha-Moda'i said, Reverse the word and interpret it: You did tremble, you did recoil, your sin fled [Parhah] from you. Raba — others state, R. Yirmiyah b. Abba - interpreted: You did remember the penalty of the crime, you were [grievously] sick, you held aloof from sinning.' (Shabbat 55b) Two reasons are given to support the claim that it is impossible for Reuven to have literally committed this atrocity. The first reason, provided by R. Shemuel bar Nachmani, is that "all of Yaakov's children were equally worthy" - i.e., all of them were righteous. We may question this point on the basis of Yaakov's harsh criticism of Shimon and Levi at the end of his life - from which it would appear that these two brothers were not as worthy as their brethren. Moreover, even if all of them were equally righteous, this does not necessarily prove that they all had a spotless record: after all, most of the brothers sinned through participation in the sale of Yosef.

The second reason is raised by R. Shimon ben Elazar, who notes that Reuven's descendants were destined to stand together with another five tribes and declare, "Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife." This claim, too, seems forced; even according to R. Shimon ben Elazar's explanation that Reuven only upset his father's bedclothes - he still apparently transgressed against "Cursed is he who dishonors his father..." - which was also declared at Mount Eival. How, then, could the tribe of Reuven have stood and made this declaration?

Perhaps behind these two reasons there lies a more fundamental perception, for which the reasons mentioned merely serve as cover. This reason may be the very fact that it is impossible for one of Yaakov's sons - the foundation stones of G-d's nation - to have committed such a heinous sin. This position is adopted, among others, by Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl in his book, "Sichot le- Sefer Bereishit":

"Anyone who thinks that Reuven, David and other great figures of Israel... are people who descended to such a distance from holiness - such a person is surely mistaken." His disciple, Rav Yehuda Brandes (in an article in Megadim 26), understood that his teacher's point of departure was not historical truth or compatibility with the literal meaning of the text, but rather the educational need to clear the great figures of the nation of such serious transgressions in the eyes of the nation. I have questioned the views of both of them at length, on both technical and theoretical grounds, in the past (Megadim 26; see also my book on

David and Batsheva), and shall not repeat that discussion here. Let us return to our question. Whatever the need may be to seek merit for Reuven, can we allow ourselves to depart so far from the literal meaning of the text, which presents such an unequivocal narrative, solely on the basis on the logic which dictates that Reuven could not have sinned thus? Moreover, let us take a closer look at what happened according to the midrashic approach. After Rachel died, Yaakov moved his bed into Bilha's tent, or alternatively, Bilha's bed into his own tent. Reuven, out of zeal for the honor of his mother Leah, from whose tent Yaakov was conspicuously absent, came and "upset Bilha's bed." It is not entirely clear what this phrase means. From the Midrash, it would seem that he overturned her bed [3], but it is not clear what harm Reuven caused by this act. Did Bilha fall and injure herself? Was she humiliated? Was Yaakov humiliated, having to resort personally to restoring the bed to its proper position? Other commentators suggest that Reuven uprooted her bed - i.e., removed it from the tent. Still, this would appear to have caused minimal damage that could easily be repaired. We may summarize and say that this interpretation of Reuven's act does not sit well with the literal text, does not make clear why the act was so serious, and does not make sense in light of what Yaakov decreed for him at the End of Days.

II. THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING REUVEN'S SIN

In my view, the reason to defend Reuven is exegetical rather than ideological. There is a contradiction between the description of the sin in Bereishit chapter 35, and Yaakov's attitude towards Reuven in his last words to him at the end of his life:

"Reuven, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellence of dignity and the excellence of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, for you ascended to your father's bed and then defiled it; he went up to my bedclothes." (49:3-4)

If indeed the act was committed as described in chapter 35 and Reuven did indeed lie with his father's concubine during his father's lifetime - is it possible that following such an abomination Yaakov would have allowed Reuven to remain in his home, including him with the other sons and giving him an inheritance in the land? Were the sins that led to the exclusion of Kayin, Cham, Yishmael and Esav more serious?

We are forced into viewing the two episodes - that of chapter 35 and that of chapter 49 - as contradictory and requiring some solution. Chazal were faced with two possibilities: either to accept the verses in chapter 49 at face value, implying that Reuven did not commit such a terrible sin, and to provide some appropriate explanation for the verses in chapter 35, or they could accept literally the verses in chapter 35 - implying that Reuven's sin was truly an abomination - and find some explanation for Yaakov's relatively mild words in chapter 49.

R. Shemuel bar Nachmani adopts the first approach, maintaining that Reuven did not lie with Bilha. He does this not out of a blind need to defend or justify Reuven, but rather in order to explain Yaakov's attitude towards him at the end of his life.

Other Sages, who understood the textual description of the sin literally - as sexual immorality - adopt the second approach. They understand Yaakov's somewhat forgiving attitude towards Reuven while on his deathbed as reflecting the long, profound and sincere repentance that Reuven had undergone: his sackcloth and fasting throughout his life, as well as his behavior in the story of the sale of Yosef, as will be explained below. For these Sages, the difference between Yaakov's attitude towards Shimon and Levi in his last words and his attitude towards Reuven arises not from the discrepancy in the severity of the sin, but rather from a discrepancy in the repentance following it. Reuven recognized his sin, confessed it and spent the rest of his life engaged in repentance, while Shimon and Levi refused to accept their father's rebuke, and even boldly answered him back (34:31). They had not undertaken any repentance for their sin up until the day they stood before their father on his deathbed.

III. TWO DEFENSES OF REUVEN

What I have said above deviates from the accepted understanding in Rashi and in the beit midrash. Rashi, in his interpretation of the sin (35:22), adopts the position that Reuven did not lie with Bilha but rather only upset his father's bed. In the story of the sale of Yosef, on the other hand (37:29), Rashi insists that Reuven was not together with his brothers at the time of the sale; he explains that he was clothed in sackcloth and engaged in fasting over his previous sin. The combination of these two midrashim leads us to an apparently impossible conclusion: although Reuven's sin was motivated by good intentions (zeal for his mother's dignity), although this sin was not particularly severe and its results could even be corrected quickly and easily - despite all of this, Reuven wore sackcloth and fasted for the rest of his life, or at least for many years (up until the sale of Yosef). Moreover, following this repentance, which is unparalleled in all of Tanakh, Reuven's birthright is handed over to Yehuda - who is the principal guilty party in the sale of Yosef!

This picture confuses two different solutions to the question of the relationship between Reuven's sin and Yaakov's response.

These two solutions cannot be combined; they represent two opposing views. According to one, Reuven's sin was relatively "minor" - he upset his father's bed, but nowhere are we told that he engaged in repentance for this act. This represents the view of some of the greatest Tannaim and Amoraim: R. Shemuel bar Nachmani in the name of R. Yonatan; R. Shimon ben Elazar and R. Elazar ha-Moda'i (Shabbat 55b); Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel in the Sifri (as we shall see below); and even the Targum Yerushalmi, the Ba'alei ha-Tosafot in their commentary on the Torah, the Chizkuni and other commentators. The great difference between Reuven's relatively light rebuke and the heavy-handed treatment of Shimon and Levi arose from the severity of the latter sin in contrast with the minor offense committed by Reuven. The second approach is adopted by R. Eliezer and R. Yehoshua (Shabbat 55b); the Sages who disagree with Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel in the Sifri; R. Eliezer ben Yaakov in Bereishit Rabba (100); the Ramban, Radak, R. Yosef Bekhor Shor and other commentators. According to this view, Reuven committed an act of sexual immorality, lying with his father's concubine, but he also repented. Let us now examine each approach, starting with the second.

IV. REUVEN'S SIN OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY

The assumption that Reuven literally committed an act of sexual immorality led Chazal (and us) to seek some merit for him: to conclude that he repented. The idea of his repentance is based on the relatively forgiving attitude displayed by Yaakov in his last hours, as opposed to his attitude towards Shimon and Levi; it is also based on the fact that he did not sit together with his brothers at the time of the sale of Yosef. These two factors do not seem strong enough to prove that he underwent such a profound and sincere process of repentance, of which the text gives no hint at all. We shall therefore expand a little on this repentance, but first let us discuss the sin itself. THE BATTLE FOR LEADERSHIP

How could Reuven, an intelligent man, involve himself in such foolishness, such an abomination, as to lie with his father's concubine? Could Bilha, a generation older than Reuven, have been such an exceptionally beautiful woman that he fell prey to his evil inclination? If we adopt this approach, Reuven's act has an obvious biblical parallel: Avshalom, who lay with his father's concubines as a declaration of rebellion against his father and a coup to take over the kingdom (Shemuel II 16:21-22). Adoniyahu, David's son, also tried to follow Avshalom's example and to marry Avishag, who was regarded by the nation as his father's concubine. The context of Reuven's story may point to a similar situation. Following Yaakov's encounter with Esav and his obsequious bowing before him, one receives the impression that Yaakov has lost his leadership of the family.

