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Parshas Vayishlach: No News is Jews News By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Yaakov's family faced a tremendous crisis. While passing through the city of Shechem, Dena, their sister was attacked and was violated by Shechem, the son of King Chamor, who bore the same name as the city. Shechem later claimed that he desperately wanted to marry her! No one in the entire city brought the prince to justice and Yaakov's sons were not going to ignore that behavior.

They were not ready for open warfare either, and so they developed a ruse. They claimed that they were ready to form a harmonious relationship with the entire population of the city of Shechem. "We will give our daughters to you, and take your daughters to ourselves; we will dwell with you, and become a single people" (Beraishis 34:16). However, there was one condition. Every male of Shechem had to circumcise. Yaakov's children insisted that it would be a disgrace for the daughters of Abraham to marry uncircumcised men. Upon direction from King Chamor and Prince Shechem the entire town agreed, and three days later, when the people of Shechem were in painful recuperation from their surgery, Yaakov's children avenged Dina's honor. Despite Yaakov's consternation, they attacked the male population and wiped them out.

The question is simple: Why ask the people of Shechem to circumcise? If Yaakov's children wanted to attack them, why go through a process of converting them? They should have asked them to fast for three days. That would have made them even weaker. They could have asked them to hand over all their weapons. Why ask them to do an act so blatantly Jewish? On September 30, 2000, the word intafada was almost unknown to the average American. And then the riots began. On one of the first days of what has now been over three years of unceasing violence, against innocent Israelis, The New York Times, Associated Press and other major media outlets published a photo of a young man who looked terrified, bloodied and battered. There was an Israeli soldier in the background brandishing a billy-club. The caption in everyone of the papers that carried the photo identified the teen as an innocent Palestinian victim of the riots — with the clear implication that the Israeli soldier was the one who beat him. The world was in shock and outrage at the sight of the poor teen, blood oozing from his temple crouching beneath the club-wielding Israeli policeman.

Letters of protest and sympathy poured in from the genteel readers of the gentile world.

The victim's true identity was soon revealed. Dr. Aaron Grossman wrote the NY Times that the picture of the Israeli soldier and the Palestinian on the Temple Mount was indeed not a Palestinian. The battered boy was actually his son, Tuvia Grossman, a Yeshiva student from Chicago. He, and two of his friends, were pulled from their taxicab by a mob of Palestinian Arabs, and were severely beaten and stabbed. The Israeli soldier wielding the club was actually attempting to protect Tuvia from the vicious mob. All of a sudden the outrage ceased, the brutal attack was almost ignored and a correction buried somewhere deep amongst "all the news that is fit to print" re-identified Tuvia Grossman as "an American student in Israel." It hardly mentioned that he was an innocent Jew who was nearly lynched by Arabs. This blatant hypocrisy in news coverage incidentally help launch a media watchdog named Honest Reporting.com.

Rav Yonasan Eibeschitz, zt"l, explains that Yaakov's children knew something that was as relevant in Biblical times as it is in today's "New York" times. Yaakov's sons knew the secret of society. Have them circumcised. Make them Jews. Then you can do whatever you want with them and no one will say a word. You can wipe out an entire city — as long as it is not a gentile city. If Shechem had remained a gentile city had the people not circumcised according to the laws of Avraham then Yaakov's children would have been condemned by the entire world. But Yaakov's children knew better. They made sure that the Shechemites, went through a Jewish circumcision. Shechem now was a Jewish city; and when a Jewish city is destroyed, the story becomes as irrelevant as an American student attacked by a Palestinian mob in Yerushalayim! Unfortunately it is that simple and that old.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Parshas VaYishlach The Explanation of a Familiar Custom

This week's parsha contains the first occurrence of the concept of erecting a tombstone on the grave of a deceased person. Anyone who has been to a Jewish cemetery has probably noticed the custom of placing a rock or a few pebbles on a tombstone when departing. What is the source of the custom? The Be'er Heitiv explains [Orach Chaim 224] this to be a manifestation of honoring the deceased (kavod hameis). When others pass by and see the collection of stones on the tombstone, they will say "Look how many people came to visit this grave site! It must have been a distinguished person who was buried here."

Contrasting the Teshuva Of Yishmael With That of Eisav

I would like to share two comments on a rather obscure pasuk [verse] at the end of Parshas VaYishlach [Bereshis 36:3]. In listing the wives of Eisav, the pasuk mentions "Bosmas the daughter of Yishmael, the sister of Nevayos". Superficially, this is strange because we learned previously that Eisav married "Machalas the daughter of Yishmael" [Bereshis 28:9]. To explain this contradiction, Rashi quotes a Medrash from the Book of Shmuel. The Medrash names three individuals who have all their sins forgiven: (1) A convert; (2) A person who ascends to greatness; and (3) A groom who gets married. All of these concepts are derived from the fact that Eisav's wife was called Machalas (having the same root as mochel, which means forgiveness) even though her real name was Basmal. The Ramban quotes a similar Medrash. At this point, Eisav intended to convert (i.e. - repent) and in fact was forgiven for his previous sins when he married Machalas (although he later reverted to his evil ways). The

Ramban quotes a Medrash that she was called Basmal because "nisbama da'ata alav". Rav Simcha Zissel Brodie explains this expression to mean that Eisav was exceedingly happy with himself. Rav Brodie explains an interesting phenomenon: Eisav did Teshuva but then apparently went back to his old ways. His Teshuva did not last. This is contrasted with Yishmael, who repented and the Teshuva did last until the end of his life.

