

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

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Translated by Kaeren Fish

Yaakov sent messengers before him to Esav, his brother, to the land of Se'ir, the field of Edom. And he commanded them, saying: "So shall you say to my master, to Esav: 'I lived with Lavan, and stayed there until now.'" (/Bereishit/ 32:4-5)

Rashi offers two possibilities as to Yaakov's intention in mentioning the time that he spent with Lavan. The second explanation is well known: "I lived (/garti/) with Lavan-but observed the 613 (/taryag/) commandments." This interpretation leads us to define the time that he spent with Lavan as a period of "survival." Despite the great challenges that he experienced, and all the problems and difficulties that he had to overcome-from the exchange of Rachel for Leah to dishonest dealings in paying his wages-

Yaakov never gave up, nor did his faith waver, and he continued to observe all the commandments, never forsaking the tradition of his fathers.

The same idea appears again, later in the /parasha/, when we read, following Yaakov's encounter with Esav: "Yaakov came whole (/shalem/) to the city of Shekhem" (33:18). Here Rashi comments: "/Shalem/ [means] whole in body... whole in his possessions... and whole in his Torah." This interpretation once again expresses the view of Yaakov as a "survivor"; the verse describes his mettle in having managed to maintain his exemplary spiritual level despite everything that could have brought him down.

Should Yaakov indeed be viewed in this light? During all the years that followed his flight from his parents' home, did he merely maintain his spiritual level, not progressing? Prior to the encounter with Esav, the Torah records Yaakov's prayer: "For with my staff [alone] I crossed over this Jordan, and now I have become two [whole] camps" (32:11). What a great change has taken place in Yaakov's life: from a situation in which he was a fleeing bachelor, he has acquired-within a couple of decades-a large family and much wealth. Can his situation as a persecuted, single man, arriving at Lavan's home, be compared in any way with his situation now-

"Now I have become two camps"?

Yaakov's progress is not expressed in the establishment of a family and the attainment of wealth alone. When the Torah tells us that he came "/shalem/ - - whole-to the city of Shekhem," it seems to mean more than that he had not fallen in his spiritual level, as Rashi maintains. There is a great difference between a person who has not fallen in his spiritual level, and a person who is /shalem/. "Completeness," "wholeness," means progressing to the highest possible level, not just managing to preserve one's existing level.

When we are introduced to Yaakov at the very outset, the Torah testifies that he is a "simple [wholehearted] man dwelling in tents." What is the meaning of this description? What seems most striking in this description is its lack of maturity and initiative. Yaakov is /tam/ -- simple-not only in the sense of "innocence," or "wholeheartedness," but also in the sense of a person who sits in his tent with no idea of how to survive in the world outside. There is one verse that seems to describe Yaakov's personality in the clearest possible terms: when Rivka urges him to steal the blessings, she tells him-"Upon me be your curse, my son." These words present Yaakov as someone who is unable to bear responsibility for his own actions; Rivka persuades him to steal the blessings only when she assures him that it is she who will assume responsibility. The Yaakov who lives in Yitzchak's house is not capable of assuming responsibility, and therefore Rivka must do it for him.

During the years that have passed since then until /parashat Vayishlach/, Yaakov has not only studied in the /Beit/ /Midrash/ of Shem and Ever, but has also passed through the "/Beit/ /Midrash"/ of Lavan and Esav. In this /Beit Midrash/ of the big, wide world, he learns to take responsibility for his actions and to deal with "real life" outside the tent. His marriage to Rachel forces him to deal with Lavan's deception; he earns his living through many years of hard work; he stands up to Esav's army-and emerges victorious. The Yaakov whom we meet in our /parasha/ is an active character, a man of initiative, who knows how to deal with the reality that unfolds around him, and to find solutions. It is true that Yaakov observed the 613 commandments while staying in Lavan's home-itself an impressive achievement. But this is only a small element in the huge personality change that takes place in him there. From being a "simple man, dwelling

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in tents," he becomes an assertive, responsible person of initiative.

The point that seems to symbolize this more eloquently than any other is the altar that Yaakov establishes before entering the land: "He called it 'E-I Elo-hei Yisrael'" (33:20). Rashi once again offers two interpretations of the name. The first is that G-d told Yaakov, "You rule the lower worlds; I rule the upper worlds." What a radical statement as to Yaakov's status! This is not the fearful Yaakov whom we met at the outset.

