

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayishlach

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ANGELIC PROTECTION

Apter Rav

"Yaakov sent messengers [angels] ahead of him to Eisav his brother..." (32:4)

Yaakov Avinu constantly strove to minimize the future troubles that would befall his descendants. Dispatching the angels with gifts to his brother Eisav has indeed helped the Jews throughout the generations. Whenever oppressors come to harm the Jews, those very same angels that Yaakov sent to Eisav reawaken and work to appease the evil ones.

Thus, the *pasuk* states: "Yaakov sent angels ahead of him." He sent them ahead of him, into the future, on a mission to protect and alleviate the plight for all future generations of Jews.

MESSENGER OF OBJECTIVITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yaakov sent messengers [angels] ahead of him to Eisav his brother..." (32:4)

Divine providence is always presenting us with opportunities to engage in various mundane activities. This does not mean, however, that G-d wants us to take every such opportunity - even one that might appear to serve some holy purpose. G-d might want us instead to recognize the possibly harmful spiritual effects of a particular opportunity, and therefore to turn it down (see Tanya, chapter 30). We must therefore carefully assess every opportunity presented to us before taking it.

Naturally, our partiality for certain activities can cause us to leap to harmful conclusions. We can remain unbiased, however, when, as Yaakov did, we "dispatch a messenger" to assess the extent to which mundane opportunities - our personal "Eisav's" - stand to be beneficial or detrimental. The "messenger" we dispatch is our imagination. Imagining ourselves engaging in an activity presented to us allows us to gauge its effect on us first. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, pp. 392-395) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CONSTANT SOJOURNING

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Eisav, thus says your servant Yaakov: I have lived with Lavan and remained until now...' (32:5)

Yaakov begins his conciliatory message to Eisav by saying, *עם לבן גרתי* - that he had been living with their uncle, Lavan, over the last twenty years. Rashi famously comments that the word *גרתי* in *gematria* equals 613, and thus Yaakov was indicating to Eisav that *עם לבן גרתי* - "I have lived with Lavan, but I observed the 613 commandments, and I did not learn from his evil ways." Yaakov professed that although he spent many years with his evil, corrupt uncle, he remained loyal to the Torah and was not influenced by Lavan's sinful conduct.

What was the source of Yaakov's extraordinary resilience? How did he succeed in maintaining his religious standards while living with such an evil person for so many years?

Rav Shlomo Wolbe (Shiurei Chumash) finds the answer to this question in the word *גרתי*, which is related to the word *גר* - "foreigner." Avraham Avinu told the *benei Cheis* that *גר ותושב אנוכי עמכם* - that he was a foreign resident, physically residing among them without actually being one of them.

Similarly, throughout the twenty years that Yaakov spent with Lavan, he was a *גר*, a foreign resident who was just passing through. He didn't "unpack," get settled, or officially change his address, so-to-speak. This is how he succeeded in maintaining his commitment to Torah. He always saw himself as a foreigner, as somebody different, who did not fully belong where he was. This is the key to resisting the natural process of assimilation.

Although we must feel grateful for the freedoms we are given here in the Diaspora, at the same time, we must live with a sense of *גרתי*, that we are foreigners, that this is not where we belong, that we are different, and that we need to be different. This is how we can say *תרי"ג מצוות שמרתי* while living among other peoples.

APPEASING WORDS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"I have lived with Lavan and remained until now..." (32:5)

The following explanation was offered by my venerable father and teacher, may the memory of a righteous and holy individual serve as a blessing:

According to Rashi's commentary on the verse "I have lived with Lavan," Yaakov told Eisav that even while living with Lavan, he, Yaakov, had still observed the 613 mitzvos. Why did Yaakov tell Eisav this?

Our Sages answered as follows: Yaakov wanted to assuage Eisav's anger and envy over the blessings that he had received from his father. To that end, Yaakov sent word to Eisav that although he had acquired livestock (32:9), he had not acquired "the dew of heaven and the fats of the land" (27:28), as promised by Yitzchak. But Eisav could counter that their father had clearly stipulated that the blessings would only materialize if Yaakov and his descendants fulfilled the Torah's precepts, so perhaps the blessings had not been fulfilled because Yaakov had been lax in the observance of the mitzvos. Thus, Yaakov told his brother that although he, Yaakov, had observed all the 613 mitzvos, still their father's blessings had not been fulfilled. Accordingly, Eisav had no reason to begrudge Yaakov over Yitzchak's blessings.

EAGER ANTICIPATION

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Eisav, thus says your servant Yaakov: I have lived with Lavan and remained until now...' (32:5)

In this *pasuk*, Rashi makes his famous comment of עם לבן גרתי ותרתי"ג מצוות שמרתי, Yaakov was telling Eisav that he had kept Torah and mitzvos even while living with a rasha like Lavan.

But how could Yakov Avinu claim to have kept all of the 613 mitzvos? He was outside of Eretz Yisrael and therefore not able to fulfill מצות ישוב ארץ ישראל; he was away from his parents, so he was unable to fulfill מצות מצות אב ואם, כיבוד אב ואם, and so on?

The Chasam Sofer instructs us to read Rashi more carefully. Rashi does not say ותרתי"ג מצוות קיימתי - I observed/fulfilled all the commandments, but rather that "תרתי"ג מצוות שמרתי." What, then does שמרתי mean?

In Parshas Vayeishev, when Yosef tells his dreams to his family, the *pasuk* says (Bereishis 37:11), ויקנאו בו אחיו ואביו, on which Rashi comments that שמר means: Yaakov, his father, waited in anticipation for the moment when the dreams would come to fruition.

When Rashi says regarding Yaakov Avinu that תרתי"ג מצוות שמרתי, it does not mean that Yaakov Avinu fulfilled all 613 mitzvos. Rather, it means that he anticipated and longed for the day that all the impediments preventing him from fulfilling all the mitzvos would be removed, thus enabling him to keep them all.

The Gemara (Kiddushin 40a) tells us that if someone genuinely wants to fulfill a mitzvah but is unable to do so due to an *ones*, something that is outside of his control, he is credited as if he nonetheless fulfilled that mitzvah.

Therefore, Yaakov Avinu is telling Eisav that while it may have been impossible, for reasons beyond his control, to have kept all the 613 mitzvos while he was in the house of Lavan, nevertheless, תרתי"ג מצוות שמרתי, he keenly anticipated the moment when he would be able to observe them all, and therefore it is considered as if he did, in fact, fulfill all of the mitzvos.

In our observance of mitzvos are we keen to observe as many as possible, or are we pleased for the reprieve when circumstances arise that make it impossible for us to perform a particular mitzvah? Do we actively seek opportunities to perform, or are we happy to avoid? Rashi is teaching us that the path to תרתי"ג מצוות קיימתי starts with תרתי"ג מצוות שמרתי, a keen anticipation and desire for mitzvah observance opportunities. (L'hisaden B'ahavasecha, p. 399)

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I have lived with Lavan and remained until now..." (32:5)

Yaakov emphasized to Eisav that he only "sojournd" with Lavan, always considering himself a foreigner in Lavan's milieu. Even while Yaakov was immersed in his work for Lavan, Lavan's materialism was "foreign" and secondary to him; Yaakov's "home" and focus remained the Torah and its commandments.

This awareness enabled him to faithfully observe the Torah's precepts in an environment hostile to holiness (as Rashi points out, this is alluded to by the fact that the numerical value of the word for "I sojournd" [גרתני] is 613, the number of the Torah's commandments). Not only was he not distracted or deterred by the physical reality that surrounded him, he was able to imbue that very reality with holiness.

Similarly, by retaining our focus on our Divine mission while involved with the material aspects of life - and proudly emphasizing this perspective to those who do not yet share it - we can not only remain impervious to the world's materialistic draw but refine and elevate it, as well. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 68-69) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

FUELING HIS FIRE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Eisav, thus says your servant Yaakov: I stayed with Lavan and remained until now; I have cattle and donkeys...' (32:5-6)

Despite the fact that I stayed (גָּרְתִּי, *Garty*) with Lavan, I kept the 613 (תַּרְי"ג, *Taryag*) mitzvos. (Rashi)

Specifically because I stayed with Lavan and knew that he was trying to cause me to fall from my devotions, I strengthened myself and attained the knowledge and ability to observe the 613 mitzvos. I attained this level specifically because of my adversary, Lavan (i.e., I used the adversity I faced to bring me closer to Torah). (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 250)

By preparing to attack Yaakov, Eisav showed that he had reached the zenith of impure audacity: the desire to combat everything holy. Therefore, Yaakov sent this message to Eisav: "I stayed with Lavan" - despite having lived with evil, I managed to remain steadfast in serving G-d. Having observed the Torah, I attained the levels of holy boldness with which to counter your impure audacity. Moreover, "I have delayed my return until now" - "now" represents the power of prayer. That is, I built up my desire to serve G-d and transformed my Torah studies into prayers to achieve even greater levels. Now that I have attained those greater levels, I am ready to match and even overcome you. The "cattle and donkeys" represent the two Mashiachs who will eventually conquer all the forces of evil. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 40a)

Eisav hated Yaakov because he had received the blessings. When Eisav decided to kill him, Yaakov fled. En route to Lavan's house, Yaakov studied Torah in the yeshivah of Shem and Eiver for fourteen years (Rashi on 28:9). Fortified by that Torah learning, Yaakov was able to draw the light of G-d into everything he did.

Thus, he was able to draw down blessings, removing Leah and Rochel from the realm of evil of Lavan and bringing them into his realm of holiness. He was also able to draw great wealth, as nearly all Lavan's wealth was transferred to him through his cultivation of Lavan's flocks.

When Yaakov met Eisav again, he said, "I stayed with Lavan, and I observed the 613 mitzvos." That is, "I studied Torah and fortified myself with it. The 613 mitzvos of the Torah gave me the strength and ability to overcome Lavan. Therefore, I will be able to overcome you, too."

"FULFILLING" TORAH PROHIBITIONS

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"I have lived with Lavan and remained until now..." (32:5)

As Yaakov made his way back to Eretz Yisrael after spending twenty years in Charan with his uncle, Lavan, he delivered a message of reconciliation to his brother, Eisav.

He began this message by saying: "I have dwelled with Lavan, and I have been delayed until now."

