

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

One of the most powerful images in the Torah is that of Yaakov (Jacob) struggling with a mysterious being (ish) before his anxiously awaited meeting with his brother Esav (Esau). (Genesis 32:25) The term used to denote this struggle is va-ye'avek.

Rashi first gives a literal reason as to the use of this term. He points out that the word va-ye'avek comes from the word avak-dust. While wrestling, dust physically rises from the ground.

Physical confrontations have always been a part of our national psyche. Throughout history our enemies would try to destroy us. In fact, Ramban points out that when the enemy cannot prevail, they attack our children, which is exactly what the ish striking Jacob's loins symbolizes. The power of this Ramban came to fore in the early 70's in the town of Maalot, when terrorists targeted children in order to bring us down. Still, in the end, like Yaakov of old, we prevail.

Rashi offers a second suggestion. The word avak interchanges with havak-embrace. According to this interpretation the Torah does not record a physical confrontation; rather a meeting of embrace between Yaakov and the ish.

In reacting to this interpretation, Ketav Sofer, Rabbi Avraham Sofer of the 19th century (son of the Hatam Sofer) explains that this idea has resonated powerfully throughout history. There are times when the ish, representative of the outside world, would try to openly approach the Jew with the intent of convincing us to assimilate.

Not only did this concern apply in the times of the Ketav Sofer, but it resonates strongly today. The soul of the Jewish people is at far greater risk than its body; and without a soul, we will lose our direction and identity.

Ketav Sofer emphasizes that the struggle between Yaakov and the ish concludes with the Torah's description of Yaakov limping as the sun rose. (Genesis 32:32) Precisely when the sun is glowing, and the darkness of oppression diminishes, Jacob, the Jew, can spiritually limp and is in spiritual jeopardy.

Of course in our times, we pray that there be no darkness of exile. But in a society of freedom other challenges surface. For example, throughout Jewish

history, whenever the darkness of anti-Semitism prevailed, the marriage of non-Jews to Jews was verboten. In America today we are so free that non-Jews are marrying us in droves.

Hence the challenge for our times: We must re-focus our priorities solely from Jewish defense to Jewish spirituality, to radically re-prioritize communal resources and funding from the physical to the spiritual sphere.

The ish's embrace of Yaakov warns us that while combating anti-Semitism is an important objective, the effort must be part of a far larger goal-the stirring and reawakening of Jewish spiritual consciousness. © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

Adapted by Dov Karoll

The beginning of this week's parasha deals with the meeting of Ya'akov and Esav. The parasha opens with Ya'akov sending messengers to inform of Esav of his return. "Tell my master Esav: So says your servant Ya'akov..." (32:5). The Midrash (Bereishit Rabba 75:11) strongly criticizes Ya'akov for taking a submissive approach to Esav:

"When Ya'akov called Esav 'my master,' God told him: You lowered yourself, and called Esav 'my master' eight times; I will establish eight kings from his descendants before there are any kings from your descendants."

Ya'akov had his father's blessings in addition to God's promise, and as such he should have taken a stronger stand.

Why is it so common for Chazal to criticize the great figures of the Torah, such as the patriarchs and Moshe, among others? The rabbis found this to be critical, for it emphasizes the human element of these great people. It teaches that even our patriarch Ya'akov had weaknesses, and that sometimes he made mistakes. Not everything he did was dictated by divine inspiration. It is precisely in this light that we can learn so much more from the patriarchs as people, given that they were human and not angels.

But even if this criticism is in place, what was Ya'akov thinking? He must have thought that his

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submissiveness was justified and warranted. As the Midrash points out, Ya'akov refers to Esav as "my master" eight times. This could not have been an oversight on Ya'akov's part. Clearly, Ya'akov himself must have seen some importance in taking this approach. What led Ya'akov to defer to Esav in this way?

In order to answer this question, we need to relate to the background of this story in the relationship between Ya'akov and Esav. Why did Ya'akov need to run away in the first place? Why was he so scared in approaching Esav? What did he do that led to Esav's hatred toward him?

