

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Yaakov sends emissaries to meet his brother Eisav and attempt to mollify him and to head off a possibly violent and even fatal confrontation. There are differing opinions in Midrash and the commentaries whether these emissaries were angels or humans. In any event it appears from the parsha that they were unsuccessful in their mission and were unable to deflect Eisav and his four hundred armed men from confronting Yaakov.

If we agree that his emissaries were mere humans then it is understandable that they could fail in their mission of dissuading Eisav and convince him to leave Yaakov and his family alone. However if we believe that Yaakov's emissaries were truly angels then how could they have failed in their mission? An angel never fails in his mission, right?

But we see from another incident in the life of Yaakov that human will and strength can even overcome an angel. Yaakov himself wrestles the angel of Eisav to a standoff. Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael because he was able to wrestle and struggle with angels and men and emerge triumphant. Never underestimate the power of a human being for good or to wreak havoc.

Eisav's determination to harm Yaakov is so intense and fixed that even a horde of angels cannot deflect him from his evil purpose. Angels have no freedom of will and action and are therefore inherently weaker than are human beings. Angels have no hidden resource of will and strength - they are what they are. Humans, when taxed, can be righteous or evil in the extreme.

Only when Eisav finally sees Yaakov and his family before him does his will waver and he now becomes much more conciliatory. He is naturally influenced by the vast amount of money that Yaakov showers upon him. That is also part of human nature for humans are always susceptible and are weakened by monetary corruption. It is not the sight of heavenly angels that softens Eisav's heart towards his brother as much as it is the material largesse that is bestowed upon him by Yaakov.

Over the long history of the Jewish people, many a decree conceived against Jews has been thwarted because of monetary considerations paid to

the proposed enforcers. As distasteful as this may sound and feel it was always a method employed to aid Jewish survival in difficult times and places.

Angels are not subject to such tactics and temptations but humans are. Humans can overcome angels but rarely are they able to elude temptation and its resulting troubles. However the same strength of will that is necessary and is part of the human makeup to overcome angels is also present when humans face temptations and difficult choices in life.

There was a campaign against drug use by teenagers in the United States a few years ago. The campaign's slogan was "Just Say No." I realize that this is a very simplistic way to deal with the problem of drug use by young people but it has the ring of truth to it. The strength to say no to angels is the same strength to say no to harm and evil. © 2010 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 SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Esau said, 'I have much,' and Jacob said, 'I have it all'" (Genesis 33:9,11).

The Book of Genesis is filled with sibling rivalry, specifically over the patrimony. We have previously commented about the two aspects of that inheritance: the blessing (bracha) of material possessions, and the firstborn status (bechora), which brings familial leadership. We have learned from the life of Abraham and his two sons that the recipient of the patrimony was not always the one who was born first; rather, it was an issue of character, of who would be most suitable to convey the Abrahamic covenant - the message of ethical monotheism - to the next generation and to the world.

We have suggested that Isaac desired to divide the patrimony, giving the bracha to Esau (the elder) and the bechora to Jacob (the younger). It was Rebekah who insisted that the two parts remain together, and ensured that Jacob received both. Rebekah's argument was certainly a cogent one. If the mission of the Abrahamic family is to succeed within Israel (both the nation and the land) and then spread its message of ethical monotheism to the entire world, the economic

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
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infrastructure, military and political dimensions of the bracha would be crucial.

But at the same time, it is clear from the Bible that it is the bechora, the moral and ethical commitments that are the essence of the patrimony; the character traits of the bracha are more easily acquired as one matures. Even more to the point, Rebekah may have gone too far in her manipulation of events. She wanted to provide Jacob with a veneer of the tough, grasping hunter. But especially under the tutelage of Laban, that aggressive and materialistic exterior almost overwhelms Jacob's gentle and wholehearted soul. If Jacob was to be worthy of the bechora two decades after he received it, he would have to give up the gains he had made by deceiving his father, purge the Esauistic craving for material objects from his personality, and reclaim his innate values as the true grandson of Abraham.

The internal exorcism of Esauism takes place in this week's portion, when Jacob wrestles with an anonymous assailant identified by our sages as the "spirit of Esau" (Gen. 32:25-30). The external exorcism immediately follows, when the brothers confront each other and Jacob offers Esau extravagant gifts. Esau, ready to forgive and forget, demurs: "I have much [rav], my brother. Let what is yours remain yours." Jacob objects, saying, "Take my blessing [bracha], which was brought [back] to you, because G-d has been gracious to me and I have it all [kol, everything]" (Gen. 33:9,11).

