

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Could Ya'akov's (Jacob) altercation with a mysterious man have been the beginning of a process of repentance for having taken the blessings of his brother Esau?

Maimonides notes that an essential element of repentance is acknowledgment of the wrongdoing and a deep sense of regret. (hakarot ha-het, haratah). The mysterious man may have been Ya'akov himself, his inner conscience. He may have asked himself, "What is my name?" (Genesis 32:28) In declaring that his true identity was Ya'akov, which means deception, he was acknowledging that he had blundered in tricking his brother and taking the blessings misleadingly.

As the narrative unfolds, Ya'akov is told he would be given another name – Yisrael (Israel). Nachum Sarna points out that the name Yisrael contains the root y-sh-r, meaning straight. Ya'akov, the deceiver, has transformed to Yisrael, one who resolved to be straight and up front with those around him.

Interestingly, Ya'akov calls the name of the place where the struggle occurred Peniel, literally meaning the face of G-d. (Genesis 32:31) In calling the name Peniel, Ya'akov may be resolving to openly face others much as he openly saw G-d. Here, Ya'akov becomes resolute to change his ways from deception to openness and honesty.

In this way, Ya'akov was fulfilling yet another step in the teshuvah process; the step of resolving not to make the same mistake again (kabbalah). Never again would he be deceptive (Ya'akov); he would forever change his ways by being up front (Yisrael) and open (Peniel).

Nechama Leibovitz clinches the idea that this altercation had something to do with Ya'akov's repentance. She notes that the angel, at this point, merely announced that Ya'akov would eventually be given another name. The name wasn't changed right there. This is because, before full teshuva takes place, sins committed against one's fellow person require asking forgiveness of the aggrieved party.

Before Ya'akov could be given an additional name he had to ask forgiveness of his brother. In the words of Nechama Leibovitz; "Only after he had said to Esau: 'Take I pray thee my blessing' (Genesis 33:11) and after his brother had accepted the blessing could

the Almighty reveal Himself to him and announce the fulfillment of the promise (of his new name) made by the angel." (Genesis 35:10) Acknowledgment and regret for the past requires a detailed description of what one had done wrong, like when Ya'akov declared emphatically that he was Ya'akov—a deceiver.

All of us have made plenty of mistakes and teshuvah is a divine gift from G-d, allowing us to right our wrongs. It is a complex psychological process and Ya'akov shows the way it is done. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

In the late 70's, both New York football teams weren't that good. Even though the Giants had a solid defense, it was more than counterbalanced by their pitiful offense. And despite having a potent offense, the porous Jets defense prevented them from having winning seasons. A young teenager at the time, I remember thinking how awesome a team it would be if they could combine the Jets offense with the Giants defense.

Obviously, if any two teams were combined, thereby having twice as many draft picks and other resources, that team would have a decided advantage over every other "single" team. Well, imagine what could have been accomplished had Eisav and Yaakov been on the same team, rather than adversaries.

"Just as [G-d's] name rested on Yaakov, so was it (originally) appropriate that it should rest on Eisav" (Midrash Zuta Shir Hashirim 1:13). The Midrash then goes on to describe what would have happened had Eisav actually fulfilled his potential, and the Nation of Israel descended from both brothers: "Eisav would have had kings descend from him, and Yaakov would have had Priests come from him. The first blessings (the ones that Yaakov "took" from Eisav) were meant for Eisav, and the latter ones (given before Yaakov fled, 28:3-4) for Yaakov. Leah and Zilpah were meant [to be married to] Eisav and Rachel and Bilhah were meant for Yaakov. [But] all of these presents were taken from [Eisav]. He sold the birthright to Yaakov, [and] he removed the yoke of heaven from upon him[self]. The Name was [therefore] taken [from Eisav] and rested on Yaakov twofold."

The last 43 verses of our Parasha are devoted to Eisav, his descendents, and the leaders that came

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

from him, including the kings that ruled “before any king ruled over the Children of Israel” (Beraishis 36:31). Had Eisav been worthy, the talents of these leaders would have been put towards building a society and civilization conducive to spiritual growth. Those that built the Roman Empire would have built the Torah Empire (including arenas for the Siyumim!). The majesty of the architecture of the great churches applied to Great Synagogues, and the efficiency of Third Reich used to build a top-notch infrastructure. Much of the effort spent combating anti-Semitism throughout history could have been directed towards further growth rather than preventing erosion. Just as a school board provides the resources for the educators to educate, Eisav (and the “Tribes” that came from him) would have provided the resources that allowed Yaakov (and his “Tribes”) to continue “sitting in tents” studying Torah (or is that “studying Torah intensely?”) and providing the spiritual resources for the (combined) nation.

