



# הַמִּזְרָחִי

# HAMIZRACHI

## PARSHA WEEKLY

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH 5783 • 2022










### ISRAEL Parsha Picture









וְתַמַּת רָחֵל וְתִקְבֵּר בְּדָרֶךְ  
אֶפְרָתָה הוּא בֵּית לָחֶם:  
בראשית לה:יט

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrahi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrahi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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# Clash Between East and West

## The Crucial Role of the Jewish State



**Rabbi Doron Perez**

Executive Chairman, World Mizrahi

### Secular Extremism vs. Religious Fundamentalism

Who is an extremist?

The answer explains Rav Kook so sharply is a person or ideology that takes **one** truth and makes it the **only** truth.

An ideology that sees the world in simplistic black-and-white terms – I am right and you are wrong. Truth is seen as monolithic – there is only one path and I just happen to have it. There is no room for different opinions – others must either be converted to my view or canceled. The epitome of extremism that we are seeing more and more of today unfortunately is this 'cancel culture' from both sides of the political divide.

There are forces pulling society to the extremes – to religious fundamentalism and supremism on the right and to progressive wokeism and secular extremism on the left. In both ideologies, there is no room for different worldviews and no nuance. One is pitted against the other and it is a zero-sum game.

Israel is at the epicenter of this clash of civilizations.

In the Western world, religion is relegated as much as possible to the private sphere, not given any authority in the machinations of state and governance. In the Muslim East, religious law and traditions inform and often dictate the public sphere. In the West, there is generally no government-mandated religion whereas in the Muslim East there more certainly is. The two seem increasingly at odds – between moral relativism and secular fundamentalists on the one side and religious absolutism and Islamic extremism on the other.

America and Western democracies and their perceived Middle Eastern proxy – Israel – are constantly targeted by the repressive Iranian regime with nuclear extinction and internationally recognized Islamic Jihadist terror organizations – Hezbollah and Hamas; ISIS and Taliban are all aiming for regional and global hegemony. Not to mention the almost now daily incessant deadly Palestinian terror attacks aimed at soldiers and civilians alike.

The world is torn between the thesis of religion and its antithesis – secularism, unable to find a synthesis.

I believe that Judaism and the Jewish State of Israel, based on its geography, history and spiritual tradition, may offer the much sought-after synthesis between East and West, between religious and secular extremism. The greatness of both can be embraced in Jewish society as a model for humanity.

Fascinatingly, Israel is a geographical link between 3 continents – at the crossroads between Africa, Europe and Asia. It is nestled at the nexus of East and West – an eastern outpost of democracy and at the western border of Arabia. A democratic oasis in a sea of theocracies, monarchies and dictatorships and terror states.

Let's take a brief look at some of the historic tensions which gave rise to the separation of statehood from religious control that can then assist us in charting a unique role for the State of Israel in the 21st century.

### Separation of Religion and State

The French Revolution ushered in an era of unparalleled tolerance and acceptance of minorities in the modern era. Although born in blood with the cruel execution of

almost 17,000 political enemies, the new French republic enshrined at its core the qualities of *fraternity, liberte and egalite* – Freedom, Liberty and Equality. This would eventually become French law over 100 years later in 1905 with the separation of Church and State – known as *laicite*.

The law accepted the three principles of the neutrality of the State, the freedom of religious expression and the limit of public powers of the Church. This ended a 1,200-year reign of the Church in the public sphere where monarchs were seen as appointed by the Pope and sovereign rule flowed directly from the Church.

The American Revolution which took place at a similar time followed the same spirit and immediately ensconced these values of freedom and pluralism in the Constitution as most clearly stated in the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion while prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

In a brief letter, written by Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut in 1802, Jefferson assured that the new American government would not give primacy and legal standing to any one particular religion or stream. In this letter, he coined the phrase that there is a “wall of separation between Church and State”.

More countries would follow the French and American examples of democratic free countries, eventually becoming known as the West or Western World exemplified by these universal principles of tolerance, pluralism and religious freedom.

### Blessings of Secularism

These secular Western republics ushered in a new era of inclusiveness and tolerance. Minorities have been given equal rights and opportunities and have flourished. The transformative gains are not only in terms of freedom and equality but also in the fields of science, medicine and technology which moved the world forward in leaps and bounds, greatly increasing life expectancy, standard of living and quality of life.

The more central religion was in public life, the more it tended to limit the rights of others. At worst burning people at the stake, and at best relegating them to being dhimmis or second-class citizens.

The reign of the Church and the Caliphate brought great catastrophes to the adherents of other religions. The Crusades, Inquisitions and so many other religiously motivated wars brought death and destruction, torture and torment to the followers of others religions, religious streams and minority religious groups.

Religion brings to the world the unique idea of absolute truth. Like so many things in life – therein lies its greatest strength as well as its greatest weakness.

Its strength is absolute moral values and objective truth. Committing with conviction to live a life of moral consistency and spiritual meaning. Not doing what is expedient and comfortable in human terms but doing what is right in the eyes of G-d.

Its weakness is absolute moral values and objective truth. Nothing is more absolute than G-d and it follows that G-d's revealed laws are therefore absolutely true. If those who follow these laws are absolutely right, then those who do not are absolutely wrong. From here the distance is not far to prejudicing and persecuting those who we perceive as not following G-d's Divine path.

### The Curses of Secularism

It hasn't all been positive. Secularism has also brought the dual curses of Totalitarianism and Moral Relativism.

In the Secular Totalitarian State, the government took the place of G-d and the State became sanctified.

Shortly after fleeing Nazi Germany, the Armenian-Jewish political scientist Waldemar Gurian wrote the following: “The totalitarian movements that have arisen after the first World War are basically religious movements. Their aim is not only to change political and social institutions but to remodel the nature of man and society”.

Totalitarianism shares many characteristics with organized religions. They believe in a future Messianic Age – a utopian future for humanity. Instead of a G-d or prophet that transforms the world, totalitarian movements are built on the belief that humanity can recreate the world under the direction of the powerful and all-controlling state.

The nexus between technological innovation and secular values created the bloodiest century in human history by far – the

20th century. Two world wars and the advent of Nazism and Communism caused the death of over 100 million people in the most brutal way. G-dless Communism and soulless Nazism created unparalleled magnitudes of evil in all of human history. Nazism created final solutions and factories of death and torture executing the wholesale death of millions with heartless precision. Communism created superficial equality where in George Orwell's famous words ‘some are more equal than others’ and whose cold-hearted leaders oversaw the murder and starvation of tens of millions of their own people in the name of an amorphous collective good. Science and technology have produced nuclear weapons, critical to deterring tyrants, yet in the hands of these same totalitarian tyrants providing humanity for the first time with the ability to destroy itself.

### Moral Relativism

Western societies and Secularism have also been plagued by deep moral relativism and crass individualism.

The singular emphasis on individual rights and freedoms has come with an inability to clearly articulate what our moral responsibilities are. The Secular Revolution focused understandably on individual rights and freedoms and less on responsibilities and moral obligations. We are freer than ever to do what we **want** but equally are not clear on what we **ought** to do. We have lost so many critical markers of identity and morality. On the altar of progressive wokeism there seems to be no place for the historic identities of gender, traditional family values and national affiliations.

Separating the state from its spiritual anchor and severing society from its moral moorings of religious values and Divine influences have brought moral decay and ethical decline.

### Judaism is not a Religion

Judaism has something to say about this secular-religious divide and the extremes to which it is being taken. Rabbi Kook in a deep and lengthy treatise entitled ‘The Development of Ideals in Israel’ clarifies the historic tension between the national and spiritual ideals.<sup>1</sup>

It is here that Rabbi Kook clarifies the critical relationship between these ideals

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PIRKEI AVOT

# What We Run To



**Rabbi Reuven Taragin**  
Educational Director, World Mizrahi  
Dean of Overseas Students, Yeshivat Hakotel

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רבי אומר... והוי זְהִיר בַּמִּצְוָה קְלָה כַּבְּחֻמְרָה, שְׂאִין אִתָּהּ יוֹדֵעַ מִתּוֹ שְׂכָרוֹ שֶׁל מִצְוָה.  
וְהוֹי מַחֲשֵׁב הַפְּסֵד מִצְוָה כְּנֶגֶד שְׂכָרָה, וְשֹׁכֵר עֲבָרָה כְּנֶגֶד הַפְּסֵדָה (אבות ב:א):  
בְּן עֲזַאי אֹמֵר, הָיִי רַץ לְמִצְוָה קְלָה כַּבְּחֻמְרָה, וּבֹרֵחַ מִן הָעֲבָרָה.  
שְׂמִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מִצְוָה, וְעֲבָרָה גּוֹרֶרֶת עֲבָרָה. שְׂשֹׁכֵר מִצְוָה, מִצְוָה. וְשֹׁכֵר עֲבָרָה, עֲבָרָה (אבות ד:ב):

Last time, we studied Rebbi's teaching about the importance of being cautious about the performance of **all** *mitzvot* — even those we assume to be less significant.<sup>1</sup> Ben Azzai<sup>2</sup> continues this theme by encouraging us to not only be cautious, but to also run to fulfill **all** *mitzvot*<sup>3</sup> — even those we see as less significant.

## Running From the Beginning

We learn the importance of running to fulfill *mitzvot* from Avraham Avinu. When telling the story of Avraham *hachnasat orchim* (hospitality), the Torah mentions four (!) times that he ran and rushed.<sup>4</sup> First he ran to invite them, then he rushed to ask Sarah to bake bread for them, and then he ran to find meat and rushed to prepare it for them.

The Ramban<sup>5</sup> explains that the Torah emphasizes this point because Avraham's running and haste reflect his passion for *chessed*. He saw *chessed* and *mitzvot* as more than mere obligations; they were his passion. We use the word *ratz* — an abbreviation of the word *ratzon* (will)<sup>6</sup> — to describe running because we run towards what we are passionate about. The Torah's description of Avraham's actions teaches us to be passionate about *mitzvah* observance and to express this passion by running to fulfill them.<sup>7</sup>

## Passion

Another expression of such passion is our fulfillment of *mitzvot* at the earliest possible moment. Chazal called this concept "*zerizin makdimin l'mitzvot*."<sup>8</sup>

Moshe Rabbeinu took this a step further. He was so eager to fulfill the *mitzvah* of

establishing *arei miklat* (cities of refuge) that he designated three cities for this purpose on the western side of the Jordan River as soon as it was captured, even though the cities would not be operational until the Jews entered Eretz Yisrael proper.<sup>9</sup> Moshe valued *mitzvah* observance so deeply that he seized the opportunity to fulfill *mitzvot* even before they were mandated.

A powerful story told about the Chofetz Chaim demonstrates this eagerness to fulfill *mitzvot*. Late one night, a boy returning from the Radin Yeshiva in the midst of a snowstorm encountered the Chofetz Chaim. The latter admonished him for being out late in the snow and told him to go home right away. The next morning, the boy asked his host — the Chofetz Chaim's sister — why the Chofetz Chaim himself was out that night. She explained that since the moon had not been visible for *kiddush levanah* the past *Motzei Shabbat*, the Chofetz Chaim had been walking around each night (even in the snow) hoping that he could see the moon and fulfill the *mitzvah* of *kiddush levanah*.

## The Will Behind It All

Like Rebbi, Ben Azzai stresses the importance of **all** *mitzvot* by encouraging us to run even towards *mitzvot* we assume to be less significant. The Alshich<sup>10</sup> explains that we should run towards all *mitzvot* because they are all (equally) the Will of Hashem. The logic behind Ben Azzai's words is similar to the teaching of Ben Teima who recommends "running like a deer to fulfill the Will of your Father in heaven." We fulfill *mitzvot* because they are the quintessential expressions of Hashem's Will. As they all equally

express His Will, we should run towards all of them equally.

The Pirkei Moshe<sup>12</sup> takes this idea a step further and explains that running to fulfill *mitzvot* whose fulfillment we see as less important is even **more** significant than running towards those we see as more important. Rushing to fulfill an "important" *mitzvah* reflects the *mitzvah's* importance. Rushing to fulfill less "important" *mitzvot* expresses our passion to follow Hashem's Will.

## One Thing Leads to Another...

Ben Azzai gives two (additional) reasons for why people should run to fulfill all *mitzvot*. The first reason is that "*mitzvah goreret mitzvah* — each *mitzvah* generates another *mitzvah*." Rabbeinu Yonah<sup>13</sup> explains that fulfilling any *mitzvah* accustoms us to such behavior and inevitably fosters our fulfillment of additional ones. The specific *mitzvah* one starts with is, therefore, less important, because the fulfillment of any and all *mitzvot* inspires future *mitzvah* observance.<sup>14</sup>

This same conditioning occurs with sin. We should run from any and all sins just as we run towards all *mitzvot*, because violating any sin weakens our aversion to future ones. Based upon the first *pasuk* in Sefer Tehillim, the gemara<sup>15</sup> explains that even one who intends to just "pass by" sinners will come to stop and observe their activities and, eventually, "sit" and join them.

