

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

From beginning to end, Genesis chapter 34 tells a terrifying story. Dina, Jacob's daughter – the only Jewish daughter mentioned in the entire patriarchal narrative – leaves the safety of home to go out to “look at the daughters of the land.” (Gen. 34:1) She is raped and abducted by a local prince, son of the king of the town known as Shechem.

Jacob learns of this fact but does nothing until his sons return. Dina's brothers Shimon and Levi immediately realise that they must act to rescue her. It is an almost impossible assignment. The hostage-taker is no ordinary individual. As the son of the king, he cannot be confronted directly. The king is unlikely to order his son to release her. The other townspeople, if challenged, will come to the prince's defence. It is Shimon and Levi against the town, two against many. Even were all of Jacob's sons to be enlisted, they would still be outnumbered.

Shimon and Levi therefore decide on a ruse. They agree to let Dina marry the prince, but they make one condition. All the male members of the town must all be circumcised. The men of Shechem, seeing long-term advantages to an alliance with this neighbouring tribe, agree. The men of the town are weakened by the operation, and their pain is most acute on the third day. That day, Shimon and Levi enter the town and kill the entire male population. They rescue Dina and bring her home. The other brothers then plunder the town.

Jacob is horrified by their actions. “You have made me odious to the people of the land,” he says. (Gen. 34:30) What then were we supposed to do, ask the two brothers? “Should we have left our sister to be treated like a prostitute?” With that rhetorical question, the episode ends and the narrative moves elsewhere. But Jacob's horror at the action of his sons does not end there. He returns to it on his deathbed, and in effect curses them:

“Simeon and Levi are brothers—
their swords are weapons of violence.
Let me not enter their council,
let me not join their assembly,
for they have killed men in their anger
and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.
Cursed be their anger, so fierce,
and their fury, so cruel!

I will scatter them in Jacob

and disperse them in Israel. (Gen. 49:5-7)

The story of Dina is an extraordinary passage.

It seems to lack any kind of moral message. No one comes out of it well. Shechem, the prince, would seem to be the chief villain. It was he who abducted and raped Dina in the first place. Hamor, his father, fails to reprimand him or order Dina's release. Shimon and Levi are guilty of a horrendous act of violence. The other brothers engage in looting the town.¹ Jacob seems passive throughout. He neither acts nor instructs his sons on how to act. Even Dina herself seems at best to have been guilty of carelessness in going out into what was clearly a dangerous neighbourhood – recall that both Abraham and Isaac, her grandfather and great grandfather, had feared for their own lives because of the lawlessness of the times.²

Who was in the right and who in the wrong are left conspicuously undecided in the text. Jacob condemns his sons, but his sons reject the criticism.

This debate continued and was taken up by two of the greatest Rabbis in the Middle Ages. Maimonides takes the side of Shimon and Levi. They were justified in what they did, he says. The other members of the town saw what Shechem had done, knew that he was guilty of a crime, and yet they neither brought him to court nor rescued the girl. They were therefore accomplices in his guilt. What Shechem had done was a capital crime, and by sheltering him the townspeople were implicated.³ This is, incidentally, a fascinating ruling since it suggests that for Maimonides the rule that “all Israel are responsible for one another” (Shavuot 39a) is not restricted to Israel. It applies to all societies. As Isaac Arama was to write in the fifteenth century, any crime known about and allowed to continue ceases to be an offence of individuals only and becomes a sin of the community as a whole.⁴

Nahmanides disagrees (in his commentary to Gen. 34:13). The principle of collective responsibility does not, in his view, apply to non-Jewish societies.

¹ An action that is disapproved of biblically: see Deut. 13:13-19, 1 Samuel 15:13-26, Esther 9:10, 9:15-16.

² The Midrash is critical of Dina: see Midrash Aggadah (Buber) to Gen. 34:1. Midrash Sechel Tov is even critical of her mother Leah for permitting her to go out to Shechem.

³ Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 9:14.

⁴ Arama, Akeidat Yitzchak, Bereishit, Vayera, Gate 20, s.v. UVeMidrash.

The Noahide covenant requires every society to set up courts of law, but it does not imply that a failure to prosecute a wrongdoer involves all members of the society in a capital crime.

