

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

There are Mozarts and there are Beethovens. Which are you? I have only the most amateur knowledge of music, but the impression one gets about Mozart is that, from him, music flowed. There is something effortless and effervescent about his compositions. They are not “sicklied o’er by the pale cast of thought.” He wrote at speed. He carried the worries of the world lightly.

Not so Beethoven, for whom it sometimes took years for an idea to crystallise into its final form, with countless drafts and revisions and crossings-out. This was a man who could be angry with himself and with the world, for whom creativity was a struggle from which he emerged triumphant with work that is rarely less than strenuous and full of conflict until its final majestic resolution. The ethereal, mystical, almost other-worldly quality of his last compositions, the sublime late piano sonatas and string quartets, are the creation of one who has finally found peace after a life of wrestling with his own angels and demons.

All of this is, for me, a way of coming to understand Jacob, the man who became Israel, our father in faith. Jacob is not the most obvious choice of religious hero. He does not appear – at least on the surface of the biblical text – as a man with Abraham’s courage or kindness, Isaac’s faithfulness and self-restraint, Moses’ vigour and passion, David’s politics and poetry, or Isaiah’s lyricism and hope.

He was a man surrounded by conflict: with his brother Esau, his father-in-law Laban, his wives, Leah and Rachel, and his children, whose sibling rivalry eventually brought the whole family into exile in Egypt. His life seems to have been a field of tensions.

Then there were his transactions: the way he purchased Esau’s birthright, took his blessing, and eventually outwitted his wily father-in-law Laban. In each case he seems to have won, but then his situation deteriorates. The episode in which, at Rebekah’s request, he dressed up as Esau and deceived his blind father, forced him to leave home and – as we see in this week’s parsha – left him traumatised with fear at the prospect of meeting Esau again. Almost the same deception he practised on Isaac, he suffered at the hand of Laban. Even his escape from Laban might have ended in tragedy, had God not warned him not to

harm Jacob (Hence the passage in the Haggada: “Go and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to our father Jacob”). His life as portrayed in the Torah seems to be a constant series of escapes from one trouble to the next.

So who and what was Jacob?

To this there are two radically different answers. There is the Jacob of midrash who even in the womb longed for a synagogue,¹ who spent his years as a young man studying in the bet midrash,² who looked like Abraham³ and whose arms were like pillars of marble.⁴ His motives were always pure. He bought Esau’s birthright because he could not bear to see Esau offering sacrifices (the privilege of the firstborn) to idols.⁵ As for his father’s blessing, the very reason Isaac became blind in old age was so that this could be possible.⁶ Esau was the opposite, a violent and mercurial character who had deceived his father into thinking he was ultra-pious,⁷ but who had – on the day he came in “tired” from the field – committed a whole series of crimes including murder.⁸

This is an extreme portrayal, but not without scriptural basis. Jacob is called an ish tam, which conveys the sense of simplicity, integrity and single-mindedness. The plain sense of the oracle Rebekah received before the twins were born was that “the elder will serve the younger.”⁹ She knew Jacob was the son destined to prevail. Besides which, as Maharatz Chajes says in his Introduction to the Aggadic Literature¹⁰, midrash paints biblical characters in moral black-and-white for obvious moral and educational reasons. It is difficult to teach children how to behave if all you have to offer is a series of studies in ambiguity, complexity and shades-of-grey.

The other Jacob, though, is the one we read in the plain sense of the text. The obvious question is:

¹ Bereishit Rabbah 63:6.

² Bereishit Rabbah 63:10.

³ Midrash Lekach Tov, Bereishit 47:18.

⁴ Bereishit Rabbah 65:17.

⁵ Bereishit Rabbah 63:13.

⁶ Bereishit Rabbah 65:8.

⁷ See Rashi to Gen. 25:27.

⁸ Baba Batra 16b.

⁹ Elsewhere in past ‘C&C’s on Toldot, I have pointed out that this text is freighted with ambiguity.

¹⁰ R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes, Mavo ha-Aggadot (printed at the beginning of standard editions of Ein Yaakov).