Esav's hatred, which led to Ya'akov's flight, and correspondingly to Ya'akov's fear in returning, stemmed from Ya'akov's taking the blessings (chapter 27). While Ya'akov was acting out of maternal deference, and may well have been justified, he seems to have suffered feelings of guilt over this act. What was the blessing that Ya'akov "stole" from Esav? It was not the blessing of spiritual continuity, the appointment of the successor to Avraham and Yitzchak. Ya'akov received that blessing from Yitzchak at the end of that story (28:3-4).

Seforno (27:29 s.v. hevei) offers an explanation that sheds light on our issue. He presents a theory as to Yitzchak's intentions in blessing Esav. Yitzchak understood that the land of Israel was meant for Ya'akov, and he assumed that Ya'akov would be a subject rather than a ruler, so that he would not be as preoccupied with matters of power and other worldly pursuits, enabling him to devote his time to spiritual matters. Yitzchak further assumed that it would be better for Ya'akov to be subservient to his brother Esav than it would be for him to serve other nations. However, given that he knew that the land of Israel was meant exclusively for Ya'akov, he made no mention in this blessing of succession to Avraham's heritage, nor

of the land of Israel. Instead, he mentioned those to Ya'akov later when he blessed him.

What then was the blessing that Ya'akov "stole"? It was a blessing for physical success. In a sense, Yitzchak was right that this blessing really should have gone to Esav. Ya'akov has no interest in "may you rule over your brothers" (27:29). He is interested in the blessing of the succession of Avraham. Therefore, when he comes to Esav in this week's parasha, Ya'akov goes out of his way to make clear that he is interested only in the spiritual blessing he received, and that he does not insist on the physical blessing that was given to him. He communicates this message implicitly by using the terms "my master" and "your servant" repeatedly, emphasizing that he does not see himself as "ruling over his brothers." Ya'akov then makes this notion explicit by his statement, "Please take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough..." (33:11). [*Originally delivered on leil Shabbat, parashat Vayishlach, 5762 (2001).*]

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the rising of the morning star... And he said, Not Jacob shall be your name any more but rather Yisrael, because you have fought with G-d and with men, and You have prevailed" (Genesis 32:25,29).

Who was this mysterious, anonymous assailant who wrestled with Jacob all that long night before his confrontation with brother Esau? Was it a heavenly angel, the spiritual power of Esau, as is suggested by the midrash (based on Daniel 10), or was it G-d Himself, as the verse immediately following the wrestling match would infer, "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, 'because I have seen G-d face to face and my soul has been saved'"(Genesis 32:31)?

If we carefully examine the structure of the Biblical tale in greater detail, I believe the answer will become self-evident; indeed, the anonymous assailant was both of the possibilities outlined above.

Our Torah portion opens with Jacob's preparation for his imminent encounter with his brother Esau after more than two decades of estrangement, a guilt-ridden encounter with a twin sibling who had threatened to kill him because he stole his elder-brother's blessing by his having posed as Esau before their father. Jacob learns that his brother is marching towards him with no less than four-hundred men, a veritable army! He responds with gifts, -- Jacob returns the "blessing" to Esau in the form of cattle, -- preparation for war (if necessary), and prayer. (Genesis 32:4-24).

Chapter 33 details the encounter itself, a remarkably tension-free meeting in which "Esau runs toward (Jacob) and embraces him ['Vayehabkehu' means 'embraces him'; 'Vayeabkehu' would mean 'wrestles with him'], fell on his neck and kissed him, as they both wept" (Genesis 33:4). Between both of these accounts, the anxiety-ridden preparation and the emotion filled rapprochement, are the five verses describing the mystical wrestling match with the anonymous assailant (Genesis 32:25-30). So who was the "man"?