Rav Huna presents this idea sharply by explaining that after committing a sin twice, we start to view it as permissible.<sup>16</sup> Though we initially see sin as taboo, transgression of even a minor *aveirah* erodes this aversion to the point where

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HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

# Ovadia: The Aftermath



**Rabbanit Shani Taragin**

Educational Director, World Mizrahi

**T**he haftarah selected for this week's parsha is the entire prophecy of Ovadiah (one chapter!) representing the conclusion of the encounter between Yaakov and Esav. Parshat Vayishlach begins with Yaakov's anticipated and anxiety-ridden meeting with his blood-thirsty brother, Esav. Yaakov attempts to ameliorate Esav's wrath through sending him gifts while he also turns to Hashem in prayer and prepares for war. Following Yaakov's triumphant struggle with a "man of G-d", he encounters Esav who surprisingly responds with brotherly love - "And he fell upon his neck and kissed him, and they wept" (33:5). In the spirit of appeasement, Esav suggests: "Let us journey and go and I shall walk before you" (33:12). Yaakov responds with reservation: "Let my master pass before his servant, and I shall lead on slowly... until I shall come to my master to Se'ir" (33:14).

Rabbi Abahu states (Bereishit Rabba 78): "I have reviewed all of the Torah and have not found (written) that Yaakov ever went to Esav at Har Se'ir. Could the honest Yaakov have been lying when he said this? (No, rather) he indeed meant that he would come to him - in the Messianic Age, as it is written, "and the saviors shall ascend Har Tzion to judge the mountain of Esav" (Ovadia 1:21). Ovadia's prophecy does not only address the age-old continuous conflict between Yaakov (Am Yisrael) and Esav (Edom), but also complements the parsha, teaching us various modes of the final resolution of this conflict.

The haftarah begins with a sharp rebuke during Ovadia's time to the nation of Esav, i.e. Edom: "For your violence against your brother Yaakov, shame will cover you... On the day that you stood in opposition, on the day that strangers took his substance captive... You should not have looked

on the day of your brother, on the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the children of Yehuda on the day of their destruction..." (10-12). As Yaakov's brother, Esav was expected to act with greater sensitivity to Am Yisrael than other nations, especially after his seemingly loving response recorded in this week's parsha. It therefore comes as a bitter disappointment when Esav joins forces with the foreign armies that come to destroy Yerushalayim.

Rivka is told: "Two nations are in your womb... and one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger" (Bereishit 25:23). Yitzchak concurs this divine prediction as he blesses Yaakov - "Be a lord over your brothers and let your mother's sons bow down to you" (Bereishit 27:29), while to Esav he says, "And you shall serve your brother, and it shall be that when you have the upper hand, you shall break his yoke from upon your neck"(ibid 40). Yitzchak describes the inter-national conflict as co-dependent: one will always be a lord with the other serving him; one will always be successful while the other wallows.

Though the struggle between the brothers is an ongoing one, servitude is presented as a possibility and not as a permanent state. Yaakov having servants who will "bow down to him" does not mean that Yaakov will oppress and rule over others; it connotes admiration of others who wish to show him respect. Yitzchak blesses Yaakov with physical gifts as a means to attract and direct others to serve Hashem as King, as Ovadia declares: "And the saviors shall ascend Mount Tzion to judge the mountain of Esav, and the Kingdom shall be G-d's" (1:21). Esav is told that he may divest himself of the yoke of flesh and blood by choosing divine service. (According to Rabbi Meir (Sanhedrin 39b) Ovadia

experienced this himself as an Edomite who converted to Judaism).

Although Ovadia declares, "There shall be no remnant of the hose of Esav" (1:18), Rebbi (Avoda Zarah 10b) interprets this as applying only to "those who act like Esav." Rebbi taught this in the presence of his Roman colleague Antoninus, implying that an Edomite may still be redeemed from the fate of Esav. If he abandons the tradition of evil then he no longer belongs to Esav's descendants. The close relationship of respect between Rebbi and Antoninus proves that not only is the hostility between Israel and Edom not a necessity - they are even able to recapture their brotherly relationship. (ChaZa"l teach us that this is hinted in Hashem's words to Rivka: "And G-d said to her, 'two nations are in your womb' - Rav Yehuda commented on this, in the name of Rav: 'Do not read "nations" (goyim) but rather "lords" (gayim)' - referring to Antoninus and Rebbi..." (Avoda Zarah 11)).

Ovadia therefore presents three possible scenarios to the nation of Edom based on the blessings of parshat Toldot and the scene of reconciliation in this week's parshat Vayishlach: 1) Esav may continue with hostility as displayed throughout the time period from *yetziat Mitzrayim* through the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash (see Tehillim 137), culminating with "and the saviors shall ascend... to judge the mountain of Esav" and punish them; 2) Following the scene of peace-making displayed by Esav as he was reunited with Yaakov in this week's parsha, there is possibility of conversion and absorption (as exemplified by Ovadia who converted and joined the House of Israel); 3) Esav may choose to abandon his evil deeds (following the example of Antoninus), and sincerely wish to "walk before him" as he suggested to Yaakov in this week's parsha

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# Halachic Q&A



## **Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

**Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council  
Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek**

**Question: An engaged couple (who recently made aliyah) are planning their wedding for sometime after Pesach in Israel. Can they plan for a wedding before Lag Ba'omer?**

Answer: The widely accepted minhag in Eretz Yisrael is to keep the days between Pesach and Lag Ba'omer (as opposed to Rosh Chodesh until Shavuot), and this is the proper thing to do. Sometimes there are weddings after Pesach before Rosh Chodesh, however, these should only be done if there is a specific need.

**Question: I used a meat knife to cut off the layers of an onion, and then accidentally grated the onion with a dairy grater. Both vessels were not used within the last 24 hours. What is the status of the grater?**

Answer: We can assume that hot dairy was not used on this grater. If that is true, and it is currently clean, the onion is kosher. The grater is kosher either way because vessels do not absorb without bishul.

**Question: We were out of the house and our children put both oven trays in the same oven. They baked dairy bourekas on one of them. We don't know which one was dairy/meat and which one was used for the bourekas. Both trays were not used for 24 hours before this happened. What should be done?**

Answer: Generally, libun chamur would be required for the trays. Because both weren't used within 24 hours, this is in the category of "heter habalah" and can be kashered through libun kal: clean them and put them in the oven at 200°C for an hour.

**Question: When I eat a half kezayit of mezonot and half kezayit of shehakol, do I make a Borei Nefashot?**

Answer: The Mishnah Berurah paskins (200:1) that you make a Borei Nefashot. Some poskim disagree (see Yabiyah Omer) and think no bracha achrona should be made. When discussing a single food, however, which is half mezonot and half shehakol, all would agree that a Borei Nefashot should be made.

**Question: I accidentally used a meat cover on a dairy pot cooking on the stove. It's a glass cover with a metal ring around it. What can be done to kasher the cover?**

Answer: You can kasher this cover through the process of haga'lah. If the entire cover does not fit into boiling water all at once, you can put it in half at a time.

**Question: How do I calculate a kezayit of wafers? Do I count the chocolate?**

Answer: The Mishnah Berurah (208:48) writes that while we should only take into account the flour, the minhag ha'olam is to consider the other ingredients as well and make an Al Hamichya if there is a volume of a kezayit.

However, this is true for cakes or foods where all of the items are mixed together. Because wafers have different layers, we would not consider the chocolate layer as part of the measure. Therefore, Al Hamichya would only be made if one ate around 4 wafers.

**Question: Can one use music to get up in the morning? If so, Jewish music or even non-Jewish music?**

Answer: One can use music to get up in the morning. While there is a discussion about whether we can listen to music after the churban and that sugya may relate specifically to waking up/going to sleep (Gittin 7a), that clearly is not speaking about music from a phone. It is permissible to wake up to non-Jewish music, but it is better to get up to songs that awaken us to kedusha.

**Question: What are the limitations regarding listening to Jewish music in the bathroom? Is there a difference between whether someone is using the bathroom/taking a shower/brushing teeth? Is there a difference between a song and a niggun? Is there a difference between singing and listening?**

Answer: In a bathroom, one can only listen to Jewish music without words. Additionally, it cannot be music that will cause him to think of pesukim.

Rav Ovadya Yosef paskins that one can listen to Torah classes (and most definitely would allow for Jewish music) when showering/bathing if the room does not have a toilet. The permissibility is only to hear but not to sing.

● *Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.*

# תקציר פרשת ויצא

הרבנית שרון רימון  
Tanach teacher and author



תוותר על בניה בקלות, ותזעק לפני ה' עד שיבטיח לה שתפילתה תיענה ובניה ישובו לגבולם.

רחל, הקבורה על אם הדרך, מסמלת לעם ישראל את חשיבות הדרך, את התהליך שעליהם לעבור, ואת התקווה שבסופו של דבר ה' ישמע לתפילתם. בשעות הקשות ביותר, כשישראל יוצאים לגלות, הם פוגשים את אמא רחל הנלחמת עליהם, זועקת לפני ה' ולא מוותרת, ובכך מחזקת אותם לעבור את הדרך הקשה מתוך תקווה שהגלות היא רק חלק מהתהליך, והגאולה בוא תבוא: "וַיֵּשׁ תְּקוּהָ לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם... וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגְבוּלָם".

רחל, שנשארה על אם הדרך, מלמדת אותנו שיש יעד שאליה שואפים, מתכווננים ומתפללים, ויחד עם זאת התהליך הוא העיקר ולא ההגעה אל היעד. דווקא בתהליך מתבררים הרצונות והשאיפות, הכחות והיכולות, התפילות והישועות.

קבורת רחל בדרך מתוארת בפרשת וישלח. רחל נפטרה בדרך לחברון, במהלך לידתו של בנה השני – בנימין. היא לא זכתה להתיישב עם כל משפחתה בארץ כנען, ולא זכתה לגדל את בניה, שילדה לאחר שנים ארוכות של צפיה, תפילות ונסיגות להרות. קבורתה בדרך איננה מקרית אלא מסמלת את העובדה שרחל לא סיימה את התהליך, כביכול לא הגיעה אל היעד.

רחל, ששום דבר בחייה לא הלך בקלות, ועברה תהליך ארוך ומפותל עד שזכתה ללדת ילדים, מלמדת אותנו את ערכו החשוב של התהליך, של הדרך. מי שציפה שנים רבות ללידת ילד, יודע עד כמה לידה איננה מובנת מאליה, ומרגיש בעוצמה את האהבה והחיבור לילדים; מי שחווה תפילות מתוך מצוקה, יודע מהו כוחה של תפילה, מה כוחו של דמעות. דווקא רחל, שהתפללה על לידת בניה ובסופו של דבר זכתה ללדת ארבע בנים, בדרך ולא זכתה לגדל אותם, היא האם שלא

בר רחל הוא אחד ממקומות התפילה המוכרים ביותר, ואנשים רבים נוהגים לפקוד את הקבר, לשפוך את ליבם בשעת מצוקה ולהתפלל לישועה. מהיכן מגיעה מסורת זו?

ירמיהו הנביא מתאר את בכיה של רחל על בניה היוצאים לגלות: "קול בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכֵי תַמְרוּרִים רַחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנְחִים עַל בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינְנוּ" וזה נענה לבכיה של רחל ומבטיח לה שהגולים ישובו: "כֹּה אָמַר ה' מְנַעֵי קוֹלָךְ מִבְּכֵי וְעֵינַיךְ מִדְמְעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׁכֵר לְפַעֲלֶתְךָ נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיְבֵיךָ וַיֵּשׁ תְּקוּהָ לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגְבוּלָם". המדרש מרחיב את דברי ירמיהו, ומתאר כיצד ישראל, בצאתם לגלות, עוברים בקבר רחל הנמצא בדרך, מחבקים את מקום הקבורה, כביכול מחבקים את אמא רחל, והיא בוכה עליהם לפני ה' ונענית יותר מכל האבות והאמהות המתפללים על ישראל. מדוע דווקא רחל מבכה על בניה?

**בדמייר חייו**  
בית מדרש לזכרו של ארי פולד הי"ד

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The Beit Midrash that is being built will serve the many needs of our community, and it will be an active, vibrant place of Torah study, prayer and holiness.

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# Light versus Darkness, Israel versus Evil



**Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir**  
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

She is the mother of several small children and the following is what she wrote me concerning this week's Torah portion.

"In parashat Vayishlach, Yaakov Avinu refuses the offer of Esau to proceed together with him, and this is his reason: 'and I will move at my own slow pace, according to the pace of the work before me and according to the pace of the children.'

"Yaakov does not hasten forward in life alongside his brother Esau. This is because Yaakov has his own family to raise, a different worldview, and moves at a different pace. When small children are involved, movement is slow. Whoever is responsible for soft and tender youngsters is obligated to advance slowly and proceed with caution.

"In the ancient world there were many types of work that demanded a leisurely approach. For example, working the earth meant that a person would sow, wait, and then just allow nature to take its course. Many other types of work required patience, and the successful person was often the relaxed one, not the harried one.

"In the digital world, there are many kinds of work that demand efficiency and speed and quickness. The successful person is the one who carefully watches the clock in order to shrink the time needed to complete a task. We are used to this and therefore find it difficult to fit ourselves into the rhythm of whoever is slower than us, such as small children. In a world in which it is difficult to wait 20 seconds to download an attachment, it's not easy to wait 5 minutes for a toddler who stubbornly refuses to take off his socks and shoes by himself.