Rashi, in one of the most famous passages in his Torah commentary, notes that the word גָּרְתִּי ("I have dwelled") in *gematria* equals 613 - תַּרְי"ג - and thus alludes to the 613 mitzvos of the Torah. Yaakov was saying to Eisav, "I dwelled with Lavan, the evil man, and [yet] I observed the 613 mitzvos, and I did not learn from his evil ways."

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe, in Amaros Tehoros, cites the Ohr Yitzchak who draws our attention to the word שִׁמְרָתִי ("I have observed") used by Rashi in this comment.

As we know, the 613 mitzvos consist of two basic groups of commands - *mitzvos asei* and *mitzvos lo ta'asei*. There are obligations and restrictions; things that we are required to do, and things which we are required to refrain from doing.

We might wonder, at first glance, how Yaakov could say that he fulfilled all 613 mitzvos. How does one "fulfill," for example, the prohibition against eating non-kosher food? The *mitzvos lo ta'asei*, the prohibitions of the Torah, are, seemingly, not commands that we fulfill, that we actively observe, but rather restrictions by which we abide. We do not perform these mitzvos, but rather refrain from forbidden activities so that we do not violate them.

What, then, does Rashi mean when he writes that Yaakov said about himself, "I observed the 613 mitzvos"?

Imagine a man telling his wife, "Look how good a husband I am - I haven't beaten you up once in all our years together!" Is his refraining from hurting his wife an expression of his love, commitment, and sacrifice?

The Ohr Yitzchak answers that we "fulfill" the *mitzvos lo ta'aseh* by restraining our impulses and desires. When we feel a drive or instinct to violate a Torah law, and we then muster the self-discipline and self-control to restrain ourselves, in subservience to Hashem's authority, we are credited with the observance of a mitzvah.

Indeed, we actively observe all the Torah's commands, both the *mitzvos asei* and the *mitzvos lo ta'aseh*, as observance of the Torah's prohibitions often requires us to work to hold ourselves back and to overcome our natural instincts and tendencies.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe explains that this is the meaning of Rashi's comment, "I dwelled with Lavan, the evil man, and [yet] I observed the 613 mitzvos."

Nobody embodied the *yetzer hara* more powerfully than Lavan. The man whom Yaakov lived with and worked for was a corrupt, immoral idol-worshiper. Yaakov was exposed to negative influences and pressures on a regular basis for twenty years. He could thus truly say, תַּרְי"ג מִצְוֹת, שִׁמְרָתִי - that he "performed" all the mitzvos, even the *mitzvos lo ta'asei*. Each and every day for those twenty years, Yaakov resisted the influence and pressure exerted by his immoral uncle and adhered to the Torah's laws and principles. And in so doing, he actively fulfilled all the mitzvos.

RECOGNIZING PROVIDENCE

Rebbe Nachman

"Yaakov was greatly frightened, and he was distressed. He divided the people who were with him into two camps, along with the sheep, cattle, and camels." (32:8)

Although G-d had promised to protect Yaakov with His Providence, Yaakov was afraid in case he had sinned. (Berachos 4a)

When a person perceives G-d's will - when he sees that everything happening to him is a result of Divine Providence - he comes to fear G-d. But if he believes that nature is a force unto itself, he cannot attain the fear of G-d. Yaakov was afraid that he had not appreciated Divine Providence and therefore had lost the fear of G-d and allowed himself to sin, in which case he no longer deserved G-d's Providence. (See Likutey Moharan II, 4:5)

DISTRESSED BY FEAR

Reb Avraham Chaim of Zlotchov

"Yaakov was greatly frightened, and he was distressed..." (32:8)

Yaakov was afraid of Eisav. His distress, however, was due not to his fear of his brother, but to the thought that he should have dared fear anyone else but G-d.

For this reason, he prayed: "Deliver me, I pray You, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav, for I fear him. If I can still find it in my heart to be afraid of Eisav, I know that I must still be far from perfect, and therefore I must pray to You to deliver me."

SCENES OF OUR LIFE

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"Yaakov was greatly frightened, and he was distressed..." (32:8)

The messengers whom Yaakov sent to Eisav returned and reported that Eisav was heading toward him with an army of four hundred men. In response, the Torah relates, וַיִּירָא - "Yaakov was very frightened, and he was distressed." Many different approaches have been taken to explain the difference between the two emotions that Yaakov experienced upon hearing the news that Eisav was making his way toward him with a large group of men - וַיִּירָא (fear) and וַיִּצְר (distress).

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe, in Amaros Tehoros, cites an earlier commentary explaining that Yaakov felt "distressed" because he felt "very frightened." His feelings of anxiety upset him. He sensed that the panic and dread which he experienced reflected a deficiency in his emunah, his faith in Hashem, and this upset him. And thus, the Torah tells, וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד - that Yaakov was very frightened, and, as a result, וַיִּצְר - he was distressed.

Of course, a certain degree of fear is not only acceptable, but also appropriate. A person who is completely fearless is likely very reckless; he will place himself in dangerous situations, and fail to take reasonable precautionary measures, because he experiences no fear. Indeed, during the first Gulf War, the Gerrer Rebbe - the Pnei Menachem - wrote that one should feel a degree of fear when an air raid siren sounds and he must run to a sealed room and put on a gas mask, due to the threat of a chemical attack. Someone who does not experience fear under such circumstances is not a healthy person. The problem becomes when וַיִּירָא...מְאֹד - when a person feels exceedingly anxious. Fear is valid and appropriate - but alongside our fear, we must recognize that nothing happens randomly, for no reason. Hashem is orchestrating and choreographing all events in the world and in our lives. And this awareness should enable us to keep our emotions in check, and avoid excessive, debilitating anxiety. (It goes without saying that I do not refer here to those suffering from anxiety as a mental disorder, who deserve unconditional support and encouragement, and should seek the professional help that they need.)

Over the course of life, we experience a wide range of emotions - joy, fear, sorrow, pain, angst, etc. These emotions are all real, they are all valid, and they should not be suppressed. But we are to recognize that they all originate from Hashem. When we feel joy over our successes and good fortune, we must acknowledge that these are Hashem's blessings. And when we feel sorrow, pain, and grief, we must recognize that these emotions, too, are part of Hashem's plan for us, as these are parts of the human experience.

We might draw an admittedly imperfect analogy to a movie, which consists of vastly different scenes, which evoke within the viewer vastly different emotions. Some scenes make the viewer cry, others make him laugh. But the viewer knows that each and every scene was carefully scripted and put together by a producer. And although the viewer has no idea what will happen next, or how the movie will end, he knows that the events aren't random, but are all part of a meticulously crafted plot.

This is how we should approach the different "scenes" in our lives, too. There will be times when we laugh, and times when we cry. There will be times of immense joy and celebration, and times of terrible pain and sorrow. We are to avoid the experience of וַיִּירָא...מְאֹד by remembering that everything that happens is part of the "script" which Hashem Himself has drawn up, and that He has drawn up the "scenes" that have yet to unfold, as well.

This realization gives us the strength and assurance that we need during times of hardship and uncertainty, so that we avoid debilitating fear and continue living meaningfully and productively under all circumstances that we find ourselves in.

PREPARED FOR PRAYER

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"If Eisav comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape." (32:9)

Rashi famously observes that Yaakov prepared in three ways for his encounter with Eisav - דורון (sending a gift), תפילה (prayer), and מלחמה (mobilizing for war).

Surprisingly, Yaakov first prepares for war before turning to G-d in prayer. We might have assumed that his initial reaction to the news that Eisav was approaching with an army would be to daven. Why did he first prepare for war by dividing his family and belongings (32:8), and only then beseech Hashem to help him (32:10-13)?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in *Meged Yosef*, explains that davening requires a mindset of truly depending on Hashem. The Torah relates in Parshas Bereishis (2:5) that even after G-d created vegetation, He did not make rain fall until the creation of Adam. Rashi explains that rain falls only when there are human beings who have a need for rainfall and pray for it. G-d did not bring rain before Adam's creation, because rain comes in response to the prayers of those who desperately need it and rely on it. Prayer, Rav Sorotzkin writes, requires a sense of dire necessity. We are to daven with humble subservience, and with a feeling of dependence on Hashem's grace.

And for this reason, Rav Sorotzkin explains, Yaakov first prepared for the eventuality of violent conflict before davening. His preparations for war put him into the tefillah mindset, making him realize the extent of the danger he faced, and his desperate need for Hashem's assistance and protection.

This is how tefillah is to be recited, and so Yaakov made a point of putting himself into this mindset before turning to G-d in prayer.

READY FOR BATTLE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"If Eisav comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape." (32:9)

Yaakov prepared himself to meet Eisav in three ways: with a gift, with prayer, and with readiness for battle. (Rashi)

Yaakov's meeting with Eisav represents the confrontation of every Jew with the forces of evil. A "gift" represents certain devotions that are given over to the Other Side (e.g., the goat to Azazel on Yom Kippur, the *mayim achronim* before the Grace After Meals, etc.). "Prayer" refers to one's supplications to G-d to be protected from the Evil One. "Battle" represents one's constant preparedness to repel "Eisav" and his cohorts, together with the determination never to fall into despair: "Even if I cannot fully win this battle, at least I will salvage some of my devotions, some of my preparedness to serve G-d."

IT'S NOT ALL OR NOTHING

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"If Eisav comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape." (32:9)

In preparing for his dreaded encounter with Eisav, and fearing the worst, Yaakov divided his family and his property, figuring that, *אם יבוא עשיו אל המחנה האחת והכהו* - if Eisav attacked one camp, the other would survive. Yaakov's strategy is an example of what is known today as diversification, spreading one's investments in order to mitigate losses and minimize risk. If one places all his assets in one investment, he is at risk of losing everything. The prudent policy is to diversify, so that if one investment is lost, the others will remain intact. Similarly, Yaakov divided his family and property in order to avoid a total loss.

Rav Noson of Breslov, in *Likutei Halachos* (Rosh Hashanah, 6:52), applies this strategy, which Yaakov employed when confronting a physical enemy, to our daily confrontations with our spiritual enemies. In life, we are constantly fighting and struggling against the *yetzer hara* in all its many different forms. And we need to acknowledge that we are not always going to win. Sometimes, the *yetzer hara* will overpower us, and we will fail. Rav Nosson warns us never to think that just because we were defeated in one area, we should not bother trying in other areas. As in the case of Yaakov Avinu, *אם יבוא עשיו אל המחנה האחת והכהו* - if one "camp" is defeated, nevertheless, *והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה* - we can still salvage the other "camp." If a person stumbled at night and saw something on his screen that he shouldn't be seeing, he should still make an effort to get up on time the next morning for *shul*. And if a person did not get out of bed in time for *shacharis*, he should still try hard to make it to *mincha* and *maariv*. And he should not let himself fly off the handle when talking to his children. Failing in one area does not mean that we should not try to succeed in others.