The debate continues today among Bible scholars. Two in particular subject the story to close literary analysis: Meir Sternberg in his *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*⁵ and Rabbi Elchanan Samet in his studies on the parsha.⁶ They too arrive at conflicting conclusions. Sternberg argues that the text is critical of Jacob for both his inaction and his criticism of his sons for acting. Samet sees the chief culprits as Shechem and Hamor.

Both point out, however, the remarkable fact that the text deliberately deepens the moral ambiguity by refusing to portray even the apparent villains in an unduly negative light. Consider the chief wrongdoer, the young prince Shechem. The text tells us that “his heart was drawn to Dina, daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, ‘Get me this girl as my wife.’” (Gen. 34:3-4) Compare this with the description of Amnon, son of King David, who rapes his half-sister Tamar. That story too is a tale of bloody revenge. But the text says about Amnon that after raping Tamar, he “hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, ‘Get up and get out!’” (2 Samuel 13:15). Shechem is not like that at all. He falls in love with Dina and wants to marry her. The king and the people of the town readily accede to the Shimon and Levi’s request that they become circumcised.

Not only does the text not demonise the people of Shechem, it also does not paint any of Jacob’s family in a positive light. It uses the same word – “deceit” (34:13) – of Shimon and Levi that it has used previously about Jacob taking Esau’s blessing, and Laban substituting Leah for Rachel. Its description of all the character – from the gadabout Dina to her excessively violent rescuers, to the plundering other brothers and the passive Jacob – the text seems written deliberately to alienate our sympathies.

The overall effect is a story with no irredeemable villains and no stainless heroes. Why then is it told at all? Stories do not appear in the Torah merely because they happened. The Torah is not a history book. It is silent on some of the most important periods of time. We know nothing, for example, about Abraham’s childhood, or about thirty-eight of the forty years spent by the Israelites in the wilderness. Torah means “teaching”, “instruction”, “guidance”. What teaching does the Torah want us to draw from this

⁵ Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. 444-81.

⁶ Elhanan Samet, *Iyunim be-Parshat ha-Shavuah*, third series, Israel: Yediot Aharonot, 2012, 149-171.

narrative out of which no one emerges well?

There is an important thought-experiment devised by Andrew Schmookler, known as the parable of the tribes.⁷ Imagine a group of tribes living close to one another. All choose the way of peace except one that is willing to use violence to achieve its ends. What happens to the peace-seeking tribes? One is defeated and destroyed. A second is conquered and subjugated. A third flees to some remote and inaccessible place. If the fourth seeks to defend itself, it too will have to have recourse to violence. “The irony is that successful defence against a power-maximising aggressor requires a society to become more like the society that threatens it. Power can be stopped only by power.”⁸

There are, in other words, four possible outcomes: [1] destruction, [2] subjugation, [3] withdrawal, and [4] imitation. “In every one of these outcomes the ways of power are spread throughout the system. This is the parable of the tribes.”⁹ Recall that all but one of the tribes seeks peace and has no desire to exercise power over its neighbours. Nonetheless, if you introduce a single violent tribe into the region, violence will eventually prevail, however the other tribes choose to respond. That is the tragedy of the human condition.

As I was writing this essay in the summer of 2014, Israel was engaged in a bitter struggle with Hamas in Gaza in which many people died. The State of Israel had no more desire to be engaged in this kind of warfare than did our ancestor Jacob. Throughout the campaign I found myself recalling the words earlier in our parsha about Jacob’s feelings prior to his meeting with Esau: “Jacob was very afraid and distressed” (Gen. 32:8), about which the Sages said, “Afraid, lest he be killed, distressed lest he be forced to kill.”¹⁰ What the episode of Dina tells us is not that Jacob, or Shimon and Levi, were right, but rather that there can be situations in which there is no right course of action; where whatever you do is wrong; where every option will involve the abandonment of some moral principle.

That is Schmookler’s point, that “power is like a contaminant, a disease, which once introduced will gradually but inexorably become universal in the system of competing societies.”¹¹ Shechem’s single act of violence against Dina forced two of Jacob’s sons into violent reprisal, and in the end everyone was either contaminated or dead. It is indicative of the moral depth of the Torah that it does not hide this terrible truth from us by depicting one side as guilty, the other as innocent.

Violence defiles us all. It did then. It does now.

⁷ Andrew Bard Schmookler, *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution*. Berkeley: U of California, 1984.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰ Quoted by Rashi ad loc.