"During so many moments of each day, it is as though our child is talking to us

without words: 'Abba, Ima, a little slower.' At such moments, it would be worthwhile to be reminded of this verse: 'And I will move at my own slow pace.' When Rashi explains 'at my own slow place' he writes 'with gentleness.' This is a magical way of moving forward and living and it would be worthwhile to repeat it to ourselves now and again: with gentleness."



Before the actual physical meeting between Yaakov and Esau, there is a spiritual battle between their two world views. As our sages have said: "The Holy One Blessed be He does not settle accounts with any nation until He first settles accounts with its gods." First there must be a spiritual, ideological struggle.

וַיִּתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר  
וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּגַע בְּכַף יָרְכּוֹ וַתִּקַּע כַּף יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב  
בְּהֶאֱבֹקוֹ עִמּוֹ  
וַיֵּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֵּאמֶר לֹא אֶשְׁלַחְךָ כִּי  
אִם בְּרִכְתֵּנִי  
וַיֵּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה שָּׂמְךָ וַיֵּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב  
וַיֵּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּאמֶר עוֹד שְׂמֶךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי  
שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעַם אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוֹכֵל  
וַיִּשְׂאֵל יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּאמֶר הַגִּידָה נָא שְׂמֶךָ וַיֵּאמֶר לְמַה זֶה  
תִּשְׂאֵל לְשִׁמִּי וַיִּבְרַךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם.

And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the socket of his hip, and the socket of Jacob's hip became dislocated as he wrestled with him. And he (the angel) said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking," but he (Jacob) said, "I will not let you go unless you have blessed me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" and he said, "Jacob." And he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but

Israel, because you have commanding power with [an angel of] G-d and with men, and you have prevailed." And Jacob asked and said, "Now tell me your name," and he said, "Why is it that you ask for my name?" And he blessed him there. (Genesis 32:25-30)

Evil arrives and puts up a struggle, but is forced to slink away with the morning light and also to give a blessing with a new name. This struggle is difficult but we survive it and even thrive within it, receiving a new name and a new essence in the process. We are injured and limping but we survive. In all the exiles until today we have paid a steep and painful price. But even while suffering terrible wounds, we have not disappeared, we have not been vanquished.

Notice that Yaakov's name change comes from an evil force. Evil, in all its honor and power and glory, is forced to admit that we are Yisrael, with the straightforwardness that being blessed with this name implies, that we walk in a straight path with Hashem. And who or what is this evil exactly? He has no permanent name ("Why is it that you ask for my name?"): sometimes evil is sadness, sometimes depression, sometimes lust, sometimes pride, and sometimes anger. Each time it has a different name. The evil inclination changes its disguise time and again.

There are numerous commentaries on this meeting but I chose a new one, truly contemporary, from Ehud Banai. The grandfather of Ehud's grandfather, whose name was Yaakov, came to Israel from Shiraz, in Persia, in the late 19th century, together with his wife, children and grandchildren. Ehud's father, also named Yaakov, after growing up

*Continued on next page*



# For the Shabbat Table



**Rabbi Danny Mirvis**  
Deputy CEO, World Mizrahi  
Rabbi at Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd Shechem, the son of Chamor the Hivvite, the prince of the region, saw her (Dina) and he took her and he lay with her and he violated her” (Bereishit 34:2).

After taking advantage of Ya'akov's daughter, Shechem came with his father to ask Ya'akov for Dina's hand in marriage:

“And intermarry with us, give your daughters to us and take our daughters for yourselves” (Bereishit 34:9).

Ya'akov's sons, greatly incensed by the violation of their younger sister, tricked them by saying they could only intermarry if the men of Shechem would be circumcised. On the third (and most painful) day after the circumcision, Shimon and Levi came upon the city and killed every male.

While much discussion around this episode focuses on Ya'akov and his family, Shechem's reaction to the proposal that he and all the men of his city perform circumcision should not be overlooked.

“And the youth (Shechem) did not delay in doing the thing (circumcising himself), for he wanted Ya'akov's daughter... And all the people who go out of the gate of his city listened to Chamor and to his son

Shechem, and all the males were circumcised, all those who go out of the gate of the city” (Bereishit 34:19,24).

To convince a city's entire male population to circumcise themselves is an exceptionally impressive feat for any youth to achieve, regardless of his position. Note that nobody was forced, but they listened to Shechem and his father and readily took part. What was the source of Shechem's motivational influence? The Torah answers, “for he wanted Ya'akov's daughter”.

Shechem's desire for Dina was so strong that it drove him to achievements far beyond his normal capability. In last week's Parsha, Ya'akov too displayed super-natural ability by the well side. Normally, numerous men were required to remove the stone from the mouth of the well.

“And it was, when Ya'akov saw Rachel, daughter of Lavan his mother's brother, and the flock of his mother's brother, Ya'akov came forward and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan, his mother's brother” (Bereishit 29:10).

The fact that a Tzaddik such as Ya'akov, who had just emerged from an encounter

with Hashem, was granted superhuman strength is less surprising. What is truly surprising is that Ya'akov – who we know from the previous Parsha as a tent-dweller who needed his mother to tell him what to wear and what to do to obtain the birthright and escape from his brother – attempted to remove the rock alone in the first place.

My Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l, explained that Ya'akov post-dream was a different Ya'akov. After Hashem spoke to Ya'akov for the first time during the dream with the ladder spanning heaven and earth, he was no longer a simple tent-dweller but a man with a mission. Whereas we would never have expected Ya'akov pre-dream to attempt such a show of strength, Ya'akov with a mission had the motivation and potential to reach for more.

From Shechem and Ya'akov we can learn the great power and increased potential of setting goals and having missions in life. Though Shechem's mission itself was not the most praiseworthy, there is much to be learnt from his determination and drive.

“Ben Zoma says, ‘Who is wise? One who learns from every person’” (Avot 4:1).

Shabbat Shalom!

*Continued from previous page*

observant, joined a secular Zionist youth movement, and allowed his observance to lapse. “Here I am today,” writes Ehud, “a son of Yaakov, searching, like him, for a way to renew the connection with Yaakov my ancient father, and with Yaakov, my grandfather's grandfather. In exile, of all places, when our people were in faraway lands cut off from one another, without

any fax or Internet, it was the Torah and the prayer book that united Am Yisrael.

Today, when the common denominator of Torah and prayer is lacking among us, we are discovering, the hard way, that sitting on one piece of land together and paying taxes together to the same Jewish government does not transform us into one people.

Something very deep is lacking in our outlook on life. Somewhere deep in our genes there is something else that must be expressed. Israeli society surely knows that dwelling on the land of Eretz Yisrael comes with certain conditions. There is a contract here between tenant and Landlord that must be honored.”

*Continued from page 3*

and the unique Jewish view from a Torah perspective. At its core, clarifies Rabbi Kook, Jewish tradition does not recognize the very category of religion and hence its separation from civic society. Nowhere in the Torah does one find the term 'religion' – in Hebrew דת.<sup>2</sup>

The very term 'religion' is not a Jewish construct as it relegates all-encompassing spiritual life to a parochial set of laws of dos and don'ts. But laws do not capture the wholeness of spiritual life. Judaism, explains Rav Kook, is not about religion, but about the totality of human and spiritual life, known as Torah. The word Torah comes from the world ירה which means to teach or to guide. It is a guide for life, a *Torat Chayim*, a spiritual and moral code relevant to every element of life. Torah is the culture of the Jewish civilization impacting every element of life. From the big picture macro elements of national and civil life to the micro minutiae of personal and private life. From the laws of political governance, the Judicial system and laws of war to the most private precincts of dietary requirements in the kitchen and modest and noble behavior in the bathroom and bedroom. Judaism aims to raise all of public and private life from animalistic impulses and instincts to angelic and human nobility and dignity. No part of life need be profane and no aspect of human life is devoid of spiritual meaning. Our relationship with G-d is ever-present and informs and permeates every aspect of life. Compartmentalizing spiritual life into private religious life is akin to compartmentalizing the soul and the body.

### **Jewish Radical Pluralism**

Jewish tradition has long promulgated the radical idea of religious pluralism. Both on an interfaith plain and intrafaith level – in the relationship between Judaism and other religions as well as within its own adherents.

Firstly, in determining what is right and the correct path in Jewish law, there is the principle of “אלו ואלו דברי אלוקים חיים”. “Both are words of the living G-d.” These words of Divinely revealed Torah as they express themselves in Jewish law can have

contradictory interpretations. I remember my frustrations at this when learning in Yeshiva. I couldn't get over how there was such a difference of opinions between the Sages of the Mishna, the Talmud, and the early and later commentators with opposite rulings in law. I remember being so frustrated as I simply wanted to know what G-d wanted from me - what is the right thing. Is the act permissible or forbidden?

Yet somehow there was almost never a bottom line that all agreed on - there were always differing opinions and a plethora of correct ways even when they were totally contradictory.

Not only two opinions, but sometimes 70 different opinions! The Sages have famously said, “שבעים פנים לתורה”, “There are 70 facets to Torah”. The same Torah can be interpreted in 70 different ways. This is quite remarkable as it is based on a verse in Yirmiyahu which says that when the Torah was revealed on Sinai it was “כפטיש יפוצץ סלע” “Like a hammer smashing the rock”. The objective perfect Torah revealed in the human world was immediately broken into 70 smaller pieces. Just like when a hammer hits a rock, it breaks into many little rocks, so too when the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai, it broke into multiple interpretations.

This is a critical lesson of absolute Divine values in their nexus with human life. Objective Divine truth must have multiple true interpretations when it enters the subjective reality of human life. Human thinking, preference and personalities are so different that Divine truth must be diverse to be authentic and relevant. ‘The Dignity of Difference’ as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has termed it.

Torah Judaism is therefore inherently pluralistic and able to integrate a plethora of diverse views within Jewish society.

This is true not just within Jewish society but also related to the nations of the world. One of the most incredible facts about Judaism is that according to its theology, not all people need to follow its religion in order to live an ideal spiritual life. Judaism

has never promulgated proactive conversations and has never been an expansionist faith. It has never aimed to build empires and convert its subjects to its religious beliefs and practices.

This stands in stark contrast to Christianity and Islam, explains Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi (Kuzari), who have engaged during their history in religious expansionism conquering many pagan nations and forcibly converting them. Today there are 2 billion Christians and 1.5 billion Muslims with 56 Majority Christian countries and 23 Muslim countries.

Contrarily there have never been more than 20 million Jews and there is only one Jewish country. G-d designated a small sliver of land to where he sent Abraham and where the State of Israel has been built today. It is not by chance that the Sages have a tradition of there being 70 core nations in the world other than the Jewish people since the time of Abraham. Each one has its unique path and they need not convert to Judaism and adopt Jewish practices to be redeemed.

The Torah does have 7 fundamental moral requirements for all human societies known as שבע מצוות בני נח – The Seven Mitzvot of the Children of Noah. All children of humanity are charged to believe in a G-d, treat each other with respect, create a system of justice of equality before the law, and not be cruel to animals and other basic laws which are seen as fundamental to the dignity of every human being. These and only these core values alone are mandated by Judaism for all nations but how each develops its own distinct beliefs, religious practices and traditions is not - religious freedom and pluralism of practice.

The greatness of the Jewish tradition is its insistence both within Jewish tradition and for all of humanity, that one need not follow my exclusive way of doing things to be right and redeemed. This is the greatness of Judaism and I believe it is the unique mission of a Jewish State. A place where there is no division between sacred and secular, between religion and state, between our right to freedom and our responsibility to do the right thing. A place where Jewish values and customs

pervade public life while striking a balance of not impinging on individual liberties and respecting the rights of all minorities.

A society based on authentic inclusive Torah Judaism can be the model for humanity. It can be the place of synthesis between secular and religious: between East and West; embracing a G-d driven spiritual life while preserving the great tolerance and pluralism of democracy, on its insistence on the rights of others and its emphasis on human endeavor and creativity which has greatly enhanced the quality of life. Technology and Torah, rights and responsibilities, state and religion, secularism and spiritualism can all be entwined together in one sacred whole.

### The Transformation from Jacob to Israel

One of the most remarkable character transformations in all of biblical literature is that of Jacob to Israel.

This is one of the few times that a name is totally changed; not adding an extra letter to the name such as in the case of Abraham, Sarah and Joseph, but rather a totally different name. This will become the prominent name, after which all of his children will be called – “Bnei Yisrael” – literally the children of Israel, will be given to the people and promised land – the People and Land of Israel – and of course today is the name of the Jewish State – the State of Israel.

Not only is the name change so unusual but so is the unique and strange way in which it transpires. It happens after a battle with a mysterious being, a seeming type of celestial creature – identified by our Sages as the angel of Esau. Strangely, Jacob wrestles with the angel and only after overcoming him in the struggle, does the angel then name him after this very struggle: ‘No longer will your name be called Jacob but rather Israel, because you have contended with G-d and with man and have overcome them’ (Bereishit 35:10).

Why is there a need to overcome Esau’s spiritual counterpart before Jacob can be renamed and become the father of all of Israel?

The Malbim ingeniously explains what is transpiring – a marvelous metamorphosis from a passive persona to a proactive

patriarch. A transformation that will refine and define the very mission of his descendants forever.

What was it that Isaac saw in his brutish Esau that he wanted to bless him and have him play a leading part in the future Jewish people? Surely he was aware that Jacob was the righteous son and trustworthy future leader of the Jewish people and not Esau? How could he not see through Esau’s duplicity, coarseness and crassness?