The dialogue is revealing, especially about how each of them now views material possessions. Esau says he has 'much,' but that doesn't mean he doesn't want more; indeed, as I learned from my childhood rebbe, Rav Menahem Manus Mandel, an individual with \$100 may be wealthier than an individual with \$200. How so? Because a person's wealth is measured not by what he has, but by what he thinks he's lacking, and everyone wants to double what he has. Hence the person with \$100, who wants \$200, only lacks \$100, whereas the person with \$200, who wants \$400, lacks \$200!

Jacob, on the other hand, has arduously learned that material blessings are merely a means to an end - a gift from G-d; the true prize is the bechora - the ability to transmit G-d's message of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Jacob spends his life doing just that: conveying the message of the covenant

to his 12 sons and his daughter. He now understands that all material possessions must ultimately be returned to G-d, and that with his familial continuity secure in his ancestral homeland, he "has everything, he has it all."

I had a close friend in elementary school who would come to class every day with two dimes, one for the charity "pushke" and another for an ice-cream. Once, as we were walking together, he tripped and one dime fell into the sewer. "Too bad, G-d," he said, "there went your dime." Much more appropriate was my beloved friend Zalman Bernstein who, from a hospital bed in the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center during the last days of his life, told me: "The only thing I really have is what I spent on my children's education and what I gave to worthy charitable causes." © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

“Rabban Shimon Bar Yochai said: It is known in the halacha that Eisav hates Yaacov." Anti-Semitism is as old as the world, but there have been different and even contradictory reasons for it. Sometimes it seems that it crops up because of the isolation of the Jews, while at times they are accused of being too much involved in the affairs of others. Sometimes it is explained as a product of natural hatred for the weak, while sometimes the cause is given as the fact that the Gentiles fear the great power of the Jews. The Jews are sometimes accused of being capitalists, while at other times they are said to be communists. The stark truth is that the Jews were pursued in the east as in the west, by drunkards, by philosophers, by believers and by apostates. What is the basis for this phenomenon?

In the words of the Maharal, "There were many who hated Yisrael without any reason" [Gevurot Yisrael 5:54]. This means that anti-Semitism cannot be explained by a visible reason but rather by something that is much deeper. "You are my witnesses, G-d says, and I am G-d" [Yeshayahu 43:12]. Since we represent Him, any hatred for G-d is turned towards us. "Your enemies will be agitated"... They will say, let us destroy their nationhood"... "They will make a covenant about you" [Tehillim 83:3-6]. "What they want is to fight against G-d... But He is G-d, who can fight Him?" [Igrot HaRambam]. The fight is waged against the nation which represents Divine morality. In the play, "My Brothers, Heroes of Praise," a Roman Senator writes a report to be delivered to the Senate: "By their very existence the Jews are a threat to Rome... Even though they are few and they are satisfied with their tiny land, we must never lose sight of the danger. The world is too

small to contain both Rome and Yehuda together." [Nechama Leibowitz, Insights for Shemot, page 13].

This situation continues to our time, as was claimed that the German dictator said: "Fate has singled me out to be the great savior of humanity. I will free the people from the bonds of the spirit which have become a goal in themselves, from the suffering which goes by the names of conscience and morals... The war over control of the world is only between us, between our two camps alone, the war of the Germans against the Jews. Everything else is a false illusion. Even if we expel the Jew from Germany, he remains our enemy all over the world." [Rausching, "Conversations with Hitler," pages 193-203].

This, then, is the internal motive, which sometimes makes use of various events in order to explain the reason for the hatred. What will happen in the end? Avraham was promised, "All the families of the earth will be blessed through you" [Bereishit 12:3]. All the Patriarchs were given the same promise, and it was echoed in the words of the prophet: "The Mountain of G-d's Temple will be at the head of the mountains... and all the nations will make their way to it... and they will say: Let us rise up to the Mountain of G-d... and He will teach us His ways, and we will go in His path." [Yeshayahu 2:2-3].

When Yaacov fought with Eisav's angel, we are told, "And he saw that he could not overpower him... so he said, send me away, for dawn has come" [Bereishit 32:26-27]. Yaacov should have rejoiced when he heard that he was winning, but instead he refused. "I will not send you away unless you bless me" [ibid]. The struggle will end only when you give in to me about the birthright and the blessings, and when you recognize me as the source of all blessings in the world. "And he blessed him there" [32:30]. "In that place?? when the nation returns to its full objective and its isolation, which will be completely fulfilled for all eternity in the land of the mountains of Yisrael" [Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsh].

