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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

No Longer Shall You Be Called Jacob

One fact about this week's parsha has long perplexed the commentators. After his wrestling match with the unnamed adversary, Jacob was told: "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings Divine and human, and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:29, JPS translation). Or "Your name will no longer be said to be Jacob, but Israel. You have become great (sar) before God and man. You have won." (Aryeh Kaplan translation).

This change of name takes place not once but twice. After the encounter with Esau, and the episode of Dina and Shechem, God told Jacob to go to Beth El. Then we read: "After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.' So He named him Israel" (Gen. 35:9-10).

Note, first, that this is not an adjustment of an existing name by the change or addition of a letter, as when God changed Abram's name to Abraham, or Sarai's to Sarah. It is an entirely new name, as if to signal that what it represents is a complete change of character. Second, as we have seen, the name change happened not once but twice. Third – and this is the puzzle of puzzles – having said twice that his name will no longer be Jacob, the Torah continues to call him Jacob. God Himself does so. So do we, every time we pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. How so, when the Torah twice tells us that his name will no longer be Jacob?

Radak suggests that "your name will no longer be called Jacob" means, "your name will no longer only be called Jacob." You will have another name as well. This is ingenious, but hardly the plain sense of the verse. Sforno says, "In the Messianic Age, your name will no longer be called Jacob." This, too, is difficult. The future tense, as used in the Torah, means the near future, not the distant one, unless explicitly specified.

This is just one mystery among many when it comes to Jacob's character and his relationship with his brother Esau. So difficult is it to understand the stories about them that, to make sense of them, they have been overlaid in Jewish tradition with a thick layer of Midrash that makes Esau almost perfectly evil and Jacob almost perfectly righteous. There is a clear need for such Midrash, for educational purposes. Esau and Jacob, as portrayed in the Torah, are too nuanced and complex to be the subject of simple moral lessons for young minds. So Midrash gives us a world of black and white, as Maharatz Chajes explained.[1]

The biblical text itself, though, is far more subtle. It does not state that Esau is bad and Jacob is good. Rather, it shows that they are two different kinds of human being. The contrast between them is like the one made by Nietzsche between the Greek figures of Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo represents reason, logic, order, self-control; Dionysus stands for emotion, passion, nature, wildness and chaos. Apollonian cultures value restraint and modesty; Dionysian ones go for ostentation and excess. Jacob is Apollonian, Esau, Dionysiac.

Or it may be that Esau represents the Hunter, considered a hero in many ancient cultures, but not so in the Torah, which represents the agrarian and pastoral ethic of farmers and shepherds. With the transition from hunter-gatherer to farmer-and-herdsman, the Hunter is no longer a hero and instead is seen as a figure of violence, especially when combined, as in the case of Esau, with a mercurial temperament. It is not so much that Esau is bad and Jacob good, but that Esau represents the world that was, while Jacob represents, if sometimes tentatively and fearfully, a new world about to be brought into being, whose spirituality would be radically different, new and challenging.

The fact that Jacob and Esau were twins is fundamental. Their relationship is one of the classic cases of sibling rivalry.[2] Key to understanding their story is what Rene Girard called mimetic desire: the desire to have what someone else has, because they have it. Ultimately, this is the desire to be someone else.

That is what the name Jacob signifies. It is the name he acquired because he was born holding on to his brother Esau's heel. That was consistently his posture during the key events of his early life. He bought his brother's birthright. He wore his brother's clothes. At his mother's request, he took his brother's blessing. When asked by his father, "Who are you, my son?" He replied, "I am Esau, your firstborn."

Jacob was the man who wanted be Esau. Why so? Because Esau had one thing he did not have: his father's love. "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob."

All that changed in the great wrestling match between Jacob and the unknown stranger. Our Sages teach us that this stranger was an angel in disguise. After they fight, he tells Jacob that his name would now be Israel. The stated explanation of this name is: "for you have wrestled with God and with man and have prevailed." It also resonates with two other senses. Sar means "prince, royalty." Yashar means "upright." Both of these are in sharp contrast with the name "Jacob," one who "holds on to his brother's heel."

How then are we to understand what, first the stranger, then God, said to Jacob? Not as a statement, but as a request, a challenge, an invitation. Read it not as, "You will no longer be called Jacob but Israel." Instead read it as, "Let your name no longer be Jacob but Israel," meaning, "Act in such a way that this is what people call you." Be a prince. Be royalty. Be upright. Be yourself. Don't long to be someone else. This would turn out to be a challenge not just then but many times in the Jewish future.

Often, Jews have been content to be themselves. But from time to time, they have come into contact with a civilisation whose intellectual, cultural and even spiritual sophistication was undeniable. It made them feel awkward, inferior, like a villager who comes to a city for the first time. Jews lapsed into the condition of Jacob. They wanted to be someone else.

The first time we hear this is in the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: "You say, 'We want to be like the nations, like the peoples of the world, who serve wood and stone.' But what you have in mind will never happen" (Ez. 20:32). In Babylon, the people encountered an impressive empire whose military and economic success contrasted radically with their own condition of exile and defeat. Some wanted to stop being Jews and become someone else, anyone else.

We hear it again in the days of the Greeks. Some Jews became Hellenised. We recognise that in the names of High Priests like Jason and Menelaus. The battle against this is the story of Chanukah. Something similar happened in the days of Rome. Josephus was one of those who went over to the other side, though he remained a defender of Judaism.

It happened again during the Enlightenment. Jews fell in love with European culture. With philosophers like Kant and Hegel, poets like Goethe and Schiller, and musicians like Mozart and Beethoven. Some were able to

integrate this with faithfulness to Judaism as creed and deed – figures like Rabbis Samson Raphael Hirsch and Nehemiah Nobel. But some did not. They left the fold. They changed their names. They hid their identity. None of us is entitled to be critical of what they did. The combined impact of intellectual challenge, social change, and incendiary antisemitism, was immense. Yet this was a Jacob response, not an Israel one.

It is happening today in large swathes of the Jewish world. Jews have overachieved. Judaism, with some notable exceptions, has underachieved. There are Jews at or near the top of almost every field of human endeavour today, but all too many have either abandoned their religious heritage or are indifferent to it. For them, being Jewish is a slender ethnicity, too thin to be transmitted to the future, too hollow to inspire.