The Malbim explains<sup>3</sup> that it is clear from the verses that Isaac’s intention was never to make Esau the future leader of the Jewish people.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it was clear to Isaac that Jacob could not do it alone as he lacked the requisite leadership qualities. Jacob was naive and innocent; bookish and studious, he felt the most at home in his tent and in the tents of spiritual study (Bereishit 25:27).

He was not at home in the outside world, not sophisticated and streetwise like his brother Esau. He lacked the political acumen and cunning necessary to survive and thrive in the harsh and challenging reality of public and political life. What he innately lacked, his brother naturally possessed. So much so that Rashi points out a remarkable insight into Esau’s leadership ability and aspirations. Regarding the article of clothing that Rebecca dressed Jacob with in order to present him as Esau, the verse calls them “בגדי חמורות” (Bereishit 27:15) meaning desirable garments. Rashi points out that these were the garments that Esau coveted and took from Nimrod. This is significant because Nimrod is none other than the first ever person to be called a mighty man on earth, one who was not only a great hunter but also the **first king** who built a kingdom stretching across Babylon. The first great political and military leader. Esau continued this leadership mantle and it was this that Rebecca wished Jacob to have and which he so lacked.

To Isaac it was clear – what Jacob so sorely lacked in leadership, his brother Esau possessed. They should be a team together where one completes the other. Rebecca vehemently disagreed as this was too risky – empowering the thuggish deceitful stronger brother would end in disaster. Better to try to empower Jacob than to risk him being overpowered. Rebecca won the day

as somehow Jacob was able to transform into a different persona. He learned how to handle himself in the face of deceptive swindlers after 20 difficult years where his scheming father-in-law Lavan swindled time and time again. He also learns how to handle Esau in his physical confrontation at the beginning of this week’s parsha, deflecting previous resentment and hatred and turning an enemy into a friend.

### The Meaning of Israel

When Jacob overcame the spiritual counterpart of Esau, he in essence incorporated all the necessary leadership qualities of Esau into his own being and persona. He now became a transformed person – one who was both the pure and innocent Jacob as well as the mighty and sophisticated Esau – Israel. One who knows how to struggle with both spiritual and human challenges and overcome them. The man of the field and the man of the tent, the man of heaven and the man of earth all intertwined into one. Statesmanship and spirituality; a soldier and a saint; a royal and religious leader. A fusion between religion and state in one unique, wholesome harmonious synthesis – Israel.

The world is in desperate need of unity of extremes and synthesis between contradictions. This may be the most critical role of a renewed Jewish State in Israel in a world struggling with dichotomous polar opposites and desperately in need of unifiers and bridge builders.

1. This article appears in his book Orot under the Hebrew title למהלך האידיאות בישראל which is quite challenging to accurately translate.
2. Indeed דת is only mentioned once as part of another word “אשדת” and its meaning is unclear. Perhaps as Ibn Ezra explains, it means a law. Much later at the end of biblical literature, predominantly in the book of Megilat Esther, we find the word “דת” appearing time and time again. The word “דת” in this sense means “law”.
3. In his commentary to Bereishit 27:1.
4. This was clearly always destined for Jacob as a later verse explicitly states (Bereishit 28:4) that ‘the blessing of Abraham’ was always destined for Jacob and his descendants, not Esau.

Continued from page 4

we come to see that sin, and even more severe ones, as acceptable.<sup>17</sup> Like Rabbi Shimon, who emphasized the importance of considering the future implications of our actions,<sup>18</sup> Ben Azzai urges us to run from even minor sins because of the additional ones our initial transgression will inevitably generate.

The Chassid Yavetz adds an important point to our appreciation of Ben Azzai's teaching. He explains that *mitzvah* observance generates additional fulfillment (only) when we are passionate about the initial observance. Running to fulfill *mitzvot* expresses and reinforces our appreciation of *mitzvot*. This appreciation inspires additional fulfillment.

### Hashem's Helping Hand

Rav Chaim Volozyn<sup>19</sup> makes a similar point regarding the next part of the mishnah, Ben Azzai's second reason to pursue *mitzvot*: "Sechar mitzvah, mitzvah. Sechar aveirah, aveirah." The question the commentaries address is the relationship between this reason and the first one (*mitzvah goreret mitzvah*).<sup>20</sup>

Rabbeinu Yonah explains<sup>21</sup> that, in addition to our own conditioning (*goreret*), when we perform a *mitzvah*, Hashem rewards us (gives *sechar*) by strengthening our efforts. Reish Lakish develops this idea by asserting that Hashem "opens the door" for one who wants to sin and aids those who seek to purify themselves.<sup>22</sup> The first step is our's alone to make. Once we make that choice, Hashem assists our efforts.

Rav Chaim Volozyn builds off Rabbeinu Yonah's idea and explains that Hashem assists us even before we begin the actual performance of the first *mitzvah*. He helps us as soon as we express interest in the *mitzvah* — as soon as we run towards it.<sup>23</sup> Ben Azzai encourages us to run towards *mitzvot* because when we do, Hashem

helps us successfully fulfill. According to Rav Chaim Volozyn, the initial "*mitzvah*" Ben Azzai refers to is the running to fulfill and the "*sechar mitzvah*" reward refers to Hashem's help in actually fulfilling the *mitzvah* we run towards.<sup>24</sup>

### Inspiration and Assistance

In summary (of the various explanations), Ben Azzai encourages us to run towards *mitzvah* observance because our expression of our passion to fulfill reinforces our appreciation of *mitzvot*. This appreciation inspires us to continue fulfilling in the future and earns us Hashem's assistance towards such fulfillment.

May Ben Azzai's words help us appreciate the opportunity to observe *mitzvot* as well as the significance of running towards them. May our running towards *mitzvot* inspire us to continue fulfilling *mitzvot* in the future.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis.

1. Masechet Avot 2:1.
2. Masechet Avot 4:2.
3. This running is so important that it even trumps other halachic considerations. For example, the gemara (Talmud Bavli, Masechet Berachot 6b) says that one should run to do a *mitzvah* even on Shabbat, when one is not supposed to run.
4. Sefer Bereishit 18:6-7.
5. Ramban, *ibid*.
6. See Masechet Avot 5:20 for an example of this connection.
7. Rashi (*ibid*) explains that it was this passion for *hachnasat orchim* that caused Hashem to send the angels in the form of human beings so Avraham could have them as guests.
8. Masechet Pesachim 4a.
9. The Rambam (in his commentary to our *mishnah*) references the gemara (Talmud Bavli, Masechet Makkot 10a) which explains this point.
10. Alshich, Masechet Avot 4:2. See also Pirkei Moshe (Masechet Avot 4:2).

11. Masechet Avot 5:20. Note that *mishnah's* linkage between "*ratz*" and "*ratzon*"
12. Pirkei Moshe, Masechet Avot 4:2. He uses this idea to explain the *girsah* in the *mishnah* which mentions only "*kalah*" (and does not compare it to "*chamura*").
13. Rabbeinu Yonah, Masechet Avot 4:2.
14. See also Avot d'Rebbi Natan 2:33.
15. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Avodah Zarah 18b.
16. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Yoma 86b.
17. The Sifrei (to Sefer Devarim, 186) says that a person begins by transgressing an *aveirah kalah*, but eventually reaches an *aveirah chamura*. For example, a person could start with hatred and progress to murder, exactly like Kayin did with Hevel. The Gemara (Masechet Shabbat 105b) explains that this is the strategy of the *Yetzer Hara*: he starts with something small and eventually works his way up to *avodah zarah*. The midrash (Devarim Rabbah 6/Tanchuma 1) at beginning of Parashat Ki Teitzei infers from the juxtaposition of various *aveirot* (and then *mitzvot*) to one another that (in both cases) one leads to the next.
18. Masechet Avot 2:9.
19. Ruach Chaim Masechet Avot 4:2.
20. Based on the fact that there is no *vav* between the two reasons, many *meforshim* (see, for example, Chasid Yavetz and Maharal) believe that this second reason is merely a continuation of the first.
21. *Ibid*.
22. Talmud Bavli, Masechet Yoma 38b. Rabbeinu Yonah points out that regarding *tumah*, Hashem merely "opens the door" to more, while, by *taharah*, Hashem actively helps. See further in that gemara where it describes how Hashem strengthens the efforts of one who chooses to avoid sin. See also Talmud Bavli, Masechet Bava Batra (9b) which explains that Hashem rewards those who pursue *tzedakah* with the resources to continue to be able to fulfill this *mitzvah*.
23. See also Midrash Shmuel (Masechet Avot 4:2) who also explains that we receive *sechar* for running.
24. Other commentaries also understand this line as Hashem rewarding additional parts of *mitzvah* fulfillment, in addition to the actual fulfillment. Rav Ovadia Bartenu, for example, learns from Ben Azzai's words that Hashem rewards us for enjoying *mitzvah* observance.

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(Bereishit 33:12). He has the possibility of remaining a powerful nation of "kings" (listed at the end of the parsha) while living peacefully, side-by-side with the

nation of his brother Yaakov. Ultimately, as described by Ovadia - Har Tziyon and Har Esav may "ally" together in serving Hashem as King of kings.

The haftarah presents possible epilogues to this week's parsha of suggested reconciliation between the brothers. The choice, explains Ovadia, is up to Esav/Edom.



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# Feeling the Fear



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"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 G-d and with men and prevails” (Gen. 32:28).

Jacob, hearing that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men, was terrified. He was, says the Torah, “very afraid and distressed” (32:7). He made three forms of preparation: appeasement, prayer, and war (Rashi on v. 9). He sent Esau a huge gift of cattle and flocks, hoping thereby to appease him. He prayed to G-d, “Rescue me, I pray, from the hand of my brother” (v. 11). 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 (Hos. 12:5) called him an angel. The Sages said it was the guardian angel of Esau.<sup>1</sup> Jacob himself seems sure that he has encountered G-d Himself. He calls the place where the struggle took place Peniel, saying, “I have seen G-d face to face and my life was spared” (Gen. 32:30).

There are many interpretations. One, however, is particularly fascinating in terms of both 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.<sup>2</sup> He felt that the Sages, intent as they were on reading the text for its halachic ramifications, often failed to penetrate 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*,<sup>3</sup> that is, a stylised episode that happens more than once in Tanach. One obvious example is a young man meeting his future wife at a 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 Zipporah. 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 the birth of a hero to a hitherto infertile woman.

Rashbam sees this as the clue to understanding Jacob's nighttime 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, “When they were in the place where they spent the night along the way, G-d confronted Moses and wanted to kill him” (Ex. 4:24). Zipporah then saved Moses'

life by performing a *brit* on their son (Ex. 4:25–26).<sup>4</sup>

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 G-d 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 G-d had set him. Evidently, Moses was still prevaricating even after beginning the journey, which is why G-d was angry with him.

So it was with Jacob. According to Rashbam, despite G-d's assurances, he was still afraid of encountering Esau. His courage failed him and he was trying to run away. G-d sent an angel to stop him 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 G-d 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 G-d to Israel's enemies. And Jacob had just said to G-d, “I am unworthy of all the kindness and faith that You have shown me” (Gen. 32:10).

Nor were these the only people in Tanach who had this kind of fear. So did the prophet Isaiah when he said to G-d, "I am a man of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). So did Jeremiah when he said, "I cannot speak: I am a child" (Jer. 1:6).

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 G-d?" 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 G-d. 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 G-d 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.<sup>5</sup>



### 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.

Shakespeare said it best:

"Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em."<sup>6</sup>

I sometimes feel that, consciously or subconsciously, some take flight from Judaism for this very reason. Who are we to be G-d'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 I? 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 for 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,<sup>7</sup> we must "feel the fear and do it anyway."

*Be not afraid of greatness*: that is why G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d has faith in us even if, at times, even the best lack faith in themselves.

#### AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Sometimes we call this fear of inadequacy "imposter syndrome". Have you ever experienced this?
- Have you ever tried to run away from something, but someone stopped you?
- Why is it important to listen to the people around you who have faith in you?

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1. *Genesis Rabba* 77:3.
2. He expounds on this in his commentary on Genesis 37:2.
3. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
4. Rashbam on Genesis 32:29. Rashbam also includes the episode of Balaam, the donkey, and the angel as a further instance of this type-scene.
5. Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 190.
6. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, act 2, scene 5.
7. Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* (New York: Random House, 2017).

# The Definition of Mitzvah



**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

**T**he Gemara records a machlokes among the Tanna'im regarding the issur of gid hanasheh. According to Rabbi Yehudah, the gid hanasheh prohibition is "from the sons of Ya'akov." The Chachamim responded, "It was stated at Sinai, but it was written in its place [in the Torah]." Rashi understands that the argument revolves around when this issur took effect. The passuk states: "Therefore, Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the gid hanasheh ... because [the angel] struck Ya'akov's hip-socket on the gid hanasheh" (Bereishis 32:33). Rabbi Yehudah holds that the subject, Bnei Yisrael, posits an issur specifically upon the children of Ya'akov, as Ya'akov's name would soon be changed to Yisrael. The Chachamim maintain that the term "Bnei Yisrael" refers to the Jewish Nation, not to the children of Ya'akov themselves. According to this opinion, the issur began only at Matan Torah; the Torah includes this passuk here only to provide the proper historical context for the subsequent issur.

