

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

By any standards it was a shocking episode. Jacob had settled on the outskirts of the town of Shechem, ruled by Hamor. Dina, Jacob's daughter, goes out to see the town. Shechem, Hamor's son, sees her, abducts and rapes her, and then falls in love with her and wants to marry her. He begs his father, "Take this girl as a wife for me" (Gen. 34:4).

Jacob hears about this and keeps quiet, but his sons are furious. She must be rescued, and the people must be punished. Hamor and his son come to visit the family and ask them to give consent to the marriage. Jacob's sons pretend to take the offer seriously. We will settle among you, they say, and intermarry, on condition that all your males are circumcised. Hamor and Shechem bring back the proposal to the people of the town, who agree.

On the third day after the circumcision, when the pain is at its height and the men incapacitated, Simon and Levi, Dina's brothers, enter the town and kill every single male (Gen. 34:26).

It was a terrible retribution. Jacob rebukes his sons: "You have brought trouble on me – you have made me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and Perizzites. I am few in number, and if they join forces and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." (Gen. 34:30)

But Simon and Levi reply: "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?" (Gen. 34:31)

There is a hint in the text that Simon and Levi were justified in what they did. Unusually the Torah adds, three times, an authorial comment on the moral gravity of the situation: "Jacob's sons, having heard what had happened, came back from the field. They were shocked and furious, for Shechem had committed an outrage in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter. Such a thing cannot be done!" (Gen. 34:7)

"The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister." (Gen. 34:27)

Yet Jacob condemns their action, and although he says no more at the time, it remains burning in his mind. Many years and fifteen chapters later, on his death-bed, he curses the two brothers for their behaviour: "Simon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence their wares. Let me never join their council, nor

my honour be of their assembly. For in their anger they killed men; at their whim they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is most fierce, and their fury, for it is most cruel. I will divide them up in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." (Gen. 49:5-7)

Who was right in this argument? Maimonides vindicates the brothers. In his law code, the Mishneh Torah, he explains that the establishment of justice and the rule of law is one of the seven Laws of Noah, binding on all humanity: And how are the Gentiles commanded to establish law courts? They are required to establish judges and officers in every area of habitation to rule in accordance with the enforcement of the other six commands, to warn the citizenry concerning these laws and to punish any transgressor with death by the sword. And it is on this basis that all the people of Shechem were guilty of death (at the hands of Simon and Levi, sons of Jacob): "because Shechem (their Prince) stole (and raped) Dina, which they saw and knew about, but did not bring him to justice." (Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 9, 14)

According to Maimonides, there is a principle of collective responsibility. The inhabitants of Shechem, knowing that their prince had committed a crime and failing to bring him to court, were collectively guilty of injustice.

Nachmanides disagrees. The Noahide command to institute justice is a positive obligation to establish laws, courts and judges, but there is no principle of collective responsibility, nor is there liability to death for failure to implement the command. Nor could there be, for if Simon and Levi were justified, as Maimonides argues, why did Jacob criticise them at the time and later curse them on his death bed?

The argument between them is unresolved, just as it was between Jacob and his sons. We know that there is a principle of collective responsibility in Jewish law: Kol Yisrael arevin zeh bazeh, "All Jews are sureties for one another." But is this specific to Judaism? Is it because of the peculiar nature of Jewish law, namely that it flows from a covenant between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai, at which the people pledged themselves individually and collectively to keep the law and to ensure that it was kept?

Maimonides, unlike Nachmanides, seems to be saying that collective responsibility is a feature of all societies. We are responsible not only for our own conduct but for those around us, amongst whom we live.

