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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav, for I am afraid of him, lest he come and attack me, mother upon child." (Beraishis 32:12) Told that Esav was coming to meet him, accompanied by 400 generals, Yaakov was afraid. He separated his camp into two, so that if Esav attacked one, the other would either escape, or come to its aid.

Then, he prayed to Hashem. He asked Hashem to save him from Esav, because he was afraid of what he might do. Then he recalled Hashem's promise to do good to him and make his children as numerous and innumerable as the sand of the sea.

Though Hashem had promised to protect him, Yaakov was fearful of Esav. Some explain it was because he had gotten that promise when he was a lone traveler heading to Charan to find a wife. Now, he had two camps full of family, servants, and animals. Perhaps the promise didn't extend that far. Maybe Yaakov would be spared, but not the "mothers and children." It wouldn't be "good" if he had to watch the destruction of his family. These ideas are suggested by the meforshim, but there's perhaps another lesson to gain from our grandfather Yaakov.

While we know Yaakov Avinu to be a tremendous Baal Bitachon, he was also a human being. It is possible that he felt the fear of the wicked in this world, though he knew intellectually that no one can harm you (or help you) without Hashem's decree. So how does Yaakov deal with this fear? He prays.

He says, "Hashem, please save me from Esav. I'm afraid of him, even though You promised to protect me and be good to me." Despite my fears, I know that I should not be afraid, because You are in control, so I turn to you.

In essence, when Yaakov's Bitachon was perhaps a bit shaky, when he couldn't make himself fully feel confident, he knew the correct course of action. Separating his camps was a step to be taken out of caution, but the real precaution was to turn to Hashem.

Despite knowing in our minds that Hashem runs the world, sometimes our hearts and bodies can't feel it. What are we to do about it? Follow the example of our patriarch, Yaakov Avinu, and turn to Hashem again and again. When we ask Him to save us, we are instilling in our hearts the confidence that this is the answer to our predicament. Bitachon is something we all must work on, from the actions of Yaakov Avinu, we learn to keep working on our faith and trust in Hashem, because that's where our salvation lies.

A Jew arrived to seek the blessing and counsel of his Rebbe, the great R' Yisrael of Rizhin. As he prepared himself to enter the tzadik's office, the Rebbe's son, Dovid Moshe, who was then a curious child who would later become the Rebbe of Chortkov, asked the visitor what he was going to ask of his holy father. As the door opened for his yechidus to begin, the Jew turned to Dovid Moshe and replied, "I am going to ask for a bracha from the Rebbe; I am davening for many things," and entered the room. A few short minutes later, when the man emerged from his meeting with the Rizhiner, the inquisitive child asked, "So? What did my father have to say?"

"The Rebbe said that "Der Eibeshter vet helfin, 'G-d Above will help.'" Seeing that the man was still feeling stressed by his predicaments, Dovid Moshe said, "Aha, that's nice. But what will be 'biz der Eibeshter vet helfin' — until Hashem helps?" "I don't know," the man admitted.

"Go back to my father and ask him what will happen until Hashem Yisborach helps." When the man reemerged a second time, the boy asked, with a twinkle in his eye, "So, what did my father tell you?"

The man smiled: "The Rebbe said that "Der Eibeshter darft helfin… biz er vet helfin, "The One Above will have to help… until He will help." © 2025 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

Jacob and Esau are about to meet again after a separation of twenty two years. It is a fraught encounter. Once, Esau had sworn to kill Jacob in revenge for what he saw as the theft of his blessing. Will he do so now-or has time healed the wound? Jacob sends messengers to let his brother know he is coming. They return, saying that Esau is coming to meet Jacob with a force of four hundred men. We then read: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed." (32:8)

The question is obvious. Jacob is in the grip of strong emotions. But why the duplication of verbs? What is the difference between fear and distress? To this a midrash gives a profound answer: "Rabbi Judah bar Ilai said: Are not fear and distress identical? The meaning,

however, is that 'he was afraid' that he might be killed. 'He was distressed' that he might kill. For Jacob thought: If he prevails against me, will he not kill me; while if I prevail against him, will I not kill him? That is the meaning of 'he was afraid'-lest he should be killed; 'and distressed'- lest he should kill."

