

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It is one of the most enigmatic episodes in the Torah, but also one of the most important, because it was the moment that gave the Jewish people its name: Israel, one who “wrestles with G-d and with men and prevails.”

Jacob, hearing that his brother Esau is coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men, was terrified. He was, says the Torah, “very afraid and distressed.” He made three forms of preparation: appeasement, prayer and war (Rashi to Gen. 32:9). He sent Esau a huge gift of cattle and flocks, hoping thereby to appease him. He prayed to G-d, “Rescue me, I pray, from the hand of my brother” (32:12). And he made preparation for war, dividing his household into two camps so that one at least would survive.

Yet he remained anxious. Alone at night he wrestled with a stranger until the break of dawn. Who the stranger was is not clear. The text calls him a man. Hosea (12:4) called him an angel. The sages said it was the guardian angel of Esau.¹ Jacob himself seems sure that he has encountered G-d himself. He calls the place where the struggle took place Peniel, saying, “I have seen G-d face to face and my life was spared” (32:30).

There are many interpretations. One, however, is particularly fascinating both in terms of style and substance. It comes from Rashi’s grandson, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam, France, c.1085-1158).

Rashbam had a strikingly original approach to biblical commentary.² He felt that the sages, intent as they were on reading the text for its halakhic ramifications, often failed to penetrate to what he called *omek peshuto shel mikra*, the plain sense of the text in its full depth.



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¹ Bereishit Rabbah 77:3.

² He sets this out in his commentary to Genesis 37:2.

Rashbam felt that his grandfather occasionally erred on the side of a midrashic, rather than a “plain” reading of the text. He tells us that he often debated the point with Rashi himself, who admitted that if he had the time he would have written further commentaries to the Torah in the light of new insights into the plain sense that occurred to him “every day”. This is a fascinating insight into the mind of Rashi, the greatest and most famous commentator in the entire history of rabbinic scholarship.

All of this is a prelude to Rashbam’s remarkable reading of the night-time wrestling match. He takes it as an instance of what Robert Alter has called a type-scene,³ that is, a stylised episode that happens more than once in Tanakh. One obvious example is young-man-meets-future-wife-at-well, a scene enacted with variations three times in the Torah: in the case of Abraham’s servant and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, and Moses and Tzipporah. There are differences between them, but sufficient similarities to make us realise that we are dealing with a convention. Another example, which occurs many times in Tanakh, is birth-of-a-hero-to-a-hitherto-infertile-woman.

Rashbam sees this as the clue to understanding Jacob’s night-time fight. He relates it to other episodes in Tanakh, two in particular: the story of Jonah, and the obscure episode in the life of Moses when, on his way back to Egypt, the text says that “When they were in the place where they spent the night along the way, G-d confronted Moses and wanted to kill him” (Ex. 4:24). Tzipporah then saved Moses’ life by giving their son a brit (Ex. 4:25-26).⁴

It is the story of Jonah that provides the key to understanding the others. Jonah sought to escape from his mission to go to Nineveh to warn the people that the city was about to be destroyed if they did not repent. Jonah fled in a boat to Tarshish, but G-d brought a storm that threatened to sink the ship. The prophet was then thrown into the sea and swallowed by a giant fish that later vomited him out alive. Jonah thus realised that flight was impossible.

The same, says Rashbam, applies to Moses who, at the burning bush, repeatedly expressed his reluctance to undertake the task G-d had set him.

³ See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

⁴ Rashbam to Gen. 32:29. Rashbam also includes the episode of Bilaam, the donkey and the angel as a further instance of this type-scene.

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
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Evidently, Moses was still prevaricating even after beginning the journey, which is why G-d was angry with him.

So it was with Jacob. According to Rashbam, despite G-d's assurances, he was still afraid of encountering Esau. His courage failed him and he was trying to run away. G-d sent an angel to stop him doing so.

It is a unique interpretation, sobering in its implications. Here were three great men, Jacob, Moses and Jonah, yet all three, according to Rashbam, were afraid. Of what? None was a coward.

They were afraid, essentially, of their mission. Moses kept telling G-d at the burning bush: Who am I? They won't believe in me. I am not a man of words. Jonah was reluctant to deliver a message from G-d to Israel's enemies. And Jacob had just said to G-d, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faith that You have shown me" (Gen. 32:11).

