

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Why is Jacob the father of our people, the hero of our faith? We are "the congregation of Jacob", "the children of Israel." Yet it was Abraham who began the Jewish journey, Isaac who was willing to be sacrificed, Joseph who saved his family in the years of famine, Moses who led the people out of Egypt and gave it its laws. It was Joshua who took the people into the Promised land, David who became its greatest king, Solomon who built the Temple, and the prophets through the ages who became the voice of G-d.

The account of Jacob in the Torah seems to fall short of these other lives, at least if we read the text literally. He has tense relationships with his brother Esau, his wives Rachel and Leah, his father-in-law Laban, and with his three eldest children, Reuben, Shimon and Levi. There are times when he seems full of fear, others when he acts-or at least seems to act-with less than total honesty. In reply to Pharaoh he says of himself, "The days of my life have been few and hard" (Gen. 47: 9). This is less than we might expect from a hero of faith.

That is why so much of the image we have of Jacob is filtered through the lens of midrash-the oral tradition preserved by the sages. In this tradition, Jacob is all good, Esau all bad. It had to be this way-so argued R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes in his essay on the nature of midrashic interpretation- because otherwise we would find it hard to draw from the biblical text a clear sense of right and wrong, good and bad. The Torah is an exceptionally subtle book, and subtle books tend to be misunderstood. So the oral tradition made it simpler: black and white instead of shades of grey.

Yet perhaps, even without midrash, we can find an answer-and the best way of so doing is to think of the idea of a journey.

Judaism is about faith as a journey. It begins with the journey of Abraham and Sarah, leaving behind their "land, birthplace and father's house" and travelling to an unknown destination, "the land I will show you."

The Jewish people is defined by another journey in a different age: the journey of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt across the desert to the Promised Land.

That journey becomes a litany in the parsha of Massei: "They left X and they camped in Y. They left Y

and they camped in Z." To be a Jew is to move, to travel, and only rarely if ever to settle down. Moses warns the people of the danger of settling down and taking the status quo for granted, even in Israel itself: "When you have children and grandchildren, and have been established in the land for a long time, you might become decadent" (Deut. 4: 25).

Hence the rules that Israel must always remember its past, never forget its years of slavery in Egypt, never forget on Sukkot that our ancestors once lived in temporary dwellings, never forget that it does not own the land- it belongs to G-d-and we are merely there as G-d's gerim ve-toshavim, "strangers and sojourners" (Lev. 25: 23).

Why so? Because to be a Jew means not to be fully at home in the world. To be a Jew means to live within the tension between heaven and earth, creation and revelation, the world that is and the world we are called on to make; between exile and home, and between the universality of the human condition and the particularity of Jewish identity. Jews don't stand still except when standing before G-d. The universe, from galaxies to subatomic particles, is in constant motion, and so is the Jewish soul.

We are, we believe, an unstable combination of dust of the earth and breath of G-d, and this calls on us constantly to make decisions, choices, that will make us grow to be as big as our ideals, or, if we choose wrongly, make us shrivel into small, petulant creatures obsessed by trivia. Life as a journey means striving each day to be greater than we were the day before, individually and collectively.

If the concept of a journey is a central metaphor of Jewish life, what in this regard is the difference between Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Abraham's life is framed by two journeys both of which use the phrase Lech lecha, "undertake a journey", once in Genesis 12 when he was told to leave his land and father's house, the other in Gen. 22:2 at the binding of Isaac when he was told, "Take your son, the only one you love-Isaac-and go [lech lecha] to the region of Moriah."

What is so moving about Abraham is that he goes, immediately and without question, despite the fact that both journeys are wrenching in human terms. In the first he has to leave his father. In the second he has to let go of his son. He has to say goodbye to the past and risk saying farewell to the future. Abraham is pure faith.

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He loves G-d and trusts Him absolutely. Not everyone can achieve that kind of faith. It is almost superhuman.

Isaac is the opposite. It is as if Abraham, knowing the emotional sacrifices he has had to make, knowing too the trauma Isaac must have felt at the binding, seeks to protect his son as far as lies within his power. He makes sure that Isaac does not leave the Holy Land (see Gen. 24: 6 -- that is why Abraham does not let him travel to find a wife). Isaac's one journey (to the land of the Philistines, in Gen. 26) is limited and local. Isaac's life is a brief respite from the nomadic existence Abraham and Jacob both experience.

Jacob is different again. What makes him unique is that he has his most intense encounters with G-d-they are the most dramatic in the whole book of Genesis-in the midst of the journey, alone, at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next, from Esau to Laban on the outward journey, from Laban to Esau on his homecoming.