Or perhaps this flows not from the concept of society but simply from the nature of moral obligation. If X is wrong, then not only must I not do it. I must, if I can, stop others from doing it, and if I fail to do so, then I share in the guilt. We would call this nowadays the guilt of the bystander. Here is how the Talmud puts it: “Rav and R. Chanina, R. Yochanan and R. Habiba taught [the following]: Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, is seized for [the sins of] his household; [if he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is seized for [the sins of] his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is seized for [the sins of] the whole world.” (Shabbat 54b)

Clearly, however, the issue is a complex one that needs nuance. There is a difference between a perpetrator and a bystander. It is one thing to commit a crime, another to witness someone committing a crime and failing to prevent it. We might hold a bystander guilty, but not in the same degree. The Talmud uses the phrase “is seized.” This may mean that he is morally guilty. He can be called to account. He may be punished by “the heavenly court” in this world or the next. It does not mean that he can be summoned to court and sentenced for criminal negligence.

The issue famously arose in connection with the German people and the Holocaust. The philosopher Karl Jaspers made a distinction between the moral guilt of the perpetrators and what he called the metaphysical guilt of the bystanders: There exists a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially if a crime is committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can to prevent them, I too am guilty. If I was present at the murder of others without risking my life to prevent it, I feel guilty in a way not adequately conceivable either legally, politically, or morally. That I live after such a thing has happened weighs upon me as indelible guilt.¹

So there is real guilt, but, says Jaspers, it cannot be reduced to legal categories. Simon and Levi may have been right in thinking that the men of Shechem were guilty of doing nothing when their prince abducted and assaulted Dina, but that does not mean that they were entitled to execute summary justice by killing all the males. Jacob was right in seeing this as a brutal assault. In this case, Nachmanides’ position seems more compelling than that of Maimonides.

One of Israel’s most profound moralists, the late Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903-1994), wrote that though there may have been an ethical justification for what Simon and Levi did, “there is also an ethical postulate which is not itself a matter of rationalisation and which calls forth a curse upon all these justified and valid considerations.”² There may, he says, be actions which can be vindicated but are nevertheless accursed. That is what Jacob meant when he cursed his sons.

¹ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, Trans. E. B. Ashton. New York: Fordham University Press 2000, p. 26.

Collective responsibility is one thing. Collective punishment is another. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt”l © 2023 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Toras Lights

“**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 after 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] Is it religiously valid to attempt to find one’s own God – or is it sufficient to accept the God idea handed down by parents and/or tradition? Certainly, if the individual can develop his own unique contact with God, his divine service will be genuine and spontaneous, rather than mechanical and formal. But a search, after all, is fraught with pain and anguish. And what if the Almighty still remains elusive, even after a lengthy quest?

We begin the Amida prayer with the words: ‘Praised art thou, our God and God of our fathers.’ Rabbi Yisrael Ba’al Shem Tov explains that it is preferable and worthy to attempt to discover one’s own God and to establish a personal relationship with Him. Until that occurs, however, one must still serve the God of one’s fathers.

In studying the biblical portions of Toldot, Vayetze and Vayishlach, we can trace an undeniable pattern which reveals that the underlying theme in Jacob’s life is his search for God – his God, and not only the God of his father.

One might suggest reasons as to why, at least in Jacob’s case, the mere acceptance of his father’s God would be difficult, if not impossible. If Jacob truly felt unloved, even rejected, by Isaac, it would be problematic for him to connect with his father’s God. And when his mother’s ploy deceives his father, this would only serve to intensify the anguish of separation from the patriarch that Jacob must feel. Jacob wasn’t sure who he really was, or more importantly, who he wished to become. After all, if his father loved Esau, perhaps he should become more fork-tongued and aggressive, more Esau-like. Perhaps then he would gain his father’s love and God’s love!

Jacob’s jealousy and guilt vis-a-vis Esau certainly got in the way of his ability to establish a meaningful relationship with the God of his father Isaac. It is certainly the wrath of his brother Esau that forces the underlying purpose of Jacob’s journey to become a

² Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *After Kibiyeh: Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State 1953-4*, <https://bit.ly/3N7UpWV>.

personal search for God and – if only subconsciously – the God of his mother in her birth- place. After all, if his father had rejected him, at least his mother accepted him. Moreover, his mother's family was much more Esau-like – cunning and smooth-tongued – than his father's.

The first episode recorded when he leaves home is the dream of the ascending and descending angels in which God suddenly appears to Jacob. The words God chooses are significant: 'I am the Lord, God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac...' [Gen. 28:13]. But not yet the God of Jacob.