We have waited so long for what we have today and have never had simultaneously before in all of Jewish history: independence and sovereignty in the state of Israel, freedom and equality in the diaspora. Almost everything that a hundred generations of our ancestors prayed for has been given to us. Will we really (in Lin-Manuel Miranda's phrase) throw away our shot? Will we be Israel? Or will we show, to our shame, that we have not yet outlived the name of Jacob, the person who wanted to be someone else? Jacob was often fearful because he was not sure who he wanted to be, himself or his brother. That is why God said to him, "Let your name not be Jacob but Israel." When you are afraid, and unsure of who you are, you are Jacob. When you are strong in yourself, as yourself, you are Israel.

The fact that the Torah and tradition still use the word Jacob, not just Israel, tells us that the problem has not disappeared. Jacob seems to have wrestled with this throughout his life, and we still do today. It takes courage to be different, a minority, countercultural. It's easy to live for the moment like Esau, or to "be like the peoples of the world" as Ezekiel said.

I believe the challenge issued by the angel still echoes today. Are we Jacob, embarrassed by who we are? Or are we Israel, with the courage to stand upright and walk tall in the path of faith?

[1] In the Mavo ha-Aggadot printed at the beginning of Eyn Yaakov.

[2] To read more on the themes of sibling rivalry in the Bible, see Jonathan Sacks, Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence, 2015.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Unheralded Heroes

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 forbearers 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."

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's
Derashot Ledorot*

Sincerely Yours

Hypocrisy is rightly a despised trait, and the word "hypocrite" a harsh and contemptuous epithet reserved for vile people. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that the popular condemnation of insincerity is not always

matched by a correspondingly universal abstention from this vice in the affairs of man in society. Every day many thousands of letters are written in which the writers employ varied devices ranging from subtle deviousness to outright deceit, and compound their crime by signing the letters, "I am, sincerely yours…."

What is a hypocrite? According to the dictionary definition it is one who pretends to be something other than what he really is (usually one who pretends to be better than he really is) or to feel what he does not really feel. Hypocrisy is feigning, acting a part, pretending. Perhaps a better word is the Hebrew tzeviut – literally: coloring, dyeing. Hypocrisy, then, is giving an impression which does not correspond with the facts. It is the incommensurateness of the inner fact and the outer appearance.

Our prophets stormed against hypocrisy. Our rabbis thundered against it. The Talmud quotes King Yannai advising his wife, Queen Salome, "Do not be afraid either of the Pharisees or of those who are not Pharisees; fear only those hypocrites who act like Pharisees, who behave like Zimri (an ignoble person), and who expect to be rewarded like Pinchas (the saintly priest of Israel)" (Sota 22b).

In that case, we are presented with a problem by the sidra. We read, in very few lines, that Reuben sinned with Bilha, the concubine of his father Jacob. If the Bible said so, it is the truth. Yet the Talmud (Megilla 25b) advises us that the story of Reuben should be read but not translated. It was once the custom that the Torah would be read as we read it, and then one person would be assigned to translate it publicly into Aramaic, the vernacular at that time. However, an exception was made of this story of Reuben, and when one rabbi insisted that it be read in the Hebrew but left untranslated, he was congratulated by his colleagues. But is this not insincere, even hypocritical? Is not the suppression of the truth hypocrisy, and is not every instance of hypocrisy deplorable?

The answer is no, it is not hypocrisy or insincerity, although it suppresses the broadcast of a true event. And, if one should insist that this is hypocrisy, then with full respect to all our honorable prejudices, certain forms of such insincerity are not malicious but wholesome and healthy. Not in all ways must one's appearances be thoroughly equivalent and correspond to his inner thoughts. To speak a conscious untruth aiming at personal gain or creating a favorable image and false impression is a foul act. But to refrain from telling all I know and consider to be true, either because I am unsure how that truth will be interpreted, or out of respect for the sensitivity and feelings of others – that is an act of civility, not insincerity.

Thus, in the affair of Reuben there were many mitigating factors, and varying interpretations are possible, as indeed many of them appear in the Talmud. A direct translation into the vernacular is, therefore, misleading and the cause of much misunderstanding. Furthermore, it is bad enough that the Torah preserves a sacred record of Reuben's misdeed, and there is no need to add salt to the wounds of a cherished forebear even if he is no longer in the world of the living.

It is a sin to lie; it is no mitzva to tell all I know, even if it is the truth. There is a law in the Shulchan Arukh that if a man has, heaven forbid, lost a close relative for whom he must mourn, but he is unaware of his loss, then one ought not to apprise him of it within thirty days of the death, for then he would be obligated to observe all of the shiva. One may not give a false answer upon interrogation, but one ought not to volunteer this kind of information, and if he does he is considered a kesil, a fool. A fool, indeed! Hypocrisy is not avoided and insincerity not served by mindless chattering and compulsive loquaciousness!

Too much cruelty has been practiced under the guise of honesty, too much frightful foolishness excused as frankness, too many assaults on the feelings of others carried out under the pretense of sincerity. Is it hypocrisy for a teacher to refrain from telling a slow student that he is unintelligent? Is it commendable sincerity to tell every homely person, "You are plain-looking and unattractive"? No, it is not. In fact, Hillel taught that one must even tell an unattractive bride that she is beautiful and charming!

The truth should be spoken, not blurted out. If you hear a performer or entertainer or artist, and have adverse criticism – even if it is constructive – then Jewish ethics and derekh eretz advise you: wait for a propitious time before offering your comments, do not offend the innermost feelings of another human being. If you apprehend a friend in embarrassing circumstances, performing an evil deed, it is a mitzvah to reproach him. You are not free to withhold your comment. But the rebuke must be administered gently, considerately, delicately. The Torah commands us, "You shall reproach your friend" (Leviticus 19:17). And the rabbis add, "Even a hundred times" (Bava Metzia 31a). On this, one of the great lights of the Musar movement commented: this means that the single rebuke must be broken into a hundred pieces and offered in tiny doses, lest the person you seek to correct should become the victim of painful insult.

Furthermore, there is a decent, beneficial, and honorable kind of hypocrisy which is not insincere, and without which society might well collapse. There are certain conventional fictions that are apparently untrue, but that suggest a kind of truth far beyond the reach of normal comprehension. Jewish law, for instance, aims at producing perfect individuals and a holy society, yet it knows full well, as King Solomon taught, that no person in the world is perfectly righteous and blameless.