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why did the Torah choose to portray the third of the patriarchs in this way? The Torah is highly selective in the details it chooses to relate. Why not paint Jacob in more attractive colours?

It seems to me that the Torah is delivering, here as elsewhere, an extraordinary message: that if we can truly relate to God as God, in His full transcendence and majesty, then we can relate to humans as humans in all their fallibility. In every other religious literature known to me, heroes are idealised until they no longer seem human at all. They are Divine or semi-Divine, perfect and infallible. There is no one like that in the whole of Tanakh. Even Noah (righteous, perfect) is seen drunk and dishevelled. Even Job (blameless, upright) eventually curses his fate. The man who, more than any other, epitomises fallibility is Jacob.

And perhaps that is the point. Jacob was a Beethoven, not a Mozart. His life was a series of struggles. Nothing came easily to him. He, alone of the patriarchs, was a man who chose to be chosen. Abraham was called by God. Isaac was chosen before his birth. Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah: these were all singled out by God for their mission. Not so Jacob. It was he who bought the birthright and took the blessing, he who chose to carry Abraham's destiny into the future.

Not until he was running away from home did God appear to him. Not until years later, alone, at night, terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau, did God or an angel wrestle with him. He alone was given, by God or the angel, a completely new name, not an enhancement of his old one but a completely new identity: "Israel." Even more strikingly, despite the fact that he was told "Your name shall no more be called Jacob,"¹¹ the Torah continues to call him Jacob, suggesting that his struggle was lifelong – as, often, is ours.

Were I to choose a soundtrack for the Jacob I have come to know, it would be Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata or his Grosse Fugue, music of such overwhelming tension that it seems on the verge

¹¹ He is told this twice, first by the angel, then by God Himself: Gen. 32:29; 35:10.

of bursting through all form and structure. Yet it was through these epic struggles that Beethoven eventually reached his own version of serenity, and it was through Jacob's extended wrestling-match with destiny that he eventually achieved what neither Abraham nor Isaac accomplished: all his children stayed within the faith. "According to the pain is the reward," said the sages.¹² That is Jacob.

There are saintly people for whom spirituality comes as easily as did music to Mozart. But God does not reach out only to saints. He reaches out to all of us. That is why He gave us Abraham for those who love, Isaac for those who fear, and Jacob/Israel for those who struggle.

Hence this week's life-changing idea: if you find yourself struggling with faith, you are in the company of Jacob-who-became-Israel, the father-in-faith of us all. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd he said, Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed. And Jacob asked him and said, 'Tell me, if you would, your name.' 'Why do you ask for my name?' And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place 'Peniel' because I have seen God face to face and I have survived" [Gen. 32:29-31].

Three times each day, we begin the Amidah prayer with the words, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our God and God of our ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob..." Why the apparent repetition in addressing the Almighty? Why do we not simply say, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our God...?"

Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov (d. 1760, Ukraine), founder of the Hasidic tradition, explained that it is preferable and appropriate for a person to attempt to discover God on one's own and to establish a personal relationship with Him. At the same time, however, one should also relate to God as did our ancestors.

Certainly, if a person were to develop his or her own unique contact with God, that devotion would be genuine and spontaneous, rather than mechanical and formalized. But such a search is inevitably fraught with setbacks and disappointments. And what if the Almighty still remains elusive, even after a lengthy quest?

The search for God is the underlying theme of Jacob's life. This was to be a search for God unique to

¹² Mishnah, Avot 5:23.

him, not reliant solely on the discoveries of God made by Abraham and Isaac, respectively. Most importantly, Jacob had to feel worthy of God's "friendship" in order to enter into a fellowship with the Divine.

Thus, in order for Jacob to find his way to God, he must first come to grips with his own personality flaws, with his own inner and truest self and identity, and with the image of God within himself! And that would require a fateful confrontation with his arch-nemesis and twin brother, Esau. He must somehow atone for his sin of deceitfully having stolen the "blessings" away from Esau. He can only meet God with a clear conscience!