In the midst of the first he has the blazing epiphany of the ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, moving him to say on waking, "G-d is truly in this place but I did not know it... This must be G-d's house and this the gate to heaven" (28: 16-17). None of the other patriarchs, nor even Moses, has a vision quite like this.

On the second, in our parsha, he has the haunting, enigmatic wrestling match with the man/angel/G-d, which leaves him limping but permanently transformed- the only person in the Torah to receive from G-d an entirely new name, Israel, which may mean, "one who has wrestled with G-d and man" or "one who has become a prince [sar] before G-d".

What is fascinating is that Jacob's meetings with angels are described by the same verb p-g-, (Gen. 28: 11, and 32: 2) which means "a chance encounter", as if they took Jacob by surprise, which clearly they did. Jacob's most spiritual moments are ones he did not plan. He was thinking of other things, about what he was leaving behind and what lay ahead of him. He was, as it were, "surprised by G-d."

Jacob is someone with whom we can identify. Not everyone can aspire to the loving faith and total trust of an Abraham, or to the seclusion of an Isaac. But Jacob is someone we understand. We can feel his fear, understand his pain at the tensions in his family, and sympathise with his deep longing for a life of quietude

and peace (the sages say about the opening words of next week's parsha that "Jacob longed to live at peace, but was immediately thrust into the troubles of Joseph").

The point is not just that Jacob is the most human of the patriarchs but rather that at the depths of his despair he is lifted to the greatest heights of spirituality. He is the man who encounters angels. He is the person surprised by G-d. He is the one who, at the very moments he feels most alone, discovers that he is not alone, that G-d is with him, that he is accompanied by angels.

Jacob's message defines Jewish existence. It is our destiny to travel. We are the restless people. Rare and brief have been our interludes of peace. But at the dark of night we have found ourselves lifted by a force of faith we did not know we had, surrounded by angels we did not know were there. If we walk in the way of Jacob, we too may find ourselves surprised by G-d.
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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“I am the Lord of Beth El, where you anointed a monument and where you made me a vow. Now, - arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.” (Genesis 31: 13).

After more than two decades away from home, Jacob has finally extricated himself from Laban and the comfortable, materialistic exile which his uncle created for him. He hears a Divine voice commanding him to go home and Jacob plans "to go back to my father's house in peace". So he sets out for Hebron where Isaac had lived with Abraham (Gen 35:37), and where the initial familial charge had been given.

However, although Jacob takes his leave of Laban at the end of the portion of Vayetze, it is only after stopping off at Seir, and then Sukkot (which suggests continued wandering) then Shekhem for an extended stay, then Beth El where he builds a monument, then Bethlehem where he buries his beloved Rachel, and finally Migdal Eder - only after all these stops and way-stations does he finally return to his father's home four chapters and many adventures later. What took him so long? What is the Bible teaching us in detailing this long delay?

Jacob's asked G-d to return him to his father's house "in peace". Jacob's early years were certainly not peaceful; his relationship with twin-brother Esau was tense; and his relationship with his father Isaac was too. Jacob felt unappreciated and unloved by his father and he felt guilty towards his father as a result of his deceptive masquerade in the guise of Esau to steal the birthright.

Most significantly, Jacob was not at peace with himself and with his G-d. Yes, Abraham had also been an aggressive fighter, who came from behind with only a small militia to defeat the four terrorist kings; and yes,

the heir to the Abrahamic birthright would have to act courageously and even militantly to see to it that compassionate righteousness and just morality would dominate the world order. But, even though Esau had sold him the birthright for a bowl of lentil soup, hadn't Jacob taken unfair advantage of his brother's hunger? Would not compassionate righteousness have suggested that he give him the soup without charge? And is it morally just to pretend to be someone else and deceive your father into giving you the birthright?

Although Rebecca had proven to Isaac that Jacob could utilize the hands of Esau to claim his rightful birthright- making use of those grasping hands of Esau can potentially strangle the Divine voice of Jacob, the wholehearted and scholarly image of G-d within. This is clearly what happens to Jacob in Labanland, where he out-foxes the sly and foxy Laban himself. This is why the angel in his dream calls him back to his birthplace, reminds him of his earlier idealism, and returns him his truest original self, the wholehearted dweller in tents.

But Jacob must repent before he returns to his father; he must go to Seir where he returns the "blessing" to Esau whom he addresses as his master and elder brother (Gen 33:11). Jacob must disgorge the Esau-ism and Laban-ism which has almost penetrated the essence of his being. He does this in the wrestling match which takes place within his own self, when the image of G-d is returned to his innermost soul (33:10). Yes, he can and should achieve aggressive mastery over the strong and powerful evil forces of Esau and the angel of Esau (Yisra-el), but with yosher- moral integrity for G-d wants righteousness, "Yashar-el".