However, because of Eisav’s wickedness (and through Yaakov’s purchasing the birthright and taking both blessings), all 12 Tribes came from Yaakov alone. What a tremendous loss of potential. Nevertheless, under the circumstances, having everything fall onto Yaakov is a better alternative than the undermining of the mission that would have occurred had Eisav stayed on as our “partner.”

This context may explain the conversation between Yaakov and the angel (identified by our Sages as the angel of Eisav) after they wrestled. Yaakov insisted that the angel bless him (32:27), which he eventually did (32:30). Before doing so, though, Yaakov is informed that his name will become “Yisroel” (Israel), “for you have shown leadership abilities with G-d and with people and have succeeded” (32:29). Had Eisav been one of the nation’s forefathers, Yaakov couldn’t have been called “Yisroel.” Perhaps Yitzchok would have been, since all of his children could then accurately be called the “B’nai Yisroel” (Children of Israel). Once Eisav became disqualified, this honor was given to Yaakov. Acknowledging that this was the case, the angel tells Yaakov that his name will be Yisroel, admitting that Eisav has no claim to the blessings originally intended for him, as he will not be part of the Nation of Israel.

Instead, it is appropriate that Yaakov got both blessings, the one for material success designed for the providers of the material resources and the one for spiritual growth, as “he has succeeded with regard to spiritual matters and with the (mundane) needs of people.” Both roles, including the role originally intended for Eisav, are accepted by the angel as being fulfilled by Yisroel, nee Yaakov. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this weeks parsha, our father Yaakov, fresh from his successful escape from Lavan, prepares to encounter his brother and sworn enemy, Eisav. He sends malachim to deal with Eisav before he will actually meet with him face to face. The word malachim signifies two different meanings. One is that it means agents, messengers, human beings who were sent on a particular mission to do Yaakovs bidding. The other meaning is that the world malachim signifies angels, supernatural messengers of G-d who were sent to Yaakov to help him in his fateful encounter with his brother. Rashi cites both possible interpretations in his commentary. When Rashi does so, he is teaching us that both interpretations are correct at differing levels of understanding the verse involved. The message here is that the encounter with Eisav, in order to be successful from Yaakovs vantage point and situation, has to have both human and supernatural help. Eisav is a formidable foe, physically, militarily, culturally and intellectually speaking. He cannot be ignored nor wished away. He has accompanied us from the time of Yaakov till this very day. At times he threatens our very existence and at times he appears to have a more benevolent attitude towards us. Yet at all times he is there, hovering over and around us, and he has never relinquished any of his demands upon us to either convert, assimilate or just plain disappear. While it is Yishmael that currently occupies the bulk of our attention, it would be foolish of us to ignore the continuing presence of Eisav in our world and affairs.

Yaakovs strategy is to employ both possibilities of malachim in his defense. He prepares himself for soothing Eisav by gifts and wealth, pointing out to Eisav that it is beneficial to him to have Yaakov around and being productive. He also strengthens himself spiritually in prayer and in appeal to G-d to deliver him from Eisav. And finally as a last resort he is prepared to fight Eisav with his own weapons, the sword and war. Two of these strategies gifts to Eisav and war against Eisav require human endeavor, talent and sacrifice. They represent the interpretation of malachim as being human agents and messengers. The third strategy, prayer and reliance upon heavenly intervention to thwart Eisavs evil designs, follows the idea that Yaakovs malachim were heavenly, supernatural creatures. In the long history of our encounter with

Eisav we have always relied upon both interpretations of malachim. Neither interpretation by itself will suffice to defeat Eisav. Without human endeavor and sacrifice, heavenly aid is often denied or diminished. According to the labor is the reward. But it is foolish to believe that a small and beleaguered people alone can weather all storms and defeat Eisav's intentions. Without the Lords help, in vain do we attempt to build our national home. Thus the double meaning of malachim in this weeks parsha has great relevance to our situation and ourselves. © 2005 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.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

As Jacob's family gets ready to meet Esau, Jacob arranges them in backward priority—maidservants first, then Leah then Rachel. So that if, G-d forbid, Esau attacks them, the most beloved will be spared because they will be further back in line. Then the Torah says: "He placed the maidservants and their children first, Leah and her children later (in Hebrew 'acharonim') and Rachel and Joseph last ('acharonim')." (Genesis 28:22)

"And Leah and her children later ('acharonim')"—RASHI: "The very last is the most beloved."