We know that Yishmael's Teshuva lasted from the fact that Yishmael showed subservience to Yitzchak at the time of Avraham's death. Even though he was older and he originally hated Yitzchak, he showed Yitzchak respect by letting Yitzchak precede him during the burial service for Avraham. In contrast, when Yaakov died, the pasuk mentions that Eisav and Yaakov buried him. The implication is that Eisav still apparently demanded to be shown preference as the older of the two brothers.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that the reason why Eisav's Teshuva attempt was not successful is because he was too smug about it. The only way a person can remain on the straight and narrow is if he realizes that he has to continually grow. When a person reaches a state of contentment and is perfectly satisfied with who he is, that is a recipe for falling back down. Many classic commentaries point out that the name Eisav (ayin sin vov) is related to the word asu-ee (ayin sin vov yud) meaning made or finished. A person who is "made" or "finished" has no more growing to do. The Baal HaTurim comments that the numerical value of Eisav is shalom (peace). Eisav's problem is that he is too much at peace with himself. He is too happy with his own accomplishments, looking at himself as a man who has no more growing to do. The Teshuva of such a person will not last. Teshuva can only be successful when a person knows that he has to constantly battle his yetzer hara and never rest on his laurels.

The Shifted Tzeire Shows Who Really Has G-d's Name Within Their Own Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer point out that only two nations have G-d's Name within their national identity: YisraEL and YishmaEL. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer then expounds the pasuk from Bilaam's "Blessing" [Bamidbar 24:23] which literally means "Woe is the one, who will live in the name of G-d" as referring to the nation of Yishmael that acts as if they were messengers of G-d. He can do dastardly things, but he thinks that he has the sanction of the Almighty Himself.

The name Yishmael appears 48 times in all of Tanach. This time [Bereshis 36:3] is the last time that it appears in Chumash. The next two times (in Melachim and Yirmiyah) are actually referring to a different person, a Yishmael ben Nesanya. The only other time it is mentioned is in Divrei haYamim, when the genealogy of Avraham is given and it mentions that Avraham had a son named Yishmael.

Grammatically, the sound of a Hebrew letter (the 'os') actually comes from the vowels underneath it. The suffix El in the name YisraEL and YishmaEL gets its essence from the tzeire vowel (.) underneath the silent letter Aleph. However, throughout Tanach, the tzeire in the name YishmaEL is not under the Aleph. It is under the preceding letter Ayin. Yishmael may have the letters of EL in his name, but it is not the essence of EL (with the proper vowels). It is only a remote allusion to G-d's Name, not the essence of His Name. YishmaEL CLAIMS to have G-d's Name within his national identity. He acts as if it is there, but it is not really there.

I heard from Rav Chaim Kahan that this could be alluded to by the pasuk [Yeshaya 8:10] "Let them plan (against us), it will become nullified; let them speak a matter (against us), it will not come to pass; for with us is G-d (ki imanu [k]EL). We are the only nation that have G-d's name - [k]EL - within our national identity.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Unheralded Heroes: Rabbi Weinreb on Parshat Vayishlach .

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

December 03, 2009

You don't hear much about them, and sometimes you don't even know their names. But they are the true heroes and heroines in our lives and in our times.

As I hope to demonstrate, it was also true in biblical times that very important characters in the narrative are hardly mentioned, perhaps only hinted at.

I first became interested in this phenomenon shortly after the events of September 11, 2001. I was listening to one of my favorite radio talk shows while driving. The guest was a professor of sociology who was insisting, much to the chagrin of the talk show host, that the firemen who lost their lives saving others at the World Trade Center were not true heroes.

He maintained that a true hero does something very unusual, something neither he nor anyone else typically does. These firemen, he argued, were simply doing their duty. They showed up to work in the morning, went through their usual routine, and responded to this assignment as part of their job.

The announcer was horrified by this professor's opinion and pronounced it a typical example of "academic snobbery". My gut reaction was identical to the announcer's horror. Of course, those firemen were heroes, great heroes. And they were heroes by virtue of the very fact that they carried out their life-saving duties with such astounding courage.

Continuing to drive, I began to reflect upon the question of the definition of "hero" in the Jewish tradition. From the Jewish perspective, is a hero some kind of Superman who behaves in some extraordinarily dramatic fashion?

Or is the true hero the person who, day in and day out, does what is expected of him in a faithful and diligent manner, humbly and anonymously, never making the headlines?

My research soon convinced me that the latter definition was the accurate one from a Jewish point of view. He or she, who dutifully and loyally does his or her job, be it in the mundane or the sacred sphere, is the true hero or heroine.

As an example, let me introduce you to a personage who is mentioned in this week's Torah portion, Vayishlach, although even if you read the portion carefully, you may not have noticed her name. Her name was Deborah. Open your Bible with me and turn to Genesis 35:8. Jacob, his wives, and their many children have returned to the Land of Israel. They have reached Bethel, Jacob's original starting point. Jacob erected an altar there.

And then we read: "And Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died and she was buried... under the oak, and it was called the 'Oak of Tears.'"

Who was this woman, never mentioned by name before? Why did her demise evoke such grief? Why is she important enough to "make it" into the biblical narrative?