The difference between being afraid and distressed, according to the midrash, is that the first is a physical anxiety; the second a moral one. It is one thing to fear one's own death, quite another to contemplate being the cause of someone else's. However, a further question now arises. Surely self-defence is permitted in Jewish law? If Esau were to try to kill Jacob, Jacob would be justified in fighting back, if necessary at the cost of Esau's life. Why then should this possibility raise moral qualms? This is the issue addressed by Rabbi Shabbetai Bass, author of the commentary on Rashi, Siftei Chakhamim: "One might argue that Jacob should surely not be distressed about the possibility of killing Esau, for there is an explicit rule: 'If someone comes to kill you, forestall it by killing him.' None the less, Jacob did have qualms, fearing that in the course of the fight he might kill some of Esau's men, who were not themselves intent on killing Jacob but merely on fighting Jacob's men. And even though Esau's men were pursuing Jacob's men, and every person has the right to save the life of the pursued at the cost of the life of the pursuer, none the less there is a condition: 'If the pursued could have been saved by maiming a limb of the pursuer, but instead the rescuer killed the pursuer, the rescuer is liable to capital punishment on that account.' Hence Jacob feared that, in the confusion of battle, he might kill some of Esau's men when he might have restrained them by merely inflicting injury on them."

The principle at stake, according to the Siftei Chakhamim, is the minimum use of force. Jacob was distressed at the possibility that in the heat of conflict he might kill some of the combatants when injury alone might have been all that was necessary to defend the lives of those-including himself-who were under attack.

There is, however, a second possibility, namely that the midrash means what it says, no more, no less: that Jacob was distressed at the possibility of being forced to kill even if that were entirely justified.

At stake is the concept of a moral dilemma. A dilemma is not simply a conflict. There are many moral conflicts. May we perform an abortion to save the life of the mother? Should we obey a parent when he or she asks us to do something forbidden in Jewish law? May we break Shabbat to extend the life of a terminally ill patient? These questions have answers. There is a right course of action and a wrong one. Two duties conflict and we have meta-halakhic principles to tell us which takes priority. There are some systems in which all moral conflicts are of this kind. There is always a decision procedure and thus a determinate answer to the question, "What shall I do?"

A dilemma, however, is a situation in which there is no right answer. I ought not to do A (allow myself to be killed); I ought not to do B (kill someone else); but I must do one or the other. To put it more precisely, there may be situations in which doing the right thing is not the end of the matter. The conflict may be inherently tragic. The fact that one principle (self-defence) overrides another (the prohibition against killing) does not mean that, faced with such a choice, I am without qualms. Sometimes being moral means that I experience distress at having to make such a choice. Doing the right thing may mean that I do not feel remorse or guilt, but I still feel regret or grief that I had to do what I did.

A moral system which leaves room for the existence of dilemmas is one that does not attempt to eliminate the complexities of the moral life. In a conflict between two rights or two wrongs, there may be a proper way to act (the lesser of two evils, or the greater of two goods), but this does not cancel out all emotional pain. A righteous individual may sometimes be one who is capable of distress even when they know they have acted rightly. What the midrash is telling us is that Judaism recognises the existence of dilemmas. Despite the intricacy of Jewish law and its meta-halakhic principles for deciding which of two duties takes priority, we may still be faced with situations in which there is an ineliminable cause for distress. It was Jacob's greatness that he was capable of moral anxiety even at the prospect of doing something entirely justified, namely defending his life at the cost of his brother's.

That characteristic-distress at violence and potential bloodshed even when undertaken in self-defence-has stayed with the Jewish people ever since. One of the most remarkable phenomena in modern history was the reaction of Israeli soldiers after the Six Day War in 1967. In the weeks preceding the war, few Jews anywhere in the world were unaware that Israel and its people faced terrifying danger. Troops-Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian-were massing on all its borders. Israel was surrounded by enemies who had sworn to drive its people into the sea. In the event, it won one of the most stunning military victories of all time. The sense of relief was overwhelming, as was the exhilaration at the re-unification of Jerusalem and the fact that Jews could now pray (as they had been unable to do for nineteen years) at the Western Wall. Even the most secular Israelis admitted to feeling intense religious emotion at what they knew was an historic triumph.

