

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Jacob and Esau are about to meet again after a separation of twenty two years. It is a fraught encounter. Once, Esau had sworn to kill Jacob in revenge for what he saw as the theft of his blessing. Will he do so now-or has time healed the wound? Jacob sends messengers to let his brother know he is coming. They return, saying that Esau is coming to meet Jacob with a force of four hundred men. We then read: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed." (32:8)

The question is obvious. Jacob is in the grip of strong emotions. But why the duplication of verbs? What is the difference between fear and distress? To this a midrash gives a profound answer: "Rabbi Judah bar Ilai said: Are not fear and distress identical? The meaning, however, is that 'he was afraid' that he might be killed. 'He was distressed' that he might kill. For Jacob thought: If he prevails against me, will he not kill me; while if I prevail against him, will I not kill him? That is the meaning of 'he was afraid'-lest he should be killed; 'and distressed'- lest he should kill."

The difference between being afraid and distressed, according to the midrash, is that the first is a physical anxiety; the second a moral one. It is one thing to fear one's own death, quite another to contemplate being the cause of someone else's. However, a further question now arises. Surely self-defence is permitted in Jewish law? If Esau were to try to kill Jacob, Jacob would be justified in fighting back, if necessary at the cost of Esau's life. Why then should this possibility raise moral qualms? This is the issue addressed by Rabbi Shabbetai Bass, author of the commentary on Rashi, Siftei Chakhamim: "One might argue that Jacob should surely not be distressed about the possibility of killing Esau, for there is an explicit rule: 'If someone comes to kill you, forestall it by killing him.' None the less, Jacob did have qualms, fearing that in the course of the fight he might kill some of Esau's men, who were not themselves intent on killing Jacob but merely on fighting 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 condition: 'If the pursued could have been saved by 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 feared that, in the confusion of battle, he might kill some of Esau's men when he might have restrained them by merely inflicting injury on them."

The principle at stake, according to the Siftei Chakhamim, is the minimum use of force. Jacob was distressed at the possibility that in the heat of conflict he might kill some of the combatants when injury alone might have been all that was necessary to defend the lives of those-including himself-who were under attack.

There is, however, a second possibility, namely that the midrash means what it says, no more, no less: that Jacob was distressed at the possibility of being forced to kill even if that were entirely justified.

At stake is the concept of a moral dilemma. A dilemma is not simply a conflict. There are many moral conflicts. May we perform an abortion to save the life of the mother? Should we obey a parent when he or she asks us to do something forbidden in Jewish law? May we break Shabbat to extend the life of a terminally ill patient? These questions have answers. There is a right course of action and a wrong one. Two duties conflict and we have meta-halakhic principles to tell us which takes priority. There are some systems in which all moral conflicts are of this kind. There is always a decision procedure and thus a determinate answer to the question, "What shall I do?"

A dilemma, however, is a situation in which there is no right answer. I ought not to do A (allow myself to be killed); I ought not to do B (kill someone else); but I must do one or the other. To put it more precisely, there may be situations in which doing the right thing is not the end of the matter. The conflict may be inherently tragic. The fact that one principle (self-defence) overrides another (the prohibition against killing) does not mean that, faced with such a choice, I am without qualms. Sometimes being moral means that I experience distress at having to make such a choice. Doing the right thing may mean that I do not feel remorse or guilt, but I still feel regret or grief that I had to do what I did.

A moral system which leaves room for the existence of dilemmas is one that does not attempt to eliminate the complexities of the moral life. In a conflict between two rights or two wrongs, there may be a proper way to act (the lesser of two evils, or the greater of two goods), but this does not cancel out all emotional pain. A righteous individual may sometimes be one who is capable of distress even when they know they have

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acted rightly. What the midrash is telling us is that Judaism recognises the existence of dilemmas. Despite the intricacy of Jewish law and its meta-halakhic principles for deciding which of two duties takes priority, we may still be faced with situations in which there is an ineliminable cause for distress. It was Jacob's greatness that he was capable of moral anxiety even at the prospect of doing something entirely justified, namely defending his life at the cost of his brother's.