Nor were these the only people in Tanakh who had this kind of fear. So did the prophet Isaiah when he said to G-d, "I am a man of unclean lips." So did Jeremiah when he said, "I cannot speak: I am a child."

This is not physical fear. It is the fear that comes from a feeling of personal inadequacy. "Who am I to lead the Jewish people?" asked Moses. "Who am I to deliver the word of G-d?" asked the prophets. "Who am I to stand before my brother Esau, knowing that I will continue the covenant and he will not?" asked Jacob. Sometimes the greatest have the least self-confidence, because they know how immense is the responsibility and how small they feel in relation to it. Courage does not mean having no fear. It means having fear but overcoming it. If that is true of physical courage it is no less true of moral and spiritual courage.

Marianne Williamson's remarks on the subject have become justly famous. She wrote: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of G-d. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all

meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of G-d that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."⁵

Shakespeare said it best (in Twelfth Night): "Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em."

I sometimes feel that, consciously or subconsciously, some take flight from Judaism for this very reason. Who are we to be G-d's witness to the world, a light to the nations, a role model for others? If even spiritual giants like Jacob, Moses and Jonah sought to flee, how much more so you and me? This fear of unworthiness is one that surely most of us have had at some time or other.

The reason it is wrong is not that it is untrue, but that it is irrelevant. Of course we feel inadequate to a great task before we undertake it. It is having the courage to undertake it that makes us great. Leaders grow by leading. Writers grow by writing. Teachers grow by teaching. It is only by overcoming our sense of inadequacy that we throw ourselves into the task and find ourselves lifted and enlarged by so doing. In the title of a well known book, we must "feel the fear and do it anyway."

Be not afraid of greatness: that is why G-d wrestled with Jacob, Moses and Jonah and would not let them escape. We may not be born great, but by being born (or converting to become) a Jew, we have greatness thrust upon us. And as Marianne Williamson rightly said, by liberating ourselves from fear, we help liberate others. That is what we as Jews are meant to do: to have the courage to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to be true to our faith while seeking to be a blessing to others regardless of their faith.

For we are all children of the man who was given the name of one who wrestles with G-d and with men and prevails. Ours is not an easy task, but what worthwhile mission ever was? We are as great as the challenges we have the courage to undertake. And if, at times, we feel like running away, we should not feel bad about it. So did the greatest.

To feel fear is fine. To give way to it, is not. For G-d has faith in us even if, at times, even the best lack faith in themselves. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

We left Jacob at the end of last week's portion as he was leaving behind Laban and Laban-land,

⁵ Marianne Williamson, A Return to Love, HarperCollins, 1992, 190.

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 at least as deserving, of it as is Jacob? What is the real content- and significance-of our Jewish birthright? The 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 on purchasing a separate grave for his wife Sarah, when he was willing to spend a small fortune in establishing a Hebrew cemetery beyond the various sites of the Hittites. He defines himself as an alien resident, 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 (Gen. 23:3-20).

Esau is 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 he dearly loved (Gen. 25:28). He even has strong sibling ties to his brother, despite Jacob's underhanded deception surrounding the blessings.

In the Torah portion this week, the Bible tells us how Esau first seemed to have set up a greeting brigade of 400 potential warriors to "welcome" the return of the prodigal brother (Gen. 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" (Gen. 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 you."

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" (Gen. 33:13-14). Yes, Esau has strong familial identity. However, Abraham has two 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 (Gen. 26:34), "Judith the daughter of Beer and Basemath the daughter of Elon." Perhaps he comforted himself with

the fact that his first wife had a Jewish name (Judith) 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 red complexion as well as the red colors of the lentil soup he exchanged for his birthright and the venison 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 Naharayim for a mate, but rather chooses a daughter of Ishmael, 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 (Gen. 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 gustatory realms. The biblical laws of kashrut 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 terms. He even expresses his desire to have the broth "poured into his mouth" as one would feed a camel (Gen. 25:30, see B.T. Shabbat, P.155 b, Rashi ad loc.).

