

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

There are many interpretations. One, however, is particularly fascinating both in terms of style and substance. It comes from Rashi’s grandson, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam, France, c.1085-1158). Rashbam had a strikingly original approach to biblical commentary.² He felt that the sages, intent as they were on reading the text for its halakhic ramifications, often failed to penetrate to what he called *omek peshuto shel mikra*, the plain sense of the text in its full depth.

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

greatest and most famous commentator in the entire history of rabbinic scholarship.

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

Rashbam sees this as the clue to

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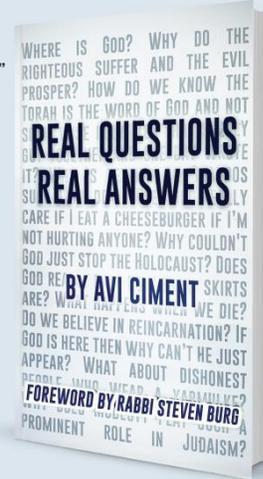
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¹ Bereishit Rabbah 77:3.

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

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

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

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

The same, says Rashbam, applies to Moses who, at the burning bush, repeatedly expressed his reluctance to undertake the task God had set him. Evidently, Moses was still prevaricating even after beginning the journey, which is why God was angry with him.

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

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

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

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

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

having fear but overcoming it. If that is true of physical courage it is no less true of moral and spiritual courage.

Marianne Williamson's remarks on the subject have become justly famous. She wrote: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."⁵

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

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

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

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

For we are all children of the man who was given the name of one who wrestles with God and with men and prevails. Ours is not an easy task, but what worthwhile mission ever was? We are as great as the challenges we have the courage to undertake. And if, at

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

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

times, we feel like running away, we should not feel bad about it. So did the greatest.

To feel fear is fine. To give way to it, is not. For God has faith in us even if, at times, even the best lack faith in themselves. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* © 2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept." (Genesis 33:4) Years ago, a college classmate provocatively announced that he planned to name his first son "after the most maligned figure in the entire Torah: Esau."

Let's consider Esau's defense. After we are introduced to Esau as Isaac's favorite son since 'the hunt was in his [Isaac's] mouth' (Genesis 30:28), we are immediately taken to the fateful scene where Jacob is cooking lentil soup when Esau came home exhausted from the hunt. The hungry hunter asks for some food, but Jacob will only agree to give his brother food in exchange for the birthright. Who is taking advantage of whom? Is not a cunning Jacob taking advantage of an innocent Esau?

Then there is the more troubling question of the stolen blessing. Even without going into the details of how Jacob pretends to be someone he's not, Esau emerges as an honest figure deserving of our sympathy. After all, Esau's desire to personally carry out his father's will meant that he needed a long time to prepare the meat himself. Indeed, it was Esau's diligence in tending to his father that allowed enough time to pass to make it possible for his younger brother to get to Isaac's tent first. Surely, Rebecca must have realized the profound nature of Esau's commitment to his father, for she masterminded Jacob's plan.

On his return from the field, Esau realizes that Jacob has already received the blessing originally meant for him. His response cannot fail to touch the reader; poignantly, Esau begs of his father, 'Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept" (Genesis 27:38).

But it is the beginning of Vayishlach that clinches our pro-Esau case. Jacob finally returns to his ancestral home after an absence of twenty years. Understandably, Jacob is terrified of his brother's potential reaction, and so in preparation, Jacob sends messengers ahead with exact instructions as to how to address Esau. Informed of the impending approach of Esau's army of four hundred men, he divides his household into two camps, so that he's prepared for the worst. But what actually happens defies Jacob's expectations: Esau is overjoyed and thrilled to see him.

The past is the past. 'And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept' (Genesis 33:4).

The defense rests. Thus described, Esau hardly seems worthy of the official censure of Jewish history as the personification of the anti-Jew. In fact, my college friend had good reason to name his son after Esau.

So, why are our Sages so critical of him? I would suggest our analysis so far overlooks something central in Esau's character. Yes, there are positive characteristics of Esau to be found in many Jews across the Diaspora. Many are aggressive, self-made people who weep when they meet a long-lost Jewish brother from Ethiopia or Russia. They have respect for their parents and grandparents, tending to their physical needs and even reciting – or hiring someone to recite – the traditional mourner's Kaddish for a full year after their death. Financial support and solidarity missions to the State of Israel, combined with their vocal commitment to Jewry and Israel, reflect a highly developed sense of Abrahamic (Jewish) identity, just like Esau seems to have. Esau feels Abrahamic identity with every fiber of his being.

