

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It is the moment the Jewish people acquired its name. Nothing could have been more unexpected or mysterious. Jacob is about to meet the brother he had not seen for 22 years-Esau, the man who had once vowed to kill him. Alone and afraid at the dead of night, he is assaulted by an unnamed stranger. They wrestle. Time passes. Dawn is about to break:

"Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.'

"But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go until you bless me.'

"The man asked him, 'What is your name?'

"Jacob,' he answered.

"Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with G-d and with men and have overcome.'"

So the people Israel acquired its name, surely the strangest and most haunting in all the religious experience of mankind.

Religion, faith, spirituality-these words conjure up many ideas and associations: peace, serenity, inwardness, meditation, calm, acceptance, bliss. Often faith has been conceived as an alternative reality, a "haven in a heartless world," an escape from the strife and conflict of everyday life. There is much to be said for this idea. But it is not Judaism.

Judaism is not an escape from the world but an engagement with the world. It is not "the opium of the people," as Karl Marx once called religion. It does not anaesthetise us to the pains and apparent injustices of life. It does not reconcile us to suffering. It asks us to play our part in the most daunting undertaking ever asked by G-d of mankind: to construct relationships, communities, and ultimately a society, that will become homes for the Divine presence. And that means wrestling with G-d and with men and refusing to give up or despair.

Wrestling with G-d: that is what Moses and the prophets did. They said, in effect: G-d, your demands are great but we human beings are small. We try, but often we fail. We make mistakes. We have moments of weakness. You are right: we have much to feel bad about in our lives. But we are your children. You made us. You chose us. So forgive us. And G-d forgives.

Judaism is a religion of repentance and confession, but it is not a religion of guilt.

Wrestling with men: since the days of Abraham, to be a Jew is to be an iconoclast. We challenge the idols of the age, whatever the idols, whatever the age. Sometimes it meant wrestling with idolatry, superstition, paganism, magic, astrology, primitive beliefs. At other times it means wrestling with secularism, materialism, consumerism. There were times, in the Middle Ages, when Europe was largely illiterate and Jews alone practised universal education. There were others-the twentieth century, for example-when Jews became the targets of Fascism and Communism, systems that worshipped power and desecrated the dignity of the individual. Judaism is a religion of protest-the counter-voice in the conversation of mankind.

Jacob is not Abraham or Isaac. Abraham symbolises faith as love. Abraham loved G-d so much he was willing to leave his land, home and father's house to follow him to an unknown land. He loved people so much that he treated passing strangers as if they were angels (the irony is: they were angels. Often people become what we see them as. Treat people like enemies and they become enemies. Treat them as friends and they become friends). Abraham dies "at a good age, old and satisfied." A life of love is serene. Abraham was serene.

Isaac is faith as fear, reverence, awe. He was the child who was nearly sacrificed. He remains the most shadowy of the patriarchs. His life was simple, his manner quiet, his demeanour undemonstrative. Often we find him doing exactly what his father did. His is faith as tradition, reverence for the past, continuity. Isaac was a bridge between the generations. Simple, self-contained, pure: that is Isaac.

But Jacob is faith as struggle. Often his life seemed to be a matter of escaping one danger into another. He flees from his vengeful brother only to find himself at the mercy of deceptive Laban. He escapes from Laban only to encounter Esau marching to meet him with a force of four hundred men. He emerges from that meeting unscathed, only to be plunged into the drama of the conflict between Joseph and his other sons, which caused him great grief. Alone among the patriarchs, he dies in exile. Jacob wrestles, as his descendants-the children of Israel-continue to wrestle with a world that never seems to grant us peace.

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Yet Jacob never gives up and is never defeated. He is the man whose greatest religious experiences occur when he is alone, at night, and far from home. Jacob wrestles with the angel of destiny and inner conflict and says, "I will not let you go until you bless me." That is how he rescues hope from catastrophe-as Jews have always done. Their darkest nights have always been preludes to their most creative dawns.