Yet, in the months after the war, as conversations took place throughout Israel, it became clear that the mood among those who had taken part in the war was anything but triumphal. It was sombre, reflective, even anguished. That year, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem gave an honorary doctorate to Yitzhak Rabin, Chief of Staff during the war. During his speech of acceptance he said: "We find more and more a strange phenomenon among our fighters. Their joy is

incomplete, and more than a small portion of sorrow and shock prevails in their festivities, and there are those who abstain from celebration. The warriors in the front lines saw with their own eyes not only the glory of victory but the price of victory: their comrades who fell beside them bleeding, and I know that even the terrible price which our enemies paid touched the hearts of many of our men. It may be that the Jewish people has never learned or accustomed itself to feel the triumph of conquest and victory, and therefore we receive it with mixed feelings."

A people capable of feeling distress, even in victory, is one that knows the tragic complexity of the moral life. Sometimes it is not enough to make the right choice. One must also fight to create a world in which such choices do not arise because we have sought and found non-violent ways of resolving conflict. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And it came to pass on the third day when they were in pain, the two of the sons of Jacob, Shimon and Levi, Dina's brothers, took each man his sword and came upon the city unresisted…" (Genesis 34:25) The rape of Dina, and the violent revenge meted out on the men of Shekhem by Shimon and Levi in Vayishlach (Gen. 34) has all the elements of a best-selling novel: illicit sex, intrigue, terrorism, murder and mayhem. In summary, Shekhem, the Prince of Hivi, rapes Dina, the daughter of Jacob, and then desires to marry her. He arranges a meeting of the families: the prince and his father, King Hamor on one side of the table, patriarch Jacob and his sons on the other. It is clear during the meeting of the families to discuss the wedding plans, that Dina is still being held captive in Shekhem: Jacob's sons suggest that if the entire male population of Shekhem agree to be circumcised, they would agree to the marriage – and even to business and social relationships between the two large and extended families. They make the consequences of a failure to agree to their conditions crystal clear: "If you will not listen to us to become circumcised, then we shall take our daughter and leave." (Gen. 34:17)

Obviously, Dina is still behind Shekhem's closed doors.

The men of Shekhem agree. On the third day following the sensitive operation, when they are considerably weakened, Shimon and Levi kill all of the males of Shekhem with their swords. One way to justify their actions is that because the wedding negotiations were being held under the specter and sword of Dina's captivity, it was obvious that the primary goal had to be to free Dina. And to unreservedly prove the point, after Shimon and Levi slew everyone 'they took Dina from the house of Shekhem and they left.'

Now we understand why the Torah records that the brothers made their offer of circumcision 'be-mirmah' – with deceit. They certainly understood that circumcision alone was not sufficient to join a gentile to the Abrahamic family. Their purpose was single-mindedly to free Dina. Therefore, they formulated a proposition that required the most sensitive of operations, hoping that it would be refused and Dina would be sent home. But were it to be accepted, they would at least have the opportunity to arrange for Dina's escape without serious opposition from the recuperating Shekhemites. The brothers (without Shimon and Levi) were only interested in freeing Dina, not in punishing the citizens of Shekhem.

We also understand now why Jacob's sons do the talking rather than Jacob himself (since filial respect would seem to demand that the patriarch conduct the negotiations). Obviously, Jacob wished to distance himself as far as possible from subterfuge – although he certainly understood the necessity of getting Dina back.

Shimon and Levi went one giant step further. They believed that all of the citizens of Shekhem must be punished for countenancing a captive's rape. If not, any daughter and granddaughter of Jacob's will be considered fair game by the gentiles!

Who is the guilty party? Shimon and Levi or Shekhem? Shekhem transgressed the natural and universal laws of morality by raping a Jewish maiden and holding her captive; therefore Shekhem is the terrorist. And the only way such terrorism could be stopped is by the towns- people themselves declaring such an activity unacceptable and bringing the perpetrator to justice – even if he is their prince, and even if some of them would be beheaded for their opposition. But no such action is recorded on the part of the population. This compels Shimon and Levi to do what they believe is in the moral interest to teach these (and all would-be) terrorists a lesson. They utilize the weakened state of the citizenry on the third day of the circumcision as the perfect opportunity to slay all the residents of Shekhem and to free their sister.

The Torah itself seems to justify the actions of Shimon and Levi.

