

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Vayishlach 5776

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein *Vayishlach*

I have always wondered why the Mishnah in Avot singled out our father Avraham as being the person who was tested ten times in his lifetime rather than concentrating on the life of our father Yaakov who, as related in this week's Torah reading, underwent so many tests and misfortunes. Yaakov finally escapes the clutches of Lavan only to be confronted by the threat of Eisav attempting to annihilate him.

Yaakov is crippled physically, spiritually and financially by Eisav and his angel and mercenaries. Healing and recovering, Yaakov has to deal with the kidnapping and the assault of his daughter Dena by Shechem. The slaughter of the men of Shechem by Shimon and Levi is watched in powerless disapproval by Yaakov and, according to tradition, numerous armed conflicts with the local Canaanite tribes ensued.

Yaakov's beloved wife, Rochel, dies giving birth to Binyamin. All of this seems to be sufficient tragedy and difficulty for one person's lifetime, yet we are all aware that the greatest test of all – the conflict between Yosef and his brothers lurks just over the horizon in the biblical narrative.

Though Avraham was tested severely and often in his lifetime, it can seem on the surface to regard the life of Yaakov as more challenging and difficult than that of Avraham. Yet the champion of challenges and tests in Jewish tradition remains Avraham and not Yaakov. Yaakov will later complain to Pharaoh about the troubled life he has led but Jewish tradition does not recognize that statement as being of heroic stature. Rather it seemingly disapproves of Yaakov's wanting a more leisurely and serene life. That will only be granted to him in the hereafter.

I think that a possible difference between Avraham and Yaakov is that most of the tests of Avraham were explicitly ordained and instructed to him by Heaven itself. God, so to speak, tells Avraham to descend into Egypt, to cast away Yishmael, to foresee the future enslavement of his descendants, to sacrifice his son Yitzchak on the altar at Moriah and to leave his ancestral home in Mesopotamia and settle in the Land of Israel.

Even though Heaven is aware of Yaakov's travails and ordains them, most of Yaakov's challenges and difficulties are, to a certain extent, to be viewed as self-inflicted. They stem from choices that he alone made. He chose to listen to his mother and obtain the blessings from his father, fully aware that by so doing he would incur his brother's violent wrath. He crosses the river to confront Eisav's angel. He is well aware that Dena's brothers intend revenge for the abduction and assault of their sister. He openly favors Yosef over the other brothers and therefore human nature of jealousy and resentment must follow.

Apparently self-inflicted tests are not the paradigm that the Torah wishes to establish regarding overcoming difficulties, tests and challenges in life. It seems that Yaakov could have avoided some of the experiences that befell him in his lifetime. The same is undoubtedly true of many of the events of past and current events in the national life of the Jewish people. Shabat shalom

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein *Hooray For The Murderers*

The trend over the past century and especially in our current twisted times has been to try to discover the motives that drive people to kill other people. The victims being killed are many times unknown to their killers and are personally innocent of any guilt in their death. Their fault lay in being of a certain race, nationality, religious belief and even simply (and unfortunately) being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

This mindset, of understanding the murderer while almost ignoring the murdered, reached new heights of official callousness, which bordered on idiocy. A Swedish official in that country's Foreign Ministry explained that the massacre of one-hundred, twenty-nine innocent people in Paris was caused by Israel's "occupation" of Palestine. Israel's provocative stance of defending itself from Palestinian terror somehow explains and may even justify the murderous behavior of the radical Islamist killers in Paris, is apparently how he explains the situation.

Well, Sweden is pretty much a hopeless case anyway as far as any sensibility regarding Israel is concerned, so we can rack up that statement as just Sweden being Sweden. But then along came John Kerry, the Secretary of State of the United States, who opined that the killings at the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris a few months ago were understandable, though still illegal,

since the magazine had sinned in publishing a cartoon of Mohamed in one of its previous editions.

This gaffe was immediately pulled back by the media people at the State Department and Kerry then stated that there was and is no justification whatsoever for that or any other terror attack. But his original statement on the matter was a most revealing insight into the thinking and value system that pervades much of America's foreign policy decisions today.

The media jumped all over John Kerry's words and criticized him for having spoken in such terms. But they did so for the wrong reason. They simply missed the point. They saw his words as weakening of a basic principle of Western democratic societies – that of freedom of speech. But the real gaffe was that of a lack of a true sense of morality, of right and wrong, of the inherent difference between the murderer and the victim.

Freedom of speech will be of little value in society if that society has lost its moral bearings and cannot clearly identify right from wrong. As always, Israel and the Jewish people are the canary in the mine. The world overlooked all Arab terrorism against Israel and Jews and then, surprise, New York, London, Madrid, Paris and Mali occurred.

There are no more good guys and bad guys left in our world. Moral equivalency reigns supreme. There are only varying degrees of grey that exist, and good and evil are relative terms of reference, certainly not to be considered as being absolute. Israelis protecting themselves are just as innocent or guilty as Arabs stabbing them with kitchen knives!

The Arabs have a grievance. And that grievance is that the Jews had the temerity to build a strong, prosperous, democratic state in the midst of an Arab region of repression, violence and constant turmoil. The existence of such an infidel state is sufficient enough to justify boycotts, violence and hatred of Israel, Jews and Judaism worldwide.

Any sort of moral compass or direction has been completely obliterated. We should no longer punish or forcibly defend ourselves against the murderers. Rather, we should attempt to understand them, sympathize with them and then they will become docile and peaceful people. This Alice in Wonderland view of the world prevails in much of academia, media and government.

The President of the United States even refuses to give the murderers a name and an identity lest it sound provocative and derogatory to the murderers amongst us. Such a lack of moral clarity is foreboding for our future and for world society generally.

The European Union is busy labeling Israeli products while Europe is under Moslem siege from migrants, bombings and a culture war. Talk about misdirected priorities and inimical policies. But this is almost what can be expected from a society that cheers and understands murderers and evades any responsibilities to the victims. The injustice of this is appalling. However we should not be deterred from holding firm even in the face of such blatant hypocrisy and woolly-headed thinking.

Eventually truth and common sense will prevail though tragically it may take a few more Paris massacres to drive home the essential moral truth – that there is a difference between murderers and their victims. Stop understanding the murderers, just concentrate on destroying them.

Shabat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayishlach *For the week ending 28 November 2015 / 16 Kislev 5776*

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

A Nod is as Good as a Wink to a Blind Man "I dwelled with Lavan..." (32-5)

Can you imagine the Prime Minister of the State of Israel standing up in the Congress of the United States and warning the Americans not to mess with the State of Israel because we keep the whole Torah?

Of course it would be a wonderful thing if such a statement were true. But even if it were true, so fine, say the Americans, "You're a good Jew and you keep your Torah, but what do we care about that? We don't believe in your Torah; we have a New Testament."

Or if he addressed the Parliament in Iran with the same claim, "Don't fool around with us, Persians, because we keep the whole Torah." I'm not sure that the mullahs would be terribly impressed with that assertion.

So why does Rashi tell us that Yaakov was threatening Esav at the beginning of this week's Torah portion. Rashi comments that by using the word – garti – "I dwelled", whose gematria is 613, Yaakov was warning Esav not to cross him, because he had been careful to observe all 613 mitzvot even while in the house of Lavan.

Why would Esav care that Yaakov had kept all of the mitzvot? Esav was not exactly the biggest believer in the mitzvot.

And if Yaakov was warning Esav, why didn't Yaakov say it explicitly instead of couching his threat in numerology? How could Yaakov expect Esav to pick up on such an obscure hint?

The purpose of a mitzvah is to connect man with G-d. Not just through the essential connection that comes through carrying out G-d's Will, but the

remembrance of why I am doing this mitzvah — because G-d commanded me to do it — reminds me that I am doing the Will of G-d, and that in itself connects me to G-d.

“I dwelled with Lavan...”

When Yaakov spoke to Esav, he was really reminding himself that sending Esav a monetary tribute, dividing his camp, and preparing for war, were no more than physical actions designed to remind himself that G-d is the Cause of all causes and the Reason of all reasons

And to remind oneself, a hint is all you need.

Source: based on Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman as seen in Talelei Orot

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Rabbi Weinreb on Parsha

Vayishlach - “Jacob’s Strategy: A Model for Jewish Leadership?”

Regular readers of this column on the weekly Torah portion are familiar with my style. They know that I usually focus upon some early personal memory and connect it to the parasha. Within each parasha, I select a less-known incident, or relatively minor personality for reflection and elaboration. I rarely deal with the major issues of the Torah interpretation, and I steer clear from both grand philosophical themes and the upheavals of world history.

