

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

I have often argued that the episode in which the Jewish people acquired its name -- when Jacob wrestled with an unnamed adversary at night and received the name Israel -- is essential to an understanding of what it is to be a Jew. I argue here that this episode is equally critical to understanding what it is to lead.

There are several theories as to the identity of "the man" who wrestled with the patriarch that night. The Torah calls him a man. The prophet Hosea called him an angel (Hosea 12:4-5). The Sages said it was Samael, guardian angel of Esau and a force for evil. (Bereishit Rabbah, 77; Rashi to Genesis 32:35; Zohar I, Vayishlach, 170a.)

Jacob himself was certain it was God. "Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (Gen. 32:31).

My suggestion is that we can only understand the passage by reviewing the entirety of Jacob's life. Jacob was born holding on to Esau's heel. He bought Esau's birthright. He stole Esau's blessing. When his blind father asked him who he was, he replied, "I am Esau, your firstborn." (Gen. 27:19) Jacob was the child who wanted to be Esau.

Why? Because Esau was the elder. Because Esau was strong, physically mature, a hunter. Above all, Esau was his father's favourite: "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). Jacob is the paradigm of what the French literary theorist and anthropologist Rene Girard called mimetic desire, meaning, we want what someone else wants, because we want to be that someone else. (Violence and the Sacred, Athlone Press, 1988) The result is tension between Jacob and Esau. This tension rises to an unbearable intensity when Esau discovers that the blessing his father had reserved for him has been acquired by Jacob, and so Esau vows to kill his brother once Isaac is no longer alive.

Jacob flees to his uncle Laban's home, where he encounters more conflict; he is on his way home when he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men. In an unusually strong description of emotion the Torah tells us that Jacob was

"very frightened and distressed" (Gen. 32:7) -- frightened, no doubt, that Esau was coming to kill him, and perhaps distressed that his brother's animosity was not without cause.

Jacob had indeed wronged his brother, as we saw earlier. Isaac says to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." (Gen. 27:35) Centuries later, the prophet Hosea says, "The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God." (Hos. 12:3-4) Jeremiah uses the name Jacob to mean someone who practises deception: "Beware of your friends; do not trust anyone in your clan; for every one of them is a deceiver [akov Yaakov], and every friend a slanderer" (Jer. 9:3).

As long as Jacob sought to be Esau there was tension, conflict, rivalry. Esau felt cheated; Jacob felt fear. That night, about to meet Esau again after an absence of twenty-two years, Jacob wrestles with himself; finally he throws off the image of Esau, the person he wants to be, which he has carried with him all these years. This is the critical moment in Jacob's life. From now on, he is content to be himself. And it is only when we stop wanting to be someone else (in Shakespeare's words, "desiring this man's art, and that man's scope, with what I most enjoy contented least" -- Sonnet 29) that we can be at peace with ourselves and with the world.

This is one of the great challenges of leadership. It is all too easy for a leader to pursue popularity by being what people want him or her to be -- a liberal to liberals, a conservative to conservatives, taking decisions that win temporary acclaim rather than flowing from principle and conviction. Presidential adviser David Gergen once wrote about Bill Clinton that he "isn't exactly sure who he is yet and tries to define himself by how well others like him. That leads him into all sorts of contradictions, and the view by others that he seems a constant mixture of strengths and weaknesses." (David Gergen, Eyewitness to Power, 328)

Leaders sometimes try to 'hold the team together' by saying different things to different people, but eventually these contradictions become clear -- especially in the total transparency that modern media impose -- and the result is that the leader appears to lack integrity. People will no longer trust their remarks.

There is a loss of confidence and authority that may take a long time to restore. The leader may find that their position has become untenable and may be forced to resign. Few things make a leader more unpopular than the pursuit of popularity.