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

As the narrative unfolds, Ya'akov is told he would be given another name – Yisrael (Israel).

Nachum Sarna points out that the name Yisrael contains the root y-sh-r, meaning straight. Ya'akov, the deceiver, has transformed to Yisrael, one who resolved to be straight and up front with those around him.

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

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

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

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

All of us have made plenty of mistakes and teshuvah is a divine gift from G-d, allowing us to right our wrongs. It is a complex psychological process and Ya'akov shows the way it is done. ©2005 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 YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrاند

Transcribed by David Twersky;

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This week's parsha teaches us how Yaakov has to deal with Esav in order to survive in Galus [exile].

We read the story of Yaakov, who, with great trepidation, was meeting Esav for the first time after all these years. Yaakov offers a prayer to G-d: "Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav..." [Bereshis 32:12].

Yaakov's prayer contains an apparent redundancy—"the hand of my brother, the hand of

Esav.” Shouldn’t Yaakov have said, “save me from the hand of my brother, Esav?” However, the pasuk [verse] seems to indicate a prayer to be saved from two different people—from his brother and from Esav.

Rav Shlomo Breur gives a very nice insight into this ‘redundancy.’ Rav Breur says that there are in fact two individuals about whom Yaakov is worried. Yaakov is worried about Esav—the rough sibling who is out to kill him. But Yaakov is also worried about being saved from the hand of his ‘brother.’

Esav can have two faces. He can be the Esav who will kill you, have pogroms against you, try to throw you out of his country and have Inquisitions against you. We certainly have to be saved from this Esav.

However, there is another disguise that Esav uses, and that is the loving brother. This is not the Esav that kills you, it is the Esav that loves you. But the Esav that loves you is sometimes as dangerous as the Esav that will kill you. If we have lost hundreds and thousands and even millions of Jews to the Esav that kills us—we our losing hundreds of thousands of Jews to the Esav who loves us, the Esav that wants to marry us, marry our sons and daughters, and who offers us “salvation through love.” This is Yaakov’s prayer. Save me from Esav AND save me from my brother.

The Pardes Yosef comments on a later pasuk [33:4], where the Torah says that Esav kissed Yaakov (vayishakeihu). The word ‘vayishakeihu’ has dots on top it. Rash”i explains that Esav really wanted to bite Yaakov, but the Medrash says that Yaakov’s neck turned to stone and Esav wasn’t able to bite him, so instead Esav kissed him.

The Pardes Yosef quotes a Yalkut that Esav said, “I won’t kill Yaakov with bows and arrows, but with my mouth and my teeth...” In other words, I will kiss him to death. That is to say, Esav tries two approaches. First he tries biting; but if biting doesn’t work, then the other approach is kissing. A Jew can be literally kissed to death. This is what Chaza”l are telling us—we need to be on guard against both the Esav who wants to shoot arrows and against the Esav who wants to stretch out his hand. With this approach, Rav Breur says a beautiful insight in the chapter of the ‘Gid HaNashe’ and makes some beautiful inferences (‘diyukim’).

The Torah tells us of the battle that Yaakov has against the Angel of Esav. This is such a crucial event in Jewish history that the Torah wants to remind us about it for all time. As a result of this event, the Torah says “Therefore the Children of Israel do not eat the ‘gid haNashe’” [32:33]. Every time we sit down and eat a kosher meat meal we are constantly reminded why we are we not eating porter-house or T-bone steaks or sirloin. The reason is because of this incident.

Since the Torah makes a reminder for this event, to be remembered for all generations, clearly the Torah wants us to learn something from the event. What does the Torah want us to learn? The pasuk tells us that “Yaakov remained alone. A stranger wrestled

with him until just before daybreak. When the stranger saw that he could not defeat him, he touched the upper joint of Yaakov’s thigh. Yaakov’s hip joint became dislocated as he wrestled with the stranger” [32:25-26]. At this point, the Torah does not mention any manifestation of consequence resulting from the incident.