Now turn back a few pages with me to Genesis 24:59. Here we read that when Rebecca left her birthplace to journey to the Land of Israel and marry Isaac, she took her nurse with her. A nurse with no name, whom we know nothing about until we learn of her death in this week's Torah portion.

Our rabbis speculate that nurse Deborah was a major part of the entire epic drama of Rebecca's life with Isaac and Jacob. They suggest that she was the one sent by Rebecca to retrieve Jacob from his long exile.

Our rabbis tell us, too, that she was nurse to Rebecca's many grandchildren who shed those many tears under the old oak tree.

Jewish mystical sources even aver that nurse Deborah was reincarnated into the much later Deborah, who was a Judge and Prophet in Israel!

Deborah is an excellent example of someone who "just did her job", regularly and consistently, and who had an impact upon three generations of major biblical characters, including a matriarch, two patriarchs, and the forebearers of the 12 tribes.

She exemplifies the type of person that the Talmud refers to when it asks: "Who deserves a place in the world to come," and answers: "He who slips in silently and slips out silently."

Rabbi Akiva, one of the great Jewish heroes and sages, taught us a similar lesson. At a critical juncture in his life, he was inspired by the fact that a stone is impenetrable by ordinary means. But when a gentle waterfall drips upon stone for hundreds of years, it succeeds in boring a hole in stone.

Quiet consistency and persistence are the true ingredients of heroism and strength.

In the Bible, as in all of life, there are major figures who work behind the scenes but who are indispensable to the important events of history. They are unheralded and often anonymous. They are real heroes too.

In the words of the poet John Keats, they are the children "of silence and slow time". They help us see the truth in that poet's exquisite words:

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter."

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Hadlakas Neiros

Rabbi Yonason Sacks

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The Gemarah (Shabbos 25a) teaches that "Hadlakas ner b'Shabbos chovah" - the mitzvah to light Shabbos candles is a binding obligation. In characterizing the source and nature of this "obligation," the Rishonim appear to identify two different values. In the thirtieth chapter of Hilchos Shabbos (Halacha 4), the Rambam associates Shabbos candles with the mitzvah of kavod Shabbos - honoring the Shabbos. This association is further highlighted by the Hagahos Maimoniyos (Hil. Shabbos 5:1), who cites the opinion of the Yerushalmi that the beracha for Shabbos candles should read "L'hadlik ner l'kavod Shabbos." In the fifth chapter of Hilchos Shabbos, however, the Rambam links ner Shabbos with mitzvah of oneg Shabbos - delighting in the Shabbos. Apparently, then, the Rambam maintains that the lighting of Shabbos candles fulfills both the mitzvah of kavod Shabbos as well as the mitzvah of oneg Shabbos. The Vilna Gaon (Beur HaGra Orach Chaim 529:1) explains the difference between kavod and oneg Shabbos. While both kavod and oneg refer to activities performed in honor of the Shabbos, the distinction between these mitzvos lies in their respective timing. Activities which are done in anticipation of Shabbos, i.e. before the commencement of Shabbos, such as cooking and cleaning the house, fulfill the mitzvah of kavod Shabbos. Activities performed on Shabbos itself, such as eating satiating meals, fulfill the mitzvah of oneg Shabbos.

Given the Gaon's explanation, the Rambam's understanding of ner Shabbos as a fulfillment of both kavod and oneg Shabbos becomes clear: by lighting the candles on Friday afternoon in preparation for Shabbos, one fulfills kavod Shabbos; by allowing the candles to continue to burn into Shabbos itself, providing an illuminated room which enhances the Shabbos experience, one fulfills oneg Shabbos. Based on this analysis, it emerges that our practice of lighting Shabbos candles before the actual commencement of Shabbos is not simply a function of the prohibition to light candles on Shabbos itself. Rather, Friday afternoon is the optimal time for lighting Shabbos candles, so that the lighting serves as a preparation for the incoming Shabbos thereby fulfilling the mitzvah of kavod Shabbos.

This understanding of the time of lighting may bear practical ramifications regarding Yom Tov, which similarly entails mitzvos of kavod and oneg (see

Rambam Hilchos Yom Tov 6:16). Although one is permitted to light candles on Yom Tov itself, the Drisha (introduction to Tur Yoreh Deah) cites the practice of his mother to nonetheless light candles before the commencement of Yom Tov, in order to fulfill the preparatory mitzvah of kavod Yom Tov. While the Drisha suggests that one should not follow this practice before the second night of Yom Tov in the Diaspora in order to avoid "preparing" from one day of Yom Tov to the next, Tosafos (Beitzah 22a s.v. Ain) argue that such a practice is indeed permissible. Since the lighting of the candle illuminates the dark room the lighting provides immediate benefit for the current day of Yom Tov, and is therefore not deemed a preparation for the next day of Yom Tov.

This understanding may also account for the opinion of the Rambam challenged by the Rashba. Regarding the mitzvah of Chanuka, the Rambam rules (Hilchos Chanuka 4:5) that one may not light Chanuka candles before nightfall, even if the pre-lit candles continue burning into the night. The Rashba (Shabbos 21a s.v. Ha d'amrinan) disagrees, arguing that as long as the candles continue to burn through the requisite time of night, one may indeed light the Chanuka candles early. As support for his opinion, the Rashba cites the case of Shabbos candles, which similarly are kindled before the time of the mitzvah (before Shabbos), but by continuing to burn into Shabbos night, fulfill the mitzvah nonetheless. Apparently, infers the Rashba, one may always light candles before the ordained time of the mitzvah, as long as the candles continue to burn for the requisite time period.