Let us try to imagine what was going on in Yaakov's family as they returned to Eretz Yisrael after their exile in Lavan's home. The head of the household, Yaakov - a mighty warrior who single-handedly removed the great stone from the mouth of the well, who stood alone day and night to fend off robbers and wild animals and to protect Lavan's flocks, who fought for his rights bravely and determinedly before Lavan and schemed against him - this Yaakov bows seven times to the ground before his brother Esav. Furthermore, he sends his wives and sons to bow down as well, he sends gifts of livestock to his brother, promises to subject himself to Esav's sovereignty in Se'ir and sees him "as one sees the face of G-d." The Hivvites inhabiting the land, knowing that the brave, strong Yaakov is on his way - grandson of Avraham, who liberated the land from the hand of Kedarla'omer; son of Yitzchak, the stubborn settler; brother of Esav, commander of the "battalion of four hundred men" - must certainly have feared and revered him. But after witnessing such fawning behavior, Shekhem - son of the prince of the land - did not hesitate to rape Yaakov's daughter, to kidnap her and bring her to his house, and then to engage in negotiations. Yaakov was silent until his sons returned, accepting - out of fear of Shekhem - the possibility that Dina would remain an unwilling prisoner in Shekhem's house forever. Yaakov's sons see (inaccurately, of course) an elderly father who has lost his strength, just as many years later the elders of Israel would regard Shemuel as an elderly leader who had lost his strength and therefore decide that he must be replaced in Yaakov's household, there commences a battle of inheritance - a battle for leadership. Shimon and Levi are the first to try out their power to inherit the role - while their father is still alive, and without his permission. Yaakov approves, by his silence, the agreement between his sons and Chamor and Shekhem that Dina will be given to Shekhem in return for the circumcision of all the men of the city. Shimon and Levi violate the agreement with their swords, regarding Shekhem and his compatriots as barbarians who raped and kidnapped their sister. There would be justification for regarding Shekhem and his men in this light, had they not made an agreement with Yaakov and with his sons. Shimon and Levi did not recognize the agreement to which

their father had committed himself - even if only by remaining silent - and for this reason they permitted themselves to spill the blood of an entire city. Following Shimon and Levi's downfall - the wholesale massacre - Reuven tries out his own leadership prospects according to the same bad counsel that was given, many years later, to Avshalom: he took his father's concubine. Thus Natan would describe to David the way in which his kingdom would be lost - "I will raise evil against you from your own house... another man will lie with your wives before this very sun" (Shemuel II 12:11), paralleling the expression used to describe how David himself received the kingdom from G-d: "I gave you the house of your master and your master's wives to your bosom" (Shemuel II 12:8). This, it seems, is the behavior of one who inherits rulership.

It is not clear whether Reuven's misdeed involved real sexual immorality, since Bilha was not his father's wife, but rather only a concubine. It seems, then, that when Rachel died and Yaakov moved his bed to Bilha's tent, he meant thereby to promote her not only to the status of his wife, like Leah, but even to the status of the "woman of the house." Reuven did not recognize Yaakov's "right" to do this. From his perspective, Leah was the natural candidate to inherit Rachel's place. Through his deed with Bilha, Reuven expressed the fact that he did not recognize Yaakov's choice; it was a vehement declaration that Bilha was no more than a maidservant and concubine. Reuven's lack of recognition of Yaakov's authority therefore led him to commit a sin of sexual immorality. Yehuda tries out his chances after his three elder brothers fail. When Yosef comes to Dotan to visit his brothers, the three oldest debate his fate. Shimon and Levi suggest that he be killed and cast into the pit (see Rashi 49:5). Reuven proposes that he be thrown into the pit alive, but a new leader arises among the brothers - Yehuda - and he decides that Yosef will be sold to the Yishmaelim. This is a "punishment," inter alia, for Yaakov having chosen Yosef and loved him more than all his brothers. Yehuda's rejection of Yaakov's right to do this draws him down to the level of kidnapping, concerning which we are commanded: "One who kidnaps a person and sells him, and he is found guilty - he shall surely die." Even before Yehuda arrived at this point, Yosef dreamed of his father, mother and brothers bowing down before him. He, too, sees himself as the leader of the family in place of his father. He lacks his elder brothers' ability to realize his leadership potential; it remains, for him, a dream. A dream of leadership would not seem to represent a crime, but Yosef adds to his dreams some tales about his brothers that he recounts to his father, implying that he is better than they.

REUVEN'S PUNISHMENT

All the brothers discussed here receive a punishment. Within the limited scope of this shiur, I shall be able to discuss only that of Reuven, who - as a result of his act - is relieved of the birthright, which is given to Yosef, and of his leadership, which is given to Yehuda. It is possible that among the rights that were meant to be awarded to Reuven, there was also the portion of land that eventually became the portion of Yehuda, who assumed some of Reuven's leadership role. Moreover, it is possible that Reuven's inheritance was among the factors that led him into his sin, since he felt himself - located in Migdal-Eder, between Beit-Lechem and Chevron - as owner of that property and entitled to sit there and decide the fate of the entire family at his own discretion. In the same way, Shimon and Levi - regarding themselves as the conquerors of Shekhem and its inheritors forever - schemed against Yosef on "their turf," eventually being punished by having Shekhem taken from them and given to Yosef.

In this portion of land, Reuven - as the firstborn - was meant to inherit the resting places of the forefathers and to see himself as the heir to their dynasty, as it is customary for the firstborn to serve the father and to continue his path. His portion would have been located on the southern border of Binyamin - the portion in which the Shekhina rests - and not to its east, as was when the tribe of Reuven ultimately settled east of the Jordan; this arrangement would have accorded with his place south of the portion of the Shekhina in the desert encampment. Following Reuven's sin, he lost this portion and was pushed eastwards to the land of Moav, the place where Lot's daughters violated their father's honor. Although their intention - like that of Reuven, who showed disrespect for his father - was good, the stain of their act remained and was not erased.

REUVEN'S REPENTANCE

From where do Chazal deduce Reuven's profound process of repentance for his sin concerning his father's concubine? Reuven, as we have said, wanted to inherit his father's role in the latter's lifetime, and he expressed this insolently by lying with his father's concubine, thereby showing his lack of recognition of Yaakov's right to choose the woman of the house - Bilha. In the wake of this ugly act, Yaakov kept Reuven at a distance, and it appears that his special fostering of Yosef as the firstborn who remains at his father's side and receives the

"radiance of his image" (see Rashi 37:3) is accelerated as a result of Reuven's banishment. Reuven, then, is the principal loser as a result of Yaakov's special relationship with Yosef. If any one of the brothers has good reason to scheme against him, it is Reuven. Because of Yosef, Reuven loses his birthright; by means of his special relationship with Yosef, Yaakov demonstrates his love for and closeness to Rachel even after her death, and his decision not to replace her with the living Leah. But it is Reuven who takes on the challenge and tries to save Yosef from his brothers' scheme. He does this out of respect for his father and in order "to return him to his father" (37:22). His act is interpreted not only as a desire to save a life, and not only as respect for his father, but also as profound repentance for his sin in not honoring his father, and even at the price of relinquishing his birthright and the status of his mother in Yaakov's house. This, to my view, is the basis for the midrashim by Chazal as to Reuven's great repentance. The precise words they choose to describe his prolonged fasting, and the analysis of Yaakov's mild attitude towards him, are claims that merely accumulate along with the basic argument presented here.

V. REUVEN'S SIN IN UPSETTING HIS FATHER'S BEDCLOTHES

We have treated at length the view of those Tannaim who maintain that Reuven did in fact commit an act of sexual immorality and later repented. Let us now turn our attention to the view of R. Shemuel bar Nachmani in the name of R. Yonatan, and others who adopt this view, that Reuven's sin involved not a forbidden sexual act but rather upsetting his father's bed. Three elements here require clarification.

A. What exactly did Reuven do - what is the meaning of upsetting the bed, and why does this act (assuming that it refers to overturning the bed or moving it from one tent to another, as most of the commentators understand it) represent what Yaakov refers to, in his last words, as "violation of his bed" (Bereishit 49)?

B. If, indeed, we are speaking of an act that is done for the sake of his mother's honor, and an act that caused no actual damage other than momentary insult, then even if we reject the possibility that Reuven engaged his whole life in sackcloth and fasting over this trifling act, we still have no answer as to why it causes such wrath and fury, to the point where Reuven is denied the birthright, the priesthood and the kingship, as we are told in Divrei ha-Yamim I (5:1-2): "The sons of Reuven, firstborn of Israel - for he was the firstborn, but because he violated his father's bed, his firstborn rights were given to the children of Yosef, son of Yisrael, but not so as to have the birthright attributed to him by genealogy, for Yehuda prevailed over his brothers and the ruler came from him, while the birthright belonged to Yosef."

C. How does this interpretation fit in with the literal meaning of the verse - "Reuven went and lay with Bilha, his father's concubine; and Yisrael heard"? REUVEN'S SIN

Following the death of Rachel, Yaakov invited Bilha to his tent in order to make her the "woman of the house" in place of Rachel, or in order to bear another son - a thirteenth. We can only speculate as to why Yaakov did not invite Leah, second in importance after Rachel. Was it perhaps because she was "despised," following her deception of him on their marriage night? Did he regard Bilha, Rachel's maidservant, as the image of the deceased Rachel? Was he hoping to balance the number of children born of Rachel and her maidservant in relation to those born of Leah and her maidservant? Was Yaakov perhaps commanded to do this; was he perhaps acting with Divine inspiration? Or did he perhaps choose Bilha because she became the adoptive mother of his most beloved sons, Yosef and Binyamin, following the death of Rachel (Bereishit Rabba 84:11 and Rashi 37:10)?

We cannot know the answers to these questions, but we know with certainty that it was Yaakov's right as a person and his obligation as the head of the household to choose for himself who his partner would be. No one had any right to question him. Let us apply our imagination to what happened that night. Here is Yaakov's tent, in the dark of night. Yaakov is busy elsewhere for a while, and Bilha - inside the tent - is preparing herself for her husband's return, excited at the honor that she has been given. Bilha is no longer wearing her regular garments; she is wearing only her night clothes. It is dark outside; everyone is asleep; no one is watching. Into the tent marches Reuven, determined, full of anger and cruelty. He grabs Bilha, drags her or carries her off, stifling her screams with his hand. He takes her to a distant tent, where he restrains her and gags her so as to keep her silent. He does not lie with her. Heaven forefend that he should defile himself with his father's concubine! His whole intention is for the sake of heaven, for the sake of justice and his mother's honor. He also does not lie with her because he hates her: Bilha has fulfilled for his mother - even if not of her own initiative - the expression, "a maidservant who inherits the place of her mistress," by taking the status of favored wife after Rachel's death. He has no interest in "a despised woman with whom you have relations" (see Mishlei 30:23). In addition to all of the above, Reuven has no time to spend on

Bilha. The moment he has finished tying her up somewhere far away, he hurries to his mother's tent (for it seems that she must have been at least partially party to his plan) and accompanies her surreptitiously to Yaakov's tent, which is still empty. It is late. Yaakov returns to his tent after summoning - for the first time since Rachel's death - her replacement, Bilha. There is no moon and the tent is completely dark. Yaakov, with the modesty that he has always practiced, does what he does quietly; perhaps wordlessly, perhaps with whispers. He has no way of knowing, by means of either voice or appearance, who it is that is waiting for him in bed. He draws "Bilha" close to him, and "she" returns his affection...