Later [32:31], the pasuk says that Yaakov named the place Peniel, saying, “I have seen the Divine face to face, and my soul has withstood it.” The next verse [32] continues “the sun rose and was shining upon him as he left PenUel” (rather than Penlel) and then concludes “He was limping because of his thigh.” This is the first time we learn that Yaakov has a physical impairment as a result of his wrestling with the Angel. Why didn’t the Torah tell us 5 verses earlier that as a result of the battle Yaakov was limping?

Rav Breur says that this parsha is telling us that during the struggle in the night, when Yaakov was struggling with the Angel of Esav and Esav tried to damage him, there were no lasting effects. We have had Inquisitions and pogroms and Holocausts. Unfortunately, we have lost many. But a lasting effect on Yaakov is not visible, because we can cope with that Esav. That battle we can withstand.

However, when “the sun rises,” when it becomes brighter, when it becomes an age of Enlightenment, when things become good and fine and secure [the sun connotes the new bright day], when Esav shines his face upon Yaakov, takes him into his society, accepts him as an equal, shows him the kiss, shows him the shake of the hand—that is when it is obvious that “he is limping on his thigh.” The effects of the “hand of my brother,” of assimilation, of the loving brother Esav are devastating. That is what is going to kill us. That is what is going to damage us permanently.

When Yaakov meets Esav at night, and succeeds, he calls it Penlel. This is the Face of G-d. But when the dawn arrives and we get the ‘brotherly love’ of Esav, then it is PenUel. Meaning ‘penu E-l’—G-d clears away, He leaves. When one is fighting and must struggle with Esav, one can be assured of Penlel—the Face of G-d is present. One knows that “I’m a Jew and he’s Esav.” It may be tough, it may be difficult, but one knows he is a Jew and he knows this is the Face of G-d.

However, when the “sun comes up” and Esav tries to ‘love you to death,’ then it becomes ‘Penu E-l’—G-d, so to speak, turns away. Then, the real impact is evident—“and he limps on his thigh.”

This is the legacy of ‘gid haNashe’—to know that Esav can try to kill us and extinguish us and burn us, but we can survive. We must be afraid, however, of the ‘hand of my brother,’ the ‘and the sun rose upon him,’ the Esav that would have our sons marry his daughters and his daughters our sons, and who would offer his “salvation through love.” That is the Esav that

leaves the lasting effect of "he limped upon his thigh."
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THE AISHDAS SOCIETY

Aspaqlaria

by Rabbi Micha Berger

What is the role of the laws of business listed in Choshein Mishpat (the quarter of the Tur and Shulchan Aruch on financial matters)?

One approach could be that working for income is a necessary evil. It's Hashem's punishment to Adam for eating the forbidden fruit— "with the seat of the brow shall you eat bread". However, by following these laws these activities are kosher, they are rendered permissible.

However, this is not the approach of Rav Shimshon Rephael Hirsch. His motto of Torah im Derech Eretz (TIDE) -- Torah with the way of the world, is about the proper marriage between the Torah and the "real world".

The union between Torah and Derech Eretz in that tiny word "im" is not haphazard. In a collection of essays titled "Harav Shimshon Rephael Hirsch Mishnaso viShitaso", Rav Yaacov Yechiel Weinberg, the "Siridei Eish", gave this description:

"The Torah, according to Rav Hirsch, is the force that gives form. Form, to Aristotle's thought, means a thing's essential nature—in distinction to the substance from which it is embodied. Derech Eretz is merely the matter on which Torah works."

It indicates that the halachic business deal is not a concession to reality, but part of the ideal. Choshen Mishpat doesn't merely render these activities kosher, it's makdish, it brings sanctity, it makes even business dealings sacred.

We can use this idea to understand an enigmatic statement the Gemara makes about our parashah. Yaacov crosses his family and almost all of his belongings across the river, and has to return for some small vessels. There, on the far side of the river, he encounters and battles an angel until dawn.

"'And Yaacov was left alone.' (Bereshis 32:25) R. Eleazar said: He remained behind for the sake of some small jars. From here [we learn] that to the righteous their money is dearer than their body. Why [do they care] so greatly? Because they do not extend their hands to robbery." (Chullin 91a)

At first this is very hard to understand. Are tzaddikim, righteous people, supposed to be that materialistic? However, as we see from the answer, it's not the monetary value of their belongings, but their spiritual value that holds the attraction. It is their sanctity of being acquired within the laws of Choshein Mishpat.

To Yaacov, his possessions were holy because they were the substance to which he applied the form, the blueprint, of the Torah.