He goes to Shekhem, where - despite the rape of his daughter, Dinah, he refuses to behave with duplicity to Shechem (the rapist) and his father. Indeed, he roundly condemns Simeon and Levi for deceiving their city into circumcision only in order to weaken and eventually kill them Jacob is demonstrating that he has now learned the importance of honest confrontation, the lesson of being "straight", up front and not a "heel-sneak".

Jacob is forced to bury his beloved Rachel because she did not confront her father honestly. He should have pointed out that since her husband - and not her brothers- had secured Laban's wealth in livestock, he, Jacob, deserved the household gods which represented the right of inheritance. Rachel also stooped to deception, and Jacob had sworn that whoever had stolen the gods deserved to die!

Finally, Jacob realizes that his eldest son, Reuben, slept with his concubine Bilhah to demonstrate that as the eldest son of the first wife Leah, he deserved the birthright, rather than his younger brother Joseph, the first-born son of Rachel. By favoring Joseph, Jacob had done to Reuben what his own father had done to him. Now Jacob realizes that in setting patterns of behavior in his desire to be Esau, he is in no small way

responsible for Reuben's transgression. Now he is finally able to appreciate and forgive Isaac's favoritism. Simultaneously, he understands that his father can now forgive him just as he is now forgiving Reuben.

Jacob is able to return to his father "in peace", finally leaving the family tensions, jealousies and hatreds behind! © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah teaches us, according to Rashi and the words of the rabbis, that our father Yaakov prepared for his encounter with Eisav by adopting three possible strategies. They were mollifying Eisav with gifts, praying to G-d for deliverance and engaging in physical battle against him. The first strategy proved to be successful, though the Torah records for us Yaakov implementing his second strategy as well, with his heartfelt prayer to the Lord that he be spared from the murderous hands of Eisav.

The question arises why Yaakov had to have alternate strategies in the first place. Was it not sufficient to rely on the power of prayer and G-d's original commitment to him that He would be with him and safeguard him from all harm? In the simplicity of faith, is that not sufficient for Yaakov, the chosen one of our forefathers?

I have often been challenged by problems that arise in life. I always prayed for G-d's help and succor. Sometimes my prayers were accepted and matters developed as I hoped for. There were other times that this did not occur. But I always had an alternate strategy - a doctor, a lawyer, an accountant, an advisor - that I followed in tandem with my prayers.

Someone once asked me if there was a lack of faith on my part when I insisted that the faculty members of my yeshiva own life insurance policies. Why not rely on prayer and Heaven alone? I replied that I was only following in the methods of my father Yaakov who also adopted alternate strategies and apparently did not rely on prayer alone. My critic thought my answer to be heretical. I thought that he was misrepresenting the Torah value of faith and wise living.

There is a common adage that G-d helps those that help themselves. To accomplish things in life, both spiritually and materially, effort and planning, devotion and industry must be expended. Once, in my yeshiva days long ago, I had great difficulty in understanding a difficult concept that was raised by one of the commentators to the Talmud. I asked my teacher whether prayer to Heaven would help me understand that concept. He answered that it would help only if one has truly exhausted one's own abilities to understand the matter.

I then realized that prayer was Yaakov's second strategy and that he felt it would help only if at first he

employed it together with prayer - first the attempt to soothe Eisav's anger with gifts. Relying on prayer alone without the expenditure of one's own talents and resources is a way of getting away cheaply in the matter.

The famous rebbe of Sanz, Rabbi Chaim Halberstam stated: "First one must be prepared to tear out one's own rib before one can expect Heaven to intervene in one's stead!" Yaakov is prepared to risk all of his hard earned wealth, and in fact his life itself, when forced to deal with Eisav. Because of this, Heaven intervenes and Eisav conciliates with Yaakov. There is a lesson here for all of us. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein-Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Yaakov was afraid" (B'raishis 32:8). He was afraid that his brother, who was coming towards him and his family with an army (32:7) would "smite me, mother and child [together]" (32:12). This fear gripped him despite G-d's assurance that "I will be with you, and I will watch over you wherever you go, and I will return you to this ground (in Canaan), for I will not abandon you until I have done that which I have spoken to you" (28:15). Yaakov hadn't yet returned to Canaan, so G-d's assurance of a safe return still applied. Nevertheless, Yaakov feared Eisav because he was afraid that he might have sinned (see Rashi on 32:11 and B'rachos 4a), thus negating G-d's promise (which was dependant on Yaakov remaining righteous).