Great leaders have the courage to live with unpopularity. Abraham Lincoln was reviled and ridiculed during his lifetime. In 1864 the New York Times wrote of him: "He has been denounced without end as a perjurer, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler over the last agonies of an expiring nation." (John Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, 71.) Winston Churchill, until he became Prime Minister during the Second World War, had been written off as a failure. And soon after the war ended, he was defeated in the 1945 General Election. He himself said that "Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." When Margaret Thatcher died, some people celebrated in the streets. John F. Kennedy, Yitzchak Rabin and Martin Luther King were assassinated.

Jacob was not a leader; there was as yet no nation for him to lead. Yet the Torah goes to great lengths to give us an insight into his struggle for identity, because it was not his alone. Most of us have experienced this struggle. (The word *avot* used to describe Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, means not only "fathers, patriarchs" but also "archetypes"). It is not easy to overcome the desire to be someone else, to want what they have, to be what they are. Most of us have such feelings from time to time. Girard argues that this has been the main source of conflict throughout history. It can take a lifetime of wrestling before we know who we are and relinquish the desire to be who we are not.

More than anyone else in Genesis, Jacob is surrounded by conflict: not just between himself and Esau, but between himself and Laban, between Rachel and Leah, and between his sons, Joseph and his brothers. It is as if the Torah were telling us that so long as there is a conflict within us, there will be a conflict around us. We have to resolve the tension in ourselves before we can do so for others. We have to be at peace with ourself before we can be at peace with the world.

That is what happens in this week's parsha. After his wrestling match with the stranger, Jacob undergoes a change of personality, a transformation. He gives back to Esau the blessing he took from him. The previous day he had given him back the material blessing by sending him hundreds of goats, ewes, rams, camels, cows, bulls and donkeys. Now he gives him back the blessing that said, "Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you." (Gen. 27:29) Jacob bows down seven times to Esau. He calls Esau "my lord", (Gen. 33:8) and refers to

himself as "your servant". (33:5) He actually uses the word "blessing", though this fact is often obscured in translation. He says, "Please take my blessing that has been brought to you". (33:11) The result is that the two brothers meet and part in peace.

People conflict. They have different interests, passions, desires, temperaments. Even if they did not, they would still conflict, as every parent knows. Children -- and not just children -- seek attention, and one cannot attend to everyone equally all the time. Managing the conflicts that affect every human group is the work of the leader -- and if the leader is not sure of and confident in their identity, the conflicts will persist. Even if the leader sees themselves as a peacemaker, the conflicts will still endure.

The only answer is to "know thyself". We must wrestle with ourselves, as Jacob did on that fateful night, throwing off the person we persistently compare ourselves to, accepting that some people will like us and what we stand for while others will not, understanding that it is better to seek the respect of some than the popularity of all. This may involve a lifetime of struggle, but the outcome is an immense strength.

No one is stronger than one who knows who and what they are. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob journeyed to Succot, and built himself a home..." (Genesis 33:16-17) What is Jewish continuity? How might it be attained? Jewish organizations have spent many years and millions of dollars in search of answers to these questions. And with good reason: how can we expect Jewish identity to exist in three generations without Jewish continuity now? I believe that an answer can be gleaned much more quickly—and inexpensively—through an examination of the lives of Jacob and Esau, where we will discover the secret to Jewish continuity.

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 how to address Esau. Informed of the impending approach of Esau's army of four hundred men, he divides his household into two camps, in order to be 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 [Yaakov], and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept" [ibid. 33:4].

The two sons of Isaac emotionally reunite in an embrace of peace, love and hope. The future of Jewish history was set to take a radical step in a new direction. Nevertheless, Jacob prefers a cool reconciliation, delicately refusing Esau's offer to travel together. Jacob feels the need to traverse a different path and, at his behest, the brothers separate once again. Jacob's reticence to requite Esau's warmth is striking. Why refuse his twin brother's gracious offer? Jacob's decision has important implications for our generation.

There are positive characteristics of Esau to be found in many Jews across the diaspora. Many are assertive, 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 the traditional mourner's Kaddish. 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. Similarly, Esau feels Abrahamic identity with every fiber of his being.