When we look at Esav in this light, we see that he took the exact opposite approach. The Torah explains Yitzchak's attraction to Esav with "ki tzayid befeev" which Rashi understands to mean "he used his mouth to ensnare". Esav would impress his father with shows of religiosity, asking questions like the correct way to tithe salt, knowing full well that salt isn't tithed.

To Esav, Torah was a tool, something you manipulate, to gain material ends.

Rashi quotes the Gemara that the identity of the angel battled was the guardian angel of Esav's children, the Edomite people.

Perhaps this is why the angel chose this moment to attack. When Yaacov embodied the proper relationship of physical and spiritual, when he saw that there is a holy way even to purchasing small jars, that was when he had to face the specter of Esav. © 1996 Rabbi M. Berger and AishDas.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Landmark Decision

This week's portion entails many of the trials and tribulations that Yaakov Avinu endured, both on a national level and on a very personal one. First, he prepared to confront his brother Esav, the results of which would produce either war or reconciliation. Then he battled an angel who dislocated his sciatic nerve. Then finally, Yaakov confronted his brother, playing the role of diplomat-warrior. He carefully weighed how to treat him with Chamberlain-like appeasement or Churchill-like aggressiveness. He returned from that encounter unscathed, but not long afterwards, the Torah tells us that Yaakov's own daughter was brutally violated, which led to a war in which his sons decimated the city of Sh'chem. Then he endures the death of Devorah, who was his mother Rivka's nursemaid.

But all these roles that Yaakov plays -- the angel-fighter, the warrior-diplomat, even the father whose daughter is attacked, are different than the role Yaakov must play in another tragic incident in this week's parsha. Yaakov simultaneously becomes a grieving widower during the birth of his final child, Binyamin, who is born an orphan for life. Rachel, Yaakov's beloved wife, dies in childbirth. Now a wayfarer on a trek to Chevron, Yaakov must bury his wife. But Yaakov does something strange. He does not bury her in the family plot in the M'aras HaMachpelah, which was bought by Avraham and reserved for the forefathers and their spouses. Yaakov opts instead to bury her where she dies in Bais Lechem (Bethlehem).

Surely Yaakov had no objection to travelling with a deceased whilst trekking to a final resting place. After all, he asked his own children to bring him from Egypt to Canaan after his demise, surely a longer and more arduous trek than Bethlehem to Chevron? Why then did he bury Rachel in Beth Lechem?

The Midrash tells us that Yaakov foresaw that one day Jews would be exiled from the Land of Israel. They would plod down the road leading from Jerusalem toward the Rivers of Babylon. They would pass the Tomb of Rachel and they would cry. She in turn would join them in their prayers. Therefore Yaakov opted for a burial site for Rachel on the road to Babylon.

But aren't there many places to pray? Isn't every stone on every road holy? And doesn't Hashem hear prayers and see tears even when they are not shed by a graveside? What gift did Yaakov give his children by relinquishing Rachel's eternal resting-place for a way station on the oft-traveled road of Galut? Is there perhaps an even deeper intent with Yaakov's plan?

Anatoly Sharansky's trials and tribulations from the time of his arrest in March 1977 through his release in 1987 included the Soviet Union's most notorious prisons and labor camps. It was a tormenting journey, but along the arduous term there were many encouraging little reminders that the One Above was holding his hand.

One day during his trial, Sharansky's firmly requested to be allowed to select a lawyer of his own choosing rather than the stooge given to him by the Soviet authorities. The judge who presided over the kangaroo court reacted by declaring a brief recess and had Anatoly thrown into a tiny holding cell. There was hardly any light in the dank compartment, and there was nothing for Sharansky to do but wait for the proceedings to resume. To pass time he stared at the various curses and inscriptions scratched on the walls by prisoners who also sat and waited like he was for the decisions of their mortal fate.

However, Anatoly did not notice the curses etched by the previous men that once sat in that cell. Instead, he saw a message of hope and inspiration scratched on the wall. A Magen David etched in the wall, stood out proudly amongst all the other frivolities of frustration. The words Chazak V'Ematz (Be strong and fortify yourself) were energetically etched underneath it. It was signed Asir Tziyon (Prisoner of Zion) Yosef Begun. Begun knew that like him others would pass this way and he engraved for them a mark of hope.