In his prayer asking G-d to save him from Eisav, Yaakov reminds G-d that He had told him He would be good to him (32:13), seeming to invoke the promise to watch over him. If Yaakov's fear of Eisav was predicated on G-d's promise no longer applying, how could he reference it in his prayer? What was the purpose of reminding G-d of an assurance that was no longer valid?

The expression used by Yaakov to refer to the promise ("and You said 'I will do good/be good with you') uses a double-language, which Rashi (quoting B'raishis Rabbah 76:7) says means two distinct things; "I will do good in your merit, [and] I will be good [with you] in the merit of your fathers (i.e. Avraham and Yitzchok)." As several commentators point out (see Mizrachi, Toldos Yitzchok and Sefer HaZikaron), even if the promise made based on Yaakov's own merits no longer applied, the promise made based on the merits of his parents still did. This would explain why Yaakov mentioned making his descendants as numerous as "the grains of sand by the sea," even though G-d's promise to him only mentioned making his descendants as numerous as "the dust that is upon the earth" (28:14,

see Rashi on 32:13); Yaakov purposely used an expression that was said only to his grandfather because he was invoking the part of the promise that was based on Avraham's (and Yitzchok's) merits. Nevertheless, we would still need to explain why Yaakov was afraid of Eisav if the part of the promise that was based on his parents' merits was still in force.

Another possibility (see Daas Z'kaynim and S'fornu, see also B'chor Shor and Rabbeinu Efrayim) works from the other direction. When Yaakov was assured that he would return safely, he was alone-he had no family and no possessions (just his "stick"); even if G-d's promise still applied, it only applied to him, not to his family. Therefore, he was concerned that Eisav would harm "mother and children," i.e. his family, and asked G-d to protect them. However, since he was sent to Charan specifically to start a family (28:2), and having his family decimated by Eisav could not be considered being fully protected by G-d, returning safely without his family wouldn't qualify as "not being abandoned by G-d" (28:15, see Ramban on 32:13).

Rashbam (see also R' Chaim Paltiel) compares Yaakov's prayer with the prayers Moshe offered on behalf of the nation after they sinned; even if they deserved to be punished, doing so wouldn't reflect well on G-d Himself, as others would think G-d couldn't fulfill His promises (not that they no longer deserved to be fulfilled). Yaakov was asking G-d to keep His promise, even if his sins had negated them, for the sake of G-d's honor. (Bais HaLevi has a similar approach, specifying that "G-d's honor" refers to G-d's will being fulfilled; if Yaakov and family were wiped out by Eisav, who would continue the Abrahamic mission?) Ramban understands Yaakov's prayer to be "just as You (G-d) did so many things for me even though I wasn't worthy of them, please keep Your promise to me even though I may no longer be worthy of it." Rather than Yaakov referencing G-d's promise as an argument for why He should save him, it was part of the prayer, specifying what he wanted the prayer to accomplish. According to Ralbag, the promise is not part of the prayer, but Yaakov's way of expressing his concern that he is not worthy of it being fulfilled (therefore needing to pray). Similarly, Malbim suggests that Yaakov understood that his fear indicated that he was not fully confident in G-d's promise, and therefore not worthy of it being fulfilled (which is why he had to ask G-d to help him despite previous assurances). Abarbanel sidesteps the issue, using a soldier going to war as a parable. If the soldier doesn't really think he might die, his fighting cannot be described as bravery; it is only if he knows the danger involved and still fights that he can be called "brave." Similarly, if Yaakov thought Eisav was just coming to spend time with the brother he hasn't seen in decades, he wouldn't think he was in danger, and wouldn't need to rely on G-d's promise to feel safe. It was only because Yaakov realized what Eisav's intentions were

that he experienced the normal human emotion of fear, and relied on G-d's promise to alleviate that fear.

Mahari"l Diskin positions Yaakov's prayer as a "catch-22." Yaakov's fear was based on two things, his merits being depleted and the possibility that he had sinned (see Rashi on 32:11 and Maharsha on Brachos 4a). If he hadn't sinned, G-d's promise would still apply, and if his merits hadn't been depleted, they would protect him despite having sinned. The "kindnesses" G-d did for Yaakov, such as helping him amass such a large flock (31:9-12) and appearing to Lavan to make sure he doesn't do anything to Yaakov or his family (31:24 and 31:29), had depleted his merits. But if Eisav took these things away from Yaakov, they ultimately would not have served any purpose, and could no longer be considered "kindnesses"-and without any "kindnesses" depleting Yaakov's merits, G-d's promise to protect him still applied! Yaakov mentioned G-d's promise in his prayer because it is part of the "catch-22," either way the promise (or similar results) should stand.