That characteristic-distress at violence and potential bloodshed even when undertaken in self-defence-has stayed with the Jewish people ever since. One of the most remarkable phenomena in modern history was the reaction of Israeli soldiers after the Six Day War in 1967. In the weeks preceding the war, few Jews anywhere in the world were unaware that Israel and its people faced terrifying danger. Troops-Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian-were massing on all its borders. Israel was surrounded by enemies who had sworn to drive its people into the sea. In the event, it won one of the most stunning military victories of all time. The sense of relief was overwhelming, as was the exhilaration at the re-unification of Jerusalem and the fact that Jews could now pray (as they had been unable to do for nineteen years) at the Western Wall. Even the most secular Israelis admitted to feeling intense religious emotion at what they knew was an historic triumph.

Yet, in the months after the war, as conversations took place throughout Israel, it became clear that the mood among those who had taken part in the war was anything but triumphal. It was sombre, reflective, even anguished. That year, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem gave an honorary doctorate to Yitzhak Rabin, Chief of Staff during the war. During his speech of acceptance he said: "We find more and more a strange phenomenon among our fighters. Their joy is incomplete, and more than a small portion of sorrow and shock prevails in their festivities, and there are those who abstain from celebration. The warriors in the front lines saw with their own eyes not only the glory of victory but the price of victory: their comrades who fell beside them bleeding, and I know that even the terrible price which our enemies paid touched the hearts of many of our men. It may be that the Jewish people has never learned or accustomed itself to feel the triumph of

conquest and victory, and therefore we receive it with mixed feelings."

A people capable of feeling distress, even in victory, is one that knows the tragic complexity of the moral life. Sometimes it is not enough to make the right choice. One must also fight to create a world in which such choices do not arise because we have sought and found non-violent ways of resolving conflict. © 2012 *Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd he named the place Mahanayim ("Twin Camps")" (Genesis 32:3).

Jacob has left Laban and Laban-land behind and - after more than two decades of living in exile - returned to his ancestral land of Israel. He retraces his steps to his original point of departure Beit-El, where he had dreamt of the ladder-Temple uniting heaven and earth. There, he prepares to fulfill his vow to dedicate a monument to G-d. His entire household removes the last vestiges of the idolatry which they took with them from the alien environment of Laban's home, and they appear purified as they prepare for a homecoming to G-d's Promised Land.

And then - apropos of nothing and unexpectedly "in media res" - the Bible records the funeral of an unknown person: "Rebecca's nurse Deborah died and she was buried in the valley of Beit-El under the oak tree; it was named "Weeping Oak" or perhaps "The Oak of Double Weeping" ("Alon Bacchuth") (Genesis 35: 8).

Who was this Deborah whose name has not previously appeared in the narrative? Rashi records that Mother Rebecca had dispatched her to Jacob to inform that he could finally return home, the "coast was clear" and Esau would not harm him. Rashi further explains that Jacob was now told of a second cause for mourning, that Mother Rebecca had also died, but her death was hidden, because had her funeral been publicized, people attending would curse the womb that bore Esau.

But is it not strange that Jacob's mourning for his mother who loved him so much and had secured for him the birthright- is subsumed under his mourning for his mother's nanny. Was not Rebecca deserving of a separate burial monument in her own right? Is Rebecca not the great heroine of the life of Jacob, who makes certain that we are the children of Israel and not the children of Esau?!

I would suggest that Jacob may have had mixed feelings about his mother and the role she played in securing his father's blessings for him. Jacob is hounded, even tortured, by having deceived his father. Was he not punished again and again, "measure for measure," for this egregious sin, by Laban's deceiving him, by placing Leah instead of Rachel under the nuptial

canopy, and later by his son's deceiving him about Joseph's death and by Joseph's deceiving his brothers by dressing up as the Grand Vizier?