This week’s column will be somewhat different from my customary style. I intend to go beyond my usual microcosmic interests and will instead relate to a macrocosmic phenomenon. I refer to the cyclical nature of history, a process epitomized in the old adage, “History repeats itself.” This phenomenon is especially important to students of the Book of Genesis, which is read in the synagogue every Shabbat during this time of year. I say this because our Sages have told us that the events of all of Jewish history are “repeats” of the narratives we are currently reading and studying. They have taught us that “ma’aseh avot siman labanim, the stories of the Patriarchs are precursors for what will happen to their descendants.”

Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, known as Ramban or Nachmanides, commits himself, in his renowned commentary, to finding predictions of future Jewish events in the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps more than any other traditional commentator Ramban insists that we read these Torah portions closely enough to be able to discover patterns of events that occurred to the Jewish people centuries, and even millennia, after the accounts described in these readings.

It is, therefore, no wonder that Ramban finds the opening drama of this week’s parasha, Parashat Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:43), especially significant. By the time we begin this week’s Torah reading, we are already thoroughly familiar with the enmity that Esau bears toward Jacob. Just two weeks ago, in Parashat Toledot, we read: “Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, ‘Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob.’” Jacob’s mother, Rebecca, knew of Esau’s hostility, and it was at her urging that Jacob fled Beersheba and sojourned for many years in the faraway land of Haran, where he married, raised a large family, and amassed significant wealth.

This week, we read of Jacob’s return to Canaan, but not before he must deal with the unavoidable encounter with his hostile sibling. How does Jacob prepare for this frightening encounter? The Torah tells us that he prepares in several ways: he readies himself for battle, he sends gifts ahead to try to mollify Esau, and he prays to the Almighty. Additionally, we learn that he divided the people with him into two camps, reasoning that “if Esau comes to one and attacks it, the other may yet escape.” We then learn Esau approaches Jacob and his camp, accompanied by a small army of four hundred men.

At this point, Jacob humbles himself extremely. “He himself went on ahead and bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother.” Esau greets him, embraces him, kisses him, and weeps with him. But that does not bring the bowing to an end. The maids and their children bow low, as do Leah and her children, and even Joseph and Rachel “came

forward and bowed low.” Jacob begs Esau to accept his gifts, and repeatedly refers to him as “my lord.” He does not merely humble himself; he subjugates himself and demeans himself before his brother. The fact that Esau has apparently relinquished his enmity and seems ready to restore brotherly relations does not convince Jacob to cease his abject behavior.

Eventually, Esau and Jacob take leave of one another. Esau offers, “Let us start on our journey, and I will proceed at your pace.” Esau seems ready to offer Jacob equality. But Jacob refuses Esau’s offer and, consistently referring to him as “my lord,” he says, “Let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I travel slowly.” Jacob seems to prefer a subsidiary status.

What does all of this mean for future relationships between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau? If one is to take the phrase “ma’aseh avot siman labanim” seriously, one must consider Jacob’s behavior as a blueprint for the Jews’ relationship with other nations for all future time.

Is this the prescribed policy for the Jewish nation’s dealings with other nations throughout our history? Are we to bow and beg forever, ignoring the conciliatory behaviors that other nations demonstrate toward us? Are we to also reject offers of equality and insist upon subsidiary status?

These questions call to mind the numerous occasions in our history when they were very relevant to Jewish policy makers. Even today there are those who, on religious grounds, insist that we must not assert ourselves in the international arena. We must avoid confrontation, even if it means forgoing rights and privileges. We must follow Jacob’s example, they argue.

Others vehemently disagree. They see this passive behavior as surrender. For them, this behavior was a nearly fatal flaw that has haunted us throughout the many centuries of our galut.

It is here that we are advised to carefully examine the words of those commentators who have explored these issues in terms of the story of Jacob and Esau’s confrontation. Chief among them is Ramban himself, who criticizes Jacob for humbling himself before Esau and referring to himself as “your servant Jacob.” In fact, Midrash Rabba goes even further and states: “The moment that Jacob referred to Esau as ‘my lord,’ the Holy One, Blessed Be He, said to him, ‘You have lowered yourself and designated him as your master eight times. I swear that I will install eight kings from among his descendants before your descendants ascend to positions of royalty.’”

How telling is the passage in Midrash Rabba, not on the Book of Genesis, but on the Book of Esther, which teaches us that Mordecai was chosen to be the hero of the Purim story, because as a descendant of Benjamin he could courageously and successfully defy Haman. Benjamin was the only one of Jacob’s children who did not bow before Esau. Benjamin was not yet born at the time of the story of Jacob’s encounter with Esau.

These passages in the writings and teachings of our Sages do not see Jacob’s behavior as the perfect model for future relationships between the Jews and their enemies. They find Jacob’s behavior weak and ultimately ineffective. Instead, they glorify Mordecai and Matityahu, heroes of the stories of Purim and Hanukkah. Can it be just a coincidence that in little more than a week, we will recall and joyously celebrate the Hanukkah story and Matityahu’s courageous leadership?

The medieval commentary authored by Ba’al Haturim puts it this harshly: “Jacob’s fear of Esau, addressing him as ‘my lord,’ caused his descendants to become exiles among the other nations.” Another commentary reminds us of an ancient proverb: “He who makes himself a sheep will be devoured by the wolves.”

Intellectual honesty demands that I at least refer to other traditional commentaries which value Jacob’s behavior and do recommend it as a model for future confrontations between Jews and their enemies. Thus, the Midrash Lekach Tov suggests that all Jewish leaders who find themselves dealing with the leaders of other nations are to study this week’s Torah portion and to learn from it strategies of appeasement and compromise. The 16th century Jewish Italian commentator, Rabbi Obadiah Sforno, also adopts this position and lauds Jacob’s tactics.

There are no easy answers to the dilemmas of leadership. But the leaders of today are well advised to study this week's parasha well, with all of its diverse interpretations, and decide for themselves which tactics to choose at today's crucial juncture of world history. Personally, I am convinced that if they do study the parasha, they may find that there were times when Jacob's way was sadly necessary. But I wager that today, they will find the strategies of Mordecai and Matityahu more compelling. I pray that they will find them effective.

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Feeling the Fear

It is one of the most enigmatic episodes in the Torah, but also one of the most important, because it was the moment that gave the Jewish people its name: Israel, one who "wrestles with God and with men and prevails."

Jacob, hearing that his brother Esau is coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men, was terrified. He was, says the Torah, "very afraid and distressed." He made three forms of preparation: appeasement, prayer and war (Rashi to Gen. 32:9). He sent Esau a huge gift of cattle and flocks, hoping thereby to appease him. He prayed to God, "Rescue me, I pray, from the hand of my brother" (32:12). And he made preparation for war, dividing his household into two camps so that one at least would survive.

Yet he remained anxious. Alone at night he wrestled with a stranger until the break of dawn. Who the stranger was is not clear. The text calls him a man. Hosea (12:4) called him an angel. The sages said it was the guardian angel of Esau.[1] Jacob himself seems sure that he has encountered God himself. He calls the place where the struggle took place Peniel, saying, "I have seen God face to face and my life was spared" (32:30).

There are many interpretations. One, however, is particularly fascinating both in terms of style and substance. It comes from Rashi's grandson, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (Rashbam, France, c.1085-1158). Rashbam had a strikingly original approach to biblical commentary.[2] He felt that the sages, intent as they were on reading the text for its halakhic ramifications, often failed to penetrate to what he called *omek peshuto shel mikra*, the plain sense of the text in its full depth.

Rashbam felt that his grandfather occasionally erred on the side of a midrashic, rather than a "plain" reading of the text. He tells us that he often debated the point with Rashi himself, who admitted that if he had the time he would have written further commentaries to the Torah in the light of new insights into the plain sense that occurred to him "every day". This is a fascinating insight into the mind of Rashi, the greatest and most famous commentator in the entire history of rabbinic scholarship.

All of this is a prelude to Rashbam's remarkable reading of the night-time wrestling match. He takes it as an instance of what Robert Alter has called a *type-scene*,[3] that is, a stylised episode that happens more than once in Tanakh. One obvious example is *young-man-meets-future-wife-at-well*, a scene enacted with variations three times in the Torah: in the case of Abraham's servant and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, and Moses and Tziporah. There are differences between them, but sufficient similarities to make us realise that we are dealing with a convention. Another example, which occurs many times in Tanakh, is *birth-of-a-hero-to-a-hitherto-infertile-woman*.

Rashbam sees this as the clue to understanding Jacob's night-time fight. He relates it to other episodes in Tanakh, two in particular: the story of Jonah, and the obscure episode in the life of Moses when, on his way back to Egypt, the text says that "When they were in the place where they spent the night along the way, God confronted Moses and wanted to kill him" (Ex. 4:24). Tziporah then saved Moses' life by giving their son a *brit* (Ex. 4:25-26).[4]

It is the story of Jonah that provides the key to understanding the others. Jonah sought to escape from his mission to go to Nineveh to warn the people that the city was about to be destroyed if they did not repent. Jonah fled in a boat to Tarshish, but God brought a storm that threatened to sink the ship. The prophet was then thrown into the sea and swallowed by a

giant fish that later vomited him out alive. Jonah thus realised that flight was impossible.