Clearly the anonymous "man" who wrestled with Jacob was the divinely-given and heaven-originated "power of Esau," thereby Biblically confirming the initial prophecy which established the struggle between the twin foetuses in Rebecca's womb as mirroring the universal-eternal battle between the two antithetical forces of spiritual Judea and militant Rome: "There are two nations in your womb, and two peoples who will separate from your innards; nation will struggle against nation, and the elder will serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). The wrestling match mirrors the cosmic tension between these forces. Once the spirit of Jacob emerges triumphant—for Israel is guaranteed to ultimately prevail—the two brothers can play out their temporal meeting in relative ease and equanimity.

But there is another and deeper level to the struggle between these forces. Rome certainly poses a physical, external threat to Judea, as evidenced by the destruction of our Second Temple by Vespasian and Titus, and our consequent dispersion to all four corners of the earth for close to two millennia. On Jacob's ability to emerge triumphant is reflected our return to Zion and Israel's eventual spiritual domination over Rome, when "all the nations will rush to the Temple Mount, for from Zion shall come forth the Torah and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2, Micah 4). Rome and all that it stands for, the militancy of Rome and the Christianity of the Vatican, the Greco-Roman values of beauty and knowledge divorced from absolute truth and morality, poses an equally dangerous threat to Judea from within; assimilation into secularism, materialism, post-modern relativism and anti-Traditionalism can extirpate Judea from its roots in a far more dangerous and total way than any external enemy can ever hope to accomplish.

This too was Jacob's fear as he prepared for his encounter with Esau. After all, hadn't he, the wholehearted dweller in the tents of Torah study, garbed himself in the hunting attire of Esau and utilized the crafty hands of Esau in order to wrest the blessings from his father and outwit his uncle Laban? Was it possible that Jacob would win the external battle against his rival Esau in his father's home, only to find his very self overtaken by Esau in personality and activity until the voice of Jacob would be completely silenced and all that would be left of the younger son of

Isaac and Rebecca would be another incarnation of Esau?!

The anonymous wrestling match, where "Jacob remains alone," is therefore also an external struggle within Jacob to retain his own soul, to reclaim his pristine persona. And whenever one struggles to reclaim his true self, he is struggling with and for G-d, that image of the Divine which informs each of us and gives us our truest essence. Jacob had embraced Esau, or Esau-ism, for too long a time; and two individuals locked together may be embracing, may be wrestling, and may be struggling to become free of an interlocking relationship which could well turn into a kiss of death.

Jacob's success in returning home to his original self is also his success in re-discovering his G-d and the G-d of his fathers. During that fateful and faithful night, Jacob met the power of Esau as well as the face of G-d—the forces of Rome as well as his own Divine Image. And only after successfully defeating both the external and internal Esau, could he establish an altar which he called, "G-d, Lord of Yisrael," the G-d who emerged triumphant. © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Ya'akov traveled to Succos, and he built a house for himself, and for his animals he made protective booths; therefore the name of that place was called 'Succos' (Beraishis 33:17). The implication is that the name of the town was based on what was done for the animals, and not on what was built for their (human) owners. As some of the commentators ask, wouldn't it have been inappropriate for Ya'akov to put the needs of the animals above his own needs? (See Rashi on Bamidbar 32:16, where the Tribes of Reuvein and Gad were taken to task for doing just that.) Why, then, was the town named "Succos" for the animals?

Rashi (based on Megillah 17a and Beraishis Rabbah 78:16) tells us that Ya'akov and his family stayed in Succos for 18 months. This length of time is understood from the wording of the verse; first it says "booths," which are less protective and therefore lived in during the summer months, then a "house" which provides the full protection needed for the winter, and then once again "booths," indicating a second summer season- for a total of 18 months. However, if the booths were built for the animals (as the verse indicates), it would seem that they would live in them for their entire stay there. While people might have gone out to summer homes as it got warmer, the animals weren't brought into the house when it got cold. If they were, the purpose of the booths wouldn't have been for the animals, but because of the weather (and the verse should have said "and he made booths for the warmer

months" or "and he built a house for when it got cold"). Besides, if he needed to build a house for the colder months, then by the next place they stayed, where it was about to be winter (following the second summer season), he should have also built a house. Yet, even though he bought the land outside of Shechem (and would have stayed there for a while had he not been forced to leave because of what transpired there), he "pitched his tent" (33:19) rather than building a house! It would therefore seem then that the house was not built in Succos just for the cold (or because of the cold), and the succos (booths) weren't meant to protect the animals only in the summer!