Rashi's second explanation is that Yaakov "coronated" G-d as the G-d of Israel. The full significance of this act is somewhat blurred in our consciousness, perhaps because it is easy to lump together or confuse the various altars built by the forefathers (Avraham built three, Yaakov two), and to think that the purpose of all of them was the same. It should be noted, however, that in /parashat Vayera/, prior to the /akeda/, Avraham builds an altar: "He planted a tamarisk in Be'er Sheva, and he called there on the Name of the Lord-the everlasting G-d" (21:33). Rashi explains: "By means of that tamarisk, G-d's Name was invoked over the whole world." Avraham called upon the Name of G-d, Who rules the entire world. G-d, in Avraham's view, is the universal G-d Who rules and controls all of creation. Now Yaakov's innovation is cast in clearer perspective: Yaakov emphasizes the fact that G-d is the G-d of the Nation of Israel, not only the G-d of the entire world. Could there be any greater expression of initiative and assumption of responsibility on Yaakov's part than acknowledging and coronating G-d as his G-d, and not only as the universal G-d?

We should not underestimate Yaakov's achievement in emerging from Lavan's and Esav's school of hard knocks with his spirituality intact. But we must also take into account the full and complete change that he has undergone-from a "simple man dwelling in tents" to the leader of a nation, the patriarch of a great family and a formidable camp, with a unique claim to G-d and a special relationship with Him. Yaakov teaches us that even in difficult situations, and even during the darkest times, a person should not fear. Even in the darkest times and places-and perhaps specifically then-a person may reach the loftiest

heights. Yaakov's message is not only that a person is able to face challenges and crises and retain his spiritual level, as Rashi explains, but that via those crises he may attain the pinnacle of human completeness and wholeness. It is precisely by means of those challenges that he may move from being a "simple man, dwelling in tents" to a situation in which "Yaakov came-whole"-whole in body, whole in his possessions, and whole in his Torah. *[This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat parashat Vayishlach 5765 (2004).]*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Abraham had the greatness and ability to transform three seemingly Bedouin Arabs into angels when they visited his home. In this week's parsha, Eisav has the destructive quality of converting, according to one Midrashic interpretation, the angels that Yaakov sent to greet him into people of force and violence. The former angels literally beat up on Eisav's men in order to make Eisav think twice about attacking Yaakov.

The lesson here is obvious. Human beings have the ability to sanctify or diminish holiness as they choose. There are homes that have the ability to structure angels and there are societies that demean and diminish even originally holy creatures into violent demons. The problem with Eisav is that he is interested in holiness and spirituality. But he is unwilling to pay the price to obtain them, to forgo his temporary wants and violent means of satisfying these urges. Even the angelic ideas that enter his house and society somehow become perverted into struggles and violence.

Eisav preaches love and peace and yet engages in constant strife and war. Some of the Chasidic masters interpreted Yitzchak's blessing of "the hands are the hands of Eisav and the voice is the voice of Yaakov" as being completely directed towards Eisav. Eisav possesses "the voice of Yaakov" as well, but he completely negates the holiness and purpose of that voice by using "the hands of Eisav."

It is not the mere idea of holiness that carries the day. It is the practice of holy behavior that matters most. A famous rabbi in America when once interrupted in the midst of his impassioned sermon by a crying child stated: "Crying children like all good ideas should be carried out." How true!

This attitude of Eisav, preaching spirituality and goodness but not really practicing it, is very prevalent in today's world. It is also unfortunately present in our Jewish world. Everyone speaks about spirituality and Torah while the behavior of many within the Jewish world is contrary to the tradition, values and lifestyle of Torah. The voice of Yaakov must also be consistent with the behavior of Yaakov - of the gentle person who

dwells within the tents of Torah and tradition - in order for it to be truly heard.

A sham pretense of holiness, a faith that is held captive to current and temporary social whims has little chance of ultimate meaning and survival. Judaism strives to raise ordinary people to the levels of angelic behavior. It never compromises on those goals though it fully recognizes that not everyone can ever achieve them. But it is only by aiming for the highest standards, even if we fall short of them at times, that we ordinary humans can become more angelic.

By compromising standards we end up emulating Eisav and reducing possible angels into unworthy human beings. How sad it is to let such opportunities to achieve greatness slide by us because of apathy and lack of self confidence and pride. Let us always follow Avraham and avoid Eisav's weaknesses.