The same, says Rashbam, applies to Moses who, at the burning bush, repeatedly expressed his reluctance to undertake the task God had set him. Evidently, Moses was still prevaricating even after beginning the journey, which is why God was angry with him.

So it was with Jacob. According to Rashbam, despite God's assurances, he was still afraid of encountering Esau. His courage failed him and he was trying to run away. God sent an angel to stop him doing so.

It is a unique interpretation, sobering in its implications. Here were three great men, Jacob, Moses and Jonah, yet all three, according to Rashbam, were afraid. Of what? None was a coward.

They were afraid, essentially, of their mission. Moses kept telling God at the burning bush: Who am I? They won't believe in me. I am not a man of words. Jonah was reluctant to deliver a message from God to Israel's enemies. And Jacob had just said to God, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faith that You have shown me" (Gen. 32:11).

Nor were these the only people in Tanakh who had this kind of fear. So did the prophet Isaiah when he said to God, "I am a man of unclean lips." So did Jeremiah when he said, "I cannot speak: I am a child."

This is not physical fear. It is the fear that comes from a feeling of personal inadequacy. "Who am I to lead the Jewish people?" asked Moses. "Who am I to deliver the word of God?" asked the prophets. "Who am I to stand before my brother Esau, knowing that I will continue the covenant and he will not?" asked Jacob. Sometimes the greatest have the least self-confidence, because they know how immense is the responsibility and how small they feel in relation to it. Courage does not mean having no fear. It means having fear but overcoming it. If that is true of physical courage it is no less true of moral and spiritual courage.

Marianne Williamson's remarks on the subject have become justly famous. She wrote:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." [5]

Shakespeare said it best (in *Twelfth Night*): "Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em."

I sometimes feel that, consciously or subconsciously, some take flight from Judaism for this very reason. Who are we to be God's witness to the world, a light to the nations, a role model for others? If even spiritual giants like Jacob, Moses and Jonah sought to flee, how much more so you and me? This fear of unworthiness is one that surely most of us have had at some time or other.

The reason it is wrong is not that it is untrue, but that it is irrelevant. Of course we feel inadequate to a great task before we undertake it. It is having the courage to undertake it that makes us great. Leaders grow by leading. Writers grow by writing. Teachers grow by teaching. It is only by overcoming our sense of inadequacy that we throw ourselves into the task and find ourselves lifted and enlarged by so doing. In the title of a well known book, we must "feel the fear and do it anyway."

Be not afraid of greatness: that is why God wrestled with Jacob, Moses and Jonah and would not let them escape. We may not be born great, but by being born (or converting to become) a Jew, we have greatness thrust upon us. And as Marianne Williamson rightly said, by liberating ourselves from fear, we help liberate others. That is what we as Jews are meant to do: to have the courage to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to be true to our faith while seeking to be a blessing to others regardless of their faith.

For we are all children of the man who was given the name of one who wrestles with God and with men and prevails. Ours is not an easy task, but what worthwhile mission ever was? We are as great as the challenges we have the courage to undertake. And if, at times, we feel like running away, we should not feel bad about it. So did the greatest.

To feel fear is fine. To give way to it, is not. For God has faith in us even if, at times, even the best lack faith in themselves.

[1] Bereishit Rabbah 77:3.

[2] He sets this out in his commentary to Genesis 37:2.

[3] See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

[4] Rashbam to Gen. 32:29. Rashbam also includes the episode of Bilaam, the donkey and the angel as a further instance of this type-scene.

[5] Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*, HarperCollins, 1992, 190.

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Rabbi Ari Kahn on Parsha

Climbing Jacob's Ladder

On the run from a furious brother who is plotting his demise, Yaakov finally falls to the ground in exhaustion and allows himself to sleep. His mind still racing, he wonders how the situation has spun so far out of control. Only yesterday, things had seemed perfect, even idyllic; only yesterday, he had been part of a family, but today tears and screams drown out all civil communication. They had managed to get along, despite their differences; but now – chaos. He had been put in an impossible situation. Should he respect his mother or his father? No child should ever be forced to make such a choice. There was no easy, clear solution: Obeying his mother meant deceiving his father. Honoring his father meant defying his mother. And then there was the matter of his brother, who wanted him dead.

And all this, over some blessings. Were they really worth this drama? Were they worth dying for? Moreover, who was to say that ill-gotten blessings would ‘work’? This was not some magical spell that merely needed to be uttered in order to bring about the desired result; this was a prayer, meant to open the very heavens and bring about Divine aid and abundance. Could blessings attained surreptitiously bring about such results? What if God did not agree with his mother, and the stolen blessings would prove worthless?

As Yaakov drifted off to sleep (or, perhaps, not really sleep), he floated into an alternative consciousness. A new reality swept over him; he had an epiphany. All at once, everything he saw was holy, beautiful, awe-inspiring. The heavens opened, and he saw the “entrance,” a ladder reaching up to heaven, with angels climbing up and down. Yaakov’s first reaction might well have been relief, even joy: God had not rejected him because of his behavior. Quite the opposite: He was granted revelation. As his eyes followed the ladder up toward heaven, he saw a glimpse of images that were so holy, they were beyond imagination.

And then, Yaakov heard a voice he had never heard before – yet the sound was strangely familiar and unmistakable: God spoke to him, introduced Himself, and promised him great things: First, that the land he was lying on would one day be his. Second, God assured him that he would have many children who would burst forth in every direction, and, third, that God would protect him. And then, the voice was still.

If we consider this revelation, first in terms of the implication that God had chosen Yaakov, and additionally in terms of the blessings that make up the content of the revelation, we might expect Yaakov to have reacted with unqualified, unmitigated joy. And yet, Yaakov’s response was far more circumspect; his words reflect a certain dread or fear behind the awe he expressed. Apparently, the content of God’s communication gave Yaakov cause for worry, not because of what He said, but because of what He did not say. Something was missing, and recent events make it clear what Yaakov had hoped to hear but did not.

Yitzchak had given Yaakov two separate sets of blessings: One set were blessings that had always been intended for him. As he sent him away to begin his journey, Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, knowing precisely whom he was, with the “blessings given to Avraham.” The Promised Land and a great nation of descendants to inherit it. This blessing was echoed in the promises Yaakov had just been given by God Himself. On the other hand, the blessing he acquired by dressing up as his brother Esav, the blessing he had taken surreptitiously, the blessing that was so important to his mother, promised physical bounty, abundance and power. When God spoke to Yaakov, He was silent regarding this blessing – and that silence was deafening; Yaakov heard it loud and clear. The blessings for great wealth were not repeated; apparently, they were not in his future.

When Yaakov awakes, he makes declarations and promises: He will build a house for God, and if God gives him the smallest modicum of physical security – clothes on his back, bread on his plate – he will, in turn, give one tenth back to the Almighty. Suddenly, for Yaakov, the blessings he had gone to such great lengths to acquire are no longer important. The physical world that had seemed so critically important pales in contrast with the sublime vision he has just been shown. Yaakov suddenly understands that he can be content to live his life with only a bare minimum of physical wealth – and he vows to dedicate even that minimal wealth to God. Yaakov sees the ladder, with its feet on the ground and its head in heaven, and he draws a remarkable conclusion: He himself can be like that ladder. He can live simultaneously in the physical and spiritual worlds. He can bridge the gap, and live his life as a quest to achieve spirituality and holiness, continually climbing up the ladder from earth to heaven. At that moment, he vows to devote his physical resources to his quest for holiness, and to climb that ladder just as he saw the angels do.

With this realization, Yaakov can continue on his journey. Only when he understands that wealth and power are not the true blessing is he able to travel forth and to succeed. Now that he fully understands the true nature and significance of the blessings he received from his father, he becomes worthy of the blessings his mother instructed him to acquire. The physical bounty with which he was blessed becomes a tool in the service of the greater blessings of spirituality and holiness. Wealth is not the real gift; rather, true blessing is born of figuring out how to take the physical stuff God gives us and use it to construct our own ladder to heaven. A blessed life is one spent climbing the ladder and transforming physical bounty into spiritual wealth.

For a more in-depth analysis see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.com/2015/11/audio-and-essays-parashat-vayetze.html>

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayishlach

Victory Is Defined As Achieving One's Stated Objective

After fighting all night with the guardian angel of Eisav, the malach tells Yaakov "Let me go, for dawn has arisen." Yaakov responds, "I will not send you free unless you bless me." The malach asks Yaakov his name. Yaakov answers that his name is Yaakov. The malach responds "Your name will no longer be called Yaakov; it will be called Yisrael, for you have struggled with the Divine and with men and have overcome." [Bereshis 32:27-30]

Yaakov has struggled with Divine refers to his wrestling with the malach. What does it mean "he has struggled with men and has overcome"? Rashi says this refers to his struggles with Eisav and Lavan. Yaakov has emerged victorious from his confrontations with both Eisav and Lavan.