Moreover, now - after 22 years - Jacob has finally disgorged himself of the garb of Esau. He has shed the external, materialistic trappings which had almost totally muted his inner spiritual voice and the scholarly naïveté which was his natural persona. He is not at all certain that his mother had been correct in her scheme. Perhaps she had over-reached, underestimated the damage that the hands of Esau can wreak upon the soul of Jacob. Had he not become more Esau than Esau, more Laban than Laban, in his exile to Laban-land?!

Providence, however, and Jewish history side with Rebecca. We are complex personalities, entering the world not as disembodied souls but as creatures of both sub-gartelian and supra-gartelian (below and above the belt, or gartel) drives and needs. The Jewish birthright - if it is to truly create a more perfect society - requires our dream of compassionate righteousness, moral justice and world peace to be nurtured and protected by the hi-tech, internet-savvy, scientifically precise, philosophically astute, and militarily advanced hands of Esau. This is what will enable us not only to survive, but also to prevail; G-d created a world of both heaven and earth, and wants them to somehow stand together.

Undoubtedly, it is simpler to separate the two. It is "safer," much less "dangerous," to isolate the voice of Jacob within a Bnei Brak Beit Midrash, leaving political statesmanship and military prowess to a secular and even a gentile world. But then we give up the dream of universal redemption, of preparing a world wherein G-d dwells in our midst. We forfeit our birthright.

This week's Biblical commentary was introduced by the final verses of last week's reading as Jacob and Laban part: "Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of G-d met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of G-d!" So he named that place Mahanayim" (Genesis 32: 2-3). "Mahanayim" means "Twin Camps" - Israel and Diaspora, Torah and cultural wisdom, the sword and the scroll. It is the very danger of living within this dialectic which creates the possibility for the most profound creativity.

A Midrashic postscript

When David, the forerunner of our Messiah was first chosen, the text (1 Samuel 16: 12) reads; "He was sent for and he came and he was ruddy red (Admoni, Edom, Esau), with beautiful eyes and goodly appearance. And G-d said, "Arise and anoint him, for this is the one". The Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 63: 8), adds "When Samuel saw David the red; he was frightened lest he would murder innocent people in the same way that Esau did. The Holy One Blessed be He said to him, "He has beautiful eyes" (The Sanhedrin of Torah Scholars are Biblically referred to as the "eyes" of the community of Israel). Esau murdered

indiscriminately whereas David will only take a life at the behest of the Sanhedrin and truly for the sake of Heaven. © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Yaakov lives in a very violent and dangerous world. Escaping from Lavan and his treacheries, he falls into a wrestling match with an angel and an actual encounter with Eisav, who apparently is determined to kill him. Extricating himself from these difficulties, bruised, wounded and slightly poorer materially for the events, Yaakov then suffers the tragedy of his daughter Dina being kidnapped and assaulted and the resultant war that his sons, led by Shimon and Levi, conduct against the leaders and citizens of Shechem.

Yaakov is appalled by the violence perpetrated by his sons but is apparently powerless to limit it. Even on his deathbed he will reprimand Shimon and Levi for their violent nature and behavior. This parsha therefore turns into a litany of tragedies and untoward events that befall Yaakov. I have always felt that when Yaakov told the Pharaoh that "my years have been few and bad" he was referring to this week's parsha and its events.

It certainly seems that any assessment of Yaakov's life, based on the events of this week's parsha, must certainly be a bleak one, full of shade with very little light shining through. Yet in the assessment of Jewish history and rabbinic tradition, Yaakov's life is seen as a triumph and success. He is the one who takes a family and builds it into a nation. He takes thirteen disparate children, each one with a distinct personality and differing goals and welds them into the people of Israel. He imbues them with the belief of monotheism, good purpose and probative behavior, in spite of their living in a world of paganism and dissolute behavior.

Yaakov is strengthened in his belief by the promises made to him by G-d many years earlier in his life, before he embarked on his fateful journey to Aram. He never questioned the validity of G-d's support of him, of his eventual salvation and survival, no matter how difficult the circumstances. In this he is the paradigm of all future Jewish existence that mimics his life and circumstances.

