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Rav Yissocher Frand
Parshas Vayishlach

I Truly Deserve the Bechora

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

Yaakov tells the messengers to say to Eisav, "With Lavan I dwelt (garti), and I stayed there until now." (Bereshis 32:5). Rashi famously comments that the Hebrew word garti (I dwelt) equals 613 in gematria, as if to tell Eisav, "even though I lived with the wicked Lavan, I kept the 613 commandments there and did not learn from his evil ways." Yaakov telegraphs a message to his brother, "You should know, I was living with uncle Lavan. He is a wicked person. I had to put up with all of his shenanigans all this time. I was away from any support system. Who knows what could happen to a person spiritually under those circumstances? But you should understand that I lived with him all this time and it did not affect me. I remained

an Erliche Yid (honest Jew), despite the fact that no one was watching. I learned nothing from him!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Sefer HaChinuch writes that the reason for this mitzvah is to provide a hint to Bnai Yisroel that even though they experience many troubles in their exile at the hands of the non-Jewish nations, they should confidently remember that they will not be eradicated. The Jewish people will be around forever,

and eventually a redeemer will come and rescue them from their oppressors. The hint is that this Angel that wrestled with Yaakov Avinu, who represented the Guardian Angel of Eisav, wished to eradicate Yaakov and remove the Jewish people from the world. However, he was unsuccessful. At most, he was able to wound him by touching his sciatic nerve. This is the way it is going to be throughout history. At the end, there will be salvation just as there was with Yaakov, as it says "the sun shone for him."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem

DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the *hashkafa* portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's *Commuter Chavrusah Series* on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for *Parshas Vayishlach* is provided below: ...A complete catalogue can be ordered from the *Yad Yechiel Institute*, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2022 by Torah.org. support Do you have a question or comment? Feel free to contact us on our website. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> to get your own free copy of this mailing or subscribe to the series of your choice. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> -- see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

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

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rashbam sees this as the clue to understanding Jacob's night-time fight. He relates it to other episodes in Tanach, two in

particular: the story of Jonah, and the obscure episode in the life of Moses when, on his way back to Egypt, the text says that “When they were in the place where they spent the night along the way, God confronted Moses and wanted to kill him” (Ex. 4:24). Tziporah then saved Moses’ life by giving their son a brit milah (Ex. 4:25-26).[4]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shakespeare said it best:

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 77:3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Tale of Two Angels

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Brother's Keeper

One day the zookeeper noticed that the orangutan was reading two books, the Bible and Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

Surprised, he asked the ape, "Why are you reading both those books?" "Well," said the orangutan, "I just wanted to know if I was my brother's keeper, or my keeper's brother." The Contrast

Sometimes, the contrast is too conspicuous to ignore. In both stories, the Torah employs the same term: "Ish," which means, a man. (The term is already used in Bereishit, to describe the first man, Adam.) In two consecutive portions, Vayishlach and Vayeishev, the same term is used. Yet Rashi, based on the tradition of our sages, changes his commentary from one extreme to the other.

In the portion of Vayishlach, we find the term "ish," a man. And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. Rashi explains that this "man" was the spiritual angel of Esau. In other words, this battle in the middle of the night between Jacob and this mysterious "man," was part of the ongoing struggle between Jacob and his brother Esau. Yet, in Vayeishev, we have the same exact term used. But there everything changes. Joseph was sent by his father Jacob, to go visit his brothers and seek their welfare. Despite his brothers loathing him, Joseph embarked on the journey and he got lost on the way. The Torah tells us: Then a man found him, and behold, he was straying in the field, and the man asked him, "What are you looking for?" And he said, "I am looking for my brothers. Tell me now, where are they pasturing?" Who was this mysterious man, "ish," who encountered Joseph at that vulnerable moment? Rashi says it was angel Gabriel, who we see is defined elsewhere in Scriptures as Ish. Strange. In