But when it comes to commitment to Abrahamic (Jewish) continuity, a willingness to secure a Jewish future, many of our Jewish siblings are found to be wanting – just like Esau. Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors in keeping us 'a people apart' and preventing total Jewish assimilation into the majority culture, has been our unique laws of kashrut. Refusing to break bread with our non-Jewish work colleagues and neighbors has imposed a certain social distance that has been crucial for maintaining our identity. But Esau is willing to give up his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. Hasn't the road to modern Jewry's assimilation been paved with the T-bone steaks and the lobsters that tease the tongues lacking the self-discipline to say no to a tasty dish? Like Esau, the overwhelming majority of Diaspora Jewry has sold its birthright for a cheeseburger.

Esau's name means fully-made, complete. He exists in the present tense. He has no commitment to past or future. He wants the freedom of the hunt and the ability to follow the scent wherever it takes him. He is emotional about his identity, but he is not willing to make sacrifices for its continuity. Primarily, it is on the surface, as an external cloak that is only skin-deep. That's why it doesn't take more than a skin-covering for Jacob to enter his father's tent and take on the character of Esau. Indeed, Esau is even called Edom, red, after the external color of the lentil soup. Esau has no depth; he is Mr. Superficial!

And what's true for a bowl of soup is true for his choice of wives. Esau marries Hittite women. And that causes his parents to feel a 'bitterness of spirit' (Genesis 27:35). No wonder! The decision of many

modern Jews to 'marry out' has reached an American average of 62%! The 'bitterness of spirit' continues to be felt in many families throughout the Diaspora. Even those who marry out and continue to profess a strong Jewish identity cannot commit to Jewish continuity. Perhaps Esau even mouthed the argument I've heard from those I've tried to dissuade from marrying out. 'But she has a Jewish name! She even looks Jewish!' He may have said, 'Her name is Yehudit [literally meaning a Jewess; from Judah]; she has a wonderful fragrance [Basmat means perfume]' (Genesis 26:34). But once again, Esau only looks at externals! ©2022 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The prophet of Israel, describing what can unfortunately be characterized as the usual situation in Jewish life, states that it is comparable to one who flees from the lion and finds one's self in the embrace of a bear. Our father Jacob, who barely escapes from the treachery of Lavan, soon finds himself confronted by the deadly mob of his brother Eisav.

Jacob, in his confrontation with Lavan, chooses the option of flight as he removes himself from the territory controlled by Lavan and his sons. But this option of flight is no longer possible in his contest with Eisav. Jacob is in his own land, the land of his ancestors, the land promised to him personally by God Himself, to be his rightful residence. As such, Jacob has nowhere to run.

As taught to us by Midrash and quoted by Rashi, his only options were to stand and fight, to buy Eisav off with monetary tribute, and/or to pray. The option of fleeing does not enter the equation in any fashion. This is perhaps the basis for the well-known Talmudic dictum severely limiting the right of a Jew to leave the Land of Israel cavalierly.

Jewish history, from biblical times to the present, shows us that exile from the Land of Israel on a collective basis never occurred voluntarily. The most mobile, wandering people in the history of civilization never left their homeland of their own volition. In this they were following the example of their father Jacob, who never considered fleeing from the Land of Israel in order to avoid the long expected and dreaded confrontation with his aggressive and volatile brother.

In our long and winding road of exile, over the past two millennia, when one country closed down for us because of economic, social or religious reasons, the Jewish people moved on elsewhere. But as we have discovered, we have run out of places to go in the world. There are no new undiscovered continents on the face of the globe, no seemingly safe havens left for escape.

This is part of the reason for the establishment of the State of Israel and its phenomenal growth and inexplicable stability. Even though it has been provoked by errors of policy and with concessions to its neighbors, it is as though the Jewish people, like their ancestor Jacob, declared that this is where they will make their stand.

Prayer is a constant in current Israeli life, even for those who do not deem themselves to be observant of Jewish law and tradition. But in spite of all of the troubles, problems, and the myriad challenges that living in our country poses, flight in a collective sense is a nonexistent possibility.