Jewish life and events can be characterized as always being one of "out of the fire into the frying pan." There never seems to be a letup, a respite from the challenges and dangers that constantly arise. Yet we Jews are constantly aware of G-d's promise that He will never completely forsake us and that within us is the ability of being an eternal and constantly renewed people.

Being a loyal and Torah abiding Jew can create within each of us a sense of serenity and harmony. However, as a nation and people, such a pleasant

passage through the waters of human history is unlikely. It is natural for us to wish that this would somehow be otherwise. But the events of the life of Yaakov stare us in the face. They chart our course in life as well. Faith in G-d and the will to persevere under all circumstances define our goals and hopes in this difficult world in which we live. For, after all, we are all the children of Yaakov. © 2012 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

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT"l

Translated by Kaeren Fish

In Parashat Vayishlach, on his return journey to his father's house, our patriarch Yaakov faces many challenges. We have much to learn from the way Yaakov deals with each situation, but his reaction in the episode concerning Dina (Bereishit 34) is very strange, on a number of levels. The first peculiarity is his lack of involvement in the whole story: after all, he is the father of Shimon and Levi (and of Dina, too); why does he not intervene and prevent the wholesale slaughter of the men of the city of Shekhem, who are innocent? Furthermore, after witnessing his sons' rampage, he reproaches them with the words (34:30): "You have sullied me, to make me look bad before the inhabitants of the land..." Why does he respond only to the practical effect of their actions, rather than addressing the moral issue? Why does Yaakov postpone this rebuke until he is on his deathbed, at which point he finally declares, "Shimon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are their swords... for in their anger they killed a man, and willfully they lamed an ox" (49:5-6). Why are these harsh words not uttered right away?

With regard to the first question, we see that when the Torah introduces the brothers' sin, it says: "The sons of Yaakov answered Shekhem and Chamor his father with guile, and they spoke" (34:13). It seems that when Yaakov sees that they are trying to trick Shekhem, he feels that he has no right to interfere; if he were to do so, his sons might respond that Yaakov himself deceived his father; why should they not do the same? (Yitzchak even uses the same term, "with guile," "be-mirma," in 27:35, when he discovers Yaakov's subterfuge.) For this reason, Yaakov is unable even to attempt to dissuade the brothers from their scheme.

When they carry out their plan, Yaakov is terrified, and we can understand what it is that he fears if we examine the account of his encounter with Esav. Upon hearing that his brother is approaching with four hundred men, "Yaakov was very afraid, and it distressed him" (32:8). Rashi explains, based on the

words of Rabbi Yehuda bar Illa'i in Bereishit Rabba 76:2, that he is "'afraid' lest he will be killed, 'distressed' lest he will kill others." Despite G-d's promise to protect him (28:15), Yaakov is scared that he may die because he has spent twenty years with Lavan, during which time he was unable to honor his father, while Esav has had this opportunity all along. Perhaps now Esav's merits will be greater than his own, and consequently G-d will not save Yaakov from Esav!

Likewise, in the case of Dina, Yaakov is afraid of the historical consequences even more than the moral ramifications of what has happened. He fears that in light of this act, G-d may reject him and his descendants; He may discontinue Yaakov's line and not create Am Yisrael, the Jewish nation, from his descendants! For this reason he says, "You have sullied me"-in the eyes of G-d; they have added their sins to the calculation. Only just before Yaakov dies, when he knows that this mistake has not caused G-d to abandon him or the promises that He made to him-only then does he give expression to his moral outrage; only then is the time ripe.

The question of timing has a further application in Parashat Vayishlach. After the story of Dina, the Torah relates (35:6-10): "Yaakov came to Luz-which is in the Land of Kena'an and known as Beit El- he and all the people that were with him. There he built an altar, calling the place El Beit El, for there G-d had appeared to him when he fled before Esav his brother. Devora, the nurse of Rivka, died, and she was buried below Beit El, under the oak (allon), and he named the place Alon Bakhut (Weeping Oak).