It is occasionally going to happen that *אם יבוא עשיו אל המחנה האחת והכהו* - our *yetzer hara* will get the best of us, and we will fail. We are not always going to triumph over our evil inclinations, our faults, and our weaknesses. But Torah life is not an "all or nothing" enterprise. When we fail, we must try to ensure that *והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה* - we don't collapse completely, that we continue maintaining everything else. We must not give up entirely just because of our struggles and failings in one area. Our mitzvos are always precious, even if one "camp" was defeated.

TEMPERED PRIDE

Vilna Gaon

"[Yaakov said,] 'I am not worthy of all the kindness and of all the truth that You have shown to Your servant... and now I am become two camps.'" (32:11)

A disciple of the wise must have within him an eighth of an eighth of pride. (Sotah 5)

Although it is not good to be arrogant, scholars must have an “eighth of an eighth” of pride in their character. Why just “an eighth of an eighth”? The eighth parshah of Bereishis is Vayishlach (32:4-36:43), which deals with Yaakov’s encounter with Eisav. The *pasuk*, “I am not worthy of all the kindness...”, is the eighth *pasuk* of that parshah.

This teaches scholars that even if they have just cause for pride in their accomplishments, as Yaakov became great - “and now I am become two camps” - they must remember that their achievements are all a gift from G-d - “I am not worthy of all the kindness...” - and realize that they are not worthy of such immense compassion.

PRAYING FOR GRATUITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[Yaakov said,] ‘I am not worthy of all the kindness and of all the truth that You have shown to Your servant...’” (32:11)

Although Yaakov was certainly aware of his many merits, he was also able to rise above natural human shortsightedness and realize how infinitely indebted we are all to G-d.

With this perspective, Yaakov humbly assumed that his merits were insufficient to deserve G-d’s protection. Therefore, he petitioned G-d to save him and his family not on account of his own merits - although he was indeed worthy - but out of His pure kindness.

Following Yaakov’s example, whenever we ask something of G-d, we too should appeal solely to His kindness and compassion. If we ask for assistance based on our worthiness - and we all certainly possess many merits - G-d’s response will be limited to the extent of our worthiness. But when we humbly disregard our worthiness, demonstrating that we, like Yaakov, have risen above our natural shortsightedness, G-d will respond with blessings that transcend the natural order. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 277-280) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

HUMBLE CLOSENESS

Baal HaTanya

“[Yaakov said,] ‘I am not worthy of all the kindness and of all the truth that You have shown to Your servant...’” (32:11)

The word “קטנתי” - I am not worthy,” can also be translated, “I have become small.” Yaakov Avinu was saying: “The great mercy which Hashem has done for me has caused me to become small and humble.”

The mercy which Hashem shows towards a person brings him closer to Hashem, and the closer one is to Hashem, the humbler he becomes.

HUMBLED BY KINDNESS

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Freidman

“[Yaakov said,] ‘I am not worthy of all the kindness... for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.’” (32:11)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: “I have grown small because of all the kindness...” Yaakov said: I have become small and humble in my own eyes because of all the immense kindness I have experienced. I have seen miracles, “for with my staff I passed over this Jordan.” These things should have taught me not to fear anyone. Yet I find myself fearing Eisav, “and now I have become two camps,” having divided my household into two camps out of fear. Hence, I feel that I am indeed quite small.

SPIRITUAL ATTACK

Beis Avraham

“For I fear him, lest he come and strike me down, mother and children.” (32:12)

Whenever a person is tested in the physical world, it is a sign that his soul is under attack in the spiritual world above.

When Yaakov saw Eisav’s strength, he knew that a great spiritual challenge faced him. Thus, he said, “I fear him, lest he come and strike me down, mother and children.” (Mother is a reference to man’s power of thought, and children refers to one’s actions and deeds.) In other words, Yaakov prayed that the *yetzer hara*, symbolized by Eisav, not contaminate the thoughts and deeds of Bnei Yisrael.

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Now deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav...” (32:12)

As Yaakov prepares to confront his brother Eisav for the first time in twenty years, he prays for G-d to save him from “the hand of my brother, the hand of Eisav” (32:12). Why did Yaakov have to clarify that his brother is Eisav, and what is the purpose of this double reference?

The Kedushas Levi suggests that Yaakov was seeking protection not only from the hand of his brother but also from Eisav’s evil influence. It is evident why one would seek safety from physical danger, and why one would seek immunity from negativity, so the real risk lies in his becoming too comfortable with Eisav to the point that he sees him more as a brother than an evil influence.

While it may be easy to refrain from doing things we clearly identify as wrong, ambiguous situations are more challenging to identify and avoid. While awareness is the first step in bypassing negative influences, avoiding such circumstances in the first place will ensure that we never get the chance to make the wrong decision.

KEEPING A SAFE DISTANCE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Now deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav..." (32:12)

The phrase "the hand of my brother" seems superfluous. Eisav symbolized the *Sitra Achara*, the Angel of Death, and the evil impulse. Thus, on a deeper level, Yaakov was asking G-d to prevent what Eisav symbolized from becoming his brother.

This explains why the verse says, "from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav." Yaakov was pleading with G-d that the evil impulse should not become his "brother." For sometimes, G-d forbid, the evil impulse tries to tempt a person to transgress by disguising the transgression as a mitzvah. That way the evil impulse can befriend a person and quickly ensnare him to sin. Ponder this.

THE GOOD TYPE OF GOOD

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"[Yaakov said to G-d,] 'And You said, I will surely do good with you.'" (32:13)

Why does the Torah say, "Surely do good?"

G-d bestows goodness upon the Jewish nation and His bounty to the other nations as well. The difference between the two, however, is that when G-d confers goodness on the Jewish people, He does so for their benefit.

By contrast, when He confers goodness on the other nations, who oppose Jewish values, it is to their detriment, as it says, "He repays those who hate Him, to their face, to cause them to perish." Thus, the goodness they receive is not truly for their benefit. However, when conferring goodness on the Jewish people, it is truly for their benefit.

That is why the verse adds the word "surely," to teach us that G-d's goodness is bestowed on us for our benefit.

OVERT KINDNESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"[Yaakov said to G-d,] 'And You said, I will surely do good with you.'" (32:13)

The deeper meaning of the doubled Hebrew verb "I will surely do good" (הֵיטֵב אֵיטֵב) is that the goodness of Divine beneficence should be apparent.

For sometimes the expressions of Divine kindnesses are concealed, and occasionally, they are concealed so much that, on the contrary, the Divine expressions of kindness may seem detrimental, since the inner goodness is hidden.

By contrast, when G-d performs overt acts of kindness with a person, the goodness is revealed.

WHOLESOME GOODNESS

Reb Moshe Leib Sassover

"[Yaakov said to G-d,] 'And You said, I will surely do good with you.'" (32:13)

Almighty G-d, it is a fact that all that You do is surely good, for it is written, "Evil does not come from You." However, we know that good can come from good but good can also come from evil.

So, I pray and beg of You, give us good that is a wholesome good, as Yaakov prayed *Haytiv Aytiv*, good for good, that is "surely good."

OVERCOMING ANGER

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And he [Yaakov] took of that which came to his hand a tribute for Eisav, his brother..." (32:14)

Since Eisav was an angry person, why did Yaakov send him a present that showed off his wealth? Wouldn't Eisav be jealous of that wealth, making him even angrier and desirous of harming Yaakov even more?

Yaakov planted a telling message in his choice of a gift for Eisav, whose whole being and power stemmed from anger and thus represents the paradigm of anger. One who controls his anger can merit great wealth (see Likutey Moharan I, 68).

By sending Eisav the fruits of his twenty-year relationship with Lavan, Yaakov demonstrated that he had never succumbed to the frustrations of Lavan's constant attempts to deceive him. Rather, he had controlled his anger all that time, thereby meriting great wealth. More importantly, Yaakov was able to control anger - i.e., Eisav - itself. (Likutey Halakhos VIII, p. 191b)

SO MANY OPTIONS

Yismach Moshe

"And he [Yaakov] took of that which came to his hand a tribute for Eisav, his brother." (32:14)

Yaakov did not know what to select or give because everything had a spark of the Divine in it. Therefore, he took whatever was at hand with the assumption that it would be proper.

FINDING RESPITE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"He put his servants in charge of each herd separately. He said to his servants, 'Go ahead of me and leave space between one herd and the next.'" (32:17)

Foreseeing the future exiles, Yaakov prayed that when the Jews were in exile and beset by troubles, there should be some "breathing space" between their sufferings. (Bereishis Rabbah 76:8)

Yaakov foresaw the long exile and its suffering, and understood the despair that would befall his descendants. He prayed for them to have the wisdom to perceive the brief respites amid the suffering. He prayed that they would recognize the respites even while enduring their individual sufferings, and always find the few comforts between difficulties that give a person the strength to continue. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 388)

PARADISE VS PURGATORY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"To whom do you belong and where are you going; and who is the owner of this that is before you?" (32:18)

Mashal: An old, wise Master sat in deep meditation with his eyes closed, legs crossed, and hands folded in his lap. Suddenly he was interrupted by the harsh and demanding voice of a marauding warrior.

"Old man! Teach me about Paradise and Purgatory!"

The Master slowly opened his eyes.

"So, you wish to know the secret?" he replied, in a soft, steady voice. "You, who are so unkempt and ugly. You, covered with dirt, hair uncombed, whose breath is foul, whose sword is all rusty and neglected. You dare ask of Paradise and Purgatory?"

The warrior was furious and cursed the old man. He drew his sword and raised it high over his head. His face turned crimson, and the veins of his neck stood out in bold relief.

"That is Purgatory," said the old man gently, just as the sword began its descent.

In that split second, the warrior was overcome with amazement, awe, compassion, and love for this gentle being who had dared to risk his life to teach him such a valuable lesson. He stopped his sword in mid-flight and his eyes filled with joyous, grateful tears.

"And that," said the Master, smiling, "is Paradise!"