Vayishlach it says that Jacob remained alone, and a man wrestled with him. In Vayeishev, Joseph is alone, lost in the field, and, again, a man encounters him and asks him what he is searching for. The same exact word is used in both cases to describe this person: Ish. Yet in Vayeishev, Rashi sees him as the angel Gabriel, and in Vayishlach as Esau's angel? A Tale of Two Men The Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1887-1979), shared the following explanation in the name of Rabbi Chaim Halberstam, the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz (1793-1876).[1] Context is always the key. The word may be the same, "ish," but the question is what does this "ish," this man, do? In both stories, there is a person who is vulnerable. In Vayishlach, "Jacob remains alone," in the middle of the night. He has been away from home for 34 years, and has been dealing with a world-class crook. In Vayeishev, Joseph, a young 17-year-old lad, is also lost and vulnerable. He has left his father, he was an orphan from his mother, and how he was on the way to brothers who despised him. He does not know it, but this journey would take him to slavery, prison, and complete alienation from his family. In both stories, two people are deeply vulnerable. Father and son. Jacob and Joseph. Both of them meet a stranger. A man who appears out of the blue. The question is what does this "ish," this man, do?

Here is the difference. In Jacob's case, the man sees a lonely man in the middle of the night and pounces on him. There is lonely Jacob in the middle of the night? Let me attack him. What about in the second story? Here too Joseph is alone. And a man encounters him. But what does the man say and do? "Then a man found him, and behold, he was straying in the field, and the man asked him, saying, "What are you looking for?" Do you see the difference? He does not pounce on Joseph. He does not exploit his vulnerability, manipulate his moment of weakness toward his own goals. Instead, he sees it as an opportunity to help. He asks the young lad: What are you looking for? You are a dreamer. I see you are searching for something. What is it that you seek? How can I help you? And Joseph tells him: "I am searching for my brothers!" I want a relationship. I am searching for love. For belonging. For understanding. For comradery. For attachment. So Rashi is simply mirroring the context of the narrative. When a man, encountering a vulnerable person, seizes the opportunity to attack him, that man, Rashi says, is an angel of Esau. But when a man, encountering a vulnerable person, seizes the opportunity to offer a loving hand, a guiding heart, to see how he can be here for you in your search for love and family, this person, Rashi says, must be the angel Gabriel! The Lesson We all encounter a person, a child, a teen, an adult, who is "alone," vulnerable, lonely, lost, confused, bewildered, and pained. We see them in their vulnerability. And we make a choice. Some of us seize the opportunity to use exploit them. Some people even utilize the opportunity to use them in immoral ways, to

abuse them, to pounce on them, to attack them, to hurt them, willingly or unwillingly. Even just to judge them. But some of us encounter the same vulnerable people. And our response is: My dear boy, my dear girl, my dear friend, tell me what are you looking for? Let me find out what you are searching for, what you yearn for. We each have to make a choice about what type of “man” we will be. I can either become a force of Esau, or I can become the angel Gabriel. When the Rebbe Went to Warm Up Soup It was the night of Yom Kippur, the holiest night of the year. The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, also known as the Alter Rebbe (1745-1812), was praying. Wrapped in his talis and his kitel, he was immersed in his davening, in intimacy with G-d. Suddenly, he removed his talis and left the shul. It was shocking. The Rebbe went to the home of a mother who had just given birth. The rest of the family went to the synagogue to pray, so nobody was present. The Rebbe kindled a flame, warmed up a soup on the stove, and fed it to the young mother who desperately needed the food. I once heard the Lubavitcher Rebbe share this story.[2] And he added: The greatness in the story is not that the Alter Rebbe went on Yom Kippur to save this mother. After all, saving a life override Yom Kippur. The uniqueness of the story is the Rebbe, in the midst of his Yom Kippur prayers, experiencing oneness with the Divine, felt the pain and anguish of the young mother.

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

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

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

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

Pearls of Wisdom

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

The Eternal Flame

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An interesting halachic query was presented to the great posek, HaGaon Harav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv. A man who faithfully and consistently attended a daily shiur on the Talmud after davening *shacharis* with the morning *minyán*, was faced with a dilemma a few days during the year. On those infrequent days, when his company was audited by the government, he was obligated to be in his office early in the morning. He had to

choose between praying with a minyan on those days and missing his shiur, or attending the shiur and praying in private – both important mitzvos.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

date: Dec 8, 2022, 10:02 AM

subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 12/08/2022

Ya'akov Meets Esav, In Multiple Ways

by R. Gidon Rothstein

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

Complementary, Not Contradictory

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bidding Farewell to the Vilna Gaon

from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com>

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

Wrestling with His Own Wrongs

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

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

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

Ya'akov won anyway and extracted the new name.