This is a famous Rashi quote. In Hebrew it is: "Acharon, acharon, chaviv." But this comment is puzzling. It seems to say that Leah is the most beloved, whereas we know that Rachel was Jacob's most beloved wife. Why then does Rashi say, in reference to Leah, 'the very last is the most beloved'? And if you will say that the very last in this line is Rachel and thus she is the most beloved, then I ask why does Rashi make his comment on the words "And Leah and her children later"? He should have made it on the words "And Rachel and Joseph last."

An Answer: It is true that the very last is the most beloved. It is also true that Rachel was the very last. It is also true that she was the most beloved to Jacob.

And while all this is true, nevertheless Rashi did not make his comment about Rachel. The reason is that Rashi was bothered by something in this verse. Can you see what that is?

An Answer: Rashi is bothered by the word "acharonim" after Leah's name. Leah was not last, so why does the Torah say that Leah and her children were also 'acharonim'?

Rashi's answer is that the word 'acharonim' does not necessarily mean 'last'; it can also mean 'latter.' It is a relative term. Leah was 'last' vis a vis the maidservants who came before her. On the other hand,

she was not 'last' vis a vis Rachel, who came after her. And the reason Rashi comments only on Leah, and not on Rachel, where the same word 'acharonim' appears, is that the word 'acharonim' is apparently problematic only when placed in reference to her, since she wasn't last. But when the Torah says that Rachel and Joseph were 'acharonim' last, that presents no problem, because in fact they were the last in line.

It is important to take notice of this. Rashi, in his commentary, never makes a comment just in order to teach us some wisdom, however true it may be (as in the saying 'acharon, acharon, chaviv'). He comments only when there is something apparently problematic in the Torah's words. Then he may use a wise saying to explain away the problem, as he does in our verse.

© 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“And they journeyed, and the fear of Elochim was on the surrounding cities and they did not pursue the Children of Jacob.” (Breishis 35:5)

The Children of Jacob are new settlers in the Land of Canaan. Shimon and Levi destroy an entire city to defend the honor of their sister Dina and miraculously they are not attacked by their neighbors. They are intimidated, not by their military might but by the fear of G-d! How did that happen? How did they dodge that bullet? We don't need too much guess work for this one. It's actually a pretty basic concept with a profoundly practical application.

A few years ago, I was getting ready to take a three week trip to Israel in January in the middle of the winter season. For years I had been going during the summer. I was used to taking light clothing. I knew I might need a sweater, but my wife insisted I take winter boots. I refused! I reasoned, "Who needs to carry those clunky things around? There's only so much room in my suitcase. I know it's the rainy season. What use do I have for boots?" So I didn't pack them!

The first week I was there, Jerusalem was hit for the first time in many decades with eighteen inches of snow. The city was paralyzed and it was beautiful beyond words but everyone was ill-prepared and under-equipped for the reality on the ground. As it turned out, my wife, bless her soul, without my knowing had tucked my fur-lined rubber insulated winter boots into a side pocket of my suitcase. My feet remained dry and warm and I was extremely grateful for her active concern and foresight!

The Torah records that when Avraham first set out on his journey, "...And they went out to go to the Land of Canaan and they came to the Land of Canaan, and Avram traversed until the place of Shechem to Alon Moreh." (Breishis 12:5-6) Rashi comments on why he had zeroed in on that place: "To pray for the Children of Jacob when they would come to battle in

Shechem". Amazingly, Avraham did not even have any children at that point. All he had was a pocket full of promises, albeit from The Almighty. Yet, he intuitively future needs and prays for their welfare before the moment of emergency. From this practice of Avraham the Talmud Sanhedrin teaches, "A person should always pray before problems arise. For had it not been that Avraham had prayed prior to the problem, between Beit El and Ai, no survivors or remnants of Israel would remain." The Jewish Nation confronted 36 casualties in the city of Ai but who knows how much worse the losses might have been had they not had the protection of Avraham's prayers in advance. The same was true with Shechem!