Will Esau stand in the way of God's promise to Jacob and his seed? Can Jacob atone for the guilt he feels vis-à-vis Esau, and exorcise the jealousy he feels towards his brother, who had been the beneficiary of Isaac's favor? Addressing the Almighty, Jacob prays to the "God of my father Abraham and the God of my father Isaac..." [ibid., 32:10], not yet able to mention "my God".

Because of what follows, it becomes clear that the wedge between Jacob and himself— indeed, between Jacob and God—is Esau. Only after Jacob can successfully separate himself from Esau will he be able to confront his own God.

On the night before he is to meet his brother in the flesh after a twenty-year estrangement, the Torah records how Jacob remained alone and wrestled with an unidentified stranger over whom he prevailed. Our Sages identify this stranger as the angel of Esau. Fascinatingly, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888, Germany) suggests that it may well have been the Esau within Jacob who is haunting the patriarch with guilt and jealousy.

Jacob receives the victory name Yisrael (Israel) from the stranger; he has prevailed against men and God. In what way? He has finally confronted the twin personality within himself: the grasping, cheating Esau he desired to become in order to obtain his father's favor and achieve momentary materialistic enjoyment, and the Esau (and Esau-ism) from within himself.

Hence, he is ready to take the wealth he received from Laban during his Esau stage and return it to Esau when they meet on the morrow: "take my blessing ('which I received under false pretenses')", he will say [ibid., 33:11] – and once he repents and returns his ill-gotten gain, Jacob is ready to accept himself.

Only after he has successfully wrestled with the stranger—exorcising the pain and guilt created by his

jealousy and deception—is Jacob finally rewarded by seeing God face to face.

And after his mastery over the angel of Esau, Jacob calls the place of the encounter Peniel, "because I have seen the Lord face to face, and my soul has been saved" [ibid., 32:31]. Jacob exorcised Esau—and in the process found both himself and his God. His struggle and search has ended in victory. The true Jacob has triumphed over himself and has become "Isra-el".

Immediately afterward, the Torah records that Jacob "came in peace [shalem] to the city of Shekhem." [ibid., 33:18]. "Shalem" can also be understood as "complete." He is now, finally, his whole, independent self.

And so he erects an altar to his own God, calling it Kel Elokei Yisrael' [ibid., v. 20], "God, the God of Israel." Finally God is not only the God of his grandfather and of his father, but also the God of Israel, the God of the "complete" Jacob, his own personal God, Whom he has discovered after many travails and much pain.

The circle is thus complete; Jacob has succeeded in his search for his true self and only then, for his own God. And because of that search, we pray in the Amidah to God as encountered by each of our patriarchs. Standing on the shoulders of (spiritual) giants, we pray to the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, reminding us of our need to pursue our own personal discoveries of ourselves and then of our own personal God! ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The long-awaited confrontation between the brothers Eisav and Yaakov occurs. At the onset Yaakov is quite concerned over the meeting. He fears that his brother, who is arriving with a band of 400 men, will undoubtedly intend to do him harm. And he knows that his brother is capable of slaughtering innocent women and children. There must have been a great feeling of relief that overcame Yaakov when Eisav takes the gifts that were meant to mollify him.

Yaakov is aware that this is only a temporary reprieve and that deep down in his heart Eisav has not yet accepted the fact that Yaakov is entitled to the blessings given to him by his father Yitzchak. Nevertheless, a temporary reprieve is also an accomplishment and the heart of Yaakov certainly must have felt lighter when Eisav departed richer than when he arrived.

This struggle with Eisav is representative of the struggle of the Jewish people with the nations of the world over our long and painful history. There are ups and downs in the story, great tragedies and unbelievable suffering mixed in with lighter moments of



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tolerance, freedom and achievement. But, deep down in the hearts of all concerned, there is the fear that the last chapter in this struggle has not yet been written.

The unreasoning hatred, of some in this world, of the Jewish people is one of the great mysteries of the human story. It is the oldest social disease and unfortunately it is still virulently present in today's society. And it may seem that Eisav cannot be easily bought off this time.

Yet, after all of the encounters that we have endured with the different forms of Eisav in our history, the rejuvenation of the Jewish people in our generations, especially in the world of Torah and in the achievements of the state of Israel is apparent. To a great extent we are witnessing a decline in the influence and power of the Church and of Western society generally. Eisav is losing whatever moral perspective is still retained from the house of his parents and from their connection to the Jewish people over all of the ages.