How does Jacob respond when he awakes? 'Surely God is in this place, and I did not know' [Gen. 29:16]. The general understanding of this verse is that Jacob, not realizing that God is in this place, is taken by surprise. But the simple meaning of 'lo yodati' is that Jacob does not yet know Him, his God. He knows what he must do to serve Him and he knows what to say in order to pray to Him, but he has not yet experienced his own personal God. We see this point underscored when Jacob makes his vow, which is usually understood to mean that if God will feed and clothe him, then Jacob will accept the Lord as his God [Gen. 28:20, 21]. Obviously it is difficult to accept such a materialistic 'deal' with the divine. Perhaps we must view the phrase in question as belonging to the 'if' clause of the oath; 'if God will...guard me, give me bread to eat...and I return in peace to my father's house and if the Lord will become my (li) personal God, then this stone will...become a House of God....' Jacob is asking for a personal God, that the Lord become his God. Jacob is asking, in addition to his physical needs, that God provide him with his most sought after spiritual need, that he experience a personal God. Then Jacob will know that his search shall have borne fruit, and he will be able to truly build a house for God and give tithes.

But in order for Jacob to find his personal God, he must first come to grips with his own personality, with his own inner and truest self and identity. He must discover who he is before he is to find his God.

For the next twenty years Jacob lives with Laban's household. In the process of raising a family and establishing a financial foothold, he loses sight of his earlier spiritual vision. He is more Esau than Esau, more Laban than Laban. Not only does he not find his own God, he runs the risk of even losing the God of his father. Although he is very successful and aggressive, he has lost, and deeply misses, his earlier dream of uniting heaven and earth. He knows he must return to his father's land and home, to his true self. When we next find him making an oath, it is with Laban upon his departure. But he still cannot speak of his own God, the God of Jacob; he can only take an oath by 'the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac' [Gen. 31:53]. Now he knows who he once was and must once again become – but he isn't there yet.

Ultimately, Jacob understands that he cannot successfully find God without first being himself – and that requires frontal confrontation with Esau. Will Esau stand in the way of God's promise to Jacob and his seed? Can Jacob atone for the guilt he feels vis-a-vis Esau, and exorcise the jealousy he feels towards this favored brother? Addressing God, Jacob says, 'O God of my father Abraham, and the God of Isaac...' [Gen. 32:10], but still no mention of the God of Jacob.

And because of what follows, it becomes clear that the wedge between Jacob and himself, between Jacob and his God, was 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 scheduled to meet his brother in the flesh, the Torah records how Jacob remained alone and wrestled with an unidentified stranger over whom he prevailed. Identified by our Sages as the spirit of Esau, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch 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 Esau he desired to become in order to try and gain his father's favor and achieve momentary materialistic enjoyment – and succeeded in removing Esau and Esauism from within himself. 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 – and he is ready to accept himself as he was even vis-a-vis his father. He is therefore ready to return home not as Jacob-Esau but as Jacob-Israel.

And 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. Apparently it was Esau, or the spiritual struggle he symbolized, that had previously stood in his way. After his mastery over the spirit 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' [Gen. 32:31]. Jacob exorcised Esau – and in the process found both himself and his God. His struggle and search ended in victory.

If what we've been describing is correct, we should now be presented with Jacob's personal God. The text describes that Jacob '...came in peace [shalem] to the city of Shekhem...' [Gen. 33:18]. The verse can also read 'whole' – and indeed he is now his whole, complete and independent self. And so he erects an altar to his own God, indeed calling it 'Kel Elokai Yisrael' [Gen. 33:20] God, the God of Israel. Finally God is not just the God of his grandfather and of his father, but He is also the God of Israel, the God of the pristine and purified Jacob, his own personal God, whom he has discovered

after many travels and through much pain. The circle is complete, the search for his own God is over. Thus empowered, Jacob is ready to face the third stage of his life, the transformation of twelve sons into twelve tribes of Israel. And now we can pray in the Amida to the personal God of each of our patriarchs, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. ©2023 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Many commentators over the ages have seen in the two confrontations between Yaakov and Eisav – first the struggle with Eisav's angel and then the meeting with Eisav in the flesh – the two-front war that Judaism and the Jewish people have been forced to fight over millennia in order to simply survive.