Even when Jacob chastises them, saying, "You have sullied me, causing me to stink among the inhabitants of the land. I am small in number and I shall be destroyed, me and my household…" (Gen. 34:30), his argument is a tactical rather than moral one. And the last words of the chapter – the closing line of the incident – is the justification of Shimon and Levi: 'Shall he [Shekhem] be allowed to make our sister into a harlot?' (Gen. 34:31).

Even from a practical perspective Shimon and Levi win the day, since the Torah testifies a few verses later that 'the fear of God descended upon the neighboring cities, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob' (Gen. 35:5). Jacob's fears did not transpire.

Shimon and Levi understood from the beginning that their action would serve as a critical deterrent.

But what about the innocent Shekhemites they murdered? Is that not an act of terror?

Fascinatingly enough, the universalist philosopher Maimonides does not think so – because he does not believe the citizens of Shekhem to be at all innocent, and so he rules in support of Shimon and Levi. Maimonides sets down the principle that "Moses bequeathed the 613 commandments only to Israel"; however, this great twelfth-century jurist-philosopher also recognizes the universal message of our Torah to all of humanity. Therefore, he continues, "In a similar fashion, Moses was commanded to enforce the seven commandments of Noah upon every human being – and who- ever does not accept them, must be killed." (Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 8:10)

Maimonides explains this harsh statement when he defines the seventh Noahide law, which he maintains is to establish law courts: "And how are the gentiles commanded to establish law courts? They are required to establish judges and executors 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 the other six laws are not to murder, not to commit adultery, incest or rape, not to steal, not to eat the limb of a living animal, not to blaspheme God and not to serve idols. Maimonides then concludes: "And it is on this basis that all the people of Shekhem were guilty of death [at the hands of Shimon and Levi, sons of Jacob]: because Shekhem [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)

Maimonides is teaching us that unless humanity accepts a fundamental morality – "Thou shalt not rape, thou shalt not murder" – a free humanity will not endure. The Torah of the seven Noahide laws must be accepted by everyone. Those who do not accept these principles and have the capability to destroy, are automatically in the category of "those who come to murder innocent people," and "must be killed before they can wreak their havoc." All of Shekhem shares in the guilt of their prince if they did not bring him to justice.

All who harbor, aid or abet terrorists share in their guilt. There are no innocent citizens of terrorist societies. Had the Germans declared the destruction of Jewish property unacceptable after Kristallnacht, the Holocaust would have ended before it began. Obviously, it is under pain of imprisonment or death that subjects of North Korea or Syria dare stand up to their inhumane governments. But it was only after people like Solzhenitzyn in the Soviet Union were willing to risk punishment and even death by protesting the enslavement of Communism that the world was saved from imminent destruction. The only way for terrorism to be stopped is by not allowing it to continue unpunished; the only way for civilization to endure – especially in a global village with mass weapons of destruction – is by insisting on the acceptance of the seven Noahide laws of humanity by every citizen of the world. And whoever remains silent in the face of his government's terror becomes an accomplice to that terror and must be held accountable for his participation in evil-doing.

What remains difficult, however, are the final words of 'blessing' uttered by Jacob to Shimon and Levi on his deathbed: "Shimon and Levi are a sibling twosome, vessels of violence are their wares…Through their anger they killed a man and through their willfulness they uprooted an ox…Cursed be their anger because it is impudent and their ire because it is harsh. I shall separate them throughout Jacob, I shall scatter them throughout Israel." (Gen. 49:5–7)

This harsh condemnation of their actions by their own father seems to contradict our discussion justifying their actions. And indeed, many of our biblical commentaries (such as Nahmanides ad loc, for example) would disagree with Maimonides' assessment and condemn Shimon and Levi for taking the law into their own hands and murdering citizens who did not actively perpetrate the crime without due process!

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky, however, in his masterful book of biblical commentary Emet Le-Yaakov, provides a fascinating insight in support of Maimonides. Yes, Jacob shouts recriminations at his sons Shimon and Levi, but he nevertheless bequeaths to them a most significant blessing. Levi is the father of the priests and Levites, the clerical leadership of Israel, the High Priests and Temple guardians. And Shimon (according to the Midrash) will provide the teachers and principals, the educators and the Roshei Yeshivot. When Jacob is truly disappointed in one of his sons – as in the case of Reuven – he withholds the birthright, he gives him no prize of inheritance. So from the perspective of the bequests granted Shimon and Levi, Jacob seems to be quite proud of them. If this be the case, then how can we understand his sharp words?