Zis schver zu sein a Yid, they used to say. "It's hard to be a Jew." In some ways, it still is. It is not easy to face our fears and wrestle with them, refusing to let go until we have turned them into renewed strength and blessing. But speaking personally, I would have it no other way. Judaism is not faith as illusion, seeing the world through rose-tinted lenses as we would wish it to be. It is faith as relentless honesty, seeing evil as evil and fighting it in the name of life, and good, and G-d. That is our vocation. It remains a privilege to carry Jacob's destiny, Israel's name. © 2008 Rabbi J. Sacks & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Yaakov sends messengers, agents to meet with his brother Eisav and to attempt to mollify his anger against Yaakov. After twenty years, Eisav still smarts from the hurt caused him by Yaakov receiving the blessings of their father Yitzchak. Eisav seeks revenge for that hurt and Yaakov is well aware of the danger that Eisav poses to him and his family. Why then does Yaakov send angels, emissaries, agents to negotiate with Yaakov? After all, the Lord has promised Yaakov to protect him from destruction. Would not a direct appearance before Eisav by Yaakov, and Yaakov personally presenting all of the gifts to Eisav directly rather than through agents and emissaries be more logical and productive?

It can be well understood that Yaakov would shirk from personally having to deal with Eisav but he is undoubtedly aware that such a meeting is eventually unavoidable, so why does he choose to postpone the dreaded moment as long as possible? It is true that the gifts given to Eisav were meant to soften his attitude and soothe his hatred towards Yaakov, but perhaps Yaakov's personal presentation of them to Eisav would

be even a more powerful inducement for reconciliation. There must be a deeper reason that explains Yaakov's strategy and behavior. And herein lays a deep message of truth and relevance for all of us.

Eisav is always better dealt with through agents, emissaries, public opinion, outside forces. Rarely is much of anything good accomplished by direct confrontation with Eisav. All of Jewish history testifies to the truth of this proposition. It may be more romantic and seemingly heroic to deal with Eisav strongly and directly. But Jewish survival has been strongly abetted by avoiding direct confrontations with the descendants of Eisav - as reflected throughout history.

The State of Israel came into being because of the temporary sympathy of the Western world and even the Soviet Union and the United Nations. The Jews would have to fight and die for its establishment but there is no doubt that if it were not for the emissaries that preceded us we would not have had the opportunity to even attempt to establish such a state. There are many times that confrontation and strength do not accomplish victory and even survival.

After every ideal and noble goal, the main task for the Jewish people has always been to successfully survive and pass on its great heritage and values to later generations and the world generally. If somehow others or circumstances can pave the way for us to accomplish this great goal of survival and success, then such help should be desired and appreciated. In a hostile world it is foolish to repudiate agents and emissaries that deal with Eisav on our behalf. © 2008 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And [Yaakov] divided the people that were with him, and the sheep and the cattle and the camels, into two camps" (Beraishis 32:8). Sounds like a good strategy, as "if Eisav approaches one camp and attacks it, then the other camp will be able to escape" (32:9). Except for one thing: When Eisav does get close (33:1), there aren't two camps, only one consisting of three parts (Leah and her children, Rachel and her son, and the maidservants and their children). What happened to Yaakov's original game plan? Eisav's 400 men were still there at the point that Yaakov had his family together (33:1), so even if they subsequently left (see Rashi on 33:16), until they did Yaakov shouldn't have reunited the two camps. How was Yaakov's family together if he had split them into two camps?

There are two other issues related to this question. First of all, in order to return home, Yaakov had to cross a waterway, the Yabok (Jabbok River, an eastern tributary of the Jordan river, about halfway between the Kinneret and the Dead Sea - see Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan's "The Living Torah," or an atlas of the area). When he does (32:23-24), he crosses his entire family at the same time. Did he reunite the two camps just to cross them over this stream and then re-divide them? Did he change his mind once he had them back together and decide to keep them together? Again, how was the family together if they were supposed to be in two different camps?

Additionally, immediately after dividing his family and belongings into two camps, Yaakov asks G-d for help. In this prayer, Yaakov contrasts his situation when he left home to his current one. All he had then was his walking stick, whereas now he had been blessed to the extent that he had "two camps" (32:11). While we can understand Yaakov contrasting his having almost nothing to having a large family and extreme wealth, it seems kind of awkward to frame his success by describing having two camps. After all, there are no more (or less) people or belongings if they were one group, two groups, or even a dozen groups. A child may think he has more cake if the piece is cut into two, but every adult knows there is the same amount of cake (and calories) as when it was just one piece (except for the crumbs created by cutting it). What did Yaakov mean when he praised G-d for giving him "two camps" if he had the exact same amount before he divided them?

