

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“You have mastered over divine forces and human powers; you have won” (Gen 32:29) We left Jacob last week leaving Laban and Laban-land behind, heaven-bent on returning to the land of Abraham and to the house of Isaac. Jacob understands that his inner self has been overtaken by the deceitful and aggressive hands of Esau, that he must return to his ancestral home in order to recapture the Abrahamic birthright. But what exactly are the building blocks of this birthright? Is it possible that Esau is now even more deserving, or is at least as deserving, of it as is Jacob? What is the real content - and significance - of our Jewish birthright?

The very first prerequisite for the carrier of the birthright is a very strong Hebrew identity, a powerful familial connection which contributes - and defines - the link to a specific and unique heritage and ancestry. Abraham established his commitment to the Hebrew identity when he insisted upon purchasing a separate gravesite for his wife Sarah, when he was willing to spend a small fortune in establishing a Hebrew cemetery beyond the various land-sites of the Hittites. He defines himself as an alien resident (*ger vetoshav*), sees himself as living amongst the Hittites but certainly not as being existentially a Hittite, and therefore refuses an "of right" burial for Sarah in any Hittite plot of land (Genesis 23:3-20).

Esau certainly is Biblically described as having a strong sense of familial identity. He demonstrates strong feelings of filial respect and devotion; the Bible even records that Isaac loved Esau because he made certain to provide his father with the venison meat he dearly loved (Gen. 25:28). He even has strong sibling ties to his brother, despite Jacob's under-handed deception surrounding the blessings. In our Biblical reading this week, the Bible tells us how Esau first seemed to have set up a greeting brigade of four-hundred potential warriors to "welcome" the return of the prodigal brother (32:7); but once Esau actually sees his younger brother and his family, his heart apparently melts with brotherly love: "Esau ran to meet him; he hugged him, fell upon his neck and kissed him...." (33:4).

Esau even wishes for the two of them to travel together and to settle down together. "Let us travel

together and move on; I will go alongside of you" (33:12). It is Jacob who politely refuses: "You know that my children are weak and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle... Please go ahead of me... I shall eventually come to you in Seir" (33:13-14). Yes, Esau has strong familial identity.

However, Abraham had two other crucial characteristics which Esau lacks: continuity and destiny. Continuity is most meaningfully expressed in marrying a suitable mate: from our modern perspective, taking a Jewish spouse (so that the children will remain Jewish), and from the Biblical perspective, not marrying an immoral Canaanite. Esau takes Hittite wives (26:34), "Yehudit the daughter of Be'eri and Basmat, the daughter of Elon."

Perhaps he comforted himself with the fact that his first wife had a Jewish name (Yehudit) and the second had a name which means sweet-smelling perfume. Esau's mentality is apparently as superficial as the name "Edom" he acquired from his exterior red complexion as well as the red colors of the lentil soup he exchanged for his birthright and the venison meat he gave his father. Moreover, when he realizes how upset his parents are with his marital choice, he still doesn't look to his mother's family in Aram Neharayim for a mate, but rather chooses a daughter of Yishmael, the "wild ass of a man whose hand is over everything." And he takes this wife not instead of but in addition to his Hittite wives (28:9).

Another test for continuity is a unique daily lifestyle, the ability to delay gratification and act with discipline, especially in the sexual and gastronomical realms. The Biblical Kashrut laws for Jews have always been a powerful tool in keeping us a "nation set apart" which didn't fall prey to assimilation. Esau sells his birthright for a portion of lentil soup - a thick, juicy filet mignon steak in our contemporary language. He even expresses his desire to have the broth "poured into his mouth" as one would feed a camel (25:30, see B.T. Shabbat, P.155 b, Rashi ad loc).