Explains Rabbi Kaminetzky: Shimon and Levi acted courageously and correctly, zealously and fearlessly. The honor of their sister had to be upheld, and society had to rid itself of terrorist-rapists and their collaborators. Shimon and Levi took the law into their own hands, acting without due process or consultation with their father, because it was the only way they could have succeeded, given the circumstances at the time. Yet Jacob had to fulminate against them so that they not make zealotry a way of life and so that others – more given to hotheadedness – would not derive permission to perform even more extreme actions with less provocation. Shimon and Levi had to act – and their father Jacob had to admonish them.

Perhaps this is even hinted at in Jacob's final words: 'I shall separate them throughout Jacob, I shall

scatter them throughout Israel.' The priests live in the various cities of refuge, and educators must go wherever there are students needing or willing to be taught by them. The quality of zealousness is a necessary spice for national pride and honor, but as is generally the case with condiments like salt and pepper, small doses enhance the taste while concentrated quantities will ruin the dish!

Shimon and Levi dare not be concentrated in one place. A little of them scattered throughout Israel will provide the necessary pride to enable the children of Israel "to stand straight and tall (komemiyut) in their land." *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 and available for purchase at bit.ly/RiskinBereshit. © 2025 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT"L

Wein Online

In this week's parsha, our father Yaakov, fresh from his successful escape from Lavan, prepares to encounter his brother and sworn enemy, Eisav. He sends malachim to deal with Eisav before he meets with him face to face. The word malachim signifies two different meanings. One is that it means agents, messengers, human beings who were sent on a particular mission to do Yaakov's bidding. The other meaning is that the word malachim signifies angels, supernatural messengers of God who were sent to Yaakov to help him in his fateful encounter with his brother.

Rashi cites both possible interpretations in his commentary. When Rashi does so, he is teaching us that both interpretations are correct at differing levels of understanding the verse involved. The message here is that the encounter with Eisav, to be successful from Yaakov's vantage point and situation, must have both human and supernatural help.

Eisav is a formidable foe, physically, militarily, culturally and intellectually speaking. He cannot be ignored nor wished away. He has accompanied us from the time of Yaakov till this very day. At times he threatens our very existence and at times he appears to have a more benevolent attitude towards us. Yet, he is always there, hovering over and around us, and he has never relinquished any of his demands upon us to either convert, assimilate or just plain disappear. While it is Yishmael that currently occupies the bulk of our attention, it would be foolish of us to ignore the continuing presence of Eisav in our world and affairs.

Yaakov's strategy is to employ both possibilities of malachim in his defense. He prepares himself for soothing Eisav by gifts and wealth, pointing out to Eisav that it is beneficial to him to have Yaakov around and being productive He also strengthens himself spiritually in prayer and in appealing to God to deliver him from Eisav. And finally, as a last resort he is prepared to fight Eisav with his own weapons, the sword and war.

Two of these strategies – gifts to Eisav and war against Eisav – require human endeavor, talent and sacrifice. They are the representative of the interpretation of malachim as being human agents and messengers. The third strategy, prayer and reliance upon heavenly intervention to thwart Eisav's evil designs, follows the idea that Yaakov's malachim were heavenly, supernatural creatures. In the long history of our encounter with Eisav we have always relied upon both interpretations of malachim. Neither interpretation by itself will suffice to defeat Eisav. Without human endeavor and sacrifice, heavenly aid is often denied or diminished.

According to the labor is the reward. But it is foolish to believe that a small and beleaguered people can by itself weather all storms and defeat Eisav's intentions solely by its own efforts.

Without the Lord to help, we attempt in vain to build our national home. Thus, the double meaning of malachim in this week's parsha has great relevance to our situation. *© 2025 Rabbi B. Wein zt"l - 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*

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

The Sciatic Nerve

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

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

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

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

Another approach points to one of the early copies of the *Krayti Uflayti*, which was printed during the lifetime of Rav Eibeschitz, and in which there is a correction in his handwriting. It replaces the letters *samech mem gimmel* (an acronym for *Sefer Mitzvot*

HaGadol) with the letters *samech hey nun*, which is an acronym for *seder 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.