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Yaakov's trip back home after 20 years in Charan was rather eventful. First Lavan chased him down and challenged him (Beraishis 31:22-54), then Aisav came after him (32:7-12), then his daughter was kidnapped and taken advantage of (34:1-31), and then his beloved wife, Rachel, died (35:16-20). Our sages, of blessed memory, tell us (Beraishis Rabbah 81:1 and Midrash Tanchuma 8, see also Rashi on 35:1) that much of these travails were due to Yaakov not yet fulfilling the promise he had made to G-d before leaving for Charan. After dreaming of the ladder with angels ascending to and descending from heaven, with G-d telling him that he is the spiritual and physical heir of his father and grandfather (28:12-15), Yaakov sets up a monument and promises that if he returns safely to his father's house he will designate it (the site of the monument) as G-d's house (28:18-22). Since he did not go straight back to Bais El to keep his promise, he was punished.

One of the questions discussed is why it was considered a delayed fulfillment if he hadn't yet returned to his father house. Since the conditions set were not accomplished, the obligation he accepted upon himself should not be applicable yet either! But there's another, more logistically difficult problem that arises when going through the Tanchuma's description.

Because Yaakov did not fulfill his promise, the Tanchuma tells us, G-d sent Aisav to try to kill him, who then took away much of his possessions (the many-herded gift). Since Yaakov didn't realize that this happened because he hadn't fulfilled the promise, G-d sent Aisav's guardian angel to try to kill him (who ended

up injuring him). When Yaakov still didn't realize why this was happening, G-d brought the problems of Dena (his daughter) upon him. This still didn't do the trick, so Rachel died-which proves (the Midrash continues) that a person's wife dies because of the sin of not fulfilling a promise. G-d says "for how long will this righteous person suffer without realizing for which sin he is suffering? I better tell him," as it says (35:1), "get up and ascend to Bais El and dwell there, and make an altar there to [the One] who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Aisav." Despite all that happened, G-d had to tell Yaakov explicitly to return to Bais El to fulfill his promise, so that he won't suffer any more.

Have you picked up on the problem yet? Actually, there's more than one question that can be asked here. There were several things described as happening to Yaakov because he delayed fulfilling his promise; his life was threatened (twice), he lost much of his material wealth, he was injured, his daughter was raped, and his wife died. Why is there only proof that the consequences of not fulfilling a promise is the latter, and not of any of the others? Why don't we learn from this that if you don't pay your pledges on time you'll lose even more money? It seems odd that the only consequence that becomes a lesson for Yaakov's descendents is from his wife dying, but none come from the other things that happened to him. Additionally, the sequence of events is stated as Rachel dying first and *then* Yaakov fulfilling his promise. However, the Torah (35:16) makes it clear that Rachel actually died *after* Yaakov left Bais El ("And they traveled from Bais El, and there was still a ways to go till they reached Efrat, and Rachel gave birth, and she had difficulty with the delivery," from which she died). How can her death have been caused (at least partially) by Yaakov not fulfilling his promise if he already *did* fulfill it? And how can the Midrash imply that she died first if she obviously died after? By taking a closer look at how to resolve the original question (why it was considered a delay at all), perhaps we can answer these questions as well.

G-d had already promised Yaakov that he would return safely (28:15), yet Yaakov felt the need to make a conditional promise that if G-d returned him safely he would make that spot the house of G-d. After all, he was about to leave the religiously safe environs of his father's home and of the Yeshiva of Shem and Aiver to live with his idol-worshipping uncle, Lavan. Would he maintain his spiritual level? Yaakov was unsure if he would still be worthy of continuing his father and grandfather's mission, and therefore of G-d's promise to return him safely (see Ramban). His conditional promise was that if G-d helped him survive his stay with Lavan to the extent that he would still be able to be a founding father of G-d's chosen people, he would designate the monument he just put up as G-d's

house, where the future Temple would stand. The point was not physically making it back to his father's house, but leaving Lavan's house spiritually intact (with the focus on "returning," i.e. leaving Lavan, not "arriving" home-see Sifsay Chachamim). Once he left Lavan's house, this "condition" was met, and the promise became applicable (and thereby eligible to be considered "delayed").

However, Yaakov wasn't sure that he had sustained the necessary level to still be one of the nation's founding fathers, so didn't head straight to Bais El to fulfill his promise. Instead, he tried to make peace with Aisav. G-d tried to give him a hint that he should be fulfilling his promise by sending Aisav to attack him, causing him to lose some of his wealth, sending Aisav's angel after him, and allowing him to be injured in the wrestling match that ensued. When Yaakov still didn't get the message, the Dena incident occurred, but still to no avail. It was at this point that G-d said that He better tell Yaakov explicitly to go to Bais El before more messages had to be sent.