To have one's eyes on an historic mission, to realize the goal of having "all the families of the earth blessed by us" (Genesis 12:3) through our vision of a G-d of compassionate justice, morality and peace (Genesis 18:19), requires a lifestyle of commitment to an ideal and delayed gratification which is foreign to - and even impossible for - the character displayed by Esau. When Jacob tells Esau that he will meet up with him in Seir, our midrash connects this rapprochement to

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the messianic period when "the saviors will go up to Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Esau" (Gen. 33:14, Ovadiah 1:21, Bereshit Rabbah 78, 14). Jacob then continues to travel to Sukkot, which implies the tabernacle and the Holy Temple, the place in Jerusalem from where our message to the world will eventually emanate (Isaiah 2, Micha 4).

But before Jacob can affirm his covenantal continuity and begin to achieve his destiny, he must first disgorge the grasping hands of Esau the desire for immediate gratification which seems to have overtaken his personality, which has substituted the Yaakov of "he shall emerge triumphant at the end" with "heel-sneak;" he must restore his self-disciplined "image of G-d" which was the source of that "whole-hearted individual who was a studious dweller in tents." This is the purpose of that mysteriously eerie nocturnal struggle with an anonymous assailant, a wrestling match with the characteristics of Esau which have invaded his personality and which must precede the Esau-Jacob face-to-face confrontation. Jacob is all alone (32:25); his struggle is an inner battle, to rid himself of the heel-sneak Esau in his soul. And he wins, both over divine forces and human powers (32:29); he has seen G-d (Elo-him) face-to-face, and succeeded in restoring his own divine image by exorcizing Esau, the real heel-sneak. He now proudly stands Yisrael, the righteous (yashar) representative of G-d and the fitting recipient of the Abraham birthright. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Eisov ran to greet him (Yaakov), and he embraced him, and he (Eisov) fell on his (Yaakov's) neck and he kissed him, and they cried" (Beraishis 33:4). If you look in a Torah scroll (or in most Chumashim), you'll notice that the word "and he kissed him" has a dot on top of each of the letters. Rashi tells us that the message of the dots is a matter of dispute in the Sifray (Behaalosecha 11/69). Some understand them to teach us that Eisov did not kiss Yaakov with a "full heart," while Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says "it is a halacha (a word usually translated as 'law'); it is known that Eisov hates Yaakov, but his

compassion was stirred at that moment and he kissed him with his full heart."

There is much discussion about this Rashi (and Sifray), including why, according to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, there are dots over the word if it is to be understood at face value, and what kind of "law" it could be that Eisov hated Yaakov. In order to try to better understand what is going on, a closer look at other Midrashim that discuss whether or not Eisov's kiss was sincere is warranted. Some of what I am about to write is based on the discussion of the commentators (either on Rashi or on the Midrashim), but is not always quite the way they meant it. Therefore, as always, I suggest that the sources be consulted to see what I gleaned from them (or was "mechaven" to) and where I took their ideas and built upon them.

"And he kissed him" has dots above it. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, "wherever the written (letters, i.e. the letters in the word that have no dots above it) are more than the dotted (letters), you darshen (learn a message from) what is written. [Wherever] the dotted are more than the written, you darshen the dotted." Before continuing to quote from Beraishis Rabbah (78:9), allow me to explain what this means. Usually, when there are dots above a word, indicating that there is a meaning included in the word besides (or other than) its plain meaning, not every letter has a dot over it. The message of the dots can either be found in the letters that have dots above them, or in the letters that are not dotted. For example, the word "eilov" ("to him," Beraishis 18:9) has dots above three of the four letters, so we (also) understand the word as "ayo" ("where is he"), indicating that the angels not only asked Avraham where Sara was, but they also asked Sara where Avraham was. The word "uvkuma" ("and when she got up," Beraishis 19:33) has a dot only on the middle "vav," indicating that there is a message in the other letters (which can be read the same way with or without the "vav"); although Lot didn't realize that his eldest daughter had lay down with him, he was aware of her when she arose (and yet still allowed himself to get drunk again the next night). "And he kissed him" has dots on the entire word, so would not fit into either category, which is what Beraishis Rabbah continues with. "Here, the written is not more than the dotted, nor is the dotted more than the written (as having 'more' means that there are at least some of the other). Instead, this teaches us that [Eisov's] compassion was stirred at that moment and he kissed him with his full heart. Rabbi Yanai said to him, 'if that were so, why are there dots on it? Instead, this teaches us that Eisov didn't try to kiss him, but to bite him (the word for 'bite' is similar to the word for 'kiss,' with a 'koof' replacing the 'kuf'), and our father Yaakov's neck turned into marble and the teeth of that wicked one became loose."