When the Talmud goes through the years of Ya'akov's absence from his parents (Megillah 17a), the time he spent on the way back from Charan (18 months in Succos and 6 months in Bais El) are counted as 2 of the 22 years he would be punished with Yosef's absence. 14 of those years were spent working for his wives, and 6 were for his own livelihood (see 31:41). 6 months were spent on Mt. Moriah (Bais El- bringing offerings, see B.R.), the future location of the Temple(s), the place where he had his heavenly dream before going to Charan, and the place where his grandfather had been willing to offer his son (Ya'akov's father). Even though none of those things compare with (14 years of non-stop) learning Torah, and they therefore counted towards the years of not honoring his parents, we can still understand why Ya'akov took the time to do them. The 18 months at Succos, however, seem to be just a "rest stop," with no other purpose. Had Ya'akov not lived there for the year and a half, but gone straight home instead, he would have likely been able to see his mother again before she died (see Rashi on 35:8). Why did Ya'akov think it was so important that he stay in Succos for any length of time, even if it meant not seeing his parents for that much longer?

The Malbim, contrasting the house that Ya'akov built for himself with the booths he built for his animals, writes the following: "For himself he built a permanent structure in order to dwell there and serve G-d, but for his cattle and his possessions he only made temporary booths, because the dealings with cattle and [other] possessions were, for him, secondary and temporary-like a booth which is a temporary dwelling." If the main reason why he built a house for himself and booths for his animals was because of the level of importance he placed on each, we may have a way of answering our above questions.

For the past 6 years Ya'akov had been toiling for the sole purpose of accumulating possessions. True, they would be necessary to continue his holy work, but they were nevertheless years spent with a significant amount of time dealing with "gashmiyus," physicality. His children had seen this for most of their lives (a little less than half for Reuvein), as well as witnessing the lavish gifts that Ya'akov had sent to Eisav. Ya'akov may have felt that before crossing the

Jordan River into the Holy Land he needed to refocus his time to portray the primary nature of "ruchniyus," spirituality. He therefore stayed in one place for an extended period of time and concentrated on serving G-d. This was the "house" that he built, and he purposely contrasted the "permanence" of nourishing the soul over the "transience" of feeding the body (as represented by the temporary housing built for the animals).

The Talmud had to account for the 2 years after Ya'akov left Charan before he returned to Yitzchok. Since people normally go from their house to their summer "booth" when the weather becomes warmer, and the Torah indicates two "sessions" or seasons of "booths" (using the word Succos twice- besides the necessity of giving the name of the town), it was understood that the time spent in Succos was the equivalent of two summers and one winter. Even though the animals were in fact kept in their booths year-round, the Torah is hinting at the length of time spent there, and the purpose for spending the time there. And because the purpose was precisely to emphasize the temporary nature of physical possessions, the place was called "Succos," impermanence. It was only after having spent time de-emphasizing material objects that Ya'akov felt he could cross into (what would become) the Land of Israel and purchase property there.

May we all be worthy of re-establishing a permanent residence there as well. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck him in the socket of his hip; so Jacob's hip socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him. (Breishis 32:25)... The sun shone for him as he passed Penuel and he was limping on his hip. (Breishis 32:33)

The sun shone for him: For whom doesn't it shine? For him it shone to heal him but for others it shone for the light. (Midrash)

The question stands. "For whom does the sun not shine?" Better yet, "For whom does the sun shine?"