Guess what, though. Yaakov *still* didn't get the message. Sure, he went to Bais El, and built an altar as G-d commanded him to do. But he didn't designate the previously-built monument as G-d's house! G-d had to appear to Yaakov a *second* time at Bais El and spell it out for him (35:9-12), telling him that he is still the spiritual heir of his father and grandfather. Only then does Yaakov know that the condition has been fulfilled, so he must keep his end of the bargain. And right there and then (35:14-15) he finally designates the monument.

But there's still one problem. Yaakov has not yet realized that he was wrong for not doing so earlier. He thinks that he fulfilled his promise right away, as soon as he got word that he "returned safely." True, he has now fulfilled his obligation, but he has not yet repented for having delayed doing so, because *he still doesn't realize that he did!* Since the sin that he was guilty of (and has not repented from) causes one's wife to die, his beloved Rachel passes away. Only now does Yaakov realize that he must have been guilty of something that causes a spouse's death, and understands that G-d had expected him to fulfill his promise much sooner. He immediately repents and sets up a monument on top of Rachel's grave (35:20), possibly as part of the repentance for not having designated the monument at Bais El sooner.

It is precisely because Rachel's death occurred after the promise had already been fulfilled that we learn that a consequence of delaying the fulfillment of a promise is a spouse's death; the other problems were only messages to try to get Yaakov to fulfill the promise, while this happened because he was guilty of not doing so. And her death was what finally made Yaakov realize what he had done wrong, despite

having occurred after the promise had already been fulfilled. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This week's Biblical reading provides a stunning climax to the riveting stories of Jacob - how and why this most clearly defined patriarch of the twelve tribes returns to his father's house, establishes the monument to G-d in Bet El as he had vowed, and merits the new name of Yisrael, the name by which his descendants shall be known forever. What is the secret behind this name, what is the true significance of the wrestling match, and why does it take Jacob such a long time to finally arrive home after his having left Laban. (He leaves Laban in chapter 29 at the end of last week's reading and he doesn't return to Isaac's house until verse 27 of chapter 35!).

We have already seen how the naïve wholehearted dweller of tents became a scheming deceiver, first manipulating his elder brother into selling him the birthright, then pretending to be the brother he was not, and finally resorting to all manners of subterfuge in order to outsmart the wise-alec Laban and come out with the majority of his flocks. Indeed, the hands of the aggressive animal-hunter and people-trapper Esau overcame the spiritually pure voice of Jacob, so that Jacob turned into Esau and truly proved worthy of his name: Ya'akov, the circumventing and crooked grasper of his elder brother's heel. Yes, he turned himself into this "drey around" in order to gain the father's love he so needed and yearned for; nevertheless, he was indeed the crooked Ya'akov, who had twice circumvented the legitimate gains which were his brother's just due (Gen 27:36).

Jacob succeeds in burying his true character and expressing his first name - until he suddenly and literally wakes up to his genuine and original vocation as a result of his realization that his very dreams have become sullied and transformed: he no longer sees angels ascending and descending a ladder connecting heaven and earth but he rather now sees speckled and striped and spotted sheep. And this latter dream is not what he wishes to bequeath to the son he has just born, Joseph the eldest child of his beloved Rachel.

In his oath more than two decades before, Jacob had predicated his acceptance of Y-HVH as his G-d upon his return to his father's house in peace; he then thought that meant his favored acceptance by his father as a newly improved model Esau. Now Jacob realizes that the very opposite is the case: he must find the courage to be what he really is, a wholehearted dweller of tents, whether his father values it or not; he must become his own man, G-d's man and not necessarily his father's man. Only then will he be free to be himself!

He leaves Laban - and wily Labanism. He is ready to confront Esau - and return his unearned blessing by giving his elder brother his crookedly gained material blessing and flocks. But first he must stand alone - he and G-d - and exorcize Esauism, the very desire to become Esau in order to gain paternal favor, from the very depth of his being. He wrestles with himself - and comes back to his true self. He is no longer the crooked Ya'akov; he becomes the straight and upright Yisra or Yashar person of G-d (EI).