The struggle with Eisav's angel, as described in the parsha, represents a spiritual and intellectual fight, a contest of ideas, beliefs and debate. The meeting with the physical Eisav in turn represents the struggle of the Jewish people to simply stay alive in a bigoted, cruel, and nearly fatal environment.

Yaakov does not escape unscathed from either confrontation. He is crippled physically and somewhat impoverished financially. Eisav's "evil eye" gazes upon his children and Yaakov is relieved to escape alive, even if damaged in body and purse, separating himself from Eisav physically and from his civilization and worldview.

The scenario is pretty much set for the long dance of Jewish history, with the Jews always attempting to survive in a constantly challenging and brutal society governed by Eisav. The rabbis of Midrash discussed the possibilities of coexistence and even cooperation with Eisav.

Though this debate did not result in any permanent or convincing conclusion, the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai that Eisav's hatred of Yaakov is completely irrational and implacable seems to be borne out by history, past and present. The anti-Semitism in today's seemingly enlightened world is so pervasive as to be frightening. And we seem to be powerless to do anything about it.

As is painfully obvious to all, these struggles for continued Jewish existence are ongoing and seemingly unending. All of the foreign ideas and current fads of Western society stand almost unanimously opposed to Torah values and traditional lifestyle. The angel of Eisav changes his program from time to time, but he is always opposed to Torah and moral behavior.

He wavers from totalitarian extreme conservatism to wild liberalism but always is able to wound the Jewish psyche and body no matter what

philosophy or culture he now advocates. We limp today from this attack on Jewish values and Torah study and practice.

Jewish parents in America sue school boards for anti-Semitic attitudes, policies and behavior. Yet they would not dream of sending their children to a Jewish school or giving them an intensive Jewish education. The lawsuit is the indicator of the limp inflicted upon us by Eisav's cultural angel.

All agree that Europe is currently a lost continent as far as Jews are concerned. The question most asked of travel agents by Jews today is "Can I wear a kippah on the street there?" Billions of dollars of Jewish treasure pillaged during World War II and immediately thereafter still lie in the hands of Eisav.

And yet we certainly would be satisfied if the world just let us alone but that seems to be a forlorn hope. So our struggle continues but the Lord's promise to us that we will somehow prevail remains valid and true. And that is our hope for continuing on as loyal and steadfast Jews. ©2023 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

Is public protest an effective means of bringing about change? While many insist on its value, some have argued that demonstrations on behalf of Jewish causes precipitate anti-Semitic backlash. The encounter between Jacob and Esau offers an insight into this debate.

After twenty-two years of separation, Jacob, preparing to meet his brother Esau, is told that Esau is ready for battle (Genesis 32:7). When they meet however, the opposite occurs: Esau embraces Jacob (33:4). What prompts this change of heart?

B.S. Jacobson, in his Meditations on the Torah, points to a pivotal incident that occurred between the time of Jacob's receiving the report of Esau's war preparations and the actual encounter: Jacob struggles with a mysterious being in the middle of the night. Jacob wins the struggle but in the process is wounded. He leaves the encounter limping (32:25–33).

The German Jewish commentator Benno Jacob feels that Jacob's limping precipitates Esau's change of heart. According to his comments, when Esau saw Jacob struggling to walk, he felt compassion for him. In Esau's mind, Jacob had been defeated. From Benno Jacob's perspective, the heart of the adversary is won by bending and endearing ourselves, walking wounded and showing our vulnerability.

This approach makes sense for Benno Jacob, who lived in Germany in the early twentieth century when Jews sought good relations with the German

government, sometimes presenting themselves as needy, ingratiating themselves to government officials for help.

