

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

I have argued in previous years of Covenant and Conversation that the episode in which the Jewish people acquired its name -- when Jacob wrestled with an unnamed adversary at night and received the name Israel -- is essential to an understanding of what it is to be a Jew. I argue here that it is equally critical to understanding what it is to lead.

There are several theories as to the identity of "the man" who wrestled with the patriarch that night. The Torah calls him a man. The prophet Hosea called him an angel (Hosea 12:4, 5). The sages said it was Samael, guardian angel of Esau and a force for evil (Bereshith Rabbah 77; Rashi; Zohar). Jacob himself was convinced it was G-d. "Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw G-d face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Gen. 32:31).

My argument is that we can only understand the passage against the entire background of Jacob's life. Jacob was born holding on to Esau's heel. He bought Esau's birthright. He stole Esau's blessing. When his blind father asked him who he was, he replied, "I am Esau your firstborn." Jacob was the child who wanted to be Esau.

Why? Because Esau was the elder. Because Esau was strong, physically mature, a hunter. Above all because Esau was his father's favourite: "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). Jacob is the paradigm case of what the French literary theorist and anthropologist Rene Girard called mimetic desire, meaning, we want what someone else wants, because we want to be that someone else.

The result is tension between Jacob and Esau which rises to an unbearable intensity when Esau discovers that Jacob has taken the blessing Isaac had reserved for him, and vows to kill him when Isaac is no longer alive.

Jacob flees to Laban where he encounters more conflict and is on his way home when he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with a force of 400 men. In an unusually strong description of emotion the Torah tells us that Jacob was "very frightened and distressed," frightened, no doubt, that Esau would try to kill him, and perhaps distressed that his brother's animosity was not without cause.

Jacob had indeed wronged him. Isaac says to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." Centuries later the prophet Hosea said, "The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with G-d" (Hos. 12:3-4). Jeremiah uses the name Jacob to mean someone who practises deception: "Beware of your friends; do not trust anyone in your clan; for every one of them is a deceiver [akov Yaakov], and every friend a slanderer" (Jer. 9:3).

As long as Jacob sought to be Esau there was tension, conflict, rivalry. Esau felt cheated; Jacob felt fear. That night, about to meet Esau again after an absence of twenty two years Jacob wrestles with himself and finally throws off the image of Esau that he has carried with him all these years as the person he wants to be. This is the critical moment in Jacob's life. From now on he is content to be himself. And it is only when we stop wanting to be someone else (in Shakespeare's words, "desiring this man's art, and that man's scope, With what I most enjoy contented least") that we can be at peace with ourselves and with the world.

This is one of the great challenges of leadership. It is all too easy for a leader to pursue popularity by being what people want him or her to be, a liberal to liberals, a conservative to conservatives, taking decisions that win temporary acclaim rather than flowing from principle and conviction. Presidential adviser David Gergen wrote about Bill Clinton that he "isn't exactly sure who he is yet and tries to define himself by how well others like him. That leads him into all sorts of contradictions, and the view by others that he seems a constant mixture of strengths and weaknesses."

Leaders sometimes try to "hold the team together" by saying different things to different people, but eventually these contradictions become clear -- especially in the total transparency that modern media impose -- and the result is that the leader will seem to lack integrity. People will no longer trust his or her remarks. There will be a loss of confidence and authority that may take a long time to restore. The leader may find that his or her position has become untenable and may be forced to resign. Few things make a leader more unpopular than the pursuit of popularity.

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Great leaders have the courage to live with unpopularity. Lincoln was reviled and ridiculed during his lifetime. In 1864 the New York Times wrote of him: "He has been denounced without end as a perjurer, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler over the last agonies of an expiring nation." Churchill, until he became prime minister during the Second World War, had been written off as a failure. After the war he was defeated in the 1945 General Election. He himself said that "Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." John F Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated. When Margaret Thatcher died, some people celebrated in the streets.

Jacob was not a leader; there was as yet no nation for him to lead. Yet the Torah goes to great lengths to give us an insight into his struggle for identity, because it was not his alone. It happens to most of us (the word *avot* used to describe Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, means not only "fathers, patriarchs" but also "archetypes"). It is not easy to overcome the desire to be someone else, to want what they have, to be what they are. Most of us have such feelings from time to time. Girard argues that this has been the main source of conflict throughout history. It can take a lifetime of wrestling before we know who we are and relinquish the desire to be who we aren't.