To have one's eyes on a historic mission, to realize the goal of having "all the families of the earth blessed by us" (Gen. 12:3) through our vision of a G-d of compassionate justice, morality and peace (Gen. 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 the messianic period when "the saviors will go up to Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau" (Gen. 33:14, Obad. 1:21, Genesis Raba 78, 14). Jacob then continues to travel to Succoth, which implies the tabernacle and the Holy Temple, the place in Jerusalem from where our message to the world will eventually emanate (Isa. 2, Mic. 4).

But before Jacob can affirm his covenantal continuity and begin to achieve his destiny, he must first disgorge the grasping hands of Esau which have overtaken his personality and substituted the Jacob of "he shall emerge triumphant at the end" with "heel-sneak"; he must restore his "image of G-d" which was the source of that "wholehearted 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 which must precede the Esau/Jacob face-to-face confrontation. Jacob is all alone (Gen. 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 (Gen. 32:28); he has seen G-d (Elohim) face-to-face, and succeeded in

restoring his own divine image by exorcising Esau the heel-sneak. He now proudly stands as Israel, the righteous representative of G-d and the fitting recipient of the Abrahamic birthright. ©2015 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

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. ©2015 *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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

I have always wondered why the Mishnah in Avot singled out our father Avraham as being the person who was tested ten times in his lifetime rather than concentrating on the life of our father Yaakov who, as related in this week's Torah reading, underwent so many tests and misfortunes. Yaakov finally escapes the clutches of Lavan only to be confronted by the threat of Eisav attempting to annihilate him.

Yaakov is crippled physically, spiritually and financially by Eisav and his angel and mercenaries. Healing and recovering, Yaakov has to deal with the kidnapping and the assault of his daughter Dena by Shechem. The slaughter of the men of Shechem by Shimon and Levi is watched in powerless disapproval by Yaakov and, according to tradition, numerous armed conflicts with the local Canaanite tribes ensued.

Yaakov's beloved wife, Rochel, dies giving birth to Binyamin. All of this seems to be sufficient tragedy and difficulty for one person's lifetime, yet we are all aware that the greatest test of all – the conflict between Yosef and his brothers lurks just over the horizon in the biblical narrative.

Though Avraham was tested severely and often in his lifetime, it can seem on the surface to regard the life of Yaakov as more challenging and difficult than that of Avraham. Yet the champion of challenges and tests in Jewish tradition remains Avraham and not Yaakov. Yaakov will later complain to Pharaoh about the troubled life he has led but Jewish tradition does not recognize that statement as being of heroic stature. Rather it seemingly disapproves of Yaakov's wanting a more leisurely and serene life. That will only be granted to him in the hereafter.

I think that a possible difference between Avraham and Yaakov is that most of the tests of Avraham were explicitly ordained and instructed to him by Heaven itself. G-d, so to speak, tells Avraham to descend into Egypt, to cast away Yishmael, to foresee

the future enslavement of his descendants, to sacrifice his son Yitzchak on the altar at Moriah and to leave his ancestral home in Mesopotamia and settle in the Land of Israel.

Even though Heaven is aware of Yaakov's travails and ordains them, most of Yaakov's challenges and difficulties are, to a certain extent, to be viewed as self-inflicted. They stem from choices that he alone made. He chose to listen to his mother and obtain the blessings from his father, fully aware that by so doing he would incur his brother's violent wrath. He crosses the river to confront Eisav's angel. He is well aware that Dena's brothers intend revenge for the abduction and assault of their sister. He openly favors Yosef over the other brothers and therefore human nature of jealousy and resentment must follow.

Apparently self-inflicted tests are not the paradigm that the Torah wishes to establish regarding overcoming difficulties, tests and challenges in life. It seems that Yaakov could have avoided some of the experiences that befell him in his lifetime. The same is undoubtedly true of many of the events of past and current events in the national life of the Jewish people.