Rashbam sees Esau's reaction differently. He is bewildered by Jacob's being alone just before the struggle with the mysterious being (32:25). If Jacob was intent on protecting his family, why did he abandon them at that crucial time?

Rashbam suggests that, up to this point, when faced with a challenge, Jacob always ran. He ran after he took the blessings from Esau. He hardly protested when he found Leah and not Rachel the morning after his wedding. He tolerated his father-in-law Laban's dishonesty in their business dealings. And he fled from Laban's house in the dead of night.

Just hours before confronting Esau, it seemed that Jacob finally had no choice but to stand strong as he prepared his family and larger camp to face Esau. At the last moment, however, Rashbam insists, Jacob separated from his family, as he once again was running away. As much as Jacob had carefully prepared for the inevitable confrontation with Esau, his nature took over – he saw fleeing as the only solution.

For Rashbam, the mysterious being was an emissary of God sent to Jacob. In the end, the emissary wounds Jacob, making it difficult for him to walk. This was God's way of telling Jacob that he no longer could run. When facing an adversary, it's important to stand fast.

Thus, when Esau sees Jacob standing tall with pride, unwilling to run and be pushed around, he gains respect for him and embraces him. Sometimes, the only way to gain respect from others is if one first has self-respect. According to this view, that new resolve on Jacob's part caused Esau to embrace Jacob rather than fight him.

Rashbam, living during the Crusades, may have been offering advice to his own generation of persecuted Jews, letting them know that if you acquiesce to anti-Semitism, you inspire more anti-Semitism.

Interestingly, after struggling with the mysterious man, Jacob is given another name, Israel. No longer is he only Jacob, from the word *akev* (heel), one who, when challenged, turns and even runs on his heels. Now he is also Israel, meaning the fighter (*sarita*), who has the strength to stand strong and prevail (32:28).

We are told that Jacob retains both names, which departs from the previous pattern when other Torah figures' names are changed (Berachot 12b). For example, Abraham and Sarah's old names, Avram and Sarai, are never used again after the divine bestowing of their new names.

The message of Jacob/Israel's dual name is clear: both the "Jacob" approach of winning the heart of the enemy and the "Israel" approach of more assertive, strident action are crucial. They work in tandem, each complementing the other to achieve the goal of securing

the safety of our people. ©2023 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 AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

One might not expect the key to happiness to be hidden in the meeting of Yaakov and Esav recounted in the parsha. But it's there.

When Yaakov explains the lavish gifts he had sent ahead to his twin, the latter demurs, at least perfunctorily, and says, "I have much [already]." Yaakov insists that Esav receive his gifts since "I have all [I need]" (Beraishis 33:9, 33:11).

Those focused on material wealth as providing happiness, explains the Kli Yakar on those sentences, can only ever claim to have "much," not "all." For, satisfaction will always be elusive. As Chazal say, "One who has one hundred wants 200" (Koheles Rabbah 1:34).

In 1971, social scientists Philip Brickman and Donald T. Campbell coined the term "hedonic treadmill" to refer to the fact that, as a person makes more money or collects more possessions, expectations and desires rise in tandem, resulting in no permanent gain in happiness.

Happiness is born, rather, of an attitude, that of "I have all." Whatever one has. "Who is wealthy?" Ben Zoma asks in Avos (4:1), and answers: "He who rejoices in what he has."

The mussar giant R' Elya Lopian offered an enlightening parable based on the pasuk "Those who seek Hashem lack no good thing" (Tehillim 34:11):

A man tells a visitor to his home how fortunate he is to be wealthy, and presents a cornucopia of expensive medications he has been able to amass to treat his many ailments. The guest smiles inside at his own fortune -- to have no need for any of the medications in the first place.

One can step onto the hedonic treadmill and spend one's life fulfilling -- or trying to fulfill -- one's material desires. But, just as it's better to be healthy than to be sick even with a full medicine cabinet, so is it better to be happy with one's lot rather than spending life in a never-ending spiral of striving.