In defense of the Rambam's opinion, R' Turtzin (Kuntrus B'Inyanei Chanuka U'Megilla 1) draws a fundamental distinction between ner Shabbos and ner Chanuka. The mitzvah of ner Chanuka begins at nightfall. Prior to nightfall, there is no mitzvah to light, and one who does light is indeed considered to be lighting early. Ner Shabbos, however, is quite different. Because of the preparatory nature of the mitzvah of kavod Shabbos, the actual time of the mitzvah is Friday afternoon. Lighting before Shabbos is not considered to be lighting early, but rather, lighting in the proper time. Because no preparatory mitzvah of kavod exists on Chanuka, one cannot compare the mitzvah of ner Shabbos with the mitzvah of ner Chanuka.

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Parshas Vayishlach

On A Wing and A Prayer

"And he said 'Let me go, for dawn has broken'..." (32:27)

The Torah records the climactic confrontation between Yaakov and the angel of Eisav. Wrestling with Yaakov until dawn, the angel finally concedes to Yaakov's superiority. The angel requests that Yaakov release him "for dawn has broken".¹ Citing the Talmud, Rashi explains that the angel relates to Yaakov that it is his day to sing Hashem's praises as part of the heavenly chorus.^[2]

The Maharsha cites another passage in the Talmud which appears to contradict Rashi's comments. The Talmud states that angels only recite their praises to Hashem at night, deferring to Bnei Yisroel who praise Hashem by day through prayer. Therefore, asks the Maharsha, how could the angel tell Yaakov that it is his day to sing praises to Hashem if angels only sing at night?^[3] Since Bnei Yisroel are Hashem's primary representatives, the

chariot for His "Shechina" - "Divine presence", their daily prayer takes precedence over the songs of the angels. Prior to the existence of "Yisroel", the angels served as the chariot for the Shechina, and as such, praised Hashem during the day. Yaakov's wrestling the angel into submission marks the onset of his transformation from Yaakov to Yisroel and the supplanting of the angels as Hashem's primary representatives with Bnei Yisroel. The angel concedes this exchange of power when he informs Yaakov that he will be called "Yisroel" for he has "striven with the Divine (i.e. an angel) and with man, and overcome".[4] When Hashem actually confers upon Yaakov the appellation "Yisroel", the verse states "vaya'al alav Elokim" - "Hashem ascended from upon him".[5] The Midrash comments that this verse is the basis for the expression "The patriarchs are the chariots for the Shechina", for they bear His glory, and through them Hashem displays His sovereignty.[6] It is at this juncture that Hashem calls Yaakov "El" - "Divine being", for the entity of Klal Yisroel is finally actualized and his new position in creation is realized.[7] Consequently, there is no contradiction between the two Talmudic statements. Prior to Yaakov's transformation, the angels sang their praises during the day, as is reflected by the request of the angel of Eisav. After the transformation they were delegated to recite praises only at night.

1. 32:27
2. Ibid, Chullin 91a
3. Chagiga 12b
4. 32:29 see Rashi
5. 35:13
6. Midrash Rabbah 82:6, Ramban ibid
7. Megilla 18a

Wye It Is Ours

"He bought the parcel of land..." (33:19)

After his encounter with Eisav, Yaakov travels toward Eretz Yisroel. The Torah relates that upon his arrival in Shechem, after a twenty-two year absence from Eretz Yisroel, Yaakov purchases land. Of what significance is this particular purchase that it requires mention? The purchase price is recorded as one hundred "kasitah". There is a difference of opinion as to the definition of "kasitah". The Targum translates kasitah as "chorfim", and the Radak explains that "chorfim" means "sheep". Rashi, however, explains that "chorfim" is "money which is accepted everywhere" (international currency).[1] Why is it important to know the medium used to purchase this land and what is "money that is accepted everywhere"?

The Ibn Ezra's comments concerning this purchase require further elaboration. He states that the Torah is teaching us the importance of owning land in Eretz Yisroel.[2] How is this lesson particularly noticeable through Yaakov's purchase?

The preceding verse states "vayichan es penei ha'ir" - "and (Yaakov) encamped before the city".[3] The Talmud understands that Yaakov entrenched himself there by enacting and establishing several ordinances. He established a medium of currency, created a marketplace and built bath houses.[4]

What message is the Talmud conveying concerning Yaakov's actions? The Midrash relates that although our forefathers made many land acquisitions in Eretz Yisroel, the Torah highlights three purchases, for Jewish ownership of these areas will be highly contested throughout history: Avraham's purchase of land in Chevron, Yaakov's purchase of land in Shechem and King David's purchase of the Temple Mount in Yerushalayim.[5] The thread common to all of these land acquisitions is the key to answering the aforementioned questions. King David's purchase of the Temple Mount from Aravnah was not the purchase of an individual within the sellers jurisdiction subject to all local legislation, rather it was a sovereign acquisition, conferring upon the land a new sovereignty and creating a new reality. Similarly, Avraham's purchase of land from the Hittites served to elevate the land from its status as Eretz Canaan to that of Eretz Yisroel, allowing him to bury Sarah upon hallowed ground. The Torah states that Avraham paid Efron four hundred shekel "over lasocher";

Rashi explains that this means that this money was accepted everywhere, i.e. international currency.[6] Since this was a sovereign purchase, an international medium was necessary.