¹¹ Schmookler, *ibid.*, 22.

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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." (Genesis 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 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! ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

We seem to find our father Jacob always in some sort of flight. He flees from the wrath of his brother Eisav and spends decades in exile in the house of Lavan. Eventually, he is forced to flee from Lavan when it becomes obvious to him that dishonesty, corruption, and idolatry that characterize the house of Lavan endanger Jacob's physical and spiritual survival, as well as that of his family.

Because of all of this, he flees the house of Lavan to try to return to his home in the land of Israel. Pursued by Lavan, Jacob eventually mollifies Lavan, and continues his journey. But now he regards himself as a fugitive, constantly in danger and subject to constant threats from outside enemies from whom he cannot seemingly escape.

The encounter with his brother Eisav, as described in this week's Torah reading, is the culmination of Jacob's realization of all his fears, and of the futility of his repeated attempts to flee and escape. Rashi points out that Jacob devised a plan of three options regarding the forthcoming encounter with Eisav: to purchase goodwill with money, with a prayer to heaven to help them escape trouble, and, if necessary, physical self-defense to preserve his life and his family.

It is noteworthy that the option of fleeing, of running away, does not appear in the literature as being an option that Jacob considered in this instance. He apparently is done running, and now turns to face his problems and his adversary, head-on, face-to-face.

Jacob is pre-empted by a mysterious confrontation with the angel of Eisav before the actual encounter with his brother. That encounter comes upon him suddenly and unexpectedly, and it is a threat that he cannot escape from. Jacob wrestles with his adversaries but in the ensuing struggle, Jacob is injured. He prevails though and emerges triumphant, so much so, that his adversary is forced to bless him and acknowledge his greatness.

It is this encounter with the angel that, somehow, brought home to Jacob the futility of attempting to escape the meeting with his brother. Jacob. He decides to confront his problems and not avoid them, and devises three options as to how he will encounter Eisav, but also confront him.

There are many problems in life -- and, in fact, life is a series of problems -- that we often attempt to deal with by ignoring them or fleeing from them. This tactic rarely proves successful. Eventually we all must meet up with our own Eisav, or at least with the angel --

and ideas that the angel represents. Judaism has never attempted to escape from the world. Instead, it has always attempted to face it, argue, and debate, teach, and instruct, and retain its faith and values. History has shown us how impossible it is to avoid confrontation -- certainly in the realm of ideas, beliefs, and normative behavior. Being able to face up to a problem and its ramifications is the first step towards being able somehow to solve or overcome the problem, with an adequate resolution. ©2021 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

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The Sciatic Nerve

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

In his book *Krayti Uflayti* (65:16), Rav Yonatan Eibeschitz tells a story of a renowned and learned butcher an expert at *nikur*, removing the sciatic nerve as required by the *halacha*. This butcher announced one day that the nerve customarily removed was the wrong one. Rav Yonatan comments, "I investigated the matter thoroughly and found that the nerve which he claimed was the correct one is found only in male animals and not females. I then showed him the *Smag* (*Sefer Mitzvot HaGadol*), who writes that the prohibition of eating the sciatic nerve applies to both male and female."

Rav Yonatan's conclusion, however, is perplexing. For it is clear from the final line of the *Smag* that it is referring to the obligation of people -- both male and female -- to follow this law. It is not discussing the gender of the animals at all!

Various possibilities have been offered to resolve this difficulty. One approach posits that Rav Yonatan meant the *Behag* (*Ba'al Halachot Gedolot*), not the *Smag*. In fact, the *Behag* does write that the sciatic nerve is present in both males and females.

Another approach points to one of the early copies of the *Krayti Uflayti*, which was printed during the lifetime of Rav Eibeschitz, and in which there is a correction in his handwriting. It replaces the letters *samech mem gimmel* (an acronym for *Sefer Mitzvot HaGadol*) with the letters *samech hey nun*, which is an acronym for *sefer hanikur* (the procedure for *nikur*). In fact, when the *Tur* describes the procedure for *nikur* (*Yoreh Deah* 65), he mentions removing the sciatic nerve in both males and females.

An objection, however, has been raised to both of these approaches. When the *Behag* and the *Tur* mention males and females, it is possible that they are referring to nicknames for different nerves (along the lines of today's male and female electrical connectors), rather than to the gender of the animals themselves.