In his introduction to the Talmud, the Rambam explains how to approach a Talmudic homily. The example he chooses is from Tractate Brochos 8A, "The Holy One Blessed be He has nothing in this world but the four cubits of Jewish Law." Can it be true? "What about before the giving of the Torah? What about other sciences and branches of knowledge?" He explains that the world, like any object of human craft is made purposefully, and therefore serves some meaningful end. The human mind sits atop the peak of the pyramid of life. The prime function of the mind is not merely to

meet material means but "to form accurate abstract concepts and to know realities as they are." Although the world requires practical functions, still the whole of creation serves or enables those whose efforts lead them to actualize their uniquely human or G-dly potential. Therefore some giant building may find its fulfillment and purpose when even after hundreds of years that man for whom the world was made worthy came to rest in its shade.

Describing the human condition, Moshe Chaim Luzatto writes in the Path of the Just, "The Holy One Blessed be He has put man in a place where the factors which draw him further from the Blessed One are many... Resultantly, man is in truth placed in the midst of a raging battle... If he is valorous and victorious on all sides, he will be the "Whole Man", who will succeed in uniting himself with his Creator, and he will leave the corridor to enter the palace, to bask in the glow of the light of life. To the extent that he has subdued his evil inclination and his desires, and withdrawn from those factors which draw him further from the good, and exerted himself to become united with it, to that extent he will attain it and rejoice in it."

It is an established principle that the patriarchs, as it were, walked in wet cement. What they experienced made a lasting impression. Jacob's struggle all night was not just his own. It was a foreshadowing of what would be over the course of a protracted exile. As morning approached the battle intensified. Jacob is injured but he continues to continue. He makes it; he survives till the break of dawn.

About this subject of the sun shining for Jacob, the Otper Rav wrote, "Also, just as when Israel is in exile, "limping on his hip", they are guaranteed that the sun will shine for them foreboding success in the future." The Klausenberger Rebbe is quoted as having said, "The biggest miracle is the one that we, the survivors of the Holocaust, after all we witnessed and lived through, still have faith in the Almighty G-d, may His name be blessed. This, my friends, is the miracle of miracles, the greatest miracle ever to have taken place." An uncle of my wife, that survived seven concentration camps, said at his grandson's Bar Mitzvah about the experience of World War II, "We lost all the battles but we won the war."

So it is that Jacob and the Children of Israel have been embattled for centuries. Although injured so often we have managed to limp toward the goal-line of human history graced with a heavenly spotlight especially trained upon our struggles within the four cubits we occupy. © 2004 Rabbi L. Lam & www.torah.org

RABBI HERSCHEL SCHACHTER

National Pride

In the days of Yehoshua, Eretz Yisroel was divided among the shevatim. With the exception of shevet

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

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

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

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

G-d considers "arrogance" to be an abominable trait. But Binyamin who was born in Eretz Yisroel was a "sabara", and he had "national pride." This "national pride" was what was needed to have the mizbeach built in his section. Arrogance pushes one away from G-d; but a healthy sense of independence and national pride brings one closer to G-d. The individual who is subservient to other human beings can not fully be subservient to G-d.

Only the Jews who live in Eretz Yisroel have the mitzvah of aliyah laregel; to come closer to G-d. The

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

Binyamin, of course, must be careful that his "national pride" not lead to the abomination of "arrogance". If the sabra's independence and "national pride" will bring him closer to Hashem, there will be no room to develop any arrogance. The closer one comes to Hashem, the more humble he will become. © 2004 Rabbi H.Schachter & The TorahWeb Foundation

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

Around the Shabbos Table

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

The Torah tells us that Yaacov was confronted by an angel, who was Esau's spiritual counterpart. Yaacov clung tenaciously to HaShem and prevailed. However, in the midst of the struggle the angel injured Yaacov in the hip. Subsequently, the angel blessed Yaacov (Bereishis 32:29): No longer will it be said that your name is Yaacov, but Yisrael [will be your name] for you have striven with the Divine and you have overcome.

Even though the angel changed Yaacov's name to Yisrael, nevertheless, the Torah in many locations still refers to him as Yaacov. In contradistinction, the Talmud (Brachos 13a) teaches that after HaShem changed Avram's name to Avraham, his name remained forever Avraham—and it is forbidden to call him Avram. Therefore, the question arises: why is Yaacov's change in name not irreversible?