Upon entering Eretz Canaan, Yaakov is attempting to establish the reality of Eretz Yisroel. his purchase was also a sovereign acquisition therefore he uses "churfin" - money accepted everywhere i.e. international currency. The Talmud teaches that at the end of days, the sovereigns of the world will come to Hashem requesting rewards for their contributions to society which benefited Bnei Yisroel. Among the contributions listed are the establishment of currency and new marketplaces, i.e. commerce, and the establishment of bathhouses, i.e. health and safety.[7]

Clearly, these are contributions of a sovereign. The Talmud is teaching us that Yaakov made these contributions to society as a sovereign. From this purchase, states the Ibn Ezra, we learn the importance of owning land in Eretz Yisroel. for particularly this purchase can be considered ownership in Eretz Yisroel.

All other purchases prior to this occasion were in Eretz Canaan and remained Canani land.[8] The Midrash is teaching us that these three land acquisitions required a special sovereign purchase to emphasize their Jewish ownership, for these lands will be the most contested in the future - Chevron, East Jerusalem and Shechem

1. 33:19
2. Ibid See Ibn Ezra Parshas Chayei Sarah 23:19
3. 33:18
4. Shabbos 33a
5. Bereishis Rabbah 79:7
6. 23:16 See Insights Chayei Sarah Volume I
7. Avodah Zarah 3b

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum .

Parshas Vayishlach

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

We know that Eisav is the brother of Yaakov Avinu. Why, then, does the Patriarch emphasize his name and his relationship to Yaakov? Rashi explains that although Eisav was Yaakov's brother, he certainly did not treat him as such. In other words, Yaakov was underscoring the rift that existed between the two siblings. The Zohar HaKadosh derives from here that when one prays, he must be very explicit, articulating the name and his relationship to the petitioner, so that there can be no question concerning about whom he is praying. These two explanations notwithstanding, the Torah could have simply written: "Rescue me from my brother, Eisav." Why does it split the two: Rescue me from "my brother" - "from Eisav"? The Bais HaLevi explains that Yaakov feared two distinct threats: the clear and defined threat of Eisav, the wicked, who was bent on destroying him physically, and the "loving" brother, who would surreptitiously destroy his spiritual dimension. Yes, Eisav as a brother could be very dangerous, in many ways creating greater danger than the physical pogrom. Yaakov had greater fear of sharing a Shabbos meal with Eisav than of battling with him in war. He, therefore, articulated both of his concerns distinctly. Yaakov's concern was realized when, soon after they met, Eisav suggested that they travel together. The Patriarch gave all kinds of excuses for

demurring. He was not spending any time in the company of his brother; it would have a deleterious effect on his family; Eisav's "love" for Yaakov was more dangerous than a sharp sword. Surprisingly, Yaakov did not manifest a similar attitude when his father-in-law, Lavan, caught up with him. Then, they sat together and broke bread, and Lavan even spent the night. Was Lavan any less evil than Eisav?

Horav Yerachmiel Krohm, Shlita, explains that the difference lay in the appearances, or, as we might assert, how each one presented himself. Lavan was not putting on a show. He dressed the part, presenting himself as an assimilated, secular person who was into contemporary pagan society. He painted himself as one who respected Yaakov, his family and the way of life that they had chosen for themselves. He, nonetheless, did not personally ascribe to it. He and Yaakov were clearly different - something which Yaakov's impressionable children were able to perceive. Eisav, however, dressed as Yaakov, and - except for certain "subtle," carefully maneuvered deviations - "talked the talk and walked the walk." He portrayed himself to his brother as one of "us," suggesting the two brothers were one and the same. True, Eisav had made "slight" adjustments and improvements to meet the perceived "challenges" of contemporary society's new moral sensitivities, but there must be room for Jewish law to "evolve" with the times. Eisav was dangerous, because he presented a challenge which, for the most part, to the unerudite and unprepared eye, defied detection. No, Yaakov could not tarry for a minute with Eisav. His menace was much more hazardous.

This concept is ratified by the Chafetz Chaim, zl. He cites the famous exhortation of Eliyahu HaNavi to the Jewish People who had been supporting the neviai ha'baal, false pagan prophets: "How long will you dance between two opinions? If Hashem is the G-d, go after Him! And if the baal, go after it!" Make up your mind. Decide whom you want to serve - either Hashem or the pagan idol. You cannot have it both ways. The Chafetz Chaim asked, "Why? What is wrong with a dual allegiance - tradition and modernity; old world convention with contemporary morals; religion and spirituality with a "dab" of secular materialism? After all, why not lead a "balanced" life? Is it better to be a complete believer in the pagan idol?

Yes! One who is playing both sides of the field is in a far worse situation than he who is totally subversive and adherent to the baal. One who is unabashedly off the derech, path, who is totally estranged from the traditional observance knows what he is, where he is and what lies in store in the future for him and his family. He knows that he has nothing, and he apparently does not care. The one who is poseiach al shtei ha'seifim, "dances between two opinions," erroneously and foolishly thinks that he is still connected to the Torah camp, that he has not relinquished his relationship with Hashem, that he is still an observant Jew, but with "modifications." The reason that he must be repudiated is because unknowing, trusting souls who look at the superficial and have difficulty seeing beyond themselves are susceptible and will be negatively influenced by his hypocritical behavior. These might be strong words, but when one plays with spiritual lives, there is no room for error.