A different refutation of the butcher can be found in Rashi (*Chullin* 90a, s.v. *hane'echalin*). He mentions that the prohibition of eating the sciatic nerve applies to a sin offering (*korban chatat*); we know that only female animals may be used for sin offerings. This is not a conclusive proof, though, as it is possible that Rashi is referring to a communal sin offering (*chatat hatzibbur*). This offering is always of a male animal. Thus the question as to whether the butcher's claim could have been correct remains an open one. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

Maimonides notes that an essential element of repentance is *hakarot hachet* (acknowledgment of the wrongdoing) and a deep sense of *charatah* (regret; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Repentance 2:2, 3). The mysterious man may have been Jacob himself, or rather his inner conscience. He may have asked himself, "What is my name?" (Genesis 32:28). In declaring that his true identity was Jacob, which means deception, he acknowledged that he had blundered by tricking his brother and expressed regret for misleadingly taking the blessings.

As the narrative unfolds, Jacob is given another name: Israel. Nachum Sarna points out that the name Israel contains the root *yud-shin-resch* (y-sh-r), meaning "straight." Jacob the deceiver has transformed to Israel, one who resolved to be straight and forthright with those around him.

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

In this way, Jacob fulfilled yet another step in the *teshuvah* process: *kabbalah* (a resolution not to make the same mistake again). Never again would he deceive; he would forever change his ways by being straightforward (Israel) and open (*Peniel*).

Nehama Leibowitz clinches this idea. She notes that the angel, at this point, only announces that Jacob will eventually be given another name. The name isn't changed right there and then because full *teshuvah* has not taken place, as sins committed against another require asking forgiveness of the aggrieved party (*Yoma* 85b).

Before Jacob 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)."

And so, we've come full circle. Jacob and Esau make peace, reflective of the names given by their father Isaac to the wells he dug just before Jacob took the blessings from Esau. One of the wells is called *Esek* (Contention), another is called *Sitnah* (Hatred), and the last is *Rehovot* (Room) – perhaps forecasting that his children, Jacob and Esau, will move from contentiousness to hatred, and finally to making space and peace with one another (26:20–22).

Built into being human is making mistakes. *Teshuvah* is a divine gift from God, allowing us to right our wrongs. It is a complex psychological process. Jacob shows how it is done. ©2021 *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 LEVIN

The Struggle

Before Ya'akov came before Eisav, he went back across the stream to get some things. The Torah tells us, "Ya'akov was left alone and a man wrestled (*vayei'avek*) with him until the break of dawn. When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip; so Ya'akov's hip-socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken.' And he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said to him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'Ya'akov.' He said, 'No longer will it be said that your name is Ya'akov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with Man and have overcome.' Then Ya'akov inquired, and he said, 'Divulge, if you please, your name.' And he said, 'Why then do you inquire of my name?' And he blessed him there. So Ya'akov called the name of the place *P'nieil*, 'for I have seen the Divine face to face, yet my life was spared.' The sun rose for him as he passed *P'nuel* and he was limping on his hip. Therefore, the *B'nei Yisrael* are not to eat the displaced sinew on the hip-socket to this day, because he struck Ya'akov's hip socket on the displaced sinew."

The Torah is very concise and particular about the use of words and spellings. When different verbs could be used, there is meaning to the choice which is made. The word "*vayei'avek*", translated as wrestled, could have been replaced by the word "*vayisar*", a form of the word "*sarita*, you wrestled (struggled)". Rashi explains that the word comes from "*avak*, dust", while HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch compares the word to "*chibeik*, hug or cling (intertwined)"; the first letters of *aleph* and *chet* can be interchanged. Hirsch explains

that Ya'akov and the man became so intertwined when they wrestled that neither could gain an advantage over the other. The Kli Yakar uses the Midrash which identifies this "man" as the angel, Sam'el, to explain why he prefers "dust." Sam'el is often used to describe the Satan, whose primary task is to blind people to the Truth. This is why he is also spoken of as Eisav's guardian angel. We see that Eisav used subterfuge often when dealing with his father and with others. Sam'el's task here was to blind Ya'akov from the truth of Torah so that he would be vulnerable against Eisav. That is why his struggle was compared to dust which can blind a person temporarily. Ya'akov was firm in his beliefs so he was not blinded.

