

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

One fact about this week's parsha has long perplexed the commentators. After his wrestling match with the unnamed adversary, Jacob was told: "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings Divine and human, and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:29, JPS translation). Or "Your name will no longer be said to be Jacob, but Israel. You have become great (sar) before God and man. You have won." (Aryeh Kaplan translation).

This change of name takes place not once but twice. After the encounter with Esau, and the episode of Dina and Shechem, God told Jacob to go to Beth El. Then we read: "After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.' So He named him Israel" (Gen. 35:9-10).

Note, first, that this is not an adjustment of an existing name by the change or addition of a letter, as when God changed Abram's name to Abraham, or Sarai's to Sarah. It is an entirely new name, as if to signal that what it represents is a complete change of character. Second, as we have seen, the name change happened not once but twice. Third -- and this is the puzzle of puzzles -- having said twice that his name will no longer be Jacob, the Torah continues to call him Jacob. God Himself does so. So do we, every time we pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How so, when the Torah twice tells us that his name will no longer be Jacob?

Radak suggests that "your name will no longer be called Jacob" means, "your name will no longer only be called Jacob." You will have another name as well. This is ingenious, but hardly the plain sense of the verse. Sforno says, "In the Messianic Age, your name will no longer be called Jacob." This, too, is difficult. The future tense, as used in the Torah, means the near future, not the distant one, unless explicitly specified.

This is just one mystery among many when it comes to Jacob's character and his relationship with his brother Esau. So difficult is it to understand the stories about them that, to make sense of them, they have been overlaid in Jewish tradition with a thick layer of Midrash that makes Esau almost perfectly evil and Jacob almost perfectly righteous. There is a clear need

for such Midrash, for educational purposes. Esau and Jacob, as portrayed in the Torah, are too nuanced and complex to be the subject of simple moral lessons for young minds. So Midrash gives us a world of black and white, as Maharatz Chajes explained (Mavo ha-Aggadot printed at the beginning of Eyn Yaakov).

The biblical text itself, though, is far more subtle. It does not state that Esau is bad and Jacob is good. Rather, it shows that they are two different kinds of human being. The contrast between them is like the one made by Nietzsche between the Greek figures of Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo represents reason, logic, order, self-control; Dionysus stands for emotion, passion, nature, wildness and chaos. Apollonian cultures value restraint and modesty; Dionysian ones go for ostentation and excess. Jacob is Apollonian, Esau, Dionysiac.

Or it may be that Esau represents the Hunter, considered a hero in many ancient cultures, but not so in the Torah, which represents the agrarian and pastoral ethic of farmers and shepherds. With the transition from hunter-gatherer to farmer-and-herdsman, the Hunter is no longer a hero and instead is seen as a figure of violence, especially when combined, as in the case of Esau, with a mercurial temperament. It is not so much that Esau is bad and Jacob good, but that Esau represents the world that was, while Jacob represents, if sometimes tentatively and fearfully, a new world about to be brought into being, whose spirituality would be radically different, new and challenging.

The fact that Jacob and Esau were twins is fundamental. Their relationship is one of the classic cases of sibling rivalry. Key to understanding their story is what Rene Girard called mimetic desire: the desire to have what someone else has, because they have it. Ultimately, this is the desire to be someone else.

That is what the name Jacob signifies. It is the name he acquired because he was born holding on to his brother Esau's heel. That was consistently his posture during the key events of his early life. He bought his brother's birthright. He wore his brother's clothes. At his mother's request, he took his brother's blessing. When asked by his father, "Who are you, my son?" He replied, "I am Esau, your firstborn."

Jacob was the man who wanted be Esau. Why so? Because Esau had one thing he did not have: his father's love. "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob."

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All that changed in the great wrestling match between Jacob and the unknown stranger. Our Sages teach us that this stranger was an angel in disguise. After they fight, he tells Jacob that his name would now be Israel. The stated explanation of this name is: "for you have wrestled with God and with man and have prevailed." It also resonates with two other senses. Sar means "prince, royalty." Yashar means "upright." Both of these are in sharp contrast with the name "Jacob," one who "holds on to his brother's heel."

How then are we to understand what, first the stranger, then God, said to Jacob? Not as a statement, but as a request, a challenge, an invitation. Read it not as, "You will no longer be called Jacob but Israel." Instead read it as, "Let your name no longer be Jacob but Israel," meaning, "Act in such a way that this is what people call you." Be a prince. Be royalty. Be upright. Be yourself. Don't long to be someone else. This would turn out to be a challenge not just then but many times in the Jewish future.