Halakha grants each person a chezkat kashrut, a presumption of innocence and virtue; yet it knows full well that, as the Bible teaches, "Man's innate disposition is toward evil" (Genesis 8:21). Is this hypocrisy? If it is, then we should all be in favor of hypocrisy! For without it, all law and religion must progressively be reduced and diminished to the lowest level of common practice. This spells the death of all ideals. A child who errs and stumbles, yet who is trusted by a parent and feels that the parent's opinion of him is higher than his poor reality, is inspired by this discrepancy to fulfill the higher image. Likewise the Jew and his halakha: he is imperfect and faulted, yet because he is granted the chezkat kashrut and told that he incorporates the image of God, and is expected to live up to it, he will strive to do just that, lest he suffer inner embarrassment and shame.

This week the Supreme Court has been deliberating on the problems of censorship and pornography. This brings to mind a fascinating article by George P. Elliot I read in a national magazine, in which a principle similar to the one we have been discussing was put forth. The author believes that the law should banish pornography, but not enforce this regulation. He asks: is it not, however, hypocrisy to outlaw pornography if we know well that it will be sold surreptitiously? He answers: "The law should rest content with a decent hypocrisy," and ban obscene literature in the marketplace even if it knows that it will be sold under the counter, where the law will not and cannot bother with it. Law is the way that society approves and disapproves of certain acts. "A certain amount of official hypocrisy is one of the operative principles of a good society." Unenforced laws express society's goals, ideals, and visions. Law is meant not only to punish, but also to educate to higher standards. "Civilization behaves as though men are decent in full knowledge that they are not."

Judaism cannot take exception to this doctrine. When, at the beginning of the Emancipation, non-Orthodox Jews did adopt an opposite point of view, they began to prune the laws and cut down the halakha to fit current, prevalent practice. As a result, they discovered – as we well know in our days – that when you do this Judaism begins to crumble and Jews begin to vanish. If Jewish laws are abandoned because they are not universally observed, Judaism becomes nothing but a sanctimonious self-approval for spiritual failures, a vacuous "hekhsher" for not-so-kosher Jews.

That is why we ought not to be impressed or depressed at the cries of hypocrisy often hurled at Orthodox synagogues that disapprove of travel on the Sabbath, though many of its members violate that standard. We rightly insist upon full and meticulous observance of

kashrut, though some members in the privacy of their homes or when away from home do not live up to this ideal. If a standard is set, the congregation must live under the impression that the ideal is a reality; and all who fail to conform must suffer the pangs of guilt. If that is a fiction, it is a splendid and sublime fiction, on the way to becoming a luminous truth.
…
We live in an alma diperuda, an imperfect and fragmented world. For truth to be triumphant, it must proceed cautiously. We must give no quarter to falsehood, but we must remember that truth must often disguise itself in a thousand different garments – until that blessed day, the "day of the Lord," when man and society will be redeemed; when truth will be revealed courageously and fully; when this world will become transformed into an olam ha'emet, a world of truth; when God's unity will be expressed in living the whole truth and nothing but the truth; and when men will confront their own selves in truth, and be truly devoted to each other, so that each man will be able to address his brother and say, in full and genuine honesty, "I am, sincerely, yours!"
**For the full text of this sermon, see Rabbi Norman Lamm's 'Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Genesis. Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's 'Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Genesis' co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and Yeshiva University Press; Edited by Stuart W. Halpern*

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Torah Forbids Plowing With a Shor and a Chamor Together

This week's parsha contains the terrible story that happened to Dina bas Yaakov. She was captured and violated by Shechem, who then wanted to marry her. Rabbeinu Bachaye brings the following Medrash Tanchuma. Shechem told Yaakov: I know that your grandfather Avraham was a prince, as it is written "A prince of Elokim are you in our midst" (Bereshis 23:6) and I also am a prince in this land. Let the daughter of a prince marry a prince. It is a perfect match."

Yaakov responded that a Nasi (Prince) can only be a "Shor" (ox). Avraham is referred to as a "Shor" as it is written "And Avraham ran to the cattle" (Bereshis 18:7) and it is written "…and many crops come forth by the strength of an ox (rov tevuos b'koach shor)" (Mishlei 14:4). Yaakov insisted that it was not a good match. My grandfather was a prince who was a Shor (ox) and you are a Chamor (donkey)! (Shechem's father was named Chamor.) The Torah decrees "You shall not plow with a Shor and a with a Chamor together" (Devorim 22:10). In effect, Yaakov told his potential mechutan, "I'm sorry, the Torah forbids a combination of a Shor and a Chamor. We can't make this Shidduch."

In order to explain this rather perplexing Medrash, we need to introduce a concept that we mentioned in past years. In the beginning of Parshas VaYishlach, Rashi says that Yaakov instructed his messengers to tell Eisav, "I have been living with Lavan, and I tarried until now." Rashi famously elaborates: During this time, I did not become a distinguished officer but I have been a mere stranger. There is no justification for you to hate me based on jealousy of the blessing my father gave me that "You shall be a ruler over your brother."

"I know you still hate me for taking the Brochos that our father thought he was giving to you. But listen, they did not help me at all. Thirty-four years later, I am still a stranger living on the road. All these years later, and I have no dominion whatsoever over my brother. I am a nobody, and you have no reason to be jealous of the blessings I received."

Rashi elaborates on the words "And I have oxen and donkeys, cattle, male and female servants" (Bereshis 32:6) as follows: Father said I would be blessed with the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, but my property is neither from the heaven nor from the earth. Again, Yaakov emphasizes to Eisav that the blessings were not fulfilled, there was nothing for Eisav to be jealous about, and, in fact, it could be that Eisav got the better half of the deal by taking the lentil soup—at least that was something concrete.

There are several problems with this Rashi. For instance, Rav Moshe Feinstein asks that the Brochos that Yitzchak Avinu gave to Yaakov were a nevuah (prophecy). Is Rashi suggesting that Yaakov is denying the veracity of this nevuah? Is he saying that Yitzchak was wrong? Is he, Chas v'Shalom, accusing Yitzchak of uttering a false prophecy? Rashi cannot be saying that Yaakov was suggesting that these prophetic brochos were worthless.

Second, brochos are never fulfilled instantaneously. The fact that Yaakov has not yet seen the benefit of these blessings in no way diminishes their value or significance. The truth of the matter is that it took hundreds of years for them to be fulfilled. Yaakov's descendants were in Egypt for 210 years, and they were in the Wilderness for another 40 years. The Blessings were really not fulfilled until the time of Shlomo haMelech. What is Yaakov telling Eisav – the blessings are worthless because they were not fulfilled? Wait! They will yet be fulfilled in full!