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav, for I am afraid of him" (B'reishis 32:12). Targum Yonasan says that Yaakov's fear was based on Eisav having the merit of honoring his father. In Iyun HaParasha #105, a question is posed based on Tosfos (on 25:25) quoting a Midrash that explains why Eisav was never circumcised. Since Eisav was very red when he was born, Yitzchok thought it would be dangerous to circumcise him on the eighth day. After a year or two, when his color was still red, Yitzchok realized that this was Eisav's natural complexion, so could be circumcised, but decided that since he didn't circumcise him when he was eight days old, he would wait until he was 13, the same age Yishmael was when he was circumcised. However, when Eisav turned 13, and Yitzchok wanted to circumcise him, Eisav refused. If Eisav defied his father's wishes that he be circumcised (a continual and constant defiance since he never fulfilled his father's wishes), why was Yaakov afraid that the merit of honoring his father would give Eisav the ability to "smite me, mother and children"?

It should be noted that not everyone agrees that Eisav was never circumcised, as Tana D'vay Eliyahu (24) says Eisav's descendants kept the mitzvah of circumcision until Yitzchok died, and Agadas

B'reishis 58:4 says that Eisav was circumcised by his parents, but he subsequently rejected it (see also Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer 29 and B'reishis Rabbah 63:13). Nevertheless, as Rabbi Yaakov Rabinowitz, N"Y, pointed out when he asked me a similar question last week, Eisav didn't really obey his father very much. He married women who, because they were idol worshippers, caused major distress to both of his parents (see Rashi on 26:35), and he never changed his ways despite having to have been rebuked by his father. [If Avraham died five years early so as not to see Eisav's wickedness (see Rashi on 25:30), his wickedness must have been obvious, and Yitzchok would have seen it as well. When Yaakov, impersonating Eisav, uses G-d's name, Yitzchok questions whether it was really Eisav (see Rashi on 27:21 and 27:22), so Yitzchok was well aware that Eisav was not a very religious fellow. It is unfathomable that Yitzchok did not try to get Eisav to change his ways, yet Eisav didn't change his ways.] How can someone who went "off the derech" despite the aggravation it brought his parents be held up as the epitome of someone who honored his parents?

In Iyun HaParasha, the question is bolstered by categorizing Eisav's refusal to be circumcised as "contradicting his father's words," which violates the mitzvah of "fearing" his father (see Yoreh Deyah 240:2). However, "contracting one's father's words" refers to when there is a disagreement between the father and someone else with the son supporting the argument of the other person. It does not seem to refer to not listening when the parent makes a request. [That doesn't mean that disobeying parents doesn't fall under the category of "fearing" them (or failing to do so), it just isn't included in that phrase.] Ramban (Kiddushin 34b) is then quoted as saying that the mitzvah to "fear your parents" and "honor your parents" is one and the same, but Ramban only said that in order to answer why they are not considered "two verses that say the same thing," which would prevent them from being a source that can be applied to other laws. Even if this approach must be relied upon to treat the two separate mitzvos of "fearing parents" and "honoring parents" as one category regarding being a source for other laws, it is clear that they are two distinct mitzvos, and not just one mitzvah that has two aspects to it. As a matter of fact, despite arguing (at times) with Rambam's list of the 613 Mitzvos (including when something counted as multiple mitzvos should be, in his opinion, counted as a single mitzvah), Ramban does not disagree with Rambam counting the mitzvah of honoring parents (#210) separately from the mitzvah to act as if one fears them (#211).

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel is quoted (D'varim Rabbah 1:15) as saying that no one honored his parents as much as he (Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel) honored his, adding that Eisav honored his father even

more. [In B'reishis Rabbah (65:16) he is quoted as saying that even though he served his father his entire life, it wasn't even 1/100th of what Eisav did for his father.] One of the specifics mentioned is that Eisav put on royal garments to serve his father, as (paraphrasing) "my father deserves nothing less" (see P'sikta Rabbasi, end of 23). Eisav excelled at the mitzvah of honoring his father, which Rambam (quoting the Sifra) defines as "feeding, clothing and helping [him] get around." Even though Eisav fell very short of fulfilling the mitzvah of "fearing" his father, which Rambam (again quoting the Sifra) defines as "not sitting in his place, not speaking in his stead and not contradicting his words," the consequences of not fulfilling that mitzvah doesn't diminish the value of the mitzvah to honor his father that he fulfilled so well. [B'reishis Rabbah (82:14) says that Eisav only fulfilled one mitzvah; since "honoring parents" and "fearing parents" are two separate mitzvos, the only one he observed was honoring his father.] There is therefore no contradiction between saying that Eisav was the epitome of someone honoring his father, even if, when it came to conducting his life the way his parents wanted, he didn't "fear" them, i.e. follow their instructions the way a subject follows the instructions of a ruler who can/will punish those who disobey him.