Often, Jews have been content to be themselves. But from time to time, they have come into contact with a civilisation whose intellectual, cultural and even spiritual sophistication was undeniable. It made them feel awkward, inferior, like a villager who comes to a city for the first time. Jews lapsed into the condition of Jacob. They wanted to be someone else.

The first time we hear this is in the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: "You say, 'We want to be like the nations, like the peoples of the world, who serve wood and stone.' But what you have in mind will never happen" (Ez. 20:32). In Babylon, the people encountered an impressive empire whose military and economic success contrasted radically with their own condition of exile and defeat. Some wanted to stop being Jews and become someone else, anyone else.

We hear it again in the days of the Greeks. Some Jews became Hellenised. We recognise that in the names of High Priests like Jason and Menelaus. The battle against this is the story of Chanukah. Something similar happened in the days of Rome. Josephus was one of those who went over to the other side, though he remained a defender of Judaism.

It happened again during the Enlightenment. Jews fell in love with European culture. With philosophers like Kant and Hegel, poets like Goethe

and Schiller, and musicians like Mozart and Beethoven. Some were able to integrate this with faithfulness to Judaism as creed and deed -- figures like Rabbis Samson Raphael Hirsch and Nehemiah Nobel. But some did not. They left the fold. They changed their names. They hid their identity. None of us is entitled to be critical of what they did. The combined impact of intellectual challenge, social change, and incendiary antisemitism, was immense. Yet this was a Jacob response, not an Israel one.

It is happening today in large swathes of the Jewish world. Jews have overachieved. Judaism, with some notable exceptions, has underachieved. There are Jews at or near the top of almost every field of human endeavour today, but all too many have either abandoned their religious heritage or are indifferent to it. For them, being Jewish is a slender ethnicity, too thin to be transmitted to the future, too hollow to inspire.

We have waited so long for what we have today and have never had simultaneously before in all of Jewish history: independence and sovereignty in the state of Israel, freedom and equality in the diaspora. Almost everything that a hundred generations of our ancestors prayed for has been given to us. Will we really (in Lin-Manuel Miranda's phrase) throw away our shot? Will we be Israel? Or will we show, to our shame, that we have not yet outlived the name of Jacob, the person who wanted to be someone else? Jacob was often fearful because he was not sure who he wanted to be, himself or his brother. That is why God said to him, "Let your name not be Jacob but Israel." When you are afraid, and unsure of who you are, you are Jacob. When you are strong in yourself, as yourself, you are Israel.

The fact that the Torah and tradition still use the word Jacob, not just Israel, tells us that the problem has not disappeared. Jacob seems to have wrestled with this throughout his life, and we still do today. It takes courage to be different, a minority, countercultural. It's easy to live for the moment like Esau, or to "be like the peoples of the world" as Ezekiel said.

I believe the challenge issued by the angel still echoes today. Are we Jacob, embarrassed by who we are? Or are we Israel, with the courage to stand upright and walk tall in the path of faith? *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 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, 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 that 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 that 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 God 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 God” 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 God (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 God and the fitting recipient of the Abrahamic birthright. ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Jacob and his family face two great crises that are recorded for us in this week's Torah reading. The first is the long-awaited encounter with his jealous and dangerous brother, who decades later still smarts over the deal that he made in selling his birthright to Jacob. Jacob is aware that his brother has the potential to destroy him and his family, and he prepares three different avenues of salvation – a financial settlement, the invocation of heavenly protection through prayer, and finally, the preparation of physical means of self-defense. In the end, his brother accepts the financial gifts offered him and departs, never again to really become part of Jacob's family and destiny. Jacob does not escape unscathed from this encounter, for he is crippled by the heavenly representative of his brother who wrestles with him to a draw. Yet Jacob feels himself relieved that, at least temporarily, his brother is no longer a mortal threat.

Throughout the ages, the Jewish people have always attempted to mollify their enemies with financial gifts and contributions to the general non-Jewish society. This has always proven to provide a temporary stay of violence with little long-lasting consequences. The Jewish people relied on praying to heaven for protection as their sole avenue of escape from destruction. They were in no position to physically defend themselves from crusades and pogroms. This pattern in Jewish history has repeated itself over and over until our very day.