More than anyone else in Genesis Jacob is surrounded by conflict: not just between himself and Esau, but between himself and Laban, between Rachel and Leah, and between his children, Joseph and his brothers. It is as if the Torah were telling us that so long as there is a conflict within us, there will be a conflict around us. We have to resolve the tension in ourselves before we can do so for others. We have to be at peace with ourself before we can be at peace with the world.

That is what happens in this week's parsha. After his wrestling match with the stranger, Jacob undergoes a change of personality. He gives back to Esau the blessing he took from him. The previous day he had given him back the material blessing by sending him hundreds of goats, ewes, rams, camels, cows, bulls and donkeys. Now he gives him back the blessing that said, "Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you." Jacob bows down seven times to Esau. He calls Esau "My lord," and himself

"your servant." He actually uses the word "blessing," though this fact is often obscured in translation. He says "Please take my blessing that has been brought to you" (Gen. 33:11). The result is that the two brothers meet and part in peace.

People conflict. They have different interests, passions, desires, temperaments. Even if they didn't, they would still conflict, as every parent knows. Children -- and not just children -- seek attention, and you can't attend to everyone equally all the time. Managing the conflicts that affect every human group is the work of the leader; and if the leader is not sure of and confident in his or her identity, the conflicts will persist. Even if the leader sees him -- or herself as a peacemaker, the conflicts will still persist.

The only answer is to "know thyself," to wrestle with yourself as Jacob did on that fateful night, throwing off the person you might like to be but are not, accepting that some people will like you and what you stand for while others will not, and that it is better to seek the respect of some than the popularity of all. This may involve a lifetime of struggle, but the outcome is an immense strength. No one is stronger than one who knows who and what he is. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Israel's military operation "Pillar of Defense" was greatly successful in ending the rocket attacks on the residents in the South whose lives were constantly being threatened by rocket fire from Hamas; the same Hamas which is now threatening another Intifada.

That war gained a great deal of moral support from the neutral bloc of nations because we have engaged exclusively in aerial strikes, directed with pincer-like precision, against specific terrorist killer-leaders as well as the major Hamas buildings of operation, media and banking. A ground invasion would have brought in its wake Israeli losses as well as more Palestinian civilian casualties. This would have removed Israel from the moral high ground, and might very well have caused us to lose the support we now enjoy from our "friends."

Still, many Israelis are concerned that our army did not "finish the job." They would have preferred a much more forceful ground attack, which would have destroyed Hamas' ability to attack Israel while bringing about a significant number of Palestinian civilian casualties. It would have prevented Hamas threats today. Would such an attack have been morally and religiously justified?

This week's Biblical portion of Vayishlach contains a fascinating precedent in the form of the military operation by Jacob's sons, Shimon and Levi against the civilian population of Shekhem. A debate in legal theory between Maimonides and Nahmanides

about the legitimacy of their action will certainly provide much fuel for our discussion.

First, let us review the facts (Genesis 34). Jacob has left Laban-land, and returns, together with his "tribe," to his ancestral homeland, Canaan. He purchases a piece of land in the city of Shekhem from Hamor, the Prince of the city, and erects an altar to G-d. Shekhem, the son of Hamor rapes Jacob's daughter Dina, leaving Jacob and his sons outraged.

Shekhem and his father come to meet the Hebrew clan. Prince Hamor announces that his son desperately wishes to marry Dina, and that they are willing to give an exorbitant dowry payment for Dina. Jacob's sons answer "with subterfuge" that only if every male resident will circumcise himself can Shekhem marry Dina and the two large clans join together; "But if you will not listen to us to become circumcised, we will take our sister and leave" (34:17).

From this last phrase, it is clear that the meeting of the potential in-laws took place under the cloud of Dina's captivity; the sweet-talking Hamor was holding Dina hostage. To the surprise of Jacob's sons, Hamor accepted the condition of circumcision. Simon and Levi took their swords on the third day after the mass circumcision; they slew every male in the city, including Shekhem and Hamor. They then rescued Dina.