"G-d appeared again to Yaakov, when he came from Paddan Aram, and He blessed him. G-d said to him: 'Your name, Yaakov-you will no longer be called by the name Yaakov; rather, Yisrael will be your name.'"

Why is Devora's death noted in between the building of the altar and G-d's revelation, with a full paragraph break separating them? G-d's appearance and blessing are usually right next to the construction of an altar! In Bereishit Rabba 81:5, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman teaches that this verse telling us about the death of Devora is actually hinting at the death of Rivka; Beit El is where Yaakov found out about his mother's passing.

If we examine G-d's blessing here, we see that it is now that Yaakov's name is officially changed to Yisrael. Why is this necessary? G-d knows that Yaakov is afraid on account of his sins: the deception of his father, as well as his absence and failure to honor him for twenty-two years. Yaakov is afraid that G-d has abandoned him. Therefore, G-d changes his name to Yisrael, as if to tell him: I have changed your name, so now you may start afresh. I do not hold you accountable for all of your previous sins.

Until Rivka dies, however, G-d cannot tell Yaakov that his past has been effectively erased, because part of that past is Rivka's role in the sin- and

Yaakov cannot erase his mother's participation in his life! For this reason, it is only after Rivka's passing that G-d can tell Yaakov to forget the past and to begin anew. Hence, prior to G-d's blessing and the changing of Yaakov's name to Yisrael, the Torah notes the passing of Rivka and her nurse. We see clearly that whether it is rebuke or blessing, the timing can often be as important as the message. (*This sicha was delivered at Se'uda Shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Vayishlach 5762 [2001].*)

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

After their "confrontation" turned into a reunion, Eisav offers to accompany Yaakov for the remainder of his trip (33:12). Yaakov declines, telling Eisav that, because of the children and the flocks, he must travel very slowly, but will meet up with him in Sayir (Beraishis 33:14), where Eisav lives. After his offer to leave some of his men with Yaakov is declined as well (33:15), Eisav returns to Sayir (33:16), but Yaakov never even attempts to meet him there. Instead, he goes to Succos (33:17), staying for there for 18 months (Rashi) before crossing the Jordan River to Shechem. How could Yaakov tell Eisav to go ahead of him to Sayir and wait for him there, and then never show up?

Ramban (33:14) says that Yaakov could have returned to his parents in Canaan one of two ways, with one of those ways passing through Sayir. Yaakov wasn't promising to meet Eisav in Sayir, only that if he chose to return via Sayir, he would stop by. Since Yaakov didn't go that way, he didn't break his promise, and there was no snub. However, Sayir was definitely very much out of the way. Eisav and Yaakov met up on the east side of the Jordan, about half way between the Kineret and the Dead Sea. Sayir is also on the east side of the Jordan, but south of the Dead Sea. Chevron, where Yitzchak and Rivka were (35:27), is west of the Dead Sea, meaning that Yaakov would have had to travel around it (south) in order to get to Chevron from Sayir. Even if Yaakov thought that Yitzchak was still in B'er Sheva (which is southwest of Chevron) he would have had to go below the Dead Sea from Sayir in order to get there. Instead, Yaakov took the much straighter path, going a little west to Succos, further west to Shechem, south to Beis El, then south to Chevron. (It was probably a more fertile route as well, allowing for less desert travel and more water availability.) If Sayir was not on the way to Chevron (or B'er Sheva), why did Yaakov tell Eisav that he would meet him there, and then never even attempt to go?

Another question discussed by Ramban (and others) is how Yaakov assumed that Eisav was in Sayir (where he sent the messengers and then said he would later meet up with him) if Eisav lived in Canaan until Yaakov's return (36:6-7). Ramban (36:6) says that

Eisav himself lived in Sayir, but his family and possessions remained in Canaan until Yaakov got there. S'fornu (36:2) points out that one of Eisav's wives was from Sayir, and says that she caused Eisav to start residing there. Chizkuni (36:6) also says that Eisav had dual residences until he was forced to move completely to Sayir, at which point he conquered it. While this may explain how Eisav could be described as living in both Sayir and Canaan, it doesn't explain how Yaakov knew in which of his two residences Eisav was currently, and thereby where to send the messengers (or why he said he would meet up with him in Sayir rather than in Canaan).