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, zt"l, (Lucerne/Zurich, Switzerland) asks an interesting question. It is understandable to say that Yaakov Avinu was victorious with his uncle Lavan. Lavan tried to cheat him; he tried to rob him; he gave him trouble. At the end of the day, at the end of the sojourn in the House of Lavan, Yaakov was in fact victorious. Yaakov came out intact with his family and with his children and he was very successful financially.

But how can we term what happened in Parshas Vayishlach (in terms of the encounter with brother Eisav) as a victory? Yaakov is afraid of Eisav; he is subservient to him; he is servile; he bows down to him continuously;

he appeases him. This isn't victory. This is appeasement! How can the Torah describe this as "Sarisa im anashim vatuchal" [you have striven with men and have overcome]? How is Yaakov victorious if Yaakov had to pay Eisav off and act like a slave to him?

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik offers a very interesting thought: If we ask this question, we do not understand the meaning of the word "victory". Victory does not necessarily mean that one vanquishes his enemy. The definition of victory is achieving what one started out wanting to achieve. Victory is achieving that goal regardless of how it is achieved. Yes, Yaakov could have in fact tried to tough it out with Eisav, but it may have cost him his family or part of his family. Yaakov Avinu was not interested in boasting rights, such as "I showed my brother! I really gave it to Eisav!" Yaakov was interested in remaining alive. He was interested primarily in being a servant of G-d. He was interested in preserving his family. At the end of the day he achieved all of those goals.

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik told this idea over to a couple that had come to him for marital counselling. In marriage, as we all know, there are many times disagreements between husband and wife. Often the issue about which they argue becomes secondary to the larger issue of "Who is going to win?" Each side digs in their heels because they want to achieve victory. Rav Moshe Soloveitchik told the couple that they should each define victory as achieving Shalom Bayis [Domestic tranquility] in their home.

As we all know, when peace dwells between husband and wife, the Shechinah [Divine Presence] dwells between them. The desired goal should not be "I want to go to my parents for Yom Tov and you want to go to your parents for Yom Tov" or "I want to do it this way and you want to do it that way". Victory is when the Shechinah dwells between them. If the way to achieve "Shechina shreyua beineihem" is in fact to give in, then that is not considered a defeat, it is considered a victory.

This does not only apply in relationships between husbands and wives, but it applies in relationships between other people as well. When people get into arguments (machlokes), the desire to win is so overwhelming that, at the end of the day, nothing else counts. All of us need to realize that when we have an adversary, the real adversary is not the person with whom one argues; the adversary is the yetzer harah [evil inclination] that tells us to prolong the machlokes.

Victory is not achieved by getting one's way and not by vanquishing one's opponent or not by getting him to admit that he is wrong. The real victory is achieved when machlokes ends and the yetzer harah is defeated. We must always keep in mind: The adversary is not my landlord; the adversary is not my boss; and the adversary is not my neighbor. The adversary is the yetzer harah that continuously tells us "Don't give in. Don't be a wimp. You need to stand up for your rights!"

A Parting Of Company Between Comrades In Arms

The Torah records the terrible incident that happened to Dinah, daughter of Leah. She was violated by Shechem, son of Chamor. Shimon and Levi, two of Yaakov's sons, were terribly upset about this and wanted to defend the family honor. They devised a plan to have all the males of the town circumcise themselves and when they were weak, killed all of them.

It would seem that Shimon and Levi were cut from the same cloth, so to speak. They apparently had similar natures, similar desires, and similar temperaments. Neither could stand for such injustice towards a family member. Although Dinah was a sister to all the brothers, it was Shimon and Levi who became comrades in arms in devising and executing the plan for revenge.

In Parshas Vayechi, when Yaakov blesses his children, he lumps Shimon and Levi together. In fact, he seems to curse them rather than bless them and tells them "therefore I will divide them in Jacob and I will disperse them in Israel." [Bereshis 49:7] They were the only two tribes that did not get their own portion of land in Eretz Yisrael. Shimon had a portion of the inheritance that was granted to the Tribe of Yehudah and the Tribe of Levi was dispersed among the different cities of Israel. It thus seems that throughout their lifetime, Shimon and Levi were two peas in a pod. They shared this common temperament of zealotry and that's the way it was throughout their lives.

And yet we see that there was a demarcation and a parting of company between Shimon and Levi. During the incident in the desert when Zimri, Prince of the Tribe of Shimon, publicly preformed an act of immorality, Pinchas, grandson of Aharon, of the Tribe of Levi took up the mantle of zealotry and killed him. In that incident, Chazal tell us, the members of the Tribe of Shimon sided with their prince. Ironically, a descendant of Levi took up arms here against his old comrade in arms, his old ally from the battle of Shechem. In this incident, they split and went on divergent paths.

The Netziv makes an observation on the pasuk "And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Yaakov's sons (shnei bnei Yaakov), Shimon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and they came upon the city confidently, and killed every male." [Bereshis 34:25]. The Netziv asks why the pasuk needs to tell us that Shimon and Levi were "two of Yaakov's sons" (shnei bnei Yaakov)? We can count!

The Netziv answers that there were two motivating factors. Shimon and Levi were upset, as the pasuk describes "for he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with a daughter of Yaakov – and such a thing is not done" [Bereshis 34:7]. The Netziv identifies the two factors as follows. Number one it was a shame for the family (lishkav es bas Yaakov). Then there was another crime as well: "Ki nevalah assah b'Yisrael" – the holiness of the Jewish people was violated by this act of immorality. One factor was Kavod Mishpacha [family pride] and one factor was Kedushas Yisrael [Jewish sanctity]. The Netziv suggests that they both did the same act of revenge but the motivations of Shimon and Levi were different. Shimon did it because of the affront to the family. Levi did it because of the violation of the sanctity of the Jewish nation, which must remain intact. The difference, says the Netziv, manifested itself generations later with the incident of Zimri and Pinchos. Shimon was always more interested in family honor and dignity. He was not motivated by Kedushas Yisrael, Jewish sanctity. When the prince of the House of Shimon was involved in an immoral act, the tribe members rallied around their prince. They came to the defense of their family member. Levi and his descendants did not focus on Kavod Mishpacha – but on the larger issue that was at stake here – Kedushas Yisrael.

Shimon and Levi parted company over Kedushas Yisrael versus Family Pride. Shimon said "Family comes first. This is our man. This is our prince. We must stand up for him and do what's right for the family." Levi said "Shimon, sorry. This is where we need to go our separate ways." This is Levi following his own approach throughout all of the Torah (l'sheetoso). When a Tribe was needed to fight the battle of the Golden Calf, it was this very tribe. "Who is for G-d, gather around me. And the entire Tribe of Levi gathered around him (Moshe)" [Shmos 32:26]. Levi had the genetic capacity – when it came to defending the Holiness of Israel (Kedushas Yisrael) – to put aside all other considerations." This is what Moshe alludes to at the end of the Torah when blessing Levi: "The one who said of his father and mother, 'I have not seen him'; his brothers he did not recognize and his children he did not know; for they kept Your statement, and Your covenant, they would preserve." [Devorim 33:9]

As long as their agendas coalesced, Shimon and Levi were comrades in arms. But at the incident of Pinchos and Zimri, there were two divergent agendas – Kavod Mishpacha versus Kedushas Yisrael. Levi came out on the side of Kedushas Yisrael and zealously defended the Honor of G-d.

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

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The TorahWeb Foundation

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Our Dual Relationship with the Secular World

When Yaakov returned to Eretz Yisroel he "encamped" ("vayichan") on the outskirts of the city Shechem (Breishis 33:18). The rabbis of the Talmud (Shabbos 33a) understand the possuk to imply that in addition he improved and "beautified" the city, either by instituting a coin system, or a public bath house, or a shopping mall. The medrash understands yet an

additional level of interpretation on the phrase "vayivhan", that Yaakov established his techum for Shabbos purposes[1]. The halacha declares that at the start of Shabbos each Jewish person has to determine where "his home" is, and has a very limited area around "his home" where he may roam about. Yaakov established his "home" and determined where his limited area of walking would be.

The Torah (Breishis 23:4) quotes Avraham Avinu as telling the bnei Chet (who lived in Kiryat Arba) that he was both a stranger and a regular citizen dwelling among them. These two terms are mutually exclusive! If one is a regular citizen, he is not at all a guest or a stranger - so how did Avraham describe himself as being simultaneously a stranger and a citizen? The answer obviously is that all religious Jews relate to the outside world about them in a dual fashion[2]. In many areas we work along with everyone else as full partners. We all use the world together and have a reciprocal obligation towards each other to make it more livable and more comfortable. When we were born we entered into a world full of beautiful trees, a world with hospitals, medications, etc. Therefore we all have an obligation to provide for such conveniences and institutions for the next generation[3]. All of mankind is considered one big partnership in a certain sense, just as people living in the same community are considered as belonging to a partnership, and are therefore obligated to contribute towards that partnership - in order to further develop it - in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the partners[4].