When someone starts a business, he should not expect to make his fortune within the first six months of opening the business. Bill Gates started Microsoft in a garage in Seattle, Washington. He did not become a billionaire overnight. It takes time. Everything takes time. It is only in our generation that we expect instantaneous results. Cooking is too slow, so we need to microwave our food. Postal services are too slow, so we need to send faxes. Faxes are too slow so we need to send email. Everything needs to be this instant. But that is not the way all of life works, and it is certainly not the way ruchniyus works.

So, we have two questions: 1) Theologically, how could Yaakov say that the prophetic blessings were not fulfilled, and 2) Of course they were not fulfilled YET – give them time to reach their historical moment of fulfillment!

The explanation is that Yaakov knew exactly with whom he was dealing—Eisav. The Sforno in Parshas Toldos shares a very important principle, not only about Eisav, but about wicked people in general. The Sforno interprets the pasuk "Sell to me like the day (ka'yom) your birthright" (Bereshis 25:31) as follows: You, Eisav, live for the day—for today. You put so much effort into today's work that you are now so exhausted so you can't even tell the difference between a bowl of soup and the color red. There is no doubt that you will not be able to perform in the function of the firstborn to minister before the L-rd Almighty, to do that which is appropriate for a bechor.

Yaakov tells his brother, "This job is not for you. You are a "ka'yom" man! You are a man that lives for today." The difference between tzadikim and reshaim is that reshaim live for the moment. They want instant gratification. They don't have the long view. Yaakov, on the other hand, had a long view of life. He knows that not everything is instantaneous. Some things take time. If you take the view that the bechora will eventually entail the Service of Hashem and a permanent job in the Beis HaMikdash, then it means something. This is how a tzadik views the matter. Yaakov tells Eisav "I know you have no interest in being the bechor, because you are only a "Ka'yom man."

This is the general approach of virtually all reshaim. They trade an Olam Kayam (a permanent world) for an Olam Over (a transitory world). When people are faced with the dilemma of choosing the pleasure of the moment or choosing the long-term view at the cost of deferring instant gratification, people that don't possess a sense of spirituality always choose the TODAY. They don't look at the long view.

Yaakov knew this facet of Eisav. He certainly knew very well that the brochos would take hundreds of years to be fulfilled. But that did not make a difference to him. He was willing to wait. On the other hand, he understood with whom he was dealing. He knew that if Eisav still did not see fruits of this blessing after 34 years, he would consider them worthless.

Yaakov was talking Eisav's language when he sent the message to Eisav: Look what happened to me… I am just a ger. I have no land. I have received neither blessings of heaven nor earth these past 34 years. However, Yaakov himself understood that he was in it for the long haul, and was in no way denying the value or validity of these blessings.

Rav Avrohom Bukspan of Miami uses this concept to suggest an interpretation of the Medrash that Rabbeinu Bechaye quotes. (I am a Shor and you are a Chamor and the Torah says a Shor and Chamor cannot plow together. Therefore, Dina and Shechem cannot marry each other.)

What is the difference between the avodah of a Shor and that of a Chamor? The work that an ox does is for the future. Oxen plow the field, making it fit for sowing. In the spring, a farmer plows his field to prepare it for planting. It takes months for wheat to grow but the oxen are out in the field long before the seeds are even placed into the ground. The avodah of the shor is for the future.

What is the avodah of a Chamor? A donkey schleps things. The farmer has a load he needs to take from point A to point B, so he puts it on the donkey who does the work of schlepping it for him. The difference between the ox and the donkey is the difference between the long view and the short view. The Shor is an animal whose whole function is to serve what is going to come in the future. The Chamor serves today's needs: I need to get this load to my house or to the barn or to the market right now!

This is what Yaakov Avinu said to Shechem ben Chamor: I am a Shor and you are a Chamor. We are not compatible and cannot be harnessed together because the Torah prohibits plowing with an ox and donkey under one yoke.

There is a second difference between an ox and a donkey. An ox chews its cud; a donkey does not chew its cud. Why does an animal chew its cud? It regurgitates the food over and over and over. It does not just eat a meal and that is the end of it. The food it consumes is a meal that goes on and on, by virtue of the constant regurgitation of the cow or ox or other kosher animals. This is also an aspect of looking at the long view.

Yaakov tells Shechem – we are not a match because I am a Jew and you are not a Jew. A Jew looks at life based on what is going to be down the road. We take the long view of life and history. You are a Chamor. Just like a donkey looks only at the present – that too is the way you view life. This is not a compatible Shidduch.

I heard that Rav Moshe Soloveitchik (from the famous Soloveitchik family), who was Rav in Zurich Switzerland many years ago, was once counselling a couple who were having marital problems. The husband came to Rav Soloveitchik and said "My wife is making a mistake. She just isn't right! We can't come to terms." Rav Soloveitchik responded, "Maybe your wife is not right. But if you have Shalom and the house is tranquil then your children and grandchildren will grow up in such an environment and will be different people – much better people! Take the long view of life. The view of a Jew is always the long-term view. "Granted, your wife may be wrong in this argument. But if you take the long view of things and consider the effects of long term Shalom Bayis, it is far more important than the short-term victory over your wife in proclaiming 'I was right!'"

The whole point of being a Jew is that we are not into it for instant gratification, or just for the here and now. We are in it for the future as well. Therefore, he advised this congregant to give in to his wife, because in the long run, it will be for the best.

That is the difference between Yaakov and Shechem. That is the difference between Yaakov and Eisav. That is the difference between a Yid and a non-Yid.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

I have always been saddened by the fact that Holocaust victims have no matzeiva. You can't visit a cemetery and see a tombstone over a grave for them as one does for all others. Yet I derive some chizuk, some support, from the beautiful teaching in Parshat Vayishlach. Here the Torah provides the details of the sad passing of Rachel. She was buried in Bethlehem, Beit Lechem, and one can visit her tomb to this very day. Indeed the Torah refers to the place of her burial by saying (Bereishit 35:20),

"Hi matzevet kevurat Rachel ad hayom," – "This is the memorial to the burial place of Rachel to this very day."
Burial Place

Now some of our commentators ask about a redundant word here. The Torah could have said, "Hi matzevet Rachel," – "This is the memorial of Rachel." Why does it say, "Hi matzevet kevurat Rachel," – "This is a memorial of the burial place of Rachel"?

The Sefer Chomat Aish explains beautifully. He cites the teaching of Chazal, our Sages, who say,

"Ein osin nefashot letzaddikim. Divreihem hein heim zichronam." – "There is no need to make a matzeiva, a memorial in stone, for outstanding people. Their words and their deeds, that is their everlasting memorial."