In the morning, behold, it is Leah. A final detail in this most troubling scenario. Let us return to Reuven, dragging an unwilling Bilha from Yaakov's tent to somewhere outside, her mouth gagged and wearing only a nightgown. We have assumed that everyone is asleep and no one sees. But this is not so! In one of the tents a young boy is trying to calm his younger brother, a crying baby, because Rachel his mother has died, and Bilha, who now raises them, has left the tent for the night without any notice of where she is going. Young Yosef is not asleep. From the entrance to his tent he watches, terror-stricken, as Reuven drags Bilha from her bed, like an attacker dragging his victim, and he concludes what any one of us would conclude in a similar situation.

He also understands, that ghastly night, what kind of life awaits a person with no mother to protect him, just as Bilha has no mistress to protect her. The next day, when the plot is discovered by Yaakov, Yosef tells him what he saw and all about his fear of Reuven and the other brothers, who may potentially act as he did. "He told evil stories about them" - every bad thing that he witnessed in his brothers, the sons of Leah, he told to his father... and suspected them of sexual immorality." (Rashi 37:2)

Perhaps the words of the verse telling us that Reuven lay with his father's concubine are not an objective reporting of the facts, but rather a fact subject to the clause in the second part of the verse - "And Yisrael heard." This is how it appeared; this is what Yaakov was told - but the Torah testifies: "the children of Yaakov were twelve." None of them committed the atrocity mentioned. Let us return to Yaakov's tent. As dawn breaks, the plot is revealed to him - in the form of Leah. There is no need to elaborate on Yaakov's humiliation and anguish at being tricked in this manner for the second time. There is likewise no need to elaborate on the humiliation and anguish caused to Bilha, who was about to be transformed from a concubine into a legal wife and one of the matriarchs of Israel. Reuven's sin, even for those who maintain that he did not commit sexual immorality, is severe, justifying the punishment that will last for eternity. The fact that he was zealous for his mother's honor is not sufficient justification for his act; after all, Shimon and Levi also did what they did in Shekhem out of zeal for their sister's honor.

Yaakov's bed was not only upset but also violated. For the second time, Yaakov has been intimate with a woman while believing her to be someone else. This act represents a severe violation of the sanctity of marital relations. "I shall separate from among you those who have rebelled and sinned against Me' (Yechezkel 20:38) - R. Levi said: This refers to those born of marital relations conducted under one of the following nine conditions: when the woman is intimidated, when she is forced, when she is despised by him, when he is under the ban, when he mistakes her for another wife, when they are quarreling, when they (or one of them) are inebriated, when he intends to divorce her, when he is thinking about someone else, or when she is brazen." (Nedarim 20b)

"When he mistakes her for another wife" - when he cohabits with one of his wives, believing her to be her rival." (Commentary of the Ran on Nedarim) Perhaps Yaakov ceased to cohabit with his wives at that point. He did not have any further relations with Bilha, and it appears that he did not cohabit with Leah, either.

"And the children of Yisrael were twelve." (35:22) While we previously interpreted this information in accordance with those commentaries who explain "twelve - and not eleven," concluding that Reuven did not sin, we now view it from the perspective of those who explain, "twelve - and not thirteen," for no more sons were born after this violation of his private life. Thus we conclude that Yaakov did not cohabit any more with his wives.

WHAT WAS YAAKOV THINKING?

The great disappointment in Reuven arises from the assumption that Yaakov did not suspect Reuven of having defiled himself with Bilha. Above, we raised the possibility that the explicit description of Reuven as having had relations with Bilha is actually what Yosef told his father; this is what Yaakov heard. According to this view, we may assume that Yaakov's anger was much greater, for he had good reason to suspect that this had happened, and Yosef's report to him was not pure gossip. When Reuven's shameful treatment - according to our postulation - of Bilha was discovered, no sensible person would believe that he had not had relations with her, and even Bilha's own testimony

would not necessarily have been accepted as reliable. At what stage, then, came the transition from "Yisrael heard" to "the sons of Yaakov were twelve"? For, obviously, this assertion by the Torah - that all of Yaakov's sons were equally worthy - is not meant as a purely theoretical matter. The possibility that Reuven is suspected unjustly of a serious sin, and that the Torah needs to testify that he did not commit it, is familiar to us from the story of the sale of Yosef. Reuven's advice to his brothers - to cast Yosef alive into the pit in the desert - sounds no less cruel than the brothers' previous plan - to kill him with their own hands and to cast his body into the pit. A verdict of "lowering and not lifting up" is very similar to a death sentence, and once the brothers hear Yehuda's idea - that Yosef be lifted out of the pit and sold - they take back their agreement to Reuven's "cruel" idea, since "What benefit is there in our killing our brother and covering his blood?" Reuven is the only one who is not party to the brothers' merciful decision, and hence is alone remains stuck with the image of the "cruel" one. But in truth, the Torah tells us that he was actually the most merciful and moral among them, for his intention was "to save him from their hand and to restore him to his father." Did the brothers know this? From Reuven's rebuke to his brothers, as they stand before Yosef to receive food, it would seem that they did. It appears that when Reuven returned to the pit, tore his clothing and cried, "The child is gone, and I - what shall I do?" - the brothers understood that his intention had been to save Yosef. Perhaps his nobility at that moment towards Yosef, who had reported his act concerning Bilha to his father (thereby bringing about his banishment by his father and brothers), represented the basis for believing his version of the story concerning Bilha: he had not defiled her, and - as terrible as his deed had been - his intentions had been good. Although a distinction must be made between the two cases, there may be some similarity between them. The brothers felt that if Yosef had exposed Reuven's true shame, it would not be logical for Reuven to do anything to save him. His (relatively) clear conscience led him to want to save Yosef from his brothers and return him to his father. "YOU INTRODUCED REPENTANCE"

We are left with one final point to clarify. According to the view according to which Reuven genuinely and completely repented for his act, why is the repentance of Yehuda accepted, such that he receives a blessing from his father, while the repentance of Reuven is not accepted wholeheartedly, and he is left ultimately with his father's rebuke? If we had only the midrash to rely on, with its description of Reuven's sackcloth and fasting, the solution to the question would be easy: these external manifestations of repentance are not of the same weight as the repentance of Yehuda, who was unconditionally and wholeheartedly ready to save Binyamin from slavery in Egypt because of his desire to atone for the sin of having sold Yosef into Egyptian slavery. This is repentance that includes repair, not just mourning and sorrow. We see that sackcloth and fasting did not help Achav when it came to the vineyard of Navot, because he did not actually take the step of returning the vineyard to Navot's heirs.

But even according to what we have said above - that the crux of Reuven's repentance lay in his attempt to save Yosef, who was responsible for him losing his birthright - Yehuda's repentance is still on a higher level. Yehuda did not only desire to save his brother, nor did he only berate his brothers in this regard. He went so far as to accept his punishment, bearing up bravely to the punishment embodied in the death of his wife and two of his sons, and even submitted himself as an eternal slave in place of Binyamin, brother of Yosef, whom Yehuda had sold as a slave. Shimon and Levi, who never repented for their sin, were completely rejected from the inheritance. Reuven, who repented but did not perform any act to repair his deed, was rejected from the birthright and all that it involved. Yehuda received his reward intact. (Translated by Kaeren Fish)

This shiur is abridged from the Hebrew original. The full shiur can be accessed in the original at: <http://www.etzion.org.il/vbm/parsha.php>. YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH ALON SHEVUT, GUSH ETZION 90433 E-MAIL: YHE@ETZION.ORG.IL or OFFICE@ETZION.ORG.IL Copyright (c) 2004 Yeshivat Har Etzion. All rights reserved.

From: ohr@ohr.edu [mailto:ohr@ohr.edu] Sent: Nov. 22, 2004 To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Vayishlach TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 27 Nov. 2004 / 14 Kislev 5765 - from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu -- Parshat Vayishlach <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/1940>

Written and compiled by RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

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

INSIGHTS Dynasty

"Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom..." (36:31)

Why do Jews believe that there is a G-d?

The famous English physicist Sir Isaac Newton had a colleague who was a staunch atheist. Newton would frequently cross swords with his colleague on this subject.

One day when the atheist came to visit Newton in his library his eyes fell upon a most beautiful sight. Sitting on Newton's desk, basking in the rays of the afternoon sun, was an exquisite astrolabe - a brass machine that depicted the solar system in three dimensions.

"How beautiful!" remarked the atheist.

"You haven't seen anything yet!" said Newton. "Do you see the small lever on the base? Move it towards you."

As the atheist moved the lever, the entire engine slowly came to life. At its center the orb of the sun started to revolve. Further out, turning on brass cogs, the earth and the planets began their revolutions around the sun; each planet accompanied by its own moons, all moving in wonderful precision.

"This is amazing!" remarked the atheist, "Who made it?"

"No one" replied Newton, deadpan.

"What do you mean 'no one'?"

"No one. It just sort of fell together, you know..."

"No I don't know! I insist you tell me who the maker of this priceless object is. I refuse to believe that this object merely 'fell together'."

"This..." said Newton, pointing to the astrolabe, "this you insist has to have a maker. But THIS..." Newton spread his arms wide, indicating the Creation, "how infinitely more beautiful and complex, THIS you insist has no Maker?"

You don't have to be able to invent the First Law of Motion to read the world like a book.

Just as the book testifies to the existence of its writer, so too the world testifies to the existence of The Divine Author.

Yet however compelling is the evidence of design in the Creation, this is not the reason that Jewish People believe in G-d.