We are told that Sam'el was unable to defeat Ya'akov. The Ramban tells us that the angel Sam'el was physically stronger than Ya'akov, but Hashem prevented him from hurting Ya'akov any more than dislocating the sinew by the hip. This caused Ya'akov to limp, literally damaging his support, weakening his ability to protect himself. The Ramban explains that this weakness enabled generations of those who wished to destroy the Jews. He mentions the descendants of Rome who nearly wiped out the entire generation of Jews at the time of Rabbi Yehudah ben Baba. The Ramban lived too early to refer to the Crusades or the Holocaust, which killed a much larger percentage of the world Jewish population at the time. Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch spoke of the weakness of support to Ya'akov as a weakness through the generations of support for those who dedicate their lives to study Torah.

Sam'el begged to be set free from Ya'akov because the dawn was rising. Rashi explains that all of the angels were required to sing praise of Hashem at the break of dawn. This was the first time that Sam'el was to participate, and Sam'el had to be free in order to sing that praise. This may seem strange as we already have learned that Sam'el was also known as Satan. We must remember that in our tradition, Satan is not a fallen angel but one whose specific responsibilities include the testing of Man within the limits that Hashem places on him. The Kli Yakar disagrees with this approach and explains that Sam'el realized that he would no longer be in darkness and no longer be able to misrepresent the truth, and, therefore, saw no reason to continue the struggle. As Hirsch explains, "As long as night reigns on earth, as long as the consciousness, the minds of men are confused, and things are not recognized clearly and distinctly for what they really are ... will he have to reckon on struggle and opposition." Hirsch remarks that, "Ya'akov's opponent can only fight as long as it is night on earth, and moreover, as long as it is night on earth, he seems to be, although indeed not the victor, still to be stronger, to have the upper hand. But as soon as the day begins to dawn, the reverse takes place, and it is Ya'akov who imposes conditions

for the end of the fight."

As the angel, Sam'el, asked to be set free, Ya'akov refused to let him go until the angel blessed him. The angel then asked him for his name and changed it from Ya'akov to Yisrael, "for you have striven (sarita) with the Divine and with Man and have overcome." As Hirsch explains, "the purpose of history will not be accomplished by Ya'akov being forced to be absorbed by the masses of the nations, but by the reverse, that the nations will at last see, get the insight, that it is just in the principles which had been presented and held aloft by Ya'akov in the midst of the struggle for existence, that their happiness and security lies, too."

Our Rabbis struggle with the change in name that is given to Ya'akov since the Torah continues to call him Ya'akov upon occasions and Yisrael at other times. Hirsch appears to explain this problem with the concept that Ya'akov, from this time, is "to be regarded and understood as Yisrael." HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin informs us that the angel did not have permission to change Ya'akov's name, but Hashem repeated this change at the end of the parasha, and still Ya'akov's name continued to be used in the Torah. One explanation given is that the name, Ya'akov, is used most of the time, but the name Yisrael is used when the pasuk involves something which will affect the entire nation. This would involve a more complete study, which is not the purpose of our discussion at this time.

Hirsch explains that Ya'akov had gone through many challenges from the time that he left Canaan until he returned. "When he was leaving the land, the sun set for him at the border, the whole interim had been a period of dark conditions for him, and now at his return, the sun rose again, (the sun rose for him), he was not beaten, not broken, but limping." The Jewish People as a whole have experienced the same darkness that Ya'akov knew, being separated from our land for two thousand years. Like Ya'akov, our lives were in danger, often by the descendants of Eisav and Yishmael, our brothers. Today we have returned to our Holy Land, we have returned to the daylight and the sun. May we prove that we can be as strong as Ya'akov and protect ourselves in our struggles by our faith in Hashem. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**H**e commanded them saying, "So shall you say to my master, to Esav, "So says your servant Yaakov..." (Beraishis 32:5) Knowing that Esav wanted to kill him, Yaakov prepared to meet his older brother in several ways. One way was by sending Esav a gift. Yaakov sent him a variety of valuable livestock in the hands of waves of messengers. But to truly understand Yaakov's wisdom, we need to look a little more carefully at how he sent it.

When he told his servants what to say, Yaakov

referred to Esav as, "my master," and himself as, "your servant." The Ramban comments that Yaakov was training them not to refer to Esav with anything other than respect, even when not in front of him. This shows an insight into human nature, that we cannot hide our true feelings. Thus, if they were going to be able to treat Esav with respect, they had to do it all the time, and believe that their master felt that way too.

