

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYISHLAH

Haftarah: Obadiah 1:1-21

DECEMBER 16-17, 2016 17 KISLEV 5777

DEDICATION: In memory of - Yosef ben Nizha - Joseph S. Gindi A"H

**Mabrook and MazalTov to our cousins Karen and Alan Sasson
On the marriage of their son David to Sharon Zeitoune**

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Editors Notes**Redeeming Hanukah from Edom**

We read this week of the battle between our forefather Jacob and the ministering Angel of Esav or Edom. However we understand man wrestling with an angel, the rabbis tell us that the dust from their battle rose all the way up to the kiseh HaKavod – The Heavenly Throne of Glory. The Rabbis explain that this dust represents a key factor in the battle between this angel who is also the primordial snake and the children of Israel. It is the dust which represents those misvot which one might consider minor and trample with one's heel as we are told in the portion we read each summer, VeHaya Ekev Tishmeun which the rabbis explain to mean that our challenge is guarding against those very laws one might consider unimportant. When the nachash – the snake is cursed in the garden, he is told man will step on his head – man will recognize the important commandments, but the snake will bite man at the ekev – at the heel. The snakes success in tempting us begins with what is perceived as the unimportant commandments. If we succumb, he then succeeds in taking us bit by bit, from the heel to the head where we eventually give up even the cardinal beliefs and

we are completely lost, Heaven Forbid. At birth Jacob grabs the heel of Esav showing us that if we preserve these unimportant items, the snake will be powerless against us. Just as Jacob was successful, so can we his children be successful if, VeHaya Ekev Tishmeun”, if we guard ourselves.

I was disturbed when the Israeli-American Jewish actress Natalie Portman announced to Jimmy Fallon that she is going to have a Christmas tree for the first time this year. What is even more disturbing are the articles written by those bearing the title of rabbi defending and even supporting this idea of bringing a tree or a bush into our homes at this time of year! (As an aside I find it so strange that those who denigrate and disparage the ancient rabbis of the Talmud and throughout our history clamor for the title of rabbi. We should consider abolishing the title among the observant in an urgent need to differentiate ourselves and replace it with the term our teachers were given of Haham. I truly appreciate it when an invitation arrives where Rabbi is replaced with Haham. It connects me with my ancestors and segregates me from the outright kofrim (heretics) who shout their title from the rafters.) How does one call a tree a secular symbol?

Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen quoting the Christian scholar Clement Miles explains the true meaning of the tree and its origins. In elaborating on why December 25th was chosen for their holiday, he explains that the early Christians were able to recruit Roman pagans into their religion by taking their pagan Holiday of Saturnalia (a week of riotous behavior) and making that the day and the week they would celebrate Christmas. In the same vein they appealed to the worshippers of the Asheira cult and its offshoots who were recruited by the Church sanctioning “Christmas Trees”. This is the same Asheira prohibited in the Torah and of which the prophets spoke so often. Pagans had long worshipped trees in the forest. At the time of the Winter Solstice, this cult would decorate the very trees they worshiped.

Thus in bringing these pagans into the fold of the Church, the Church incorporated the practice of bringing a tree into one's home and decorating it. For Jews to emulate this practice is as close as we can probably get to ancient biblically listed idolatry in our modern world.

The same goes for the beautifully wrapped gifts placed under those trees. Traditions of a "god" (some say Nimrod who called himself a god) who gave gifts under an evergreen tree abound. Among the Scandinavians it was the god Odin who left special gifts during the Yuletide season under the evergreen tree, his sacred tree! In ancient Rome, the emperors compelled their most despised citizens (guess who those people typically were You win, of course they were us) to bring offerings and gifts during the Saturnalia (in December) and Kalends (in January). As you look at the beautiful tree with the gifts below, imagine our ancestors driven against their will and against their beliefs to bring offerings to these ancient rulers who imagined themselves gods and to their pagan gods) Later, this ritual expanded to include gift-giving among the general populace. The Catholic Church gave this custom a Christian flavor by re-rooting it in the supposed gift-giving of Saint Nicholas.

The rabbis of the Talmud established two post biblical holidays. They are Purim and Hanukah. And they are very different.