A simple reading of this Midrash would have Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar understanding the kiss the same way Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai does (a real kiss),

with Rabbi Yanai asking the question we posed earlier; if it was a regular kiss, and the word means what it is supposed to mean, why would there be dots above it? Rabbi Yanai would understand the dots the way the first opinion in the Sifray (the "Tanna Kamma") does, that they teach us that it was not a real kiss, with Rabbi Yanai taking it a step further; not only was it an empty kiss, but he really wanted to bite him, not kiss him. We can now add one more question onto our list; how does Rabbi Yanai know that Eisov wanted to hurt Yaakov, rather than the dots just teaching us that it wasn't a full-hearted kiss?

To complicate things further, a similar Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 7:4) has Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar giving the general rule of how to apply the dots, telling us that the rule doesn't apply to our word, and then concluding by saying that the dots therefore teach us that Eisov really tried to bite Yaakov, not kiss him. Although the Eitz Yosef says that this is a copyist's error (with the transcriber skipping the words between the two times the word "this teaches us" is used), another Midrash (Seichel Tov, which are Midrashim compiled by Rabbeinu Menachem bar Shelomo in the year 4899) has Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar giving the "dot rule" then telling us that since it doesn't apply here, the dots over all the letters teach us that it was NOT a real kiss. Then Rabbi Yanai asks why there are dots before telling us that Eisov really wanted to bite Yaakov, not kiss him. So does Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar think that Eisov gave Yaakov a real kiss (as implied by Beraishis Rabbah), gave him a half-hearted kiss (as implied by Midrash Seichel Tov) or that he tried to bite him (as implied by Shir Hashirim Rabbah)? And since the opinion stated before Rabbi Yanai in Midrash Seichel Tov is that it was not a real kiss, how could he then ask why there were dots? Obviously, the dots are there to teach us that it was not a real kiss!

Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar doesn't (only) teach us the rule of how to apply the dots on our verse; he taught us how to use it by Avraham and Sara (Beraishis Rabbah 48:15), where the rule applies. I would suggest that Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar was quoted by the Midrashim on "and he kissed him," in order to show that the rule doesn't apply here. The Tanna who quotes him in Beraishis Rabbah, after showing us that the rule doesn't apply, gives his opinion, which, like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, is that this was a full kiss. The Tanna who quotes him in Midrash Seichel Tov also wanted to show us that the rule doesn't apply before giving his opinion, which, like the Tanna Kamma in the Sifray, is that it wasn't a full kiss. Likewise, the Tanna who quotes him in Shir Hashirim Rabbah shows us that the rule doesn't apply before giving his opinion, which is the same as Rabbi Yanai's. (There could also be three Tanna'im who disagree about what Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar held.)

Although there are several approaches given to explain why, if this was a full, regular kiss, there would

be dots above the word (see Aimek HaNetziv, B'er Yitzchok and Rav Yechiel Michel Feinstein), the most common approach (see Nachalas Yaakov, Maskil L'Dovid and B'er Haitiv) is that without the dots we would have assumed it wasn't a full kiss, because Eisov hates Yaakov. The dots teach us that this kiss was different from what we would have assumed, and it really was a full-hearted kiss. The issue this approach raises is that if Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar (in Beraishis Rabbah) agrees that the dots change what we would have thought the word means, why did Rabbi Yanai ask him why there were dots? They may disagree about how the dots change the meaning (depending on whether the starting point was that the word means a full kiss or a fake kiss), but since they both agree that there is a change, how can he ask about the purpose of the dots according to the other opinion? It would seem that the key would be how we would have understood the word "and he kissed him" had there been no dots. Do we go with the meaning of the word itself, or with the context the word is used in.