Father Jacob chides Simon and Levi: "You have sullied me, causing me to stink among the inhabitants of the land...I am few in number, and should they band together and attack me, I will be annihilated - I am my household" (34:30). But the last word of the chapter - and what gives final closure to the incident- is the statement of Shimon and Levi: "Should they be allowed to make our sister into a harlot?" (34:31).

It is especially important to note that Jacob does not charge his two sons with moral opprobrium; his condemnation is on political rather than ethical grounds. Plus, the Bible itself informs us that Jacob's fears had no real basis. Much the opposite: "[Jacob and his entourage] traveled on, and there descended the fear of G-d upon all the cities roundabout, and no one dared to pursue the sons of Jacob" (35:5).

Maimonides, the great Jewish legalist-philosopher, offers a startling post-script to this incident. He rules (Laws of Kings 9: 14), "The Gentiles are commanded to keep the Seven Noahide Laws, the seventh being the establishment of law courts and judges to rule on and enforce the compliance to the first six. Any Noahide who transgresses any one of these seen is to be killed by the sword. And it is for this reason that all the householders of Shekhem were guilty of death. "Shekhem stole (and raped Dina); the Shekhemites saw and they knew and... they did not bring them to justice."

Nachmanides disagreed, interpreting the Noahide law to establish law courts and judges to mean to legislate the details of a civil legal system; he does

not hold every Gentile responsible for the proper execution of each criminal. (Ramban to Genesis 34:13).

But Maimonides has a most compelling argument - especially in light of recent history. Shekhem would never have permitted himself to rape Dina, had she not been a Hebrew maiden, a stranger who was isolated from the rest of the city. Once you are dealing with people who believe that it is power which gives one the right to dominate, then you must use even more power if you hope to survive. Germany and Japan became very different nation-states after the Second World War, but only after they were convinced that they could not beat the allies militarily. And remember, it was the residents of Gaza who brought Hamas into power!

Allow my position to be made very clear: I'm very proud of Israel for doing everything possible to avoid civilian casualties, often even at the risk to the lives of our own soldiers. This is what makes us so different from our enemies.

But we cannot allow this sensitivity to be the means by which we hand victory to our enemies. As long as the enemy is a Jihadist, that would be the ultimate immorality. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Many commentators over the ages have seen in the two confrontations between Yaakov and Eisav - first the struggle with Eisav's angel and then the meeting with Eisav in the flesh - the two-front war that Judaism and the Jewish people have been forced to fight over millennia in order to simply survive.

The struggle with Eisav's angel, as described in the parsha, represents a spiritual and intellectual fight, a contest of ideas, beliefs and debate. The meeting with the physical Eisav in turn represents the struggle of the Jewish people to simply stay alive in a bigoted, cruel, and nearly fatal environment.

Yaakov does not escape unscathed from either confrontation. He is crippled physically and somewhat impoverished financially. Eisav's "evil eye" gazes upon his children and Yaakov is relieved to escape alive, even if damaged in body and purse, separating himself from Eisav physically and from his civilization and worldview.

The scenario is pretty much set for the long dance of Jewish history, with the Jews always attempting to survive in a constantly challenging and brutal society governed by Eisav. The rabbis of Midrash discussed the possibilities of coexistence and even cooperation with Eisav.

Though this debate did not result in any permanent or convincing conclusion, the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai that Eisav's hatred of Yaakov is completely irrational and implacable seems to be

borne out by history, past and present. The anti-Semitism in today's seemingly enlightened world is so pervasive as to be frightening. And we seem to be powerless to do anything about it.

As is painfully obvious to all, these struggles for continued Jewish existence are ongoing and seemingly unending. All of the foreign ideas and current fads of Western society stand almost unanimously opposed to Torah values and traditional lifestyle. The angel of Eisav changes his program from time to time, but he is always opposed to Torah and moral behavior.

He wavers from totalitarian extreme conservatism to wild liberalism but always is able to wound the Jewish psyche and body no matter what philosophy or culture he now advocates. We limp today from this attack on Jewish values and Torah study and practice.

Jewish parents in America sue school boards for anti-Semitic attitudes, policies and behavior. Yet they would not dream of sending their children to a Jewish school or giving them an intensive Jewish education. The lawsuit is the indicator of the limp inflicted upon us by Eisav's cultural angel.