A dispute arose between two of the great third generation Admorim, chasidic leaders. It occurred during Napoleon's war with the armies of the Russian Czar. The issue: For whom should they pray to succeed - Czar Nikolai or Napoleon Bonaparte? The Czar was a violent despot who persecuted his citizens, with the Jews suffering more than others. Napoleon was known to be a liberal who promoted emancipation and the rights of the people. While this was wonderful for a democratic country, equality for the Jews could create an environment which would encourage assimilation. This dispute revolved around the two approaches of Eisav - as Eisav himself or as a brother. Over the last few hundred years, we have experienced the tragic consequences of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment during which the brotherly love exhibited by the secular world served as an open invitation for so many of our brethren to join.

Regrettably, they did, and the results have been disastrous. The Czar might have destroyed us physically, but we would have at least died as Jews. And he (Yaakov) said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (32:27) Yaakov Avinu and the angel representing Eisav contended throughout the night. Our Patriarch bested the angel, and the angel was ready to return to Heaven. Apparently, it was his turn to sing Hashem's praises as part of the Heavenly chorus. Yaakov was not prepared to let the angel leave. He wanted a blessing - but not just any blessing. As Rashi explains, Yaakov wanted an acknowledgment that he - not Eisav - was entitled to the blessing of Yitzchak Avinu. We wonder why Yaakov found it necessary to demand Eisav's angel's approbation concerning the blessings. Once Yitzchak Avinu gave his blessing to Yaakov, it should have sufficed to allay any anxiety he harbored regarding the blessings. Yitzchak was a Navi, prophet. What more did he need? Should Yaakov have been bothered by Eisav's discontent? If he was the rightful owner, then who really cared what Eisav thought? Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, derives from here that if somebody has a taaneh, claim, concerning something that one has; if there is a dispute regarding something in one's possession - even if it is erroneous - it impedes one's ability to maintain a sense of achievement, to experience a feeling of entitlement. If Eisav was complaining, then Yaakov had not prevailed. This is why the Patriarch could not rest assured until his rightful ownership to the blessings was acknowledged and confirmed.

The Midrash teaches us that when Yaakov received the blessings from his father, Eisav gave forth a loud cry, Vayitzaak tzeakah gedolah u'maarah ad meod, "He (Eisav) cried out an exceedingly great and bitter cry" (Bereishis 27:34). Eisav was "reimbursed" for his anguish when Mordechai, upon hearing the news of Achashveirosh's decree, also gave forth an exceedingly great and bitter cry. The Midrash adds that Eisav allowed three teardrops to descend from his eyes: one from the right eye; one from the left eye; and the third one remained in his eye. These three tears have catalyzed oceans of tears to fall from the Jewish People's eyes. Why? Because when you cause someone to cry - even if it is not your fault - and it was not intentional - you are held accountable for causing pain to another person.

The hallmark of a Torah leader is not only his encyclopedic knowledge, but also his immaculate character traits. The care that some took in order not to cause any ill feelings inadvertently to any Jew, regardless of his position, background, or religious affiliation, is legend. I take the liberty of citing two vignettes. The great Gaon, Rav Akiva Eiger, zl, possessed an unprecedented knowledge of Torah. As great as he was, his humility overshadowed his brilliance. In the area of anivus, humility, he was without peer. His distinguished son-in-law, the Chasam Sofer, said the following about him: "When the Torah writes that Moshe Rabbeinu was anav mikol adam asher al pnei ha'adamah, 'the most humble person on the face of the earth,' we really do not know what that means. How are we truly able to estimate Moshe's anivus? Nonetheless, if we gaze at my father-in-law, Rav Akiva Eiger, and delve into his middah, attribute, of humility, we will have some idea of the Torah's perspective on anavah. Only then, can we begin to fathom Moshe's true distinction concerning this character trait."

The following story substantiates R' Akiva Eiger's incredible humility and demonstrates the lengths to which he would go in order not to aggrieve another person. Even as a youth, R' Akiva Eiger's fame spread throughout Europe. Prospective matches were proffered to his family from the most distinguished European families. One such individual, who was quite interested in having the young genius for a son-in-law, sent two talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars of the highest caliber, who were counted among the elite of the city of Lissa. They were dispatched to spend time with the young man and test him thoroughly to see if he was really as "good" as everyone claimed. During the "test," R' Akiva Eiger's uncle, Rav Wolf, stood by the side listening. He was shocked to see his nephew remain silent for the questions. It appeared that he was unable to answer the questions posed by these two scholars. After a while, the two rabbonim gave up. There must be some mistake. This boy was certainly not qualified to bear the title of Gaon. He knew nothing.

With this in mind, the two scholars left clearly upset that they had wasted their time. Rav Wolf could not understand his nephew's behavior. It was not like him to be unable to answer a question. "Why did you not answer their questions?" he asked his gifted nephew. "Forgive me, but if I would have answered their questions they would have felt bad that they had erred. The first one asked me a question which happens to be an explicit Tosfos. The other one obviously was unaware of a discussion in the Talmud concerning the exact topic that he asked me about. I did not want to make them feel bad, so I remained quiet. Better they should think that I am unerudite, and cancel the shidduch, matrimonial match, than I should in any way cause them to feel bad."