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

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

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

The sins that enabled the angel to hurt Ya'akov, Hatam Sofer suggests, were the two sisters he married, and his delay in fulfilling his vow to God. The second idea I leave for some other time, but the first surprises us because Ramban addressed

the issue, said that when the Gemara says the Patriarchs observed the Torah, it was only in Israel; Ramban even thought it a reason Rahel died on her way into the Land.

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

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

A Surprising But Sincere Moment of Rapprochement

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

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

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

When Ya'akov met Esav, Kli Yakar thinks he tried to convince Esav he had failed to take his blessings, Hatam Sofer thought he was at risk because of two personal failures, the more surprising one being his having married sisters, and Ha'amek

Davar sees a true reconciliation, a reminder we should always be open to when non-Jews do honestly want a good relationship with us.

from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein**

<ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com> date: Dec 8, 2022, 6:59

AM subject: Pshuto Shel Mikra in Vayishlach

PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA

From the Teachings of Rav Yehuda Copperman zt"l

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

The Source for Gid Hanasheh —

Matan Torah or Parshat Vayishlach?

על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנפש:

Therefore, the Children of Israel will not eat the gid hanasheh.

(Bereishit 32:33)

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

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

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

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

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

Similarly, we do not perform milah because Avraham performed milah on himself and the members of his household, but rather because Hashem commanded us through Moshe to perform milah as Avraham did. The same is true regarding gid hanasheh. We do not refrain from eating it by virtue of a prohibition to Yaakov Avinu, but rather on account of the command of Moshe Rabbeinu. Indeed, you will note that they

(Chazal) said (Makkot 23b), “Six hundred and thirteen mitzvot were said to Moshe at Sinai,” and all of these[6] are included in those mitzvot.

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

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

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

Before Matan Torah vs. Before Parshat Yitro We return now to the words of the Rambam, that what obligates us in the mitzvah of milah is not Hashem’s command to Avraham, but His command to us through Moshe at Sinai. Here we ask the following question. If this is the case, why does the Rambam (Sefer HaMitzvot, mitzvot aseh 215) quote as the source in the Torah for the mitzvah of milah the pasuk in Parshat Lech Lecha (Bereishit 17:10) “המול לכם כל זכר — circumcise for yourselves every male,” which was said to Avraham before Matan Torah, and not the pasuk in Parshat Tazria (Vayikra 12:3) “וּבְיָוֶם הַשְּׁמִינִי

יְמוּל בְּשַׂר עֶרְלָתוֹ — and on the eighth day the flesh of his orlah shall be circumcised,” which was said after Matan Torah?

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

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

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

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

Mitzvah number three; Not to eat from the gid hanasheh, as it says “Therefore Bnei Yisrael will not eat the gid hanasheh.”

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

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

[1] [In which case the prohibition, when initially stated, certainly applied to both types of animals.] [2] [Which means that the prohibition applies specifically to animals that are permitted to Bnei Yisrael at the time of Matan Torah, that is, kosher animals only.] [3] That is, positive and negative mitzvot. [4] Such as Noach or the Avot. [5] [A limb from a live animal, one of the seven mitzvot of Bnei Noach] [6] Mentioned above: ever min hachai, milah, gid hanasheh. [7] For example, the Chet Ha’Egel and the Chet HaMeraglim. [8] See Masechet Zevachim 115b where the Gemara quotes a machloket between R’ Akiva and R’ Yishmael as to whether the details of the mitzvot were also given at Sinai, or just the general aspects of the mitzvot. [9] See Masechet Gittin 60a where the Gemara discusses if the text of the Torah was given “מגילה מגילה — scroll by scroll” or “התומה — as one unit.” [10] In this respect,

perhaps we may suggest that the pasuk can be understood on two levels. On the level of pshat we can understand that the words “לֹא יֹאכְלוּ” — they will not eat” are a description of the practice of “בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל,” which in this sense refer to Yisrael’s (that is, Yaakov’s) sons prior to Matan Torah. On the level of Midrash, the words “לֹא יֹאכְלוּ” constitute a prohibition for “בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל,” the People of Israel after Matan Torah. As we will discuss (see the opening chapter in Parshat Mishpatim), it is possible to learn the same pasuk in terms of halachah on both a pshat and drash level, provided they do not contradict each other. This is the case here, where the pshat refers to the time before Matan Torah, and the drash to the time afterward. Copyright © 2022 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved.