As such we are witness to the fulfillment of the verse that Yaakov remained alone. There are no longer many who think as we do, that view the world and its history through our lense and perspective. Yaakov is accustomed to remaining alone. He has seen too many fads, ideas, and theories – social and economic – shine temporarily and then fade into the darkness of the past.

It is better to be alone with truth and faith than to be part of the crowd of mockers and sycophants. The final chapter will show that the brothers would unite but under the banner of the faith of Yaakov. This is a process that requires patience and wisdom, items that are always in short human supply. But the promise made between the brothers long ago regarding the judgment of Mount Zion gives us hope and vitality to pursue their dream and make it come to reality. ©2017 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

Could Ya'akov's (Jacob) altercation with a mysterious man have been the beginning of a process of repentance for having taken the blessings of his brother Esau?

Maimonides notes that an essential element of repentance is acknowledgment of the wrongdoing and a deep sense of regret. (hakarot ha-het, haratah). The mysterious man may have been Ya'akov himself, his inner conscience. He may have asked himself, "What is my name?" (Genesis 32:28) In declaring that his true identity was Ya'akov, which means deception, he was acknowledging that he had blundered in tricking his brother and taking the blessings misleadingly.

As the narrative unfolds, Ya'akov is told he would be given another name – Yisrael (Israel). Nachum Sarna points out that the name Yisrael contains the root y-sh-r, meaning straight. Ya'akov, the deceiver, has transformed to Yisrael, one who resolved to be straight and up front with those around him.

Interestingly, Ya'akov calls the name of the place where the struggle occurred Peniel, literally meaning the face of God. (Genesis 32:31) In calling the name Peniel, Ya'akov may be resolving to openly face others much as he openly saw God. Here, Ya'akov becomes resolute to change his ways from deception to openness and honesty.

In this way, Ya'akov was fulfilling yet another step in the teshuvah process; the step of resolving not to make the same mistake again (kabbalah). Never again would he be deceptive (Ya'akov); he would forever change his ways by being up front (Yisrael) and open (Peniel).

Nehama Leibowitz clinches the idea that this altercation had something to do with Ya'akov's repentance. She notes that the angel, at this point, merely announced that Ya'akov would eventually be given another name. The name wasn't changed right there. This is because, before full teshuva takes place, sins committed against one's fellow person require asking forgiveness of the aggrieved party.

Before Ya'akov could be given an additional name he had to ask forgiveness of his brother. In the words of Nehama Leibowitz, "Only after he had said to Esau: 'Take I pray thee my blessing' (Genesis 33:11) and after his brother had accepted the blessing could the Almighty reveal Himself to him and announce the fulfillment of the promise (of his new name) made by the angel." (Genesis 35:10) Acknowledgment and regret for the past requires a detailed description of what one had done wrong, like when Ya'akov declared emphatically that he was Ya'akov--a deceiver.

All of us have made plenty of mistakes and teshuvah is a divine gift from God, allowing us to right our wrongs. It is a complex psychological process and Ya'akov shows the way it is done. ©2017 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 DAVID S. LEVIN

Why Does Yaakov Call Out to Hashem & Elokim?

Over the last two weeks we have seen the conflict between Eisav and Ya'akov to the point where Ya'akov had to flee for his life. Now after many long years of exile during which Ya'akov married and had eleven sons (Binyamin was not yet born) and one daughter, Ya'akov finally returns to his homeland and must face his brother, Eisav. Ya'akov learns from the

messengers he sends to see Eisav that Eisav is approaching him with four hundred men, a warning of hostilities to come. Ya'akov divides his camp and prepares for battle, but first he approaches Hashem with prayer. This prayer deserves our scrutiny to determine the message that Ya'akov wishes to convey.

The Torah tells us, "And Ya'akov said, 'Elokim of my father Avraham and Elokim of my father Yitzchak, Hashem who said to me, return to your land and to your birthplace and I will do good with you. I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and all the truth that You have done your servant, for with my staff I crossed this Jordan and now I have become two camps. Please save me from my brother from Eisav because I am afraid that he will come and strike me, mother and children. And you said I will surely do good with you and I will place your children like the sand of the sea, that one will not be able to count them because they are too numerous.'"