Bais Efrayim offers three approaches to explain why Yaakov mentioned G-d's promise in his prayer despite his fear being based on the promise no longer applying. His first suggestion is that only two of Yaakov's three preparations for Eisav were based on his fear that G-d's promise was nullified by sin- sending Eisav a large present and dividing his "camp" into two "camps." Prayer, on the other hand, was appropriate whether the promise still applied or not, so Yaakov included it in his prayer. Bais Efrayim's second suggestion is based on the notion that Yaakov had wanted to be dealt with through G-d's "Midas HaDin" (attribute of strict justice), whereby everything was absolutely deserved without having to rely on G-d's kindness. Yaakov was afraid that based on that standard he no longer deserved to be protected from Eisav, so asked G-d to help him through His "Midas HaRachamim" (attribute of mercy); by that standard, Yaakov was still confident that G-d's promise still applied. Bais Efrayim's third approach is similar to Ramban's, albeit using verses from the first two chapters of Yirmiyahu as an example of G-d "remembering the kindness of [the nation's] youth" (2:2), despite sending Yirmiyahu to warn Israel that punishment is imminent (1:12-17); Yaakov was asking G-d to keep His promise despite his current state, based on the closer relationship they had at the time the assurance was given.

When discussing Moshe's prayer after the sin of the golden calf (Sh'mos 33-34, lesson #3), Ralbag explains how prayer works; how it can cause something that wouldn't have happened to happen, or cause something that would have otherwise occurred not to. One of the ways prayer works is by motivating the person to become worthy of it. By verbalizing/concretizing what we want, and thinking

about how we need to improve in order to deserve it, the process has been started to actually deserve it.

Yaakov was afraid that Eisav could harm him because he wasn't sure that he still deserved the protection G-d had promised him. This mirrors Yaakov's concern immediately after the promise was made (see Ramban on 28:20), which led to Yaakov making a vow as a means of motivating himself to maintain the level necessary for the promise to be fulfilled (see <http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-vayaytzay-5763> <<http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-vayaytzay-5763>>). A vow is a valid motivational tool for the long term, and was appropriate when Yaakov's spiritual level had to be maintained for a long time (until he actually returned, when the promise could be fulfilled). However, with Eisav approaching, there wasn't much time. Yaakov was afraid that he (currently) wasn't worthy of the promise being fulfilled, and had to do whatever he could to become worthy. He therefore asked G-d to save him from Eisav, using prayer as a vehicle to become worthy of what he was asking for. In that prayer, he mentioned G-d's promise to remind himself that he had been worthy of such a promise, and could become so again. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Is public protest an effective means of bringing about change? While many insist on its value, some have argued that demonstrations on behalf of Jewish causes precipitate anti-Semitic backlash. This week's Torah portion offers an insight into this debate.

After 22 years of separation, Yaakov (Jacob), preparing to meet his brother Esav (Esau), is told that Esav is geared up to do battle. (Genesis 32:7) When they meet however, the opposite occurs. Esav embraces Yaakov. (Genesis 33:4) What prompted the change?

Commentators point to a pivotal incident that took place between Yaakov receiving the report of Esav's war preparations and the actual encounter. This is the episode of the struggle between Yaakov and a mysterious being in the middle of the night. Yaakov wins the struggle but in the process is wounded. He leaves the battle limping. (Genesis 32:25-33)

Benno Yaakov, the German Jewish commentator, feels that Yaakov's limping precipitated Esav's change of heart. According to his comments, when Esav saw Yaakov struggling to walk, he felt compassion for him. In Esav's mind Yaakov had been defeated. From Benno Yaakov's perspective, the heart of the adversary is won by bending and ingratiating ourselves by walking wounded. This approach makes sense as Benno Yaakov lived in Germany in the early 20th century-a time in which the Jews were seeking good relations with the German government.

Rashbam sees it differently. He is bewildered by Yaakov's desire to be alone just before the struggle with the mysterious being? (Genesis 32:25) If Yaakov was intent on protecting his family why did he abandon them at that crucial time?

Rashbam suggests that up to this point, when faced with a challenge, Yaakov always ran. He ran after he took the blessings from Esav. He said nothing when he found Leah and not Rachel the morning after his wedding night, and he fled from his dishonest father-in-law Lavan's (Laban) house in the dead of the night. Just hours before confronting Esav it seemed that Yaakov finally had no choice but to stand strong. At the last moment, however, Rashbam insists that he was alone because once again he was seeking to flee. As much as Yaakov had carefully prepared for the inevitable confrontation with Esav, his nature took over - once again he saw fleeing as the only solution.