Nimshal: The Chiddushei HaRim, R' Yitzchak Meir Alter zt'l, writes that Eisav's questions are remarkably similar to the Mishnah in Avos (3:1): "Reflect on three things and you won't come to sin: Know from where you came; where you are going, before Whom you're destined to give a future reckoning."

Why would the evil Eisav suddenly adopt the pious tone of the Mishnah? Because even the *yetzer hara* asks these very same questions to bring one to despair and sin. For in a split second one can plunge from the heights of joy, *yiras Shamayim*, and the World to Come, to a life of despair and negativity - the path to Purgatory.

[Fortunately, the opposite is true as well; in a split second, one can turn from a life of despair and negativity to the heights of joy, and the World to Come - the path to Paradise.]

STOP AND THINK

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"He instructed the first one, saying, 'When my brother Eisav meets you and asks you, saying: To whom do you belong, where are you going, and whose are these that are before you?'" (32:18)

As part of his preparations for the showdown, Yaakov sent gifts through messengers to Eisav. Yaakov told the messengers that when they meet Eisav, he will ask three questions:

1. Who are you?
2. Where are you going?
3. To whom do these (gifts) in front of you belong?

Is there a message in the three questions that Yaakov said Eisav would ask?

HaRav Avinoam Maimon suggests that these three questions describe how a person should lead their life.

- The first question was "למי אתה - To whom do you belong?" Which community do you identify with? Who influences your opinions and your beliefs? How important are those beliefs in your day-to-day life?
- Second, "ואנה תלך - Where are you going?" What goals and aspirations drive you forward?
- Finally, "למי אלה לפניך - To whom are these in front of you?" Will your children, who go before you, continue in your path? Will your grandchildren continue the legacy of their past?

These are the questions that each one of us needs to consider regularly to ensure that we set our compass in the direction that will ensure that we know who we are, where we are going, and that our children will continue on the same path.

The story is told of an elderly Rav in Soviet Russia who one morning was on his way to shul. Suddenly, an armed police officer approached him, drew his gun, and asked the elderly rabbi, "Who are you? What are you doing here? Where are you going?"

The rabbi smiled and quietly asked the officer, "Tell me, officer, how much do you earn as a policeman?"

The officer replied that he earned twenty kopeks a day. "I would like to ask a favor from you," said the rabbi.

"I will pay you twenty kopeks a day if you promise me that every day on my way to shul, you will wait for me here, stop me, and ask me those three questions:

- Who are you?
- What are you doing here?
- Where are you going?!"

(Bein Adam LaParshah, p. 129)

OUTSMARTING THE EVIL IMPULSE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"When my brother Eisav meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong...'" (32:18)

When a person first approaches G-d, his evil impulse strongly resists. To counteract it, a person should ponder that being devout has material benefits as well. This way, his evil impulse will not object to his attaching himself to Him. Later on, after attaching himself to G-d, a person should desire only to give his Maker pleasure - not to profit in this world.

This is the deeper significance of the words "When my brother Eisav" - alluding to the evil impulse, who is called Eisav - "meets you," i.e., encounters the angels of Yaakov, meaning Yaakov's holy thoughts that created these angels, and he attempts to oppose these holy thoughts. When this happens to us, the question arises what to do.

So the Torah continues, "Answer him, 'We belong to your servant Yaakov'" i.e., "we are indeed Yaakov's angels, created by his good deeds, but do not oppose Yaakov on account of his good deeds, because these good deeds are a gift sent to my master, to Eisav, meaning, it is in Eisav's best interests not to interfere with Yaakov, since through Yaakov's good deeds, Eisav will benefit in this world."

Thus, the material reward available in this world serves as a bribe to silence the evil impulse.

CONSISTENT AFFIRMATIONS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"This belongs to your servant Yaakov; it is a gift sent to my master, to Eisav, and my master is right behind me." (32:19)

As Yaakov prepares to face his brother Eisav, he instructs his camp to group his peace offerings, with people at the front and rear of each group of gifts. Yaakov instructs each group leader to say, "This belongs to your servant Yaakov; it is a gift sent to my master, to Eisav, and my master is right behind me" (32:19). Rather than telling us that each group was given the exact instructions, the Torah specifies that the second, third, and all those who followed were instructed to speak to Eisav in precisely the same manner. Why would the Torah need to mention each group separately?

Kli Yakar explains that it was important for Yaakov's people to deliver a consistent message of conciliation, where each response is deferential to Eisav. This same message was conveyed by each group leader, signifying unity and solidarity among all of Yaakov's people and reinforcing the message to Eisav that he is relevant to Yaakov and that Yaakov sees him as his master and deserving of these gifts.

Yaakov's approach of blitzing Eisav with affirmations of his worth was effective in appeasing Eisav's desire for revenge and is a crucial lesson for us to internalize.

Expressing to someone their worth to us, even if they already know it, can profoundly change their reality. However, that only works when our message is consistent.

SPARKLING POSSESSIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He took them and moved them across the river and then moved all his possessions." (32:24)

The Baal Shem Tov taught that our ownership of a particular object is an indication that our souls are particularly connected to the "sparks" of Divinity that sustain that object.

This is why we are drawn to certain objects and not to others, since we are naturally drawn to objects that are spiritually connected to us.

By using these objects for a holy purpose, we reveal the G-dliness inherent in these objects. (See Keter Shem Tov 218 and Ohr Torah 413, explaining Rosh HaShanah 27a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

THE WAR FOR TORAH

Chofetz Chaim

"Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (32:25)

We know that Avraham Avinu represented the *middah* of *chesed* - kindness. Yitzchak represented *avodah* - service, and Yaakov represented Torah.

The Angel of Eisav could bear *chesed*; he could even abide *avodah*. But he could not tolerate Torah study for it is the foundation upon which the existence of Bnei Yisrael rests.

Thus, from all the Avos, he fought with Yaakov, for he - and the *yetzer hara* as well - constantly declare war against the Torah and those who study it.

ALREADY A WINNER

Rabbi Binyomin Pruzansky

"Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (32:25)

We all struggle in different ways. We all have our tests.

Yaakov wrestled an angel and got hurt, but the struggle itself was the victory.

If you're fighting on, you're winning.

The name "Yisrael" means, "you fought and won," because Hashem wants each and every one of us to face our challenges and keep fighting.

We don't win by seeing our opponents on the floor, defeated, we win as soon as we start fighting, as soon as we take on the challenge and believe we can win.

LEAVE NO MAN BEHIND

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (32:25)

At one point during Yaakov's journey back to Eretz Yisrael, he found himself alone, and he then came under attack by an angel. Yaakov and the angel wrestled through the night, until Yaakov prevailed. But while the angel was unable to subdue Yaakov, it did succeed in inflicting an injury, dislodging Yaakov's hip. To commemorate this event, the Torah tells (32:33), we refrain from the גיד הנשה - part of the animal corresponding to the part of the body where Yaakov suffered his injury.

We must ask, why is this the way we commemorate Yaakov's triumph over the angel - by refraining from a certain portion of meat? We celebrate our ancestors' victories through festivity, by eating. (As the old joke goes, "They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat!") Why is this particular triumph - Yaakov's victory over the angel that wrestled with him - commemorated in the opposite fashion, by abstaining from a specific food?

The Chizkuni explains that the prohibition of גיד הנשה does not celebrate Yaakov's triumph over the angel, but rather punishes us for the neglect that resulted in our patriarch's painful injury. Yaakov came under attack, as mentioned, when he was left alone - ויותר יעקב לבדו. After Yaakov brought his family and possessions across the river, he remembered that he had forgotten some small items across the river, and he went back to get them. The Chizkuni writes that his children were at fault for allowing Yaakov to go back across the river alone at night. At least one or several of them should have joined him so he would not be alone and vulnerable. Had they been more responsible, Yaakov would not have been attacked, and he would not have been injured in his גיד הנשה. This is why we are commanded not to eat this part of an animal - as a punishment, of sorts, for leaving Yaakov alone, and causing him to suffer harm.

No Jew should ever be left לבדו at any given time. We are all responsible for one another, and our responsibility includes ensuring that no fellow Jew is ever alone and vulnerable. We must never be too tired or too busy to join a fellow Jew in need; no matter the circumstances, no Jew should ever be alone.

NOT WHAT, BUT HOW

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (32:25)

When you read through the *pesukim*, you notice that there is one really important detail missing from the story. What exactly were Yaakov and the angel (who according to the Medrash was the angel of Eisav) fighting about?

The only thing that the Torah shares is that Yaakov was left alone with this "man," and they wrestled until sunrise. Yaakov then gets injured, but he did not release the angel until he received a *brachah*. Upon receiving a *brachah* in the form of his new name Yisrael, Yaakov let go of the angel and the angel left. What was the impetus for this fight and what are we to learn from it?

I once heard a beautiful suggestion. Oftentimes we are only focused on the end game. We tend to feel that it doesn't matter how we achieve our goals only if we achieve our goals. We don't always value the work and the journey; we only value the end result.

The Torah is teaching us, by not mentioning the reason for the confrontation, that sometimes the struggle IS the goal. Sometimes, it's less important what we are trying to accomplish, and it's more important to focus on how we want to get there.

Yaakov needed to struggle in advance of his meeting with Eisav so that he had a chance to work through his inner struggles and be prepared before sparring with his nemesis.

This is a powerful lesson that we must live by and, more importantly, model for our children.

We certainly need to set objectives for ourselves to achieve. However, we must also recognize that the impact of how we accomplish our goals is equally as important in ensuring that we and our families continue to grow as Jews and as people.

TACKLING HURDLES

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (32:25)

Rashi, quoting the Gemara (Chullin 91a), explains that Yaakov crossed the river alone to retrieve some small jars that he had left there, when he was met by the angel of Eisav who fought with him until daybreak.

However, the Rashbam argues with Rashi and takes a very novel approach to this episode:

He explains that Yaakov's intention in crossing the river was not to fetch small jars - he was trying to run away from Eisav! He knew that Eisav was most probably coming to kill him, and therefore did the most sensible thing, he was trying to run away in order to sneak into Eretz Yisrael without any confrontation. (The reason why Yaakov was willing to leave his family unprotected was because he knew that Eisav's vendetta was against him alone, and not his family.)

The Rashbam goes on to explain that the angel who met him was not the angel of Eisav, as Rashi says. Rather, it was Yaakov's own angel who was trying to prevent him from escaping from Eisav!