But when it comes to commitment to Abrahamic (Jewish) continuity, the willingness to secure a Jewish future, many of our Jewish siblings are, like Esau, sadly found to be wanting. 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. Like Esau, however, the overwhelming majority of diaspora Jewry has tragically 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. It is on the surface, as an external cloak that is only skin-deep. That is 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 for which he sold his birthright.

And what is true for a bowl of soup is true for his choice of wives, as he marries Hittite women, causing his parents to feel a "bitterness of spirit" [ibid. 26:35]. No wonder! The decision of many modern Jews to "marry out" has, according to the 2013 Pew Research Center report, reached an American average of 58%! The "bitterness of spirit" continues to be felt in many families throughout the diaspora. As the Pew report shows, those who marry out and continue to profess a strong Jewish identity are not able to 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!" Esau may have said, "Her name is Yehudit!" [literally, a Jewess, from Judah]. "She has a wonderful fragrance!" [Basmat means perfume] [ibid. v. 34].

On the other hand, Jacob's name, Yaakov, is a future-tense verb. Jacob is constantly planning for the future, anticipating what he must do to perpetuate the birthright. Similarly, if we are to attain Jewish continuity, we must internalize two crucial lessons from the example of Jacob and Esau: 1) never sell one's birthright for any price; and 2) guaranteeing a Jewish future means planning strategically with an eye towards the long-term, sacrificing short-term gains in order to demonstrate a commitment to continuing the legacy and lifestyle of Abraham and Sarah. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the more perplexing questions that is raised in this week's Torah reading is why Yaakov sends agents and messengers to Eisav to inform his brother of his return to the land of Israel. King Solomon in Proverbs had already advised to let sleeping dogs lie, so to speak. So why should Yaakov place himself in a situation of anticipated danger and difficulty when it could have been avoided.

There are many insights and comments that have been expressed over the ages regarding this problem. I will take the liberty of adding my ideas to possibly explain this quandary. We all are aware that deep within each of us there is a psychological impetus to attempt to correct what we may deem to be a past error of judgment or behavior. In fact, the entire Jewish concept of repentance is built on this and can be mobilized for good and positive purposes. This impulse is usually sublimated when current events constantly impinge upon our lives.

We are busy making a living, raising a family, engaging in a profession or business, studying or teaching, and we have little time to think and recall all our past misdeeds and errors. In fact, we become so involved in our lives, that we almost forget our past behavior and less than noble life patterns. But, as is often the case, the past gnaws upon us, and eventually gives us no rest until and unless we attempt to somehow correct what we feel was wrong and even shameful.

Yaakov is aware that he obtained both the birthright and the blessings from his brother by questionable means. This matter has been discussed for millennia, and we have alluded to the many insights, interpretations, comments, and explanations for the behavior of Yaakov. Nevertheless, the issue remains basically unresolved, for the verses in the Torah remain explicit, unchangeable, and eternal. It is, perfectly understandable that our father Yaakov should try

somehow to make amends to his brother for the past times that Eisav, wrongly or rightly, felt that he was taken advantage of and deprived of what was really his.

Considering this, it is perfectly understandable why Yaakov behaves in the way he did and bestows upon Eisav such exaggerated gifts. It may be his attempt to square things and to defuse the bitterness of the past. It is not so much that Eisav should be mollified, but, rather, that Yaakov should become refreshed and more at peace with himself regarding his eternal mission of building the Jewish people -- a mission which requires that he possess the birthright and the blessings of his father Yitzchak.

Only people who are at peace with themselves can really be constructive and positive in life, for them and others. It is this realization that impels Yaakov to seek out his brother before establishing himself in the land of Israel and beginning to fulfill the mission and the blessings that were rightly given to him. ©2020 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

As he flees his brother Esav (Esau), Ya'akov (Jacob) is promised by God that he would return safely to Canaan. (Genesis 28:15) One wonders then, why, in this week's portion, is Ya'akov afraid? (32:8) Doesn't Ya'akov's fear reflect a lack of belief in God?