The first few words of our section elicit many questions especially in the use of the term the Elokim of my father Avraham and the Elokim of my father Yitzchak. (Elokim is most often translated as G-d whereas the name which we associate as Hashem, the Tetragrammaton, is taken to mean Lord). In order to understand why these different names are significant, we must examine a few other places where Ya'akov speaks with Hashem. In Parashat Vayeitzei (31:42) before Ya'akov leaves Lavan's house to return home to his father, he prays to Hashem as "Elokei Avraham u'fachad Yitzchak, the Elokim of Avraham and the Dread of Yitzchak." Rashi tells us there that Ya'akov did not wish to use Elokim by Yitzchak because Hashem does not associate His name, Elokim, with the living. Our Rabbis ask why Ya'akov now changes to an expression which clearly indicates that Yitzchak has died even though Yitzchak is still alive. The Da'at Z'keinim explains that Ya'akov assumed incorrectly that the aggressive approach of Eisav with four hundred fighters could only mean that Yitzchak must have died, for Eisav would never act that way while Yitzchak still lived. Our Rabbis also ask why Ya'akov includes the name of Hashem when he has already used the name Elokim. Ya'akov did not know by which attribute he would be saved; it would be either by Justice if he deserved to be saved or Mercy if Hashem needed to show him mercy should he not deserve saving. Ya'akov was also concerned that perhaps he had already received his equal reward for the totality of good which he had already performed. "I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and all the truth that You have done your servant," and any further good would be out of mercy.

When the Torah says, "I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and all the truth that You have done your servant, for with my staff I crossed this Jordan and now I have become two camps," the term,

"I have been diminished" can have several meanings. The first interpretation we listed earlier, namely that Ya'akov was concerned that his balance of reward was greatly diminished and he might not deserve any further reward or protection from Hashem. This is one of the opinions proposed by Rashi who also proposes the second opinion, namely that Ya'akov was concerned that perhaps he had sinned and the punishment he would have received was balanced against his merits. The Ramban asks why Ya'akov invoked Hashem's promise to give him many children if he honestly believed that he had forfeited this promise based on the previous two opinions. The Ramban also questions what kindnesses Ya'akov had received from the time that he was told to leave Charan until now. The Ramban believed that Ya'akov was not concerned that the miracles he had received already had diminished his level of merit but that he was never worthy of all the kindness which Hashem had shown him and therefore could not be worthy of receiving even more kindnesses.

When Ya'akov says to Hashem, "Please save me," HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Ya'akov was not asking Hashem's help for himself but for his children. "I am not praying and begging anything for myself, I have already received so much from Thee that I cannot possibly pay the debt of gratitude that I already owe Thee...save me for the sake of my children, on whom Thou has promised to build such a great future." Ibn Ezra explains that Ya'akov's concern was that he did not know whether the promise of many children applied to these children or to others that he might have in the future. That is why Ya'akov adds the last phrase, "lest he come and strike me, mother and children," since maybe these wives and these children would not be part of his destiny unless he prays for them.

Ya'akov's ambivalence about his worthiness caused him to use both the name Hashem and Elokim. (We know from Hashem's speech to Moshe that Hashem never used the quality of Mercy to judge the forefathers). If Ya'akov, who is referred to as haTzaddik (the Righteous One), was ambivalent, all-the-more-so should we, who would never expect to be called haTzaddik, be concerned that we are not worthy of any reward from Hashem that has not already been given to us. The problem is that we are never truly aware of our balance of good and evil. That is why our prayers speak of Hashem (mercy) before Elokim (justice). A true Tzaddik is much more cognizant of his actions and that is why Ya'akov begins with Elokim and ends with Hashem. Ya'akov understood his greatness but he was also aware of his negative surroundings and their possible effect on him. For this reason, governed by all of the factors which we have mentioned, Ya'akov invokes both of these names dealing with the qualities of Justice and Mercy.