P'sikta Rabasi (ibid) tells us that the merit of Eisav honoring his father has kept his descendents "on top" of Yaakov's descendents; when that merit wears off, Yaakov's descendents will rise over his. It is no wonder, then, that as he was about to face Eisav, Yaakov was afraid that in the merit of honoring their father, his otherwise wicked brother might be victorious.

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RAB SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais HaMussar

In anticipation of his meeting with Eisav, Yaakov sent a peace offering of numerous animals, with the hope that his generous gift would assuage any ill feelings that Eisav might have had toward him. After receiving Yaakov's present, Eisav tried convincing Yaakov to take back his gift since he was not lacking monetarily. In response, Yaakov pushed Eisav to accept the gift, "For Hashem has been gracious to me and I have everything (kol)" (Bereishis 33:11). While the simple translation of "kol" certainly refers to Yaakov's many materialistic acquisitions, Chazal explained Yaakov's response in reference to the spiritual arena.

The Gemara tells us (Bava Basra 16b), "Hashem gave three people a taste of the next world while they were still living in this world: Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. This can be deduced from that which we find that the Torah writes "bakol" in reference to Avraham, "mi'kol" in reference to Yitzchak and "kol" in reference to Yaakov."

The subsequent Gemara makes another

statement regarding the above pesukim. "There were three people whom the Yetzer Hara did not rule over: Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. This can be deduced from that which we find that the Torah writes "bakol" in reference to Avraham, "mi'kol" in reference to Yitzchak and "kol" in reference to Yaakov."

Rav Wolbe (Shiurei Chumash, Vayishlach 33:11) explains that there is no reason to understand that these two statements of Chazal disagree with one another. Our aim in this world is to reach a level where we "taste" Olam Haba while still living in this world. How does one achieve such a goal? It is achieved when, not merely does one rule over his Yetzer Hara, but actually succeeds in causing his Yetzer Hara to become subservient to him. In other words, the evil inclination is channeled toward the positive and thus transformed into "good." This is the idea intended by Chazal when they said, "Love Hashem with all your heart[s] i.e. your good inclination and your evil inclination" since even the evil inclination can be transformed into a tool which is used to achieve love of Hashem.

Rav Wolbe related that when he would pass the Monastery of the Silent (in Latrun Israel), his heart would go out to them. They are simply misguided. Not only do they live their lives in celibacy and poverty, they also refrain from speaking.

This is a degrading lifestyle, because not only do they not use their talents to actualize their potential, often the very opposite is true. Since many of them cannot overcome their base desires, their cravings find expression in less than noble fashions.

The purpose of Yiddishkeit is to take all our talents and desires and channel them toward avodas Hashem. We are meant to marry, enjoy our food, sleep and talk as long as the goal behind these actions is serving Hashem. There is nothing greater, more fulfilling and better "tasting" than living an otherworldly existence right here in on earth! © 2015 Rav S. Wolbe, zt"l and AishDas Society

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

When Jacob finds out that his brother Esau is coming to meet him, he prays to the Almighty to save him: "Save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau" (Genesis 32:12). Why is "from the hand of" repeated? The Torah does not waste words. Once would have been sufficient.

The reason the words "from the hand of" is repeated is to teach that when a brother turns into an enemy, he becomes a much more dangerous enemy than a stranger. Tosfot, a commentary on the Talmud (Taanit 20a) adds that just as a one-time beloved friend is the worst enemy, so too when two enemies become friends, it is the strongest of friendships.

When you have difficulties in getting along with someone, don't think that just because at present you

do not like each other that it will always be so. On the contrary, if you will be able to overcome the animosity between you, the former negative feelings can be transformed into extremely positive feelings. On the international scene we have seen countries which have fought bitter wars against each other finally make peace and become close allies. This should serve as a lesson for us in making peace with individuals who have quarreled with us in the past.