Our Sages (Nedarim 32b) teach that the name Avram has a numerical value of 243 -- signifying that HaShem initially gave Avraham mastery of 243 limbs of the body. After circumcision he was given mastery over all 248 limbs. Thus the name Avraham has a numerical value of 248 -- meaning that he was a total master over himself. HaShem blessed him so that the negative impulse would be powerless against him—forever.

On the other hand, the incident of Yaacov's battle with the angel foreshadows that the descendants of Esau will desire to uproot Klal Yisrael throughout the ages. In addition, the injury that Yaacov sustained signifies that all the righteous descendants of Yaacov will be endangered in each generation. Therefore, although Yisrael prevailed over the guardian angel of Esau, his victory did not mark the indefinite defeat of the destructive forces. Hence, Yaacov's change of name to

Yisrael is not permanent, just as his victory was temporary.

The incident of Yaacov and the angel conveys the message: no matter how many times we are endangered we can triumph, just as Yaacov did. Moreover, the blessings and healing that Yaacov ultimately received signify the great light that will shine on us at the time of our redemption—when the dominance of Yisrael will be forever.

Implement: Look within and confirm your inner strength—the power of Yisrael—to prevail. [Based on the Etz Prei of the Steipler]

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

When Yaacov rebukes Shimon and Levi for their actions in Shechem, he says, "Shimon and Levi are brothers, they use their weapons for their benefit" [Bereishit 49:5]. What is he referring to? The commentators disagree whether the action taken by Shimon and Levi, killing the inhabitants of Shechem, was justified or not (see the Ramban). In any case, the Torah describes their actions in Shechem in two stages. First, it is written, "And on the third day, when they (the people of Shechem) were in pain, the two sons of Yaacov, Shimon and Levi, Dina's brothers, each took a sword and came upon the city in safety, and they killed every male. They killed Chamor and his son Shechem by the sword, and they took Dina from Shechem's house and left." [34:25-26]. At this point, the affair seems to have ended, since Yaacov's sons left the scene and finished their mission. However, this is immediately followed by the second stage: "The sons of Yaacov went among the dead and took booty from the city that had defiled their sister. They took their sheep and cattle, and their donkeys, and what was in the city and what was in the field. They took all of their wealth and their children and women, and they took whatever was in the home." [34:27-29]. Why is the taking of booty described as a separate operation?

Evidently, the aim of the Torah is to point out that looting the city was not connected to rescuing Dina. This would seem to be what made Yaacov angry. "You have caused me trouble, shaming me in front of the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Prizi. And I am few in number, they will gather about me and strike me, and I and my house will be destroyed." [34:30]. Perhaps Yaacov feared that the taking of booty would lead to G-d's anger and therefore to a danger of being defeated by the inhabitants of the land. This is what happened much later, when one of the men took booty from a city that was attacked by Bnei Yisrael. Here is what Yehoshua said to Achan, who took booty from the city of Jericho: "You have caused us trouble! Let G-d make trouble for you today." [Yehoshua 7:25]. And that is why Yaacov emphasizes before his death,

"Shimon and Levi are brothers, they use their weapons for their benefit."

The basic idea is that when such a serious action as destroying an entire city by the sword is undertaken, it is especially important to be very careful and avoid taking from the spoils. The best example of this principle is the law of a city of idol worship, where it is explicitly prohibited to take anything. In that case, the Torah explains the law. "Let nothing become attached to your hand from the banned items, so that G-d will return from his anger and have pity on you and make you multiply, as He promised your forefathers" [Devarim 13:18]. As the Natziv explains, "the affair of a city of idol worship can lead to... one who kills the guilty people becoming cruel in nature... Therefore, the Torah insists that one who is involved derives no direct benefit from the booty, and G-d will decrease His anger. And He will give you the ability to feel the trait of mercy." There are indeed cases when destroying an entire city might be justified, but it is vital in such cases that the action be performed for holy reasons, without any personal benefit. Only in this way will the person's soul not suffer any damage, and G-d "will have pity on you."