For Rashbam, the mysterious being was an emissary of G-d sent to Yaakov. In the end, the emissary wounds Yaakov, making it difficult for him to walk. This was G-d's way of telling Yaakov that he no longer could run. When facing an adversary, it's important to stand fast.

Thus, when Esav sees Yaakov standing with pride, unwilling to run, he gains respect for him and embraces him. Sometimes, the only way to gain respect from others is if one first has self respect. Witnessing a preparedness to stand tall, Esav gained new respect for Yaakov. He was no longer a brother who could be pushed around. It was that new resolve on the part of Yaakov that earned Esav's respect and caused him to decide to embrace Yaakov rather than fight him. Rashbam, living during the Crusades, may have been offering advice to his own generation of persecuted Jews, letting them know that if you cave in to anti-Semitism you arouse more anti-Semitism.

Interestingly, after struggling with the mysterious man, Yaakov is given another name, Yisrael. No longer was he only Yaakov which comes from the word *akev* (heel), one who, even as he negotiates, runs on his heels. Now he is also Yisrael, which means the fighter who has the strength to prevail.

We are told that Yaakov retains both names. This is unlike other characters in the Torah, such as Avraham (Abraham) and Sarah whose old names, Avram and Sarai were never used again after the Divine giving of their new identity. The message of the dual name is clear; both the Yaakov approach of behind the scenes discussion with authority and a willingness to negotiate and compromise and the Yisrael component of and outspoken advocacy are crucial. They work in sync, each complementing the other to achieve the goal of justice and *tikkun olam*. © 2010 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern

and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

Descendants and Deficiencies

“These are the descendants (*toldos*) of Esav" (Breishis 36:1). The word "*toldos*" is spelled in four different ways: with two vavs, no vavs, only the first vav, or, as in our pasuk, only the second vav.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (25:12) explains that a missing vav of the root, the first vav, indicates an internal deficiency in the descendant. A missing vav of the plural, the second vav, represents a lack in the number of descendants.

When describing Hashem's creations-"These are the products (*toldos*) of the heavens and the earth" (Breishis 2:4) both vavs appear, since Hashem's works lack neither quality nor quantity. Similarly, the description of the lineage of Dovid Hamelech and the Mashiach-"these are the generations (*toldos*) of Peretz" (Rus 4:18) -- uses two vavs to reflect their completeness.

The descendants of Esav are great in number but lacking spiritually and morally. Therefore "*toldos Esav*" (Breishis 36:1) omits the first vav but contains the second.

Some of the descendants of Yitzchak, i.e. Yaakov and his sons, were spiritually great. Hence, "*these are the offspring (toldos) of Yitzchak*" (Breishis 25:19) contains the first vav. Since Esav and his children lacked spiritual greatness, the second vav, which would indicate greatness among all of Yitzchak's descendants, is omitted. Rashi's comment on the word *toldos*-"Yaakov and Esav who are spoken of in the parsha"-may reflect the presence of the first vav and the absence of the second vav, respectively.

"The descendants (*toldos*) of Yishmael" (Breishis 25:12) is spelled without either vav. Rav Hirsch explained that this is due to the fact they were neither spiritually great nor numerous. This requires explanation, as Yishmael had many sons and innumerable descendants! The Kli Yakar (Breishis 25:23) states that there are *gerei tzedek* from Esav but not from Yishmael (see Chasam Sofer Kesubos 53a). As such, perhaps Rav Hirsch is saying that quantity is positive only when at least some quality results.

Surprisingly, the first vav is omitted when describing Yaakov's sons, "*These are the descendants (toldos) of Yaakov*" (37:2). Rav Hirsch explains that this indicates the moral deficiency of Yaakov's sons in their sin against Yosef. This paradigmatic interpersonal sin (see Meshech Chochma Vayikra 16:30) can be partially explained by the family history. Avraham had a bad son, Yishmael, and Yitzchak had a bad son, Esav. The

defect in the offspring of Yitzchak is rooted in the previous generation: Avraham begat Yitzchak. Since Avraham had a Yishmael, Yitzchak had an Esav. Yaakov's sons anticipated that their generation would be no different than the previous ones, and thus were expecting there to be a bad son among Yaakov's children. When Yosef behaved inappropriately (Rashi 37:2), they jumped to the erroneous conclusion that he was the Yishmael or Esav of their generation. They misunderstood his dreams as confirmation of this hypothesis and this led them to their terrible sin (see Malbim Breishis 37:4).