He is now almost ready to return home; he must first, however, test out his new persona of walking in a straight line rather than "dreying" around and cutting corners. He takes Shimon and Levy to task for selling Shechem a bill of goods about circumcision in a war of subterfuge rather than confronting them as terrorist - rapists head-on: "You have muddied me, causing me to stink in the eyes of the inhabitants of the land..." (34:30); you desecrated G-d's name by having been disingenuous. Jacob then weeps and mourns the death of his mother's nurse and nanny Devorah - but Rebecca, who instigated Jacob's crookedness, is not mourned or even mentioned at all!

Rachel then dies in child-birth for having deceived her father and stolen his teraphim, presumably because she believed that the terpahim (or trophies) - a tangible sign of the heir to the family fortune - rightfully belonged to Jacob, who had worked alongside her father so diligently and capably. But Jacob said it properly and morally: "The one in whose possession are the terafim shall not live;" (31:32) a birthright dare not be stolen, and a man's wife is equal to the man himself!

And finally, "And Reuven went and lay with Bilhah, his father's mistress..." (35:22). Reuven usurps his father's place in a most blatant and pornographic manner; he deserves to be punished, perhaps even banished from the family. Jacob is justifiably furious. But the new-born Yisrael also understands that he must directly take responsibility and own up to his own weaknesses. Was this not a desperate (albeit unfortunate) cry of pain, a poorly designed and badly executed declaration that he - Reuven - was his father's rightful heir and that he should not have been cast aside in favor of Joseph, younger first-born of the more favored wife?!

A wisened and chastened Yisrael understands that he must assume a large portion of the blame for Reuven's immoral act - and so he hears of the incident and overlooks it. His silence allows him to remain the patriarch of the twelve tribes - and his silence also gains him the catharsis of self-forgiveness for his act of deception which he so yearns to receive. After all, if his misguided paternal favoritism allows him to forgive the transgression of Reuven, ought not Isaac's misguided paternal favoritism of Esau allow him - Jacob - to be forgiven of his transgression towards his father Isaac?

And so now, "Jacob returns to Isaac his father" (35:27) in peace within himself, at last. Finally "The crooked has become straight," (Vehava he'akov le'mishor - Isaiah 40:4). © 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Is public protest an effective means of bringing about change? While many insist on its value, some have argued that demonstrations on behalf of Jewish causes precipitate anti-Semitic backlash. This week's Torah portion offers an insight into this debate.

After 22 years of separation, Yaakov (Jacob), preparing to meet his brother Esav (Esau), is told that Esav is geared up to do battle. (Genesis 32:7) When they meet however, the opposite occurs. Esav embraces Yaakov. (Genesis 33:4) What prompted the change?

Commentators point to a pivotal incident that took place between Yaakov receiving the report of Esav's war preparations and the actual encounter. This is the episode of the struggle between Yaakov and a mysterious being in the middle of the night. Yaakov wins the struggle but in the process is wounded. He leaves the battle limping. (Genesis 32:25-33)

Benno Yaakov, the German Jewish commentator, feels that Yaakov's limping precipitated Esav's change of heart. According to his comments, when Esav saw Yaakov struggling to walk, he felt compassion for him. In Esav's mind Yaakov had been defeated. From Benno Yaakov's perspective, the heart of the adversary is won by bending and ingratiating ourselves by walking wounded. This approach makes sense as Benno Yaakov lived in Germany in the early 20th century-a time in which the Jews were seeking good relations with the German government.

Rashbam sees it differently. He is bewildered by Yaakov's desire to be alone just before the struggle with the mysterious being? (Genesis 32:25) If Yaakov was intent on protecting his family why did he abandon them at that crucial time?

Rashbam suggests that up to this point, when faced with a challenge, Yaakov always ran. He ran after he took the blessings from Esav. He said nothing when he found Leah and not Rachel the morning after his wedding night, and he fled from his dishonest father-in-law Lavan's (Laban) house in the dead of the night. Just hours before confronting Esav it seemed that Yaakov finally had no choice but to stand strong. At the last moment, however, Rashbam insists that he was alone because once again he was seeking to flee. As much as Yaakov had carefully prepared for the inevitable confrontation with Esav, his nature took over - once again he saw fleeing as the only solution.

For Rashbam, the mysterious being was an emissary of G-d sent to Yaakov. In the end, the

emissary wounds Yaakov, making it difficult for him to walk. This was G-d's way of telling Yaakov that he no longer could run. When facing an adversary, it's important to stand fast.