Indeed this is so very true, because the true impact, the legacy of such people continues to exist in people's hearts and in people's minds. In turn, they pass it on to the generations to come and that's how great people continue to live forever.

Now we can understand why the Torah does not say, "Hi matzevet Rachel," – "This is the memorial of Rachel." It is because Rachel has a far greater memorial than a memorial in stone. Rachel's legacy has endured within our hearts and our minds for all time and that's why the Torah says, "Hi matzevet kevurat Rachel."

The essence of that place is as a memorial in stone marking the place where she was buried, and that's the place which we can come to in order to pay our respects to her.
Legacy

With regard to the six million precious Jewish souls who perished in the Holocaust, it is beyond words to explain. But in truth, they continue to live on through us. The torch of their Judaism and their good deeds is borne aloft by us with pride, guaranteeing that despite the efforts of our enemies to destroy us, am Yisrael chai – through our efforts and our faith, the people of Israel live on forever.

Despite the fact that there are no matzeivas for them, nonetheless the victims of the Shoah, will remain alive within us for all time.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Collateral Damage

In our Torah portion of Vayishlach, every action and feeling felt by Yaakov should be analyzed carefully, since Nachmanides-Ramban stresses that all that occurred to our forefathers will occur to Jews later on, and Jews should try to emulate their behaviors (**Nachmanides, commentary to Genesis 12:6**). Thus, when Jacob prepares for war against his brother Esau, it is, in a sense, a lesson for Jews how to prepare for war as well. When confronted with the possibility of fighting his brother, Esau, the verse (**Genesis 32:8**) states that Jacob felt two emotions: he was both fearful and distressed. Any extraneous word, or, in this case, extraneous verb, requires explanation why the apparent redundancy. Rashi explains (**Genesis 32:8 Rashi commentary**) that Jacob was not only distressed that he may be killed (since he might be found unworthy to continue living), but he was also distressed that he might kill innocent people during the confrontation. Rashi super-commentary *Siftai Chachamim*, explains Rashi's words in greater detail (**Siftei Chachamim commentary on Rashi commentary to Genesis 32:7**): Jacob had no fear of killing Esau or anyone who had come to kill him (since this killing would be legitimate self-defense). However, Jacob was afraid that there were innocents within Esau's camp who had no intention of harming Jacob or his family. Jacob was afraid that he might kill them in the "confusion of war."

What may have been an unusual occurrence back then, takes front and center concerning armies fighting in all wars in the twenty first century, The killing of innocent civilians unintentionally in the battle is called "collateral damage". If the war is legitimate, is killing innocent civilians as part of war moral from a Jewish perspective? Soldiers confront

this every day, and Israeli soldiers in particular, confront this situation, as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza intentionally place weapons and military personnel among civilian populations, "daring" the Israelis to harm the civilians. Thus, this essay will discuss what Judaism has to say about such a situation, and how to resolve the inherent dilemma of fighting combatants who are located within civilian populations.

In order to make the dilemma more real and practical, let us describe a clear-cut scenario, based on actual circumstances, faced by soldiers in the past and present. in the past. Israeli intelligence has confirmed that a well-known terrorist, who has killed many Israelis, plans to blow up a bus of Israeli civilians within the next 24 hours. The man is hiding in Gaza City, in an apartment known to the Israeli army, but located in a building with ten other apartments that are filled with innocent women and children. The Israeli army is cognizant of exactly where he is hiding. However, in order eliminate the imminent terrorist threat he presents (since he will almost certainly kill many Israelis the next day), the army will necessarily have to kill between ten to fifteen women and children. Should they take the lives of these innocent people in Gaza in order to assassinate the terrorist and destroy the threat to the civilian Israeli population?

If killing fifteen civilians is indeed justified in order to eradicate this terrorist threat, then what if the situation required killing fifty people in that apartment complex? What if it might cost one hundred lives? If killing fifteen civilians, however, is considered immoral and does not justify killing the terrorist, then would killing five innocents be considered moral? One? Can innocent residents legitimately be "sacrificed" in order to slay a terrorist and prevent him from killing civilians? Are there reasons to allow this collateral damage? What are the reasons to allow the terrorist to live (so that Israeli soldiers will not kill innocent people in Gaza) even though that terrorist will almost certainly kill innocent people in the future?

Sensitivity & Precedent in Judaism for Preventing Civilian Casualties - From the fear by Jacob in our Parsha, it seems that he would have felt guilty and acted improperly had he killed innocents in Esau's party, and that it would indeed be immoral to kill these individuals, even if they associated with the evil Esau. Are there any other scriptural sources describing our dilemma?

Immediately after Abraham was victorious in his war against the Four Kings which freed his kidnapped nephew Lot, God appears to Abraham and tells him that Abraham's reward will be great. Rashi explains why God felt it necessary to reassure Abraham (**Genesis 15:1 with Rashi commentary**). Abraham was worried that he had "used up" any rewards due him because he might have killed people during the war, says Rashi, and God reassures Abraham that he need not be afraid of this. The Midrash explains in greater detail specifically what Abraham was afraid of (**Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 44:4**). Abraham was not fearful that he had killed the warriors that opposed him. Rather, says the Midrash, Abraham was afraid that he might have inadvertently killed civilians who may have been righteous, and for this immoral act, his rewards would be "used up". God tells Abraham that every person he killed was like a thorn – i.e., was destined and deserved to die. Thus, no innocent civilians were killed in the war. But the fact that Abraham was worried about this possibility again shows of Jewish concern for civilians who might accidentally be killed as part of war.

An even more explicit reference regarding this issue involved King Saul, who was commanded to kill all the Amalekites. When he approached the city which contained majority of Amalekites but also some people from the Kenite tribe, he warned the Kenites to leave city immediately, so that they would not be killed accidentally during the battle (**I Samuel 15:5-6**). Here, too, we see Jewish sensitivity to collateral damage. Unfortunately, this course of action is not available to resolve our dilemma, since a public warning, like King Saul's, to the innocent residents of that apartment house would also alert the terrorist to flee among the civilians, helping him escape injury. What cannot be inferred from Saul's incident, however, is what would have happened if the Kenites had refused to leave. Would King Saul have refrained from attacking the Amalekites knowing innocents would inevitably be killed?