Yet another question that deserves a closer look is how Yaakov could, at this point in time, return at all. He had run away from Eisav fearing for his life, and was told by Rivka not to return until she lets him know that it was safe (27:42-45). If Eisav was still upset, how could Rivka send for him; if he wasn't, why was Yaakov still afraid? Rashi (35:8) tells us that Rivka had sent D'vora to get Yaakov while he was still in Padan Aramas as she told him she would-so that he would return. However, the message may not have been that Eisav was no longer upset so it's safe to come back (as was anticipated), but rather that it was safe to come back because, after marrying Ahalivama (who was from Sayir) Eisav was spending his time in Sayir, not in Canaan. He had become a leader there (as evidenced by the 400 men he brought with him to meet Yaakov), and would not be around (in Canaan) to exact revenge (and, perhaps, be less motivated to do so). Therefore, Yaakov returns, but sends messengers to Sayir (where he was told Eisav now hangs out) to try to reduce or eliminate any residual anger Eisav may still have.

Although Eisav may have originally intended to battle Yaakov, he at least makes it seem as if everything is okay between them, even offering to have some of his men accompany him (and his family and belongings) until they are able to spend some quality time together. Chizkuni (13:14), possibly because Yaakov uses the expression "until I come to you in Sayir" rather than the plural "we" (see also Netziv), says that Yaakov told Eisav he would come to Sayir after he brings everyone (and everything) to their final destination, when he would be able to focus on their time together, and do so "with joy and in peace." Eisav wasn't expecting Yaakov to travel out of his way with all of his things to Sayir, only that eventually they would get together, after Yaakov was no longer preoccupied with settling down in Canaan. (Eisav made his offer before Yaakov mentioned meeting him in Sayir, so his offer was to help him get to Chevron.) Yaakov's response wasn't that I'll go to Sayir instead of to Chevron, and spend time with you there before even seeing our father, but that rather than trying to catch up while we travel to Chevron (when I'll be distracted taking care of the family and the flocks), I'll come visit you in Sayir after I've settled in Chevron. Since Eisav still had his

things in Canaan, it's possible that they accomplished this there (in Chevron), perhaps even after Yitzchak passed away. But there's another possibility as well.

After Yaakov arrives in Chevron, the Torah tells us that "he settled in the land of his father's sojournings" (37:1). Although Avraham and Yitzchak lived there as temporary residents (see 35:27), Yaakov "settled" there, or at least tried to. Torah Sh'laima (37:1) quotes a Midrashic manuscript that says Yaakov thought his years in Aram had fulfilled the prophecy of Avraham that "his descendents would be strangers in a land that was not theirs" (15:13). [Perhaps Yaakov thought that the 400 years of exile started from when Avraham was told about them, and that even the overlapping years counted. If so, the 105 years that Avraham lived afterward that prophecy, added to Yitzchak's 180, the 98 years Yaakov lived until he "settled" in Canaan and the years his children lived until then (R'uvain and Levi were more than 10, plus the ages of the others) come to more than 400 years. Yaakov returned with great wealth (see 15:14), and his children were Avraham's great-grandchildren, i.e. the fourth generation (see 15:16), meaning that all of the conditions of Avraham's prophecy could have been fulfilled.] If Yaakov thought that the years of exile were over, he would have also thought that he wouldn't have any more distractions, and could visit Eisav in Sayir. However, instead of "dwelling in tranquility" (see Rashi on 37:2) as Yaakov had hoped, he had to deal with his children's sibling rivalry and all that it brought. His "retirement" trip to Sayir had to be postponed indefinitely.