Yaakov Avinu, like his grandfather Avraham, felt obligated to establish shopping malls etc. to improve everyone's quality of living. Yes, we are all obligated to participate in all civic, scientific, and political enterprises which will enrich the lives of the entire community.

But at the same time the religious Jew has his own unique outlook on life and style of living. The tradition of the Talmud was, based on the possuk in Eicha (2:9), that although there is much chochma (knowledge and wisdom) to be gained from the secular world, but "Torah" (teaching a way of life and an outlook on the world) can not be picked up from the other disciplines. These can only be acquired through the revealed truths of the Torah.

Avraham Avinu says that although he is on the one hand a full-fledged citizen, at the same time he feels he is a stranger amongst his non-Jewish neighbors, and not only does he lead his life differently from them, even after death he may not bury his spouse Sara in the regular cemetery. Even in death, the Jew stands alone. And similarly Yaakov, despite the fact that he's so involved in improving the entire society, nonetheless he feels it necessary to chart out his techum, indicating that he can not "go out of his box" to mingle freely with all of his neighbors. He is absolutely unique and alone. The Torah mentions the fact that the Jewish people always stands alone (see Bamidbar 23:9), and this is linked (Devarim 33:28) to the "standing alone" of Yaakov Avinu.

Immediately after the mention of the fact that Yaakov wanted his family to stand alone, the Torah relates what tragedy followed (perek 34) when Dina decided to disobey her father's instructions and "hang out" with the local girls her age.

The Torah commanded us[5] ("u'shmartem es mishmarti" - Vayikra 18:30) to introduce safeguards to the mitzvos. Not only are we Biblically forbidden to carry in a reshush harabbim, we must also abstain from carrying in a karmelis, lest we forget and carry in a reshush harabim. Not only are we Biblically prohibited to eat meat cooked with milk, we should also avoid eating chicken with cheese, lest this will lead to eating real basar bechalav. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto wrote in his classic work Mesilas Yesharim that the Torah's command to "erect a fence" ("asu s'yag laTorah" - Avos 1:1) about the mitzvos, to protect us from even coming close to sin, is not addressed only to the rabbis. Each individual must introduce personal "harchakos" (safeguards) depending on his or her particular situation.

The Torah relates (Breishis 35:2-4) that Yaakov disposed of all the avoda zarah (idols) in his possession which his children had taken from Shechem. The commentaries point out that avoda zarah ought to really be burnt. Why didn't Yaakov destroy them? The suggestion is offered (see Sforono) that the people of Shechem had already been "mevatel" these avoda zarahs, so

strictly speaking, they had already lost their status of avoda zarah. Yaakov's disposing of them was a chumra that he thought appropriate in his circumstance.

A man like Yaakov who is very involved in the outside world, establishing shopping malls, etc., has to accept upon himself additional chumras and harchakos to prevent himself from being swallowed up by the secular society around him. One who sits in the beis hamedrash all day long, or who lives in Bnei Brak or Meah Shearim doesn't really need all such extra chumras or harchakos; he's no where near the secular world.

The same word ("vayichan") which indicates how Yaakov acted in accordance with the concept of "toshav" (a regular citizen of the world), also has the additional connotation of drawing the lines for isolation through techumin. We all have an obligation to strike a proper and reasonable balance between our status as ger and toshav; and the more one functions as a toshav, the more that individual must personally emphasize that he is at the same time really a "ger"

[1] See Meshech Chochma

[2] See "Confrontation" by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Tradition, Summer 1964, pp.26-27

[3] See Taanis 23a

[4] See Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 163:61. Also see Taxation and Dina Demalchusa

[5] See Yevamos 21a

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The Jerusalem Post

By Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

The Eternal Struggle And How It Will End

November 26, 2015 Thursday 14 Kislev 5776

From its inception, the Jewish nation has faced and continues to face waves of hatred and anti-Semitism.

This week's portion describes Jacob's return with his family from his father-in-law's home in Haran- Padan Aram back to the land of his fathers, the Land of Israel – then called the Land of Canaan. The pinnacle of this journey is the complex and emotionally charged meeting between Jacob and his older brother Esau. The latter, as we remember, was waiting for the day when he could kill Jacob in revenge for the blessings Jacob tricked their father Isaac into giving him. This was the central reason why Jacob fled his father's house for Haran. Now Jacob is returning to his land not knowing how Esau will react to his return. Has he forgiven him during the years that have passed since that same incident, or does his original plan to get back at Jacob still stand? Jacob does not know, so he makes various plans in preparation for the encounter. He sends gifts to Esau; he prepares his family for battle; and – of course – he prays to God.

We read about another encounter that takes place the night before the meeting with Esau with a mysterious figure who is not willing to identify himself. The encounter quickly becomes a struggle that lasts all night; a struggle that has ramifications to this day. Let us read the verses that describe the struggle and its results: "And Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the socket of his hip, and the socket of Jacob's hip became dislocated as he wrestled with him... "And he said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have commanding power with [an angel of] God and with men, and you have prevailed.' ... And Jacob named the place Peniel, for [he said,] 'I saw an angel face to face, and my soul was saved.' "Therefore, the Children of Israel may not eat the displaced tendon, which is on the socket of the hip, until this day, for he touched the socket of Jacob's hip, in the hip sinew. (Genesis 32, 25-33) In this mysterious story we read about an angel (in the Bible, angels are occasionally referred to as "God") who wrestles with Jacob until the break of dawn. The struggle ends with Jacob's victory, but victory has a price: Jacob sprains his hip. In commemoration of this struggle, the Jewish nation refrains from eating the "gid hanasheh," the "displaced tendon" of animals.

What was this struggle? What is the message we learn from it? And why is it that thousands of years later, we are still careful about refraining from

eating the gid hanasheh (sciatic nerve) in order to remember this struggle and its results? This struggle that lasted through the night carried an important message for Jacob moments before his meeting with Esau, and this message is still relevant to us.

Jacob does not know what will happen the following day at the charged meeting with his brother, and this angel who comes to wrestle with him comes to teach him about the eternal struggle “until the break of dawn” that he and his descendants will be part of, and of its results.

From its inception, the Jewish nation has faced and continues to face waves of hatred and anti-Semitism. The enlightened world of today is also not devoid of these phenomena as we see in the clearly biased reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While hundreds of thousands of civilians are slaughtered in neighboring countries and the world does not bother to denounce this horrific situation, we face across-the-board denunciation for placing a mobile structure for security purposes. There is no logical explanation for this. But there is an intrinsic one.

The struggle between Jacob and his descendants and the “brothers” went on until the break of dawn, until the complete redemption when all of humanity recognizes the moral supremacy of the Jewish nation and its tremendous contribution to the advancement of all of humanity.

The first message is that there will be an end to this terrible struggle and it will end with the victory of Jacob over the enemy. The end, we are promised, will be good.

But we must not be complacent. Despite the fact that Jacob emerges victorious from the struggle, he pays a heavy price and becomes crippled. There is no need to list the heavy price paid by the Jewish nation in the pogroms, the Holocaust ... and up to today when terrorists armed with primitive ammunition go out into the streets to murder innocent Jews. We are sure of our victory, but we know that the path that leads to it is not simple and requires tremendous efforts while exacting a high price.

We must always remember that we do not eat the gid hanasheh. This is an eternal reminder of an eternal struggle. Despite its heavy price, its end is guaranteed in the words of the angel-person: “You have commanding power with [an angel of] God and with men, and you have prevailed.”

Shabbat shalom.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites.

The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Vayishlach: The Blessing of Necessity

November 25, 2015

Necessity is the mother of attraction. -Luke McKissack

Jacob has an emotional reunion with Esau, his twin brother who wanted to kill him 20 years earlier. In preparation for the potentially explosive meeting, Jacob sends multiple flocks of various domesticated animals as a gift to his estranged brother.

Esau, in an understandable display of magnanimity declines the extremely valuable and generous gifts and states “I have a lot, brother. You should keep what’s yours.” However, Jacob is not to be dissuaded and gives a long speech pressuring Esau to accept the gift, finally stating “I have all.” Esau yields and accepts the gift.

The Sfot Emet in 5634 (1874) explains that there is a significant difference between having “a lot” and having “all.” Having a lot is the trait of the wicked Esau, who has more than he needs and may even boast of his wealth. To such individuals God gives more than necessary and that is the end of further divine care or involvement in their lives. The extreme material wealth and success they have may be the extent of their reward for the meager good they have done in their lives. No more rewards or happiness will come their way, in this world, or the next.

However, the trait of the righteous Jacob is to be content with what he has. It is all he needs. It is sufficient. God continually makes sure he has everything he needs at the time and nothing more. Nothing extraneous is given until such a time as it is needed. A person who requests and just gets his current necessities on a regular basis is likened to a vessel that can continually receive God’s blessings.