In another Torah narrative, we may be able to infer that Moses himself was sensitive to the needless killing of innocents, even in wars mandated to capture the Land of Israel. After numerous wars in the desert against various nations, the Torah records that the Jewish people offered peace to the nation of Sichon if the Sichonites would simply let the Jewish people pass through their land unharmed. When they refused, the Jews battled with them and defeated them. But nowhere did God ever command Moses to first offer them peace (**Numbers 21:21-23 with Rashi commentary**). Elsewhere, the Torah itself says that it was Moses's own idea to offer peace as an alternative to war (**Deuteronomy 2:26-27 with Rashi commentary**). Why did Moses do it? The Midrash alludes to one possible reason (**Deuteronomy 2:26-27 with Rashi commentary**). It says Moses believed there were those among Sichon those innocents who had not sinned, and it was for this reason, apparently, that Moses decided to offer this specific nation the possibility of peace (which they refused). Thus, in order to avoid killing non-sinners, Moses preferred a peaceful alternative. The Midrash goes on to say that Moses "taught" God this concept, and it is for this reason that God later on in the Torah commands Moses (and all Jewish leaders) to always first offer peace to the enemy before going to war (**Deuteronomy 20:10-16**). It is possible that the reason behind this tactic is to avoid killing innocent people during warfare.

There is one more allusion to Jewish sensitivity to collateral damage in the Bible. In the last book of narrative, Chronicles, which reviews Jewish history up until that point, King David writes that the reason that he was not allowed to build the Holy Temple is that he shed blood in wars. Radak commentary explains that this specifically refers to acts of collateral damage, the innocent lives that had to be taken by King David in the course of war (**I Chronicles 22:8 with Radak commentary**). Thus, according to a modern decisor, Rabbi Asher Weiss, (**Rabbi Asher Weiss, Minchat Asher Deuteronomy 32:6**), he explains that while this action of killing civilians was sometimes necessary as part of waging war, Judaism did not attach enough guilt to this deed to actively punish King David for this necessary action, but did not hold him completely innocent, and denied him the merit of building the Holy Temple, which is the symbol of peace and atonement.

Jewish Law Also Seems To Be Sensitive To Collateral Damage - In the section of Midrash that discussed Jewish law (**Midrash Sifri, Shoftim 56-57**), Sifri describes proper Jewish behavior in times of war. In addition to the prohibition to intentionally defeat the enemy by tactics of starvation (unless they resist all peace overtures), it is also forbidden to kill the women and children in war, the "innocents." Thus, even in an obligatory war, a Jewish army should be sensitive not to cause collateral damage, wherever possible. It should be noted that this was written at a time where every other army in the world killed innocents indiscriminately, including women and children, in the course of war, unless they were later "saved" for slave labor or other future (generally nefarious) uses by the soldiers.

In accordance with the verses quoted above, Jewish law mandates that when fighting a conventional war, the Jews must first publicly declare their intentions to fight by sending public letters to the enemy (**Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 6:5**). This allows the innocent civilians and those who do not want to fight to escape the battle scene. Unfortunately, as noted above, this tactic could not possibly be used in our situation, since the element of surprise is a prerequisite for killing the terrorist. As soon as the Israeli army would warn the residents of an apartment house that it intends to kill the terrorist living there and that they should therefore leave the place, the element of surprise would be lost, and the terrorist would be able to escape along with the others. When fighting a Jewish war, Jewish law also forbids an army from completely surrounding the enemy (**Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 6:7**).

From the perspective of one Jewish authority, the terrorist is considered a *Rodef*. He is a "pursuer" who is about to kill innocent people and he may be stopped even if doing so necessitates killing him. Similarly, even the children in the apartment building may also be considered *Rodef*-Pursuers who are preventing the elimination of the terrorist. Shulchan Aruch already rule that if innocents, even children who are about to cause a person to be killed, however unintentionally and unaware of the impending damage, they are, nevertheless, considered a Rodef-Pursuer, and may be killed (**Shulchan Aruch, Chosen Mishpat 425:1**). Therefore, Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli (a 20th century Rabbi), rules that a Jew would be permitted or even obligated to kill such a child (who is preventing the death of the terrorist) in order to avoid the deaths of other innocents (**Responsa Amud Hayemini 16:4**). There are several other current-day Poskim-decisors who disagree somewhat on on this complex and nuanced issue, especially if today's terrorist has the Jewish law status of full-fledged war or not. This issue is too important to be decided in this limited space (it is suggested to see the complete chapter, if possible, in "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*", for a full discussion).

The Policy of the Israeli Army Regarding This Moral Issue - Most Rabbis would probably permit the killing of the civilians in Gaza if that were the only way to eliminate an imminent terrorist threat and kill the terrorist. Nevertheless, that is not the practiced policy of the Israeli army. Even when the army is aware of a known and wanted terrorist in an apartment complex, it does not generally bomb the apartment complex, since this bombing will necessitate the deaths of innocent civilians. Rather (when a terrorist threat is not imminent), the army patiently waits for the terrorist to exit the building (as long as it takes) and enters his automobile. Then it immediately bombs the car. The passengers of the car are also usually killed, under the assumption that anyone entering the car with this person is not an innocent civilian.

In addition, the Israeli army has done something amazing in Gaza, in each of the recent "wars", never before seen in war, in 2008, in 2014 and again in 2022, in order to help minimize civilian casualties. While the tactic of dropping leaflets from planes has been used for many years in the past in order to warn civilians to leave target areas, the Israeli army actually phoned and SMS'd each Palestinian family in Gaza in advance of bombing sites, where it knew that rocket launchers were hidden among civilians. This gave time for those civilians to flee and avoid injury, thereby minimizing unnecessary civilian casualties. Recently, in 2022, the United States forces killed Ayman al-Zawahri, assistant to Bin Laden, They were able to kill him with an advanced drone, that only killed and hurt only him, while standing on his porch, without damaging to anyone else in the apartment or in the populated area of Kabul.

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

A Dialogue Between Alienated Relatives and Historical Lessons

Rabbi Shuki Reich

Since time immemorial, the Torah has dealt with sibling rivalry and conversations of conflict. The Torah begins with the primal story of Cain and Abel which ends in murder. Later on, we are given the discourse which took place between the children of Noach; we meet Yitzhak and his brother Yishmael; and we even come upon a conversation between Avraham and Lot's people: "And Avraham said unto Lot: let there be no strife between me and you, and between my shepherds and your shepherds, for we are brethren. Behold the whole land is before you. Separate yourself, I pray thee, from me. If you take the left, I shall take the right; and if you take the right, I shall take the left."

Avraham says in so many words: we are brethren, so we must separate.