Unable to defeat us militarily or economically, even though diplomatically they have wounded us severely, our enemies openly declare their intent to make us leave our homeland. But that is a very unrealistic policy. The children of Jacob, in the state that bears his name, certainly will follow his example until it finally brings quieter times and better relations.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

One of the most powerful images in the Torah is that of Jacob struggling with a mysterious being (an ish – literally, a man) before his anxiously awaited meeting with his brother 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). Wrestlers cause dust to physically rise 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, Nachmanides points out that when enemies cannot prevail, they attack our children, which is exactly what the ish striking Jacob's loins symbolizes (32:26). Nachmanides has tragically been proven correct today, as terrorists often target children.

Rashi also offers a second suggestion. The word avak interchanges with havak (embrace). According to this interpretation, the Torah not only records a physical confrontation, but also a meeting in which Jacob and the ish embrace.

Ketav Sofer, the nineteenth-century rabbi Avraham Sofer, explains that this idea has resonated powerfully throughout history. There are times when the ish, representative of the outside world, has tried 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 Jacob and the ish concludes with the Torah's description of Jacob limping as the sun rose (32:32). Precisely when the sun is glowing and the darkness of oppression diminishes, Jacob the Jew limps, signifying his spiritual jeopardy.

The ish's embrace of Jacob warns us that while combating anti-Semitism is an important objective, the effort must be part of a larger goal – the stirring and reawakening of Jewish spiritual consciousness. ©2022 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"He said, 'If Esav comes and attacks one camp, then the remaining camp can escape.'" (Beraishis 32:9) From this verse, Chazal learned that Yaakov was ready to fight Esav if that's what it took. Rashi explains, "the camp will survive against his will (presumably Esav's) because I will fight with him." This is his basic explanation, though other commentaries say this is not the simple explanation but an extrapolation. They say that the other camp could have run away, or defended itself, or been left alone, not that they necessarily would have to fight. Normally, Rashi would use a simple explanation, so it is curious that he only uses this one.

The Ohr HaChaim explains further. If Esav attacks one camp, then we would know he has evil intentions. Then, the second camp, which was armed, would mobilize and come to its aid. They would undoubtedly be able to drive Esav off, as they were fresh and strong, and perhaps they would also be able to save the first camp as well. With this insight, we can perhaps explain what Yaakov's thought was.

In *Koheles*, (4:9-10) Shlomo HaMelech says, "Two are better than one... for if one falls, his friend shall help him up..." When an individual is in trouble, he cannot save himself. He needs someone to help him. However, the second person doesn't just do what the first couldn't. Rather, he strengthens and encourages the first so that he can do what must be done. This was what Yaakov intended by splitting his camp into two.

If he had 100 warriors, how would splitting them into two groups of 50 help? It might not help physically, but emotionally, knowing their group was not alone and had another group to come to its aid, the first group would be emboldened and encouraged. Two are better than one, because one, even one group, may feel the situation is hopeless, but when there's another force to come to his aid, he does not succumb to the despair. His spirit is buoyed and he can face challenges more difficult than he could alone.

Perhaps, then, the meaning of "al korcho, against his will," does not refer to Esav at all, but to the

first camp. Yaakov said, "If Esav attacks the first camp, it will escape even against its own will, for I will fight with it, and support that group in its battle." This is quite a different lesson than merely that the second group would escape. It teaches that having someone to tackle things with helps you succeed. It teaches that being there to support someone else can save his life! This is such a beautiful drasha that Rashi could not abandon it.

A yeshivah bochur in Bnei Brak was once found with inappropriate reading material. His Roshei Yeshivah wanted to expel him, but before taking this drastic step, they decided to consult with Rav Shach, the Gadol Hador and Rosh Yeshivah of Ponevezh.

Rav Shach requested to meet the bachur before he offered his opinion. He did so, and realized that the boy was having doubts in emunah. Rav Shach spoke with him at length, and tried to strengthen his faith in Hashem. This meeting took place at the end of the winter zman. Rav Shach asked the bachur, who lived in Tel Aviv, to meet with him again over the Pesach break.

After Pesach, the boy's Rebbi asked Rav Shach if the boy had indeed made the effort to travel to Bnei Brak to see him. Rav Shach replied that the boy did not have to come to him, because he himself traveled to Tel Aviv twice to see him over the Pesach break.

At the beginning of the new session, the bochur returned to yeshivah ready to learn, and reported to his rebbe that his faith was now strong and steadfast.