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date: Dec 4, 2022, 9:01 AM

subject: **Amalek: Rejection and Disaffection**

Vayishlach (Genesis 32 - 36)

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

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

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

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

we control the media and banks, and we are all doctors and lawyers. It makes me feel really good!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In other words, through this attack the Amalekites “cooled off” the Jewish people. Meaning, after hearing and seeing all the incredible miracles that God had done for the Jewish people as they left Egypt (the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, and the utter defeat of the Egyptian army), all the other nations feared the Jewish people and wouldn’t consider fighting them. However, Amalek’s attack “cooled them off” and showed the other nations that it was possible to mount a war against the Jewish nation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yet, it is still difficult to fathom how someone who professed such admiration of the Jewish nation could birth a child who would grow up to be the archenemy of the Jewish people. In addition, Elifaz, who was the father of Amalek, was “raised on

the lap of Isaac,” which was why he refused to do his father’s bidding and kill Jacob (Genesis 29:11).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Gid ha-Nashe or not, Here I come!

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

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

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

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

overcome any difficulty, and ultimately emerge victorious. Shabbat Shalom

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/1051430/yutorah/yutorah-in-print-parshat-vayishlach-5783/>

In the Land of Curiosity

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

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

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

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

About nineteen hundred years later, curiosity once again revolutionized religious history. The Beit Hamikdash had been demolished and dark clouds of exile were swirling over Yerushalayim. In a dreary world without miracles or prophecy, we needed a great sage who could master the entire sweep of Torah and transmit it to future generations. We desperately needed Torah to be distilled for the torturous exile which awaited our people. An uneducated but curious farmer passed by a waterway, whose soft rushing stream carved out rock formations. His curiosity was piqued by watching soft water sculpt solid rock so he reasoned that Torah study, which is exhausting and difficult, could powerfully forge religious identity. Convinced of the strength of Torah study, he altered his own life in mid-stream becoming Rabbi Akiva, one of our greatest Torah sages. Three times in history Hashem was discovered through human curiosity, a basic trait which Hashem Himself imbued within us. We possess a thirst and a desire for knowledge and we utilize our curiosity to better study our world, engage new information, and find Him. We possess both instinctive curiosity as well as analytical curiosity. When

we encounter something new, we instinctively approach it, explore it and try to better understand it. Additionally after we are familiar with an idea but we sense inconsistency or a gap in our knowledge, we feel compelled to explore resolve that gap. Without intellectual curiosity human progress would be stalled. During the scientific revolution between 1500-1700 humanity exhibited uncommon curiosity in analyzing, organizing and dramatically transforming our world. Curiosity allows us imagine a better world, rather than the fallen one we currently inhabit. As George Bernard Shaw remarked 'Some men see things as they are and say why, I dream things that never were and say, why not? We idolize curiosity but don't always pay enough attention its perils. What are the religious risks of unhealthy or excessive curiosity? Adam, Eve and Pandora Man's original sin was caused by Adam and Eve's uncontainable curiosity. The glistening tree at the center of the garden was too enchanting and even though consuming the fruit would incite divine punishment, they could not contain their curiosity and their catastrophic decision wrecked human history. Drawing in part upon the Torah, Greek mythology describes a similar fall caused by uncontrollable curiosity. Pandora, the first woman created by the gods, could not contain her own curiosity, opened a sparkly box which she knew contained pernicious contents, and unleashed misery upon humanity. Based upon this myth we refer to our own curiosity-driven miscues as opening a Pandora's box. Like all human desires, curiosity overwhelms our better judgement compelling foolish behavior even when we are aware of its unfortunate consequences. Like any uncontrolled desire, curiosity counters our better moral judgement causing moral weakness or even actual sin. Vertical thinking and horizontal thinking Curiosity also distracts our focus, causing our minds to wander and lose concentration. Our modern, noisy, and overstimulated world fascinates our curiosity, making it almost impossible to "live in the moment" and bring our full presence to our relationships. "Distracted thought" muddles our prayer, as we struggle to concentrate our wandering minds upon our dialogue with Hashem. Mental distraction obstructs our ability to deeply concentrate upon a single-minded issue. In the late 18th century, the great mussar school of Chelm emphasized mental focus as the source of moral development. Thinking deeply about life and values would, they contended, lead Man to a religiously directed lifestyle. Students actively worked to condition mental discipline and to avoid mental distraction. Mental exercises included thinking uninterruptedly about one particular item for lengthy periods of time. As curiosity always open new mental pathways, it constantly shifts our focus to new ideas, thereby preventing more penetrating analysis of any one idea. Curiosity induces horizontal thought, but depth demands vertical thinking. When we think wide, we don't always think deep. The addiction Curiosity is also addictive. Content