We believe in G-d because the entire Jewish People had a firsthand experience of the Divine during the Exodus from Egypt, at Sinai and the forty years of daily miracles that followed. Ah, you will say, that was them. What about me? What connects my belief in G-d to the experience of people I never met a couple of thousand years ago?

The answer is that parents don't lie to their children about things that are important for the children to know. If indeed G-d did speak to the Jewish People at Sinai, and miraculously guided us through the desert; if He indeed gave us a Torah which tells us how to live our lives, then this certainly qualifies as information that our forbears would deem essential to pass on to us.

"Tradition" is infinitely more than the rhapsody of a Russian-Jewish milkman named Tevye.

"Tradition", the passing over from father to son of that encounter at Sinai is the lifeblood of Judaism.

One of the ways we express that link is by referring to ourselves as the son/daughter of so-and-so. For example, my name is Yaakov Asher ben Dovid. Yaakov Asher, the son of David. My father's name was Dovid ben Shmuel, and his father's name was Shmuel ben Tanchum Yitzchak.

My name - who I am - is inextricably linked with from where I come. I am a link in a chain that spans the millennia. My very name says that.

At the end of this week's Torah portion, there is a list of the kings of Edom. If you look at this list you'll notice that not one of these kings was hereditary. Not one. Every one of them founded and finished his own dynasty.

Edom is descended from Esav. Esav despised the birthright and sold it to Yaakov. Esav viewed heredity as disposable, insignificant. He was prepared to sell it for a bowl of lentils. Esav's worldview is that of unmitigated meritocracy. Nothing else counts. This is his view even to this day.

Meritocracy has much to recommend it. However, when you are building a belief system which will rely on a chain that spans the millennia, to despise dynasty is to disqualify yourself from the job at hand - the eternal witnessing of G-d's interaction and interest in mankind.

- Thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

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RABBI MAYER TWERSKY
A PEOPLE OF DESTINY

And [Eisav] said, 'Travel on and let us go - I will proceed at your pace.' But [Ya'akov] said to him, ...'let my lord go ahead of his servant; I will make my way at my slow pace according to the gait of the work that is before me and to the gait of the children...'

Chazal teach us that Parshas Vayishlach which describes the encounter between Ya'akov and Eisav provides a blueprint for Jewish-gentile relations throughout history. The topic of Jewish-gentile relations is obviously too vast for a single dvar Torah. Let us, however, focus on the pesukim quoted above and on one element of these relations.

Ya'akov accords Eisav great respect, yet firmly declines to travel together. What paradigm has Ya'akov established for Jews throughout Jewish history?

We accord gentiles respect in keeping with their human dignity, their status of the handiwork of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. R. Yochanan would greet everyone in the marketplace, Jew and gentile alike. Moreover, since their certainly is a universal dimension to Jewish life, we can cultivate a genuine friendship and collegiality. Colleagues in the lab or law firm can and do share common experiences. In addition, Jews are exceedingly respectful of governmental authority. The relationship which existed between Rebbe and Antoninus exemplifies these elements of Jewish-gentile relations

It is, however, of paramount importance that friendship and/or collegiality not obscure or encroach upon the most basic fact of Jewishness: as Jews we have a unique mission and destiny, and consequently must safeguard our Jewish destiny. Accordingly, notwithstanding his sincere desire for good relations, Ya'akov tells Eisav, "I will make my way..."

Against this background of destiny and identity many halachic social constraints on Jewish-gentile relations can be understood and, in paramount, the egregiousness of intermarriage stands out. Intermarriage Rachaman litslan destroys Jewish identity and prevents the rendezvous with Jewish destiny. Accordingly, the Rav zt"l was absolutely adamant regarding the ban on attending an intermarriage. Often we try to rationalize and justify attendance of such weddings. We reason that if the Jewish partner comes from an assimilated background and was never exposed to Yahadus, what right do we have to judge him/her and boycott the wedding. Why should a ba'al teshuva strain family relations by absenting himself/herself from a sibling's wedding? After all, it is not the sibling's fault.

But, of course, that line of reasoning is fallacious. In refusing to attend an intermarriage we are not judging another individual. Only the Rebbono Shel Olam can pass judgment on one's liability, and to what extent extenuating circumstances should be taken into account. But although we refrain from judging individuals and affixing individual liability in such cases, we can and must judge actions and courses of action. Unquestionably, intermarriage is anathema because it destroys Jewish identity and destiny. Accordingly, it is nothing less than a chilul Hashem to be present at such a marriage. One can not attend a wedding as a conscientious objector. By attending, one eo ipso joins in celebrating. A Jew can not under any circumstances celebrate the partial destruction of Jewish identity.

With this same compelling line of reasoning in mind, the Rav was also equally adamant that subsequent to the wedding intermarried "couples" must not be included in family gatherings or invited to family semachos, and the like. Inviting the couple as such eo ipso acknowledges and accepts their illicit marriage. Under no circumstances may this acceptance be forthcoming. Let us not delude ourselves into thinking that we would be simply maintaining relations for purposes of kiruv. To the contrary, we are being m'sa'yai'a yedei aveira, strengthening the hands of those living in sin and creating a chilul Hashem.

May Hakadosh Baruch Hu save us from nisyonos and guide us all along His path of Torah u'mitzvos.

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THE INCIDENT OF EISAV'S 400 MEN

By MICHAEL HOENIG, Esq. <MHoenig@herzfeld-rubin.com>

THE EISAV ENIGMA

Among our Patriarchal family members, Eisav deservedly receives "bad press" from our Sages. Considering his genealogy, the household in which he was raised and his exceptional sibling, much more should have resulted from this Bechor with pre Mosaic priestly obligations. After all, alone in history Eisav had all of the following: Yitzchak and Rivkah as parents, Avraham and Sarah as grandparents and Yaakov as brother. Eisav not only disappoints in not fully living up to his potential but proceeds headlong towards evil. Overtly (but vis a vis his father, covertly) he acts as a Rasha. Violence, rape and robbery are routine lifestyle patterns. It seems too facile to attribute Eisav's errant behavior to some "bad seed" phenomenon. His illustrious parentage belies it. He is, after all, the birth product of prayers by near ultimate Tzaddikim and Neviim. He is one of the fruits of a blessing by Hashem and, in fact, is divinely described in the womb as a "nation" (Goy) and "race" (Leum). Rashi observes that "Leum" always denotes a people that has all the characteristics of a kingdom [25:23]. Indeed, so august is Eisav's potential that "one race shall be firmer than the other" (Uleom Milom Yeemotz) [Ibid.]. Thus, when Yaakov falls Edom will rise, a legacy denoting periods of greatness.

Moreover, Eisav clearly has flashes of brilliance and positive potential recognized by our Sages. For example, his Kibud Av is prodigious, virtually legendary. The Gemara describes his homage as a paradigm of Kibud Av. Thus, when Eisav appears before his father he dresses royally. Fatiguing hunts and personal preparation of tasteful delicacies for Yitzchak assume priority. Regaling his father with Torah thoughts and knowledgeable theological questions (even though designed to mask his misbehavior) reflects some innate ability and willingness on his part to study and forego at least some lascivious pursuits. Additionally, he seems touched by his father's revulsion to idol worship by his Hittite wives and tries to win back paternal approval by marrying a daughter of Yishmael. And, despite violence prone physical prowess coupled with the instincts of a cunning hunter and man of the field, Eisav manages to stifle his revengeful blood lust towards Yaakov upon discovery that his father's blessing, intended for him, was preempted through guile. Out of love for his father, who would be devastated by fratricide, Eisav controls what must have been an irresistible impulse to wreak prompt vengeance. Calculatingly, he puts off plans to execute Yaakov until after their father dies. Kibud Av dominates his natural instincts. The pervasive influence of Kibud Av upon Eisav's self control also seems remarkable in light of the Edomite Lord's normal bent towards impulsive acts of the moment. Rashi tersely comments upon Eisav's routine proclivities to murder, forcing married women, trespassing on others' properties and what must have been that epoch's version of cattle rustling or animal poaching. He was a domineering, powerful, physical, lustful specimen who took what he wanted when he wanted it and brooked no opposition to his whims. We witness a glimpse of this, when famished and utterly fatigued from the hunt, Eisav thinks so little of his birthright, considering it "despicable" (Vayivez et Habechora), that he "sells" it for a serving of Yaakov's lentil pottage. The man's animal instinct must be gratified instantly. The privileges of a first born's status can be abandoned to appease ravenous craving of the moment. Indeed, the physical so overwhelms the spiritual, he demands that Yaakov literally shovel the food down his throat. Animal impulse prevails over duty even though it is an intensely spiritual occasion - the day of Avraham's death - and the lentil pottage is food prepared for mourners. This subservience to animal impulse, in part, galvanizes Rivkah into action. Eisav's capacity for murderous retribution is well known to his mother, a prophetess and a discerning judge of character raised in a Padan Aram household where chicanery and sharp practices prevailed. Knowing her elder son and fearing that Eisav will kill his brother, Rivkah counsels Yaakov to leave the jurisdiction forthwith. Yet Eisav overcomes his impulse out of love for his father. Such mastery over murderous rage in deference to a high form of Kibud Av marks Eisav as a man of exceptional potential. But he behaves dismally in other facets of life. Why? How could a son of Yitzchak and Rivkah go so bad? Which incorrect fork in the road did Eisav take on the way to becoming a consummate Rasha? That he did not start out that way is clear. "And the lads grew" (Vayigdelu Haneirim ...), as Rashi observes, tells us that until age 13 Eisav and Yaakov could not be distinguished by what they did. Only after Bar Mitzvah did Eisav make his way to idolatrous temples. If his conduct prior to age 13 paralleled Yaakov's, it must have been exemplary.