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

Our parsha tells of Jacob's reunion with his brother Esau after a 22 year interval. Jacob had fled from Esau 22 years earlier because of Esau's threat to kill him. At this reunion Jacob feared that Esau, if he still harbored his anger, would kill Jacob and wipe out his entire family. The encounter of the two brothers produced a surprise ending.

The following Rashi comments are amazing, in light of current events and the rise of anti-Semitism in the world. "And Esau ran towards him (Jacob) and he embraced him and fell upon his neck and he kissed him and they cried." (Genesis 33:4)

"And he embraced him"—RASHI: "His (Esau's) mercy was aroused when he saw him (Jacob) bowing all these bows."

And he kissed him—RASHI: There are dots on it [this word] and there is a disagreement [among the Sages] about this matter. Some explain the dots to tell us that Esau didn't kiss him with his whole heart. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai explains it otherwise: It is a given law—it is known that Esau hates Jacob. But at this time his mercy was aroused and he kissed him with all his whole heart. Dots written on letters can mean we are to disregard the letters with dots above them and read the word as if those letters weren't there. In this case since every letter in the word "and he kissed him" has a dot on it, it is as if the whole word is absent. Thus Rashi says he didn't really kiss him— for he did so without a true feeling.

Rabbi Shimon has a strange comment here. What would you ask? A Question: What does Rabbi

Shimon mean when he says "It is a law that Esau hates Jacob"? What kind of "law" is this? That's a strange term to use. He could say Esau (the gentiles) hate the Jews. But to call this a law is quite unusual. And if is a "law" why is this case an exception?

It is not difficult to see what question Rashi is responding to. Esau was out to kill Jacob and all of a sudden (after 22 years) he runs to embrace and kiss him. "Methinks he doth protest too much."

It is for this reason that Rashi tries to understand Esau's motivation. But back to our question: What did Rabbi Shimon mean when he says "It is a law"?

An Answer: There are laws of countries and laws of nature. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is saying something very profound. Esau's hatred of Israel—Gentile anti-Semitism, is akin to a law of nature. It is immutable. It is everlasting. It need not be rational to be. It just is. Each generation of Jews has experienced anti-Semitism in one form or another for over three thousand years. Each generation tries to understand why the nations of the world have an antipathy for Jews. Once it is explained as being due to the Jews being rich (as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion claimed— "Jews control the powers in the whole world"); sometimes it is because Jews are poor and always begging. Sometimes it's because they are materialistic capitalists; sometimes because they are revolutionary communists. Sometimes because they are backward and uncouth; sometimes because they are too cultured and high society. Sometimes because they are parasites in foreign lands and have no country of their own; sometimes because they do have a country of their own. On and on it goes.

We live in the midst of this situation right now. The phenomenon of anti-Semitism defies any rational attempt to explain it. It is not rational just as any law of nature is not rational. It just is. But if it is an immutable law, why then did Esau kiss Jacob with all his heart this time? Hint: See the previous Rashi comment.

An Answer: Rashi had said before that Esau's mercy was aroused when he saw Jacob bow down to him so obsequiously. That is the explanation! When Israel prostrates itself before Esau, when he surrenders all claim to independence, all claim to self-hood, then Esau is truly a friend of Israel! That's what happened here. Jacob flowered Esau with servile prostrations. Esau then felt warm mercy, true feelings of "brotherhood" for his poor subservient sibling.

The Sages criticize Jacob for being so servile to this brother with murderous intentions.

Anti-Semitism has once again risen its ugly and poisonous head. The "law" of human nature is still with us. We must learn to perceive its actuality and not think it's a passing fad. We must learn to live with it and learn to fight it.