The Ramban ("Ha'emunah Ve'habitachon," pgs. 354-355 of Vol. II of "Kisvay HaRamban") suggests that Yaakov never divided his family, only his belongings, as he never feared that he or his children would be harmed, only that he may lose a sizeable amount of his wealth. It is therefore no contradiction to find the entire family crossing the river together or meeting Eisav together. (As far as why Yaakov divided the family into three groups, The Netziv and the Malbim suggest that after Eisav's angel was able to inflict damage to Yaakov's thigh area he feared that some damage could be inflicted on his children even if they would all survive. The fear that Eisav would smite "mother with her children," the Ramban explains, refers to the other people that were with him, not his own wives and sons.)

One of the explanations given for Yaakov going back for the small jugs he had forgotten (see Rashi on 32:25) is that he knew that anything G-d had given him was given for a reason, and there must be some way that these small items would enhance his spiritual growth. It can be suggested that Yaakov may have thought the reason G-d gave him such wealth was to be able to attract Eisav to try to take it away, in order to keep him away from his family. Having so much that it

could be split into two parts, each being large enough for Eisav to go after, was something certainly worth mentioning in his prayer.

Although the word "camp" can refer to belongings, as Eisav referred to the large gift sent by Yaakov as a "camp" (33:8), the common understanding is that Yaakov feared for the safety of his family. The Abarbanel suggests that Yaakov put all of his family in one camp (along with some of his belongings) and put most of his belongings (including his servants) in the other camp. He then figured out which way Eisav was more likely to attack, and sent the camp with the bulk of his wealth along that route, sending his family the other way, along a route that crossed the river. After crossing his family over the river, Yaakov joined the other camp, hoping Eisav would keep busy trying to take his things without realizing there was anything else of Yaakov's to try to get. However, G-d saw to it that Eisav went the other way so that he would meet Yaakov's family, and so that Yaakov would be able to keep everything he had earned in Charan. When Yaakov saw which way Eisav actually came, he joined his family, meeting Eisav before he got to them.

According to this approach, the family crossed the river while the other camp avoided it (so didn't have to cross), and the two camps didn't meet up again until after Eisav had left. Yaakov mentioning having "two camps" could refer to having his family in one and his wealth in the other (thanking G-d for having both) or to the fact that he had enough wealth in one camp to be able to distract Eisav from attacking his family, which was in the other.

The Targum Yonasan (32:8) and the Midrash Seichel Tov (ibid) say that the two camps consisted of Leah's side of the family (including Zilpah and her children) and Rachel's side of the family (including Bilhah and her children). We would then have to explain how, if they were in separate camps, they were together when they crossed the Yabok and when they met Eisav.

The Netziv, although following the Ramban's approach that Yaakov never feared for his family's safety and only divided his belongings, adds one more step, saying that Yaakov only feared Eisav initially, but overcame it by the next day and reunited the two camps. This addition can also be applied if Yaakov split the family into two camps as well. The Bais Efrayim suggests that Yaakov only feared Eisav before his encounter with his "angel" counterpart, but after surviving that wasn't afraid any more, so reunited the two camps. While both possibilities explain how the family was together when they met Eisav, only the Netziv's will explain how they were already together when they crossed the river. (The significance of having "two camps" rather than just "one," made up of the same amount as the two combined, is not dealt with either.)

Several years ago (in 5762) I suggested another possibility. At the beginning of Parashas Vayeitzei (28:11), Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky zt"l explains why, before going to spend time with Lavan, Yaakov had to learn in the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver. The Torah he had learned with Avraham and Yitzchok was taught in an insular environment, without having to deal with any outside influences. Shem, who had lived amongst the generation that was so corrupt they had to be wiped out by the flood, and Eiver, who lived through the generation that built the tower of Babel, taught Torah in a manner that prepared Yaakov to deal with the corrupt environs of Charan. It was this part of the Torah, the Torah of "exile," that Yaakov taught Yosef (see Rashi on 37:3), enabling him to retain his parent's values while living in Egypt.

Faced with the possibility of going to war with Eisav, Yaakov realized that he, or some of his children, might have to flee in order to avoid being destroyed. He therefore wanted to prepare his family for that possibility, and needed to impart this aspect of the Torah on them. Then again, Eisav may not be able to destroy him, and his family would be able to live together in Canaan, as his father and grandfather had done. Perhaps Yaakov divided his family into two "camps" for this reason; half of them he prepared to live in "exile" while the other half prepared to set up a community in what would become Israel. There didn't have to be a physical separation between the two camps, just a different curriculum. "If Eisav attacks one [type of] camp," preventing the family from living together in the Holy Land with Yitzchok, "then the other camp will allow us to survive" even in exile.