We must take a lesson from Ya'akov's actions.

We must seek to become more aware of our actions and seek to increase our positive behaviors. At the same time, we must not become arrogant and believe that we should be rewarded for those actions or that they have not become diminished by Hashem's rewards to us or by our own misdeeds. May we pray to Hashem for mercy and may we hope that we are worthy enough to be rewarded by the Justice of Elokim.
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ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Monetary Sensitivity

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit

by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Righteous people refrain from being tempted to commit robbery. Thus Yaakov crossed the river Yabok in this week's Sedra just to retrieve small jars that he had inadvertently left there. Our forefathers' actions predict the actions of future generations (maaseh Avot siman l'banim). The Torah therefore is also sensitive to the monetary needs of its people when there is a chance of loss of money so that one is not placed in a position where he/she might be tempted to steal.

This sensitivity is paramount in various situations. To site a few- a Kohen when viewing the status of a Negah" (blemish) in one's house ,first instructs the owner to remove all the utensils from the home before he pronounces his judgement whether it is Tamei (defiled) or not, for the Kohen is concerned that the person should not suffer undo financial hardship for should he declare the nega tamei, all the utensils in the house would be Tamei as well. Likewise, in the Holy Temple, the utensils used were not made of expensive metals in order not to spend frivolously the money of the people. Examples of this are the "kalpi" (the markers) -used on Yom Kippur to designate which goat was sacrificed and which was to be killed -was made from wood not gold or silver, and also the mouth piece of the Shofar and the basket that carried the incense were all made from silver and not the more expensive gold.

Additionally when the Torah instructs a person to offer a sacrifice it does not use the language "everything that he has (kol asher yesh lo) but rather "from all that he has (mekol asher yesh lo-Vayikra 27;28) indicating one should not spend above his means (k'fi missat yado –Devarim16;10) and should not designate for Mitzvot more than one fifth of his wealth.

Yet there are times that we do insist on quality and the more expensive. The axiom that portrays this is- "There is no poverty amongst wealth (ein aniyut binkom ashirut). As an example, we don't use utensils in the Beit Hamikdash which is "cheap" but rather implements which show wealth and royalty. Therefore in the Temple they did not repair broken utensils but rather replaced them, and the morning Tamid (the first

sacrifice of the day) was poured from a golden utensil.

In conclusion therefore, it would seem that whether or not expensive utensils were used was based on the discretion of the sages as they weighed and considered issues such as loss, honor of the service and need. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

The name "Bais Yaakov -- the house of Yaakov" has become synonymous with the Jewish People.

Yaakov's efforts to build the foundation of the Jewish People are related in the parshios of Vayeitzei and Vayishla. There is another house that Yaakov built in these parshios. Parshas Vayeitzei begins with his promise to build a house for Hashem upon his return to Eretz Yisrael and Parshas Vayishlach concludes with the fulfillment of this commitment. Chazal comment that unlike Avraham and Yitzchak who liken the future location of the Beis Hamikdash to a mountain and a field, Yaakov calls it a home. It is this term that becomes the permanent name, as we refer to the Beis Hamikdash which is built on the Har Habayis. What is the significance of a house that plays such a vital role in Yaakov's existence and particularly in his relationship with Hashem?

The emphasis on a house was not always part of Yaakov's life. Yaakov is described as a dweller of tents, which Chazal interpret to refer to the tents of the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. In his youth, Yaakov relates to Hashem through the vehicle of a tent, yet in later years he serves Hashem in a house. This model of transformation from tent to the house is not only found in the personal life of Yaakov. The Jewish People in their youth worship Hashem in a tent-like structure, i.e. the Mishkan, which is referred to as a tent. It is only centuries later when the tent of the Mishkan is replaced with the house known as the Beis Hamikdash. How does a house differ from a tent and why is it crucial that both Yaakov and his descendants incorporate aspects of the world of tents and of houses into their Avodas Hashem?