The same thing happens with Yitzhak and Esav. And if that is not enough – with Yosef and his brothers as well.

Nowhere in Bereshit do we find sibling affection; instead, there is plenty of jealousy and competition – competition which not only fails to bring the siblings closer together, but ultimately becomes the basis for all future tension throughout history.

The prophet Jeremiah warns us (9, 3): "Take you heed of thy neighbor, and trust not in any brother; for every brother acts deceitfully, and every neighbor goes about with slanders."

The expression used by Jeremiah – "for every brother acts deceitfully" – kol ach akov ya'akov – is reminiscent of our Patriarch's name – Yaakov. Perhaps this is the reason his name was changed to Yisrael, and the name Yaakov remained secondary (Berachot 13).

According to the Ramban, the encounter between Yaakov and Esav exemplifies future encounters. This is how he puts it: "We, too, should imitate the ways of this righteous person [Yaakov], and prepare ourselves on three different dimensions, in much the same way that he had prepared himself – by praying; by preparing gifts; and by readying himself for war, for the purpose of escaping and saving himself."

However, the Ramban does not view Yaakov's acts of flattery, expressed by the gifts he sends, in a positive light at all:

"Our Sages have already criticized [Yaakov] for this act. As is written in Bereshit Rabbah (85, 3) – 'He that passes by, and meddles with strife not his own, is like one that takes a dog by the ears' (Proverbs 26, 17). The Holy One, blessed be He, said unto Yaakov: [Esav] was going about his business, and you were the one who sent out messengers to him saying 'So says your servant Yaakov'. In my humble opinion this suggests that we were the ones who caused our own downfall at the hands of Edom. After all, the kings of the Second Temple were the ones who made covenants with the Romans (Maccabees 1, 8), while some others even traveled to Rome, which ultimately led to their defeat. This idea has already been stated by our Sages and written in our scriptures…"

The Seforno has a very different take on Yaakov's act of sending out messengers to Esav:

"'And Esav ran' – he immediately had a turn of heart when he saw Yaakov so subdued. As our Sages have said: [The prophet] Achiya HaShiloni cursed Israel that it may be like a stalk that succumbs to every wind. Had the zealots of the Second Temple behaved in this subdued fashion, the Second Temple would not have been destroyed, as attested to by Rabi Yochanan ben Zakkai himself (Gittin, Perek HaNizakin): The zealots refused to leave and succumb, and so the Temple was destroyed."

Both the Ramban and the Seforno base their interpretation on an analysis of the destruction of the Second Temple. The Ramban contends that the Temple was destroyed because of the desire to forge ties with Rome; while the Seforno claims that the destruction of the Second Temple was the result of the zealots' refusal to forge relations with outsiders.

These are two very different historical readings, both of which are enlightening, in that they teach us that any person can look back at historical events and find that which s/he wishes to find.

The Netziv of Volozhin, in his exegesis on the Torah, pauses the encounter between the two brothers on the word "vayivku" – "and they cried". This is what he says:

"And they cried. Both of them cried. This teaches us that at that moment, Yaakov's heart was also infused with love for Esav. The same holds true for all generations to come. When Esav's descendants become infused with a pure, unblemished spirit and acknowledge the People of Israel and its virtues, we, too, shall attain the awareness that Esav is our brother. In much the same way that Rabi [Yehuda HaNassi] truly loved Antonius, and there are many other such examples."

Learning important lessons from the stories of the Torah

The Torah instructs us: "Remember the days of old, contemplate the years of many generations; ask thy father, and he will declare unto thee, thine elders, and they will tell thee." We have a clear obligation to remember past events and understand history.

However, in our attempt to learn from the encounter between Esav and Yaakov, we seem to be left with two contradicting messages. How then can we learn from the days of yore?

When taking lessons from history, one cannot simply impose the past on the present. By learning the past, we gain insight and wisdom – binu is the word the Torah uses for this type of contemplation. But this insight, or wisdom, can only be achieved if we take a broader and more spiritual view of things – not by drawing a straight line from past to present, or by copying-pasting. As the Sefat Emet put it: remembrance is an internal point void of any forgetfulness.

It is also the point of faith, which means there we do not attempt to find a straightforward, instant lesson for the present.

To use the words of the Sefat Emet yet again:

"Remembrance lies deep in one's heart. In a place where there is no forgetfulness. And when there is remembrance down below, in the heart of every Jew, then remembrance is also evoked in the Heavens above."

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org
Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg
The Effect of Our Actions

"And Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him" (Vayislach 32:8.) Rashi explains that Yaakov had two different emotions. On the one hand, he was frightened that Esav might kill him, while at the same time, he was also distressed that perhaps he might have to kill others in order to save himself. Why was Yaakov so concerned that he might kill others? After all, the posuk says, "When the wicked perish, there is joyful song" (Mishlei 11:10.) Moreover, Yaakov knew that Eisav wanted to kill him. Chazal say, "If someone is coming to kill you, preempt him and kill him first" (Sanhedrin 72a.) Why then was Yaakov so distressed?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) suggests that Yaakov was pained by the prospect that he might have to kill others to save himself because such an outcome was not truly necessary. Yaakov knew that Hashem could easily save him without forcing him to harm other people. Eisav could simply decide to leave Yaakov alone and not attack him and his family. But if Hashem were to save Yaakov only by having him kill other people, that would demonstrate that Yaakov Avinu was deficient in some way and did not deserve to be saved in a more pleasant manner. It distressed Yaakov to consider such a possibility.

This is similar to one who finds tzara'as in his home. The Torah says that when Klal Yisrael come into Eretz Yisrael, Hashem will place a nega tzara'as on the walls of their homes (Vayikra 14:34). Rashi comments that this tzara'as is actually a positive development because by demolishing the home as part of the purification process, the homeowner will uncover treasures that the previous non-Jewish owner hid in the walls of the home. But there is also a negative element in this tzara'as because if the Jewish owner were not guilty of a sin, then Hashem could have given him wealth by other means. The fact that he receives his wealth through a tzara'as affliction proves that he is somewhat guilty and in need of an atonement. Similarly, if Yaakov Avinu would have to resort to saving himself by killing other people, that would show that he was not worthy of being saved in a more pleasant way. And that may have been the cause of his distress.