In fact, Yosef was a righteous person whose behavior was somewhat different from his brothers'. The tragic mistake of treating someone whose path in the service of Hashem is different from one's own as a wicked or heretical person is precisely the sin which caused the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash. Substantive but acceptable differences led some to consider their coreligionists to be tz'dukim, beyond the pale. Perushim, righteous Jews, pursued each other based on the false imagination of the other as a heretic (Netziv, Meishiv Davar 1:44).

Just as Yishmael was thrown out of Avraham's home with Hashem's consent (Breishis 21:10-12), Esav was distanced by Yaakov (Breishis 33:13-14, see Rashi). Later, idolaters were purged by Moshe Rabbeinu (Shemos 32:27-9). It is critical, however, not to extrapolate from these precedents to cases that lie beyond certain rigorous borders. It is proper to distance oneself from heretics, pray for their downfall (v'lamalshinim-v'chol haminim), and even, when possible, pursue them (Avodah Zarah 26b). However, the mistake of Yosef's brothers and the Perushim of bayis Sheni was to attack righteous individuals whose ways differed from theirs.

Rav Hirsch himself was famous for Austritt, i.e. stepping away from the organized community which was controlled by heretical Reform Jews. Other great rabbonim disagreed. In any event, each case is somewhat unique and must be individually analyzed (see Kovetz Igros Achiezer vol. 1, p. 243-244).

While the aforementioned Netziv bemoaned unnecessary disunity in Klal Yisrael, others considered the disunity necessary and critical in order to maintain ideological purity. Now, over a century later, these disputes continue. To what extent should Torah-true Jews separate themselves from heretics? What about their innocent children, whom the Rambam (Hilchos Mamrim 3:3) requires us to "pull close with words of peace until they return"? How does one deal with those who subscribe to the fundamentals of our faith (ikarei emunah), but view the halachic process in a radically different way? Should they be attacked, ignored, or embraced? Some otherwise Orthodox Jews have succumbed to the temptations of promiscuity or alternate lifestyles. Should one express outrage or

sympathy? Might it depend on whether the behavior is recognized as sin or trumpeted as perfectly acceptable?

As we read parshiyos Vayishlach and Vayeshev, we must learn the lessons of the four spellings of toldos and attempt to properly balance the beloved ideals of truth and peace. This balance will lead to our ultimate redemption (Zecharyah 8:19). © 2011 Rabbi M. Willig & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI DANIEL TRAVIS

Integrity

“When his [Yosef's] brothers realized that their father loved him more than he loved the other children, they began to hate him. They could not say a peaceful word to him." (Bereshith 37:4) Although these words are not complimentary to Yaakov's children, there was a very positive side to their actions. Yaakov's sons certainly entertained ill feelings toward Yosef, yet truthfulness was so much part of them that it did not allow them to say anything to Yosef that was contrary to the thoughts they bore in their hearts. (Rashi on Bereshith 37:4) This level is called tamim (perfect), and indicates that there is no contradiction between one's inner feelings and one's external actions—that one's actions are in perfect harmony with the feelings in one's heart.

It is often difficult to harmonize one's heart and one's actions; therefore this praise is reserved only for the truly righteous. (Rabbeinu Bachyeh on Bereshith 37:4) King Dovid described this behavior when he wrote, "Speak truth in your heart." (Tehillim 15:2) This level of truthfulness is very exalted indeed, and is found only among those who truly fear G-d. (Bava Bathra 88a)

Nevertheless, there are times when it is better not to speak the truth that is in one's heart in order to spare another person from embarrassment. After all, King Dovid said, "Speak truth in your heart." He didn't say, "Speak the truth that is in your heart." Rav Safra and Rava once took a walk together outside the city limits. As they were walking they met Mar Zutra on his way to visit the city. Mar Zutra, mistakenly thinking that Rav Safra and Rava had come especially to greet him, told them that they should not have troubled themselves to do so. Rav Safra responded that they had not been aware that Mar Zutra was on his way to town; they were simply out walking, and had not intended to greet him. (Chulin 94b)

Rava was of the opinion that under such circumstances it would have been better not to "speak the truth in one's heart," but rather to keep quiet. Since Rav Safra and Rava had not known that Mar Zutra was approaching the city, if they remained silent and let Mar Zutra assume that they had come to meet him they would not have been deceiving him. They would just have been leaving him to his own assumptions—if anything he would have "tricked" himself. Since it would embarrass Mar Zutra to know that they had not come to

greet him, Rava felt that they should not have informed him. © 2011 Rabbi D. Travis & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reveals to us the true nature of Edom, descendants of Eisav, and displays her two-sided character. It teaches us to recognize Edom's perpetual hatred for the Jewish people and never to trust her friendship. Although there may be moments when Edom displays true brotherhood we must always be wary of these situations and never establish any close association with her.

