

לע"נ

יוחנן בן יקותיאל יודא ע"ה

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה

Home Weekly Parsha VAYISHLACH

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The struggle with Eisav's angel, as described in the parsha, represents a spiritual and intellectual fight, a contest of ideas, beliefs and debate. The meeting with the physical Eisav in turn represents the struggle of the Jewish people to simply stay alive in a bigoted, cruel, and nearly fatal environment.

Yaakov does not escape unscathed from either confrontation. He is crippled physically and somewhat impoverished financially. Eisav's "evil eye" gazes upon his children and Yaakov is relieved to escape alive, even if damaged in body and purse, separating himself from Eisav physically and from his civilization and worldview.

The scenario is pretty much set for the long dance of Jewish history, with the Jews always attempting to survive in a constantly challenging and brutal society governed by Eisav. The rabbis of Midrash discussed the possibilities of coexistence and even cooperation with Eisav.

Though this debate did not result in any permanent or convincing conclusion, the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai that Eisav's hatred of Yaakov is completely irrational and implacable seems to be borne out by history, past and present. The anti-Semitism in today's seemingly enlightened world is so pervasive as to be frightening. And we seem to be powerless to do anything about it.

As is painfully obvious to all, these struggles for continued Jewish existence are ongoing and seemingly unending. All of the foreign ideas and current fads of Western society stand almost unanimously opposed to Torah values and traditional lifestyle. The angel of Eisav changes his program from time to time, but he is always opposed to Torah and moral behavior.

He wavers from totalitarian extreme conservatism to wild liberalism but always is able to wound the Jewish psyche and body no matter what philosophy or culture he now advocates. We limp today from this attack on Jewish values and Torah study and practice.

Jewish parents in America sue school boards for anti-Semitic attitudes, policies and behavior. Yet they would not dream of sending their children to a Jewish school or giving them an intensive Jewish education. The lawsuit is the indicator of the limp inflicted upon us by Eisav's cultural angel.

All agree that Europe is currently a lost continent as far as Jews are concerned. The question most asked of travel agents by Jews today is "Can I wear a kippah on the street there?" Billions of dollars of Jewish treasure pillaged during World War II and immediately thereafter still lie in the hands of Eisav.

And yet we certainly would be satisfied if the world just let us alone but that seems to be a forlorn hope. So our struggle continues but the Lord's promise to us that we will somehow prevail remains valid and true. And that is our hope for continuing on as loyal and steadfast Jews.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Jewish Journey

Vayishlach

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Deut. 4:25

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayishlach

The Key to Yaakov's Gratitude is Hayarden HaZEH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Content of the Divine Revelation

Revivim

Rabbi Melamed

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

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

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

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

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

Content of All Revelations

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

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

Blessed are the Righteous

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

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

The Levites and Priests Led the Army of Israel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Namaste

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

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

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

Shambhala and Mandala

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

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

Voodoo Dolls

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

Parshat Chayei Sarah: The Significance of a Grave Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Cf. Kiddushin 2a-b
Shabbat Shalom

[CS This is the latest
<https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/category/5/torah/parsha>
Rachel's Last Lecture - Essay by Rabbi YY

Rabbi YY Jacobson
Rachel's Last Lecture

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

The Final Moments

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

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

For years Rachel was childless. When she finally mothered a child, she named him Yosef, proclaiming "May G-d add another son to me." [2]

Her wish was granted. She conceived another child. But, as she was about to give birth, tragedy struck. The Torah relates:[3]

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

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

Rachel died. She was buried on the road to Ephrath—now Bethlehem.

Why, when Rachel was in such a condition, did Jacob argue with her over the name to be given to the newborn child? Was this the right time and place to argue over such a matter? Wouldn't Jacob at such a time wish to convey words of comfort?

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

Rashi's Perspective

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

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

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

But why the argument?

I will present three interpretations.

The Silence

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

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

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

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

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

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

Husband and Wife Think of Each Other

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Fate of a Child

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

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

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

From Pain to Strength

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

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

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

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

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

<http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/kitveyet/betmikra/veaviv.htm> [12] He cites Hoshea 9:4 and Devarim 26:14 where the term "oni" means mourning, as the term "onen" describing someone on the day of his loved one's death. It also denotes vigor, see Genesis 49:3 and Isaiah 40:29." [13] Genesis 49:3 [14] This may be the deeper meaning in Rashi as to why Jacob wished to highlight the fact that Benjamin was born in the Holy Land.]