Those who seek to serve Hashem lack nothing. Their perspective on life and why they were created provides them the understanding that, whatever they have, they have everything. ©2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And I sent [this message] to tell my master; to find favor in your eyes." (Ber. 32:6) Yaakov

sent messengers to Esav in order to win his favor. Whether it was an appropriate natural effort to avoid confrontation, or perhaps something more than should have been done, is the subject of discussion. Indeed, the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (ch. 37) says Hashem took Yaakov to task for calling Esav his master and decreed that it would indeed be the case that Esav would rule over Yaakov in this world, until the remnant of Yaakov will cut off the feet of Esav at Mount Seir and bring Hashem's Shechina back to earth.

We find several times that Yaakov was concerned with the perception of the people around him, such as when Shimon and Levi killed out the city of Shechem for kidnapping and violating their sister Dina. Later, during the famine, Yaakov wanted his sons to go to Egypt for food, lest people around him think his family wasn't suffering also (they weren't.)

It seems that Yaakov's concern for public opinion only went so far, though, as when it came to Esav, he was also prepared for war. When his sons made a point about their sister, he didn't fight it either, and when his sons initially refused to go to Egypt without Binyamin, Yaakov simply didn't send them.

Ultimately, Yaakov recognized, as should we, that Hashem is in charge of whatever happens and the opinion of others towards us will be greatly influenced by our spiritual stature. However, we learn something else from Yaakov's desire for "approval" from others.

Yaakov, as great and powerful as he was, having overcome angels and men, was also extremely humble. He was willing to lower himself if the situation called for it. He didn't mind calling Esav his master if Esav was appeased by it. It didn't make it true; it just made Esav feel good and perhaps would avoid conflict. (The Kli Yakar in Devarim 2:3 advises us to hide our successes from Esav and Yishmael to avoid enmity.)

Ironically, Esav's arrogance hurt him. The Ramban explains that when Yaakov's messengers arrived at Esav's feet with the gifts, he refused to acknowledge them. He had no idea these gifts were being offered to him because he was so haughty he would not engage with them to hear the message from Yaakov that he was trying to win Esav's favor as his master, the very thing Esav wanted more than anything else! What a contrast to his brother, Yaakov, who was in complete control of himself and truly had "everything."

The lesson we can learn from here is that we don't always need to win. We don't need to assert our power and make people do things our way. By being smart and humble, we can vanquish our enemies without firing a single shot.

Shmuel HaNagid was a vizier to the Caliph of Granada and leader of the Spanish-Jewish community. A Jewish man once bad-mouthed him and the Caliph, following accepted Muslim protocol, instructed R' Shmuel to personally "cut out that man's evil tongue."

R' Shmuel took the trembling man to his home

and made him comfortable. He treated him as an honored guest and never mentioned the issue of his being insulted, nor did he take the opportunity to belittle the man for his affront. Some time later, the Caliph called for the man to see that his order had been carried out. The man could not stop lavishing praise on Shmuel HaNagid for his wisdom, kindness and generosity.

The Caliph was incensed at R' Shmuel. "How dare you disobey me? I told you to cut out his tongue, yet he still speaks!"

R' Shmuel responded with typical insight, "Your eminence, you told me to cut out his "evil" tongue, and that's exactly what I have done. Don't you see how this tongue only speaks with sweetness and love?" ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Ya'akov or Yisrael

We are told in this week's parasha about the death of Rivka's wet nurse, Devorah. It is not clear why Devorah is with Ya'akov, but Rashi implies that Rivka had sent her to him in Padan-Aram to tell him that it was time to return to Canaan. What follows in the Torah is an unusual appearance of Hashem to Ya'akov with a blessing. The Torah tells us, "And Elokim appeared to Ya'akov again when he came from Padan-Aram, and He blessed him. Then Elokim said to him, 'Your name is Ya'akov; your name shall no longer be called Ya'akov, but Yisrael shall be your name.' And He called his name Yisrael. And Elokim said to him, 'I am Keil Shakkai. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a congregation of nations will descend from you, and kings shall issue from your loins. The land that I gave to Avraham and to Yitzchak, I will give to you; and to your offspring after you I will give the land.' And Elokim ascended from upon him in the place where He had spoken with him. And Ya'akov set up a pillar at the place where He had spoken with him – a pillar of stone – and he poured a libation upon it, and poured oil upon it. The Ya'akov called the name of the place where Elokim had spoken with him Beit-Eil."