Two practical points emerge from this. The Talmud says, "A person should always cry for the future and gratefully acknowledge the past!" 1) Whatever success or survival we enjoy, as a nation or as individuals, is most probably due to the protective prayers of prior generations. It is likely not in the insufficient merit of our own goodness that the malevolent machinations of our numerous enemies are more often than not frustrated. 2) We as parents of future generations have a duty to pray for the health, welfare, and spiritual success of our children and grandchildren born and not yet... After all this is what Avraham, our common father, had done. That's what makes him an Av—a father.

The caring parent prepares and packs away for the future that which is needed for his children to find safety in world of unforeseen danger. So too the loving father casts a blanket of prayer to cover his sleeping children, shielding them from the cold winter night of exile, in ways they could never know, and that has always been the job of the av! © 2005 Rabbi L. Lam and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In the Torah portion of Vayetztei, we read about the Almighty's promise to Yaacov when he left on his journey. "I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go, and I will return you to this land." [Bereishit 28:15]. We also read Yaacov's responding vow, slightly different: "If G-d will be with me, and He will protect me on this path where I am going... And I will return in peace to my father's house... Then G-d will be my divine spirit, and this stone that I set aside as a monument will be a House of G-d..." [28:20-22]. Yaacov does not promise to set up a monument when he returns to the land but when he returns to "my father's house." This vow remains with Yaacov during the years he spends in Lavan's house, including the moment when he quotes G-d's message to his wives: "I am the G-d of Beit El, where you set up a monument and

where you made a vow to me. Now rise up and leave this land and return to your birthplace." [31:13].

However, surprisingly, we see in this week's Torah portion that Yaacov did not seem to be in any great hurry to return to his father's house. After reaching an agreement with Eisav, he first settled in Succot and then moved close to Shechem, where he even bought a plot of land. Later on, he pitched his tent close to Migdal Eider (35:21).

Perhaps this is the explanation for Yaacov's many problems. The affair of Dina and the consequent difficult relations with the surrounding nations might not have happened if Yaacov had hurried back to his father's house. After the affair of Shechem, the Almighty even explicitly told Yaacov to hurry. "Ascend to Beit El and remain there, and build an altar to G-d, who was revealed to you when you were fleeing from your brother Eisav" [35:1]. Only then did Yaacov finally fulfill his vow. "And Yaacov built a monument in the place where He spoke to him, a monument of stone, and he poured a libation on it and he poured oil on it" [35:14]. (This is similar to what he did the first time, see 28:18.) Yaacov evidently understood that even though he had not yet reached his father's house he was obligated to fulfill his vow, since the delay in going home was his fault, while the Almighty had fulfilled His part of the bargain. In view of these events, the question asked above becomes even stronger: Why didn't Yaacov hurry home?

The answer to this question may be that Yaacov was in fact afraid to return home. When his parents sent him to Lavan's house, his mother told him to remain until "I will send for you and bring you back from there" [27:45]. Yitzchak, when he blessed Yaacov with Avraham's blessing, did not mention the possibility of Yaacov's returning home at all (28:1-4). And now, years had gone by, and Yaacov had not received any message from his mother (could it be that she had died in the meantime?), and certainly not from his father. Thus, it is possible that Yaacov did not have the courage to return to Yitzchak, whom he had deceived in the affair of the blessings.

What finally caused Yaacov to return to Yitzchak? The Torah implies that it was the affair of Reuven and Bilhah. Yaacov suddenly understood that the distance from his father's house had exacted a great price in terms of the spiritual development of his children. As soon as Yaacov heard about the incident, he made his final decision. "Yaacov joined his father Yitzchak at Mamrei, in Kiryat Arba, Chevron, where Avraham and Yitzchak lived" [35:27].

Yaacov and Eisav

by Rabbi Eliyahu Zini, Or Vishua Hesder Yeshiva, Haifa

Anybody who has a feeling for the fact that the Torah is the word of G-d understands immediately that the meeting between Yaacov and Eisav is far removed

from a simple encounter between two brothers from different spiritual worlds. Rather, it is a meeting between two different cultures, an event that ends in a clash between them. One who has a feeling for the Torah understands very well why our sages moved the images of the brothers from the present world and placed them in a more appropriate place, on a spiritual-metaphysical plane. Thus, the meeting between Yaacov and Eisav incorporates within it the contact between Yisrael and Edom through the generations. On a more realistic level, this represents the contact between Yisrael and Western civilization throughout history. Like what happened between the brothers, this meeting will become an unending frontal clash, one that will end with the Divine promise, "And the saviors will ascend to Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Eisav, and the kingdom will be G-d's alone" [Ovadia 1:21].