But perhaps Yaakov Avinu was upset for a different reason, namely that even if killing others in self-defense is justified, nevertheless the act of murder itself, even when warranted, has a negative effect on a person. The Sefer HaChinuch (#16) writes that the Torah prohibits the breaking of the bones of the korban Pesach because "ha'adam nif'al k'fi p'ulosav - a person is affected by his actions." A prince does not break bones when eating. If Klal Yisrael were to break bones when eating the korban Pesach, that might ingrain within them a lowly spirit. The Torah therefore prohibits breaking the bones of the korban Pesach to ensure that Klal Yisrael will act like royalty, and that will reinforce within them an appreciation of their elevated status.

The Torah, in a different context, alludes to the powerful effect that negative behavior can have on a person. After the Torah dictates that an ir hanidachas (a city which worships avodah zara) must be destroyed, it adds that one may not derive any benefit from the rubble of the city "so that Hashem will turn back from His anger, and He will give you mercy" (Devarim 13:18) Why does the Torah emphasize that Hashem will give you mercy? The Chofetz Chaim explains that it is only natural that one who murders, even when he is obligated to do so, will become more cruel and insensitive. The Torah promises that this will not happen to those who obey the command to destroy the ir hanidachas. They will not be adversely affected by their actions, rather Hashem will reinforce within them a sensitivity for human life, and He will ensure that they remain merciful and compassionate people.

Perhaps Yaakov Avinu was distressed that he might have to kill in order to save himself because he feared that without special protection from Hashem, he would be negatively affected by the act of murder. Even if he were technically permitted to kill Eisav and his men, going through that process would make him a more callous and inconsiderate person. Yaakov davened that Hashem should save him not just from the hands of Eisav, but from any negative effect to his character that an encounter with Eisav might generate. This is the way of a righteous person. Not only is he careful with his actual deeds, but he exhibits a heightened sensitivity to the secondary ramifications of his behavior as well.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam
The One for Whom the Sun Shines

And Yaakov named the place Peniel, for [he said,] "I saw an angel face to face, and my soul was saved." And the sun shone for him when he passed Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. (Breishis 32:31-32)

And the sun shone for him: -to heal his limp. – Rashi

It's a fascinating, even shocking statement here. The sun rises for everybody, every day! How can the Torah declare that the sun rose for Yaakov?!

I was driving on the Brooklyn Bridge a few weeks ago on my way to a Chasuna, a wedding when I reminded myself of something I heard from one of my Rabbeim many years ago when we were together on the Brooklyn Bridge on our way to a Chasuna.

The traffic was jammed and we were essentially parked in the direction we were heading. No one was moving on our side. We could feel the sway of the bridge as the cars and trucked zoomed on the other side. My Rebbe took a long look behind us and craned his neck to look ahead and then he said, "Of all the people on this bridge right now, we are probably going to do the most important thing!"

I remember thinking at the time, "How could he possibly know what other people are going to do!? How can he make such a bold declaration like that!?" I was bewildered for a while but later it dawned on me that he was treating me to an important window into his mindset.

How did he get to be such an important person!? How did he become such a giant Talmud scholar?! What's the difference between him and I?! I realized that he realized and felt the importance of whatever he was doing. If he's learning now then that's the most important thing to do! If he's saying Tehillim for a sick person then that's the most important thing.

If he's helping a child then that must be the mandate of the moment and that too is the

most important thing. When he was collecting Tzedaka he approached it with the tenacity of someone who was doing something very important.

Sometimes a person can hide behind a veil of false modesty, that is really born from a fear of failing or caring over much what other people think.
We can feel that what we are doing is not enough or that we should be doing something else. Life is happening someplace but it's not happening here.

This Rebbe always felt that life is happening here as the Hillel HaZaken said, in all his extreme humility, "If I am here then everything is here!" Now isn't that actually haughtiness!?

Ben Zoma would say: A good guest, what does he say? How much effort did the host expend on my behalf, how much meat did the host bring before me. How much wine did he bring before me. How many loaves did he bring before me. All the effort that he expended, he expended only for me.

However, a bad guest, what does he say? What effort did the host expend? I ate only one piece of bread, I ate only one piece of meat and I drank only one cup of wine. All the effort that the homeowner expended he only expended on behalf of his wife and children. (Brochos 58A)

Is Ben Zoma teaching us about good guests and bad guests at a Shabbos table? Yes, for sure, and more too. Who is a good guest in this world?

The Mishna in Sanhedrin asks, "Why was man created singular?" All other creatures were formed in units of flocks, and dens, and gaggles, but mankind was originally a single being. So, the Mishna is curious why that is so. Why was man not even a couple or a family? Why was he created singular?

The answer is stunning! "Because a person has an obligation to say, 'The world was created for me!'" That means that when Adam opened his eyes and saw the light running towards him at 186,000 miles per seconds, and he felt the green carpet beneath his feet, and the sweet smells of Garden of Eden fruits entering his olfactory glands, he could actually and factually declare that the whole world was created for him. And so it is with every subsequent person who would stride upon the plant.

Yaakov, and guests like him, who are more grateful in realizing that everything was truly created for them, prove with their attitude that they are in fact, the one for whom the sun shines!

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Power of Personal Choice

In the choice of the haftarah, we see one of the most incredible examples of the power of personal choice.

How we can choose to direct our own lives, no matter what the circumstances.

We see it in this week's parasha, which is juxtaposed to the haftarah from the prophet Ovadia, who is a descendant of Eisav (Esau). You can be a son of two of the greatest and most righteous people – Yitzchak and Rivka – and you can turn out to be Eisav. Yet, you can be a descendant of Eisav while in the palace of one of the most wicked king and queen of Israel, and turn out to be an incredible righteous person, Ovadia.

It was Eisav who had every opportunity, like Ya'akov, to become a tzaddik. But he ended up as one of the arch-enemies of the Jewish people. He represents so much of what is not good in humankind.

Ovadia for two reasons could have turned out so differently, but look at the choices he made. He was a descendant of Eisav and a prophet at the time of Izevel (Jezebel) and Achav (Ahab), two of the worst kings and queens of Israel, who killed prophets and sages. Ovadia hid 100 prophets to save them, in spite of the difficulties involved in doing so, ultimately becoming a prophet himself and meriting his own book in Tanach.

The home you grow up in has an impact. Your circumstances have an impact. Your surroundings have an impact. But ultimately, nothing stands in the way of personal choice.

You can be the son of Yitzchak and Rivka and turn out to be an Eisav, and a convert from the descendants of Eisav in a most wicked environment and be a prophet and a great tzaddik.

May we all know that we are not entirely victims of our circumstances, but can be victors, decision-makers, proactive, and ultimately decide the course our lives can take.