Rav Zev Leff learns from this Rashbam that although we are never permitted to go looking for problems, if we happen to be faced with one, we are not permitted to turn and run without meeting the challenge facing us. And even though running away may be the correct solution, such a decision cannot be taken until we have thought through all the consequences.

We are in this world to grow, and this is mainly achieved through successfully climbing the hurdles that are placed in our way. They may be difficult to overcome, but they are a gift to help us to become better people. So, in the words of Rav Yitzchak Berkovits when discussing such struggles - "enjoy the challenge!"

CHEERED ON BY THE OTHER SIDE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And he [the angel] said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' And he [Yaakov] said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'" (32:27)

After a full night's battle, Yaakov manages to subdue his opponent until daybreak, at which point, his combatant admits to being an angel and asks to be released, explaining: "From the day I was created, my time has not come to sing praises before Hashem until now" (Chullin 91b).

This seems very unusual. An angel is called to fight Yaakov, and it happens to be that his turn to praise Hashem falls on the following morning.

Was there no other angel available who did not have such an important appointment for the next day?

We can ask another question based on what is said in the name of Rav Chaim Brisker, that an angel is only permitted to sing to Hashem once he has succeeded in his mission. If that is the case, here the angel was subdued - he lost! If so, how can he now go and sing to Hashem?

The Zohar (135b) explains that the angel with whom Yaakov fought against was a representation of the *yetzer hara*, evil inclination. (The Zohar identifies this angel as the celestial representation of Eisav who also represents the *yetzer hara*, in addition to the satan and the angel of death. See also Rashi on this verse and Bava Basra 16a.)

We have a vision of the *yetzer hara* as an evil being whose life's task is to make us stumble at every opportunity. If we fail, he rejoices, and if we succeed, he commits to try harder to get us next time. Yet, this is not accurate. Like every other angel, the *yetzer hara* is an emissary of Hashem, and thus, just like Hashem, he wants us to succeed.

Accordingly, we can now answer our questions. The *yetzer hara's* role is to fiercely challenge us, but his ultimate goal is for us to overcome his challenge, causing us to become greater. Therefore, by losing to Yaakov, the *yetzer hara* - as a true emissary of Hashem - really won!

As such, it was not the case that the angel's turn to sing before Hashem "happened" to be on that day, it was only because Yaakov overcame him that he had now completed his mission. Only after having succeeded in his task could he present himself before Hashem and sing His praises.

When it comes to facing challenges, we certainly need to fear the power that the *yetzer hara* wields against us. However, based on the above, we should be comforted and strengthened to know that we will never face a challenge that we cannot overcome. In fact, even our biggest adversary is rooting for our success!

IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And he [the angel] said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' And he [Yaakov] said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'" (32:27)

Bnei Yisrael is named after the famous struggle between Yaakov and the Angel of Eisav: "Because you struggled (שרית) with G-d and with man and prevailed" (32:29). However, when Yaakov said to the angel, "I will not let you go until you bless me," the Patriarch was delivering a powerful life lesson: Within every crisis lies the possibility of blessing. Events that are the most painful are also those that, in retrospect, allow us to grow the most.

It is crisis, explains the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Lord Jonathan Sacks zt'l, which forces us to make difficult but necessary decisions. It plunges us from the surface to the depths, where we discover strengths we previously didn't know we had and a clarity of purpose we hitherto lacked. One must therefore say to every crisis, "I will not let you go until you bless me!"

Struggle isn't easy. Although Yaakov Avinu was not defeated, he "limped." Battles leave scars. Yet Hashem is with us even when He seems to be against us. For if we refuse to let go of Him, He refuses to let go of us, giving us the strength to survive and emerge stronger, wiser, and blessed.

The famous question is asked: "Why do bad things happen to good people?" There are actually two ways of asking this question. The first is to wonder: Why has Hashem done this to me? Never ask this question, because one can never know the answer. Humans think of now; Hashem thinks of eternity. We can never see the universe from His point of view, so we will never find the answer to "why me?" But there is another way to ask it: What does Hashem want me to learn from this? How is He challenging me to grow? How must I respond? Asking it this way involves looking forward, not back. And that is how to deal with crisis. Wrestle with it, refusing to let it go until it blesses you, until you emerge stronger, better, or wiser than before. To be a Jew is not to accept defeat. That is the meaning of faith.

TIME TO SING

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"And he said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.'" (32:27)

Rashi explains that the angel asked to be released because the time had arrived for him to sing G-d's praises. Until that moment, the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 78:1) says this angel had never sung G-d's praises and now the moment arrived for it to sing G-d's praises. We must therefore ask why the time for the angel to sing arrived at that particular moment.

The answer seems to be the following. Every nation has a patron angel. Whenever a nation performs an act of kindness for the Jewish people, the nation's patron angel is energized and sings a song of praise to G-d.

In our passage, the angel spoken of was Eisav's patron angel. When Eisav performed an act of kindness to Yaakov, Eisav's angel was empowered to sing a song of praise to G-d. This is why the Midrash says this angel had never before sung G-d's praises and now its time had arrived, for Eisav had never before acted kindly to Yaakov, and now he did so. Now, therefore, the time had finally arrived for the angel to sing G-d's praise.

WORLDLY INTERACTIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[The angel said to Yaakov,] 'No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with [angels of] G-d and with men, and you have prevailed.'" (32:29)

The name "Yisrael" did not replace Yaakov's original name but complemented it. It expressed a new, loftier status that he was now granted.

Whereas "Yaakov" had to struggle with Eisav to secure Yitzchak's blessings, these blessings were now granted to "Yisrael" openly by Eisav's guardian angel.

Yaakov's two names represent the two ways in which we interact with the world.

Sometimes the material world or our own materialistic tendencies can get in the way of our Divine consciousness or mission in life; we must then, like "Yaakov," struggle to reveal the Divinity that underlies the material world.

At other times, the world can be used as a means to enhance Divine consciousness or fulfill our Divine mission; at such times, our challenge, like "Yisrael" is to use these opportunities both to bring the world to a higher level of Divine consciousness and to promote our own spiritual growth. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 795-798) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

CONSTANT AWARENESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"[The angel said to Yaakov,] 'No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with [angels of] G-d and with men, and you have prevailed.'" (32:29)

Some people cleave to G-d continuously, even while engaged in seemingly pedestrian conversations. Others cleave to G-d mentally while learning Torah and observing mitzvos, but not while busy with day-to-day affairs.

The first level is called Yisrael (ישראל), a composite of the words for "mine is the head" (לי ראש) and "G-d is upright" (ישר אל), indicating its superiority. The second, lower level is called Yaakov (יעקב), a composite of the letter yud (י) and the word for "heel" (עקב), indicating an inferior level.

This is what the angel meant when it said, "No longer Yaakov... but Yisrael, because you have commanding power," namely, "you cleave to G-d even while engaged in ordinary talk."

"With G-d and with men, and have prevailed" means "you successfully focus your thoughts on G-d at all times."

BEYOND NATURE, BEYOND MAN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[The angel said to Yaakov,] 'No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with [angels of] G-d and with men, and you have prevailed.'" (32:29)

The channels through which G-d funnels His energy into the world in order to continuously create it and sustain it - the spiritual forces that guide what we commonly refer to as "the forces of nature" - are His entourage of angels (see Igeret HaKodesh 25).

Nature hides G-d's presence in the world. Seeing beyond nature's facade - acknowledging G-d's existence and His involvement in our lives - is already a great challenge. But a still greater challenge is the toxic cynicism of those who mock our spiritual path.

Eisav's guardian angel told Yaakov that he had "prevailed over angels and men," meaning over the angels of nature as well as the negativity of cynics. By giving us the name "Yisrael," G-d thus assured us that both the forces of nature and human scoffers will ultimately join our efforts to lead a spiritually moral life and reveal G-d's presence in the world - and bless us with success, as well. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 796-797) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Reb Noson of Breslov

“And Yaakov asked, ‘Please tell your name.’ But he said, ‘Why do you ask my name?’ Then he blessed him there.” (32:30)

Angels are given names according to their missions, and these missions change constantly. Therefore, the angel said to Yaakov, “Why do you ask my name?” Yaakov, on the other hand, represents truth and stability - i.e., an unchanging mission to serve G-d.

This truth equipped him with the ability to withstand the attacks of the angels and always choose the right path. Thus, the angel said to Yaakov, “for you have battled with angels... and have been victorious.”

SHINING LIKE THE SUN

Rebbe Nachman

“The sun shone for him as he passed Penuel. He was limping on his hip.” (32:32)

The sun shone in order to heal him. (Rashi)

Yaakov is compared to the sun, which brings healing. Similarly, charity is compared to the sun - as in the phrase “A sun of charity” (Malachi 3:20). Like the sun, charity brings healing. (See Likutey Moharan I, 86; *ibid.*, I, 251)

Just as the sun illumines a person’s physical path, so does his intellect illumine his path in life. The name Yaakov (יעקב) itself implies intellect, as in the phrase *va’yaakveini* (ויעקבני, he outwitted me) (Bereishis 27:36). (See Likutey Moharan I, 1; *ibid.*, I, 74)

DRAWING THEM CLOSER

Rebbe Nachman

“Therefore, to this day Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the gid ha’nasheh, which is on the hip socket, because he hit Yaakov’s hip socket on the gid ha’nasheh.” (32:33)

There are three explanations for the word *ha’nasheh* (הנשה, sciatic): *Nashu ve’kaftzu* (נשו וקפצו, moved away from); *Nashani* (נשני, forgot or became removed from); *Nashu gevuratam* (נשו גבורתם, lost their strength). (Rashi)

These three interpretations may be applied to those who have lost the courage to approach and serve G-d. *Nashu ve’kaftzu* - there are some people who at one time recognized G-d, but who have moved away from Him. *Nashani* - others have, over time, forgotten their connection to G-d. *Nashu gevuratam* - still others want to serve G-d but feel too weak to do so.

The angel who wrestled with Yaakov intended to create situations that would induce people to leave G-d. But Yaakov and the tzaddikim in general are always seeking ways to help people who are far from G-d to draw close to Him. (See Likutey Moharan I, 56:3)

LOVED AND PROTECTED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Therefore, to this day Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the gid ha’nasheh, which is on the hip socket...” (32:33)

The purpose of this prohibition is not just to commemorate the fact that Eisav’s guardian angel dislocated Yaakov’s hip joint, but to remember the entire story of the struggle with this angel and how G-d miraculously rescued Yaakov from him.