This may explain the Chazal quoted by Rashi (33:14), that although Yaakov never made it to Sayir, his words would be fulfilled in the days of Moshiach, as it says (Ovadya 1:21) "And the saviors will arise from Mt. Zion to judge the Mount of Eisav," which would seem to be irrelevant to Yaakov's promise to meet Eisav in Sayir. However, if the intent was to go there after all of his other business was taken care of, we can understand that Yaakov's mission is not complete until Moshiach arrives, may it be soon. ©2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

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. ©2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

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. © 2010 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 NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Yaakov has overcome the tremendous trials of living for over twenty years in an alien environment and being subjected to severe challenges and injustices. It was under these trying circumstances that Yaakov married and raised the 'shivtei kah,' the founding pillars of the Jewish people. After fleeing Lavan's home, he encountered Eisav and succeeded in subjugating his brother's angels, and was finally ready to make a triumphant return to his parents' home.

Yet his ordeals were far from over. Just when he looked forward to a period of respite, the tragic story of Dina's abduction and violation at the hands of Shechem ben Chamor, befell him, followed by his sons' devastating strike against Shechem in retaliation for the outrage. How did this tragic chain of events come about? How could Providence have permitted Dina to be subjected to such a humiliating assault?

Our tradition teaches that many factors contributed to this disaster. The Torah tells us that Dina went out to associate with the 'daughters of the land'; the local girls. It seems her objective was simply to examine their culture and lifestyle. She was taken to task for this choice, as the verse says: 'kol kevuda bas melech pnima'; a princess' place is in the home. In mingling with the gentile population, she compromised her modesty and so she, in turn, was compromised.

In another place, our sages indicate that her behavior was influenced by her mother, Leah, who, our sages call a "yatzanis;" one who tends to put herself forward even when not wholly appropriate. Leah went out to the field to greet Yaakov, informing him of her desire to be with him that evening. Dina's desire to go forth "among the daughters of the land" is seen as an outgrowth of her mother's tendency to act in an immoderately forward manner.

Our sages also view Yaakov as carrying an element of responsibility for the tragedy that befell Dina as well. Rashi tells us (chapter 32; verse 22) that before his encounter with Eisav, Yaakov placed Dina in a chest so that Eisav should not gaze upon her and desire her as a wife. For this, he was punished by having her fall into the hands of Shechem. Had Eisav married Dina, Rashi says, she may have influenced him so profoundly, he would have repented.

Dina's experience of being locked away from the world in a chest likely piqued her curiosity, sharpening her desire to investigate her surroundings. After all, when we excessively restrict our children from engaging the outside world, the temptation to taste the forbidden fruits and wander off the reservation is so much more acute.

Lastly, our sages tell us that Yaakov deserved to have his daughter abducted for tarrying excessively before returning home to his parents, who surely missed him and longed to see him. (Rashi Chapter 35;verse 1).

The sad and sorry saga that unfolded in Shechem was precipitated by a complex interplay of factors, as we have seen. From the perspective of our sages, we gain access to an even deeper dimension. Through these bizarre events, Hashem was planting the seeds and orchestrating events for later generations.

Our sages tell us that the union of Dina and Shechem gave birth to Osnas, who later became the wife of Yosef, the forbears of two of the twelve tribes, Ephraim and Menashe. For the Divine plan to be brought to fruition, it was necessary that Yosef marry

one who was born of the union between polar opposites; the profane and the sacred. Dina's daughter, Osnas, chose to connect to her mother's spiritual legacy of sanctity.

This fascinating story is but one example of the multidimensional underpinnings of events that appear deceptively simple on the surface. The Divine plan that drives human events is so sublime and unfathomable, we are only afforded a tiny glimpse from time to time of its breathtaking sweep.

In our own lives, we can learn from the events in this portion how to view our own lapses of judgment. We tend to blame ourselves, and often find fault with our upbringing. We examine our parents' disposition and deflect the blame for our own poor choices onto our forbearers. But all of this is an exercise in futility and misses the point.