Hashem began his discussion with Ya'akov concerning his name; "Your name is Ya'akov; your name shall no longer be called Ya'akov, but Yisrael shall be your name.' And He called his name Yisrael." Hashem said similar words to Avram when He changed his name to Avraham, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be a father of nations; your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations." The Ohr HaChaim points out that there is a difference between Avraham's name change and Yisrael's name change. If a person would refer to Avraham as Avram after his name change, he would be breaking a decree from Hashem. This is not true of calling Yisrael, Ya'akov. The Ohr HaChaim explains that a name which is given by man is a reflection of the soul

of the person. Avram's name itself was changed, whereas Ya'akov received a different name, one that was not based on his original name. The original name of Ya'akov contained his essence, his soul. This is based on the words "shimcha Ya'akov, your name is Ya'akov." Hashem did not alter that soul by giving him another name. Ya'akov's new name, Yisrael, indicated an additional aspect of his behavior, a quality not completely found in his original name, similar to an additional soul. In Avraham's case, his name was changed by adding a letter which changed the meaning of his name but not essentially his soul.

The Kli Yakar also deals with this difference. When Hashem gave Avram the new name of Avraham, he uprooted his previous name, replacing it completely with Avraham's new name. With Ya'akov, there was never any intention to uproot his previous name. This is evident from the fact that throughout the Torah, both names, Ya'akov and Yisrael, are present. Rashi indicates that the name Ya'akov "connotes a person who comes in stealth and treachery," whereas the name Yisrael comes from sar, which means an officer and a gentleman. Gur Aryeh posits that the additional, unnecessary phrase, "your name shall no longer be called Ya'akov," indicates a negative connotation to the name Ya'akov.

Part of the Kli Yakar's explanation revolves around "geulah, redemption or return from exile." There are two redemptions; the redemption of the present and the redemption of the future. The redemption from Egypt will not be displaced or uprooted by the redemption of the future, however, the remembrance of the miracles of the redemption from Egypt will be secondary (tafel) to the primary remembrance of the miracles of the final redemption (ikar). In this same way, the actions and the conceptual appearance of the actions associated with the name Ya'akov, will become secondary to the primary actions and the conceptual appearance of those actions associated with the name Yisrael. It is not that the miracles of the redemption from Egypt were less in size, number, or importance than the miracles of the future redemption. It is instead that the B'nei Yisrael were not worthy enough for the miracles in Egypt to have taken place. Moshe was forced to speak to Par'oh deceptively (stealthily), asking to leave Egypt only for a three-day journey to serve Hashem. The final redemption will take place when the B'nei Yisrael are completely worthy of that redemption.

What is somewhat puzzling from this section is that we have seen earlier that Ya'akov's name was changed to Yisrael by Eisav's angel. At the beginning of the parasha, Ya'akov battled with Eisav's angel at night, and he held Eisav's angel until it would bless him. As part of that blessing, the angel said to Ya'akov, "No longer will it be said that your name is Ya'akov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with men and you have overcome." Rashi explains that "no longer

will it be said that the blessings came to you through treachery and deceit, but rather through authority, and in full view." Rashi implies that the angel was stating a prediction, that Hashem would speak to him soon at Beit Eil and change his name. The Ramban explains that the angel really did change Ya'akov's name. However, Hashem said, "Now you are still called Ya'akov even though the (angel) of Eisav has changed your name, because he was not sent to you to change your name."

The Emek Davar has an approach to this entire section which seems to encompass many of the aforementioned ideas. Ya'akov was named because of a Natural act, though one which appears unnatural. Ya'akov was holding onto the heel (ekev) of his brother when being born. Though this was unnecessary for his birth, this action led to his name. This distinctive action led to the defining of his character, his soul. Eisav's angel indicated to Ya'akov that he did not have to hold onto his brother's heel to be born, because "you have striven with the Divine and with men and you have overcome." The angel tells him that his name is Ya'akov, and even though Hashem tells him that his name is now Yisrael, Hashem also says his name is Ya'akov. By repeating the word "shimcha, your name," Hashem indicates that both names are to be used.