All agree that Europe is currently a lost continent as far as Jews are concerned. The question most asked of travel agents by Jews today is "Can I wear a kippah on the street there?" Billions of dollars of Jewish treasure pillaged during World War II and immediately thereafter still lie in the hands of Eisav.

And yet we certainly would be satisfied if the world just let us alone but that seems to be a forlorn hope. So our struggle continues but the Lord's promise to us that we will somehow prevail remains valid and true. And that is our hope for continuing on as loyal and steadfast Jews. © 2013 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 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-yeavek.

Rashi first gives a literal reason as to the use of this unusual term. He points out that the word va-yeavek 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 the fore in the early 70's in the town of Maalot, when terrorists targeted children in order to bring us down and this trend, unfortunately, continues today. Still, in the end, like the Yaakov of old, we prevail.

Rashi offers a second suggestion. The word avak interchanges with hibuk-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, Dennis Prager notes, 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 reprioritize communal resources to the spiritual and educational spheres.

The ish's embrace of Yaakov warns us that while combating continued anti-Semitism and terrorism is a critically important objective, especially in these times, we must never lose sight of the fact that this effort must be taken alongside the goal of the stirring and reawakening of Jewish spiritual consciousness.

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RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

No News is Jews News

Yaakov's family faced a tremendous crisis. While passing through the city of Shechem, Dena, their sister was attacked and was violated by Shechem, the son of King Chamor, who bore the same name as the city. Shechem later claimed that he desperately wanted to marry her! No one in the entire city brought

the prince to justice and Yaakov's sons were not going to ignore that behavior.

They were not ready for open warfare either, and so they developed a ruse. They claimed that they were ready to form a harmonious relationship with the entire population of the city of Shechem. "We will give our daughters to you, and take your daughters to ourselves; we will dwell with you, and become a single people" (Braishis 34:16). However, there was one condition. Every male of Shechem had to circumcise. Yaakov's children insisted that it would be a disgrace for the daughters of Abraham to marry uncircumcised men. Upon direction from King Chamor and Prince Shechem the entire town agreed, and three days later, when the people of Shechem were in painful recuperation from their surgery, Yaakov's children avenged Dina's honor. Despite Yaakov's consternation, they attacked the male population and wiped them out.

The question is simple: Why ask the people of Shechem to circumcise? If Yaakov's children wanted to attack them, why go through a process of converting them? They should have asked them to fast for three days. That would have made them even weaker. They could have asked them to hand over all their weapons. Why ask them to do an act is so blatantly Jewish?

On September 30, 2000, the word intafada was almost unknown to the average American. And then the riots began. On one of the first days of what has now been over three years of unceasing violence, against innocent Israelis, The New York Times, Associated Press and other major media outlets published a photo of a young man who looked terrified, bloodied and battered. There was an Israeli soldier in the background brandishing a billy-club. The caption in everyone of the papers that carried the photo identified the teen as an innocent Palestinian victim of the riots -- with the clear implication that the Israeli soldier was the one who beat him. The world was in shock and outrage at the sight of the poor teen, blood oozing from his temple crouching beneath the club-wielding Israeli policeman. Letters of protest and sympathy poured in from the genteel readers of the gentile world.

The victim's true identity was soon revealed. Dr. Aaron Grossman wrote the NY Times that the picture of the Israeli soldier and the Palestinian on the Temple Mount was indeed not a Palestinian. The battered boy was actually his son, Tuvia Grossman, a Yeshiva student from Chicago. He, and two of his friends, were pulled from their taxicab by a mob of Palestinian Arabs, and were severely beaten and stabbed. The Israeli soldier wielding the club was actually attempting to protect Tuvia from the vicious mob.

All of a sudden the outrage ceased, the brutal attack was almost ignored and a correction buried somewhere deep amongst "all the news that is fit to print" re-identified Tuvia Grossman as "an American student in Israel." It hardly mentioned that he was an innocent Jew who was nearly lynched by Arabs. This

blatant hypocrisy in news coverage incidentally help launch a media watchdog named Honest Reporting.com.