The Tanna Kamma in the Sifray says that without the dots, we would understand the word in its own right, regardless of the context, i.e. that it was a real kiss; the dots therefore tell us that it wasn't. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai disagrees with the premise that the context doesn't matter, and is telling us that the "halacha" of how to understand words (without dots) is by putting it in context (see B'er Haitiv and Aimek HaNetziv; also see Sefer Yosef Hillel). Since it is known that Eisov hates Yaakov, a dot-less "kiss" can't be a full kiss, making the dotted "kiss" a kiss we wouldn't expect in this situation, i.e. a full-hearted one.

The Tanna Kamma in Midrash Seichel Tov, who agrees with the Tanna Kamma in the Sifray, tells us that the dots change the word from its context-less meaning of being a full kiss to it being a half-hearted one. Rabbi Yanai agrees with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's "halacha" that we put the words into context, but disagrees about which direction to take it. Whereas Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says that the dots change it from being an empty kiss to being a real kiss, Rabbi Yanai says that the dots take it past being just an empty kiss, and teach us that he didn't just go through the motions of kissing without meaning it, he really tried to bite him. His response to the Tanna Kamma is therefore "if so," that there was only an empty kiss, "there wouldn't need to be any dots," because the context tells us that it wasn't a real kiss.

Rabbi Yanai's response in Beraishis Rabbah is a bit harder to explain. One possibility is that he didn't realize why the Tanna Kamma said that it was a real kiss, so asked why there would be dots. Another possibility is that Rabbi Yanai was really responding to the Tanna Kamma of Midrash Seichel Tov, but his opinion was included anyway in Beraishis Rabbah. If, however, Rabbi Yanai understood that the Tanna Kamma in Beraishis Rabbah used the dots to change

the meaning from what the context would have taught us, and was responding to him, perhaps he wasn't saying that even without dots we would know that it wasn't a real kiss, but that the dots can't restore the word to its pre-context meaning. Since dots always indicate that it's something less than we would have thought, and without the dots we would have thought that it was an empty kiss, Rabbi Yanai is saying that the dots must push the meaning even further away from its plain meaning, namely that Eisav didn't want to kiss Yaakov at all, he wanted to bite him. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

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. © 2009 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 DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah reveals to us the true nature of Edom, descendants 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, descendants 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 descendents 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 descendents 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) © 2009 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Jacob, on his way home after an absence of 22 years, hears that Esau is coming to meet him with a force of 400 men. He is terrified. He knows that many years earlier, his brother was merely waiting for Isaac to die before he took revenge. His approach with so large a contingent of people suggested to Jacob that Esau was intent on violence. He prepares himself. As the sages noted, he made three types of preparation. First, he made provisions for war, dividing his household into two camps in the hope that one at least would survive. Then he prayed to G-d to protect him. Then he sent gifts, hoping to allay Esau's anger.

One sentence in particular caught the attention of the sages: "Jacob was very afraid and distressed. (32:7)"

One of these two phrases is surely superfluous. If Jacob was afraid, he was distressed; if he was distressed, he was afraid. Why use two descriptions if one would do? This provided the springboard for a highly significant midrash: "Jacob was very afraid-lest he be killed. He was distressed-lest he kill. (Rashi)"

Jacob's fear was physical-the fear of death. His distress, though, was moral- the fear that he himself might be forced to kill his brother. But this, as the commentators note, is puzzling. There is a rule in Jewish law that if someone comes to kill you, you may kill him first (Sanhedrin 72a). This is a basic principle of self defence, without which there can be no right to life.