After a long and bitter exile, full of suffering, exploitation, and attacks, Yaacov returns to his homeland after being forced to leave because of his brother Eisav. This is exactly the same as what happened to our nation, when we were forced to leave our land by the Roman Empire, which was considered by our sages as the equivalent of Eisav. And just as we found that there was interference by the British Empire, which was followed by the entire Western world that threatens our existence here (for example, the UN, UNESCO, etc), so Yaacov was hindered by Eisav on his way.

No flattery and no desire to surrender will help our situation, because that does not correspond to the will of G-d. Yaacov must "give up" his identity as Yaacov and be transformed into Yisrael—that is, one who is willing to struggle with G-d and with people in an effort to succeed. This struggle will not end on a level of security or economics, even though it is necessary to prepare for these matters too (as Yaacov did, preparing for a gift, for prayer, and for war). In his own world Eisav, who "has so much," sets no importance on whatever we have. "My brother, you can keep what you have" [33:9]. This wearying battle of the giants lasted for the entire long night of our exile, until we returned to the land. And even our victory did not cause them to abandon this attitude. The sages teach us that Yaacov "limps on his hip" [32:32] because of his own inner distortions. In modern terms, this refers to those who see themselves as more dedicated to the ideals of Eisav than to the G-d of their fathers. Somebody whose entire way of life is based on the sword and on power—among the nations, in society, in research, in academia, in the humanities, and in ethics—cannot tolerate Yisrael, whose life is rooted in faith and holiness and who cannot make any compromise with spiritual victory and with the understanding of the unity of all reality. If Yisrael will continue to be on the move, disassociated from this world and from material existence, Western civilization will be able to separate the spiritual and the

material world, making it seem as if the two are antagonistic to each other.

The transformation of Yaacov into Yisrael at the entrance to the land teaches us that the final victory will stem from the spirit and not from brute strength. This is not the spirit of Christianity, which strangles this world (and which also stems from Edom), but the spirit of a simple man, who dwells in tents, one who goes to battle linked to the Almighty and knows that he must conquer even those who are dressed in pure white in spite of their innate corruption, including those who are so powerful that they believe in the strengths of their armies. Yisrael can be described as follows: We struggle in the name of holiness and faith against what is material in this world, but we do it from within the material world. And we will succeed.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This week's Bible portion recounts the tragic death of young Mother Rachel in child-birth, during Jacob's journey home to Israel. "And it was when her soul was departing, because she was dying, that she called his name Ben-Oni (the son of my travail); and his father called him Ben Yamin (the son of my right hand)" (Genesis 35:27).

Is it not strange that father Jacob would change his son's name from the one given by his beloved wife in such difficult circumstances? And why do we read in the very next verse, "And Rachel died; and she was buried on the road to Efrat, which is Bethlehem" (35:28)? After all, Efrat is barely fifteen miles from Hebron, the ancestral burial place. Why not travel the extra distance and bury her together with the Abrahamic family, next to the husband who worked so hard for her hand in marriage and who loved her so deeply?! I believe that herein lies a profound message about the significance of Efrat as well as about the unique personality of Rachel.

With her dying breath, Rachel names her second son Ben-Oni; The Hebrew oni can mean travail, as in the onan state of mourning during the period between the death and burial of a close and beloved relative, or it can mean strength, as in Jacob's blessing of his first-born son Reuven, You are my first-born, my power and the first of my strength...(Genesis 49:3). Rachel's name was therefore a double-entendre, a name given to two possible meanings, each very different from the other: it could either be taken to mean "the son of my travail" or "the son of my strength." Jacob wishes to place the most positive interpretation on the name given to this second son of his and Rachel's. Jacob also adds the nuance, "son of my right hand", since Rachel was at the same time the true source of his strength as well as his right-hand partner, soul-mate and beloved.

I do believe, however, that there is yet an even more profound meaning to the name given by Jacob. It would seem that Mother Rachel died on the road to Efrat because she had stolen Laban's household G-ds (t'rafim), and Jacob - never dreaming that his wife was the culprit - declared to Laban, "the one with whom the G-ds shall be found, that person shall not live" (Genesis 31:32, and see Rashi as loc). Now why would Rachel steal the G-ds? Rashi maintains that it was in order to prevent Laban from worshipping idols - but then logic dictates that she should have destroyed them! Apparently she held onto them during the journey, and hid them from her father when Laban conducted his search. So what was Rachel doing with them?