Beraishis Rabbah (76:3), commenting on the split into two camps, says that the words "if Eisav comes to the first camp and attacks it" refers to "our brothers in the south" (i.e. those living in Israel, which is south of Babylonia when traveling via the fertile crescent), while "and the remaining camp will escape" refers to "our brothers in exile." Although the Ramban (on 32:9) explains this to mean that just as Yaakov split his family into two camps (yeah, I know, this doesn't jibe with the other Ramban I quoted; let's leave that for another day) in order to ensure survival, so too does G-d always make sure there are Jewish communities in different parts of the world so that our enemies can't wipe us out by attacking just one location, it can be suggested that the Midrash is referring to the two types of communities, one in the Holy Land and one in exile.

This could also explain why Yaakov makes a point of contrasting his humble beginnings to having two camps - having offspring that can set up two different kinds of communities, one living in Israel and the other surviving in exile. And it could explain why Yaakov alluded (32:12) to being saved from "his brother" and from "Eisav," as they represented different situations, one that allowed him to live with his father

and the other that forced him to stay away. Either way, since there were only two camps in theory, without being separated physically, we can understand how the family was all together when they crossed the river and when they met Eisav. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd [the Lord] said, 'Not Ya'akov shall your name be called any more but rather Yisrael, because you have striven with G-ds and with men and you have prevailed' (Genesis 32:29).

Two questions: What does the name Yisrael really mean? Also, why does Ya'akov take such a circuitous route after leaving Laban rather than going straight away to his father's house?

In last week's commentary we saw how the name Ya'akov (ekev, means heel in Hebrew) can be taken to mean two very different things: the connotation can be taken to be either the younger twin brother grasping onto the heel of the older as they both emerge from the womb, coming up from behind, succeeding against difficult odds by dint of desperate diligence and extraordinary effort, surviving and triumphing at the end; or it can emanate a usurping, supplanting, crookedly pushing aside, "heel-sneaking," younger brother!

In the latter definition, the "heel-sneak" always seeks to avoid confrontation and to escape responsibility; after all he can always claim he didn't see you in front of him, he didn't mean the words that you heard him say, he was merely peeling the wands without an intention to manipulate the appearance of the sheep. In contrast, only the son who is willing to assume full responsibility to help realize the vision and mission of Israel will prevail in the end - if indeed "the end" connotes the messianic era of redemption.

We have already seen how the naïve whole-hearted 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-aleck 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 Ya'akov, so that Ya'akov turned into Esau. Yes, he succeeded in this "drey-around" (turning himself around) in order to gain the father's love that he yearned for so much. Nonetheless, in the process of pursuing his father's love he ended up turning himself into the very disguise he had assumed. He truly had become the 'crooked' Ya'akov who had twice circumvented the legitimate gains which were his brother's just due (Gen 27:36).

Ya'akov manages to bury his true character - until he suddenly and literally wakes up to his genuine and original vocation when he realizes that his very

dreams have become sullied and transformed: if our dreams reflect what we were thinking about when we were awake, then Ya'akov is no longer seeing angels ascending and descending a ladder connecting heaven and earth he is rather now seeing speckled and striped and spotted sheep. And this latter dream is not the dream he wants to bequeath his newest newborn, Joseph, the eldest child of his beloved Rachel.

In his oath more than two decades earlier, Ya'akov had predicated his acceptance of Y-HVH as his G-d if and when he returned to his father's house in peace; and no doubt the father he had in mind was Father Isaac who had just accepted him in his role as a new improved Esau. But at this stage in his life Ya'akov realizes that the very opposite is true, that 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 Esau-ism, the very desire to become Esau in order to gain paternal favor, from the very depth of his being. He confronts and wrestles with himself - and comes back to his true self. He is no longer the crooked Ya'akov; he becomes the straight and upright Yisrael i.e. 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! In mourning only for his nanny, he confronts the anger he feels for his mother.