Rabbi Meir Yechiel of Ostrovzah saved the Jews of his city from a pogrom during the First World War. The Austro-German army left the city and the Russian army entered. In other places the Jews suffered greatly when the Russian soldiers came in. Rav Meir Yechiel called a meeting of the notables of his city and told them about his plan to greet the Russian soldiers as liberators. They would give out food and cigarettes to the soldiers and develop a friendly relationship with them. This is what they did and the soldiers acted in a very friendly manner towards the Jewish population of the city. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

Immediately following his encounter with Esav, Yaakov involves himself in three activities. First, he purchases a plot of land in the area of Shechem. Second, Yaakov encamps on the outskirts of Shechem which Chazal in *Maseches Shabbos* interpret to mean that he physically improved the city for the inhabitants of Shechem. Lastly, Yaakov builds a *mizbeach* for serving Hashem and it becomes the spiritual center of his new home. Three suggestions are given as to what physical improvement Yaakov made to Shechem: he built a bathhouse, established a market place, or instituted a new currency to enable the population to do business more efficiently.

We are supposed to view the actions of the Avos as models for our behavior. What should we derive for ourselves from the actions of Yaakov as he enters Shechem?

In *Maseches Shabbos* we are taught the story of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai who had to flee from the Romans and spent many years in hiding, learning Torah in a cave. Why were the Romans looking for Rabbi Shimon? Chazal tell us that they wanted to punish him for a disparaging comment he had made about Roman society. Someone had praised three areas of accomplishments of the Roman Empire in Rabbi Shimon's presence. Their bathhouses, market places and bridges were praised as improving the lot of the populations they conquered. Rabbi Shimon responded to the praise saying that all these physical accomplishments amounted to nothing. The bathhouses were built to beautify citizens' bodies to

enable more immorality; the market places had been built to allow public gatherings for inappropriate activity; the bridges were only built to enable the Romans to collect more money as tolls to further their own physical pleasure. Upon hearing these words of Rabbi Shimon, the Romans began to search for him, forcing him into hiding.

Many years later when the decree against Rabbi Shimon was rescinded, Rabbi Shimon emerged from the cave. To commemorate his escaping the clutches of Rome, Rabbi Shimon turns to Yaakov as a model. What had Yaakov done to express his gratitude for being saved from the clutches Esav, the ancestor of the Romans? He physically improved the city of Shechem thereby performing kindness to others just as Hashem had been kind to him. Rabbi Shimon, therefore, decided to improve the quality of life of the people of Teveria where he now resided.

The model that Rabbi Shimon chose to emulate is striking in light of the events that caused him to flee in the first place. He criticized the bathhouses, marketplaces, and bridges for toll collection of the Romans. Yet, these were the same areas of public life that Yaakov had improved for the people of Shechem! Yaakov built a bathhouse, a marketplace, and improved their coins! What did Rabbi Shimon have in mind by drawing upon the example of Yaakov in specifically those areas he had criticized so harshly so many years earlier?

Perhaps the answer can be found in the actual improvements Rabbi Shimon did perform for the people of Teveria. The *gemara* relates that he helped determine that a certain area in Teveria that had previously been thought to be impure was in fact pure. By making a spiritual improvement to Teveria, Rabbi Shimon was teaching us the secret of the improvements of Yaakov: of course every city needs bathhouses, marketplaces, and a source of revenue and monetary system. However, these physical necessities, like all other physical needs, can never be seen as ends unto themselves. In order to function in this world, physical needs must be taken care of, but only to facilitate spiritual pursuits. In Roman society, the physical bathhouses, market places and monetary system had become ends unto themselves. Without spiritual goals, all these institutions were no more than ways to pursue and enhance physical pleasure. Rabbi Shimon didn't oppose these necessities but rather opposed pursuing them as ends instead of as means to spiritual goals.

The key to Yaakov's success was his last improvement, i.e. building a *mizbeach*. He created the spiritual center of Shechem, thereby giving meaning to all he contributed physically. In Teveria Rabbi Shimon saw bathhouses, market places and a monetary system, and recognized the opportunity to help see to it that these institutions didn't become merely physical

ones. He purified Teveria, and by doing so purified the entire physical life of the city. A city can have well developed bathhouses, market places and a strong economy and be worthy to be the home of Yaakov and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai as long as there is a pure mizbeach at the center. ©2007 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

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

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