The noted archaeologist-historian Cyrus Gordon cites the custom of the Mari and Nuzu ethnic tribes of the fertile crescent during the period of our patriarchs: parents would bequeath the household G-ds to the heir who was to receive the birthright and the major portion of the inheritance. Apparently when Jacob had initially married Leah and Rachel, there weren't any adult sons of Laban; hence, Jacob shepherded the flocks and developed the herds. By this time - almost two decades later - the younger sons had grown up, and become jealous of their brother-in-law (Genesis 31:12). Laban had certainly expected to leave the household G-ds - and the inheritance - to the eldest of his sons. Mother Rachel, however, correctly understood that it was her husband Jacob - the eldest of the generation, albeit a son-in-law and not a son - who was responsible for Laban's phenomenal success as a herdsman, and who therefore deserved the major portion of the inheritance. It was for that inheritance that she stole the household G-ds.

In this respect, Rachel was true to the teachings of her mother-in-law Rebecca and was a genuine soul-mate to her husband Jacob. First of all, she believed that the religious birthright (bekhorah, which was already Jacob's), must be coupled with the material blessing of her father's inheritance; Torah needs an economic infrastructure in order to sanctify the world. And secondly - although she certainly expressed the compassionate voice and soul of Jacob as evidenced in her giving over the secret signs to Leah so as not to cause her elder sister embarrassment under the nuptial canopy - she was not reluctant to assume the "hands of Esau" in order to procure for her family what she deemed was rightfully theirs.

With this in mind, is it not possible that Jacob gave the name "son of my right hand" to their son, born at the moment of his beloved wife's death as punishment for her act of stealing the household G-ds, for two reasons: yes, Rachel was his right-hand, the very source of his love and his resiliency; but Rachel was also his right hand in the sense of the right hand which he had encased with hirsute strength and aggression when he stole his rightful blessings as well

as in the sense of the right hand which she had employed to steal the household G-ds - which she also believed were rightfully her family's. And she met her grave - and Jacob would be hounded until his grave - by the sin which each had nevertheless committed, despite the logic of their acts.

Why was Mother Rachel buried on the way to Efrat, a city half way between Hebron and Jerusalem, and not in the Cave of the Couples in Hebron? Hebron was where our history began, the city of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, the initial visionaries of a G-d of justice, contemplative and peace; Jerusalem - the city of Peace, to which all nations will flock to learn the Torah of beating their swords into ploughshares - is where our history will culminate, where our vision will finally be realized. Efrat is, the bridge between past and future, vision and realization; it is the verdant, rocky road leading to redemption. This path to redemption is paved with dreams and disappointments, commitments and concessions, high-minded ideals and shattered illusions. And in a yet imperfect world, although the ends never justify the means, achievement of the ends often necessitate uncomfortable and less-than-perfect means: wars, in which -even in the most necessary of conflicts (such as WWII and our War of Independence, Six Day war, Yom Kippur War) - innocent people are killed, cruel acts are perpetrated, and deceptions, which- even if they are done for the sake of heaven - nevertheless remain deceptions.

In an imperfect world, wherein one must struggle for redemption one must sometimes perpetrate imperfect acts - and suffer their consequences. This I believe is the price which Rebecca (who is never mourned by her sons). Jacob and Rachel must pay for their journey along the road to Efrat, for their difficult but glorious march towards redemption. © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah reveals to us the true nature of Edom, descendents of Eisav, and displays her two-sided character. It teaches us to recognize Edom's perpetual hatred for the Jewish people and never to trust her friendship. Although there may be moments when Edom displays true brotherhood we must always be wary of these situations and never establish any close association with her.

The haftarah opens with a moving description of a plot acted out against Edom, descendents of Eisav. The prophet Ovadiah says, "How was Eisav pillaged, his hidden treasures sought out? To the borders they sent you (Eisav), all of your allies enticed you: then they were able to overtake you." (1:6) These particular passages refer to an historic moment when the surrounding allies of Edom pretended to rush to her assistance in her war against a powerful neighbor. The

allies accompanied Edom all the way to the end of her borders and then abandoned her, leaving her entire country unprotected. They returned inside her country and invaded the entire Edom, now in a most vulnerable state. The prophet draws our attention to this specific episode to demonstrate the unique character of Edom's "brotherhood." Historically speaking, although Edom always appeared politically as a true ally this relationship was only superficial and when the opportunity arose she would typically turn against her loyal "friends" and leave them stranded. This time, her allies gave her a taste of her own medicine and, after luring Edom into war they turned on her and pillaged her entire country.