This week's portion teaches us that our job is to embrace the circumstances of our life even if they seem to be the product of our own faulty judgments. Instead of turning to recrimination, our task is to view Divine providence, in the context of history and our own personal lives, as the supreme guiding force. In the end, all will be understood and revealed as being part of a Divine plan designed for our own personal benefit and the benefit of the world at large. © 2012 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

We read in our parashah (33:18), "Yaakov arrived 'shaleim' / whole at the city of Shechem... and he encamped before the city." Midrash Rabbah interprets the end of the verse as an allusion to observing Shabbat, i.e., Yaakov arrived on the outskirts of Shechem before dark and marked-off the techum Shabbat of his encampment. [The "techum" is the approximately 2,000 amot-wide band around an encampment or city where a person is allowed to walk on Shabbat. If this is not what the verse is teaching, then for what purpose did the Torah mention the obvious detail that Yaakov camped?]

The midrash continues: Because Yaakov observed Shabbat, he was promised an inheritance without boundaries. In contrast to Avraham, who was promised (13:17), "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, for I will give it to you"-i.e., an inheritance limited by the boundaries of the Land-Yaakov was promised (28:14), "You shall burst out westward, eastward, northward and southward." [Until here from the midrash]

R' Aryeh Finkel shlita (rosh yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Modi'in Ilit, Israel) comments about the first part of our verse-"Yaakov arrived shaleim at the city of Shechem": "Shaleim" is related to "Shalom," which is a major theme on Shabbat (as in the multiple references to shalom in the song, "Shalom aleichem"). Yaakov,

who observed Shabbat, is the only person in all of Tanach who is called "shaleim" / "whole." Shalom / peace, harmony, perfection is the ultimate level to which a person and the world can aspire, and Yaakov achieved what no other person achieved-to have his image engraved on Hashem's throne. [We do not need to understand what this kabbalistic expression means to recognize that it indicates the pinnacle of human achievement.] (Yavo Shiloh p.401)

"When he [the angel] saw that he could not overcome him [Yaakov], he struck the socket of his hip; so Yaakov's hip-socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him." (32:26) R' Gershon Ashkenazi z"l (Austria; 1618-1693) cites the Zohar, which states that Yaakov's injury was a punishment for marrying two sisters. In light of this, R' Ashkenazi continues, we can understand the Gemara (Chullin 91a), which finds an allusion to Yaakov's injury in the verse (Yeshayah 9:7), "G-d sent a word for Yaakov; it befell Yisrael." That verse appears in a prophecy about the royal house of David; what is the connection between that subject and Yaakov's injury?

R' Ashkenazi explains: The Gemara relates that some people questioned King David's legitimacy because he was a descendant of Ruth, a Moabite woman. When people mocked King David, he would ask them rhetorically, "Don't you also come from a prohibited marriage, i.e., from Yaakov who married two sisters?" In fact, Yaakov's marriage was not prohibited because the Torah had not yet been given, nor was Ruth prohibited from marrying a Jew. Thus, writes R' Ashkenazi, the people blessed Boaz upon his marriage to Ruth (Ruth 4:11), "May Hashem make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built up the House of Yisrael." They were acknowledging that just as Yaakov's marriage to two sisters was not prohibited, so Boaz's marriage to a female Moabite convert was not prohibited. This is the common denominator between Yaakov's injury and the royal house of King David. [Nevertheless, while Yaakov did not technically sin, he was held accountable to some degree for an act-marrying two sisters-which the Torah would later prohibit.]

R' Ashkenazi concludes: In this light we can understand, as well, why the Gemara points out that Yosef removed the gid ha'nasheh from the meat that he fed his brothers when they came to his home in Egypt (see Bereishit 43:16). The prohibition on eating the gid ha'nasheh recalls Yaakov's injury, which, in turn, demonstrates the legitimacy of King David. Yosef was not certain that his brothers had not yet recognized him, and he wanted to assure them that he was not challenging the right of Yehuda, the progenitor of King David, to lead the brothers. Therefore he removed the gid ha'nasheh, as if to say, "King David is no less legitimate than we are, coming as we do from two sisters." (Tiferet Ha'Gershuni) © 2012 S. Katz and torah.org