Rachel then dies in childbirth for having deceived her father and stolen his teraphim, presumably because she believed that the teraphim (or trophies) - a tangible sign of the heir to the family fortune - rightfully belonged to Jacob who worked alongside her father so diligently and capably. But Jacob was firm in his moral commitment: "The one in whose possession are the teraphim shall not live:" (31:32) a birthright dare not be stolen no matter how just the motive.

And finally, "And Reuven went and lay with Bilhah, his father's mistress..." (35:32). Reuven usurps his father's place in a most blatant and lewd manner; he deserves to be punished, perhaps even banished from the family. Jacob is justifiably furious. But the 'newborn' Yisrael also understands that he must take direct responsibility and own up to his own weaknesses. Was this immoral act not a desperate (albeit unfortunate) cry of Reuven's pain, a poorly designed and badly executed declaration that he - Reuven - was his father's rightful heir as first-born son of the first wife, and that he should not have been cast aside in favor of Joseph, younger first-born of the more favored wife?!

A wiser 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 - Ya'akov - to be forgiven of his transgression towards his father Isaac? And so now, "Ya'akov returns to Yitzhak his father" (35:27) in peace within himself, at last. Finally "The crooked has become straight," (Vehaya he'akov le'mishor - Isaiah 40:4), Ya'akov has become Yisrael - Yashar-El, the straight, righteous man of G-d.

Jacob, the one who will succeed at the end and who, in the end, diligently surpasses Esau by coming up from behind, at this point in time has become a conniving usurper, a 'heel-sneak' who peeled away his authentic whole-hearted personality only to reveal another lavan-like layer of deception. The heroism of Ya'akov will emerge in his ability to grow back into himself - and his G-d - and emerge as Yisrael. © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DAVID LAPIN

That is Family!

What is Family? The blood relationship between members of a family defines who family is but not what family is.

Two sons of the same parents are brothers, two daughters are sisters; two people descended from the same grandparents but not the same parents are cousins. But what does it mean to be a brother, a sister or a cousin? What does it mean to "be family"? And, why is family so terribly important to us?

The secret of family is buried in the troubling story of the rape of Dinah, daughter of Yaacov, and the revenge of Shimon and Levi her brothers.

Dinah wanders off alone to visit with the non-Jewish women of the land. Shechem, son of the Prince of the land, sees her and rapes her (Ramban 34:2). He

then falls in love with her, seduces her and asks his father the Prince to negotiate her marriage to him. Prince Chamor proposes an alliance between the people of Shechem and the House of Yaacov whereby they would become a unified community. Dinah's family is furious.

The Sons of Yaacov answer them with wisdom (Onkelos' translation of *mirma*). (Note the word for "answer", *annah* is of the same root as *innah* used to describe Shechem's act of rape.) Over a long discourse they persuade Shechem and Chamor to have the whole city of Shechem circumcised as a precondition for the communal merger. On the third day after the circumcision, known to be a day of weakness and pain, Shimon and Levi kill every male, capture the women and children, and take the property for spoil.

The Benei Yaacov held the entire community capitably accountable because they tolerated rape and facilitated kidnapping. They failed to establish courts of law to hold even the mighty to moral account. This is a primary obligation of all civilized society in accordance with their Noachide responsibilities (Rambam *Melachim* 9:14 and *Or Hachaim* 34;25-26).

What was father Yaacov's view of Shimon and Levi's bloody revenge? He passively stood by when the sons made the original deal with Shechem and Chamor. He did so because he thought their strategy was restricted to the recovery of their sister, and at most the execution of Shechem, the criminal. He never imagined that they would exterminate the whole city's men. He criticizes them severely. Even so, his objection is not so much about the injustice of their actions. It is more about the political incorrectness of their campaign, and the potential retaliation that their irresponsible behavior could instigate. Their impetuosity put the lives of the entire Jewish nation of the time at risk. They had not consulted their leader, and as much as they venerated him, they did not agree with his rebuke either.

Yaacov fears retaliation. So what does he do? Does he go to the nations of the land and explain, apologize, and assure them that his sons would be held to account? No not at all! Declaring that he would never allow his sons to fall into the hands of non-Jewish enemies, he takes his sword and his bow and stands defiantly at the gates of Shechem with the towering stature of his gigantic G-dliness and vows: "If any of the nations of the world dare to make the slightest attempt to attack my sons, I shall battle them!" (B.R. 80:9)

That, is family.