The Rambam, however, suggests a different understanding, writing that "one should take to heart the great principle included in this Mishnah." Elsewhere, he quotes the Midrash which outlines the following historical order of commandments. Initially, Hashem commanded Adam to observe six of the mitzvos Bnei Noach. Since mankind was prohibited from eating meat until the mabul, the issur of eiver min hachai (consuming a limb of a living animal) only took effect at that time. Later, Avraham received the mitzvah of bris milah, Yitzchak the opportunity to separate ma'asros (that the separation is effective), and Ya'akov the prohibition of gid hanasheh. Since, in this view, Ya'akov himself received the issur of gid hanasheh, the argument among the

Tanna'im must be understood differently than Rashi had presented it. According to the Rambam, the disagreement instead pertains to the binding nature of the issur of gid hanasheh. The Tanna'im dispute whether we observe this issur today because it was given to Ya'akov, or solely because of its repetition at Matan Torah.

The latter view, which is the majority opinion, reflects the "great principle" mentioned by the Rambam, according to which any command given to a navi other than Moshe Rabbeinu may only be temporary in nature, a hora'as sha'ah. In contrast to hora'as sha'ah, "mitzvah" is a technical term that connotes the fact that the din remains in effect throughout all future generations. This is consistent with the comment of Rashi (Vayikra 6:2), "[The word] צו (command) expresses urging for the immediate moment and for future generations." A מצוה, as such, may only be relayed through the nevu'ah of Moshe.

We derive this principle from the concluding passuk of Sefer Vayikra "These are the mitzvos that Hashem commanded Moshe to Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai" (Vayikra 27:34), which Chazal understand as teaching that "A navi is not permitted to introduce anything new from now on". Similarly, continues the Rambam, we observe the mitzvah of bris milah today, not because it was given to Avraham, but because it was repeated to Moshe.

The Sifrei, cited by Rashi in the beginning of Parshas Mattos teaches us the following difference between the nevu'ah of Moshe and that of the other nevi'im. Other nevi'im prophesied with the phrase "כה אמר ד" - "So said Hashem," but Moshe, uniquely, prophesied using the phrase "זה הדבר" - "This is the word that Hashem has commanded."

The Kedushas Levi explains that the other nevi'im perceived a vision in a dream, which they then interpreted using the ruach hakodesh that rested upon them, in their own language and from their own perspective. They introduced their nevu'ah with "כה אמר ד" because their nevu'ah reflected the general message that Hashem showed them, but was not transmitted in the actual words of Hashem. This is why two nevi'im would never prophesy using the same language. Even if two nevi'im would be shown the exact same vision, they would each interpret it from their unique perspective, using their own language.

In contrast, Moshe's nevu'ah, introduced with *זה הדבר*, consisted of an exact dictation given to him by Hashem, word for word and letter for letter. Chazal call this *אספקלריא המאירה* - a "clear glass" vision. Since his nevu'ah contained *אותיות ונקודות* (precise letters and vowels) there was no need for his personal commentary and explanation. This is what Chazal mean when they state that *שכינה מדברת מתוך גרונו* - "the Shechinah was speaking from inside his throat." Moshe's nevu'ah to Bnei Yisrael did not involve his own interpretation, or even his own powers of communication. He was simply a conduit through which the words of Hashem reached Bnei Yisrael.

The Kedushas Levi's distinction highlights the fact that Moshe was the only navi able to transmit a mitzvah. In contrast, the nevu'os of other nevi'im, preceded by "כה אמר ד", were not intended to convey a mitzvah for all future generations, but rather only a hora'as sha'ah (or a message that did not contain a particular mitzvah).

Following this line of reasoning, the phrase "כה אמר ד" would be appropriate even to introduce a nevu'ah of Moshe

*Continued on next page*



# Why was Yaakov Afraid?



**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman**  
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**A**t the beginning of the Parsha, it says ויירא יעקב מאוד ויצר לו (Bereishit 8:32). Yaakov was fearful and in pain. So Rashi tells us: ויירא שְׂמָא יְהָרֵג, וַיִּצֹר לוֹ אִם יְהָרֵג הוּא אֶת אַחֵרִים Yaakov was scared that he might get killed and he was afraid that maybe he would have to kill others.

There is a difficulty because there are times when there is a Mitzvah to kill somebody like when you have to save a life. If you can kill someone to save someone else's life you don't have to do Teshuva for that. If you kill someone to save your own life you certainly don't have to do Teshuva for that. What is he afraid that he may have to kill people who come to kill him?

In the Melo Ha'omer he answers that the whole reason that Yaakov took the Bechora from Eisav was so that he would be the Kohen and that he would do the Avodah. The Halacha is that if a Kohen kills then he is no longer suitable to Duchan and presumably to do the Avodah as well. Yaakov thought to himself, I might kill someone else and I might kill B'heter but that would Pasul me. The whole reason I got the Bechora was to get the Kehuna, and now I am going to lose it, and therefore, Vayeitzer Lo. But Yaakov Avinu was not alive when the Bais Hamikdash was built! He knew that he wasn't going to be alive, not in the times of the Mishkan and not in the times of the Bais Hamikdash. We need a better reason!

However, we have an old rule from Rav Tzaddok. Rav Tzaddok says that there are some Mitzvos that are in the form of an Aveira. Mitzva B'tzuras Aveira. It is a Mitzva to do it, but the form of the Mitzva is a sin.

For example, Yibum. It is a sin to marry one's sister-in-law, yet in the case of Yibum that becomes a Mitzvah. That becomes a Mitzvah B'tzuras Aveira. It is a Mitzvah in the form of an act that would otherwise be an Aveira.

Rav Tzaddok's rule is whenever you have a Mitzva B'tzuras Aveira it has to be done totally Lishmah. Since there is an aspect of Aveira, it has to be done totally Lishmah. This explains why the Gemara says we should shy away from doing Yibum.

As a matter of fact, there is one person in the Gemara who holds that it is K'ba Al Ervah. If someone does Yibum for another reason it is a sin. Anytime you are doing a Mitzvah that is B'tzuras Aveira it has to be done with the right intention.

The Chofetz Chaim says the same thing regarding Lashon Hora L'toeles. Where you are allowed to say Lashon Hora as a Mitzvah when you want to help someone else to get saved from a Tzar, but it has to be done totally L'sheim Shamayim.

Rav Tzaddok says that when Moshiach will come and there will be a Bais Din and he will have a job giving Malkus. Someone will be Chayuv Malkus and there will be a Mitzvah to give him Malkus. Can you imagine, people will line up for the Mitzvah like people run to do Shiluach

Hakein or Pidyon Petter Chamor. There are rare Mitzvos that people run to do it and Bais Din will say we have a Mitzvah for people to give Malkus. People will run for it and line up for it.

Wow! Make a Beracha Asher Kidishanu B'mitzvosav Vitzivanu to give Malkus to Chaivei Malkus. Says Rav Tzaddok stay away because a Mitzva B'tzuras Aveira needs too much Lishmah.

The Velt says regarding Eisav that when Eisav discovered that he lost the Bechorah he screamed Tz'aka Gedola Umara, a great cry. Because of that, many generations later Mordechai was in pain and he also screamed Tze'aka Gedola Umara. The question is why. Why does Klal Yisrael deserve a punishment that Eisav screamed Tze'aka Gedola Umara as he deserved it? There is an answer. It is the same answer along the lines that we are saying.

Yaakov stole the Berachos and he caused Eisav to scream. As long as he did it L'sheim Shamayim it was good, but Yaakov on his Madreiga got a little bit of pleasure from Eisav screaming Tze'aka Gedola Umara. A Mitzvah B'tzuras Aveira, is not ideal. Yaakov was scared that he would kill Eisav. Killing Eisav is a Mitzvah. If he comes to kill you, try to kill him. That is what you are supposed to do. But Yaakov was afraid that it was a Mitzvah B'tzuras Aveira. You have to be fearful of such Mitzvos, you have to be afraid that you won't do it properly L'sheim Shamayim.

● Edited by Yehuda Kaufold and Josh Harris.

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if it was only a hora'as sha'ah. This is why Moshe's nevu'ah regarding Makkas Bechoros is introduced with כה אמר ד' in the passuk, ויאמר משה כה אמר ד' כחצות הלילה, – “Moshe said, ‘So said

Hashem, At about midnight I shall go out in the midst of Mitzrayim” (Shemos 11:4), for it contained no mitzvah for future generations. This nevu'ah was apparently not through an אספקלריא המאירה and was thus

akin to the level of nevu'ah of the other nevi'im.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.

# How Do We Find Meaning In Our Internal Struggles?



**Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein**  
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

*“And Jacob remained alone and a man [an angel] struggled with him until daybreak ... And he [the angel] said ‘release me for the sun has risen’, and he said ‘I will not release you until you have blessed me’. And he said to him ‘what is your name?’, and he said ‘Jacob’. And he said ‘your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with G-d and with men and you have overcome...”*

It’s an intriguing episode shrouded in mystery. What’s clear is that it is one of the formative moments of the Jewish people. Jacob’s (Yaakov) name is changed to Israel (Yisrael) – which ultimately becomes the name of the Jewish people. But, what does it all mean?

We know that every human being is created with free will, the means to make moral decisions. At the heart of free will – the ability to choose good – is, of course, the possibility of choosing bad. G-d created human beings to do good – to choose good – and to live in accordance with higher ethical and spiritual ideals (as set out by the Torah). But, at the same time, G-d gave human beings the power to live in accordance with our lower selves – to completely subvert the purpose of creation.

Free will is what gives humans real agency and the ability to be self-actualised, and is the greatest gift G-d could have given us. In fact, the Rambam writes that among G-d’s creatures, human beings are the unique recipients of this gift. Angels are pre-programmed to actualise the will of G-d and are unable to deviate from this programming. Animals function purely on instinct; while they make decisions and choices all the time, they wouldn’t

make a choice that goes beyond their immediate wants.

And so, in a certain fundamental sense, G-d steps back and gives us human beings the space to make our own moral choices. Certainly, we have to bear the consequences of our actions – and the notion of reward and punishment is integral to Judaism – nevertheless, the choice to make these moral decisions is entirely ours.

But, this choice is made even more real by the fact that it’s not just a theoretical choice, but that G-d actually created human beings with two drives – with a drive to do good, and also a natural drive that takes a person away from G-d. These are two equal forces within the human being. Our sages refer to the drive to do good as the yetzer tov (the good inclination) and the lower drive as the yetzer hara (the bad inclination).

The Kli Yakar says the struggle that takes place here between Jacob and this angel is really symbolic of the internal struggle that all people have between the forces of good and evil within them, between the good and the negative inclination. This angel represents the forces of negativity within a person, and Jacob was struggling with it. The Kli Yakar explains that the struggle begins because Jacob shows spiritual weakness by leaving the camp and travelling alone in the dark, putting himself in a situation of danger simply in order to retrieve a few small pieces of property they had left behind on their journey. This preoccupation with material possessions left him vulnerable to the forces of spiritual negativity embodied by the angel.

The Kli Yakar brings the Talmudic tradition that this angel’s name was Samaeil – a derivation of the phrase, “one who blinds from seeing G-d”. The Kli Yakar says the negative inclination within a person is exactly this – a blinding force. When we have moral clarity – when we have G-d consciousness and a deep understanding of our own moral responsibilities and spiritual potential – then we have the strength to overcome the negative drives within us. But, when our vision becomes blurred – when the right thing to do becomes obscured, and seems out of reach or unappealing – then the yetzer hara is difficult to overcome.

Jacob was wounded in the encounter, meaning the yetzer hara inflicted serious spiritual damage. Nevertheless, Jacob’s yetzer tov ultimately emerged victorious. With this victory, he was granted the name Israel, which the Kli Yakar says comes from the Hebrew word yashar, which means “straightness”, while the name Jacob is derived from the word “crooked”. He translates the verse, “... that you have striven with man and with God and overcome” as, “...that you have achieved moral straightness in the eyes of God and man”. And so Yisrael refers to that victory over the negative inclination.

The sages of the Talmud give us a number of different strategies on how to confront this life-long struggle. One of the key approaches is learning Torah. The Talmud says if the negative inclination assails you, you should “drag him into the Beit Hamidrash”, the house of learning. A person who learns Torah learns to see with clarity. When we immerse ourselves in its Divine wisdom, we are able to discern the “path

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# Yaakov - Got it All



Rabbi Shalom Rosner  
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

ויאמר עשו יש לי רב (בראשית לג:ט)  
ויעקב אמר..חנני אלוקים וכי יש  
לי כל (בראשית לג:יא)

When Yaakov meets his brother Esav, Yaakov attempts to appease Esav by offering him gifts. Esav refuses and explains – that he does not need any gifts – *yesh li rav* – I have **plenty** of wealth. When Yaakov begs Esav to accept his gifts, Yaakov explains that he was blessed and *yesh li kol* – I have everything. The *Kli Yaakar* derives an important lesson from the difference between how each brother described his economic status.

Esav depicts his means by using the phrase *yesh li rav* – which can be interpreted as I have plenty – but also as I have most of what I want – meaning, I am not fully satisfied with my lot. I seek to obtain more. I am lacking something.

In contrast, Yaakov describes his stature as – *yesh li kol* – I have **everything**. Yaakov is not boasting that he is super rich – that would only ignite feelings of jealousy. Esav might conjecture that Yaakov obtained his wealth due to the blessing he “stole”. Rather, Yaakov is stating that he is totally content with what he has. Nothing is lacking.