The second story concerns the Chazon Ish, zl. He once was about to leave home, but was delayed by a number of petitioners, each one with his own personal tale of woe, hoping for the sage's listening ear, and, of course, a blessing that would make things right. Finally, the last one had left, and the Chazon Ish could leave for his very important meeting. He asked the driver to pull out very slowly, not in any way indicating that he was in a hurry. The people that had poured out their hearts to him should not think that he was in a rush, and that his meeting had taken precedence over their concerns. They had to know that the Chazon Ish experienced each individual's personal pain as his own.

And Dinah, the daughter of Leah, whom she had born to Yaakov, went out to see the girls of the land. (34:1)

Two distinct guidelines are presented in the parsha concerning how to deal with the outside world. In the first instance, we see Yaakov confronting Eisav - Jew living separately from the non-Jew - but, at certain times, it is necessary to come in contact, to relate to them. In the second situation, the Jew is living together with the non-Jew and must now raise his children in a society whose moral and ethical culture is different from that of the Torah. Dinah, the daughter of Yaakov Avinu, grew up under such circumstances. Surrounded by a house full of brothers, she had a natural desire to see and experience what the outside world had to offer. Regrettably, her experience was tragic, leaving her tainted for life. If it could happen to Yaakov's daughter, what should we say? How much more careful should we be with our children today?

Commonality has been a disease that has plagued the Jewish community since its inception. Avraham Avinu lived with it when he raised Yitzchak, the person who would succeed him as the next Patriarch. To paraphrase Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita, "Our children must be given total, unequivocal protection. When we play games trying to satisfy their craving for a 'normal' social life, we take a great chance of losing them altogether to outside influences." Rav Belsky cites a powerful interpretation from Horav Shimon Schwab, zl. The Torah in Devarim 8:5 says: "And you shall know with your heart that as a man afflicts his son, Hashem, your G-d, afflicts you." Chazal teach us that this pasuk refers to Avraham who tormented his son, Yitzchak. In what way did Avraham, the amud ha'chesed, pillar of loving kindness, afflict his son - and why would he do such a thing? It was totally uncharacteristic of him.

Rav Schwab explains that one must first take into consideration the circumstances surrounding Yitzchak's upbringing. He was raised to be entirely different from everyone else. Thus, Avraham had to deny his son from having any contact with members of the prevalent culture in which they lived. The second Patriarch presumably grew up with no friends or neighbors with whom he could have social contact. Avraham was called the Ivri, "one from the other side," because the entire world was on one side, while he was on the other side. Veritably, it must have been a lonely existence, but Yitzchak received something that our children might find today to be at a premium: an abundance of powerful love from his parents to offset the pain of loneliness.

Rav Belsky notes that this was the case in many observant families growing up in America during the early part of the twentieth century. In many cities across America, the Jewish community consisted of no more than a handful of Jews. They lived alone within a sea of secular culture that could have

easily drowned them had they attempted to swim in its current. These people "afflicted" their children, denying them the friends, parties and sleepovers that were a part of the social fabric of society. They went to public school, but that is where their social contact ended. The restrictions were definitely severe, but, as a result of these constraints - coupled with the unwavering love, understanding, devotion and care which they received - their grandchildren today are the pillars of Torah communities throughout the world. Rav Belsky adds that if a child's life becomes an endless array of harsh prohibitions, he may well become resentful, but if he experiences genuine love and sensitivity, then this approach will surely succeed.

The guile used by those who would subvert us from the Torah way of life changes with the times. The goal, however, remains the same: present filth and depravity in the most beautiful manner, making it appear appealing and even proper. Shechem and Chamor presented moral pollution through a facade of acceptability and appropriateness. Shimon and Levi saw through the ruse, refusing to compromise on the Torah principles that they prioritized in their lives. We, too, must not only reject that which we know is wrong, but go so far as ensuring that the threat to our spiritual existence is totally expunged. This was the rationale of Shimon and Levi. They feared that one day in the future, the threat of assimilation would once again rear its ugly head. They prevented this danger from being realized.

You have discomposed me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land. (34:30)

Shimon and Levi were both involved in taking revenge against the city of Shechem. Yet, when Yosef had to incarcerate one of the brothers, he chose Shimon. Apparently, he was the one who might have instigated a revolt against him. Why not Levi? When we look down the road to the future we see that Zimri ben Salu, a descendant of Shimon, would be the individual who would lead a rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. On the other hand, when the sin of the Golden Calf was perpetrated, we do not find that any of Levi's descendants were involved. On the contrary, they were the ones who took to the sword in support of Moshe.

An analysis of the reactions of Shimon and Levi to the violation of Dinah, could view the scenario from two perspectives: a sin was committed; and a disgrace against the house of Yaakov was carried out. One is personal; the other is national. There is also a feeling that Hashem's Name was besmirched. Horav Michael Peretz, Shlita, feels that Shimon and Levi understood the violation of Dinah from two distinct perspectives, and each had different attitudes toward the outrage. Shimon cared about the family, and the shame they would suffer. Levi was concerned about the actual sin. A Jewish girl had been defiled by a pagan. This is a terrible sin. It impugns the spiritual integrity of the Jewish People.