Indeed, the Rashbam states, "the messengers did not know of Yaakov's concerns." That is to say, when Yaakov sent them, he did not disclose his fears or let them see that he was worried about how Esav would treat him. Rather, he pretended there was a respectful relationship and he was sending gifts to his dear brother. This would further ensure the gifts would not be conveyed to Esav in a positive light, without any negative connotation regarding his personality or behavior.

There is one final piece of the puzzle which we find in the words of the Ramban. He says that the honor Yaakov bestowed upon Esav was that of a younger brother for an older one because, as Chazal teach, the mitzvah to honor one's father and mother extends to an older brother. Esav hated Yaakov for taking the birthright and brachos, but Yaakov acted as if that sale meant nothing to him and Esav was still the eldest brother. In this way, he hoped to mitigate Esav's anger.

In that lies another nuance which ties all these ideas together. Why is the eldest brother revered like the father? Because in the father's absence, the eldest takes his place in protecting and caring for the rest of the family. When Yaakov showed Esav this deference, he was essentially praising him for being a worthy successor to Yitzchak who would protect and care for his younger (though only by moments) brother.

When dealing with someone with a difficult personality, be it a colleague, child, or friend, the key is to not let on that you're concerned by them, but to continually show confidence in their kindness, selflessness, and ability to be great. It is to "pretend" their traits are positive both in front of them and behind their backs.

In this way, you stand a better chance of turning them around and having them live up to that potential than you do by criticizing or putting them down. Yaakov Avinu understood this. Surely, this insight into humanity and relationships was... well, a gift.

A talmid of R' Noach Weinberg z"l, founder of Aish HaTorah, recounted how one evening, R' Noach invited him home to help put up his sukkah and have dinner. When they got there, R' Noach's seven-year-old son was trying to climb a pipe in the corner of the living room. The boy was about six feet off the ground and not getting any higher.

Knowing what would happen in his home, the

student braced himself as R' Noach approached the boy, sure that the child would get into trouble. But he was in for a surprise. R' Noach got right next to his son, bent over a bit and said, "Stand on my shoulders and I'll help you reach the ceiling."

That's how R' Noach treated every Jew, and that's why he was a giant in Kiruv. He didn't scold; he humbled himself and helped everyone reach higher.
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RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Reb Yeruchem

"Yaakov remained alone. A man wrestled with him till daybreak." (Bereishis 32:25) Just as "Hashem alone will be exalted on that day," (Yeshaya 2:11) so too is Yaakov described as being alone/levado. That is what Chazal say,

although to us the comparison sounds like apples and oranges. Other than the spelling of the same word, there does not seem to be anything that the two instances of "alone" have anything in common. At the end of time, Hashem will be the only deity recognized and served. Furthermore, He will be exalted for this, i.e. people will understand that He does it all alone, without having to call on Nature, people, or anything else. (Bereishis Rabbah 77:1) What does that have to do with the fact that Yaakov was left alone on the wrong side of the river, and could call on no one for assistance when he was mugged -- although he very much could have used the help?

The midrash is telling us that one of the midos of HKBH is levado. The Torah describes Creation, and Hashem's relationship with it. It speaks of an assortment of heavenly beings, all His "helpers," as it were, in fulfilling His commands. While we understand that we cannot take descriptions of "help" to Hashem literally, they point to His somehow sharing a space with other things and beings. There is one midah, however, which we can call "levado." It refers to aspects of Himself that applied "before" there was a Creation. And, as the line in Adon Olam has it, after everything else is spent, "levado yimloch" -- alone He will reign. This aloneness does not apply to any of His other midos. In effect, it stands above all of them.

To some small but important extent, Yaakov shared that midah going in to the fight with Esav's angel. He rose to a level of self-containment, complete independence of relying on others. It was specifically a Yaakov who was fully alone that could struggle the entire evening with that malach and never go down.