Why then was Jacob distressed lest he kill? If, in the struggle, he was forced to kill Esau to protect his own life, he would be acting fully within his rights. This is the profound answer suggested by Rabbi Shabbatai Bass (Siftei Chakhamim):

"One might argue that Jacob surely should have had no qualms about killing Esau, for [the Talmud] states explicitly: "If one comes to kill you, forestall it by killing him." None the less, Jacob did indeed have qualms. He feared that in the fray he might kill some of the Esau's men, who were not intent on killing Jacob but were merely fighting against Jacob's men. And even though Esau's men were pursuing Jacob's men, and every person has the right to save the life of the

pursued at the cost of the life of the pursuer, none the less there is a provision: if the pursued could have been saved my maiming a limb of the pursuer, but instead the rescuer killed the pursuer, the rescuer is liable to capital punishment on that account. Hence Jacob was rightly distressed about the possibility that, in the confusion of battle, he might kill some of Esau's men outright when he might instead have restrained them by merely inflicting an injury."

The rules of defence and self-defence are not an open-ended permission to kill. One is limited to the minimum force needed to protect yourself or another from danger. Jacob's distress was that he might kill someone when mere injury would have sufficed. This is the law restricting what is nowadays called 'collateral damage', the killing of innocent civilians even if undertaken in the course of self-defence.

The sages heard something similar in the opening sentence of Genesis 15. The previous chapter describes Abraham's victorious war against the four kings, undertaken to rescue his nephew Lot. We then read: "After this, the word of G-d came to Abram in a vision. He said, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield. Your reward will be very great.'" (Genesis 15:1)

The question is obvious: of what was Abraham afraid? He had just been victorious in battle. He had no cause for fear. On this, the midrash comments: "Another reason for Abram's fear after killing the kings in battle was his sudden realisation: 'Perhaps I violated the Divine commandment that the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded the children of Noah, 'He who sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.' Yet how many people I killed in battle.'" (Tanchuma Buber, Lekh Lekha 19).

Another midrash puts it slightly differently and more precisely: "Abraham was filled with misgiving, thinking to himself, 'Maybe there was a righteous or G-d-fearing man among those troops which I slew.'" (Bereishith Rabbah, 44:4).

What is going on in these sources? For this we need to borrow a concept from philosophy, namely, the idea of a moral dilemma. This phrase is often used imprecisely, to mean a moral problem, a difficult ethical decision. In fact it means something more specific. Moral problems are often of the form: what is the right thing to do in the circumstances? A moral dilemma is different. It arises in cases of conflict between right and right, or between wrong and wrong-where, whatever we do, we are doing something that in other circumstances we ought not to do.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Terumot 8) describes one such case, where a fugitive from the Romans, Ulla bar Koshev, takes refuge in the town of Lod. The Romans surround the town, saying: Hand over the fugitive or we will kill you all. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi persuades the fugitive to give himself up. This is a complex case, much discussed in Jewish law, but it is one in which both alternatives are tragic. Rabbi Joshua

ben Levi acts in accordance with Jewish law, but the prophet Elijah asks him: "Is this the way of the pious? [Ve-zu mishnat ha-chassidim?]

Jean-Paul Sartre, speaking of existential decisions, gave the example of a Frenchman during the war who has an elderly and ailing mother with no one else to look after her. Should he stay with her, or should he join the resistance?

Life presents us with many such decisions. They are particularly common among those in public life, who are sometimes faced with courses of action that are in the long-term public good, but with which they may feel profoundly uneasy as private individuals. There are no easy answers in such cases. If there were, they would not be dilemmas.

It is one of the tests of a moral code that it does not present moral choices as easier than they are. There are moral dilemmas. They are a fact of the moral life. There are times when a good human being, even if he or she does the right thing, will still experience (not remorse but) regret. We will still suffer pangs of conscience even though we know we are justified in what we do.

One of the most profound examples of this is the remarkable book, *The Seventh Day*, that emerged from discussions among Israelis after the Six Day War. Although they had achieved one of the most stunning military victories in history, the prevailing tone is one of distress that they had been forced to kill in order to defend their country and people. Never, I suspect, has a less militaristic work emerged from a victorious army.