Furthermore, the righteous when they request their needs do not do so out of a sense of entitlement, thinking that somehow they deserve it. They realize that these are underserved gifts from God that we request in humility. God, out of a sense of benevolence grants us our daily necessities.

When a person realizes this reality and as the Mishna in Pirket Avot states, is happy with their portion, then they are truly wealthy.

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To Mauricio Macri on his successful election as the new President of Argentina. We hope that he is what the country and the continent needs

Ben-Tzion Spitz is the Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of two books of Biblical Fiction and over 400 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes
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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Vayishlach: Pillars and Sanctuaries

After twenty years of hard labor working for his treacherous uncle, Jacob returned safely to the Land of Israel. Jacob was successful in appeasing his brother Esau, and finally made it back to Beth El.

Beth El was the place where, as he set out to leave the Land of Israel, Jacob dreamt of a ladder reaching to the Heavens, of angels and God’s promise to watch over him. Now Jacob fulfilled his twenty-year-old promise and erected a matzeivah, a pillar in God’s Name, in Beth El.

From the Torah’s account, it appears perfectly acceptable for Jacob to erect a pillar. Later on, however, the Torah specifically prohibits all pillars of worship, even if they are used to worship God:

“Do not erect a sacred pillar, which the Eternal your God hates” (Deut. 16:22).

What about Jacob’s pillar? The Sages explained that serving God through pillars “was beloved in the time of the Patriarchs, but abhorred in the time of their descendants” (Sifri Shoftim 146).

Why did the status of pillars change?

The Mountain, the Field, and the House

To answer this question, we need to examine the difference between a pillar and a sanctuary. A pillar is a large single stone, a focal point of Divine service, around which all may gather. A sanctuary, on the other hand, is a house of worship, a building in which worshippers gather.

Why does it matter whether the worshippers gather around or inside?

The prophet Isaiah envisioned a future time when many nations will say, “Let us go up to God’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob” (2:3).

Why will they be attracted to the God of Jacob, as opposed to the God of Abraham or the God of Isaac?

The Sages noted that the unique spiritual service of each of the Avot (Patriarchs) was expressed by the different spatial contexts in which they connected to God:

Abraham — served God on the mountain of Moriah during the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac.

Isaac — reached his own spiritual heights in the field where he meditated (Gen. 24:63).

Jacob — promised that the location of his lofty dream would become a house of God (Gen. 28:22).

The Sages interpreted Isaiah’s prophecy as follows: The nations will seek neither the “mountain of Abraham” nor the “field of Isaac,” but rather the “house of Jacob” (Pesachim 88). What does this mean?

When Abraham began introducing the concept of one God into the world, he did not lecture about detailed, organized forms of worship. Abraham did not instruct his followers to observe the 613 mitzvot that govern all aspects of life. Rather, he taught the overall concept of one Creator. The “mountain of Abraham” and the “field of Isaac” are a metaphor for this spiritual message, which, like a mountain or an open field, is accessible to all.

This is also the type of service that is associated with a pillar — a central point around which all may gather.

Jacob, on the other hand, vowed that he would establish a house of worship. While pillars were an acceptable way to worship God in the time of the Avot, Jacob envisioned a future era when the Jewish people would be ready for a higher form of Divine service. The open, accessible service of Abraham would prepare the way for an all-encompassing and detailed service of Torah and mitzvot. The metaphor for Jacob’s service is a house, with walls that enclose and surround the worshippers, binding them to a specific form of worship.

A second aspect of a house is that it serves to differentiate between those who are inside of it and those who are not. Once the Jewish people merited access to this loftier service and entered the elevated sanctuary, it was no

longer appropriate for them to relate to God through the abstract service represented by pillars.

Isaiah prophesied that, in the future, the nations will recognize the beauty and depth of a service of God that encompasses both the spiritual and physical realms. They will recognize the importance of good deeds, mitzvot, and Halachic discipline. Then they will declare: simple faith in God and abstract theology are not enough. Let us enter into the sanctuary, into “the House of the God of Jacob.”

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. III, pp. 10-12 (letter 546))

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

BS"D - Vayishlach 5776

Mishpachot, Meraglim and the Significance of 400

Nov 24, 2015

Four Questions

Judaism: Four questions - and it's not even Pesach

Intriguing answers that tie up different incidents in the book of Genesis. And an answer to the intriguing reason someone gave for staying in America.

The number 400 appears in the Torah three times: At the Brit Bain HaBetarim (Covenant of the Divided Parts), HaShem said to Avram, "... Know well that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land and will be enslaved and tormented for 400 years."

The price Avraham paid for the Cave of the Patriarchs, as it is written: "...and Avraham paid Efron the Hittite 400 silver shekels".

And the soldiers who came with Aisav numbered 400 men.

What is unique about the number 400?

Compassion is one of the perceived qualities of HaShem. As an example, Rashi explains that HaShem took Avraham away 5 years prior to the years he was allotted at birth, so that he would not see his grandson Aisav go astray. HaShem is sensitive to Jewish suffering, so why did He subject the Jewish nation to 400 years of suffering in Egypt?

The Midrash relates that when Ya'akov left for Charan, Aisav sent his son Elifaz to murder him. Ya'akov convinced Elifaz that it would serve the interests of Aisav and Elifaz that rather than murdering his uncle, Elifaz should take all of his wealth and "an indigent is as good as dead". Why didn't Elifaz murder Ya'akov and also take his wealth?

The Jews left Egypt and arrived at the desert area of Refidim, where Amalek suddenly attacked them. What was the sequence of events that aroused Amalek to attack at that time?

I submit:

It was an accepted more at the time that the number 400 was both a number but also an expression to describe a huge amount, be it money, soldiers or time.

All of Abraham's family was aware of the decree of 400-years of servitude in a foreign land. And were equally aware that the decree would be in effect with the children of Ya'akov, who was the spiritual heir of Avraham and Yitzchak.

When Elifaz was about to murder his uncle, Ya'akov warned him that if he would be murdered or die without children then the decree of 400 years of exile and bondage would by necessity fall on the descendants of Aisav, as the natural heir of Yitzchak.

Eliphaz and Aisav agreed on the decision not to murder Ya'akov, but let "nature" run its course with the Jewish nation to undergo the 400 year decree of servitude.

We can now understand that HaShem predetermined the number of years of servitude to be 400, which would seem in Aisav's mind to be close to eternity, and assure that Aisav would refrain from murdering Ya'akov so that the decree would not be implemented with Aisav's descendants.

When the Jews left Egypt after concluding the 400-year decree, Amalek (the descendants of Aisev and Elifaz) felt they could now destroy Israel without fear of incurring the decree of 400-years servitude.

Conclusion

1- Despite the apparent gulf between the individual incidents in the book of Beraishiet, and also the great divide between all the events in the flow of history, everything in the world is woven together in accordance to the wisdom of the Creator. We need only discover the unified theory laid down by the Creator, who is One and has made all things as one.

2- What was with Aisav in days of old, is re-occurring now. The Aisav-ist nations of Europe turned their backs on all moral responsibility, preferring that Ya'akov (Medinat Yisrael) suffer the brutality of terror, assassinations, suicide bombers, UN indignation, boycotts, divestments and sanctions, as long as it does not affect them.

However, the time has come for a U-turn in history. The two-millennium decree of suffering we underwent for our sin of leaving the Torah, is becoming part of the daily life of the European Aisav-ists, as stated in Tehilim 79,6-13:

(ו) שפך חמתך אל הגוים אשר לא ידעוך ועל ממלכות אשר בשמך לא קראו

(ז) כי אכל את יעקב ואת נוהו השמו

(ח) אל תזכר לנו עונת ראשנים מהר יקדמונו רחמיך כי דלנו מאד

(ט) עזרנו אלהי ישענו על דבר כבוד שמך והצילנו וכפר על חטאתינו למען שמך

(י) למה יאמרו הגוים איה אלהיהם יודע בגוים לעינינו נקמת דם עבדיך השפוך

(יא) חבווא לפניך אנקת אסיר כגדול זרועך הותר בני תמותה

(יב) והשב לשכנינו שבעתים אל חיקם חרפתם אשר הרפוך אדני

(יג) ואנחנו עמך וצאן מרעיתך נודה לך לעולם לדר ודר נספר תהלתך

6 Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name;

7 for they have devoured Jacob and devastated his homeland.

8 Do not hold against us the sins of past generations; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need.

9 Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.

10 Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Before our eyes, make known among the nations that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants.

11 May the groans of the prisoners come before you; with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die.

12 Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the contempt they have hurled at you, Lord.

13 Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will proclaim your praise.

Tehilim 90,13-16

(יג) שובה ה' עד מתי והנחם על עבדיך

(יד) שבענו בבקר חסדך ונרננה ונשמחה בכל ימינו

(טו) שמחנו כימות עניתנו שנות ראינו רעה

(טז) יראה אל עבדיך פעלך והדרך על בניהם

13 Relent, Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.

16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.