Thus, when Esav sees Yaakov standing with pride, unwilling to run, he gains respect for him and embraces him. Sometimes, the only way to gain respect from others is if one first has self respect. Witnessing a preparedness to stand tall, Esav gained new respect for Yaakov. He was no longer a brother who could be pushed around. It was that new resolve on the part of Yaakov that earned Esav's respect and caused him to decide to embrace Yaakov rather than fight him. Rashbam, living during the Crusades, may have been offering advice to his own generation of persecuted Jews, letting them know that if you cave in to anti-Semitism you arouse more anti-Semitism.

Interestingly, after struggling with the mysterious man, Yaakov is given another name, Yisrael. No longer was he only Yaakov which comes from the word akev (heel), one who, even as he negotiates, runs on his heels. Now he is also Yisrael, which means the fighter who has the strength to prevail.

We are told that Yaakov retains both names. This is unlike other characters in the Torah, such as Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah whose old names, Avram and Sarai were never used again after the Divine giving of their new identity. The message of the dual name is clear; both the Yaakov approach of behind the scenes discussion with authority and a willingness to negotiate and compromise and the Yisrael component of and outspoken advocacy are crucial. They work in sync, each complementing the other to achieve the goal of justice and tikkun olam. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

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! © 2006 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The activities of Shimon and Levi in Shechem are in the end criticized by Yaacov: "You have discredited me" [Bereishit 34:30]. And the criticism is even harsher in Yaacov's parting words in the Torah portion of Vayechi (49:5-7). However, especially in view of this repeated reprimand, we may well ask why the description of the affair of Shechem ends with the words of Shimon and Levi, "Will he treat our sister as a prostitute?" [34:31]. This seems to give the "last word" to Shimon and Levi. Didn't Yaacov have an answer to their rhetorical question? And if indeed he did not have a valid response, why did he repeat his reprimand in even stronger terms before he died?

It is likely that the Torah did not intend to justify the actions of the brothers but rather to broaden the perspective with respect to what they did. At first, the brothers could have indeed been given credit for their action-even if Yaacov did not like what they had done, it seemed that they acted out of a sense of responsibility for their sister. But in order to test if this was really their motive, it would be necessary to test their feelings for their family in another case, their emotions might conflict with their other motives.

And this, of course, brings us to the sale of Yosef. It is interesting that the Torah emphasizes how far away these events took place from the city of Shechem. At first, Yosef came to Shechem to look for his brothers, but there he was told "They have gone away from here!" [37:17] -- they had moved away, to Dotan. Why was it necessary for the Torah to emphasize the fact that the sons of Yaacov left Shechem? Evidently, this is a hint that their leaving Shechem was also an expression of their abandoning the principle of family responsibility, which they had declared in Shechem. As Rashi notes, "They took themselves away from the feeling of brotherhood."

This is especially conspicuous in view of the special role that Shimon and Levi played in the sale of Yosef: "And one man said to his brother, behold, the master of dreams approaches, let us kill him..." [37:19-20]. Who were the two brothers? Our sages tell us that they were Shimon and Levi (see Rashi). These two brothers, had asked in shock, "Will he treat our sister as a prostitute?" But now they did not ask, "Will our brother be treated as a murderer?" Rather, they were willing to kill their own brother. And this explains Yaacov's harsh reprimand of Shimon and Levi. "He called Shimon and Levi brothers, meaning brothers in having a blemish. He said to them, you were brothers in the affair of Dina, as is written, 'and Dina's brothers each took a sword' [34:25]. But you did not act as Yosef's brothers when you sold him." [Bereishit Rabba 99:7].

Thus, the Torah purposely quotes the words of Shimon and Levi, without any response at the end of the affair, waiting until the portion of Vayeishev. When the brothers sold Yosef, they contradicted the previous justification for their actions, which had seemed to show a feeling of responsibility for the family. And therefore Yaacov was able afterwards to combine the two events into one: "'For they killed a man in their anger'-this refers to Chamor and the people of Shechem-'and by their will they uprooted an ox'- they wanted to uproot Yosef, who is compared to an ox" [Rashi, Bereishit 49:6].

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“**A**nd the angels returned to Yaakov saying, 'We came to your brother to Essav and he is also coming to greet you and four hundred men are with him.' And Yaakov was very afraid and it distressed him and so he divided the nation that was with him..." (Breishis 32:7-8)

"He was afraid and distressed: He feared maybe he would be killed. It distressed him that he might kill others." (Rashi)

It is easy to picture how Yaakov experienced fear of death when confronting his enraged brother marching towards him with four hundred men. How do

we picture that he, Yaakov, the studious brother had any chance for military victory?