He said, "If Klal Yisrael includes a person who is so caring that he traveled twice to Tel Aviv to see me, I have no more questions in emunah." ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

"As surely as I have established My covenant with day and night -- the laws of heaven and earth -- so will I never reject the offspring of Yaakov..." (Yirmiyahu 33:25-26) There are laws of nature, and of human nature. And one of the latter is, according to Rabi Shimon bar Yochai, in a beraisa brought by Rashi (Beraishis 33:4), the "halacha" that "Esav hates Yaakov."

When the sar shel Esav wrestles with Yaakov, our forefather asks him "Tell me your name" and Seforno comments that the question's intent was, "What sin of mine allowed you to attack me?"

No answer to the question is recorded or, presumably, offered.

Something poignant inheres in that. When hatred of Jews is manifest, we often try to understand what begat it, what "reason" there is for it. But, even though the haters might claim there are reasons, when looked at closely, their "reasons" are illogical. There's simply no "there" there.

Because the hatred isn't "caused" by anything. It just is, as an expression of animus inherent in Esav's and his spiritual descendants' essence.

It is, in other words, a law of human nature. And rather than criticize ourselves for doing this or that wrong, or not doing this or that right, we do best to just smile at the demonstration of that "law," and, even as we fight, as we must, to counter the unwarranted anger and slanders, try to accept that, at least among some people, it will absurdly persist until Mashiach arrives.

And at the same time, we must recognize, too, that, despite Esav's evil intentions, another "law," another reality, is that Hashem "will never reject the offspring of Yaakov," will never allow Esav and his spiritual progeny to win. ©2022 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The G-d of Israel

When Ya'akov left his encounter with Eisav upon returning to his homeland, Ya'akov slowly made his way into Canaan, stopping first in Succot, which was across the Jordan River, and then in Shechem, inside Canaan. The Torah tells us, "And Ya'akov journeyed to Succot and built himself a house, and for his livestock he made shelters; he therefore called the name of the place Succot (Shelters). Ya'akov arrived intact at the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan, upon arriving from Padan-Aram, and he camped before the city. He bought the parcel of land, upon which he pitched his tent, from the children of Chamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred kesitahs. He set up an altar there and proclaimed, 'Keil, Keilokei Yisrael, G-d, the G-d of Israel.'"

Several questions arise from this short passage in our parasha. Ya'akov had been with Lavan for twenty years, and one would think that he would be anxious now to see his parents. This should have been even more pressing now that he had survived what could have been a deadly reunion with his brother, Eisav. Yet, it appears that Ya'akov built a house and shelter for his animals, and he remained in the area of Shechem for eighteen months. Rashi explains that the word nasa, journeyed, is more commonly used to say from where a person journeyed and not to where he was going, so the three things which Ya'akov built could be an interpretation of time rather than significant in themselves. Ya'akov traveled from Lavan at a time when Succot (huts) were used (summer); he then built a house (winter) for himself; and later he built succot (shelter) for his animals (summer). The Or HaChaim explains that Ya'akov named this new dwelling place after the shelters that he built for his animals, because he was the first person to build a covered shelter for animals.

The second question from our passage deals with the singular word, "shaleim, intact, complete, at

peace.” The Ramban explains that this is like a person saying, “that man there has come from between the teeth of the lions (Lavan and Eisav) and has arrived unhurt.” Rashi explains that Ya’akov was intact: (1) bodily, as the limp that he suffered when he fought with the angel was now cured, (2) financially, as he did not lose anything by giving Eisav so many animals and servants, and (3) spiritually, for he had not forgotten any of the Torah that he learned from his father while he was in Lavan’s house. The Mazkil L’David explains that Ya’akov’s gifts to Eisav were an illusion, as the rewards that Hashem gave to him were not shared with his brother. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that, “Shaleim is the expression of the most complete harmony, especially the complete agreement of external matters with internal ones. All true peace, worthy of the name ‘shalom’ even of civil life is not one made according to stereotyped external patterns, but must come out from inside, from the nature and ideal of the harmonious order of the matters of life.” Ya’akov was intact, he had not been altered by needing to provide a livelihood for his family.

There is another aspect of Ya’akov’s life that previously had threatened his complete harmony. In an earlier section of this week’s parasha, Ya’akov had reunited with his brother, Eisav. According to HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, Ya’akov was still frightened that his brother would attack him, even after they separated peacefully. The Torah also tells us that Ya’akov had avoided going with his brother to Har Seir, but had implied that he would join him later. Ya’akov continued to make excuses for not joining Eisav in Seir, and in order to appease Eisav, sent him a tenth of all his produce and new animals each year. This continued for several years until Ya’akov arrived “shaleim” in Shechem. At that time, he no longer sent Eisav a portion of his wealth, and he no longer made excuses for not joining his brother.