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Dividing the Camp

When Ya'akov returned to the Land of Canaan, his messengers told him that Eisav was coming to greet him with four-hundred men, presumably well-trained soldiers. Ya'akov took several precautions to protect his family. The Torah states, "And Ya'akov became frightened, and it distressed him. So, he divided the people with him, and the flocks, and the cattle, and the camels, into two camps. And he said, 'If Eisav comes to the one camp and strikes it, then the remaining camp shall be a refuge.'" All of this was prior to sending his brother gifts and seeking his forgiveness. It was also prior to Ya'akov's prayers to Hashem in which he asked Hashem to protect him from Eisav.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains a grammatical problem in our sentences that gives an even deeper understanding of Ya'akov's sentiments when dividing the camps. The word "machane, camp" is normally found in the masculine form as is evidenced here also. However, when describing the first camp that might be overrun by Eisav's forces, the feminine form is used, noted by the feminine number "ha'achat, the one (feminine)." Rashi gives other examples throughout the scriptures where different words are both masculine and feminine, sometimes even within one sentence. Hirsch explains that when "Ya'akov thinks of its being destroyed, he calls it feminine. (Here) we can hear the deep sigh that is forced out of Ya'akov's breast: if Eisav comes to the one "poor weak" camp. This interpretation would also mean that the second camp, written in masculine form, was stronger; yet Ya'akov's plan is that the first camp (the weaker one) would fight while the second camp (the stronger one) would flee. HaRav Hirsch's explanation would appear to be after the fact; should the first camp be destroyed, it would then draw our sympathy as the "poor, weak camp."

Rashi explains that Ya'akov prepared for his meeting with Eisav in three ways: (1) paying tribute, (2) prayer, and (3) battle. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin asks why Ya'akov did not start with prayer, but instead with praise and tribute. Ya'akov reversed the order of this preparation by first preparing for battle (separating the camps). Next he prayed to Hashem to protect him. Finally, he sent gifts to Eisav to appease him from his anger. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Ya'akov's change in the order in which he prepared was caused by the report he had received from the messengers he sent, namely, that Eisav was approaching with four hundred men. Ya'akov took this to mean that he had to first prepare for battle rather than prayer, as he feared for the lives of his children and his wives as an immediate threat.

The Ramban gives a different reason for dividing the camps. The Ramban suggests, "that during the time Eisav smites one, the other will flee, or perhaps his anger will subside, or deliverance will come to them from Hashem." But what about the first camp? The Ramban cites a Midrash that says that Ya'akov armed the first camp heavily, but made the fighters put their arms underneath white garments. In that way they would appear innocent and welcoming, while at the same time they would be quietly prepared for battle. How they would act would then depend on Eisav's actions, first.

One of the problems of this small section of the Torah is that we are not given a description of how Ya'akov divided the camps. There is no statement of the criteria used, and there is no indication of how the people were divided and placed in which camp together. There are other places in the Torah where the twelve tribes were separated into two groups: (1) the stones which held up the eiphod had six tribes inscribed on each stone, and (2) six tribes were to stand on Har Eival while six tribes stood on Har Gerizim while the blessings and curses were described by a chorus in the valley between those mountains. There are debates among the Rabbis as to the order of the names on each stone based on either age or grouped by mothers, but it is clear that the tribes were divided six on one stone and six on the other. Here, in our section, it is not clear who or how many tribes were in the forward camp and who or how many were in the latter camp. It is possible that the forward camp contained only servants while the latter camp had all the wives and their children. It is only stated that the animals (flocks, cattle, and camels) were divided into two camps, but "the people with him" does not clarify which people were where.