Isaac Abrabanel (Spain, 15th century) suggests that fear is a sign of neither cowardice nor weakness. It is part of the human dimension, an emotion we cannot control – it just is. A person who is afraid should not be judged harshly. For who among us has never been afraid?

The real question is, “what do we do when we're afraid”? Do we become immobilized, unable to go forward, or do we gather strength in an attempt to meet the challenges that lie ahead? Emotions may be involuntary but actions can be controlled.

Thus, Ya'akov's fear is understandable—it's part of the human condition. Ya'akov's greatness was his preparedness to act contrary to his natural feelings; to come back to Canaan even though it meant confronting Esav.

Abrabanel, who was involved in the political world of Spain, instinctively felt that fear could not be overcome, it could only be dealt with through action. As a man of deeds he understood the inevitability of fear—and its only antidote—action

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik approaches the issue of fear differently. Everyone is beset with fears of some kind or another. Some are afraid they will not succeed in their careers, others fear losing wealth or

status, and still others are afraid of sickness, bodily weakness, poverty or aging.

Such fears may be utterly wiped out by a greater fear, the fear of the Lord. From his prison cell in Chistopol, Natan Sharansky wrote that an idea in the Book of Psalms helped him defy the KGB— “the beginning of wisdom is to fear the lord.” (Psalms, 111:10)

Indeed, the higher fear of God removes the lesser fears that invariably affect every human being. From this perspective, even the fear of God is not a stern attribute of the Almighty, it is rather an expression of God's love of all people. After all, a fear of God is able to quash other fundamental human fears.

Perhaps, it can be suggested that even for Rabbi Soloveitchik, lesser fears can never be completely overcome as one's belief in God is never perfect. Even the greatest believers may have some infinitesimal doubt. Hence, even the great Ya'akov, on some level, was afraid.

Rabbi Steven Exler, my extraordinary colleague and successor, notes that the Torah says “be strong and resolute, have no fear” – *chizku v'imtzu al tir'u*. (Deuteronomy 31:6) Yet, in L'David Hashem, recited around the High Holidays, the text repeats the phrase, “be strong and resolute,” while dropping the words “have no fear” – *chazak ve'ya'ametz libecha*. (Psalms 27:14) Perhaps because the Psalmist recognized that fear can never be totally overcome. Notwithstanding, we have the capacity to act, to believe, to “be strong and resolute.”

Rav Nachman of Bratslav once said, “the whole world is a very narrow bridge, but the main thing is not to be afraid at all.” Rav Nachman may not have meant that fear can be completely overcome. Rather he was suggesting that we not act afraid, or that we allow the higher fear of God to help push away our lesser fears. ©2020 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

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Gid HaNasheh

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 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 DAVID LEVIN

Experiencing Tragedy

Parashat Vayishlach contains the tragic account of Ya'akov's loss of both his mother, Rivka, and his wife, Rachel, which was preceded by the rape of his daughter, Dinah, all within a short time span. Any of these events could have had a paralyzing effect on anyone and certainly when experiencing such hardship all at once. Yet we see that Ya'akov did not falter from his ultimate goal of establishing the Jewish people in their land. We must understand that Ya'akov was emotionally moved by each of these events, but he was able to maintain his perspective.

The first of these events recorded in the Torah was Dinah's rape and kidnapping by Sh'chem. "And Dinah the daughter of Leah who bore her for Ya'akov went out to see the daughters of the land. And Sh'chem the son of Chamor the Hivite, Leader (King) of the land, and he took her and he lay with her and he

made her suffer." Dinah is criticized by the Rabbis for going out among the women of the land unescorted, but this did not give Sh'chem permission to kidnap her and rape her. Rashi explains the double language of "he lay with her and made her suffer" as the first being a regular sexual act and the second being a demeaning one. The Ramban argues that it is unnecessary to say that the second act was demeaning as every sexual act which is with an unwilling partner is degrading to that partner. Ibn Ezra appears to see this as one act and the suffering refers to the idea that she was a virgin.