This two faced nature of Eisav was, in fact, the undertone of our Jewish nation's sad experiences throughout the Roman Empire, largely composed of the descendants of Eisav. To demonstrate this, the prophet Ovadiah focuses on a specific aspect of the Roman era, the role the Edomites played in the destruction of the second Temple. Ovadiah says, "On the day the nations took the Jewish people captive, and entered the Jewish gates casting lots over Yerushalayim, you were also amongst them." (1:11) In truth, the war against Yerushalayim belonged to the Romans but Edom could not stand idly by and therefore gladly participated in the destruction of the walls of the Bais Hamikdash. The Malbim (ad loc.) reminds us that these descendants of Edom were actually alleged Jewish converts who were accepted during the reign of Herod. Initially these Edomites gave the impression of sincerity and were warmly welcomed by the Jewish people. But, as could have been predicted, Edom could not be trusted and when the Jews were down, these "converts" rallied against their own Jewish "brethren" and readily assisted in destroying them.

This two faced nature expressed itself even in the earlier Babylonian exile when Eisav's descendants offered their assistance in driving the final nails into the Jewish coffin. The Prophet Ovadiah says, "And don't stand by the crossroads to finish off refugees." (1:14) The Yalkut Shimoni (549) explains that this passage refers to the cunning strategy of the Edomites during our first exile. They would station themselves a short distance behind the Babylonian army and wait in ambush for the Jewish refugees. They reasoned, "If the Jews win we'll say we're here to help them and if the Babylonians win we'll help them kill the remaining Jews." Again we are reminded of the unique "brotherhood" of Edom. Due to their two-faced character, they could easily pass for true brothers awaiting to help the Jews in their time of distress. But, in truth, this disguise only provided them a perfect opportunity to eradicate any trace of the Jewish people, should the situation arise.

Edom's pattern of "brotherhood" traces itself all the way back to Edom's predecessor, Eisav. In this

week's sedra, (Torah portion) we read that Eisav ran towards his brother Yaakov to embrace him. Although Eisav had been Yaakov's arch enemy from birth, it seems that he had undergone a sincere change of attitude. Yaakov had sent an elaborate present to Eisav as a gesture of true friendship and, for the first time in their lives, a sense of friendship and brotherhood developed. The Torah relates that in response to this gift, "Eisav ran to his brother, embraced him, and "kissed" him. (Bereishis 32:4) However, Chazal note the mysterious dots which appear in the Torah above the word "kissed" and reveal that Eisav did not truly intend to kiss his brother. In actuality, he attempted to bite him, but was unsuccessful in his endeavor. His perpetual hatred was so deep that even in this true moment of friendship he could not subdue his innermost feelings and found himself compelled to express them. In explanation of this, Rashi (ad loc) quotes the classic statement of Rav Shimon Bar Yochai, "It is a set principle that Eisav hates Yaakov." This warns us never to lose sight of Eisav's inner hatred and even when true gestures of "friendship" are displayed never to overlook what lies beneath the surface.

Edom, the present day Eisav will never be our true friend and we must always be wary of her association with us. We should never become too closely related to her and must always remember her true character. This deep seeded hatred remains throughout the generations until the final day when, as Ovadiah says, "The saviors will rise from Mount Zion to judge the (inhabitants of Eisav's) mountain and then the perfect reign will belong to Hashem. (1:21) © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI CHAIM LANDAU

National Council of Young Israel

What does it really take to be a prophet? How perfect must such a leader be? Is he/she ever allowed the normal human manifestations of character imperfections that we associate with ourselves - or are the standards higher?

The answer is perhaps hinted in the parshah when the delegation Yaakov sent out to meet with Esau returns with the information that an entire army of people is headed towards Yaakov, whose intentions might be anything other than cordial. And then the text tells us that Yaakov was afraid.... which, in any other context might be an appropriate and acceptable reaction to the news. But, given that in the previous Parshah, HaShem has already promised Yaakov that He will protect and be with him, and not forsake him (Chapter 31, verse 3) why does Yaakov accede to fear? Has he lost his trust in HaShem?... HaShem's promise?... HaShem's ability to even fulfill His promise?