Bill'am foresaw: "It is a nation that dwells alone, and is not reckoned among the nations." (Bamidbar 23:9) Targum Yonoson understands this as, "It is a nation that, by their being alone, will in the future inherit the world, because they do not concern themselves with the ways of the other nations." Can it be that that our greatest claim to olam habo will be avoiding the

ways of the non-Jews? Yet, upon reflection, we should question how it was that our ancestors were able to withstand the urge in so many places and times to blend in with their cultural surround. How did they resist the temptation to gain more acceptance by imitating the ways of non-Jews? There must have been -- and continues to be -- such a strong pull to share their world! The source of their strength, indeed, was this midah of levado inherited from our avos. They all became alone-ers, proud individualists who refused to attach themselves or follow others.

The Mishnah teaches, "Who is the wise one? He who learns from everyone. Who is mighty? He who conquers his own inclinations. Who is rich? He who finds happiness in his own portion. Who is honored? One who honors others." (Avos 4:1) All of these make the touchstone of success something that is internal, rather than external.

If a person could only become wise if he finds the proper teacher, what will become of the person who cannot find a teacher? But if he has the capacity to learn from everyone he encounters, then he can always access wisdom, without dependence upon others. The greatest wisdom is accessible from within, and not dependent on relations with others.

If strength depends on the ability to overpower another, what strength can a person possess when he faces someone indeed stronger than himself? If strength, however, can be measured independently of others, if it can relate entirely to himself, then he can show true strength in vanquishing his yetzer hora.

If wealth is determined by net worth relative to that of other people, no person can ever be truly secure in it. His assets are always subject to risk factors that can undo him. But if it can be measured independently of others -- if the only frame of reference is himself -- a person can be wealthy in the happiness that his own lot brings him.

Honor that comes from the accolades of others ceases if others refuse to express their adulation. But if honor can come from the capacity to bestow it upon others, there are limitless opportunities to do so, and honor will never evade him.

These examples show the power of the levado trait on the individual. Multiplied across the entire Jewish nation, the independence it produces allow us to stay the difficult course of history till the arrival of geulah at the end. (Based on *Daas Torah* by R. Yeruchem Levovitz, *Bereishis* pgs. 205-206) ©2021 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

Rachel's dying wish was to name her second son "Ben-Oni," "son of my pain," but Yakov instead calls him Binyamin (35:18). There is great significance to names given in the Torah. Why is

someone's wish for a name ignored, even more so Rachel's wish during the last days before she passed?

Among the explanations given, one is that while Rachel focused on the negative when naming her son (the pain she endured), Yakov thought it best to focus instead on more positive things, like the fact that Binyamin was born despite Yakov's old age (Rashi), or the fact that one of Binyamin's descendants, Mordechai (called "ish yemini," the root Yud-Mem-Nun also shared by Binyamin), would one day save the Jews. It could also be even more poignant: Rachel's pain would one day emerge as a positive, as the Jews would be able to pray at her grave many years later. Yaakov's resolve in changing his son's name to Binyamin is not at all about suppressing the pain but actually about using the pain as a source of strength. ©2021 Rabbi S. Ressler & *Lelamed, Inc.*

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In this week's Parashah we read of Yaakov's reunion with his brother Esav. As this week's Haftarah, we read the entire book of Ovadiah. R' Gamliel HaKohen Rabinowitz-Rappaport shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Sha'ar Ha'shamayim in Yerushalayim) identifies several reasons for this choice.

First, Ovadiah was himself a convert who descended from Esav, and his prophecy foretells the downfall of wicked Edom as a punishment for its oppression and persecution of Yaakov's descendants. [Our Sages use "Edom" to refer to the Roman Empire and its spiritual and political heirs to this day.]

Second, the Haftarah ends with the verse: "Then redeemers will ascend Har Tziyon to judge Esav's mountain, and dominion will be Hashem's." This will be the fulfillment of Yaakov's promise to Esav in our Parashah (33:14), "Let my master go ahead of his servant; I will make my way at my slow pace according to the gait of the flocks before me and the gait of the children, until I come to my master at Seir [Esav's land]."

Third, we read in the Haftarah, "The House of Yaakov will be a fire and the House of Yosef a flame-- and the House of Esav like straw; they will kindle among them and consume them." Since we read in the Parashah that Yaakov humbled himself to Esav, we read in the Haftarah that that relationship is not a permanent one.

Finally, Ovadiah was a courtier to Achav and Izevel, the wicked king and queen of Yisrael. Our Sages say: "Let Ovadiah, who lived among evil people and did not learn from their ways, prophecy about Esav, who lived among righteous people and did not learn from their ways." (Tiv Ha'haftarah)

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