Yaakov realized that the experience of his personal pain should not be limited to his own personal suffering. He converted it into a message of hope and inspiration for the ages. Rachel was transformed from a symbol of despair and grief into a symbol of hope for eternity. Yaakov foresaw that one day the Jews would leave Israel, shattered and broken. By having Rachel's final resting place as landmark in their agonizing journey, they, too could garner a message of hope. They would see Yaakov's pain and remember his triumphant endurance. They would understand that despite his sad life, Yaakov persisted. His children united and his legacy was impeccably unblemished.

And though he often stood on the desolate road surrounded by enemies, his future was never renounced. And his children's future, too, will never despair. For Rachel cries for them, and she will not stop until they return to their true borders. © 1998 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

It is clear that the "man" who wrestled with Yaakov (Beraishis 32:25) was an angel, as Yaakov is described as having "fought with the divine" (32:29) and he named the location where they wrestled based on having "seen the divine face to face" (32:31). Rashi tells us (32:25), based on Chazal, that this angel was Eisav's protective angel.

Although this approach is the most widely known, there is another mainstream approach in Chazal as well. Pirkey D'Rebbe Eliezer doesn't tell us the name of the angel that wrestled with Yaakov, but the description given does not fit "Sama'el," also known as "the evil inclination" and "the angel of death," i.e. the "sar" (ministering angel) of Eisav. Tanchuma Yoshon (Vayishlach 7) and Yalkut Shimoni (132) tell us that it is none other than Micha'el, the closest thing the Chosen People have to a protective angel (since G-d is really our Protector). We can certainly understand, based on the historical animosity between Yaakov and Eisav, why Eisav's "sar" would wrestle with Yaakov, with the war Eisav is planning to wage against Yaakov fought by his protective angel as well. Why, however, would Micha'el fight with Yaakov?

The Yefeh To'ar (Beraishis Rabbah 77:1) suggests that Micha'el was motivated by jealousy, aroused when Yaakov became as unique on earth as G-d is in heaven. Although the Talmud (Shabbos 89a) says that angels do not have any jealousy, it is possible that this only refers to being jealous of each other (whereby they would need the laws of the Torah to keep them in check); being jealous for G-d's sake may be different. However, wrestling with Yaakov (and injuring him) without being sent to do so by G-d ascribes to Micha'el autonomy not usually attributed to angels. Yalkut Shimoni (132) has G-d asking Micha'el if injuring Yaakov was appropriate, as well as asking him why he did it, implying that it was done without G-d's permission, raising the same issue.

When Yalkut Shimoni first mentions that it was Micha'el who wrestled with Yaakov, it describes a similar purpose as the one given by Midrash Tanchuma; "since G-d saw that [Yaakov] was afraid (of Eisav), He sent Micha'el to fight with him." The implication that holding his own against an angel would alleviate any fears Yaakov had about fighting a mere human being (even Eisav) is expressed explicitly in the Yalkut; "Micha'el said to [Yaakov], 'I am one of the senior heavenly officers and you did this to me, yet you are

afraid of Eisav?" This can explain why Micha'el was sent to wrestle with Yaakov, but not why he went beyond his mission (or how he was able to) by injuring Yaakov. (According to the Yalkut, because Micha'el injured Yaakov he was permanently assigned to helping Yaakov and his descendants.)

There are numerous other issues raised regarding the meeting between Yaakov and Eisav, and in order to understand the details of their meeting, the tension between them needs to be put in context. Obviously, Eisav's major point of contention with Yaakov was his taking the blessings that Yitzchok had intended for Eisav; understanding why Yitzchok wanted to bless the wicked Eisav, why Rivka insisted that Yaakov must steal them, and why both Rivka and Yaakov thought eventually Eisav would no longer be angry at Yaakov, likely hold the key to understanding these issues.

I have previously explained (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/toldos.pdf, pg. 7, and www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/vayeitzei.pdf, pg. 2) that Yitzchok thought Eisav could provide all of the material things Yaakov would need to successfully fulfill the spiritual mission started by Avraham and Sara. It would be as if Yaakov was the Rosh Yeshiva, the teacher and scholar, while Eisav was the fundraiser. Yaakov and his descendants could focus on their spiritual growth while Eisav and his descendants supported them, allowing them to focus purely on spirituality. They would all be on the same team, sharing the benefits the way Yisachar and Zevulun did, with each member of the team contributing their specific talents. In order for this "partnership" to work, Eisav would have to succeed financially; because Eisav craved material things, he desperately wanted the blessing Yitzchok had intended for him, a blessing for tremendous financial success. Rivka realized, though, that this "partnership" wasn't going to work if the person who was supposed to provide the material things didn't really care if the mission succeeded, and all Eisav cared about was his material wealth. She therefore told Yaakov that he has to receive the blessings intended for Eisav, that he needed to take on the responsibilities of both the learning and the fundraising, the spiritual growth and the financial burden, if the spiritual mission were to succeed.