True wealth is not dictated by quantity. It is a matter of one’s attitude. One can have millions of dollars and feel as though it is not enough to maintain the lifestyle they seek. Another can own a few assets but be

totally complacent with very little and feel no deficiency.

In fact, we are later told “*vayavo Yaakov shalem ir Shehem*.” (Bereshit 33:18). Yaakov arrived in Shehem **complete**. Rashi explains shalem in three areas: *shalem* in his health — he was no longer limping from his battle with the angel of Eisav; *shalem* in his wealth — all his assets were intact; and *shalem* in his Torah — he had not forgotten any of his Torah.

The *Yam Simchah* questions this Rashi: complete in his health and complete in his Torah we can understand. But complete in his wealth? That is impossible! He transferred livestock and other precious items to Esav. He may have still been affluent, but his wealth was less than it was before gifting the items to his brother. How can Rashi claim he was complete in his wealth? The *Yam Simchah* answers this by quoting the *Shelah Hakadosh*, who explains the words we recite in the *birkat hamazon*: *v'dorshe Hashem lo yachseru kol tov* וְדוֹרְשֵׁי ה' לֹא יִחְסְרוּ כָּל טוֹב, those who seek out G-d don't lack anything. We don't say that those who seek out Hashem **have** everything, rather that they won't be lacking anything. Meaning, they won't **feel** like they are missing anything. They trust that G-d provides them with their necessities.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian offers a relevant *mashal*. Someone visits a friend and notices that his friend does not own even one bottle

of medicine. When he leaves his friend's home, he is very troubled and feels very bad for his friend. He tells his comrade – “this guy is in dire straits! There's not even one bottle of medicine in his entire house.” His friend replies, “Fool! There's no medicine in his home because he and his family are all healthy! If they were sick and lacking medicine, that would be bad, but they're healthy and well, so they don't need medicine.

That is how one is to view their possessions. We only lack medicine if we are sick and truly need it to be healed. If we don't have a need for an item, then its absence is immaterial.

In society today, people's satisfaction with their economic stature is based on those around them. Even if an object is not necessary, if the fellow down the block has it and we don't, we feel as if we are lacking something. The litmus test of our wealth should not be in comparison to others, but rather whether we possess our essentials. We must learn to appreciate what we have. As Chazal tell us “who is rich – one who is satisfied with their lot.” Our attitude should be “*yesh li kol*”. To sincerely believe that Hashem provides us with what we require. We don't lack anything. Following Esav's approach, one will never achieve true satisfaction, always feeling that something is lacking. Yaakov's path leads to a rich, meaningful, happy and healthy life.

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of straightness” – understanding our moral duties and our greater purpose, and attaining G-d-consciousness.

But, while we can maximise our chances of success, there is no way to exempt ourselves from the struggle itself. Indeed, the struggle is what makes life worthwhile, it is what lends meaning to our moral accomplishments. If there was no struggle and there

was no real free choice then there would be no option to achieve greatness in this world. If there was no struggle, the victory would be meaningless and life itself would be meaningless. It is free choice alone – the ability to choose good over bad, but also to choose bad over good – that makes our choices, and the lives we lead, and the moral victories we achieve, meaningful.

And so the soul enters this world ready for the struggle, ready to do battle, ready to overcome. And this picture of Jacob's lonely, overnight wrestling match with the angel of his conscience is the picture of our own lifelong struggle – the struggle is lonely, the adversary is formidable, but the rewards are unimaginable and eternal.

# Vayishlach: Wrestling with G-d and with Man



**Michal Horowitz**  
Judaic Studies Teacher

In this week's *parsha*, *Parshas Vayishlach*, we learn of the historic confrontation between Yaakov and Eisav, after they have been apart for twenty years. Yaakov, having fled his home to save his life from before his brother who vowed to kill him, is now en route back to Canaan, after twenty years of working for Lavan. He is returning along with his four wives, twelve children, many flocks and servants. Fearing the wrath of his brother Eisav, Yaakov prepares for war. He divides his family into two camps, to ensure that one will survive if the other is attacked, he sends gifts to Eisav and he prays to Hashem to save him.

The night before he is to meet Eisav, Yaakov finds himself alone by the Yabok River, where a mysterious *Ish* – identified by the Sages as the *Sar shel Eisav* – confronts him and wrestles with him all night long. As the morning dawns, the angel's time has come to sing *shira* (songs of praise to G-d in Heaven) and he asks Yaakov to release him from the epic battle in which they are engaged. Yaakov replies: *I will not send you away until you have blessed me. The angel asks for his name, and he replies: Yaakov. And the angel says: No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, rather, Yisrael. For you have striven with G-d and with men and have overcome* (Bereishis 32:25-29).

Interestingly, a few *perakim* later, we find that *once again* Yaakov is informed of his name change, this time by G-d Himself. *And Hashem said to him: Your name is Yaakov. No longer will your name be called Yaakov, rather, Yisrael will be your name. And He called his name Yisrael* (35:10).

Ha'Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l teaches: "We find two places where Yaakov learned of the changing of his name: once from the angel who fought with him prior to his confrontation with his brother Eisav, and once

from Hashem Himself. There is an interesting, and noteworthy, difference between the two. When the angel informed Yaakov about the name change, he gave a reason for it, stating: *'For you have striven with G-d and men, and you have overcome.'* However, when Hashem informed Yaakov of the name change, no reason is given.

"In order to understand the reason for this differentiation, we must first explain the meaning of the reason given to Yaakov by the angel. The angel told Yaakov he was worthy of the name Yisrael because *'he strove with the Divine and with man and overcame.'* What was the nature of this striving to which the angel referred?"

Rav Moshe explains that "A person is faced with many challenges in this world. It is his role to meet those challenges and remain steadfast in his faith and fear of Hashem. Life's challenges mainly fall into two categories. First, there are the personal struggles that every person has *within himself*. Our *yetzer harah*, evil inclination, is always trying to tempt us to transgress the laws of Torah in search of imagined material gain. Hashem granted us the *yetzer harah* for our benefit, to ensure that we would always have free choice – and thus, be deserving of reward in the World to Come.

"... There is, however, a second type of challenge that is sometimes even more difficult than the first. This is the challenge of people. In every generation, there are those people who try to persuade and prevent us from adhering to the tenets of our Torah. This is an adversary we constantly face, and with much effort, we must fight against.

"The angel told Yaakov that *in the past* he had been successful on both of these fronts. *'For you have striven with the Divine'* refers to one's ongoing battle with one's Divinely given *yetzer harah*. *'And with man,'* refers to

the various people who tried to stop Yaakov from pursuing his spiritual goals (See Rashi to Bereishis 32:29 – *'For you have striven with men: This refers to Eisav and Lavan.'*). For this reason, the angel told Yaakov he was worthy of having his name changed to Yisrael."

Hence, the declaration of the angel that Yaakov's name would be changed to Yisrael commemorates Yaakov's *past* internal and external battles, and his new name would be a testament to his victories and triumphs over all the forces that sought to dissuade him from his mission of *avodas Hashem*.

"Hashem, on the other hand, was not referring to Yaakov's past. In changing Yaakov's name to Yisrael, Hashem was assuring Yaakov that *all the future generations of Klal Yisrael* would be worthy of the name Yisrael; that they all would contain learned, G-d fearing individuals who would neither give in to the persuasions of the *yetzer harah* – our internal battle, nor bend to the will of corrupt and wicked people – our external battle" (Darash Moshe, v.II, Artscroll, p.69-70).

In living up to our title of the *Bnei Yisrael*, we are charged – and blessed – with a unique mission. Each one of us must contend with our *internal forces* that seek to distract us from our life mission of living lives of *Bnei Torah*. And each of us must fight mightily against the society in which we live; a society whose very fabric and essence is the antithesis of Torah ideals.

Yaakov *Avinu* himself was successful in overcoming his struggles in both realms, and hence, he merited the name Yisrael. Hashem then promised him that *in the future*, his children, the *Bnei Yisrael*, would be successful as well, continuing on the path of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov/Yisrael, meriting – and living up to – the essence of our name.

# From Yaakov to Yisrael



**Rabbi Menachem Leibtag**  
Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

**P**arshat Vayishlach begins as Yaakov sends messengers ahead, apparently to assess to what extent Eisav is still a danger. However, to Yaakov's surprise, his messengers come back with a report that he most probably did not expect: Eisav, with four hundred men, was on his way to meet Yaakov! There can be no doubt concerning how Yaakov understood this report. Eisav is out for his head!

Expecting that Eisav was on his way to kill his entire family, he quickly divides his camp in two (to save at least half of them), then turns to G-d in prayer. Yaakov's prayer reflects this predicament. On the one hand, G-d told him to return and promised to protect him. Yet on the other hand, G-d never told him to initiate an encounter with Eisav. Did Yaakov think he had made a mistake? Maybe he was supposed to return to Canaan and avoid Eisav entirely?

Had he 'sinned' by sending messengers? Did G-d want him to stay clear of Eisav (and his bad influence)?

To our surprise, even though Yaakov prayed, G-d doesn't appear to provide Yaakov with an immediate answer!

## WHAT SHOULD YAAKOV DO?

Yaakov now faces a predicament. After all, what does G-d want him to do?

After he prays, that evening Yaakov prepares an elaborate 'peace offering' for his brother. Hence, it appears that Yaakov has chosen the path of 'appeasement', hoping that his brother will be so impressed that he may change his mind.

Nevertheless, there is an interesting detail in these instructions that must not be overlooked. Yaakov instructs his men to

leave a gap between each flock of animals. In other words, he wants this 'offering' to be presented very slowly and staged. Then he commands each group to make the same statement: "When Eisav will meet you and ask who are you and where are you going and who are these for? Answer him, they are a present from your servant Yaakov – **and he is right behind us**".

Then, Yaakov repeats this very same command to each group, emphasizing each time that each group should state – "Behold, Yaakov is right behind us..."

What are the purpose of these 'gaps' and the repeated message of "Yaakov is right behind us"?

## WHAT DIRECTION IS HE CROSSING?

That very same evening, after he designates his offering and the men that will bring it to Eisav, Yaakov takes his two wives, two maidservants, and his eleven children; and crosses the Yabok River.

But it's not clear why he is crossing this river, and what his intentions are! Is this simply part of his journey to meet Eisav (as most commentators understand), or possibly (as Rashbam suggests), Yaakov is **running away!**

If Rashbam's interpretation is correct – then we have a wonderful explanation for the 'gaps'; the message that 'Yaakov is right behind us'; and the need for the Torah's detail of Yaakov crossing the Yabok! They all are part of Yaakov's plan to 'run away' from Eisav, to save his life.

## THE STRUGGLE

That evening, as Yaakov crosses the Yabok with his family, G-d sends a mal'ach who struggles with Yaakov until the morning.

It would only be logical to assume that there is a divine reason for this struggle.

If we follow Rashbam's approach (that Yaakov is running away), then G-d's message seems to be quite clear. By keeping Yaakov engaged in battle all night long, G-d is not allowing Yaakov to run, thereby telling him that he shouldn't (or doesn't need to) run away. In fact, Rashbam claims that Yaakov's injury is a punishment for his running away!

This also explains Yaakov's request for a blessing. The angel blesses Yaakov by 'changing his name' from Yaakov to Yisrael. Considering that the name Yaakov implies some sort of 'trickery', while the name Yisrael implies the ability to 'stand up and fight'; then this 'blessing' is simply G-d's answer to Yaakov – don't run away, rather encounter your brother!

As we would expect, still fearing his brother, he tries to save at least some of his family by splitting them into groups. Then, he runs to the front to encounter Eisav directly, bowing down seven times in a last effort to 'appease' his brother.

Most likely to Yaakov's total surprise, Eisav greets him with hugs and kisses – in what appears to be a very friendly (and brotherly) manner. Eisav even invites his brother to join him on his return trip to Se'ir. Yaakov prefers to travel slowly at his own pace, 'promising' to arrive in Se'ir at a later time.

## THE PAST & THE FUTURE

What should we learn from this story? One could follow Rashbam's approach and arrive at a very 'right wing' conclusion. But if one studies Ramban's interpretation to these events, one would arrive at a very 'left wing' conclusion (i.e. there are times when Am Yisrael must first attempt

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# Jewish Photosynthesis



**Rabbi Eli Mansour**

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**W**e read in Parashat Vayishlah of the angel that attacked Yaakov Abinu as he made his way back to Eretz Yisrael from the home of Laban. The Rabbis teach us that this angel was Satan himself. Every nation has a heavenly angel that advocates on its behalf, so-to-speak, in the heavens. Satan “volunteered” for the job of being the angel of the nation established by Esav, which represents evil and the antithesis of everything that Am Yisrael is meant to represent. Satan’s attack on Yaakov Abinu was launched in order to prevent Yaakov Abinu from establishing Am Yisrael, the nation that would, for all eternity, struggle against the evil of Esav. Fortunately, Yaakov Abinu won this battle, and although he was injured, symbolizing a diminution of Am Yisrael’s power, nevertheless, he triumphed over Satan and indeed we, his descendants, are still able to wage this struggle against the evil spiritual forces in the world.