A tent conjures up the image of being temporary. It is a dwelling place for those who are traveling and have not yet set down their roots. In contrast, a house is a symbol of prominence. The Mishkan was a tent as it was dismantled and reassembled as the Jewish People traveled through the desert. Although the Mishkan was endowed with sanctity, as soon as it was moved from its location it lost its holiness. Even the sanctity of the location of the Mishkan in the city of Shiloh, which housed the Mishkan for 369 years, was only temporary. After the Mishkan was destroyed, Shiloh lost its unique status. Only Yerushalayim, which housed the Beis Hamikdash, would take on the status of a permanent sanctuary. The

Beis Hamikdash was not a tent but a house in the fullest sense.

In Tehillim, Dovid HaMelech describes his yearning to dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of his life and to visit the sanctuary of Hashem. These two requests seem contradictory. How can one simultaneously live somewhere permanently and yet merely be a visitor? Obviously the optimal reality in avodas Hashem is to be in Hashem's presence all the time. Yet, there is a danger in such an existence since we tend to take for granted things that we constantly have; we lose enthusiasm if we no longer view something as being fresh and new. Dovid is beseeching Hashem to enable him to serve Him on a constant basis with the excitement of a first time experience. He wants to be a dweller all of his days yet never lose the passion of a visitor.

Yaakov begins his avodas Hashem in the world of the tent. The freshness and excitement that accompanies one on his travels are found in the tents and Shem and Ever. As Yaakov gets older, he must build a permanent home for his family to serve Hashem. Nevertheless, he must draw inspiration from the days of his youth. As Dovid Hamelech taught us, he must live in a house with the enthusiasm of a tent. The tent and the house of Yaakov becomes the model from his descendants. They first construct a tent and then endow the house of Hashem with the enthusiasm of the Mishkan in the now permanent structure.

This message speaks to many of us at different stages of life. Those who are still in the tents of Torah in their youth should continue to thrive and grow with the enthusiasm of youth. Many of us have reached the stage in which we are building structures of permanence for ourselves and our families. At this critical period, we can sometimes lose sight of our original goals in life which we may have formulated during our years in the tents. The challenges of daily life can make it difficult to approach avodas Hashem with the excitement of youth. Yet, we must rise to the challenge. If we do not create a permanent structure of avodas Hashem with the enthusiasm of our youth, our structure will be hollow and devoid of meaning. Let us turn to our great models from the past who taught us how to thrive in both the tents and houses of Torah. Let us turn to Hashem with a sincere plea to be able to dwell in His house all of the days of our lives and still remain like visitors in His home. ©2017 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & TorahWeb.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Before Jacob's confrontation with his brother, Esau, he made preparations to ensure the safety of his family and his possessions. Following this, the Torah relates:

"And Jacob remained alone..." (Genesis 32:25).

How are we to understand the significance of his remaining "alone"?

The Midrash (Beraishis Rabbah 77:1) states that 'just as the Almighty is alone, so too Jacob was alone'. We see from this that the Sages understand that the word "alone" is a positive attribute and a form of emulating the Almighty. "Alone" means that you have an independent attitude and perspective.

The Mishna (a teaching) in Pirke Avot 4:1 (Chapters of the Fathers --a compilation of Jewish wisdom) defines four key terms: "Who is the wise man? The one who learns from everyone. Who is the strong person? The one who conquers his negative impulses. Who is the wealthy person? The one who is happy with his portion. Who is the honorable person? The one who honors others."

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz, of blessed memory, explained the Mishna in light of the positive attribute of being alone -- that every person can only obtain the most important things in life independently of anyone else. The important things depend on your attitude and perspective.

Wisdom is an approach to life, not a comparative contest. The wise man is the individual who does not compare his wisdom to that of others, but because of his love for wisdom he chooses to learn from everyone, for each person has wisdom to share. True strength is having the ability to overcome your negative tendencies and impulses. If it were dependent upon being victorious over others, as soon as someone else is stronger, you are no longer the strong man. True strength is only dependent upon yourself. Wealth is not dependent on how much money you have or the number of your possessions. If it were, then you could lose your entire wealth overnight. Rather, true wealth is feeling joy for what you do have. If honor were dependent on how others treat you, what are you supposed to do if others decide not to honor you? Woe to a person whose honor is dependent on the whim of others. True honor is up to you. You are honorable if you honor others regardless of how others treat you. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz*