There was another factor as well. Rivka had received a prophecy about the twins she was carrying that included "the elder serving the younger" (Beraishis 25:23). Even had Yitzchok's plan worked, the Rosh Yeshiva (Yaakov, who was younger) would be in charge, making all the final decisions. However, when Yitzchok gave the blessings for material wealth to the son he thought was Eisav, he included being the boss over his brother (27:29), meaning that the fundraiser had the final say. By taking the blessings, Yaakov took over the whole operation (he received the blessings for the spiritual part before he left for Charan, see 28:3-4).

Yaakov was now the boss of his brother, who was no longer a partner in the family business (their spiritual mission), but a competitor instead.

Eisav finds out that Yaakov tricked their father, and the blessings for material wealth he wanted so badly were given to Yaakov instead. And, to top it all off, not only was his material success taken away, but now he would have to answer to his brother rather than the other way around. Eisav begs his father for a blessing too (27:36), but Yitzchok tells him there is nothing left to give him, as he already gave it all to Yaakov (27:37). Eisav starts crying (27:38), and somehow Yitzchok finds a blessing for him (27:39-40). Wait a minute! I thought Yitzchok said there were no other blessings left to give! Here did this blessing come from? Why didn't Yitzchok think of it before? It would appear that originally Yitzchok thought Eisav wanted to be part of the team, which was now impossible; Eisav wasn't qualified to be a Rosh Yeshiva (and didn't want to be) and Yaakov had just received the blessings intended for those who provide the financial support. What was left to give Eisav? Then Yitzchok realized that Eisav never really wanted to support Yaakov, he just wanted the riches. Once he was "off the team," he could get a blessing for financial success too; it would just have nothing to do with Yaakov's success (notice how G-d's name isn't mentioned in Eisav's blessing for material success, only in Yaakov's). Yitzchok tried to placate Eisav regarding Yaakov being his boss too, telling him that when Yaakov falters (spiritually), he wouldn't be his boss.

Eisav hates Yaakov for what he did, and vows to kill him. Rivka tells Yaakov to run away until Eisav's anger subsides. What would calm his anger? If Eisav wanted the blessings for the material wealth they brought, and he ended up receiving a blessing for material wealth, as his blessing comes true and he starts accumulating wealth, his anger should go away.

Yaakov leaves for Charan, unsure that he will survive the exile. G-d appears to him, reassuring him that everything will be okay, that He will be with him wherever he goes, and that He will return him to this land (28:15). Yaakov responds by making a vow (28:20-22) that he will fulfill after G-d's promises are fulfilled. However, whereas G-d had promised to "return [him] to this land," Yaakov says he will fulfill his vow "when I return in peace to my father's house." Can there be "peace" in his "father's house" if he and Eisav are still enemies? G-d very much wants Yaakov to fulfill his vow (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/vayishlach.pdf, pg. 3), but knows that before that happens, Yaakov must make peace with Eisav.

Instead of heading straight home, Yaakov sends messengers to Eisav in Sayir (32:4). Sayir is southeast of the Dead Sea, nowhere near Chevron, which is west of the (middle of the) Dead Sea, where Yitzchok is (see 35:27). If Yaakov wanted, he could have tried to avoid contact with Eisav rather than initiating it. But Yaakov wants to patch things up, so he

tries, hoping that by now Eisav is wealthy enough to no longer be angry about the blessings. He is concerned that Eisav may think his wealth is only temporary, that once the blessings Yaakov stole take effect, his wealth may be gone. He therefore sends a message to Eisav that includes the fact that he is keeping the Torah (see Rashi on 34:5), so the blessings are not being preempted, and that he is also wealthy (34:6), so they are being fulfilled. This way, Eisav will realize that the wealth he is enjoying is not because Yaakov's blessings haven't started yet, and that Yaakov taking the blessings didn't adversely affect him. Unfortunately, that wasn't enough, and Eisav and his 400 men are heading towards Yaakov to attack (32:7). Yaakov becomes scared, and formulates an emergency plan to prepare for the war with Eisav that seems inevitable.