That mood was born thousands of years earlier, when Jacob, father of the Jewish people, experienced not only the physical fear of defeat but the moral distress of victory. Only those who are capable of feeling both can defend their bodies without endangering their souls. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Bar-on Dasberg; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

According to the Rambam, there are no angels in physical reality. Therefore as far as he is concerned any appearance of an angel in the Tanach takes place either in a dream or in a prophecy. This includes the struggle between Yaacov and the angel. But the Ramban questions this assumption: If the whole fight took place in a dream or a prophecy, how did Yaacov become physically lame after the encounter?

Rabbi Avraham, the Rambam's son, replies to this that quite often a person's body responds to a dream or a prophecy and is influenced by it. This is a well known phenomenon that is called "psychosomatics" in modern times. Ralbag suggests that the opposite is true. Perhaps a physical pain that

Yaacov experienced had an influence on his dream. In either case, we can see that there is a mutual influence between the body and the soul. It is important for us to recognize this fact and take advantage of it for our own personal development.

We can see from the results of historical and archeological research that throughout history there were conflicts between city dwellers on the land and nomads who came from far away and interfered with their agricultural livelihood. One exception to this rule took place during the Middle Bronze Age, when it seems according to records from the time that the two different types of population lived in perfect harmony.

At the time that our forefathers lived, in the Middle Bronze Age, we can see indications of this harmony in the atmosphere between our ancestors, who were shepherds and came from far away, and the permanent population of the land. The inhabitants of Shechem wanted to make a covenant with the house of Yaacov, Eisav married women from the nation of Chet, and Avraham was a friend of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamrei. Can it be that our ancestors were "planted" in this special era by the Divine guidance, or is it possible that their unique traits and righteousness were the cause of this remarkable attitude at the time? [Yitzchak Meitless, "Lachpor at HaTanach"]

In this week's Torah portion Yaacov organizes the burial of two women. Over Rachel's grave he puts a stone monument, "the monument for Rachel's burial to this very day" [Bereishit 35:20]. And then he buries Rivka's nurse under an oak tree which serves as a monument. The difference between the two monuments is that a stone is permanent. It can serve as a road marker for hundreds of years, as is seen in the conversation between Shmuel and Shaul, "you will find two men at Rachel's tomb" [Shmuel I 10:2]. A tree as a monument, on the other hand, symbolizes the life cycle, waning and then growing again, as Yeshayahu prophesizes about the exiles of Ashur: "As the elm and the oak which while shedding their leaves still have vitality, so will their holy seed serve as a monument" [Yeshayahu 6:13]. They may appear at present to be dead, but they will grow again.

Idol worshippers also worship trees and stones, with a hint of some idols that are permanent and others that are alive. But only our G-d is both "a living G-d" [Devarim 5:23] and one whose "throne will last forever" [Mishlei 29:14]. And that is the significance of the third monument that Yaacov builds. "This stone which I have put here as a monument will be a House of G-d" [Bereishit 28:22]. And Yaacov adds life to it, "And he built an altar there" [35:7].

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha, our father Yaacov, 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 Yaacov's bidding. The other meaning is that the word malachim signifies angels, supernatural messengers of G-d who were sent to Yaacov 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 Yaacov's 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 Yaacov 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.

Yaacov's 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 Yaacov 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 are the representative of the interpretation of malachim as being human agents and messengers. The third strategy, prayer and reliance upon heavenly intervention to thwart Eisav's evil designs, follows the idea that Yaacov's 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 can by itself weather all storms and defeat Eisav's intentions solely by its own efforts.

Without the Lord in our help, in vain do we attempt to build our national home. Thus the double meaning of malachim in this week's parsha has great

relevance to ourselves and our situation. © 2009 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

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky; Technical Assistance by David Hoffman

I would like to share two comments on a rather obscure pasuk [verse] at the end of Parshas VaYishlach [Bereshis 36:3]. In listing the wives of Eisav, the pasuk mentions "Bosmas the daughter of Yishmael, the sister of Nevayos". Superficially, this is strange because we learned previously that Eisav married "Machalas the daughter of Yishmael" [Bereshis 28:9]. To explain this contradiction, Rashi quotes a Medrash from the Book of Shmuel. The Medrash names three individuals who have all their sins forgiven: (1) A convert; (2) A person who ascends to greatness; and (3) A groom who gets married. All of these concepts are derived from the fact that Eisav's wife was called Machalas (having the same root as mochel, which means forgiveness) even though her real name was Basmal.