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) © 2012 S. Katz & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

All...most

Yaakov prepared himself to confront his brother—a man who 22 years ago set out in a rage to kill him. Yaakov had no idea what this encounter would yield. All he knew was that his brother Esav was fast approaching with 400 armed men. And the prospects for peace were dim. There was little to do. He prepared for war, but he also prepared to avert war by offering gifts to appease the wrath of his mighty kin. He sent messengers laden with sheep, cattle, donkeys and camels all as offerings of peace to Esav. The bribe worked and the encounter that ensued was not confrontational at all. Yaakov greeted his older brother with great dignity. He bowed and called him, "my master." At first, Esav declined Yaakov's generous gifts. "I have much, let what you have remain yours." (Genesis 33:9) Yaakov urged Esav to accept the offering. "Please accept my gift," he pleaded, adding that "G-d has been gracious to me and I have everything." (Genesis 33-11)

Ultimately Esav agreed, accepted the gifts and made a counteroffer. He asks Yaakov to join him or at least let his men accompany Yaakov and his family on their journey. Yaakov refused the magnanimous offer from his former enemy and the brothers parted ways. Esav left toward his destiny— Seir—while Yaakov traveled to a town he named for its symbolic transience—Sukkoth, meaning tents.

What are the roots of these brothers'

ideological differences. One refused generous offers from his former nemesis; the other accepted. One travels with an entourage, and the other only with family and some servants. One traveled toward his permanent home and the other names the resting place with a word that means huts.

The Rebbe, Reb Ber of Mezritch, was once approached by a chasid who had a very common problem.

"Rebbe," he pleaded. "I never seem to have enough. The more I get, the more I want. I know it is improper to think this way and I need help."

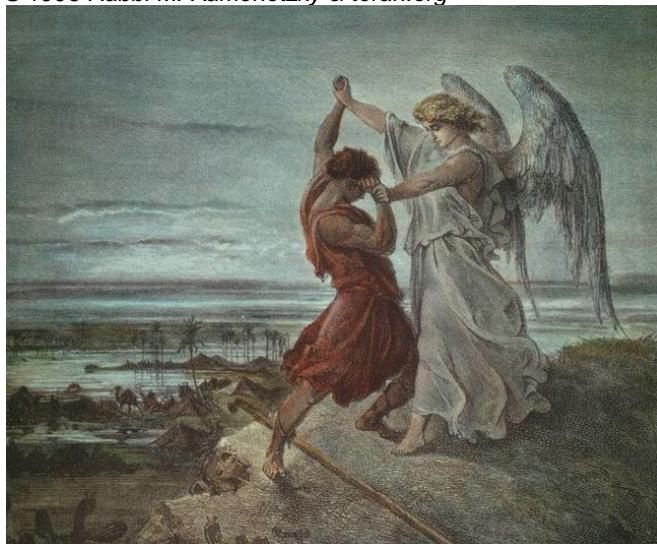
The rebbe told the man to visit Rebbe Zusia of Anipoli. "He can guide you with your difficulty."

The man was shocked as he approached Reb Zusia's residence. He saw a ramshackle wooden hut with boarded windows. Upon entering, the poverty was overwhelming. The man figured, "surely this is a man who is in constant need. He hardly has what he needed, and must grapple with new desires on a constant basis. He surely will be able to counsel me on my longing for the articles that I lack."

The man discussed his problem with Reb Zusia, but Reb Zusia looked at him in amazement. "What are you coming to me for? How can I advise you? I have absolutely everything I need!"

There is a distinct difference in how Yaakov and his brother Esav perceived their lot. Yaakov said he had everything. He needed no favors, wanted neither gifts or help from Esav, and was very happy to live in a tent city named Sukkoth. Esav only had most of what he wanted. If you push the right buttons, he could be bought, cajoled and swayed for a little more.

The vision of one's future is determined by the essence of one's present. One who believes he has only most of what he can acquire will not be satisfied until he has it all and he will never have it all. But one who feels he has it all, will be most happy—always. © 1996 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org



Gustave Doré, Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1855)