providers in the media are skilled at tapping into our curiosity, tempting us with clickbait and leading us down endless internet trails of nothingness. We innocently click on a curious story and slowly wander off into hours of meaningless content.

Curiosity only excites greater curiosity leading us on a journey which often feels like Alice in Wonderland. We awaken hours later realizing how much time we have wasted on nothingness. Curiosity, though initially innocent, ensnares us into the realm of the forbidden. It begins harmlessly enough, but we quickly discover that we have “innocuously” entered forbidden territory. This was precisely the pathology of Eve, who began by innocently touching the tree, but soon found herself innocently consuming prohibited fruit. Curiosity always poses the danger of “one thing leading to another “. Social curiosity We crave relationships and we desire to learn more about our surroundings and about the lives of other people. Social curiosity helps us build healthy interpersonal relationships, but it can also be morally destructive. Too much social curiosity about people’s lives leads to shameful gossip and slanderous badmouthing. Even if conversation about people’s lives isn’t slanderous it is still inelegant. As Eleanor Roosevelt commented “ great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events and small minds discuss people.” The more we speak about people and their lives the more our minds contract. Unhealthy Social curiosity consumes discussion about people in place of more meaningful discussion about ideas. It provides a constant menu of mental junk-food. Worse, unbridled social curiosity can lead to voyeurism and delighting in viewing private matters of people’s lives. The popularity of reality-shows brings out our worst voyeuristic tendencies Finally, our social curiosity takes us to ‘places’ we should not be visiting. It was Dinah’s curiosity which led to her assault and eventually to the murder of an entire city. Her family had just faced a terribly tense encounter with Esav and, looking to release that tension, she tours the neighboring city of Shechem, looking for some adventure or distraction. The midrash asserts that Dinah was physically hidden from Esav for her own protection. When our access to the world is stifled and our horizons are diminished, we become even more curious about the world around us. She passes through Shechem visiting her new neighbors but exposing herself to uncouth elements. Her social curiosity takes her places she shouldn’t be visiting, and leads to her abduction. Curiosity is Hashem’s gift to human and the trait we use to decipher our world and to disclose its Creator. Yet, as with every gift, it must be delicately balanced, especially in a world filled with shiny metal objects and a highway of distraction known as the internet.

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A Noble, Penitent, and Forgiving Spirit

Rabbi Yakov Haber

A Noble, Penitent, and Forgiving Spirit

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

Notwithstanding his grave miscalculation, Reuvein's noble personality emerges in several ways. Firstly, he soon after repents of his misdeed (see Rashi ibid. 37:29). Chazal testify that Reuvein was the very first person to do teshuva (Bereishis Rabba 84:19). Questioning this assertion in light of the fact that Adam and Kayin repented before Reuvein did, the commentaries on the Midrash answer that unlike Reuvein's predecessors who only repented after they were punished, he was "posei'ach b'teshuva" - initiating the process before Ya'akov Avinu (on his deathbed) wrested away the endowments of kingship and priesthood. Mori v'Rabi Rav C. Y. Goldwicht zt"l, the founding Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem b'Yavneh, presents a comprehensive analysis of the nature of Reuvein's repentance, illuminating for us how Reuvein's actions should serve as a model to emulate (Asufas Ma'arachos, Vayesihev, "Segulas haTeshuva v'Hatzalas Yosef"). Rav Goldwicht elaborates on the answer of the aforementioned commentaries on the Midrash explaining that Reuvein repented out of love not just fear of punishment. This was his uniqueness over his predecessors. Famously, Reish Lakish teaches (Yoma 86b) that concerning one who repents out of love, "zedonos na'asos lo kizchoyos," his former sins become sources of merit. Rav Goldwicht explains this seemingly paradoxical statement as follows: Each person has enormous reservoirs of abilities to serve Hashem with great zeal, creativity, energy, and determination. However, often these resources remain untapped since motivation might be lacking. Sometimes the natural desire for sin serves as the catalyst through which these qualities are actualized. Once the sinner is aware that he contains these newly-revealed resources through his misdeeds, he has the ability then to challenge them for service of his Creator. Reuvein did exactly that. Feeling a