He certainly had sufficient acumen to learn Torah intricacies. In order to fool Yitzchak he had to be conversant with more than mere rudiments of Torah knowledge. It is likely that up to age 13, at least, Eisav must have engaged in serious religious studies at the knee of Yitzchak or even of his grandfather Avraham. How could a child escape doing so while growing up in Yitzchak's household? Rashi [25:30] advises that Avraham died on the day of Eisav's devouring of the lentil pottage so that the Patriarch would not see his grandson falling into degenerate ways. This suggests that Eisav had not yet reached a degenerate status prior to the

incident in which he ceded his birthright. Even later, some sophisticated Torah knowledge had to be acquired if only to delude his father successfully. We may presume that, even as an adult, Eisav was conversant with subtle niceties of religious law and had cerebral potential to master Torah. And, despite Eisav's "bad press" from our Sages, we occasionally see other glimpses of magnificent potential beyond observance of Kibud Av. When Yaakov hides his daughter, Dinah, lest Eisav be attracted to her and seek marriage, Yaakov is faulted for this act of furtiveness. Dinah, the Rabbis say, might well have caused Eisav to repent, to mend his ways.

We are even advised that this incident may have had a causal nexus with Dinah's later tragedy at the hands of Shechem. Clearly, then, if Eisav was capable of repentance, he was not a total lost cause despite his depravity. A potential to change from rank evil to good also seems partially confirmed by Eisav's genuine turnabout in feelings when meeting Yaakov upon the latter's return from Lavan. Eisav runs to his brother, embraces him, kisses him and weeps [33:4]. Rashi says Eisav's genuine pity was aroused and quotes Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai for the proposition (though contested by others) that the unusual dots above the word "kissed" (Vayishakehu) signify that Eisav's brotherly gesture was with "his whole heart" at that moment. (Bechol Libo) [33:4, Rashi]. According to this view, Eisav goes from sheer hate with murder in his eye to brotherly amity on the spur of the moment.

We could, of course, delve further into indicia of Eisav's inherent potential for greatness. For example, although his father's blessing pales beside the one given to Yaakov, in the global scheme of things, it certainly is not paltry. (One may compare Eisav's rather generous blessing to those given by Yaakov to some of his sons.) Obviously, Yitzchak does not view his son as totally irreparable or unworthy of a blessing, despite realizing the truth about his disappointing son. Indisputably, Eisav is a commanding figure. He cuts a wide swath. He is Edom (Hu Edom) [36:1] with all that entails. Despite all his evil ways, he is given the land of Seir as an inheritance. The Torah respectfully enumerates his progeny in no less than 30 verses [36:1-30].

It hints that Edom's future fortunes will prosper whenever Yisrael's piety falls short. Lamentably, history has shown this to be a rather bountiful, if contingent, blessing. Indeed, Eisav believes himself worthy to claim burial rights in the Meoras Hamachpela and, in fact, his head is interred in that holy site. Clearly, this is no ordinary man, no ordinary Rasha. Nevertheless, despite some biblical narrative and Midrashic elaboration regarding Eisav's deeds and character, he remains an enigma. The status of his role model parents, his lineage, an early moral upbringing, affluence, leadership qualities and other positive attributes easily should have halted the precipitous descent towards evil. Why this giant of a man became a Rasha remains a mystery. Since Eisav allegorically and metaphysically represents Edom, with profound ramifications for Yisrael across the spectrum of time, the question is far from academic. We need to know more about the fallen star he represents; how dormant genius can beget evil; how potential greatness fails to develop despite a most nurturing environment.

Since Eisav's behavior also triggers key responses by Yaakov and sets in motion a chain of events leading to Yisrael's nationhood, it is important to learn as much as we can about Eisav, how he reasons and what makes him tick. The Torah obviously supplies some clues, some by textual Peshat, some by implication and some, perhaps, via code. We need to discern the clues. Each Torah word, each letter, each reference to the man potentially imparts relevant information. Perhaps the smallest additional gleaning will reopen vistas lost to us over time during catastrophic assaults on the Mesorah process. The ensuing discussion certainly does not answer the question of the Eisav enigma. However, it attempts to develop facets of an incident that could add further understanding about what Eisav represents.

THE INCIDENT: SETTING THE STAGE

One puzzling aspect of an incident in Parshat Vayishlach conceivably might be a clue. Perhaps it is mere coincidence, perhaps something more. With caution, the following is set forth for those more knowledgeable to consider. The assumption is that Torah engages in no superfluity. Everything is meaningful. Each letter, each word, each juxtaposition is significant. One such textual sliver deserving of closer scrutiny is the incident of Eisav and his 400 men [32:3 to 33:17]. The Torah explicitly mentions it. What is its significance? Is it a piece of the Eisav jigsaw puzzle? Does it shed any light on Eisav? Or Yaakov? Why exactly 400 men? Why not more, or less? And why is that specific number mentioned more than once? First, we need to set the stage. The opening verses of Vayishlach vividly paint the scene and give rise to the foregoing questions. Yaakov returns to the Holy Land escorted by angels [32:1, Rashi]. Despite having fled as a destitute fugitive, [The Midrash records that Yaakov's possessions were confiscated by Eisav's emissary instead of killing him as instructed] he now arrives as a Gevir with wives, children, abundant wealth and a considerable entourage. The presence of an angelic escort attests to his blessed status. Indeed, his very return was sparked by a Divine message: "[N]ow arise, go out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." [31:13] Under these promising circumstances and after the passage of many years, Yaakov is optimistic that Eisav's hatred has abated. He dispatches messengers (Rashi says they were angels "Malochim Mamash") to his brother in Seir/Edom. He commands them to address Eisav respectfully as "my lord" (Adoni) and to say: "I have sojourned with Lavan ...@ (Im Lavan Garti ...) [32:4]. Rashi points out that an alternative explanation of this phrase is a coded message to Eisav BiGematria. By numerological coding, Yaakov thereby tells Eisav: "Though I have sojourned with Lavan the wicked, I have observed the 613 Divine Commandments" (Taryag Mitzvos; "Taryag" or "613" BiGematria being equivalent to "Garti") [Rashi, 32:4]. The coded message is fascinating. Apart from a few introductory words, it is the first substantive statement Yaakov makes to his brother. Use of Gematria at the outset is quite revealing. First, Yaakov must assume that Eisav will understand it, that he has the spiritual training to appreciate the code words and the Taryag Mitzvos symbol. Yaakov thus presumes lofty subtlety on the part of his cunning brother. Second, since they form the outset of his substantive message, the code words assumedly are intended to have some forceful impact upon Eisav. Yaakov is not expressing a banality. Are the words a guarded caution or threat against any impulsive action? Do they signal Yaakov's special status as a protected one of Hashem a man not to be harmed? Or do they diplomatically suggest that Yaakov's

achievement of Taryag Mitzvos, despite being in Lavan's environment, implies a special spiritual domain that will not threaten Eisav's more worldly realm of Edomite values?

Whatever the precise intent, Yaakov codes Gematria into his message because Eisav has capacity to understand not only the code but its substantive import. Eisav's initial response is not long in coming. The messengers return to Yaakov and say: "We came to thy brother Eisav, and also he goeth toward thee, and four hundred men with him." [32:6] The Posuk reveals no verbal response from Eisav to Yaakov whatsoever. There is no greeting, no statement, no word. Just the messengers' observation: Eisav's march toward Yaakov with 400 men (Vearba Meos Ish Imo). It is my premise here that the specification of 400 men is indeed Eisav's response to Yaakov. He answers by deed. The number is highly significant. It too is a code. Yaakov opened with a message BiGematria and Eisav, I submit, responds in kind. And there is a connection between the messages. Before we explore this premise, it is useful to note the juxtaposition of the very next Posuk. Immediately after the reference to the "400 men," the Bible states: "Then Yaakov feared greatly and was distressed ..." (Vayira Yaakov Meod Vayetzer Lo) [32:7]. Juxtaposition of the reference to Eisav's 400 men with Yaakov's feelings seems profound. Yaakov is not merely fearful; he is "greatly" afraid (Vayira Meod). He is not only greatly fearful; he is also distressed (Vayetzer Lo). The usual economy of Torah verse is punctuated here with multiple emotional descriptions. Something in the preceding verse arouses calamitous portents. And what does Yaakov do? He divides his entourage and wealth into two camps so that Eisav's successful attack on one will allow the other to escape [32:7,8].

Peshat may satisfy some that any report of 400 men accompanying Eisav would be viewed by Yaakov as a mortal threat. But the text does not say they were armed; or that Eisav's intentions were hostile. Yaakov also had a large entourage. A royal escort for the Edomite Lord does not automatically mean that one is on a war footing. Indeed, Yaakov seemed optimistic just a few verses earlier in sending the messengers. And why the specific mention of 400 men? Peshat does not satisfy totally. Something about that message immediately evokes Yaakov's dread and profound distress. He is shocked into desperate defensive and strategic action. Yaakov prepares for war. He even contemplates losing half his family and wealth as casualties. Although he soon will execute the sophisticated triad of strategic defense planning, (1) gifts and homage (Doron); (2) prayer (Tefila); and (3) military readiness (Milchama), at the precise moment the messengers return with Eisav's coded response there is dread. Why? What about the reference to the 400 men disturbed Yaakov's equilibrium and shook his earlier confidence? After all, he had been blessed and reassured by Hashem a short time earlier.

MULTIPLE REFERENCES TO 400: A CLUE?