Rav Yonasan Eibeschitz, zt"l, explains that Yaakov's children knew something that was as relevant in Biblical times as it is in today's "New York" times. Yaakov's sons knew the secret of society. Have them circumcised. Make them Jews. Then you can do whatever you want with them and no one will say a word. You can wipe out an entire city -- as long as it is not a gentile city. If Shechem had remained a gentile city had the people not circumcised according to the laws of Avraham then Yaakov's children would have been condemned by the entire world. But Yaakov's children knew better. They made sure that the Shechemites, went through a Jewish circumcision. Shechem now was a Jewish city; and when a Jewish city is destroyed, the story becomes as irrelevant as an American student attacked by a Palestinian mob in Yerushalayim! Unfortunately it is that simple and that old. © 2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

Therefore the Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the displaced sinew on the hip-socket to this day, because he struck Yaakov's hip-socket on the displaced sinew.

The text is unclear concerning the location and extent of Yaakov's injury. Just how did the angel attack Yaakov? Was the injury bilateral, or only to a single hip? These questions are subject to a dispute in the gemara. (Chulin 90B-91A)

R. Yehuda maintains that the malach (appearing either in the guise of an idolater or a Torah scholar) stood to Yaakov's right, and struck him only on that side. The sinew that is forbidden to us in commemoration of that struggle is therefore only the one on the right side of the animal.

The Chachamim, on the other hand, argue that the malach approached Yaakov from behind, and struck him on both sides. The sinews of both the right and left of the animal are therefore forbidden.

The two positions are sourced in the events of the evening. Where did the malach stand? How did that affect the struggle, and Yaakov's injury. But we also understand that such details are not casual. Nothing in the lives of the avos is casual. From the details that the Torah records about these giants we can read the larger story of the Jewish experience. As Ramban demonstrates, events in their lives propagated through time, and determined conditions and events in the lives of their descendants. If we look for the greater message in the struggle between Yaakov and the malach, we are certain to find it.

According to Chazal, the malach was none other than the yetzer hora, also known as the Angel of

Death, aka as the Guardian Angel of Esav. The all night battle led to no one claiming victory. As the incident ripples across time, this would mean that Yaakov would not be defeated by his major enemy. Jewish faith would continue unblemished

This hostile malach would not take no for an answer. If it could not bring Yaakov down, it would at least seek to leave its mark on some of Yaakov's descendants. Here, saro shel Esav had some success. There would be times in history that at least some of Yaakov's offspring would fall prey to the blandishments of the yetzer hora.

We can divide the Torah's mitzvos into two large groups -- mitzvos between man and his fellow man, and mitzvos between man and G-d. These are the two chief areas upon which all Jewish life stands. They took the form of the two tablets at Sinai. The first group of the Ten Commandments -- the right tablet -- governed the relationship between man and G-d; the left tablet described expectations concerning man's treatment of other men. (When the would-be convert asked Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while "standing on one foot," he meant all of the Torah dealing with interpersonal mitzvos. That is why Hillel could answer, "What is distasteful to you, do not do to your fellow.")

Looking back at the events of the long evening, the malach could approvingly summarize the battle: "You have striven with Elokim and with people, and prevailed." (Bereishis 32:29) In other words, Yaakov's commitment and faith remained fully intact, both vis-a-vis G-d and man. The malach did manage to dislocate the hip-socket sinew. In the course of history, there would be some Jews who would not remain steadfast in their performance of mitzvos.

In modern times, we have seen these casualties. We have witnessed the wholesale abandonment of major parts of the Torah. The worst part of this unfaithfulness concerned the mitzvos between man and G-d. Astonishingly, even among those Jews, commitment to fellow Jews remained strong. These "non-practicing" Jews continued their charitable giving, and continued assuming responsibility for Jews in need around the globe. This is what R. Yehuda meant by localizing the damage to the right sinew, i.e., the part of Torah that deals with mitzvos between man and Hashem. The left side remained unimpaired.

The Chachamim demur. Looks are deceiving, they argue. It may seem that these Jews remain strong and steadfast in their observance of at least a good part of the Torah. But it cannot be as good as it looks. Mitzvos are intertwined. When people let go of significant parts of the Torah, their emunah and yiras Hashem must suffer in the process. Without that emunah, none of their other observance has a firm foundation. Their performance of the interpersonal mitzvos is laudable while it lasts -- but the long-term

outlook is bleak. Without emunah and yiras Shomayim, the vestiges of their observance are without foundation. Changed circumstances and conditions will easily cause them to drop those observances. Their behavior in interpersonal areas may look strong from the outside, but it must be weak from within.