The second incident of violence against the family of Jacob is recorded for us in the story of the kidnapping and rape of Dina. Here Jacob unaccountably appears to us as being passive and having no real plan for Dina's salvation and for punishing the evildoers. It will be Shimon and Levi that will respond violently and save Dina from her captors, showing that violence, even justified violence, always comes with its own costs. It is interesting to note that the Torah does not record for us any appeal from Jacob to Heaven. He apparently accepted that this tragedy occurred to him and his daughter somehow justifiably, and that there was no necessity for an appeal to Heaven after the fact. Jacob is aware that the judgement of heaven is always inscrutable to humans as the Talmud itself states: those matters that Heaven has hidden from our understanding, humans should not attempt to understand."

Jacob will later criticize Shimon and Levi for their behavior and their actions. Yet, the Torah itself leaves the correctness of the behavior of Shimon and Levi without judgement and throughout the ages, the

commentators have debated the matter of contention between the father and the sons. Suffice it to say, that Shimon, as the teachers of Israel, and Levi, as the priests of Israel, remain heroic figures in Jewish history and current Jewish life. In our time, through the independent might of the state of Israel, these three avenues of salvation that Jacob had in the encounter with his brother, once again exist in terms of Jewish survival and success. They should be employed very judiciously. ©2019 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 Ya'akov (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-ye'avek.

Rashi first gives a literal reason for the use of this term. He points out that the word va-ye'avek 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 have tried 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 comes to fore when considering how terrorists often target children.

Rashi offers a second suggestion. The word avak interchanges with havak – embrace. According to this interpretation the Torah does not record a physical confrontation; rather a meeting when Ya'akov and the ish embrace.

In this vein, 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 Ya'akov and the ish concludes with the Torah's description of Ya'akov limping as the sun rose. (Genesis 32:32) Precisely when the sun is glowing, and the darkness of oppression diminishes, Jacob, the Jew, spiritually limps as he is in spiritual jeopardy.

The ish's embrace of Ya'akov warns us that while combating anti-Semitism is an important objective, the effort must be part of a far larger goal – the stirring and reawakening of Jewish spiritual consciousness. © 2019 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And Yaakov sent messengers to Esav his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom." (Beraishis 32:4) Chazal discuss what kind of messengers Yaakov sent. Were they angels? Servants? There are different lessons depending on what he sent but there's a bigger question that arises even before that. Why did he send messengers at all?!

He knew his brother wanted to kill him and he was now returning home and passing by his brother's land. Why not go unnoticed and simply enter without the fanfare of announcing his arrival and the great show of wealth? Why would Yaakov specifically draw attention to himself in this way?

The Midrash in Beraishis Rabba asks this question, likening him to someone getting embroiled in a fight that isn't his, or as Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei, "grabbing a dog by the ears." The Ramban, in fact, says that this was an incorrect choice and we made a similar mistake in the times of the Chashmonaim by reaching out to the Romans and making treaties with them. Through this, we caused our own downfall. But even if it was a wrong choice, what was Yaakov thinking in the first place? Perhaps if we understand that we can prevent ourselves from bad choices as well.

The Netziv explains that when he saw the angels at Machanaim, he realized he had reached the border of Eretz Canaan. This was the fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Yaakov, that he would safely return to his father's land. Though Yaakov prayed that he return to his father's house, this was not mentioned by Hashem and Yaakov was afraid that his prayer was not accepted. Therefore he felt he had to contend with Esav so he reached out to try and make peace with him.

Yet, as the Midrash tells us, this was a mistake. He should not have initiated contact with Esav. Doing so led to an ongoing relationship with him and being on Esav's mind. He would have been safe without it and now put himself into danger.

Though Yaakov felt Hashem's promise had been fulfilled and he might now be left on his own, this seems to seriously undervalue Hashem's kindness even to those who are undeserving. If Hashem had promised to bring him back to his father's land, surely it would not be to simply have him die when he got there.

Hashem would not have made him rich simply for Esav to come and steal it all away.

We, too, often feel we need to interact with the nations of the world in order for them to accept us. If we want to be "equals" then we are selling ourselves short. The currency upon which our existence operates is eternal, not temporal. If we want them to leave us alone, we would be better served by not showing up on their radars, and keeping to ourselves.

We should not flaunt our success for that is what stirs them up more than anything. Just as Yaakov should not have sought to make peace with Esav, we should focus on our relationship with Hashem and He will protect us from all comers.

The Gemara in Taanis (8b) discusses that there was once a famine and a plague. The people felt they should pray for the plague to stop and they would tolerate the famine.