The explicit reference to the 400 men cannot be insignificant.^{1/} The factual context is too dramatic. The circumstances guarantee some importance. The number is not vague or approximate but quite specific. It immediately precedes the devastating sentence "Vayira Yaakov Meod Vayetzer Lo." It expressly is mentioned again immediately after Yaakov's struggle with Eisav's guardian angel: "And Yaakov lifted up his eyes, and saw, and behold, Eisav came, and with him 400 men." (...Veimo Arba Meos Ish) [33:1] Additionally, when the brothers part, the 400 men are later mentioned by strong textual implication, as Rashi observes, on the Posuk: "So Eisav returned that day on his way unto Seir." [33:16] The implied meaning is that Eisav alone returned, but the 400 men who accompanied him had slipped away from him one by one - an act for which they were to be rewarded in Davidic times [33:16, Rashi]. What, then, does the "Arba Meos Ish" signify? Why does the Torah go out of its way to relate it twice explicitly and once by implication? Why does Eisav intend that Yaakov get that message? And why does Yaakov react extra fearfully and distressfully, especially after sending Eisav a powerful message BiGematria that Yaakov is a man of exceptional achievement, the Taryag Mitzvos, despite being with Lavan? Additionally, the reader will note that immediately after the second explicit reference to the "Arba Meos Ish" [33:1], there is no mention of Yaakov's fear or distress as there was earlier. On the contrary, Yaakov acts resolutely in ordering the parade of his family and bowing to his brother. A scant three Psukim later, Eisav runs to Yaakov, embraces and kisses him and the two weep. [33:4] Was there a major change during the interval and with what significance?

PRIOR REFERENCES TO THE NUMBER 400; A CONNECTION?

In examining the significance of the multiple references to 400 men and the message's initial impact upon Yaakov, it is helpful to ask whether the number 400 itself could have some special or symbolic meaning to the twin brothers. Obviously, if a coded clue were sent and received both would have had to be "tuned in" to the uniqueness of the number. Given their illustrious forbears and common family upbringing, a special understanding between the two is not difficult to hypothesize. But what, if any, was it? The Torah explicitly mentions the number 400 in two earlier instances well within the historical knowledge and probable recollection of the brothers. Each event was highly significant from both factual as well as spiritual standpoints. Family tradition indelibly would have noted the references.

The first occurs during the 'Bris bein Habesorim' [Lech Lecha, 15:1 to 15:21]. Hashem appears to Avraham and assures him that he will have heirs as numerous as the stars who will possess the Holy Land. Avraham is also told, however, that his descendants "shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's," will be enslaved, and afflicted for 400 years (Yadoa Teda Ki Ger Yihye Zaracha B'erez Lo Lahem Veavodum Veinu Osam Arba Meos Shana) [15:13]. The second historical event in which the explicit number 400 figures prominently is Avraham's purchase of the Meoras Hamachpela as a burial site for Sarah [Chaye Sarah, 23:3 to 23:20]. When concluding his purchase from Ephron the Hittite, Avraham pays the enormously extravagant sum of 400 shekels of silver (Vayishkol ... Arba Meos Shekel Kesef Over Lasocher) [23:16]. The Torah's enumeration of these earlier events in which the number 400 also is specified inevitably tantalizes about a connection between the incident in Vayishlach and either or both of the earlier occurrences. Facially, one could postulate a kesher. Both events undoubtedly would have been known to Yaakov and Eisav. Both would have been significant above and beyond a mere historical footnote.

We might hypothesize, for example, that the "code" number 400 in Eisav's message invoked Yaakov's dread because it suggested that the 400 year enslavement (Shibud) of Avraham's "seed" (Yaakov and his family) as "strangers in a land not their's" (Ger ... B'erezt Lo Lahem) actually was about to begin in Edom/Seir (a "foreign" land given as a Yerusha to Eisav) with Eisav as the enslaver. That dire prospect plausibly could cause Yaakov much anguish. Enslavement by Eisav might well qualify as long term torment (Veinu Osam Arba Meos Shana) justifying Yaakov's abject fear and defensive action. The fact that a 400 year enslavement was Hashem's direct statement to Avraham (Yadoa Teda ...) and, therefore, would in fact occur could not be taken lightly. Yaakov could have cause for concern since the sages date the commencement of the 400 year shibud to Yitzchak. The number 400 as a "code" associated with the Meoras Hamachpela purchase also might be a plausible trigger for Yaakov's dread. Eisav claimed burial rights and priority in the site. Indeed, the Gemara in Sotah reports that Eisav actually protested and impeded the burial of Yaakov in the Meoras Hamachpela upon the return of his remains from Egypt. The reader will well recall Yaakov's own fixation on not being buried in Egypt and in having a formal oath sworn that his remains would be returned to the holy site. During the Eisav-initiated controversy over burial rights in the Meoras Hamachpela, Naftali is dispatched to Egypt to obtain written proof of Yaakov's rights. However, one of the grandsons, impatient with Eisav's travesty upon Yaakov's honor and the delay in according a proper burial, summarily decapitates Eisav. His head is interred in the Meora. Via prophecy and Ruach Hakodesh, Yaakov could well have divined the Meora purchase, Eisav's march and the future burial controversy as related matters of great symbolic significance. Thus, there is a plausible keshet between the Meoras Hamachpela event and the struggle between the brothers that conceivably could have triggered fear and suffering on Yaakov's part when he received the coded Gematria message involving the number 400. Yet, there also are some shortcomings in letting the matter rest here entirely.

First there is the physical non- juxtaposition of the Vayishlach incident of Eisav's 400 men with either prior event. Instead, Yaakov's confrontation with Eisav follows hard on the heels of Yaakov's episode with the pursuing Lavan and, indeed, at the end of some 20 years of vexatious challenge by his father in law. Lavan assuredly is uppermost on his mind. "Im Lavan Garti" are Yaakov's first substantive words. Second, we also would have to assume that Yaakov's prophetic powers (Nevius) were less than complete so that what was foretold ostensibly as a "Shibud Mitzraim" would be misconstrued by him as a "Shibud" by Eisav or Edom. And, in that connection, even if a 400 year "Shibud Eisav" were feared, Hashem's message to Avraham was one of eventual redemption (V'Acharay Chen Yetzu Birechush Gadol) [15:14]. The ending would be one of "geulah." Would this prediction be so dreaded? Similarly, as to the reference to 400 shekels, we would have to assume that Yaakov could not portend that he rightfully would be buried in Meoras Hamachpela. And why should that event, a confrontation to occur only years later, evoke morbid fear precisely at the moment of Vayishlach? Each assumption, of course has decided difficulties. Thus, despite explicit Biblical references to the number 400 in each prior scenario, it may be that we have to dig deeper, look harder, search more probingly for a connection that fits uniquely with the Vayishlach incident and the coded messages back and forth. Perhaps there is one that even embraces on some higher plane the earlier historical references to the number 400. The following discussion explores a conceivable hypothesis.

THE "MITZVAH CONNECTION": DECODING THE CODED MESSAGE

Since Yaakov's initial coded communication concerned the subject of Mitzvos, it is tantalizing to ponder whether Eisav's coded response, the number 400, also pertains to the subject of mitzvos in some way. Does it and, if so, how? And why would such a "mitzvah" message evoke morbid fear? One potential answer to these questions is startling, indeed, astounding in both its simplicity and scope. In turn, it suggests some subtler implications as well. Sefer Hachinuch numbers and elaborates each of the Mitzvos chronologically as they appear in the Torah, parsha by parsha. 2/ The Chinuch lists and discusses both positive and negative precepts. Mitzvah number 400, traced to Parshas Pinchas, is a positive precept dealing with the laws of inheritance. The initiating verse is most dramatic for our purposes: "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. And if he has no daughter," etc. (Ish Ki Yamus Uven Ein Lo Vehoavartem Es Nachalosh Levito Veim Ein Lo Bas, Vegomer) [Bamidbar 27:8-9]. A later verse establishes that these rules of inheritance constitute a strong edict, a "statute of judgment, as the Lord commanded Moses" (Vehoyas Livnai Yisrael Lechukas Mishpat Kaasher Tziva Hashem Es Moshe) [Bamidbar 27:11]. In the Chinuch's Mitzvah Number 400, according to the rules of implementing an inheritance (Nachaloh), if a man dies without a son or daughter, with none of their respective progeny surviving him, the deceased man's inheritance goes to his brother! The brother succeeds to the entire inheritance. In the context of the coded messages between Yaakov and Eisav, referring to the brothers' byplay about Mitzvos, the number 400 could well trigger dark foreboding in Yaakov.

Eisav's Mitzvah Gematria would effectively have been a mean spirited message of doom, a threat against life, a signal that Eisav's march was intended to kill Yaakov's sons and daughters, leaving him bereft of heirs, and then to kill Yaakov too, with Eisav succeeding to his inheritance (Yerusha). Yaakov, a Torah sage, would have understood the threatening message clearly. The opening verse of Mitzvah number 400 explicitly refers to death (Ish Ki Yamus). The succeeding verses in Parshas Pinchas further hint at the method and legal pretext by which Eisav meant to reclaim the birthright, his father's blessing and future destiny. The brother would twist a nuance of Torah law. Yaakov's family was to be wiped out. The divine promise was to be eradicated. Little wonder the coded signal about Eisav's 400 men evoked extraordinary fright and efforts at survival.

Perhaps the foregoing hypothesis serves to explain a curious textual reference a few pesukim later which the commentators aptly highlight. When Yaakov prays for salvation he says, "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav, for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, mother and children." (Hatzileni Na Miyad Achi Miyad Eisav Ki Yarei Anochi Oso

Pen Yavo Vehikani Eim Al Bonim) [32:12]. Rashi comments upon the unusual double reference, "from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav." Of course, we know who Eisav is. Why the added reference to "my brother"? Rashi answers the use of multiple terms by suggesting it means a brother who does not act as a brother should.

But an alternative gloss on the gist of Yaakov's prayer also fits uniquely with the hypothesis of Eisav's Mitzvah Number 400 message detailed above. Since Eisav's pretext to inherit Yaakov's rights relies upon his relationship as a surviving brother (Ach), Yaakov includes in his prayer an explicit plea to save him "from the hand of his brother," i.e., that Hashem thwart the plan to use a brother's status to supplant him. This is further supported by the balance of Yaakov's prayer in which he expresses "fear" (Ki Yarei Anochi) that Eisav will smite "me, mother and children" (Vehikani Eim Al Bonim). Eisav's killing of Yaakov and his children could thus permit implementation of the laws of Mitzvah Number 400 with Eisav as the successor. And who could stop him but Hashem? Given the precise details of Yaakov's desperate prayer, we can see dramatic support for the hypothesis above about a coded "Mitzvah message" implicit in Eisav's use of the number 400 one Yaakov plainly admits is fearful. But if the threat were purely physical, would Yaakov have reacted so extra fearfully? After all, Hashem had granted him bounty, blessings and heirs. A divine message had advised him to return to the Holy Land.