Ya'akov's reaction to this rape appears subdued. "And Ya'akov heard that someone had defiled Dinah and his sons were with his flock in the field and he kept silent until they arrived. ... And the sons of Ya'akov arrived from the field when they heard, and the men were distressed and were fired deeply with indignation for he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with the daughter of Ya'akov, such a thing may not be done." HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains the brothers' reaction. When a person allows himself to damage himself by doing something wrong, he is disappointed and saddened at his own failing. When someone else causes him damage and does evil to him, his anger builds up inside of him and he wishes to harm that person. The brothers were angry with Chamor for allowing Sh'chem to act in this way to Dinah. Chamor was the king of his people, and he should have insisted that his son act on a level befitting his stature. The brothers also blamed themselves for being so involved with their own tasks and their flocks that they neglected to protect their sister.

The second tragedy for Ya'akov was the death of Rivka. The Torah does not record her death except by inference. The Torah tells us, "And Devorah, the nursemaid of Rivka, died and she was below Beth-el, below the plateau, and he named it Alon Bachut (the plateau of cryings)." The Medrash explains that the Torah mentioned Rivka's name to quietly announce that she, too, had died and was buried. The word bachut could be read bachot, cryings (the two cryings being for Devorah and Rivka). The Ramban explains that her death was kept hidden and the crying was due to the fact that she could not be honored in the way in which she deserved. Yitzchak was too blind and too ill to arrange for his wife's funeral and Ya'akov was still away. Rivka died before she was able to see her favored son, Ya'akov, return.

The third suffering was perhaps Ya'akov's hardest and his biggest test. From the time that he had arrived in Lavan's city and saw Rachel, he had loved her. He agreed to work for seven years to marry her only to be tricked into marrying her sister instead. He agreed to work for seven more years for Rachel. He married Rachel a week after marrying Leah but was still committed to those seven years of labor. He favored Rachel even though she remained childless while the

other wives gave birth. Rachel finally gave birth to Yosef but did not give birth again for eight years. This birth was to be her final act on Earth as she died in childbirth. "And it was as her soul was leaving her, for she died, that she called his name Ben-Oni (the son of my suffering) and his father called him Binyamin (son of my right hand)."

According to the Radak, Binyamin means "the dear son", the child to whom special attention and love will be shown. Rashi explains that the yamin or right is to the South, demonstrating that Binyamin was the only child who was born in the area that was to be the land that was given to the Jewish people, Yisrael. This was an indication of Binyamin's holiness and therefore Ya'akov's deep connection to him. The Ramban questions Rashi's sense of direction. If Ya'akov was coming from Padan Aram and crossed the Jordan River, his right hand would be pointing towards the North. He understands the name to mean son of my right hand, my strength, my support. But there is another concept that is to be kept in mind here. Destruction comes from the North. This may be a precursor to the destruction that happens within the Tribe of Binyamin in the case of the concubine who was raped and murdered in Binyamin's territory. But Binyamin is also the place of forgiveness as the Mizbei'ach, the Altar, is in the North. The slaughtering of the Sin Offering, the Guilt Offering, and the Korban Olah (all of which are a accomplish forgiveness and atonement) is done in the North.

Through all his suffering, Ya'akov maintained his faith in Hashem. Only one who is grounded in his faith of Hashem can understand that everything that one experiences, whether pleasant or unpleasant, becomes an opportunity to become closer to Hashem. One who is grounded by his faith in Hashem does not get bogged down by questions that too frequently begin with "how could" or "why did". One understands that everything is part of Hashem's plan for the world which can only ultimately go in a positive direction. It is not that "everything happens for the best" it is that we do not need to understand or define "best". Ya'akov understood this concept as did his fathers before him. No other Av experienced greater changes in his life, yet he was able to survive those changes with faith and a view to the future. Ya'akov dealt with the pain, yet he realized that each tragedy urged him forward to complete his task. May we learn from Ya'akov and grow to that same level of faith and that same perspective to continue to further Hashem's plan on Earth. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd he lodged there that night and he took from what he had in hand a gift for Esav, his brother." (Gen. 32:14) These few words have

so much meaning and implication. Since the deeds of the Patriarchs are the blueprints for the lives of their descendants, us, it behooves us to take note of even the smallest details.