[Added by CS

From: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

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

Potomac MD Torah Study Center

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Eitel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you. Shabbat Shalom Hannah & Alan]

Vayishlach: Pillars and Sanctuaries

Rav Kook Torah

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

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

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

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

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

Why did the status of pillars change?

The Mountain, the Field, and the House

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

Why does it matter whether the worshippers gather around or inside?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayishlach

All... Most

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Vayishlach

The Real Fight

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It's too bad about the ones who are lost and can no longer to be found. Many times I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov as El Shaddai, and they never questioned Me, nor did they ask, 'What is Your Name?' I told Avraham, 'Arise, and walk the length and width of the land that I am giving to you.' (Bereishis 13:17). Yet when he wanted a place to bury Sarah, he couldn't find anything until he purchased land for 400 shekels!" (Sanhedrin 111a)

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

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

I Didn't Know How Much They Love Us

By Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Yaakov and Yisrael - A Dual Destiny

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tidbits • Parashas Vayishlach 5785

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In memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

Parashas Vayishlach • December 14th • 13 Kislev 5785

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

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Bava Basra 172

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

Chanukah begins on Wednesday evening, December 25th.

Shabbos Chanukah is Shabbos Parashas Miketz, December 28th.

VAYISHLACH: Yaakov sends malachim to Eisav who is approaching with 400 men • Yaakov prepares for his confrontation with Eisav with gifts, prayer, and readying for war • Left alone on one side of the Yabok River, Yaakov battles and defeats the ministering angel of Eisav (see Taryag section) • Yaakov is given the name Yisrael • Yaakov encounters Eisav and they part in peace • Dina ventures out into the city of Shechem, and is assaulted by its leader's son, Shechem • The Shevatim are outraged and plan their revenge • Shechem and his people agree to be circumcised • Shimon and Levi annihilate the male inhabitants of the city of Shechem • Yaakov builds an altar in Bais-El • Rachel passes away during the birth of Binyamin • Reuven moves Yaakov's bed to Leah's tent • Yitzchak passes away at 180 years of age, and is buried by Yaakov and Eisav • The descendants of Eisav and the kingdoms of Edom.

Haftarah: Ovadiah (1:1-21) relates the prophecy about the rise and fall of the Kingdom of Edom, the descendants of Eisav. Ovadiah was himself a convert from Edom.

Parashas Vayishlach: 154 Pesukim • 1 Prohibition

It is forbidden to eat the Gid Hanasheh (the sciatic nerve) of a kosher animal.

Mitzvah Highlight: Yaakov was saved from the Malach of Eisav, escaping with just a wound to his thigh. This mitzvah reminds us that despite the constant and ongoing persecution by Eisav's descendants, our nation will ultimately be spared and redeemed (Sefer HaChinuch).

“נִקְהִילִי שׁוֹר וְחֲמֹר”

“And I acquired an ox and a donkey” (Bereishis 32:6)

Rashi explains that it is “Derech Eretz” to reference many oxen in a singular form. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l explains that when a person references his own possessions, it is proper to be modest and not needlessly boast about them. Thus, Yaakov modestly used the singular form “ox,” although he had many oxen.

We find as well that Eisav proclaims to Yaakov “Yesh Li Rav,” “I have an abundance,” and Yaakov replies to Eisav, “Yesh Li Kol,” “I have everything.” An “abundance” is measured relative to what is common in society. Eisav looked to the world around him to measure his success and was only content when he exceeded societal standards. Yaakov, however, confidently proclaimed “I have everything,” as he was satisfied that all his needs were met. Yaakov saw no need to boast about his abundance, as he attached little importance to the status associated with material success and instead focused on everything he was given.

This concept can be illustrated by an incident which occurred in a ballroom in the United Kingdom. In attendance were many of the UK's dignitaries, including the Queen of England. Suddenly, a commotion erupted, as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher entered the hall. The reason for the commotion? Madam Thatcher was wearing a dress identical to the Queen's! The very next day, the Prime Minister's office sent a letter to the Queen expressing her apologies over the incident. The response from the Queen's secretary was curt and quick in coming: “The Queen of England does not notice what other people are wearing.” Similarly, when we are aware of our own inherent importance and dignity, we are not threatened by the successes, possessions or achievements of others.

Ira Zlotowitz – Founder Ahron Dicker – Editor

לע"נ

יוחנן בן יקותיאל יודא ע"ה

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה

ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

אנא מלכה בת ישראל