The Ramban quotes a similar Medrash. At this point, Eisav intended to convert (i.e. -repent) and in fact was forgiven for his previous sins when he married Machalas (although he later reverted to his evil ways). The Ramban quotes a Medrash that she was called Basmal because "nisbasma da'ata alav". Rav Simcha Zissel Brodie explains this expression to mean that Eisav was exceedingly happy with himself. Rav Brodie explains an interesting phenomenon: Eisav did Teshuva but then apparently went back to his old ways. His Teshuva did not last. This is contrasted with Yishmael, who repented and the Teshuva did last until the end of his life.

We know that Yishmael's Teshuva lasted from the fact that Yishmael showed subservience to Yitzchak at the time of Avraham's death. Even though he was older and he originally hated Yitzchak, he showed Yitzchak respect by letting Yitzchak precede him during the burial service for Avraham. In contrast, when Yaakov died, the pasuk mentions that Eisav and Yaakov buried him. The implication is that Eisav still apparently demanded to be shown preference as the older of the two brothers.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that the reason why Eisav's Teshuva attempt was not successful is because he was too smug about it. The only way a person can remain on the straight and narrow is if he realizes that he has to continually grow. When a person reaches a state of contentment and is perfectly satisfied with who he is, that is a recipe for falling back down.

Many classic commentaries point out that the name Eisav (ayin sin vov) is related to the word asu-ee (ayin sin vov yud) meaning made or finished. A person who is "made" or "finished" has no more growing to do. The Baal HaTurim comments that the numerical value of Eisav is shalom (peace). Eisav's problem is that he is too much at peace with himself. He is too happy with his own accomplishments, looking at himself as a man who has no more growing to do. The Teshuva of such a person will not last. Teshuva can only be successful when a person knows that he has to constantly battle his yetzer hara and never rest on his laurels.

The Shifted Tzeire Shows Who Really Has G-d's Name Within Their Own

Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer point out that only two nations have G-d's Name within their national identity: YisraEL and YishmaEL. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer then expounds the pasuk from Bilaam's "Blessing" [Bamidbar 24:23] which literally means "Woe is the one, who will live in the name of G-d" as referring to the nation of Yishmael that acts as if they were messengers of G-d. He can do dastardly things, but he thinks that he has the sanction of the Almighty Himself.

The name Yishmael appears 48 times in all of Tanach. This time [Bereshis 36:3] is the last time that it appears in Chumash. The next two times (in Melachim and Yirmiyah) are actually referring to a different person, a Yishmael ben Nesanya. The only other time it is mentioned is in Divrei haYamim, when the genealogy of Avraham is given and it mentions that Avraham had a son named Yishmael.

Grammatically, the sound of a Hebrew letter (the 'os') actually comes from the vowels underneath it. The suffix El in the name YisraEL and YishmaEL gets its essence from the tzeire vowel (..) underneath the silent letter Aleph. However, throughout Tanach, the tzeire in the name YishmaEL is not under the Aleph. It is under the preceding letter Ayin.

Yishmael may have the letters of EL in his name, but it is not the essence of EL (with the proper vowels). It is only a remote allusion to G-d's Name, not the essence of His Name. YishmaEL CLAIMS to have G-d's Name within his national identity. He acts as if it is there, but it is not really there.

I heard from Rav Chaim Kahan that this could be alluded to by the pasuk [Yeshaya 8:10] "Let them plan (against us), it will become nullified; let them speak a matter (against us), it will not come to pass; for with us is G-d (ki imanu [k]El). We are the only nation that have G-d's name-[k]El-within our national identity.

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