Yaakov was trying to find favor in Esav's eyes, so he sent a gift. The Torah tells us that he took from what he had on hand. Would we imagine he sent Esav something he didn't have? What is the simple understanding here?

Rashi offers three explanations. 1. It was in his possession. 2. There is a Midrash which says it was diamonds and pearls which one binds in a pouch and holds in his hand, (as he doesn't trust it anywhere else due to its value.) 3. Yaakov gave things which were "chulin," meaning mundane, since Yaakov had previously tithed them as he'd promised Hashem he would do if he were to return home safely.

When Rashi says that it was in Yaakov's possession, presumably, this means he didn't go out to acquire something else to give Esav. Rather, he felt that if a gift was going to work, it would have already been given to him by Hashem, Who always sends the cure before the illness. This leads us into the second answer, regarding the gems.

When the Mishkan was built, the Nesi'im, the tribal princes, provided onyx stones. From where did they get them? Chazal say these precious stones fell with the Manna from Heaven at the homes of the princes. They understood that they were given to them for a purpose, and that use was revealed later when the Mishkan was to be built.

Just as they understood they got these things for a reason, Yaakov knew that what he had was given to him for a reason, and it would be appropriate for the gift to Esav. He did not have to go out and look for something better.

However, Yaakov also had to take one more step to refine the gift. Yes, Hashem gave him what he needed, but when we are given things, they are not just for our use. Rather, our job is to elevate the world around us, and that includes our possessions. The way Yaakov rectified his animals and money was by taking Maaser, tithing them, as he accepted upon himself to do.

Now, after that was done, the gifts he sent were ready to be used by Yaakov, much as one makes a blessing on food before he eats it. Failure to do so is considered 'theft' from Hashem because a person has no right to it yet.

What we learn from Yaakov's gift is that in life, we are given the tools we need to get the job done, but we are bound to fulfill our mission with those tools. That is the way we will be guaranteed Hashem's protection and blessing in all that we do.

Naftali is a printer. A woman whose wedding invitation he had printed years ago called him to print for an event she was running for an organization that

facilitates kidney transplants.

He attended the event as her guest and was amazed. He decided to donate a kidney.

A number of people tried to dissuade him. "What if your child needs a kidney in the future?" one asked. Without batting an eye, Naftali responded, "Hashem orchestrated events so that I got to this point. If He's preparing me to do this, why would I worry about that?" © 2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Insights from Krakow

I have become unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. For I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and the mothers with their children.

It is intriguing that Yaakov never expressed such fear at other times that his life was imperiled. Years before, he had incited the burning rage of his brother Esav when he learned that Yaakov had won the bracha of their father. A short while later, fleeing from Esav in anticipation of future danger, he was accosted by Esav's agent sent to kill him. At that time, Yaakov was very much alone. He had no children and no allies. Still, the Torah does not tell us about any great fear of his. In our parshah, it is many years later, and Esav's anger should have subsided somewhat. Moreover, Yaakov was no longer alone. Among his numerous children were Shimon and Levi, who later subdue the entire city of Shechem. Why was Yaakov more concerned about his safety at this time than previously?

In explaining the phrase "for I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan," Rashi offers two options. It might mean that Yaakov looked upon his rags-to-riches transformation with trepidation. He had begun his journey penniless, possessing nothing besides his staff, but now was a rich man with a large family. Surely that withdrew from his account of merits, and left him exposed to the danger of an attack by Esav.