There is a problem also with Ya'akov's fear as stated, "And Ya'akov became frightened, and it distressed him." When Ya'akov was described as frightened, Rashi explains that he was frightened that he

or his family would be killed. Since two words were used (frightened and distressed), Rashi explains that Ya'akov was distressed that he might be forced to kill others in defense of his family. Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett explains, "Abarbanel finds Ya'akov's fear very puzzling. First of all, Hashem had already assured Ya'akov that he would always have divine protection. 'Behold, I am with you; I will guard you wherever you go.' Similarly, just prior to this point in time, as he was preparing to leave his father-in-law, Lavan, Hashem told him, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your native land, and I will be with you.'" Rabbi Kasnett continues that Abarbanel did not see this as a lack of faith in Hashem. Man is comprised of both a spiritual and physical side. A soldier goes into battle with a fear of death, but his spiritual comprehension of a "higher responsibility" enables him to overcome that fear. HaRav Sorotzkin adds that Ya'akov was a powerful man, even more powerful than Eisav, since Ya'akov removed the boulder over the Well by himself, a task which required three men to accomplish. Also, Ya'akov's sons were powerful as two of them destroyed an entire city (Shechem). He suggests that the problem that caused Ya'akov to pray to Hashem stemmed from his not knowing whether Eisav came for war or peace. If for war, Ya'akov should do a pre-emptive strike. This would mean that he would kill others before knowing if they came in peace.

Throughout, Ya'akov maintained his faith in Hashem. Ya'akov understood that his life had not been easy, his choices difficult and filled with consequences, and his constant struggle to maintain his principles among people who had little regard for Torah. Yet he knew throughout that Hashem was with him, protecting him, and guiding him on a path of righteousness and Torah values. May we also understand that Hashem is with us to guide us in our lives through His Torah. *© 2025 Rabbi D. Levin*

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Reflections

Yaakov famously sequestered Dinah his daughter in a box as he prepared to meet his brother Esav.

That, according to the Midrash Rabbah brought by Rashi (Beraishis 32:23). His reason for hiding Dinah, the Midrash notes, was because he feared that Esav, upon seeing her, would wish to marry her. And Yaakov didn't want to take that chance.

There's a phrase in the Midrash, though, that is easily overlooked but shouldn't be. Not only did he put his daughter in a container, he "locked her in."

What that seems to indicate is that Yaakov knew that, as Chazal explain at the very beginning of the saga of Dinah's abduction and rape by Shechem, she was a yatzanis, an "outgoing personality." She was a naturally curious person. And so, prudently, her father locked her in, since he feared she might emerge during his meeting with Esav to witness the goings-on and be targeted by her uncle.

And, according to the Midrash, Yaakov is faulted for that, since, had Dinah in fact been seen by Esav and ended up marrying him, she might have been able to turn his life around and alter the enmity he held in his heart for Yaakov.

But protecting children is a parent's first priority. Wasn't Yaakov right to do what he did?.

Apparently not. The question is why.

What occurs is that children have natural proclivities and tendencies. There are times, to be sure, indeed many times, when a child has to receive "no" as an answer.

But squelching a child's nature is not a good idea. It can easily backfire. Ideal child rearing is channeling the child's nature, not seeking to squelch it. (See Malbim on Chanoch lina'ar al pi darko in Mishlei 22:6).

My wife and I know a couple whose little boy seemed obsessed with airplanes, beyond the normal interest in such things shared by all little boys. The parents didn't try to dissuade him from his desire, as he grew, to fly or work with planes, to force him, so to speak, into a box. They allowed him to express it, and the little boy is grown today, a yeshiva (and flight school) graduate who is a certified air traffic controller, and he's raising a beautiful, Torah-centered family with his wife, our daughter. *© 2025 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org*

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Yaakov has overcome the tremendous trials of living for over twenty years in an alien environment and being subjected to severe challenges and injustices. It was under these trying circumstances that Yaakov married and raised the 'shivtei kah;' the founding pillars of the Jewish people. After fleeing Lavan's home, he encountered Eisav and succeeded in subjugating his brother's angels, and was finally ready to make a triumphant return to his parents' home.

Yet his ordeals were far from over. Just when he looked forward to a period of respite, the tragic story of Dina's abduction and violation at the hands of Shechem ben Chamor, befell him, followed by his sons' devastating strike against Shechem in retaliation for the outrage. How did this tragic chain of events come about? How could Providence have permitted Dina to be subjected to such a humiliating assault?

Our tradition teaches that many factors contributed to this disaster. The Torah tells us that Dina went out to associate with the 'daughters of the land'; the local girls. It seems her objective was simply to examine their culture and lifestyle. She was taken to task for this choice, as the verse says: 'kol kevuda bas melech pnima'; a princess' place is in the home. In mingling with the gentile population, she compromised her modesty and so she, in turn, was compromised.