It is an auspicious task to name a child. A new parent could be concerned that the name that is chosen may send the child on a wrong path, as that name is a reflection of the soul of that child. We must realize that there is another partner in this task, namely Hashem. We must have faith in Hashem that He will guide us on the right path to name our child and through all our tasks in life. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

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The Sciatic Nerve

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

In his book *Krayti Uflayti* (65:16), Rav Yonatan Eibeschutz 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 ha-tzibbur*). 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 CHAIM LANDAU

National Council of Young Israel

What does it really take to be a prophet? How perfect must such a leader be? Is he/she ever allowed the normal human manifestations of character imperfections that we associate with ourselves - or are the standards higher?

The answer is perhaps hinted in the parshah when the delegation Yaakov sent out to meet with Esau returns with the information that an entire army of people is headed towards Yaakov, whose intentions might be anything other than cordial. And then the text tells us that Yaakov was afraid.... which, in any other context might be an appropriate and acceptable reaction to the news. But, given that in the previous Parshah, HaShem has already promised Yaakov that He will protect and be with him, and not forsake him (Chapter 31, verse 3) why does Yaakov accede to fear? Has he lost his trust in HaShem?... HaShem's promise?... HaShem's ability to even fulfill His promise?

A most beautiful response to this seeming lack of trust displayed by a Patriarch is afforded by Rav Elchanon Wasserman. He quotes the statement of the Rambam from Chapter 7 in the *Shemoneh Perokim* where Maimonides authoritatively states that perfection

is no precondition to prophecy. Proof? Well, he offers, look at King Solomon and the prophet Samuel, both of whom, in the pursuit of a divine imperative, allowed fear to become a matter of concern. Which, he says, is proof positive that one doesn't have to be perfect to receive divine prophecy.

The Chesed Le'Avraham, however, asks the following question on the Rambam, which is: How can the Rambam present his case with such original authority when the Gemara has already asked that very same question. Quoting Masechet Berachot, the Gemara however responds to the possibility of Yaakov's fear in meeting with Esau, which is: "shemoh yigrom hachet", meaning that when HaShem originally made the promise, Yaakov was indeed the epitome of perfection, but with the passing of time, and having worked some twenty years for Lavan, maybe Yaakov no longer is that perfect being and might now be tarnished with sin...thus negating the precondition for HaShem's promise.

Furthermore, the Gemara continues, regarding the fear displayed by the prophet Samuel, the reason given to understand this is that people on a mission of a "sheliach mitzvah" are guaranteed from any kind of harm.....So why does Shmuel not know this? Because when you go to a place fraught with danger, then this concept is inapplicable.

So, if the Gemara has already asked and responded to the fears surrounding Yaakov and Shmuel, wherein lies the originality of the Rambam? And this is where the beauty of Rav Elchanon is on display. He responded that, in fact, we are dealing with two very different questions. The Gemara is asking the question that, following HaShem's promise of protection, why didn't our two heroes trust in the divine word. The Rambam is asking a totally different question. What ever happened to ordinary, basic elementary trust in HaShem, the "bitachon" that comes with "ve'ani be'chasdechah botachti.."? ...the trust that comes not as a response to a promise but as part of being a Jew... Here, the Rambam states that no one is perfect, and even a prophet is allowed in certain situations to allow the normal human condition of fear to emanate.

It's a very warming interpretation that allows us normal people, who love our Judaism, our Jewish people, and through the former, our trust in HaShem, to sometimes allow the fear we at times face in our lives to be not a denial of our fundamental beliefs, not a denial of HaShem (G-d forbid) but an acceptable response of the human condition. For to be perfect means to be super-prophetic.

But to err at times on the side on being afraid is to be, simply, prophetic.
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