Ya’akov wished at this point in his life to thank Hashem for fulfilling His promise made twenty years earlier as Ya’akov was fleeing his brother. The Torah tells us that Ya’akov “set up, erected” an altar and proclaimed, “Keil, the Keil of Yisrael.” Our Rabbis are struck by the term used to “erect” this altar, “vayatzev.” HaRav Hirsch explains that the usual term used for constructing an altar is either “banah, he built” or “asah, he made,” never “hitziv, he set up or erected.” HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the use of the word, “hitziv” is appropriate because this altar was established on the same spot where his ancestor, Avraham, had built an altar. It would also become the place where a future altar would be built when the B’nei Yisrael returned from slavery in Egypt. This altar would not only be a means of serving Hashem, but would also be a boundary marker, establishing this property as belonging to the B’nei Yisrael. The word “hitziv” is found in other places in the Torah for the establishment

of a border.

There is much confusion which stems from the proclamation at the altar of “Keil, the Keil of Yisrael.” In most of the other places found in the Torah, when an altar was built, the Torah says, “Vayikra b’sheim Hashem, and he called in the name of Hashem.” Here the Torah says, “Vayikra lo Keil, Keilokei Yisrael, and he called for himself G-d, the G-d of Yisrael.” The Ramban cautions us that this was not the name of the altar, but a remembrance of all that Hashem (Keil) had done to see him safely to this spot. The Ramban was concerned that one might think that Ya’akov was declaring that the altar was an anthropomorphic representation of Hashem. Ibn Ezra, however, says that the proclamation was a name given to the altar much like when Moshe named an altar, “Hashem nisi, Hashem is my miracle,” named for the miracle which Hashem had performed for Moshe. HaRav Sorotzkin approaches this declaration from a different perspective. He reminds us that “Yisrael” can mean both Ya’akov and the B’nei Yisrael, the nation. He explains that none of the forefathers was associated in his lifetime with a particular name of Hashem. HaRav Sorotzkin, therefore, says that Ya’akov used this name Yisrael to mean the nation of Yisrael, not himself. He continues that Ya’akov specifically used this name, Yisrael, for the nation which would descend from him. In this way, the nation of his descendants would pray to Eilokei Yisrael, the Keil of Yisrael.

This conscious choice by Ya’akov renamed the nation from B’nei Ya’akov to the B’nei Yisrael. Ya’akov understood that he was named because he held onto the heel, akeiv, of Eisav when he was born. He received a second name earlier in our parasha when he fought with the angel and survived. HaRav Hirsch explains that Yisrael comes from “sara, rule” and “shor, ox.” “It means, ‘In the womb he held on to the heels of his brother, and in his full vigor he became the superior with Hashem.’ Ya’akov blessed his children that they should also become superior because of their close relationship with Hashem. May we all be worthy of that blessing. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be’eros

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

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

R. Yehuda maintains that the malach (appearing either in the guise of an idolater or a Torah scholar) stood to Yaakov’s right, and struck him only on

that side. The sinew that is forbidden to us in commemoration of that struggles is therefore only the one on the right side of the animal.

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

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

According to Chazal, the malach was none other than the yetzer hora, also known as the Angel of Death, aka as the Guardian Angel of Esav. The all night battle led to no one claiming victory. As the incident ripples across time, this would mean that Yaakov would not be defeated by his major enemy. Jewish faith would continue unblemished

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

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

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

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

The Chachamim demur. Looks are deceiving, they argue. It may seem that these Jews remain strong and steadfast in their observance of at least a good part of the Torah. But it cannot be as good as it looks. Mitzvos are intertwined. When people let go of significant parts of the Torah, their emunah and yiras Hashem must suffer in the process. Without that emunah, none of their other observance has a firm foundation. Their performance of the interpersonal mitzvos is laudable while it lasts -- but the long-term outlook is bleak. Without emunah and yiras Shomayim, the vestiges of their observance are without foundation. Changed circumstances and conditions will easily cause them to drop those observances. Their behavior in interpersonal areas may look strong from the outside, but it must be weak from within.

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