This is why the Chachamim insist that Yaakov was hurt by blows from the rear, and on both sides. Standing in front of Yaakov, one cannot see the damage. Still involved in the interpersonal life of the Jewish people, they seem to be fine, upstanding Jews, despite having discarded many mitzvos. From behind, however, that is in a place hidden from view and a time when no one observes, they are entirely compromised - without a single leg to stand on. (Based on Be'er Yosef, Bereishis 32:26-33) © 2013 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Vayishlach, we find Yaakov crossing the Jordan River with his family, and going back for some small earthenware jugs that he forgot (Talmud: Chulin 91). Why would a wealthy man such as Yaakov have to go back for a few jugs? One answer, according to Rabbi Shraga Simmons, is that Yaakov lived with the understanding that whatever possessions G-d gave him were for a purpose. As such, the jugs were as precious as jewels. To Yaakov, the fact that they were inexpensive didn't matter. Rabbi Ezriel Tauber explains this with the following metaphor: If we were thirsty and asked a friend to bring us water, if they bring a paper cup filled with water, we would drink the water and throw out the cup. But now let's say we were wandering in the desert dying of thirst. If we were to lift our eyes to Heaven and say, "G-d, I'm dying, please make a miracle and send water!!" and behold, a hand reaches down from Heaven and gives us water in a paper cup. We would certainly drink the water... But what about the cup? We wouldn't throw it away -- a cup from Heaven is a great souvenir! Because G-d could have sent us the water any way He wanted, like making it rain, or created a well, or simply pouring the water into our mouth. The fact that G-d handed us a paper cup tells us that He not only wanted us to have the water, He wanted us to have the cup too.

We're only expected to work with the tools G-d provides, and whatever He provides is precisely what we need. Whether or not the eventual goal is completed is only in G-d's hands. This idea of having everything we need is emphasized again in our Parsha, when after 20 years apart, Yaakov is reunited with his twin brother Esav. In describing their state of affairs, Esav says, "I have a lot;" and Yaakov says, "I have everything". (33:9-11) The difference is subtle, but in fact speaks volumes. Esav is saying "I have a lot..." but I sure could use more, whereas Yaakov is saying, "According to my part

in G-d's grand eternal plan, I have everything -- exactly what I need." If we look at every possession (even little jugs) and situation as a special gift from G-d, the puzzle of life becomes truly meaningful, and more importantly, complete. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd [Yaakov] took his two wives and his two maidservants and his eleven children” (B'reishis 32:23). Although Binyamin was not born yet, Yaakov already had twelve children, as Leah also had a daughter, Deena. Why does the Torah only refer to eleven children if there were twelve? Rashi, based on the Midrash (B'reishis Rabbah 76:9), tells us that Yaakov had hidden Deena in a "box," so that Eisav wouldn't take her against her will. For doing this, thereby preventing the possibility of Deena being able to positively influence Eisav, Yaakov was punished, and Deena was taken by Shechem instead. Was Yaakov really expected to risk his daughter's well-being on the remote chance that his wicked brother could be rehabilitated by her?

There are other aspects to the meeting between Yaakov and Eisav that seem quite puzzling as well. First of all, Yaakov was surprised when he found out that Eisav was coming "with 400 men" (32:7), causing him to become "very afraid and distressed" (32:8). Rivka had told Yaakov that she would call for him when Eisav's anger subsides (27:45), which she did by sending her nurse-maid D'vorah (see Rashi on 35:8). Since Rivka had sent word that Yaakov should return, Eisav's anger must have subsided. If Eisav was no longer upset about Yaakov stealing the blessings, why was he coming with an army to attack him? Secondly, how did Eisav's demeanor change so rapidly, from planning to attack Yaakov (33:1) to giving him a loving embrace (33:4)? It couldn't have been the enormous gift Yaakov sent, as the army was still there even afterwards, and Eisav was initially unwilling to accept the gift, stating that he was so wealthy he didn't need it (33:9). Was it Yaakov's bowing seven times? Would Eisav undergo such a complete turnaround based on actions that could easily be insincere, especially when done by somehow he thought had "tricked" him twice already (27:36)? Additionally, from the start, Yaakov's stated goal was to "find favor in Eisav's eyes." It was part of the original message sent to Eisav (32:6), and was repeated in person (33:10). Yet, when Eisav offers to assign some of his men to help Yaakov travel, Yaakov's response (33:15) was "why should I find favor in my master's eyes?" Wasn't "finding favor in Eisav's eyes" the whole point? [Because of this disconnect, the commentators bend over backwards to try to put a comma between "why" and "I find favor in my master's eyes." Nevertheless, a straightforward reading (see Onkelos) has it as one statement (see 25:32 and 32:30,