Family holds its members to the highest standards and confronts when they disappoint. But family is also *moseir neffesh* (gives their lives) for one another when necessary. Yaacov confronts Shimon and Levi. He criticizes them even more directly in *Vayechi*, before his death (*Bereishit* 49:5-7). He attributes later tragedies to their violent streak. He

accuses them of adopting that streak from Eisav (see Rashi 49:5) rather than inheriting the noble traits of Yaacov. Still, he defends their lives and is willing to protect them to the death.

That, is family.

The same applies in the relationship of Dinah to her brothers. Dinah is criticized for initiating the whole incident. An attractive young girl, she should not have wandered off unaccompanied to socialize with alien groups of vastly different beliefs and values. Yet her family does not abandon her for that. They confront her for her wrongdoing but protect her with their lives. It is for this reason, the *Midrash Rabbah* (80:9) says, that Shimon and Levi are referred to as the brothers of Dinah although all of them were her brothers: because it was they who gave their lives for her dignity. The others were related as brothers but behaved like brothers.

That, is family.

Similarly, the *Midrash* says Miriam is called Aharon's sister and not the sister of Moshe too, because although Aharon confronted her and criticized her for talking *Lashon Harah*, he was *moseir nefesh* for her forgiveness and recovery.

That, is family: To confront and to challenge; to protect and to defend. Of all the relationships we have, family is the one we most need. We feel comfortable with friends who tread on eggshells around us so as not to be too confrontational, and avoid judging us even when they believe we are wrong. With family it goes far beyond comfort; it goes to trust.

We trust people who are willing to risk their popularity to help us become better. With family we feel more than comfort: we feel secure. We feel secure that we will be held to high standards and challenged to stretch ourselves to our limits of greatness. Secure that when they complement us, it is sincere. Secure also, as in no other relationship, that in a time of need our family will sacrifice everything to stand by us, support us and defend us.

That, is family. © 2008 Rabbi D. Lapin & *iAwaken.org*

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. © 2008 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.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

As he flees his brother Esav, G-d promises Yaakov that he would return safely to Canaan (Genesis 28:15). Then why in this week's Parsha,

Vayishlach, is Yaakov afraid? Doesn't Yaakov's fear reflect a lack of belief in G-d?

The Abrabanel suggests that fear is a not sign of weakness, but rather a part of the human dimension, a feeling that is neither right nor wrong. A person who is afraid should not be judged harshly, for whom among us has never been afraid? The real question is what do we do when we're afraid? Do we become immobilized, unable to go forward, or do we gather strength in an attempt to meet the challenges that lie ahead? Feelings may be involuntary but actions can be controlled. Yaakov's greatness was his preparedness to act contrary to his natural feelings; to come back to Canaan even though it meant confronting Esav.

Rav Nahman of Bratslav once said, "the whole world is a very narrow bridge, but the main thing is not to be afraid at all." Yaakov's actions teach us that when we are afraid, it doesn't mean we're lacking in faith or convictions. Rather, it means that we have an opportunity to gather our strength and conquer our fears by confronting them! We won't act afraid, unless we are afraid to act! © 2008 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

A Chassidic interpretation of the verse, "For we will take from it to worship G-d" [Shemot 10:26], implies that the Jews intended to take along with them as sacrifices to G-d not only from their own holy sheep and cattle but also from Pharaoh's impure stock. "You will also place sacrifices in our hands" [10:25]. But this is not easy to understand. How can an animal belonging to an evil person be accepted by G-d as a sacrifice? The answer is that this is the path followed by Yisrael? they want to save not only themselves from their problems, they want to redeem the entire world at the same time as their own salvation. This will even include those who were the cause of their own bondage. The Almighty is a powerful redeemer, and He has the ability to transform darkness into light and evil into good, striving towards the eventual goal at the end of days: To turn "all the evil ones of the earth" [Tehillim 101:8] towards G-d.

Based on this Chassidic approach, our sages learned to reveal the sparks of light that are hidden deep within darkness, no matter how lowly it is, and to see within them the light of G-d. Some people might suspect that this is a way of giving legitimacy to what is evil and ugly, and the truth is that various false messiahs have fallen into this very trap. But the truth cannot be denied. We are messianic in nature, and the messianic trait is to raise everything to a holy state, since every single thing has holy elements.