The haftorah opens with a moving description of a plot acted out against Edom, descendants of Eisav. The prophet Ovadiah says, "How was Eisav pillaged, his hidden treasures sought out? To the borders they sent you(Eisav), all of your allies enticed you: then they were able to overtake you." (1:6) These particular passages refer to an historic moment when the surrounding allies of Edom pretended to rush to her assistance in her war against a powerful neighbor. The allies accompanied Edom all the way to the end of her borders and then abandoned her, leaving her entire country unprotected. They returned inside her country and invaded the entire Edom, now in a most vulnerable state. The prophet draws our attention to this specific episode to demonstrate the unique character of Edom's "brotherhood." Historically speaking, although Edom always appeared politically as a true ally this relationship was only superficial and when the opportunity arose she would typically turn against her loyal "friends" and leave them stranded. This time, her allies gave her a taste of her own medicine and, after luring Edom into war they turned on her and pillaged her entire country.

This two faced nature of Eisav was, in fact, the undertone of our Jewish nation's sad experiences throughout the Roman Empire, largely composed of the descendants of Eisav. To demonstrate this, the prophet Ovadiah focuses on a specific aspect of the Roman era, the role the Edomites played in the destruction of the second Temple. Ovadiah says, "On the day the nations took the Jewish people captive, and entered the Jewish gates casting lots over Yerushalayim, you were also amongst them." (1:11) In truth, the war against Yerushalayim belonged to the Romans but Edom could not stand idly by and therefore gladly participated in the destruction of the walls of the Bais Hamikdash. The Malbim (ad loc.) reminds us that these descendants of Edom were actually alleged Jewish converts who were accepted during the reign of Herod. Initially these Edomites gave the impression of sincerity and were warmly welcomed by the Jewish people. But, as could have been predicted, Edom could not be trusted and when the Jews were down, these "converts" rallied

against their own Jewish "brethren" and readily assisted in destroying them.

This two faced nature expressed itself even in the earlier Babylonian exile when Eisav's descendants offered their assistance in driving the final nails into the Jewish coffin. The Prophet Ovadiah says, "And don't stand by the crossroads to finish off refugees." (1:14) The Yalkut Shimoni (549) explains that this passage refers to the cunning strategy of the Edomites during our first exile. They would station themselves a short distance behind the Babylonian army and wait in ambush for the Jewish refugees. They reasoned, "If the Jews win we'll say we're here to help them and if the Babylonians win we'll help them kill the remaining Jews." Again we are reminded of the unique "brotherhood" of Edom. Due to their two-faced character, they could easily pass for true brothers awaiting to help the Jews in their time of distress. But, in truth, this disguise only provided them a perfect opportunity to eradicate any trace of the Jewish people, should the situation arise.

Edom's pattern of "brotherhood" traces itself all the way back to Edom's predecessor, Eisav. In this week's sedra, (Torah portion) we read that Eisav ran towards his brother Yaakov to embrace him. Although Eisav had been Yaakov's arch enemy from birth, it seems that he had undergone a sincere change of attitude. Yaakov had sent an elaborate present to Eisav as a gesture of true friendship and, for the first time in their lives, a sense of friendship and brotherhood developed. The Torah relates that in response to this gift, "Eisav ran to his brother, embraced him, and "kissed" him.(Bereishis 32:4) However, Chazal note the mysterious dots which appear in the Torah above the word "kissed" and reveal that Eisav did not truly intend to kiss his brother. In actuality, he attempted to bite him, but was unsuccessful in his endeavor. His perpetual hatred was so deep that even in this true moment of friendship he could not subdue his innermost feelings and found himself compelled to express them. In explanation of this, Rashi (ad loc) quotes the classic statement of Rav Shimon Bar Yochai, "It is a set principle that Eisav hates Yaakov." This warns us never to lose sight of Eisav's inner hatred and even when true gestures of "friendship" are displayed never to overlook what lies beneath the surface.

Edom, the present day Eisav will never be our true friend and we must always be wary of her association with us. We should never become too closely related to her and must always remember her true character. This deep seeded hatred remains throughout the generations until the final day when, as Ovadiah says, "The saviors will rise from Mount Zion to judge the (inhabitants of Eisav's) mountain and then the perfect reign will belong to Hashem. (1:21) © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org