Excerpt from the book "With All Your Might"

There are situations in life where a Jew distances himself so far from his commitment to the urgent needs and demands of Am Yisrael, as if declaring to HaShem: "Erase me from the book that You have written" (Moshe's request of HaShem if He destroys the Jewish nation).

I have in front of me a letter that appeared in the chareidi magazine "Mishpacha." The writer explains why she opted to live in Lakewood and not in Eretz Yisrael. She concludes with the following: "As long as Eretz Yisrael remains mostly a secular country I cannot move there. It just hurts too much. I will just wait for Mashiah – hopefully, not too long".

I would ordinarily not relate to this kind of letter – despite her anguish pulling at my heart strings – I will answer her for two reasons:

1- There is an unconventional, novel “chidush” to her approach. Our rabbis have taught that women, much more than men, have a natural love for Eretz Yisrael. That is why not one woman took the side of the Biblical meraglim (spies) when they spoke badly of the land. But among the other irrational positions taken by certain contemporary chareidi groups, we find that even their women do not feel the intrinsic love of the land of their righteous mothers.

2- The ideas expressed by this righteous Jewish woman are unfortunately rampant among certain circles of “bnei Torah” in the galut. I would like to tell her and all of them what “hurt” really means.

The pain of a wounded soldier – dati and not so dati – who has just lost a leg in defense of our right to live in Eretz Yisrael is a bit more than the “hurt” of that righteous Jewish woman.

Or the pain suffered by the parents of a soldier killed in battle or taken prisoner while defending our country.

The holy people of this land – dati and not so dati – who are living the words of our prophets that HaShem will restore us to this land are more “Jewish” than the most observant person in Lakewood, New Jersey, USA.

We are the followers of Yehoshua Bin Nun who liberated the Holy land, but those in the galut are followers of the other 10 spies.

The thousands of rabbanim and teachers found in every corner of Eretz Yisrael sacrifice in order to disseminate Torah among people who unfortunately did not have the privilege of a Torah education. Their physical and financial sacrifices are succeeding, as attested to by the many batai kneset and yeshivot that are established in places one would never dream that Torah would enter.

I would like the good people in Lakewood to experience for one day what our sons and grandchildren go through every day in the military to ensure that the murderers don’t enter our land. They would run back to Lakewood!

The hurt borne by the holy people of Eretz Yisrael – dati and not so dati – in our quest to rebuild Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael is a bit more than the devastating “hurt” our righteous Jewish woman suffers when she sees a car being driven on Shabbat in Tel Aviv, which led her to avoid the pain by remaining in the Gan Eden galut of Lakewood.

The righteous Jewish woman’s letter appeared in the magazine Mishpacha (Family), but unfortunately she and those like her are not part of my “mishpacha”, because by their words and actions they have requested from HaShem to erase them from the “Book that He had written”.

Shabbat Shalom

- See more at: <http://nachmankahana.com/vayishlach-5776/#sthash.f2t9ZxHr.dpuf>
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Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha

The Gid Hanasheh Incongruity

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

For the week ending 28 November 2015 / 16 Kislev 5776

In Parshas Vayishlach, after Yaakov Avinu’s epic battle with Eisav’s guardian angel[1], where he got injured in his hip socket[2], we are given a Biblical commandment, the third and last of the whole sefer Bereishis, that Bnei Yisrael may not partake of the Gid Hanasheh, the sciatic nerve, of any animal. Additionally, there is a Rabbinic prohibition on eating from the outer sinew of the animal’s thigh tendon[3]. The Sefer HaChinuch[4] writes that this mitzvah actually serves as a constant reminder that eventually we will be redeemed from this protracted exile.

To fulfill this mitzvah properly, every last trace of said nerves and the fat covering the sciatic nerve must be removed as well. This act is called

nikkur, a.k.a. treibbering, deveining, or porging the forbidden nerves and fats, and it takes an expert to do it properly[5].

Trouble was the Traveling Treibberer

One of the most outstanding experts in hilchos nikkur known was Rav Yonason Eibeshutz zt”l (1690 - 1764), one of the greatest Torah giants of his period and famed author of 89(!) works[6], including the renowned Yaaros Devash, Urim V’Tumim, and Kreisi U’Pleisi. In the latter sefer, in his commentary to the laws of Gid Hanasheh[7], Rav Yonason recorded a fascinating historical incident, which posthumously sparked a raging halachic controversy.

He related that an expert porger came to town (Prague) claiming that the sinew that Jews have been removing for centuries was the wrong one! This treibberer alleged that a different sinew was the true Gid Hanasheh. The ramifications of his claim were gargantuan, for if it were deemed accurate, consequently all of World Jewry would have chas veshalom been eating non-kosher from time immemorial!

Rav Yonason writes that he showed this fellow the error of his ways as the sinew this porger was referring to was found exclusively in male animals, and could therefore not possibly be the correct one, for it states in the “SMaG (ostensibly the Sefer Mitzvos Hagadol, written by Rav Moshe of Coucy in the 13th century, Negative Commandment 139) that the prohibition of Gid Hanasheh applies to both males and females”. With his vast knowledge and expertise, Rav Eibeshutz thus averted potential communal disaster. He concludes his passage reiterating the importance and necessity of a porger’s proficiency and capability.

Kreisi Controversy

However, as many puzzled people later pointed out, this logic seemed inherently flawed, as this quote does not actually appear in the SMaG! The SMaG in his actual quote (Mitzvos Lo Sa’aseh 139) was referring to people, not animals! In other words, he wrote that women were similarly obligated in keeping this prohibition as men do[8]. They wondered, is it possible the great Rav Eibeshutz could have made such a simple mistake? And, if so, what was it that the Kreisi U’Pleisi showed this traveling treibberer that refuted his taynos? Many scholars over the years searched for a proper solution to this perplexing conundrum.

One suggestion was that the porger was unlearned, and Rav Yonason wanted to expose his ignorance and therefore set a trap and easily refute him[9]. The issue with this is that, by Rav Yonason’s own testimony, the porger was a “Talmid Chacham and expert”, which would negate this solution.

The Pischei Teshuvah[10] cites the Toldos Adam, who takes a different approach and makes an example out of this story as proof that even Gedolim can err. Following this would mean that one may not partake in eating said meat without removing both sinews. Although the Toldos Adam’s intent was merely to uncover the truth, he unwittingly fueled the fires of the Haskalah, as one of their primary goals was the undermining of Rabbinic authority[11]. In fact, this author personally heard noted historian Rabbi Berel Wein aver that the Haskalah used this story as propaganda to sway the masses.

On the other hand, many Rabbinic luminaries wrote responsae[12], including a tremendous pilpul by the Chasam Sofer[13], not only defending the Rav Eibeshutz’s words from attack, but actually each citing different proofs and logic how his shittah is truly correct, that the Gid Hanasheh must be present in both male and female animals.

Several authorities[14] wrote that it must be a printing mistake and the correct point of reference was the S - H - G (ס"הג), referring to the Sefer Halachos Gedolos, a ninth century Halachic code which contains a section on hilchos treifos[15], who actually does imply that the Gid Hanasheh is found in both male and female animals. Others[16] feel that he meant “a sefer mitzvos gadol”, meaning a big book of mitzvos, possibly referring to the Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzva 3), who implies this as well.

“VeHetzdiku es HaTzaddik”

However, the whole truth did not actually come out until 1930, when a rabbi in Los Angeles, Rabbi Shlomo Michael Neches, wrote in the Shaarei Tzion Torah Journal[17] that he had in his possession an original manuscript of the Kreisi U’Pleisi, and the words SMAG were crossed out

by Rav Yonason Eibeshutz himself, and written on top of them were the letters S - H - N (סחנ, which stood for Seder Hilchos Nikkur, referring to the Seder HaNikkur of the Baal HaTurf[18]. There it was written explicitly that the Gid Ganasheh that both men and women are forbidden from consuming is found in both male and female animals. Finally and justly, a Gadol Hador was vindicated - 165 years after his death[19]!

Although we had to wait over a century and a half to attain clarity on this halachic mystery, it is imperative that we realize that our true mesorah (in this case - all the way back to Yaakov Avinu!) is rock solid and our chachamim are given special siyatta dishmaya to arrive at the correct halachic conclusions. It might take a century or even a millennium, but in the end we clearly see why our chachamim are called "Einei HaEidah"[20].