The second option offered by Rashi is that Yaakov looked upon his staff in wonder and appreciation, because it had enabled him to ford the river. He had stuck the staff into the water, and the Yarden split for him! He had merited the performance of an open miracle, which certainly had to diminish his store of usable merit. If so, we have to wonder, how does the rest of the verse follow? How is the miraculous splitting of the river relevant to Yaakov's becoming two camps?

If we combine Rashi's two approaches, we will discover a way to solve our original problem. Both approaches amount to the same idea: Yaakov was conscious of how much had changed since the time he had set out on his journey away from home. When he

found himself alone and powerless back then, he feared nothing and nobody. Avraham had been assured by Hashem of the continuity of his progeny, and that they would become a nation that would one day receive the Torah and take possession of the Land. Furthermore, Avraham had been told that the succession would proceed through Yitzchok (to the exclusion of Yishmael) -- but not through all of Yitzchok. That meant that he, Yaakov (and not Esav), would be the conduit of the Divine promise for a future Klal Yisrael. Nothing could get in the way of the fulfillment of Hashem's promise. He was, in effect, invincible. He would witness miraculous Divine intervention on his behalf; the splitting of the river was not so unexpected.

Now, however, Yaakov found himself the patriarch of two large camps. The Divine promise had been fulfilled. He had fathered eleven of the future shevatim. The future had been safeguarded. Everything had changed. In his humility, Yaakov now regarded himself as irrelevant and expendable. He had done his job. Nothing lost if he were killed by Esav.

It was this surfeit of Divine beneficence that made Yaakov completely vulnerable. For the first time, he feared for his life. (Based on *Chidushei R. Yosef Nechemia (Kornitzer) (1880-1933)*) © 2020 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

At the beginning of this week's Parashah, Yaakov prepares to meet Esav for the first time since Esav made up his mind to kill Yaakov. Yaakov hears that Esav is marching toward him with an army of 400 men, and "Yaakov became very frightened" (32:8). Why was Yaakov frightened? Did he not have Bitachon / trust in Hashem, Who had promised to protect him? Was Yaakov's fear a sin? Many of the classical commentaries -- including Rashi, Rambam, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra, among others -- discuss these questions.

R' Yitzchak Abarbanel z"l (1437-1508; Portugal, Spain and Italy) writes: Yaakov's fear of Esav was not due to a weakness in his Emunah / faith or his Bitachon. Yaakov's fear was like the feeling a brave warrior has before going into battle -- he recognizes the reality that he may be killed, but he forges ahead anyway. If one goes into war thinking there is no danger, we would not call him brave! Where is his bravery, if he is oblivious to the danger he is in? If a person does not know the value of money or is so wealthy that money is meaningless to him, would we praise him for his charity? Only one who understands what he is giving up is praiseworthy!

Likewise, continues R' Abarbanel, Yaakov's Bitachon was meaningful only because he was afraid of Esav. Had Yaakov not understood what he was up against, his Bitachon would have been worthless. Clearly, Yaakov did trust in Hashem, for there were

many ways he could have saved himself -- fleeing, sending a messenger to their father Yitzchak asking him to intervene, etc. -- but Yaakov did not do any of those things. Our Sages teach that a Jew should not say, "I hate non-kosher food." Rather, he should say, "It looks delicious, but the Torah prohibited it to me!" Similarly, writes R' Abarbanel, a person should not say, "I am not afraid!" Rather, he should acknowledge his fear, and then he should place his trust in Hashem. (Peirush Al Ha'Torah)



"He charged them, saying, 'So shall you say: To my lord, to Esav, so said your servant Yaakov -- I have sojourned / "Garti" with Lavan and have lingered until now'." (32:5) Rashi z"l writes: The word "Garti" has the numerical value of "Taryag" Mitzvot / the 613 Commandments. Yaakov is saying: I kept them all and learned none of Lavan's evil ways. [Until here from Rashi]

R' Yonoson David shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Pachad Yitzchak in Yerushalayim) asks: Presumably, Yaakov meant to say that he prevailed over Lavan in the merit of his Mitzvah observance, and he likewise would prevail over Esav in that merit. But, why did he mention that there are 613 Mitzvot?