The Netziv (Naftali Tzvi Berlin—late 19th century) points out that all the verbs in this verse are in

the first person and refer to Esau. "He ran, he embraced him; he fell upon his neck, he kissed him and they cried." All the verbs are in the first person, except the last one "they cried." Both Jacob and Esau cried, says the Netziv, because the day will come when Esau will truly embrace his brother Jacob in honest unadulterated compassion, then both brothers will cry in happiness. That day, hopefully not too far off, is the Messianic day. May we all live to see it! © 2004 aish.org & Dr. A. Bonchek

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Harried and pursued, faced with a seemingly implacable foe, Yakov returns to the Land of Israel. He will suffer a crippling injury in his encounter with the angel and alter ego of Eisav. He will endure shame and tremendous sadness when the local chieftain of the tribe that inhabits the city of Shechem rapes his daughter Dena. Yakov disowns the actions of Shimon and Levi when they exact revenge on Shechem for dishonoring their sister and he is forced to separate himself from his children, creating a lasting tension in his family. His beloved wife, Rachel, dies in childbirth while delivering Yakov's twelfth son, Binyamin. All in all, the parsha is certainly not a happy one in describing Yakov's life and his return to the Land of Israel. It seems that he was perhaps better off staying in the house of Lavan, in the exile of Aram Naharayim, rather than attempting to reestablish himself in the Land of Israel. Yet, he returns home, because the Lord told him to do so. And eventually he is able to overcome all of the difficulties that befell him on his return to his homeland. Eisav leaves him for greener pastures, he is healed from his crippling injury, the incident of Shechem finally passes after wars and struggles with the local population, and Yakov establishes his home in the Land of Israel. His heart is never healed from the death of Rachel and the tension in the family between he and the brothers, as well as between the brothers themselves is subdued but present. Returning home to the Land of Israel was a great challenge for Yakov, fraught with problems, dangers and tragedy. Yet, he is happy to be home for he knows that there is where God wishes him to be.

The events of the fathers illuminate the lives of their descendants. Over the past two centuries the children of Yakov have returned home to the Land of Israel. They have encountered wars, enmity, tragedy and enormous difficulties. The adventure of this later return has caused enormous rifts within the Jewish world itself. The brothers of Israel do not see eye to eye regarding its significance and direction. The struggles have been mighty and continue to be daunting. Yet somehow, God has brought together over five million Jews into their homeland where they have prospered and built a first world country and nation. The

continuing, relentless war against the Jews mounted by the Arabs has crippled us in many ways, as has the continually growing list of tragic casualties. Yet, we hope to emulate our father Jacob and return home whole in spirit, whole in body and mind, whole in wealth and prosperity. This is no small order but since Yakov accomplished it so will we be able to do so as well. The dictum of the rabbis that the events of the fathers are the harbingers of the circumstances of their descendants has been proven true over and over again throughout Jewish history. So we should be confident of an eventual positive outcome to our generation's difficulties as well. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

We read in this week's parashah of Yaakov's return from his exile in Charan. The Torah relates (33:18), "Yaakov arrived intact at the city of Shechem." Rashi explains: "Intact in body, for his limp was healed; intact with his wealth, despite having given Esav a large gift; intact with his Torah learning, for he did not forget it during his years in Lavan's house."

R' Menachem Mendel Schneerson z"l (1902-1994; the Lubavitcher Rebbe) explains that Yaakov's exile and return foreshadow three aspects our own exile and future return. First, Yaakov returned intact in body. An important part of our exile is our self-sacrifice for G-d, and our afflictions in exile result from Hashem's putting us to a test in order to arouse that power of self-sacrifice. We are assured, however, that we will return from exile intact with our bodies. Indeed, once the Jewish people accomplish their divine service in exile, all their afflictions will become completely nullified, for in truth, they were never real—they were nothing but a test.

Second, Yaakov returned intact with his wealth. While in exile, the Jew is expected to descend from his intrinsically holy level and don mundane garments in order to transform the world and elevate it with him. In doing so, the Jew makes an investment in the world—himself. However, this descent is not permanent, and the Jew is assured that he will return to his former "wealth."

Finally, Yaakov returned intact with his Torah learning. One might fear that making the descent just referred to will cause him to forfeit whatever spiritual accomplishments he has achieved. However, we are assured that this will not occur. (The Chassidic Dimension p. 38, based on Likkutei Sichos Vol. XV, p. 265) © 2000 Rabbi S. Katz & www.torah.org