R' Shmuel bar Nachmaini said, "Rather pray for the famine to end and people will stop dying from the plague because Hashem gives food to be enjoyed by the living."

Similarly, since Hashem had given Yaakov all that he did, he should have trusted that Hashem would continue to watch over him. © 2019 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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 cite 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 bimkom 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 DAVID LEVIN

And I Did Not Know

The story of Rachel Imeinu is a sad one indeed. She was the second daughter of Lavan and in line to marry the second son of Yitzchak, namely Ya’akov. She would have been Ya’akov’s only wife and she would have been destined to give birth to all twelve tribes. If this had been her thoughts and her plans, we can see that Hashem has a way of changing those plans to create personal tests from which she might grow and improve. She lost the exclusivity of her marriage to Ya’akov through her older sister. She watched as her sister and even the two maidservants gave birth before she had her first child. As Ya’akov and the family fled from Lavan’s house, she stole her father’s family idols and hid them from him, endangering not only her life and the lives of her co-wives and children but also her husband. Finally, she died giving birth to her second son, Binyamin.

The Torah tells us: “And they traveled from Beit El and there was still a stretch of land to go to Efrat when Rachel gave birth and had difficulty in her childbirth. And it was when she had difficulty in her labor that the midwife said to her, ‘Don’t be afraid for this one too is a son for you.’ And it was as her soul was departing, for she died, that she called his name Ben-Oni but his father called him Binyamin. And Rachel died and she was buried along the way to Efrat which is Bethlehem. And Ya’akov set up a monument over her grave, and it is a monument of Rachel’s grave to this day.”

One of the questions that has been asked is

why Ya’akov buried Rivka outside of Beit Lechem and did not bring her into the city of Beit Lechem or even to Efrat. Whether the distance to Efrat was short or long is not really relevant. The distance quoted was to Efrat and not to Beit Lechem which was a much shorter distance. The Aggadah as quoted by HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains Ya’akov’s unwillingness to bury Rachel at any other place. Rachel would always have a special bond with Binyamin which was formed by her death in childbirth. The place where Rachel died would later be part of the inheritance of Binyamin. Both Beit Lechem and Efrat would be part of the inheritance of Yehudah. Ya’akov understood this from a prophetic vision, so he purposefully chose to bury Rachel “along the way”, within the land of Binyamin. Burying Rachel on the path also enabled the words of Yirmiyahu (31:14), “Thus said Hashem: a voice is heard on high, wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeps for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children for they are gone.” These words of Yirmiyahu were uttered as the Jews went into exile at the destruction of the First Temple. They brought comfort to those going “along the way” into exile, for they also predicted a return to rebuild the Land of Israel. A Midrash is told that Rachel’s weeping was so intense that Hashem had to ask her to stop or He would not have been able to exile the Jews from their land.

When Rachel gave birth to Yosef, she named him by saying that, “Hashem should gather to me (yosef li) another son.” Her fear was not that she would die but that Hashem had not listened to her plea. The reassurance given her by the midwife would help to ease her mind. There was good reason for her fear according to the Midrash. We are told that each of the twelve sons was born together with a daughter. This was true of Yosef’s birth also. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the repetition of the concept of “had difficulty in her childbirth” and the phrase, “and it was when she had difficulty in her labor” indicates that twin girls were born and the word “gam, also” indicates that Binyamin was born in addition to these two girls. This also then clarifies the reason for Rachel’s fear. She knew that it was common for her to have two births, one boy and one girl, but when the two girls were born first, she feared that Hashem had not listened to her plea for another son.

Bereishit Rabbah says, “she (Rachel) named him in the language of the Aramites (her native tongue) and he (Ya’akov) named him in the Holy tongue (Hebrew).” HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Rachel had certainly learned Hebrew and spoke it always. When a person is dying, however, it is common to revert to the language of one’s Mother Tongue which for her was Aramaic. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the word “On” (aleph, vav, nun) means to have a legal title of possession. In this explanation Ben Oni means the son whom I possess. But the word is

etymologically related to the word *hon* which can be taken to mean the misuse of the power of acquisition. "On" can also mean the beginning of pain and grief at a bitter loss as if someone robbed you of a possession. "Ben Oni here means the 'son of my grief', son of my departure which will soon be mourned." Ya'akov, however calls him Ben Yamin, the son of my right hand. Here Ya'akov refers to his strength and his power, stressing in Hebrew the brighter meaning of "On" which is power (of possession).