Rav Elhanan Wasserman (1874-1941) raised the question of why Satan waited until the emergence of the third of our patriarchs before launching this assault. Why did he not try to attack Abraham Abinu, who founded the nation that was destined to be Satan’s nemesis? Wouldn’t it have been wiser for Satan to try to “nip it in the bud,” to cut off Am Yisrael at its very root, the moment Abraham Abinu came onto the scene? And even if, for whatever reason, Satan deemed it unwise to launch this assault against Abraham, why did he not attack during the time of Yishak? Why did he wait until the time of Yaakov?

Rav Wasserman answered this question by analyzing the particular points of strength of the three patriarchs. They were all towering spiritual figures, but each had his own “specialty,” his unique

forte, if you will. Abraham excelled especially in the area of Hesed, loving kindness. But although he bequeathed this quality to his descendants, and Am Yisrael has always distinguished itself through its generosity, charity is not a uniquely Jewish quality. Many gentiles are also selfless and giving, as are many non-observer and unaffiliated Jews. Satan did not launch his attack against Abraham, because a nation that is defined primarily by Hesed is not guaranteed to endure. He did not feel threatened by Abraham, because a nation built mainly around loving-kindness, as important as this quality certainly is, will not likely last.

Yishak, too, did not pose an immediate risk to Satan. Yishak, who was offered as a sacrifice, signifies the quality of prayer (which is associated with sacrifices). Prayer, like Hesed, is a crucial aspect of religious life, but does not guarantee Am Yisrael’s survival. Many synagogues here in the United States and elsewhere were unable to continue past the first generation after their establishment. Satan did not feel threatened by Yishak because he knew that praying is not enough to produce another loyal generation of God-fearing Jews.

Yaakov Abinu, however, posed a grave threat to Satan. Yaakov is described as a “Yosheb Ohalim” (“tent-dweller”), a devoted student of Torah. His outstanding quality was Torah learning. Once Yaakov came onto the scene, Satan realized he was in trouble. A nation that devotes itself to learning and education is guaranteed to endure. If there are yeshivot where children are trained and educated to follow the nation’s laws, values and customs, the nation will continue to reproduce itself, generation after generation. And this is why Satan launched an attack against

Yaakov. Seeing Yaakov’s commitment to Torah, Satan realized that Yaakov is indeed capable of producing an eternal nation that will hinder his attempts to promote evil. He therefore attacked Yaakov, and although he succeeded in inflicting an injury, making it more difficult for Yaakov and his descendants to fulfill their mission in the world, Yaakov prevailed.

Needless to say, every aspect of Judaism is critically important and may not be ignored. But we can learn from Satan that Torah education is what holds the key to Jewish survival. Satan can handle packed synagogues on Shabbat and charity events, but Torah learning is his kryptonite. It is our greatest weapon against him.

In nature there is a process called photosynthesis which is vital for life. Plants receive energy from the sun, and they process this energy in order to produce oxygen. Without this process, of course, we would not be able to live. In Judaism, we have another kind of “photosynthesis,” which occurs not in plants, but within our precious children. The children receive the “energy” from the Torah, and with this spiritual force they produce our “oxygen” – the key to our survival. When we send our children off to school to learn Torah, we are doing our part to produce our nation’s “oxygen,” ensuring our continued existence.

Torah study is the ammunition we need to fight the Satan. The more we invest in Torah education, the more successful we will be in this ongoing battle, and ensure that Kedusha will prevail and triumph over evil.

# Making Havdalah



**Rabbi Moshe Weinberger**  
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

**A**fter Shimon and Levi killed the inhabitants of Shechem and Shechem the son of Chamor, Yaakov Avinu was very upset with them and criticized them by saying (34:30) “עַכְרְתֶּם אֹתִי לְהַבְאִישְׁנִי בִישֵׁב הָאָרֶץ,” “you have caused trouble for me to make me smell bad among the dwellers of the land.” What exactly does Yaakov Avinu’s criticism “עַכְרְתֶּם אֹתִי,” “you have caused me trouble” mean exactly? The word “עַכְרְתֶּם” is very rare in Tanach. Rashi explains that the expression as follows: “It is an expression denoting ‘murky water,’ as if to say ‘my mind is not clear now,’ and according to the agada it means ‘the barrel [of wine] is cloudy.’”

In other words, prior to Shimon and Levi’s actions, there had been a type of clarity, a clear barrel of wine. Yaakov is saying that Shimon and Levi made that pure wine cloudy and murky. In what way did Yaakov’s sons create murkiness or a lack of clarity?

The book of Yehoshua is the only other place in Tanach where the expression “עַכְרְתֶּם” is used. There, Yehoshua placed a ban (אָחֻר) on anyone who rebuilds or takes anything from the recently destroyed city of Yericho. After losing a battle Yehoshua receives a prophecy that the loss was due to someone taking from the אָחֻר, the banned property. Also through prophecy, he singles out the culprit, Achan, and brings him, his family, his property, and the banned property to be destroyed in עֲמֻק עֲכוֹר, the Valley of Achor (עֲכוֹר - עַכְרְתֶּם). Before killing Achan as Hashem commanded him, Yehoshua says “מָה עַכְרְתֶּנּוּ?” “Why have you caused trouble for us?” What is the concept of the עֲכוֹר created by Achan violating the אָחֻר, the ban, and what is the concept of עֲכוֹר, the clouding of the barrel of

wine? And how do those ideas relate to what Shimon and Levi did to the people of Shechem?

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (the “Ramchal”) explains the state of man before and after the sin of the first man. He says there that before the sin, man had free will to choose between good and evil and that good and evil were two separate and clearly distinct choices. Good was good and evil was evil and it was clear which was which. By eating from, the tree of knowledge of good and bad, man destroyed the clarity that previously existed and brought evil into himself, thus making it difficult to distinguish between good and evil. According to the Ramchal, “[Adam] descended very much from his level and incorporated the darkness and murkiness within himself.” Using the word for cloudiness and murkiness that Yaakov and Yehoshua used, the Ramchal explains that Adam made the distinction between good and evil murky and confusing.

The Ramchal explains that later, Avraham Avinu, the first Jew, began the process of bringing man back to its original state by reestablishing the difference between good and evil. Avraham was called “אֲבִרָם” (Bereishis 14:13), Avraham the Hebrew (lit. “the one on the other side”) because, according to Bereishis Raba on that verse, “the whole world was on one side and he was on the other side.” He maintained a separation between good and evil. When Avraham realized that his nephew Lot was not a good influence on his household, Avraham said (13:9) “please separate from me.” We see therefore that Avraham repaired the sin of Adam Harishon by reestablishing the separation between good and evil. In Egypt later on, although the Jewish people failed in many

ways, they maintained the distinction between themselves and the Egyptians by living in a separate city and maintaining separate names, a separate language, and a unique mode of dress.

According to the Ramban (34:13), Yaakov’s criticism of Shimon and Levi by saying that although Shechem, who took their sister Dina, deserved to be killed, they killed the rest of the city without any good reason. Yaakov recognized that it was appropriate for them to take up their swords to kill Shechem, and perhaps his father, for taking Dina. There is a time for war, and Yaakov agreed with the argument that “shall our sister be treated like a harlot?” Shimon and Levi were upset that the Shechem wanted to dissolve the distinction between them and the children of Yaakov through intermarriage. They killed the people of Shechem because they wanted to reestablish the separation between the Jewish people and the nations.

Yaakov told them that by attacking everyone, and not just the person who actually took Dina, they accomplished the opposite of their goal. One important distinction between the children of Yaakov and the nations of the world is (Bereishis 27:22) “the voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Eisav.” We must not only be separate from the nations, but we must also act differently. By taking revenge on the whole city of Shechem as Eisav would have done, instead of only the perpetrators, which is the Jewish way, Shimon and Levi actually blurred the distinction between good and evil, between Yisrael and the nations. “עַכְרְתֶּם אֹתִי” means that Shimon and Levi created murkiness and a lack of clarity where Avraham and Yaakov had worked to establish clarity, a distinction between good and evil.

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# Is There Peace in Your Family?



**Rabbi YY Jacobson**  
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## Disaster

One afternoon a man came home from work to find total mayhem in his house. His three children were outside, still in their pajamas, playing in the mud with empty food boxes and wrappers strewn all around the front yard. The door of his wife's car was open, as was the front door to the house. Proceeding into the entry, he found an even bigger mess. A lamp had been knocked over, and the throw rug was wadded against one wall. In the front room the TV was loudly blaring a cartoon channel, and the family room was strewn with toys and various items of clothing. In the kitchen, dishes filled the sink, breakfast food was spilled on the counter, nosh was all over the floor, a broken glass lay under the table, and a small pile of sand was spread by the back door. He quickly headed up the stairs, stepping over toys and more piles of clothes, looking for his wife.

He was worried she may be ill, or that something serious had happened. He found her lounging in the bedroom, reading a novel. She looked up at him, smiled, and asked how his day went. He looked at her bewildered and asked, "What happened here today?"

She again smiled and answered, "You know everyday when you come home from work and ask me what in the world did I do today?" "Yes," was his incredulous reply. She answered, "Well, today I didn't do it."

## Whole

"Jacob arrived whole to the city of Shechem," the Torah states in this week's portion, Vayishlach.

What a gift it is—to be whole, complete. To be wholesome, unified, integrated, holistic. How many of us can claim to be whole?

How did this happen? What was the secret behind Jacob's "wholeness" at this moment? He had been married for years, he had many children, and was a successful man. He had garnered much wealth and had dealt successfully with many an adversary.

What transpired at this moment which conferred upon Jacob this condition of "wholeness"?

In fact, nowhere does the Bible describe a human being in such a way—that he or she was "shalem," whole. It is an extraordinary description for a human being, who from the genesis of time, is characterized by duality, fragmentation and conflict.

Apparently, something extraordinary occurred in the life in Jacob, which made him whole, precisely at this juncture of his life.

## The Preceding Scene

There is no escaping the juxtaposition between this statement—"Jacob arrived whole"—and the preceding scene in the Torah. In the previous scene, Esau finally made peace with his brother Jacob. After decades of estrangement, hostility and ire, and the fear of outright war between the brothers, they had at last reconciled, even if they would not live together.

It is a profound development. Twenty-two years earlier Esau vowed to kill Jacob, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother." Now, as they are about to meet again, we stand posed anticipating a harsh encounter. Upon hearing that Esau is approaching him with a force of four hundred men, Jacob is "very afraid and distressed." He devises an elaborate defense, including a strategy for war.

When Esau finally appears, something very different transpires. The

Bible's description of the meeting is unforgettable:

"Esau ran toward him, embraced him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him. And they wept." There is no anger, animosity or threat of revenge. Peace has at last descended upon the Abrahamic family. The next scene in the Torah reads: "Jacob arrived whole..."

The message to us seems clear; You may be a wonderful, accomplished and successful individual, but as long as you are not on speaking terms with your own sibling, you will not be whole. As long as a family is torn by mistrust and conflict, none of its members can be whole. You may be right or wrong in your arguments, but as long as the conflict lingers, you will remain broken. We cannot make ourselves whole, nor can we mend the world, if we lack the courage and vulnerability to create peace within our own families. The family is the nucleus of civilization.

Sometimes we have no choice but to create music out of torn chords. If we have tried whatever we can to reconcile and it did not work, we must create wholeness within a fragmented state. We cannot change other people and each of us must learn to develop his or her own relationship with G-d. Yet, we must try and do whatever we can to create familial harmony. When we can't achieve this, we must know that there will be moments in which we will have to grieve over a terrible loss.

George Burns once quipped that happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city. It is often easier to get along with the "whole world" than with your own family. But it is only through family harmony that we can achieve genuine wholeness in our lives.

# Vayishlach: Sent On A Mission



**Rabbi Judah Mischel**

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpia, OU-NCSY

In the Autumn of 1971, the ongoing political controversy over “Who Is A Jew?” which was to define Jewish identity in the State of Israel, was at a peak. At that moment, the Lubavitcher Rebbe sent a delegation of Russian Chabad Chasidim, former refuseniks who had recently arrived in Eretz Yisrael, on a mission to meet with various community leaders and share a message on behalf of the Rebbe. The topic was the importance of *mesirus nefesh*, self-sacrifice in the battle to ensure that Israel’s Law of Return would always clearly state that it applies only to one who was born to a Jewish mother or who had undergone a *halachic* conversion. As part of their tour, the men met with Reb Moshe Feinstein, zt”l, Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Tiferes Jerusalem, roundly recognized as the *Gadol haDor*.

Reb Moshe, who had once served as the Rav of Luban, Russia, and fled with his family, was deeply moved by the self-sacrifice and perseverance modeled by the Chasidim. He was astounded at their level of learning and their high spiritual attainments, and marveled at how they had developed into *talmidei chachamim* and even maintained their visibly Jewish and Chasidic appearance with long beards, under such dangerous conditions.

With a tear of amazement in his eye, Reb Moshe asked them, “Please, how were you able to survive under the terror of Stalin’s religious oppression? How were you able to accomplish all of this?”

One of the group, R’ Yaakov Notik, answered with luminous *temimus*, simplicity and sincerity: “What choice did we have? We are Jews, and we did what God expected of us.”



This week marks Yud Tes (the 19th) of Kislev, the celebration of the release of the Alter Rebbe, Reb Shneur Zalman of Liadi, from imprisonment in Czarist Russia in 1798. More than simply a commemoration of the personal liberation of the Alter Rebbe, also known as the “Ba’al haTanya”, the author of

*Sefer haTanya*, Yud Tes Kislev marks a turning point in Jewish history. The spontaneous liberation of the Rebbe ushered in a new era for the revelation and teaching of the “inner soul” of Torah.