Postscript: Interestingly, and quite apropos, this fascinating historical episode has had a recent, and equally fascinating, addendum. Apparently, Rabbi Neches' sefarim, including his original copy of the Kreisi U'Pleisi, were donated to the UCLA Research Library. Several scholars traveled there to see Rav Eibeshutz's original amendment and came upon an astonishing discovery. It turns out that it was not the handwritten correction of that renowned Rav Yonason Eibeshutz, but that of another, later Rav Yonason Eibeshutz, who lived at least a century after the first. This second Rav Eibeshutz, a Torah scholar of note, was the Av Beis Din of Lashitz, Poland, and author of Shu"t Tiferes Yonason. Apparently, this was his personal copy of Kreisi U'Pleisi, and he was the one who made the amendment which was later proven accurate in shedding light on the original Rav Yonason's puzzling citation, and not the author himself[21]. Either way, and whichever Rav Eibeshutz, we manifestly see the Divine orchestration involved in clearing up this complicated complexity of historical record.

This article was written l'Zechus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif umiyad!

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

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[1] Bereishis (end of Ch. 32). This follows Rashi's understanding (ad loc. 25, end s.v. vaye'aveik ish), based on the Midrash Rabbah (ad loc. 77: 3) and Midrash Tanchuma (ad loc. 8; who adds that the guardian angel of Eisav was Sama-el). However, there is another opinion, cited in Otzar HaMidrashim (ad loc.), that it was really the ma'alach Michael that Yaakov fought, and not Eisav's guardian angel, in order to prove to Yaakov that he had nothing to fear from Eisav.

[2] Due to the dictum of 'Maaseh Avos Siman L'Banim' [see recent article titled 'Mysterious Omens and our Forefathers'] we are still feeling the repercussions of this act nowadays. See Chofetz Chaim al HaTorah to this parshah.

[3] Gemara Chullin (Ch. Gid Hanasheh, 91a - 93b); Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 65, 8).

[4] Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 3). Several Rishonim, including the Ramban (Bereishis Ch. 32: 26), Rabbeinu Bachaya (ad loc.), Rashba (Chiddushai Agaddos, Chullin 91a), and Ra'ah (Pekudas HaLeviim, Brachos 33b), as well as the Midrash Rabba (Parshas Vayishlach 78, 5), also imply this message. See the Machon Yerushalayim version of Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 3, footnote 3) at length.

[5] See Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Yoreh Deah 65, 13 & 14), and their commentaries.

[6] See preface to sefer 'Chacham HaRazim - Rebbe Yonason Eibeshutz'.

[7] Kreisi U'Pleisi (Yoreh Deah 65, Kreisi 16).

[8] See for example, the Baruch Taam's glosses to the Kreisi U'Pleisi ad loc. Although others, including the Tzemach Hasadeh (on Yoreh Deah 65, pg. 41), assumed he meant the SMaK, it is also not found there; neither is it in the Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos (Mitzvos Lo Sa'aseh 183). See also Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi's Alpha Beta Tinyeisa D'Shmuel Ze'ira (vol. 1, pg. 195 - 196).

[9] See Hegos B'Parshiyos HaTorah by Rabbi Yehuda Nachshoni, on Parshas Vayishlach, pg. 137.

[10] Pischei Teshuva (Yoreh Deah 65, 2), citing the Toldos Adam (Rav Yechezkel Feivel Wolfe of Vilna; vol. 2, Ch. 15, pg. 237).

[11] Paraphrase from Professor Shnayer Zalman Leiman's excellent "Rabbi Jonathon Eibeshuetz and the Porger" (pg. 16). Thanks are due to Rabbi Eliezer Brodt, author of Bein Kesseh L'Essor and Lekutei Eliezer, for providing me with this important source.

[12] Including the Mahar"i Assad (Shu"t Yehuda Ya'aleh, Yoreh Deah 102), Rav Shlomo Kluger (Shu"t Tuv Taam V'Daas, Mahadura Kama vol. 1, 100) [neither of whom actually approved of the Chasam Sofer's pilpul], the Butchatcher Gaon (Daas Kedoshim, Yoreh Deah 65, Hilchos Giddin HaAssurin 4; see explanation in Gidulei HaKodesh there, 1), the Ginzei Yosef (Shu"t 96, 2, quoting the Einei Yisrael), the Mahar"i HaLevi (Shu"t vol. 1, end 36, s.v. mah shetamah), and the Arugas Habosem (Shu"t Yoreh Deah 64, 4). See also Rav Moshe Yosef Shapiro of Prague's 'Bris Avraham' (Parshas Vayishlach) who, quite thoroughly argues on the whole premise of those who questioned Rav Eibeshutz, as once the Torah wrote that Bnei Yisroel may not partake of any Gid Hanasheh, it is patently obvious that it must occur in all kosher behemos, with no differentiation between male and female. Additionally, as the Rambam writes in his preface to his Pirush HaMishnayos regarding the Torah's 'Pri Eitz Hadar' being identified as the Esrog, once we have a Mesorah L'Doros dating back to Moshe Rabbeinu, all other so-called 'proofs' to the contrary immediately fall off. Therefore, he avers, the same would apply here as well regarding the Gid Hanasheh.

[13] Shu"t Chasam Sofer (Yoreh Deah 69), cited approvingly by the Pischei Teshuva (ibid.) and Shu"t HaRava"z (Yoreh Deah 111). The Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 65, 25, in the brackets) might be referring to this solution as well.

[14] Including the Mishmeres Shalom (Yoreh Deah 65, Mishbetzos Zahav); Rav Avraham Shimon Traub, the Kaidan Gaon, in a new edition of Sefer Halachos Gedolos (pg. 296) that he published; the Ginzei Yosef (ibid.); and Rav Yosef Adler (cited in Shu"t Mishnah Halachos vol. 3, 67). The Tzitz Eliezer (Shu"t vol. 8, 25, 2 and vol. 18, 63, 6 s.v.v'ani) actually prefers this amending to the later one, opining that Rabbi Neches must not have been able to read Rav Yonason's handwriting clearly.

[15] BeHa"G (61, Hilchos Treifos pg 129a; exact location cited in Maadanei Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 65, footnote 118). Still, others feel that the BeHa"G's words are also not entirely clear that he was referring to female animals; see Haghos Rav Ezriel Hildesheimer to the BeHa"G (ad loc.), Chadrei De'ah (ad loc. 8), Giluy Daas (ad loc. 7), and Daas Yonason (glosses on the recent Zichron Aharon version of the Kreisi U'Pleisi 65, 16).

[16] See Shu"t Mishnah Halachos (vol. 3, 68, s.v. u'mah). One can also infer this from the Minchas Chinuch's comments (Mitzva 3, 13).

[17] Shaarei Tzion Torah Journal (Choveret HaYovel 1930, 25) - under the title "VeHetzdiku es HaTzaddik" - "The Tzaddik Was Justified" (Devarim Ch. 25, verse 1); also printed in HaPardes Journal (vol. 4, Journal 1: 10 pg. 18 - 19). This important historical tidbit is found in Pardes Yosef (Parshas Vayishlach, 33 s.v. uv'kru"p), as well as in Torah Shleimah (Parshas Vayishlach, 169), and Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer (ibid.). It is also added as an important footnote in many recent editions of the Shulchan Aruch, some printed with the words "mitzvah l'farsem".

[18] Seder HaNikkur (Shaar HaRishon, Hechsher HaBassar 8b - exact location cited in Maadanei Hashulchan Yoreh Deah 65, footnote 118), also brought in the Tur (end Yoreh Deah 65), as well as in Rabbeinu Yerucham (Nesiv 15, 14, pg. 128b). According to Professor Leiman (cited above) the version Rav Eibeshutz showed the porger was the 1577 version with the glosses of Rav Tzvi Bochner, a master treiberer and contemporary of the Rema, as there are those [see Prishah (Yoreh Deah 65, 56) and Shu"t Mishnah Halachos (vol. 3, 68 s.v. bram and s.v. mevuar)] who explain that in other versions, the words "male" and female" are actually referring to types of muscles, not the gender of the animals.

[19] Also thereby proving that Rav Eibeshutz chose the right name for his sefer, Kreisi U'Pleisi - See Gemara Brachos (4a) and Rashi (ad loc. s.v. shekorsim).

[20] Parshas Shelach (Bamidbar Ch. 15, verse 24). Interestingly, this author has seen it averred that history has proven that in the whole sefer Kreisi U'Pleisi on all of Yoreh Deah only one (!) actual mistake was found, but it turns out that it was clearly an error in Geometry - see Kreisi U'Pleisi (Tiferes Yisrael, Yoreh Deah 190, 14) and the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch's Lechem V'Simlah (ad loc. Simlah 11). This will Bezr"H be addressed fully in this author's upcoming maamar in Kovetz Eitz Chaim (vol. 25).

[21] See Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok HaKohen Miller's maamar in Kovetz Hama'eyan (vol. 215; Tishrei 5776, pg 100 - 102), with pictures of the title page and amendment of Rabbi Neches's copy of Kreisi U'Pleisi. Thanks are due to R' Moshe Boruch Kaufman and R' Dovid Wasserlauf for pointing out this startling recent development in the saga of Rav Eibeshutz and the traveling treiberer.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'zechus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!

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