The reason we commemorate this miracle in particular is because it expresses G-d’s promise of our survival throughout history. By rescuing Yaakov from the power of Eisav, G-d was telling Yaakov’s descendants, the Jewish people, that despite all the persecutions they would later suffer throughout their various exiles at the hands of oppressing nations, they would never be destroyed.

It is significant that we commemorate this episode by recalling a seemingly minor detail of it - what happened to Yaakov’s hip. By doing so, we celebrate how G-d’s love and commitment to Jewish survival extends to every detail of our existence, even seemingly minor ones. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 148-154) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

BUILDING BRIDGES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“He went ahead of them, and he prostrated himself to the earth seven times, until he approached his brother.” (33:3)

When Eisav was coming toward his brother Yaakov with four hundred men, Rashi tells us that he came with hatred in his heart.

Yaakov, too, felt animosity toward his brother and prepared himself for the inevitable confrontation.

What happened, however? The Torah tells us: “He (Yaakov) bowed seven times until he came close to his brother.”

R’ Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt”l explains that with each bow, Yaakov attempted to find merit in his brother, to release his hatred and “come close” to Eisav.

Overcoming his ill feelings had the miraculous effect of softening Eisav, too, until Eisav felt mercy toward Yaakov, and ran to him and kissed him with brotherly love.

A beautiful story is told of two brothers, who lived on adjoining farms.

Although they grew up extremely close, a small misunderstanding grew into a major confrontation, until it finally exploded into an exchange of bitter words, followed by long weeks of silence between them.

One morning, a carpenter knocked on one brother’s door.

“Hi. I’m looking for some work,” he said. “Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there for me?”

"Actually, yes," the farmer said. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my brother's property. We used to be very close, but not anymore. I want you to build me an eight-foot-high fence, so I won't have to look at his place anymore. That should teach him a lesson."

The carpenter nodded. "Show me the nails and the post-hole digger, and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you."

He worked hard all that day, measuring, sawing, and nailing. At sunset, when the farmer came out to see the progress, his jaw dropped.

There was no fence there at all. Instead, there was a bridge that stretched from one side of the creek to the other! And there was his brother, coming towards him, across the newly built bridge, his arms outstretched!

"You are quite a fellow to build this bridge after all that's gone on between us," his brother said.

The two men met at the middle of the bridge and embraced one another. Peace had finally been re-established between them.

As for the carpenter? He could be seen, toolbox in hand, walking out into the horizon, on his way to build more bridges.

KEEP GETTING UP

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"He prostrated himself to the earth seven times..." (33:3)

The Midrash Rabbah teaches: Why did Yaakov Avinu bow seven times? On account of the verse, "A tzaddik falls seven times and gets back up."

This midrash is teaching us that even if a person falls time after time, to the point where he "bowed to Eisav" seven times, he still has the power to get up, strengthen himself and restart as if his falls never were.

SHOW OF DISCONTENT

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Freidman

"And Eisav said, 'I have enough, my brother...' (33:9)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "And Eisav said: 'I have much, my brother...'"

Yaakov urged the gifts on Eisav, saying: "...because I have everything..." (33:11). It will never occur to an Eisav that he has "everything," for however much he may have, he will always want more. Yaakov, on the other hand, "rejoices in his portion." However little someone of Yaakov's character may possess, he will feel he has "everything" and desire nothing more.

GIFT OF CHARITY

Rebbe Nachman

"'No, please, if I have found favor in your eyes, take my gift from my hand,' Yaakov said. 'For seeing your face is like seeing G-d's Face, and you have shown me favor...' (33:10)

When a person gives charity, he manifests G-dliness in the world. If a person is unfairly taxed, it is considered as if he gave that money to charity. (Bava Basra 9a)

Thus, Yaakov, who felt forced to present a gift to Eisav, said, "In seeing your face and giving you a gift, it is as if I gave to charity, and so merited to see G-d's Face." (Likutey Moharan II, 4:10)

TRUE WEALTH

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Please accept my blessing as it was brought to you, for G-d has been gracious to me, for I have everything..." (33:11)

The Torah depicts Eisav as a person who said, "Yesh li rav - I have a great deal." Yaakov, on the other hand, said, "Yesh li kol - I have everything." Indeed, this is the sign of Yaakov's moral superiority over Eisav. But if Yaakov has "everything," why doesn't Eisav see this and be influenced positively? In fact, why doesn't the authentic and spiritual Torah way of life influence all Jews? Why do they not see the value of a Torah lifestyle?

Rabbi Berel Wein shlit'a explains that it may very well be that Yaakov has everything and Eisav only has a great deal, but that is not quite how it appears to the rest of the world. Yaakov is alone, while Eisav is popular. Yaakov is burdened and persecuted, while Eisav is strong and respected. Yaakov limps and apologizes, while Eisav struts and issues orders. The world shortsightedly prefers Eisav's glorious "rav" to Yaakov's humble "kol." Therefore, Yaakov's way does not seem to be an enviable one.

Wise people, however, see life in the long range and not just for its temporary satisfaction. Their definition of "kol" carries spiritual and moral appeal and is not measured solely by material criteria. Our holy Sages assure us that living a moral, observant, Torah way of life is the way to really have "everything."

In a world that single-mindedly pursues financial and social accomplishments, where it sometimes seems that nothing is ever enough, it is essential that we reestablish within our lives the priorities of Yaakov Avinu a satisfaction with our share in life, an appreciation of our glorious history and tradition, and a sense of fulfillment in striving to be a holy people.

SEEKING WISDOM

Rebbe Nachman

"G-d has been gracious to me, for I have everything..." (33:11)

Initially, Eisav wanted to destroy Yaakov and his children. But when Yaakov said, "G-d has been gracious to me," he imbued himself and his children with the blessing of gaining grace or favor. (Bereishis Rabbah 78:10)

The letter *Chet* (ח) alludes to intellect, as it suggests the words *Chiyut* (חייות, vitality) and *Chokhmah* (חכמה, G-dly wisdom). To attain *Chokhmah*, a person requires the faith that it exists, so that he may seek it. This faith is alluded to by the letter *Nun* (נ). Together, *Chet* and *Nun* form the word *Chen* (חן, grace or favor).

Yaakov had faith and sought wisdom. Thus, he attained *Chen*, and as a result, found favor in Eisav's eyes. In general, a person who has G-dly intellect attains grace and favor. (See Likutey Moharan I, 1:4)

CLOTHES MAKES THE MAN

Reb Yehoshua Belzer

"[Eisav said,] 'Travel on and let us go and I will proceed alongside of you.'" (33:12)

Rashi explains "alongside" to mean "in line with you." Eisav wanted that Yaakov's children should dress the same as he did. In all other ways they could do as they were accustomed, but not in dress.

Yaakov answered that the children were tender, meaning vulnerable. Clothing has a great influence on a person. His concern was that if the children made a change in their clothing and dressed like Eisav, they would then eventually take on his other customs.

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Let my lord go ahead of his servant. I will make my way slowly, according to the pace of the herds before me and the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir." (33:14)

He who wants to purify himself must be patient. The Talmud offers the analogy of one who enters a spice shop wishing to purchase a sweet-smelling fragrance. He is told by the proprietor, "Wait! Absorb the smells, see what is attractive, and then you will buy." (Yoma 39a)

This was Yaakov's attitude: "I have much to do. My children are young and not tempered."

Only by being patient can one attain his goal. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 226a)

FURNISHING OUR TRUE HOME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He [Yaakov] built himself a house and made huts for his livestock. Therefore, he named the place Sukkot." (33:17)

Allegorically, this means that Yaakov made a "home" for his true, inner self - his Divine soul and its spiritual needs but only temporary "huts" for his possessions and physical needs (his "livestock"). In other words, he made sure that his Divine soul felt "at home" in his daily life, but kept his material concerns "outside" of his focus, lest they feel too much "at home" and start to take over his life.

Similarly, a visitor once asked Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, why his home was so poorly furnished. Rabbi Dov Ber answered by asking his visitor, "Well, why don't I see any of your furniture with you?"

"Because I am now in transit," replied the visitor, "but my home is properly furnished!"

Rabbi Dov Ber then told his visitor, "I, too, am just in transit through this world, and like you, I do take care to furnish my real home - the next world - properly." (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, p. 68) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SHELTERED BY FAITH

Reb Noson of Breslov

"He [Yaakov] built himself a house and made huts for his livestock. Therefore, he named the place Sukkot." (33:17)

Yaakov worked his entire life to reveal faith in G-d. Even his house was built with this goal in mind. For faith is mainly revealed through the idea of Sukkah (סוכה), which is similar to Sokheh (סוכה, oversee). The tzaddik oversees faith and nurtures it, using every means available to him to reveal it to others. Thus, "He made sukkahs for his flocks" - for those people whom he was able to influence, he illuminated true faith. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 257b)

ENTIRELY COMPLETE

Rebbe Nachman

"Yaakov came in peace (lit. whole) to the city of Shechem..." (33:18)

Shalem (שלם, whole or complete) applies to health, wealth, and Torah studies. (Shabbat 33b)

Despite the efforts of Lavan and Eisav to destroy him, Yaakov came *shalem* (whole or complete) to Shechem. Yaakov was complete in health - the four elements of his constitution were in harmony since he had mastered his desires. He was complete in wealth - not lacking any possessions, despite having given Eisav a massive gift. And he was complete in his Torah study - he had no questions and was able to study without any barriers to understanding. (See Likutey Moharan I, 27:8)

EMERGING WHOLLY INTACT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Yaakov arrived intact in the city of Shechem, which is in Canaan, arriving from Padan Aram. He camped in view of the city.” (33:18)

Rashi tells us that the word “intact” in this verse implies that (a) Yaakov had already recovered fully from the injury he sustained when wrestling with Eisav’s guardian angel, (b) Yaakov’s flocks had already replenished themselves from the animals that he had given to Eisav in order to placate him, and (c) Yaakov had not forgotten any of the Torah that he had studied prior to becoming Lavan’s employee, despite the drain on his time due to working.

Yaakov’s travels, travails, and safe return to the Promised Land presage our historical journey through exile and our imminent redemption. Just as Yaakov arrived with his health, wealth, and knowledge of the Torah intact, we too will ultimately arrive in the Holy Land, when Mashiach comes, intact in these three respects.