In this week's Torah portion we read the story of Shechem and Dina. We are thoroughly astonished at the way our sages interpreted the "romance" of these shocking events. The Torah itself repeats over and over lofty phrases which do not seem to belong in this story. "He wanted Yaacov's daughter" [Bereishit 34:19]; "And his soul became attached to Dina, Yaacov's daughter" [34:3]; "My son Shechem longs for your daughter" [34:8]. Our sages heard these phrases with their sensitive hearing and derived a very precious concept from them. "The way that the Almighty likes Yisrael is described in three different phrases? to be attached, to desire, and to yearn... And this can be seen in the passage about this evil man. He became attached, he had a desire for Dina, and he longed for Yaacov's daughter." [Bereishit Rabba 80].

Everything in the world always has two dimensions, the internal and the external. This is true of the most shocking events that take place. Together with the terrible and rough exterior, the sensitive person who desires redemption can discern thin lines of internal value whose deep and characteristic beauty can never completely disappear. It sometimes happens that the intensity of the evil sharpens the viewpoint of the discerning eye to the existence of such an internal attachment, which is never completely eliminated.

The sages said that one who gives credit to the source when quoting somebody else brings redemption to the world. If we will be privileged as it were to hang on to the edges of the garments worn by our sages and to reveal the good inner kernel that is hidden within every manifestation of sin and evil? not to justify it but to raise it up and repair its faults? we will have learned how to call out in the name of He who created the world, and in this way we will truly be the harbingers of redemption.

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (24:6), "For through [wise] strategies, you can wage war for your benefit, and salvation is in abundant counsel." R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; early 14th century) writes: King Shlomo informs us in this verse that devising strategies is an important activity. Indeed, a person cannot live in this world without having a strategy for acquiring his basic needs. G-d had promised Yaakov (Bereishit 28:15), "Behold, I am with you; I will guard you wherever you go, and I will return you to this soil; for I will not forsake you until I will have done that which I have spoken about you." Nevertheless, Yaakov toiled day and night and took other steps to amass wealth, as described at length in last week's parashah. Likewise, a person must try to protect himself from those who might harm him, just as Yaakov took steps to protect himself and his family from Esav, as described in this week's parashah. The

bottom line ("sof davar") is that one should not rely on miracles.

On the other hand, R' ibn Shuiv continues, our Sages do criticize Yaakov for going too far. In their words, Yaakov "pulled the ears of a sleeping dog" (compare Mishlei 26:17). In fact, Esav had long ago forgotten, or lost interest in, what Yaakov had done to him. By reaching out to Esav, Yaakov unnecessarily reawakened Esav's old hatred. (Derashot R.Y. ibn Shuiv)

"Then Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to Esav, his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom." (32:4)

The midrash says, quoting Mishlei (26:17): "Like one who seizes a dog's ears, so is one who grows wrathful over a dispute that is not his." [Says the midrash:] Hashem said to Yaakov, 'Esav was traveling along, minding his own business, and you had to send him a message?!'"

R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer z"l (1795-1874; German rabbi) asks: Does it not display good midot / character traits that Yaakov humbled himself before another person for the sake of ensuring peace? Why should he be criticized for this behavior?

He answers: Many commentaries question whether Yaakov's fear of Esav manifested a shortcoming in bitachon / trust in Hashem. In fact, it was appropriate for Yaakov to fear that he would be unworthy of G-d's protection because he might have sinned. However, that feeling should have been a private matter between himself and Hashem. To display it publicly was wrong because it could cause others to question Yaakov's bitachon. (In this respect, he acted unlike his grandfather Avraham who was not afraid to attack four powerful kings with a small army.) Had Yaakov ignored Esav, Esav would have assumed that Yaakov was confident of a miraculous victory, and Esav would have avoided Yaakov as well. (Sefer Ha'berit)

"Then he [the angel] said, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken.' He [Yaakov] said, 'I will not let you go unless berachtani.'" (32:27)

Most commentaries understand the word "berachtani" as being related to "berachah." Yaakov said to the angel who had wrestled with him, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

R' Yehuda He'chassid z"l (Germany; died 1217) offers a different interpretation. He writes that "berachtani" is related to "berech" / the upper legs near the "yaraich" / hip. "I will not let you go," Yaakov said to the angel, "until you cure my hip that you injured." When we read that Yaakov was left limping, it means he was in pain. However, his dislocated hip had been repaired. (Ta'amei Mesoret Hamikra) © 2008 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org