Why should mere physical threat paralyze him with fear? Or did the coded number 400 also signal some deeper, spiritual challenge that posed even greater danger? Which subtle features of the coded response, if any, made the overt physical threat cloaked within the "Mitzvah message" even more disastrous? The reader will recall that the number 400 explicitly appears again after Yaakov's struggle with Sar Eisav. Yet Yaakov then shows no fear. What happened in the interval? The next section elaborates further on the subtler implications of the coded message.

THE "AVRAHAM/EISAV/LAVAN CONNECTION": FURTHER DECODING THE CODED MESSAGE?

1. The Avraham Component?

Let us reexamine Eisav's coded response (Vearba Meos Ish Imo) to Yaakov's coded message (Im Lavan Garti). What possible other supervening signal could the reference to Eisav's 400 men register that triggered Yaakov's distress? To attempt an answer, we need to probe an additional aspect of history undoubtedly well known to the brothers. On what other occasion were a substantial number of men recruited for military action? When and where does the Bible similarly record a very specific number of men clearly gathered to do battle? What were the circumstances? What was the outcome? Is there a keshet? Parshas Lech Lecha [14:12-24] recounts Avraham's military expedition against the Four Kings (Chederlaomer, etc.) who took his nephew Lot captive. Avraham hears the news from a "Palti" (one who had escaped) [14:13]; compare the similar use in Vayishlach of the very word "Pelaita" when Yaakov divides the camps in the event of Eisav's attack [32:5]. Avraham mobilizes immediately; he arms his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen (Shemona Assar Ushelosh Meos) [14:14], and pursues the abductors to Hobah near Damascus. The military expedition successfully smites the enemy, frees the captives and restores the booty. Avraham disdains any monetary reward [14:22-23]. He is not a mercenary. This was a war fought upon principle for family rescue. Avraham wants nothing, not even a shoelace [14:23]. However, he does not object to reimbursement of "that which the lads have eaten" (Asher Achlu Hanearim) and the "portion of the men who went with me ..." (Vechelek Haanashim Asher Halchu Iti ...) [14:24].

It will be noted that the incident with Avraham's military campaign involves recruitment of men by explicit, specific number 318 of them [14:14]. Although Rashi initially quotes the sages that this refers to Eliezer 318 being the numerical equivalent of his name (note the use of Gematria on the specific number) we focus here on the Peshat, namely, that Avraham was accompanied by 318 armed servants. This approach is confirmed even later by Rashi [at 14:24] when he defines "Haanashim Asher Halchu Iti" as meaning "my servants who went with me." It may also be noted that, although the text variously describes Avraham's soldiers as "Hanichav" or "Yeliday Baiso" [14:14] or "Veavadav" [14:15] or "Hanearim" [14:24], eventually they also are referred to as "Haanashim Asher Halchu Iti" [14:24]. The significance of this ultimate terminology is its striking parallel to the precise form of language used in Vayishlach: "Vegam Holech Likrascha Vearba Meos Ish Imo." [32:6]. Both accounts refer to the root word for "men" (Anashim and Ish). Note that by Avraham the number of men (Anashim) is specifically enumerated (318) as it was by Yaakov (400 Ish). Note also that Avraham refers to the 318 men as "Haanashim Asher Halchu Iti" (using the root words "Holech" and "Iti," i.e., "with me") [14:24]. A similar word structure is found in Vayishlach by Yaakov where the Posuk says "Vegam Holech Likrascha" and 400 men are "Imo," i.e., "with him." The foregoing parallels in terminology, enumeration of numbers and the factual context of a war footing in both incidents seem more than mere coincidence. Avraham's war was fought for principle, for family rescue, not for profit, property, reward or material objectives. Its successful outcome was amazing, to say the least. A much more powerful army, indeed four kings, were decisively defeated on their own turf. Avraham's force suffered no casualties. The enemy's primary captive was rescued. All property and prisoners were returned. The "holy" and just nature of the campaign and victory were commemorated in a ceremony officiated by Malki Tzedek, King and Priest of Yerushalayim [14:18-20]. Copious blessings were bestowed upon the Patriarch.

The expedition and Avraham's glorious achievement surely were well known to Yaakov and Eisav who were raised when Avraham was alive. The exceptional grandchildren could view the pious Avraham as a real life warrior/hero blessed by Hashem, victorious on the side of right and justice against fierce odds. Avraham was not alone a Tzaddik or learned sage; he was a physical and spiritual Giber; a moral, military genius; larger than life in all dimensions. This facet of Avraham and the details of his military campaign (plus what it symbolized) could not have been lost on Yaakov, the "Yoshev Ohalim," the antithesis of the military Giber. Yet, we find that after Yaakov wrestles with Sar Eisav and receives a blessing he approaches his brother's potential military confrontation resolutely, without fear, and brimming with

confidence. Similarly, every facet of Avraham's dramatic campaign could hardly have escaped Eisav's eye. The hunter, the man of the field, the physically powerful specimen would admire military heroism. He particularly would have been attracted to all the military details, the strategy, the battlefield tactics. The modern day equivalent might be the war colleges where past wars and engagements are analyzed in detail and all battlefield tactics are learned by heart. And since Eisav was cunning, the lessons to be learned from Avraham's campaign would serve him in good stead as a leader of Edom. Thus, we confidently can assume that both Yaakov and Eisav keenly were aware of Avraham's military expedition and the explicit numbering of Avraham's soldiers at 318. Even so, what does this have to do with Eisav's 400 men? The numbers in the two incidents plainly are not the same. What is the connection, if any? And what is its significance in the context of the events in Vayishlach?

2. The Lavan Component?

Now we must again flash forward to Yaakov. First he returns to the Holy Land with bravado and optimism. Eisav is an obstacle but seemingly surmountable. Yaakov sends him a coded message and Eisav's coded response is to approach with 400 men. That number comprises the number 318 (associated with Avraham's victorious army) plus an additional numerical component. The number representing that missing element is 82. Thus, 400 is the sum of 318 plus 82. BiGematria, what does the number 82 potentially signify in the context of Eisav's own message? The answer is "Lavan." Numerically, the Hebrew letters "Lavan" equal 82. Eisav's coded gesture of bringing 400 men, it might be said, symbolically connoted to Yaakov two elements: the warlike nature of this escort (318) plus the additional symbolic cluster of values representing the artifice, deceit, chicanery and devious success reflected by Lavan an additional 82. Just as Yaakov sent Eisav a Gematria laden message, meaning much more than the mere words, so too, Eisav responded with one containing deeper meanings. Eisav's message, however, evokes Yaakov's gross fear and distress. Cautiously, we may speculate why. Yaakov perhaps perceived Eisav's coded response as one posing mortal and spiritual danger to him and his household. His posterity, his future, the nationhood, all that had been promised by Hashem was seen as in jeopardy. But which features of Eisav's response had the potential to cause such utter dejection?

One simple alternative is that the Avraham component (318) plainly signalled a military campaign by Eisav. Combat was ordained by the Edomite. In some deeper way, Eisav subjectively could have signalled to Yaakov a claim that his march partook of the same quality and character as Avraham's war — one allegedly based upon principle, honor, family security and justice rather than mere material or worldly gain. Could Eisav's "Avraham campaign" signal (318) thus have been perceived by Yaakov as purporting to reflect an Eisav of some new spiritual dimension, of principle, of higher moral objectives than the old Eisav? An Eisav who laid claim to Avraham's spiritual legacy, rather than one who rejected what Avraham stood for, could prove a more dangerous adversary. If Eisav's boast were true, the implications could be cosmic in scope. The portents would cut across time well into the future. A majestic Edom is formidable enough, capable of wreaking much harm, physically mighty in worldly terms. But an Edom that had both worldly power and a new found spiritual or moral dimension could be virtually invincible. Such a combination, if true, could constitute an awesome threat to Yisrael's very existence. Could Eisav really have changed and assumed Avraham's values? The threat, however, was graver still. Yaakov now had much more to contend with. Eisav's message signalled not only the "Avraham dimension" but also had added the "Lavan component" to Eisav's arsenal (82). Lavan, a consummate Ramani and successful charlatan, already had deceived Yaakov repeatedly and over a long period of time. Yaakov had been his obligatory servant. Until near the end, their relationship had approximated that of master and servant. In addition, Lavan was a major destructive force: "Ma Bikesh Lavan Haarami" He was a potential defiler of the spirit, a vexatious oppressor using deceit and evil. That Lavan's tactics differed from those of Eisav/Edom meant little to the overall objective: Yaakov's destruction. Thus, if Eisav truly had added the "Lavan component" to his claimed "Avraham component," Yaakov now had very much to fear indeed.

Significantly, the "Lavan factor" (and all that it represents) is materially juxtaposed in the previous Parsha and immediately before the opening verses of Vayishlach; it is also found in the opening verses themselves. Thus, for example, a scant few Pesukim before Vayishlach begins, we are told of the tumultuous, emotional encounter between the hotly pursuing Lavan and Yaakov. [See 31:17 etc.] And, we are advised, Yaakov plainly feared Lavan (Vayomer Le Lavan Ki Yaresi ...) [31:31]. Even the uneasy, unsettling "peace" Lavan and Yaakov strike is one involving tension nonetheless. Indeed, so pervasive a negative force has Lavan been in Yaakov's life, Yaakov's first words to Eisav are "Im Lavan Garti." Irrevocably, indelibly, Lavan continues to be on Yaakov's mind. The reader will note the striking use in the Lavan episode of the root word "fear" (Ki Yaresi) and also in the Eisav episode (Vayira Yaakov Meod). In both instances Yaakov expresses fear. But by Eisav it is that he "feared greatly." When Eisav signalled that his upcoming war against Yaakov purportedly blended both the Avraham and Lavan legacies, Yaakov justifiably "feared greatly and was distressed." This was no ordinary Eisav. The "new," more powerful Eisav seemed more lethal than Yaakov had ever known him. Yaakov's entourage had to be divided. Escape had to be insured (Hanishar Liflaitah) [32:8]. Survival was paramount if the prophesied future for Yisrael was to be given a chance.