Reb Shlomo Chayim Kesselman, zy’a, was the primary educator and beloved *mashpia*, spiritual guide, of Tomchei Temimim in Tel Aviv, Lod and Kfar Chabad in the first half of the Twentieth Century. An *oveid*, ‘servant of God’, and pedagogue who dedicated his life to building up people, he shaped the inner world of generations of *talmidim*, cultivating depth and spiritual focus in countless future leaders of Lubavitch. Reb Shlomo Chayim demanded the highest standards of contemplation and commitment from the students, encouraging them to strive for true righteousness in their *avodah*. His required *farbrengens*, transformative soul-gatherings, lasted for hours, sometimes through the night without a break.

Back in 1926, having been caught red-handed and found guilty by the Soviets of the ‘crime’ of teaching Torah, Reb Shlomo Chayim was sentenced to six months of forced physical labor, including cleaning the streets and removing garbage, a punishment meant to degrade and humiliate him. For the resolute Reb Shlomo Chayim, however, his *Hisbonenus*, ‘meditation on God’, and his devotion to his mission of disseminating Torah, were his only badges of honor, and these could never be taken away. In fact, taking pride in being punished for his *mesiras nefesh*, he would don his Shabbos clothes before going out to the street to do his job.

At a *farbrengen* held on *Yud-Tes Kislev* that same year, the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, the “Rayatz”, mentioned Reb Shlomo Chayim:

The time for *mesirus nefesh*, self-sacrifice, will soon be gone, because in the near future, teenagers will be able to study Torah overtly. Fellow Jews: seize the opportunity for self-sacrifice! Seize it,

because there will soon come a time of complete religious freedom, and when that happens, you’ll search for some way of experiencing self-sacrifice, but you won’t find it. There will soon come a time when you will speak admiringly of a person who served time (in prison) because he was a *malamed*, or because he maintains a *cheder*, or yeshiva, or a *mikvah*. You will envy such people, and will feel sore that you yourselves did not have the merit of doing so yourselves. When that time comes, the hem of Shlomo Chayim’s coat will be considered holy!



The Alter Rebbe explains,

*The force of the Divine light of the blessed Ein Sof which is clothed in the soul... is great and powerful... enables one to withstand a test of self-sacrifice to the extent of even refusing to do some single act that is contrary to the faith in the One God, such as, for example, bowing to an idol, even without acknowledging it in his heart at all... This is called “fear that is contained in love”, the natural love of the Divine soul that is found in all Jews, the intrinsic desire and will of which is to be attached to its origin and source in the Light of the Blessed Ein Sof. (Tanya, Chapter 19)*



Yud Tes Kislev, “the Rosh Hashanah of Chassidus”, is a uniquely auspicious day for re-committing ourselves to values that are worthy of self-sacrifice.

לשנה טובה בלימוד החסידות ובדרכי  
החסידות תכתבו ותחתמו!

May we be written and inscribed for a good year in the study of the Soul of Torah, and its ways of fearless righteous action; May we always live our Yidishkeit — our *shlichus* and mission — with passionate dedication and depth, amid revealed good!

# Precious Priorities

**Mrs. Shira Smiles**

International lecturer and curriculum developer

**M**ore than thirty years passed since Yaakov Avinu had last seen his brother Eisav. Now, as Yaakov is returning to his father's house, he reaches out to Eisav with an assertion that seems rather irrelevant. Yaakov declares that he sojourned, garti, with Lavan and was delayed in meeting Eisav until this point (Bereishet 32:5). Rashi comments that the word garti carries specific significance; it has the numerical value of taryag, the number of mitzvot in the Torah. Yaakov is telling Eisav that he kept the mitzvot and did not learn from Lavan's evil ways. How are we to understand this message? By no means could Yaakov have kept all 613 mitzvot even if he had wanted to! Let us look a little deeper and see how these compelling words hold much wisdom and direction as to Yaakov's, and by extension our, trajectory in this life. Rashi tells us that Yaakov Avinu particularly used the word shamarti, I guarded, as opposed to kiyamti, I upheld, to express his loyalty to mitzvot. Rav Bick in Chayei Moshe notes here that one who learns about a mitzvah,

albeit is unable to do it, is considered to have been involved in the mitzvah. Thus, for example, one who says the portion of Karbanot in his morning prayers is considered to have brought korbanot although he didn't bring a physical sacrifice. Similarly, says Rav Dunner in MikdashHalevi, the word shamar connotes hope and anticipation for the opportunity to do a mitzvah. Yaakov Avinu kept the mitzvot that he could and waited with expectancy to fulfill the mitzvot that he was unable to while living with Lavan. Yaakov Avinu's message to Eisav and to us is clear. A Jew's attitude toward mitzvah performance is with anticipation: we view mitzvot as opportunities! We look forward and are excited to be an extension of the Divine by doing as many mitzvot as we can!

Moreover, Yaakov Avinu was telling Esav that although he lived with Lavan for many years, he was not influenced by his ways. Rav Epstein in Sefer Hearot, notes that one can observe the whole Torah, keep every letter of the law and simultaneously be a naval b'reshut haTorah,

indulge in physicality and forget his spiritual focus. How is this message pertinent for Eisav? Rav Grossbard in Da'at Shraga explains that Yaakov Avinu was communicating a deep truth to Eisav. Do not think that you will influence me with your "brotherly love"! My devotion to Torah and mitzvot is stronger and more powerful than your coercion. There will always be Jews that resist the affection of the gentile world as they try to kill us with their "love" and manipulate us to become like them.

Yaakov Avinu specifically used the word garti to convey his true perspective of his life's mission as Rav Roberts in Prism of Torah points out. A Jew should always view this world as a temporary dwelling. Yaakov Avinu knew he was not a toshav, a settled dweller in olam hazeh. He understood that living a higher existence requires total devotion to spiritual purpose and sacred meaning.

*Continued from page 22*

to appease their enemies in any manner possible).

One could suggest that the Bible's ambiguity is intentional, as there are times in Jewish History when a 'right wing' approach is correct, and there are times when a 'left wing' approach is preferable. Similarly, there are times when we must take action, even when we are in doubt in regard to the true intentions of our enemies. While at other times, it may be better to remain passive.

Just as life is not a 'fairy tale', neither is Chumash. Nevertheless, we should learn that in every encounter that we face, we must both act (i.e. turn to ourselves) and pray (i.e. turn to G-d). We must make every effort to understand our predicament in order to arrive at the approach that would best follow the path that G-d has set. However, when that path is not clear, we must pray that G-d will not only assist us but that He should send some sort of an 'angel' to assure that we follow the proper direction.

Yaakov leaves this encounter not only limping but also 'contemplating' and 'wondering'. But he continues on his journey, on his way to Bet-El, ready to face any future encounter with prayer, wisdom, action, faith, and resolve.

So too, in the history of the Jewish people – there are times that we must stand up and fight, and there are times that we attempt appeasement. There are also times when we struggle, and remain limping. Yet we continue to pray, study, contemplate, and persevere with unyielding resolve to achieve our goals.

# And How Will I Fight?



**Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi**  
Popular Torah teacher and author

**T**his week Rabbi Mordechai Sternberg passed away, one of the greatest gentlemen of his generation. In his last shiur, which he gave about four months ago for Tisha B'Av, he taught the words of Rav Kook about the increase of evil and violence that corrupts every lofty ideal. When he quoted the words, "And how will I fight?" he burst into uncontrolled tears

And how will I fight. After all, there are people, perhaps all of them, who are not meant for wars: spiritual people, family people, women who just want to fill the day with good, and just like Yaakov, they will be forced to fight a war they did not choose!

How do you fight violence! Please, the teacher asks his students, not violently!

The Baal HaTanya was imprisoned in St. Petersburg – of his own accord, without having done anything wrong. When he was released on the 19th of Kislev, his students rightly thirsted for revenge. They wanted to punish those who had forged a false plot against their rabbi and Hasidism in general.

The Baal HaTanya sought to turn the thirst for revenge into a "Tzama" (an event that takes place every year in

Yerushalayim) and the prison into the opening of four gates... and this is the Torah that he taught immediately after his release from prison, a Torah whose words appear in our parashah: "I have become small from all the favors and from all [the truth]. This means that with every single favor that G-d bestows upon a man, he ought to become very humble... This [humility born of kindness] is also the characteristic trait of Yaakov and therefore, he justified himself for his fear of Esav...A strict warning: Hold your peace! Mention nothing! Rather, [the men of our Chasidic fraternity] are to subdue their spirit and heart with humility, with 'a soft answer [that] turns away anger,' and with a restrained spirit... and through all that, perhaps G-d will put [a conciliatory and loving response] into the heart of their brethren, [for] 'as waters [reflect] one's face, [so does the heart of one man reflect the heart of another].'" (Iggeret HaKodesh, 2)

Do not make yourself small in the face of evil, he urges, feel small in the face of the good that surrounds you all the time. In the end, even evil will notice this great presence at your side and will have no choice but to capitulate in the face of all that good. But Hashem wants much more.

He will not be satisfied with the fact that the "evil ones" are no longer violent. It is not enough for Him that Esav no longer harms Yaakov. He wants the evil one to also reveal the good in himself, to mourn for the image of his G-d that has been corrupted...

The circles that dance every year at the "Tzama" event, the singing of the girls with their eyes closed to the tune of "Arba Babov", are in my eyes the most effective fight against violence, the violence outside of us and the violence within us. We do not run away from it or ignore it, we prepare for war, but those who will win in the end will be the presence and prayer.

"And how will I fight?" asked the sensitive Rav Kook. And he will fight with beauty, and he will fight with poetry, and he will fight with such a large circle of followers, so small in the face of all this truth.

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*Continued from page 24*

In practical halacha, where the law of חרם (banned people or property) applies, the violation of the ban's separation between everyone and everything and the banned object or person is one of the most serious transgressions. The Medresh Tanchuma (Vayeshev 2) derives this from the story with Yehoshua and Achan: "If

one transgresses a ban, it is as if he violated all five books of the Torah and he will be punished for all of his sins." Based on what we have said, we can understand why the violation of a ban is so serious. The word חרם literally means "separated." Something can be separated because it is holy or the opposite. But if one brings

confusion into the world by mixing two things that are not meant to be mixed together, it causes the world to regress away from its ultimate purpose, which is to regain the clarity that existed before the sin of Adam Harishon.

# Hebrew Language in the Parsha



**David Curwin**  
balashon.com

In Parshat Vayishlach, we read about how Yaakov crossed the ford of the Yabok, and at night fought with a mysterious man:

וַיִּנְתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיִּאָּבֵק אִישׁ עִמוֹ עַד עֹלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר:  
“Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.” (Bereshit 32:25)

What is the origin of the verb אָבַק here? Why does it mean “wrestle”?

This is the source of debate among medieval commentaries as well as modern linguists.

Rashi first quotes the grammarian Menachem ben Seruk, who connects the verb to the noun אָבַק - “dust”, for during the wrestling dust covered them. This is opinion of Ibn Ezra and Radak, and we find the verb with that meaning in Pirkei Avot 1:4 - וְהָיִי מִתְאָבֵק בְּעֶפְרֹרֶת רַגְלֵיכֶם - “cover yourself with the dust of their feet.”

Rashi, however, does not accept this opinion, and instead claims that אָבַק means “he fastened himself on.” He brings a few Talmudic quotes where אָבַק means “attached”, and then says that it is the way of two who struggle, for one person to throw the other down, then he grasps him - אֹבֵקוּ - and entwines him - חֹבֵקוּ - in his arms.”

Ramban continues this approach, and brings a number of cases in Hebrew where the letters א and ח interchange. Therefore, אָבַק derives from חֹבַק, “embrace, hug.”

These two different approaches are suggested earlier in the Talmud (Hullin 91a) by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. He gives two explanations to our verse:

ורביב"ל אמר אמר קרא (בראשית לב) בהאבוקו עמו  
כאדם שחובק את חברו

“Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The Torah writes (Bereshit 32:26) ‘as he wrestled

with him’ - as a person embraces [חֹבֵק] - his friend”.

אמר ר' יהושע ב"ל מלמד שהעלו אבק מרגלותם עד כסא הכבוד

“Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: this teaches us that the dust [אָבַק] of their feet went up to the Divine Throne.”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi offered two different explanations, the medieval commentaries disagreed, and there is not a consensus among modern linguists. So how should we relate to this debate if these giants could not agree?

Perhaps the commentary of R. Hayim of Volozhin on Pirkei Avot 1:4 could help. He explains וְהָיִי מִתְאָבֵק בְּעֶפְרֹרֶת רַגְלֵיכֶם as meaning we must wrestle and struggle with our teachers, and sometimes the student will be the correct one. We must pursue the truth at all costs. But how should we do this? By sitting at the dust of their feet, with humility.

## Parsha Riddle



**Reb Leor Broh**  
Mizrachi Melbourne

What three different words appear in the Parsha that mean a “gift”?

### Answer to the Parsha Riddle

34:12 וְהָיָה לְךָ חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים

33:11 וְהָיָה לְךָ חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים

33:10 וְהָיָה לְךָ חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים



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