Thus, we need not be afraid in the meantime to “wrestle” with materiality in order to keep it from encroaching on our spiritual health. Nor should we think that having to earn a living means that we cannot fathom G-d’s Torah properly for lack of time to devote to its study. By doing our best in all these areas, we can look forward to greeting the Messianic Redemption intact in all facets of life. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5687, p. 196. Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, pp. 173-176) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

BASELESS HATRED

Reb Menachem Zemba of Warsaw

“...and [Yaakov] encamped before the city.” (33:18)

Rabbi Shimon said: It is a known maxim that Eisav hates Yaakov. (Rashi)

What does Rabbi Shimon mean by referring to Eisav’s hatred for Yaakov as a “known maxim”? There are people forever trying to find out reasons to justify anti-Semites’ hatred of the Jews. Practical experience, however, has shown that this hatred has no cause and is founded on neither logic nor reasoning.

In some quarters, the Jews are hated because they are supposedly capitalists; in other circles they are persecuted because they are imagined to be socialists. Some hate the Jews because they find them too gifted or too clever; others hate them because they consider them parasites and burdens on the rest of the population. Some accuse the Jews of religious fanaticism; others charge them with being radicals and spreading secularism. Obviously, the Jews cannot possibly be guilty of all these things. Where, then, is the logic behind anti-Semitism?

Therefore, Rabbi Shimon states: “It is a known maxim that Eisav hates Yaakov.” The hatred of the anti-Semite for the Jew is a law unto itself, not founded on reasoning or motivation.

WHOLESONE TRADITION

Bnei Yissaschar

“Yaakov arrived intact in the city of Shechem, which is in Canaan, arriving from Padan Aram. He camped in view of the city.” (33:18)

The Hebrew letters in the word *shalem*, used here for “in peace” (lit., “whole”), form the initials of the Hebrew words *Shem* (name), *Lashon* (language) and *Malbush* (dress). This is to teach us that despite his long association with Lavan and his friendship - in the end - with Eisav, Yaakov remained “whole,” clinging to his traditional Hebrew name, language, and dress.

A Jew’s “wholeness” or “integrity” is measured by the extent to which they refuse to part with these three identifying Jewish characteristics.

MATURE MORALITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Yaakov’s sons - Shimon and Levi - Dina’s brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city with confidence and killed every male.” (34:25)

Shimon and Levi are referred to here as “men” even though they were only 13 years old at the time. For this reason, this verse is cited by some Talmudic sages as the source for the notion that a boy becomes bar mitzvah - that is, he matures sufficiently to be obligated to practice all of G-d’s commandments - at the age of 13 (Rashi on Nazir 29b).

But significantly, the Torah refers to Shimon and Levi as “men” specifically in the context of their selfless (and even self-endangering) defense of morality. This teaches us that our observance of G-d’s commandments - and even our mature, rational appreciation for them - must be based upon a supra-rational and selfless commitment to morality. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 289-293; *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 162, 421) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

CONSULTING WITH OUR LEADERS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“Yaakov’s sons - Shimon and Levi - Dina’s brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city with confidence and killed every male.” (34:25)

Why does the verse not simply say, “Shimon and Levi took their swords” without mentioning that their father was Yaakov? Are we not already familiar with the family to know that Shimon and Levi were the sons of Yaakov?

Rashi tells us that the Torah emphasizes that they were the “sons of Yaakov” because they should have consulted with their great father before making such a drastic decision - reminding them that they were not just any Shimon and Levi, but the “sons of Yaakov,” the Gadol Hador. (See Gur Aryeh and the Mizrahi)

This provides an insight into the great importance of seeking advice from those who are greater and wiser than us, especially from the Gedolei Yisrael. The Mesillas Yesharim highlights this message using a parable of someone trapped in a garden maze. At every turn he is hoping to find the correct path, but since his perspective is limited, he is bound to make many wrong turns. So how can he escape the maze? By listening to the advice of someone in a lofty position, who can see where all the paths lead. This perfectly describes the Gedolei Yisrael - "the eyes of the Nation" (Bamidbar 15:24) - who have a much higher vantage point than us. As such, they can see where people are heading and the obstacles they are heading toward... (Mesillas Yesharim chap 3)

To us, stuck in the maze of life, it is not always apparent whether we are heading in the right direction. But if we seek out those who have raised themselves to a higher viewpoint, we can be confident that their advice and instruction will lead us to our intended destination.

TIME TO STRIKE BACK

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Yaakov said to Shimon and Levi, 'You have made trouble for me... They will gather together and attack me, and I and my house will be destroyed.' They said, 'Should he make our sister into a harlot?'" (34:30-31)

Mashal: In previous times, the Russian army used to kidnap children and take them away from their families for many years. These children were called cantonists.

The kidnappings took place at fixed times of the year, and during those weeks children were kept hidden in cellars to avoid detection by the Czar's agents.

Rav Dovid Blinder zt'l (Rebbi of Rav Chaim Brisker) was unwilling to allow his students' studies to lapse for such a long time and he would learn with them in their various hiding places.

Once, a cantonist agent heard the sound of Torah learning coming out of a cellar. Upon entering, he found a Jewish boy learning together with R' Dovid.

As the Russian agent began to drag the boy away, R' Dovid punched him in the face with all his might. Such an act bordered on rebellion against the Russian Empire, and only with the greatest effort was R' Dovid spared a prison sentence.

"Where did you get the courage to punch an agent?" R' Dovid was asked, but he did not act the hero.

"I had no idea what I was doing! It's just that I was in the middle of explaining a Tosafos to the boy when suddenly someone grabbed him and started to drag him out. Don't you see, he interrupted us in the middle of explaining a Tosafos!"

Nimshal: Pogroms, massacres and holocausts have been perpetrated against Bnei Yisrael for thousands of years, and one thing is certain: there is no way to reason with our enemies.

Yaakov's sons have taught us that sometimes, only blunt force and a willingness to defend ourselves against the attacks of our enemies will teach them to leave us alone.

Shimon and Levi reacted with brute force to the kidnapping and humiliation of their sister Dinah. When Yaakov accused them of endangering the future of the entire Jewish nation, their response was simply, "How could we not have done as we did?"

Sometimes a swift, knee-jerk response in the face of evil is the right move, even if risky.

AVOIDING EVIL

Reb Zeev Wolf Landau

"G-d commanded Yaakov, '...make there an altar to Hashem Who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Eisav, your brother.'" (35:1)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "And make there an altar to Hashem Who appeared to you, due to your avoidance of the face of Eisav." Our worthiness of receiving Divine revelation is determined by the extent to which we shun evil.

SURVIVING AND THRIVING

Rabbi Ari Ciment

"And G-d said to him, 'Your name is Yaakov; your name shall no longer be called Yaakov but Yisrael shall be your name,' and He called his name Yisrael." (35:10)

Our forefather Yaakov never died. (Taanis 5b)

Given that Yaakov had a whole funeral procession and was even embalmed, how can this be true? One cryptic answer utilizes a *pasuk* in Yirmiyahu from which a Tanna proves Yaakov is on some level still alive - that he remains alive in or by virtue of his progeny, the Jewish People. But can there be any alternative meaning?

Another answer or approach may be derived from our parshah, but first one more question: "And G-d appeared to Yaakov again when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And G-d said to him: 'Your name is Yaakov; your name shall no longer be called Yaakov but Yisrael shall be your name,' and He called his name Yisrael." (Bereishis 35:9-10)

What is the significance of changing the name Yaakov to Yisrael?

The name Yaakov conjures up the imagery of Yaakov holding onto Eisav's heel for dear life. The name highlights the survivalist holding-on-for-dear-life nature of the Jew. The concept of "Yaakov never died" then probably speaks to this idea - that a descendant of Yaakov has genetic resilience, as if to say, "Yaakov [i.e., the nature of us always holding on to the heel never dies (i.e., we survive against all odds)." Yisrael, on the other hand, is an officer (שר) of G-d (ל-א); this represents the stand-alone, independent, and self-sufficient nature we achieve after we survive.

This *pasuk* therefore represents what G-d ultimately wanted from Yaakov and his descendants - not to be satisfied with just being a survivor but metamorphosing and growing into being a leader.

Takeaway Message: The concept of “Yaakov Avinu never died” speaks to the idea that a descendant of Yaakov has genetic resilience: Yaakov (always holding on to the heel) never dies (we survive against all odds).

Yaakov never dies in the sense that his descendants never give up, and they survive against the odds. The challenge for all Jews is to metamorphose from the surviving Yaakov to the succeeding leader Yisrael.

FROM PAIN TO PURPOSE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“She called his name Ben Oni, but his father called him Binyamin...” (35:18)

Rachel’s dying wish was to name her second son Ben Oni, “son of my pain,” but Yaakov instead calls him Binyamin (35:18). There is great significance to names given in the Torah. Why is someone’s wish for a name being ignored, even more so Rachel’s final wish?

Among the explanations given is that while Rachel focused on the negative (the pain she endured) when naming her son, Yaakov focused instead on more positive things, like the fact that Binyamin was born despite Yaakov’s old age (Rashi), or the fact that one of Binyamin’s descendants, Mordechai (called “*ish yemini*,” the root *yud-mem-nun* also shared by Binyamin), would one day save the Jews. It could also be even more poignant: Rachel’s pain would one day emerge as a positive, as the Jews would be able to pray at her grave many years later.

Yaakov’s resolve to change his son’s name to Binyamin is not at all about suppressing the pain, but about using the pain as a source of strength.

POWER OF ALTRUISM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Rachel died and was buried on the road leading to Efrat. Efrat is also known as Beis Lechem.” (35:19)

We are taught that Rachel chose to be buried in Beis Lechem, rather than in Chevron with the other patriarchs and matriarchs. She foresaw that the Jewish people would pass by Beis Lechem many centuries later when they were driven out of the Land of Israel following the destruction of the first Temple. At that time, after the patriarchs tried but failed to appease G-d, Rachel argued that just as she had not been jealous of her sister Leah when she became Yaakov’s wife, G-d should not be “jealous” of the idols the Jews had worshipped.

G-d accepted her argument, and proclaimed: “Because of you, Rachel, I will return the Jewish people to their homeland.”