There were three aspects to Yaakov's "emergency plan." He split his camp into two (so at least some could escape while the others kept Eisav and his men busy, see 32:8-9), he beseeched G-d to help him survive the battle (32:10-13), he settled down for the night (32:14), and he prepared an elaborate gift for Eisav (32:14-21). What was the purpose of this gift? Yaakov includes a message to Eisav, telling him that he hopes it will bring about forgiveness and reconciliation (32:21). If the issues that caused the tension were Eisav's perceived lost wealth and Yaakov being the "master" over Eisav, the gift could accomplish three things: (1) It would prove that Yitzchok's blessings already came true, so the wealth Eisav had (also) accumulated was his, and would not be lost once Yaakov's blessings started to take effect; (2) it would show Eisav that Yaakov was willing to share his wealth, in case Eisav wasn't satisfied with the amount that his blessing brought him; and (3) it would demonstrate that Yaakov was not going to act as Eisav's "master," but treat him as if he was royalty, trying to appease him the way a visiting dignitary does when going before a king. Would it work? Yaakov wasn't sure, and couldn't have been thrilled with the prospect of losing part of his family in battle while the others escaped. But what else could he do?

Even though Yaakov had already settled down for the night (32:14 and 32:22), shortly thereafter (32:23) Yaakov gets up in the middle of the night, reunites his family, and crosses the Yabok (an east-west tributary of the Jordan River). Why did Yaakov change his mind, and instead of keeping two camps have everyone together, and get up in the middle of the night after having planned to stay there till the morning? The Rashbam and Chizkuni (32:23) say that Yaakov was trying to run away from Eisav to avoid meeting/confronting him. [According to the map on page 89 of "Atlas Daas Mikra," Succos (where Yaakov went next, see 33:17) is north of the Yabok, whereas Penu'el (where Yaakov was left by himself and wrestled with the angel) is south of the Yabok. Why would Yaakov cross his family over the Yabok going north if

the trip from Charan to Sayir (or to Chevron) was towards the south? Apparently, Yaakov had changed his mind and reversed course in order to avoid Eisav.] If Yaakov successfully avoids facing Eisav, he will never make peace with him, and won't fulfill his vow (yet). Therefore, G-d sends Micha'el to make sure Yaakov doesn't run away and is forced to face Eisav (see Rashbam and Chizkuni on 32:25).

What were G-d's instructions to Micha'el? Could G-d have told him to fight Yaakov so that he sees that he can defeat (or is as strong as) angels? How could Micha'el fight with all of his strength (necessary for Yaakov to find out that he can hold his own against angels) if he knows that the whole purpose is for him not to win? It would seem that Micha'el was instructed to prevent Yaakov from running away, and when he "was unable to" (32:26), purposely injured Yaakov in a way that would make fleeing nearly impossible. How could Yaakov run away from Eisav with such a painful limp? Micha'el was fulfilling G-d's instructions, and G-d told him he did a good job (not that it was said in the form of a question), but because he caused an injury to Yaakov, had to help his descendants from then on. Whether it was because he couldn't run away or because he was no longer afraid, Yaakov no longer tried to avoid facing Eisav, and didn't re-divide his family into two camps - keeping the children with their respective mothers instead (33:1-2).

In order to drive home the message that he didn't consider Eisav his "servant," nor see himself as the "master," Yaakov repeatedly prostrates himself before Eisav (33:3). Eisav doesn't attack, and the scene that follows indicates that he no longer harbors resentment towards Yaakov. Yaakov reiterates that the gifts sent the night before were meant for Eisav "to find favor in my master's eyes" (33:8; notice who is the "master"), but Eisav says "I have plenty" (33:9), as the blessing I received provides enough wealth, and I don't need any of yours. Yaakov insists that his gift is the kind of tribute one gives to royalty (33:10), again inferencing Eisav being the "master," and then says words that, if he wasn't convinced all had been forgiven, would be quite provocative: "take my blessing" (33:11), i.e. accept part of the wealth I now have because I made your blessing mine. Eisav is not taken aback by this wording, because he knows what Yaakov meant. "I have everything," Yaakov adds. The wealth that comes from my blessing is only there to help my spiritual growth, and I have everything I need without the wealth I am giving to you. If G-d gave me this additional wealth, it is so that I could offer it to you, so that we can be brothers again. Eisav accepts Yaakov's gift, and Yaakov is able to return "in peace" to his father's house.

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