In last week's portion a scene is described in which Yaakov approaches the shepherds of Haran. They are squatting by a well of water which is covered by a huge rock. That rock served as a communal safe. Three flocks had already congregated there and they were waiting for all the flocks to arrive before attempting to roll the rock off the well. We can only imagine how big this rock must have been that a large group of people were needed to roll it from its place. Keep in mind that rolling a rock or a car or a piano or any large object is many times easier than to lift it up.

When Rachel appears with the sheep, the Torah records for us, "And Yaakov drew close and he revealed the stone from on top of the well and he watered the sheep of Lavan the brother of his mother." Rashi tells us that he didn't even roll it. He pulled it out like one uncorks a bottle.

We see from here that Yaakov was enormously strong. He was not some pale skinned weakly creature who avoided fighting with his brother because he was afraid of being beaten up. It was rather a matter of principle for him to dodge a violent confrontation by praying and sending gifts etc.

At a press conference in London in 1969 Golda Meir is reported to have said, "When peace comes we will perhaps be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons. But it will be harder for us to forgive them for making having forced us to kill theirs."

We can easily understand how Yaakov was distressed by having now to face the terrible option of exercising his own brute force. He would have preferred not to have to manifest that ugly side of his self and he did all he could to keep it hidden. It was not from weakness and vulnerability alone that Yaakov our great Patriarch used paths of peace in dealing with his arch enemy Esau. It may well have been a strategy born from strength. © 2006 Rabbi L. Lam & Project Genesis

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

Jacob saw his brother, Esau, for the first time after many years of hiding from him. During their childhood, Esau was angry at Jacob because he thought that Jacob had stolen his birthright. Jacob now wanted to give Esau some of his flocks as a peace offering, but Esau declined, saying:

"I have plenty... let what you have remain yours.' But Jacob said, '...I have everything.' " (Genesis 33:9-11)

There is a world of difference between what Esau meant when he said he has "plenty" and Jacob declaring that he has "everything". Esau, a selfish person caring only about his materialistic possessions, proclaimed that "I have plenty" because "plenty" is quantitative. His material possessions are what he saw

as his net worth. If he would ever lose a majority of his possessions, then he would be plenty no more.

Jacob, however, who had his entire family with him, proudly declared, "I have everything." Our most valuable and prized possessions will always be what money can never buy—our lives, our health, our families. For thousands of years, the wisest men have been preaching this truism. But why do we fail to embrace it?

In interviews with elderly people who look back on a life gone by, they dejectedly speak about how they should have spent more time with their families, taken better care of themselves, and certainly focused less on their careers. In fact, there isn't a headstone that could be found on a single grave site that states that the one buried achieved great success in business, real estate, athletics, or the arts. Rather, it proclaims the virtues that the deceased possessed as a grandparent, parent, sibling or spouse.

And this is the world's most ironic paradox. While society, the media, and the world-at-large shower accolades and praise on those who achieve business or personal success, when you pass away this isn't at all how your life is judged—by man or by G-d.

Monetary and career success are wonderful things. We're all designed for greatness and should strive to succeed and grow in many aspects of our lives. But it's the priceless things in our lives that we tend to take so much for granted and never fully appreciate until we, G-d forbid, no longer have them or are faced with a fear of losing them.

This is why Jacob knew he had everything. Is there not a dying wealthy person who would without hesitation give his entire fortune to live another year? How about for just another week? Would you ever want to switch places with him? Of course not. Yet, billions of people who still have so much physical life in them choose to walk the earth being unhappy, discontented, and miserable.

The reason for this is that they're usually focused on only the same things that Esau was. Their idea of wealth is exactly what the zombies of society and the media have said that it should be. So instead of appreciating and loving their tremendous and endless amount of true wealth that constantly surrounds them, they instead choose to dwell on missed and lost opportunities, the things they don't have, and all of the possessions they long for.

If you think about "what you have" in the same terms as Esau, then you are certain to have a life filled with frustration, disappointment, and unhappiness. But if you understand the life-changing statement of what Jacob said and you think about all of the irreplaceable and priceless things you have in your life right now, then you now will wake up each and every morning confidently knowing that you really do have everything.

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