It is Rachel’s self-sacrifice and devotion that evoke G-d’s promise to redeem us, despite our misdeeds and shortcomings. (Rashi and Radak on Yirmiyahu 31:14; Hitva’aduyot 5711, vol. 2, pp. 59-61; Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, p. 238) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

FRESH START

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[Eisav married] Basmah...” (36:3)

Eisav’s wife Basmah was nicknamed Machalat (“The Forgiven One”) when they were married (Bereishis 28:9) as an expression of the fact that G-d forgives a couple’s sins when they marry (see Rashi; Yerushalmi Bikurim 3:3). At marriage, we commence a new phase of life and, in that sense, are born anew and are granted a clean slate (see Gur Aryeh on this verse).

One of the purposes of marriage is to bring new life into the world. Spiritually, positively influencing others imbues them with new spiritual life (see Sanhedrin 19b). Thus, just as G-d forgives our shortcomings when we get married, He forgives our shortcomings when we take upon ourselves to influence others positively.

The Torah specifically teaches us this lesson in the context of the wicked Eisav’s marriage in order to impress upon us that we should never consider ourselves unworthy of teaching the Torah to others.

When we devote ourselves sincerely to this goal, we are elevated to a new spiritual level, revealing our true essence, which is indeed free of sin, and we are granted a clean slate. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, p. 168) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

ENTERPRISE OF KINDNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Timna was a concubine of Eisav’s son Eliphaz, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz...” (36:12)

Timna can serve an object lesson in the dangers of being stingy. Her very name means “You will withhold,” reminiscent of Shlomo HaMelech’s advice (Mishlei 3:27): “Do not withhold [*al timna*] good from one who needs it when the power is yours to bestow it.” Timna’s nature was to withhold even when she had nothing to lose by giving.

A member of a royal family (see Bereishis 36:22), Timna sought to convert to the faith of Avraham, but she was rejected on account of her stinginess, which was deemed incompatible with the generosity that Avraham had instilled in his family. Rather than forsake her stinginess, however, she tried to have her way by becoming a concubine of Avraham’s great-grandson Eliphaz. But by aligning herself with the wicked Eisav, she perpetuated her own evil, giving birth to a son who inherited her heartlessness - Amalek, the cruel archenemy of Israel.

By practicing generosity and cultivating a generous spirit, we can, in contrast to Timna, be a part of Avraham's great enterprise of spreading goodness, making the world fit to be G-d's ultimate home. (Ohr HaTorah, Bereishis, vol. 5, 886a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

CULTIVATING SPIRITUALITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"These are the sons of Seir the Chori, who lived in the land..." (36:20)

The Torah lists Eisav's wives and their descendants who settled in Seir and then chronicles the inhabitants of the land before Eisav displaced them: "These are the sons of Seir the Chori, who lived in the land..." (36:20). Why did the Torah have to tell us the rather obvious fact that they inhabited the land?

Rav Kook quotes the Talmud and explains that the natives were unparalleled experts in farming and in their knowledge of the optimal conditions and timing for each crop. They embraced the acquisition and application of knowledge in their trade but lacked spiritual awareness, which requires just as much attention and cultivation.

We rely heavily on technology and social media for our daily living but need to consider what can come from employing those same tangible resources for an intangible higher purpose. Using social media to spread Torah is but one avenue toward spiritual growth and serves as an example of how we can explore other possibilities to cultivate and grow.

SELFLESS UNITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"These are the kings who reigned in Edom before any king reigned over the descendants of Yisrael..." (36:31)

Although Eisav's descendants tried to establish an organized kingdom with a local, native monarchy, they never succeeded in doing so. The Torah informs us that the eight kings who ruled Edom were not Edomite kings; the Edomites had to invite foreigners to impose order among the competing clans since they were incapable of doing so themselves. The Torah then tells us (Bereishis 36:40-43) that after the last of these foreign kings died, the Edomites abandoned their attempt to unite, separating into eleven tribal groups.

All this is not surprising; Eisav was the very embodiment of haughtiness and arrogance, and his descendants inherited these traits. They could never achieve true unity, since unity requires self-effacement and dedication to the long-term good of the whole, even at the expense of the short-term good of the individual. True self-effacement and dedication to the good of the whole, in turn, is possible only when it stems from our acknowledgment that G-d is the only true reality.

Unity born of true selflessness and dedication to G-d and His vision for our world is the key to peace, harmony, and receiving the fullness of G-d's blessings. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 295-297; Sefer HaSichot 5748, vol. 1, pp. 151-154) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

REFINING CIVILIZATION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Eisav's tribal chiefs included] the chief of Magdieil and the chief of Iram." (36:43)

These names - Magdi'eil and Iram - allude to Rome. (Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer 38; Rashi on this verse; Bereishis Rabbah 83:4)

G-d told Avraham that the Jewish people would go into exile four times, the fourth time under the Romans (Bereishis Rabbah 44:20). Our present exile is an extension of the Roman exile, since the culture, legal system, and even many of the languages of Western civilization derive from those of the ancient Romans.

At first, the Romans actively opposed G-dliness, destroying the Second Temple and repudiating the Torah's values. Since then, however, Western culture has become increasingly refined. From a spiritual perspective, it has gradually shed its opposition to G-dliness and has begun marshalling its material and cultural resources to contribute to the spiritual refinement of the world.

We can facilitate this process by studying the Torah and deepening our observance of its commandments. This will enable us to identify the differences between Jewish and "Roman" values, and then elevate the latter by revealing their innate Divine potentials. This will hasten the advent of the ultimate Redemption, when all mundane reality will express its inner spiritual essence. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, pp. 411-412) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

HAFTORAH

THERE WILL BE A RECKONING

Kochav MiYaakov

"[Thus says Hashem concerning Edom,] 'Behold, I have made you small among the nations; you are greatly despised. The pride of your heart has beguiled you.'" (Ovadiah 1:1-3)

When Edom is entrusted with the task of oppressing the Jews and embittering their lives, he becomes boastful, thinking that G-d must regard him as important. Actually, the fact that he is chosen to be the torturer and hangman of the Jews is proof how "small" and "greatly despised" Edom really is.

This may be likened to the story of a prince, the only son of a powerful king. He was adored by his father and petted by a household of devoted servants.

One day the child became dangerously ill, and an awful-tasting medicine was prescribed to cure him. "I will be able to cure him," the court physician reassured the anxious father, "but I can do it only if neither the king nor his faithful servants will come into his son's presence. Instead, let the king appoint a cruel and wicked man who has neither regard nor understanding for the true nobility of the king's son and who without mercy will force the boy to take the bitter medicine and adhere to the strict regimen that I will prescribe."

The evil man chosen for this task noted with pride that all the members of the royal household had been told to keep away from the prince and that he alone had been entrusted with the care of the king's son. Soon he began to boast of his importance and to regard himself as a favorite at the court. But disillusionment was not long in coming, for he was eventually told: "It is only because you are so terribly despised, a stupid, cruel man entirely devoid of decency and compassion, that you were chosen to carry out this task. A fine and noble man would not be able to do the work for which you were hired. The king needs you now only to force his son to submit to the painful and unpleasant cure he must have if he is to recover. Once the prince is well, you will be dismissed from the king's court and sent back to the mean and despised among the people."

In the same vein, the prophet Ovadiah said to Edom: "The pride of your heart has beguiled you." You are proud that you've been charged with the mission of oppressing the Jewish people. In truth, the fact that this task has been entrusted to you is proof that "I have made you small among the nations," that "you are greatly despised." It was only because of your cruelty, stupidity, and heartlessness that you were chosen to take charge of the Jews, to administer to them the punishment they must have in order to be cured of evil, while their loving Father in Heaven must stay away and let you do what must be done. But remember that in the end "I will bring you down from there, says G-d" (1:4).

SHAMED BY VENGEANCE

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"For the violence done to your brother Yaakov, shame shall cover you..." (Ovadiah 1:10)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "For the violence of your brother Yaakov, shame shall cover you." When an unruly boy goes to his father crying that his friend, who is known to be a quiet, well-behaved boy, has given him a beating, his father will say: "Let's go quickly and see how your friend is, for if he became sufficiently angry to strike you, then you must have beaten him cruelly. I hope he is still alive."

Similarly, when an Eisav protests that a Yaakov has hurt him, that a Jewish boy has aimed a gun at him or that a humble Jewish working man has insulted his people, one may be sure that the Eisav had first tortured and

oppressed the Yaakov so cruelly that even he, Eisav, is filled with shame at the thought. G-d says to Edom: "For the violence of your brother Yaakov, shame shall cover you. How badly must you have hurt him if you, O evil Eisav, succeeded in driving even meek Yaakov to resort to violence."

FIREY HOLINESS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"The house of Yaakov will be fire, the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Eisav for stubble; and they will kindle them and consume them." (Ovadiah 1:18)

In the weekly parshah, Yaakov Avinu was left wounded and limping as a result of his confrontation with his brother Eisav's guardian angel. In the haftorah, the Navi Ovadiah prophesies that Edom, the descendants of Eisav, will torture and hurt the Jewish people both in body and spirit. However, just as Yaakov emerged *shalem*, perfect and complete, from his struggle, so will the Jewish people remain pure and whole in the future. In the end, Edom's enemies will deceive, plunder and rob her, and her land will become desolate because she opposed Yaakov. Edom will be repaid measure for measure for tormenting the nation of Israel. Ovadiah speaks of Klal Yisrael's survival and future conquests. Her exiles will return, her borders will be restored, and Hashem's kingdom will be established forever.

Regarding the above *pasuk*, Rashi writes (Bereishis 30:25): Fire without a flame has no effect at a distance. The Shem MiShmuel, Rav Shmuel Borenstein zt'l of Sochatchov, explains that the difference between a fire with a flame and without a flame lies in its ability to spread. A fire that burns on a wick is indeed a fire, but its zone of influence is extremely limited. On the other hand, a large blaze can be seen from quite a distance and is capable of spreading, charring a huge area in the process.

The children of Yaakov are charged with sanctifying the world: "*Kedoshim tiheyu* - You shall be holy" (Vayikra 19:1). Rashi and the other commentators define this commandment that one should sanctify yourselves in what is permitted to you. In other words, *kedushah* that spreads and sanctifies the pleasures of this world constitutes a stinging response to the likes of Eisav, whose goal in life is the enjoyment of this world. Yosef HaTzaddik, who tenaciously overcame adversity and controlled all his desires, symbolizes a flame that spreads far and wide. This flame spreads and burns Eisav's reason for living, charring his assertions into silent ashes. True, he believed that this world was meant to serve him. However, when we unleash the "Fire of Yaakov" along with the "Flame of Yosef" this shows what this world is really meant for, and how to use it properly for holiness.

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