see Netziv on 33:15).] Finally, the tension between Yaakov and Eisav was caused by Yaakov deceiving Yitzchok, presenting himself as Eisav in order to get the blessing that Yitzchok had intended to give Eisav. Any attempt at reconciliation would be undermined if Eisav was reminded that Yaakov had taken his blessing. Yet, when Yaakov tried to convince Eisav to accept his gift, the words he used were "take my blessing" (33:11). How could Yaakov mention the blessing or use the same term when trying to heal the wounds that taking the blessing had caused? Eisav had already indicated he was over it (by embracing him and being friendly), yet Yaakov brings it up again? (When I mentioned this to a chaver, he said "I think Freud asks the same question.")

There were two main aspects to the blessing Yitzchok had wanted to give Eisav; material wealth (27:28) and dominion over others, including over his brother (27:29). There was no mention of anything spiritual (other than G-d being the source of the blessing), nor was there any indication that Yitzchok was transmitting the blessing he had received, which was the blessing given to Avraham, with the exception of "those who curse you being cursed and those who bless you being blessed" (which were phrased differently and in a different order; compare with 12:3). There's no mention of inheriting the Promised Land, and no mention of having descendants "as abundant as the stars in the sky," "the dust of the earth" or "the sands of the seashore." When Yitzchok blessed Yaakov as he left for Charan, on the other hand, he mentioned "the blessing of Avraham" as well as the Promised Land (28:4). It is quite obvious that Yitzchok was not trying to make Eisav the heir apparent of Avraham's legacy; that was reserved for Yaakov. He was hoping that Eisav would support Yaakov, a "Yissachar/Z'vulun" type of relationship, and therefore tried to give Eisav a blessing for material wealth (see page 7 of <http://tinyurl.com/kerkpwq>). [Why Yitzchok wanted the "fundraiser" to be the boss is a separate issue; perhaps he thought freeing Yaakov from the monetary decisions would help him focus on his spiritual growth. Rivka's prophecy that "the elder will serve the younger" (25:23) makes it clear that Yaakov should be the boss, but Yitzchok was likely unaware of this prophecy, which might have been referring to how things ended up, with Yaakov being both the fundraiser and the Rosh Yeshiva.] Rivka realized that Eisav would not support Yaakov's spiritual mission, telling Yaakov he must therefore get the blessing intended for Eisav and take on both roles.

Eisav was devastated when Yaakov took the blessing, but not because he wanted to support Yaakov's spiritual development. He wanted the wealth that the blessing promised, as well as the power to rule over others, including his brother. As it turned out, though, even without the blessing Eisav became fabulously wealthy (see 33:9), and yielded much power

(as evidenced by his controlling a mighty militia and conquering the land of Sayir). It was at this point that Eisav's anger subsided, so Rivka sent for Yaakov.

Even though he was told that Eisav's anger had subsided, Yaakov also wanted to repair his personal relationship with his brother, or at least not aggravate it further, so rather than just showing up back in Canaan unannounced, he sends word to Eisav that he is returning, and that he wants to "find favor in his eyes," i.e. get along. However, rather than just accepting that his brother is coming home, Eisav gathers a militia to attack. Not because he is still upset about losing the blessing for wealth or power; he has those things. There was still one aspect of the blessing that Eisav didn't have; which brother would serve the other. Realizing this, Yaakov prepares a huge tributary gift, the kind presented to rulers by visiting dignitaries to show their allegiance and to demonstrate their subservience. [Rabbi Moshe Shamah ("Recalling the Covenant"), referencing the practice in the ancient world as well as (in a footnote) one of the Gaonim, explains how the number 220, the amount of animals in the first two herds presented to Eisav, and twice the amount of the third, signified being the subservient half of a partnership.] Although Eisav likely took notice of this gesture, he wasn't convinced that Yaakov was really reversing their roles and agreeing to allow his brother to rule over him, so continued towards him with his militia. Upon seeing Yaakov's repeated prostrations (33:3), though, he was convinced, and was no longer upset about what had happened so many years ago.