A most beautiful response to this seeming lack of trust displayed by a Patriarch is afforded by Rav Elchanon Wasserman. He quotes the statement of the Rambam from Chapter 7 in the Shemoneh Perokim where Maimonides authoritatively states that perfection is no precondition to prophecy. Proof? Well, he offers, look at King Solomon and the prophet Samuel, both of whom, in the pursuit of a divine imperative, allowed fear to become a matter of concern. Which, he says, is proof positive that one doesn't have to be perfect to receive divine prophecy.

The Chesed Le'Avraham, however, asks the following question on the Rambam, which is: How can the Rambam present his case with such original authority when the Gemara has already asked that very same question. Quoting Masechet Berachot, the Gemara however responds to the possibility of Yaakov's fear in meeting with Esau, which is: "shemoh yigrom ha-chet", meaning that when HaShem originally made the promise, Yaakov was indeed the epitome of perfection, but with the passing of time, and having worked some twenty years for Lavan, maybe Yaakov no longer is that perfect being and might now be tarnished with sin...thus negating the precondition for HaShem's promise.

Furthermore, the Gemara continues, regarding the fear displayed by the prophet Samuel, the reason given to understand this is that people on a mission of a "sheliach mitzvah" are guaranteed from any kind of harm.....So why does Shmuel not know this? Because when you go to a place fraught with danger, then this concept is inapplicable.

So, if the Gemara has already asked and responded to the fears surrounding Yaakov and Shmuel, wherein lies the originality of the Rambam? And this is where the beauty of Rav Elchanon is on display. He responded that, in fact, we are dealing with two very different questions. The Gemara is asking the question that, following HaShem's promise of protection, why didn't our two heroes trust in the divine word. The Rambam is asking a totally different question. What ever happened to ordinary, basic elementary trust in HaShem, the "bitachon" that comes with "ve'ani be'chasdechah botachti.."? ...the trust that comes not as a response to a promise but as part of being a Jew... Here, the Rambam states that no one is perfect, and even a prophet is allowed in certain situations to allow the normal human condition of fear to emanate.

It's a very warming interpretation that allows us normal people, who love our Judaism, our Jewish people, and through the former, our trust in HaShem, to sometimes allow the fear we at times face in our lives to be not a denial of our fundamental beliefs, not a denial of HaShem (G-d forbid) but an acceptable response of the human condition. For to be perfect means to be super-prophetic. But to err at times on the

side on being afraid is to be, simply, prophetic. © 2005 Rabbi C. Landau & ncyi.org

RABBI CHAIM LANDAU

National Council of Young Israel

Parshat Vayishlach records the meeting between Yaakov (Jacob) and his brother Esav, and the preparations Yaakov made in case Esav was still angry with him for stealing Esav's blessings. Yaakov split his camp and decided to move his family to a distant place. When he goes back to get the last of his belongings, the Torah tells us that he wrestled with a 'man', which commentaries tell us was the Satan (the evil inclination). When the angel realized he couldn't defeat Yaakov, he struck his hip, injuring Yaakov, but Yaakov wouldn't let the angel leave until he blessed him. Then the Torah says that he blessed Yaakov, but doesn't tell us what the blessing was. What was the blessing? Furthermore, what was the significance of hitting Yaakov's hip, making him limp from then on? Lastly, we know that angels can only be assigned one job per trip. If so, how could the angel fight Yaakov AND bless him?

One answer could explain all these questions as follows: The angel, representing Yaakov's evil inclination, wrestled with him, but not for the purpose of hurting him. The whole point of wrestling is to defeat your opponent without necessarily causing actual physical harm. In effect, the Satan "struggled" to get Yaakov to give in to his temptations, but when he realized that he couldn't win, he resorted to physically injuring Yaakov. Why? Injury can potentially be used as an excuse for Yaakov to not perform certain commandments, since now it would be harder for him to walk/perform them. However, because of this injury WE are forbidden from eating the sinew that the angel hit, and that's exactly the blessing that the angel gave Yaakov: What could have been used as an excuse for NOT performing a Mitzvah (positive commandment), has itself BECOME a Mitzvah! Because of Yaakov's pain we now have a chance to perform another commandment by not eating that sinew in animals. So the angel's sole job was to give Yaakov this blessing, but Yaakov had to first turn it from an excuse to a blessing! We learn a very valuable lesson from this incident: True greatness is only achieved through adversity. Whenever we reach a challenge in our lives, we should remember not to use it as an excuse, but as a stepping stone to reach the next challenge, and even greater heights! © 2005 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