R' David explains: There is a fundamental difference between Lavan's and the Torah's respective world-views. At the end of last week's Parashah, after Yaakov's eloquent defense of his decision to run away, Lavan replies (31:43), "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flock is my flock, and all that you see is mine." Lavan meant: "Nothing you said made any impression on me. I, Lavan, do not believe any order exists in this world; it is a free-for-all, where everything is mine if I say so. Certainly, I do not believe in right or wrong." This, writes R' David, explains why the Torah records (24:50): "Lavan and Betuel answered..." The Torah is teaching that Lavan spoke before his father because, in Lavan's world, there is no order.

In contrast, R' David continues, the Torah tells us that Rivka -- Lavan's sister and Yaakov's mother -- was an orderly person. When Avraham's slave asked her two questions at once, she answered the first question first and the second question second (see Rashi to 24:24). The contrast between Lavan and Rivka is not just a difference in manners; it is fundamental to the mission of which Rivka was to become a part -- to establish twelve holy tribes that would implement Hashem's order in the world. The fact that there are exactly 613 Mitzvot is not random; it is "orderly," paralleling the 613 parts of the human body (see Makkot 23b). [Thus, by telling Esav that he kept the 613 Mitzvot, Yaakov was conveying that he expects to be safe from Esav because he is in the midst of accomplishing the holy mission assigned to him.]

R' David adds: In this light, we can better

understand why the Sages instruct us to recite the third Parashah / passage of Shema (i.e., the Parashah of Tzitzit) daily. The Mishnah (Berachot 2:2) teaches that we accept the yoke of Mitzvot in the second Parashah of Shema ("Ve'hayah Im Shamo'a"). What, then, is added by the third Parashah, which also seems to be about the Mitzvot -- saying, for example: "It shall constitute Tzitzit for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them"? R' David explains: Ve'hayah Im Shamo'a refers to Mitzvot generally, whereas the third Parashah actually alludes to the existence of 613 Mitzvot (see Rashi to Bemidbar 15:39). As explained, that number reflects that the Mitzvot are not a random collection of commandments; there is order to them. (Kuntreis Sukkot 70)



"I have become small as a result of all the kindnesses and all the truth that You have done Your servant." (32:11) The Midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Zuta (1:5) teaches: Yaakov is to be praised especially for his Tzedakah / acts of charity, as it is written, "I have become small." This refers to Tzedakah, as it is written (Mishlei 16:8), "Better a little Tzedakah..." [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Chaim Abulafia z"l (1669-1744; Eretz Yisrael and Izmir, Turkey) writes in the name of R' Y. Chabiliv z"l (referred to by those who quote him as the "Chassid" / "pious one" and "Kadosh" / "holy one"; possibly a reference to a 17th century rabbi of Chevron by that name): What led the Midrash to conclude that our verse refers to Yaakov's giving Tzedakah? Seemingly, Yaakov is saying the opposite: I have insufficient merits with which to deserve Your kindness!

R' Chabiliv answers: The Arizal teaches that one should not put himself down or minimize his own good deeds in a time of danger. Consistent with this, the author of the Midrash was bothered by Yaakov's seeming to minimize his own merits. Therefore, the Midrash reinterpreted the verse as extolling Yaakov's merits. (Etz Ha'Chaim: Parashat Vayakhel)

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (1724-1806; lived in Eretz Yisrael and Italy, but traveled throughout Europe and North Africa; known as "Chida") adds: Nevertheless, Yaakov did not want to appear to have served Hashem for the sake of receiving reward. Therefore, he used an ambiguous expression that both alluded to the diminishment of his merits because of G-d's kindness and alluded to his performing the Mitzvah of Tzedakah. (Pnei David, quoted in Otzrot Ha'Chida)

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