In another place, our sages indicate that her behavior was influenced by her mother, Leah, who, our sages call a "yatzanis;" one who tends to put herself forward even when not wholly appropriate. Leah went out to the field to greet Yaakov, informing him of her desire to be with him that evening. Dina's desire to go forth "among the daughters of the land" is seen as an outgrowth of her mother's tendency to act in an immoderately forward manner.

Our sages also view Yaakov as carrying an element of responsibility for the tragedy that befell Dina as well. Rashi tells us (chapter 32; verse 22) that before his encounter with Eisav, Yaakov placed Dina in a chest so that Eisav should not gaze upon her and desire her as a wife. For this, he was punished by having her fall into the hands of Shechem. Had Eisav married Dina, Rashi says, she may have influenced him so profoundly, he would have repented.

Dina's experience of being locked away from the world in a chest likely piqued her curiosity, sharpening her desire to investigate her surroundings. After all, when we excessively restrict our children from engaging the outside world, the temptation to taste the forbidden fruits and wander off the reservation is so much more acute.

Lastly, our sages tell us that Yaakov deserved to have his daughter abducted for tarrying excessively before returning home to his parents, who surely missed him and longed to see him. (Rashi Chapter 35;verse 1).

The sad and sorry saga that unfolded in Shechem was precipitated by a complex interplay of factors, as we have seen. From the perspective of our sages, we gain access to an even deeper dimension. Through these bizarre events, Hashem was planting the seeds and orchestrating events for later generations.

Our sages tell us that the union of Dina and Shechem gave birth to Osnas, who later became the wife of Yosef, the forbears of two of the twelve tribes, Ephraim and Menashe. For the Divine plan to be brought to fruition, it was necessary that Yosef marry one who was born of the union between polar opposites; the profane and the sacred. Dina's daughter, Osnas, chose to connect to her mother's spiritual legacy of sanctity.

This fascinating story is but one example of the multidimensional underpinnings of events that appear deceptively simple on the surface. The Divine plan that drives human events is so sublime and unfathomable, we are only afforded a tiny glimpse from time to time of its breathtaking sweep.

In our own lives, we can learn from the events in this portion how to view our own lapses of judgment. We tend to blame ourselves, and often find fault with our upbringing. We examine our parents' disposition and deflect the blame for our own poor choices onto our forbearers. But all of this is an exercise in futility and misses the point.

This week's portion teaches us that our job is to embrace the circumstances of our life even if they seem to be the product of our own faulty judgments. Instead of turning to recrimination, our task is to view Divine providence, in the context of history and our own personal lives, as the supreme guiding force. In the end, all will be understood and revealed as being part of a Divine plan designed for our own personal benefit and the benefit of the world at large.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

We read in our parashah (33:18), "Yaakov arrived 'shaleim' / whole at the city of Shechem... and he encamped before the city." Midrash Rabbah interprets the end of the verse as an allusion to observing Shabbat, i.e., Yaakov arrived on the outskirts of Shechem before dark and marked-off the techum Shabbat of his encampment. [The "techum" is the approximately 2,000 amot-wide band around an encampment or city where a person is allowed to walk on Shabbat. If this is not what the verse is teaching, then for what purpose did the Torah mention the obvious detail that Yaakov camped?]

The midrash continues: Because Yaakov observed Shabbat, he was promised an inheritance without boundaries. In contrast to Avraham, who was promised (13:17), "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, for I will give it to you"-i.e., an inheritance limited by the boundaries of the Land-Yaakov was promised (28:14), "You shall burst out westward, eastward, northward and southward." [Until here from the midrash]

R' Aryeh Finkel shlita (rosh yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Modi'in Ilit, Israel) comments about the first part of our verse-"Yaakov arrived shaleim at the city of Shechem": "Shaleim" is related to "Shalom," which is a major theme on Shabbat (as in the multiple references to shalom in the song, "Shalom aleichem"). Yaakov, who observed Shabbat, is the only person in all of Tanach who is called "shaleim" / "whole." Shalom / peace, harmony, perfection is the ultimate level to which a person and the world can aspire, and Yaakov achieved what no other person achieved-to have his image engraved on Hashem's throne. [We do not need to understand what this kabbalistic expression means to recognize that it indicates the pinnacle of human achievement.] (Yavo Shiloh p.401)