sense of responsibility precisely as the firstborn, he felt duty-bound to protect his mother's honor. This was the first recorded example of his utilizing his leadership role as the firstborn, but his action was a grave miscalculation. But a positive benefit emerged from this tragic episode. Reuvein now channeled these newly developed leadership skills to rescue his brother Yosef. In the words of the Midrash quoted by Rashi (ibid. 37:22), "He said, 'I am the firstborn and the oldest of all of them; the blame will only be placed on me!'" His leadership role, originally discovered through a rash, intemperate act prompted him to rescue his brother. His repentance now rose to the level of teshuva mei'ahava, consisting of active channeling of all of one's talents - including the newly-found ones as a result of former sins - for the performance of courageous, lofty deeds in the service of G-d. These dual accomplishments, repentance and the saving of Yosef are lauded together by the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 13:18):

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

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

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

Since a higher form of teshuva is required to achieve atonement for such a sin, Reuvein also had to repent on a level befitting the sin attributed to him even though he committed a lesser sin.

Rather than feeling resentment toward his earthly father or His Father in Heaven for his loss of his leadership roles, Reuvein enthusiastically repents in order to recapture his former pure state even if he had to forfeit his former glory. This recalls the

famous statement of another towering figure who sinned in a lesser manner than that which was attributed to him, Dovid Hamelech - who guided generations with the power of repentance (see Avoda Zara 9a) and spent the rest of his life returning to His Creator - "שבטך ומשענתך המה ינהמוני", "[Both] your rod [of punishment] and your staff [of support] comfort me!" Punishment atones; suffering brings us back to Hashem.

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

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

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

More divrei Torah from Rabbi Haber

More divrei Torah on Parshas Vayishlach © 2022 by TorahWeb Foundation. All Rights Reserved

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

Rav Kook Torah

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<https://peninim.org/>

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

ויעקב נסע סכתה ויבן לו בית ולמקנהו עשה סכת. על כן קרא שם המקום סכת
Yaakov journeyed to Succos and built himself a house, and, for his livestock, he made shelters. He, therefore, called the name of the place Succos. (33:17)

Vayishlach 5783

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

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

back with another wheelbarrow filled with sand. This time the inspector was certain that the Jew was attempting to pull a fast one on him. He searched and searched and came up with nothing.

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

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

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

Rav Nesanel arrived, and shortly thereafter he wrote his friends, singing the country's praises. He wrote, "My home has windows that are three meters high; the house is roomy and stunning. The inhabitants of Yerushalayim want nothing and live in total calm and joy." The letter impressed the community that remained in Poland, but, before they committed themselves to such a change in their lives, they wanted one of their own to see for himself and report back to them the country's extraordinary features. The agent left for Eretz Yisrael and immediately upon arrival went in search of Rav Nesanel. It was a small community in which everyone knew one another. He was directed to a small corner of Meah Shearim. He walked down the steep steps to the basement of a house that had seen better days. He searched for a while until he was able to locate the "hole in the wall" that served as home to Rav Nesanel and his family. He entered to see a number of young children playing on a sheet spread out on the floor. The poverty that reigned in the home was evident. The joy that he saw on the faces of the children, however, was something to behold. He asked the children to direct him to Rav Nesanel. They pointed

to a shul across the street. He entered the shul to hear Rav Nesanel learning in his singsong voice. After greeting one another, Rav Nesanel asked, "Have you made the move?" "No, actually I am here to check out the community to see if everything that you wrote about your house is true. Sadly, I have to say that it could not be further from the truth."

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

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

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

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

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

The man then thought of an idea, "I will sell you my chelek, portion, of Olam Habba, the World to Come for one ruble." What could the poor fellow do? The Rebbe had given explicit instructions to settle for the first business opportunity, even if it meant buying this man's Olam Habba for a ruble. "I agree." The poor man immediately put together a contract, had two

witnesses affix their signatures, and the deal was made. He now owned the merchant's Olam Habba, and the merchant had his sole possession: one ruble.

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

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

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