Yaakov particularly would be most sensitive to the challenge of the "Lavan factor" — now a claimed source of invigorated tactical strength in an already formidable Eisav. Yaakov recognized the power of Lavan's strategies. After all, Yaakov himself received his father's blessing (the Bracha) via Lavan like deceit. Eisav's signal that Lavan-like qualities were being invoked to reclaim the Bracha Yaakov had acquired through guile was vexing, not only as an external threat, but as a reminder of an inner weakness. It echoed Yaakov's realization of a trace of Lavan oriented conduct in himself, a sense of taint and guilt that was difficult to erase. All this changes, however, when Yaakov and Eisav actually meet. What occurred during the interval?

3. The Actual Encounter. No Fear? When Yaakov actually sees Eisav and his 400 men (Vayisa Yaakov Eynav Vayar Vehinay Eisav Ba Veimo Arba Meos Ish) [33:1], he is more composed, more self-assured, more confident. He acts cordially, respectfully but with purpose. What happened between the time he first heard with dread about the "400 Ish Imo" and the time he actually saw the "400 Ish Imo"? All the difference in the world! Yaakov successfully had wrestled with Sar Eisav. Though wounded, Yaakov had triumphed, had assumed his rightful ascendancy, had preserved the future — not only as Yaakov personally but as Yisrael with all the majestic implications of that metamorphosis (Lo Yaakov Yeomair Od Shimcha Ki Im Yisrael Ki Sarisa Im Elokim Veim Anashim Vatuchal) [32:28]. Yaakov now had achieved his Bracha through positive action, through resolute effort, through spiritual growth rather than guile or deceit. Both the struggle and ensuing reward removed any trace of an inner deficiency. The bestowed title "Yisrael," with all its future promise, wiped away any perceived stigma of a "Lavan connection." Yaakov had contended with Sar Eisav and had prevailed. Yisrael was saved. The ensuing physical encounter with Eisav was one for wariness, care, diplomacy and tact. But it was not to be dreaded.

The future ramifications are enormous. The inevitable link between Edom and Yisrael cuts across time. When Yisrael embraces Taryag Mitzvos and achieves requisite spirituality, it can successfully contend with Sar Eisav, with Edom's might — even when the latter embraces the "Lavan component." Yisrael may have to undergo morbid feelings of fear and distress from Edom's perceived lethal danger. Yisrael may even be wounded. But it can, and will, prevail (Vatuchal) [32:28].

G. LESSONS FOR OUR TIME? The worldly yet mystical relationship between Eisav/Edom and Yisrael deserves recognition. We need to better understand the Eisav enigma, the labyrinth of the challenge he represents. It is simply too easy to dismiss Eisav as a uni-dimensional Rasha. Though dangerous, such types are predictable and can be dealt with readily. They do not pose a supervening danger to Yisrael's spiritual survival. Eisav, however, poses an omnipresent threat and challenge primarily because he is multidimensional and subtly complex. A lordly, worldly figure of enormous brute force, he nevertheless wants and alleges to be a spiritual heir of Avraham. He is capable of supreme Kibud Av. He speaks Yitzchak's and Yaakov's Torah language; he claims a portion of Meoras Hamachpela; and he can even demonstrate brotherly amity on the spur of the moment despite underlying murderous rage. Eisav, in short, neither wants to nor can abandon the spiritual legacy of Avraham. Indeed, he claims it as a rightful heir. However, Eisav also wishes to inherit the legacy of Lavan, a wily, subtle, sophisticated, genius like master of duplicity, fraud and sharp practices — a "con artist" extraordinaire. Lavan is not a mere stranger to him; he is Eisav's spiritual and familial kin. And Lavan's legacy is very attractive to Eisav for practical reasons. Lavan successfully vexed Yaakov, got under his skin, profited from him, bested him and was his master for years. The "Lavan component" provides Eisav with another weapon in his arsenal against Yaakov.

Ultimately, Eisav seems to come at Yaakov with a triad of apparently powerful qualities: majestic worldly force; a purported spiritual legacy from Avraham; and the devastating legacy of guile and artifice of a Lavan. Eisav believes that these components can co exist in one universe, in one personality; that together they create an invincible superpower. Yaakov intuitively knows that the Lavan and Avraham legacies cannot be blended successfully. After all, Yaakov had a first hand opportunity to adopt the same integrated approach when living with Lavan for many years. Yaakov, however, personally repudiates the Lavan legacy. It is not for him. It is clearly inconsistent with being Avraham's spiritual heir. Yet, when Eisav's coded message signals the complex blend of three forceful qualities, including the fearful "Lavan factor," Yaakov justifiably feels dread. He has never faced such a threat before. There is a need for decisive planning, defensive action, self preservation. The situation changes, however, following Yaakov's successful struggle with Sar Eisav. His innate judgment is confirmed. Avraham's spiritual aura cannot simply be engrafted onto an Eisav or a Lavan. Avraham's legacy is inconsistent with the latter. It is unique and stands alone. Yaakov is Avraham's true spiritual heir. His earlier repudiation of the Lavan component was correct. Eisav's threat, though formidable, can be blunted.

Perhaps some practical lessons for modern day man can be discerned. Consciously or subconsciously, some may believe that one can claim to be Avraham's spiritual heir and incorporate aspects of Lavan's tactics at the same time. For example, some will learn, pray and observe mitzvos but nevertheless practice guile or deceit in the business world. The temptations to resort to Ramai tactics in the market place are great. After all, Lavan's legacy abounds there. Indeed, economic self preservation often seems to dictate that course. But the blend is incompatible. The mix doesn't work. The forces are inconsistent. "Im Lavan Garti" means that, to be Avraham's true spiritual heir, one must reject the Lavan component. That is as true when acting in the secular world as in the world of home and community. And from the standpoint of achieving material success, opting to repudiate Lavan does not equate with choosing a life of poverty. Avraham was blessed with much wealth. So was Yaakov. They are successful role models for the real world. No part of the Lavan component is needed.

CONCLUSION

The incident of Eisav's 400 men involves much more than meets the eye. It possibly is a clue to better understanding the Eisav enigma. The foregoing discussion calls attention to this possibility and urges those more worthy, insightful and knowledgeable to explore the ramifications.

FOOTNOTES

1/ The instant essay hypothesizes a reason different from prior scholarly discussions regarding the number 400, which appears to be significant in a number of Biblical contexts. For an interesting article on the subject, see Rabbi Yisroel Reisman, "The 400th Blow," The Jewish Observer, pp. 18 21 (Feb. 1986) (400 in Gematria is numerical equivalent of Ayin Ra — the evil eye; Eisav, Bilaam, Nevuchadnetzer and even Satan said to take their destructive powers from this mysterious force; Efron's name spelled without vov has numerical value of 400 related to Efron's Ayin Ra and, consequently, the exorbitant price paid for the Meoras Hamachpela;

"Yedai Eisav" has numerical value of 400 symbolizing his mastery of using Ayin Ra to destroy, hence Yaakov's gifts sent to Eisav to "satisfy his eyes"; "Eretz Lo Lahem" has numerical value of 400 which, according to Rabbeinu B'chai, connects to Yisrael's slavery and suffering in a land not theirs as a shield against Ayin Ra, etc.).

See also, Rabbi Jacob Rabinowitz, "Strangers for Four Hundred Years," in The Yeshiva University Haggada, pp. 27-29 (Student Organization of Yeshiva, RIETS, 1985) (discussing 400 in context of the 400 year Shibud and other events involving common motif of Ayin Ra, referred to as "evil inclinations"; number 400 equivalent of letter Tof, last letter of Hebrew alphabet, thereby denoting "largeness" and emphasizing maximum size, importance or time.)

2/ Several incisive reviewers of the instant essay duly noted that the Chinuch's count of Mitzvos differs from that of other authorities earlier and later. (E.g., R. Saadia, Rambam, Solomon Ibn Gabirol). Indeed, no two Rishonim used the same method or list of counting. Rambam, for example, whose list but not the numbering the Chinuch uses, counts Nachaloh as Mitzvas Eseh number 248. Thus, a valid scholar's question may be raised as to why Eisav should have employed and Yaakov perceived a system of reckoning used only by the Chinuch, one not recorded in all of Jewish literature before the 14th century. How did Yaakov understand the Remez? A facile answer is use of Ruach Hakodesh which, of course, presents other problems. Nevertheless, other scholarly reviewers of the essay, when confronted with this question, dismissed it as constituting a fatal flaw. The Chinuch is an acknowledged and reputable authority deserving of some reliance. We deal here with a tool possibly helpful in explaining Peshat on a Biblical reference that is mysterious and enigmatic. That other authorities number Mitzvos differently does not preclude reliance upon one highly acceptable source to help explain an obscurity. Elu Ve Elu Divrei Elokim Chaim. It may be that Chinuch's numbering elucidates Peshat on this particular issue while others offer insights on still other questions. Torah commentary is replete with numerous discussions that elaborate according to one established view though others may differ. Moreover, the Keshet, as developed in the essay, seems most striking and directly relevant, a fact perhaps too strong to attribute to mere coincidence. Further, reliance on the Chinuch here merely reinforces the essay's later discussion about the coded "400" message. Finally, the essay's real purpose is to stimulate further thought about an obscurity by those more knowledgeable than this writer. Reference to the reputable Chinuch for that objective seems justifiably merited. To clarify, this essay makes no claim of an ultimate answer to the mystery of Eisav's 400 men. That task is left to those more worthy. The major point is that an answer should be found.