Rav Peretz asserts that their separate attitudes can be traced back to their births and the names that their mother, Leah, had given each of them. The names defined them and catalyzed distinct characteristics in them. When Leah gave birth to Shimon, she declared, "Because Hashem has heard that I am unloved, He has given me this one also, and she called him name Shimon," (Bereishis 29:33) which is a derivative of shema, to hear. Shimon represented Leah's response to what she believed was a negative situation in her life. Thus, Shimon's entrance into this would be from what one might view as a negative viewpoint. Levi, however, was named on a more positive note. "This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons," there He called him Levi (ibid.29:34). Concerning Shimon, Leah emphasized the negative, while regarding Levi, she underscored the positive.

Underscoring negativity can result in a child having a hidden agenda which germinates over time, producing the likes of Zimri. Emphasizing the positive, albeit in a negative situation, since Leah does not seem to have been more "loved," can result in descendants of the caliber of Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon HaKohen, and Miriam HaNeviah. I think the choice is clear.

You have discomposed me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land... I am few in number. (34:30)

Rashi explains that Shimon and Levi's actions had disturbed the presence of mind of Yaakov Avinu placing him in a potentially dangerous and vulnerable position vis-?-vis the Canaanite cities surrounding him. The calm that had until now prevailed in Yaakov's home had been disrupted.

What is the meaning of l'havisheini b'yoshev ha'aretz, "making me odious among the inhabitants of the land"? Why would Shimon and Levi's actions against Shechem have such a deleterious effect on Yaakov's reputation? It is not as if the surrounding people were cultured and civilized. Furthermore, why is Yaakov concerned about his family being limited in number?

Clearly, their strength had nothing to do with their numbers, as we see the devastation wrought by Shimon and Levi, who were but two young boys. What did our Patriarch fear? Last, in Yaakov's blessings prior to his demise, he rebuked Shimon and Levi saying, Klei chamas m'cheiroseihem, "Their weaponry is a stolen craft" (Bereishis 49:5). Rashi explains that Shimon and Levi's preoccupation with the weaponry of violence was a trait borrowed from Eisav. It was Eisav who was supposed to live by the sword - not Yaakov. Rashi uses the word umnus, preoccupation or profession, as an acceptable way of life for Eisav, which they seemed to have copied from him. Why does Yaakov refer to it as an umnus, profession.

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, asserts that Yaakov's rebuke was not due to the actual killing, the punishment, which they had meted out against Shechem. His problem was with the umnus, aspect of violence.

This belongs in Eisav's domain. Jews are not violent. They do not resort to murder and execution. That was Eisav's vocation. It was his pastime. After having convinced the populace to circumcise themselves, Shimon and Levi attacked them during the recuperation period and avenged their sister's name, and, for that matter, the name of the Jewish People. The manner in which they carried this out, however, was odious. It tainted the Jewish Name.

A Jew is considered strong only when he acts one hundred percent like a Jew. When we act like Eisav, we are outnumbered. This is what Yaakov intimated when he said, "I am few in number." Horav Ezrachi posits that this idea is the underlying concept behind the Al HaNissim prayer which we say on Chanukah: "You gave the strong into the hands of the weak; the many into the hands of the few; the ritually defiled into the hands of the ritually clean; the wicked into the hands of the righteous; the wanton into the hands of those who are involved in the study of Your Torah." This tefillah underscores the form of the miracle, its cause - not its distinction.

The truth is that we are few, we are weak; from a physical standpoint, we have nothing to show for ourselves. In contrast, from a spiritual perspective, we are righteous, pure, and we study Torah. When we observe Judaism in its perfect form, when the people are on a spiritual plane which coincides with Hashem's expectations of them, then we are able to vanquish our enemies. We triumph over evil when we act as Jews.

There are times when our objectives are credible and praiseworthy, but our approach in carrying out our goals leaves much to be desired. That is acting like Eisav. Singing pesukim from Tehillim to music which would turn the stomachs of even the most addicted hard-rock enthusiast, does not constitute Jewish music. Dancing for a simchah to the choreography of the latest hip aficionado, is not Jewish dancing. The list goes on. The message is clear. We have our way. They have their way. When we try to emulate them, it is odious. We embarrass and demean ourselves, as well as the Jewish name. When we act as Jews are supposed to act, maintaining our holiness and purity, then we are a credit to ourselves, the Jewish People and Hashem's Name.

Lo asah kein l'chol goi, u'mishpatim bal yedaum.

He did not do so for any nation, such judgments, they know them not.

What is meant by this statement? Do gentiles not have laws? While their code of laws do not have the Torah as their origin, they nonetheless have laws. The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, explains that their laws do not bring them any closer to Hashem. They are not inspired by their laws to praise and give

thanks to the Source of law and order. Klal Yisrael, however, are acutely aware of the origin of their mishpatim, and, thus, overtly express their praise and gratitude to Hashem. Our mishpatim are part of our Torah. They comprise life itself.

Veritably, without Torah, one can neither properly know judgment, nor is it truly possible to discern right from wrong objectively. Without Torah as his guide, one is capable of turning light into darkness and vice versa.

Distortion has become a way of life in today's society, as those whose mission it is to adjudicate and legislate laws have no clue of the meaning of "true and false." Their attitudes are founded in their bias, and they are misdirected in accordance with their desires. We who have received this most precious gift - the Torah - have an obligation to praise Hashem for affording us the ability to maintain a clear sense of direction, an uncompromising pristine vision of right and wrong, true and false, so that justice will be executed efficiently and effectively.

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Etzmon and Abigail Rozen and Family