The matzeivah (monument) that Ya'akov erects at the place of Rachel's burial is the first such matzeivah recorded to mark a grave in the Torah. HaRav Sorotzkin explains: (1) Rachel wanted to name Binyamin "Ben Oni" as a memorial to her suffering and her death in childbirth but Ya'akov changed his name to Binyamin. For that reason, Ya'akov wished to memorialize her death with the matzeivah. (2) Since Rachel was buried next to the road, the place of her burial might become obstructed and forgotten. There was no tree nearby as in the burial of Devorah that people would then be able to identify and know that the grave was under it. Not only because of the importance of the site but also as an aid to Kohanim who must avoid a grave, Ya'akov made a matzeivah there. (3) The rest of the Avot would be buried in the Machpeilah, a family cave, which precluded the need for any identification. Rachel, however, was buried "along the way" so the marker became necessary.

It is not hard to feel sympathy for Rachel. Her life seemed like one negative experience after another. We also know that our lives can sometimes feel as sad and as unfulfilled as hers. It is our attitude that may need to be adjusted in order to understand that our lives are blessed instead. We must understand that every challenge that we receive from Hashem is a way for us to learn more about ourselves and our ability to cope. We do not have to be rich or healthy or smart or successful to be grateful to Hashem for all that He has given us. Our attitude enables us to be satisfied with our lives and opens us to see the great gifts that we receive daily. The serenity which we are granted is overwhelming. May we each open our hearts and our lives to recognize all that Hashem provides for us.
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RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"**A**nd he said, 'Your name shall no longer be called 'Ya'akov,' but 'Yisroel,' because you struggled with [an angel of] God and with men, and you have prevailed.'" (Bereishis 32:29) The world is divided between those who CAN see, and those who CANNOT. The first group includes many people who are PHYSICALLY blind, and the second group includes mostly people who are not.

It's a remarkably deceptive matter. Everyday,

billions of people, for thousands of years now, have gone about their lives based upon what their eyes have seen and their ears have heard. Consequently, they have gone to their graves, many after LONG lives, having missed the point of life.

Thus most people never move on past their lowest level of soul, the Nefesh, even after many reincarnations. There is plenty to rectify on this level alone, but life with access to only the Nefesh is nothing compared to a life with access to higher levels of soul. As much as such people feel "themselves," they are really just a fraction of their true selves.

It is like the difference between Ya'akov and Yisroel, one person on two VERY different levels. When the verse says that the angel of Eisav could not overcome "him," Kabbalah explains that the "him" was Yisroel, not Ya'akov, whom the angel COULD have defeated.

From the account of their epic all-night wrestle, it sounds as if Ya'akov only became Yisroel BECAUSE of his victory: And he said, "Your name shall no longer be called 'Ya'akov,' but 'Yisroel,' because you struggled with [an angel of] God and with men, and you have prevailed." (Bereishis 32:29)

But from Kabbalah, it seems more as if he FIRST became Yisroel, and that it was THIS that allowed Ya'akov to defeat the angel. The change of name after the fact, and then officially after the incident in Shechem, was only Divine confirmation of the transformation.

When? How? What happened to Ya'akov Avinu to cause him to leap to the next level called "Yisroel"? Whatever it was, it seems to have been the same thing that transformed the Chashmonayim in their time, inspiring them to go from PASSIVE-CONQUERED mode to PROACTIVE-CONQUEROR mode. It was this that led to their remarkably miraculous redemption:

God said to Ya'akov, "For endangering yourself for a small container, I Myself will repay your children with a small container to the Chashmonayim!" (Midrash Tzeidah LaDerech)

If not for those pachim ketanim -- small jars, Ya'akov would not have found himself alone with the "stranger." If not for the all-night battle with the stranger, Ya'akov would not have become Yisroel, at least at THAT time.

So, NATURALLY, the small jars became the symbol of Ya'akov's historic transformation. And therefore NATURALLY, a small jar also became the symbol of the Chashmonayim's victory as well, with a twist though. Then it was the CONTENTS of the small jar -- SHEMEN ZAYIS -- that took center stage at the time of Chanukah.