Having accomplished his goal of convincing Eisav that he was not interested in lording over him, the next step was "finding favor in his eyes." Eisav had refused to accept his "tribute" (33:9-10), so Yaakov tried to take it to the next level, calling it his "blessing." Eisav had accused Yaakov of "tricking" him twice, regarding the birthright and regarding the blessing. His accusation about the birthright had no basis, as Eisav had agreed to exchange it for "this red stuff" (25:30), questioned what value it had for him (25:32), and belittled it (25:34). As far as the blessing, though, Eisav had a valid point. Even though the blessing for material success had to be given to Yaakov, Eisav was not given the option. Had he been given the option, he wouldn't have relinquished it, but for the wrong reasons (thinking he needed it to achieve wealth and power). Now, however, knowing that he had all the wealth and power he could have ever hoped the blessing could provide, would Eisav be willing to let Yaakov keep the blessing? Was there a chance that Eisav would reconsider, and now want to be Yaakov's partner in his holy mission, freeing Yaakov from the financial responsibility? If Yaakov was to proceed with a clear conscience, he would have to give Eisav the opportunity to reclaim his original role, or to give it up willingly. Although Kli Yakar (33:10) understands this to be Yaakov's intent earlier, I would suggest that it was when Yaakov changed the term

used for his gift from "tribute" (33:10) to "blessing" that he offered the blessing, and all that it entailed, back to Eisav. He declined, eventually accepting the gift itself only because Yaakov implored him to (33:11).

Even after declining to take over the responsibility for all the material needs, Eisav offered to help Yaakov bring his things home (33:12), or at least have some of his men accompany him (33:15), but this was an offer of help from an outsider, not a partner fulfilling the obligations of the partnership. Yaakov declined this offer, asking why, if Eisav was not going to be his financial partner/backer, did he "find favor in his eyes" vis--vis helping him travel. The "finding favor in his eyes" regarding their past tension had been achieved; if Eisav was not going to reclaim his original role as the financier, Yaakov didn't think it was appropriate for him to be part of the enterprise. This was Yaakov's way of saying "if you're in, you've got to be all in; which one's it going be?" He didn't say "no" to Eisav's offer, he asked why he should "find favor in his eyes" to be given help if he didn't "find enough favor in his eyes" to be his partner. Eisav's response? "And Eisav returned on that day to his way, to Sayir" (33:16). Yaakov had offered Eisav (again) to take over the responsibilities that come with the blessing, but Eisav declined, willingly.

Once we place the conversation between Yaakov and Eisav in this context, Deena's potential role becomes more prominent. When describing what could have been, the Midrash (Shir HaShirim Zuta 1:15, <http://tinyurl.com/lz57a6y>) says that Eisav would have married Leah (and Zilpah) and Yaakov would have married Rachel (and Bilhah); kings would have come from Eisav (as they are responsible for making sure society runs properly) and kohanim would have come from Yaakov (as they are responsible for the nation's spiritual growth). After Yaakov took over both roles, though, Yaakov had to marry Leah too (and Zilpah), and the entire nation came from him. Where would that leave Eisav, since Yaakov and Leah were already married? Yaakov may have agreed to work for Rachel for seven years in order to give Eisav a chance to marry Leah (see page 2 of <http://tinyurl.com/lvk7hpb>), but once Yaakov had to marry Leah, if Eisav ever reconsidered, who would be his spouse? Deena was Leah's daughter, and had the potential to take her mother's place. By keeping Deena hidden from Eisav, this possibility was removed, making Yaakov's offer for Eisav to reclaim his original role more difficult to accept. Therefore, Yaakov was punished for hiding Deena, Eisav's potential mate, from him. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