And apparently it did in Ya'akov's time as well, though the verse does not even hint to it: From where did Ya'akov get this jar? When he picked up the stones from under his head and returned them in the morning,

he found a stone that had a jar of oil in it, and he used it to pour on the top stone. When it refilled itself, Ya'akov knew it was set aside for God. He said, "It's not right to leave this here." (Yal-kut Reuveini, Vayishlach)

So he didn't. Ya'akov took that jar of oil with him everywhere he went. He took it with him to Padan Aram for 20 years, and when he finally decided to return home in his 34th year, he made sure to bring it back with him. And the night before his historic identity change, it was the reason he found himself alone on the other side of the Yabok fighting with the Angel of Eisav.

As is often the case with Torah, the addition of just a "little" piece of information, dramatically alters the storyline. The Talmud makes it seem as if Ya'akov returned for the jar. The Midrash corrects this and says, that it was for the MIRACULOUS OIL inside the jar that Ya'akov risked his life.

Nevertheless the story cannot end here. It helps to know that Ya'akov greatly valued the jar because of the miraculous oil inside of it. The question is, what does the oil have to do with his transformation from Ya'akov to Yisroel, in Ya'akov's time AND in the time of the Chashmonayim?

It's a VISION thing. Somehow shemen zayis -- olive oil -- is tied up with the idea of VISION. This is why Ya'akov needed the oil to anoint the monument he built because of the vision he had had the night before:

And Ya'akov woke up from his sleep, and he said, "Indeed, God is in this place, and I did not know [it]." And he was frightened, and he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." (Bereishis 28:16-17)

Certainly Ya'akov had known that Har HaBayis, the Temple Mount, was a special place, the holiest one in the world. It's the reason why, after going all the way to Charan, he returned BACK there to pray. Nevertheless his dream greatly enhanced his vision of just HOW holy the place was, of the level of Godly revelation that was possible there.

Perhaps he already knew that too, but had just experienced it for the first time. After all, it was such a level of revelation that drew Avraham to the place to complete the test of the Akeidah. After traveling for three days in the direction of Jerusalem, not knowing where to stop for the Akeidah, God finally gave Avraham a sign that he had arrived: the Shechinah hovering over the mountain.

According to the Midrash, once he saw the sign, Avraham wasn't sure who should continue with him the final distance. He knew that it was a miraculous vision, so he figured anyone meant to accompany him would see it too. When Yishmael and Eliezer both could not see it, he knew to tell them the following: "You stay here -- Peh-Heh -- with the donkey, while I and the lad will walk until there -- Chof-Heh -- prostrate ourselves

and then return to you." (Bereishis 22:5)

They are but two simple "location" words, but of two dimensions. The word "here," or Peh-Heh in Hebrew, equals 85 in gematria. Adding one for the kollel, a form of gematria that hints to higher spiritual roots of a concept, the gematria is 86. This is the numerical value of "Elohim," the hidden reality of God that people often refer to as "nature."

The gematria of "there," is 25 -- Chof-Heh, and with the kollel it is 26, another Name of God referred to as "Hovayah." This is the four-letter Name of God that we do not pronounce as written because it is too holy for us at this time in history. It is associated overt revelations of God, and therefore the Shechinah -- Divine Presence. The deeper message to Yishmael and Eliezer was, "You stay here on the level of Elohim while we go there, to the level of Hovayah."

Elohim is the reality of Divine light that permeates the level of Creation that EVERYONE sees. Hovayah is the reality of Divine light that permeates all of Creation that FEW people ever merit to see. In other words, Elohim is like the body, the kli -- vessel, and Hovayah is the soul, the inner light that fills it.

Which brings us to shemen zayis. There is the shemen, and there is the zayis. The zayis, which is very bitter, is the fruit that really can't be eaten unless it is first pickled. The oil is fruit of the fruit that cannot be used unless first EXTRACTED from the olive. But after having done that, it can be kindled to produce brilliant LIGHT, brilliant previously HIDDEN light. To be continued... ©2019 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Before encountering his evil brother, Esav, Jacob divided all that he had into two camps. The Torah states: "And (Jacob) said 'If Esau will come to one camp and smite it, the remaining camp will be saved' " (Genesis 32:9). What lesson do we learn from Jacob's action?

Rashi, the great commentator, tells us that Jacob had three strategies to deal with the threat from his brother: 1) he sent gifts to appease him 2) he prayed for Divine assistance 3) he prepared for war.

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz points out that Jacob did not rely on his righteousness; he made every humanly effort possible. The forefathers kept to natural laws in dealing with life situations. After all, the laws of nature are the Almighty's laws (He did set up the universe!). This is our goal -- to do all that is in our power, but to realize that our success ultimately depends upon the Almighty. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2014 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