On Purim we recall that Haman attempted to destroy us physically: He couldn't care less whether the Jews were observant or not, he simply wanted us to be gone. On Hanukah, however, the Hellenists wanted to destroy us spiritually. They enforced the banning of the Sabbath, circumcision, and New Moon calculations (without which we would have no holidays). They defiled the Temple, yet they had no desire to kill us. They simply wanted us to become absorbed within their culture.

In each of these two Rabbinic holidays, the rejoicing fits the crisis. On Purim, in place of the physical destruction planned by Haman, we have physical rejoicing with the festive Purim meal, by sending mishloah manot, gifts of food and through matanot la-eyyonim, giving charity to the poor. As a child, on Purim we went to grandma and grandpa along with all the relatives and played Torah for dollars and made out like bandits. People ate and drank and laughed and danced and truly celebrated the physical.

On Hanukah, we celebrate our escape from the spiritual destruction the Hellenists planned for us through spiritual rejoicing. We sing the Hallel and we light the candles. It is those flames we ponder: those flames which recall the spiritual light, the soul and our desire to rise up. We are forbidden from making use of them on a physical level for Hanukah is the holiday of the spirit. And while Jerry Seinfeld tells us that all Jewish Holidays can be summed up in nine words (they tried to kill us, we won, let's eat), remarkably, latkes and jelly donuts aside, there is no inherent misvah to have a celebratory meal.

The battle between Esav-Edom and Yaakov-Yisrael was over the birthright. The two brothers should have formed a partnership. This was Isaac's intention in desiring to bless Esav. But Esav had to recognize that he in fact sold the birthright. I always thought that once Esav accepted this fact, the battle would be over. Esav is Edom, Edom is Rome, and Rome became the Church. When Pope John Paul II, the leader of the Church, the head of Edom and the representative of Esav came to Jerusalem and acknowledged that the Jewish people are "our elder brothers", I thought the battle was over and the partnership could begin. But if in fact the physical Edom is willing to join Jacob, the spiritual side, his angel, the one who battled Jacob is not. He has not ceased in biting at our heal and bringing up the dust.

We hear again and again that Mashiach is waiting at the door. We see again and again the strange coincidences in the world alluding to a change. Can it be a coincidence that in this year of upheaval, Hanukah and Christmas (Saturnalia) fall out on the same day? Last year when Hanukah and Thanksgiving coincided we were bombarded with all the Thanksgivingkah articles and Hanukah turkey recipes. This year let's avoid any semblance of merging Hanukah with either a pagan or Christian holiday. Let us not give in to the Greeks whose goal was to allow us to remain Jews without the Judaism. Let us recognize that Hanukah is a holiday of the spirit and not of Madison Avenue or Hollywood.

As I write this I can see the attacks coming at me on the internet from these Reform, Reconstructionist and who knows "rabbis". "What's the big deal", they'll write. It's only a secular symbol, they'll insist. Do they not realize that the snake has already defeated them? Do they not realize that they started by giving in to

the little things, to the dust under the heel and in the end they have given up the head too?

Yaakov defeated the angel of Edom. The angel knew that Jacob's children would not be as strong. And we have seen too many of his children lose the battle. But if one camp falls, the second will survive. In the time of Macabees, the majority of the Jewish people succumbed to the Hellenist ways. They became lost among the Greeks and the Romans. Today, too many of the Jewish people follow the Hellenists path and are victims of Edom's angel. 2200 years ago, the second camp, the camp of the Maccabees survived and was able to rededicate the Temple and celebrate the miracle of Hanukah. Let us merit resisting the temptation of this snake. Let us recognize that the little things are important. May Hashem watch over and assist us in the merit of Jacob and may our second camp be zocheh to rebuild the Third Bet HaMikdash, the everlasting Temple in Jerusalem, Bimhera BeYameynu Amen.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Va'yishlach - Yaacov meets up with Esav

- 1- Esav is coming toward Yaacov to kill him. Yaacov splits up his camp and prays.
- 2- Yaacov prepares presents for Esav. Yaacov fights with the malach (of Esav).
- 3- Yaacov meets up with Esav
- 4- Yaacov bows and gives presents to Esav. Esav goes to Seir. Yaacov goes to Succoth and then to Shechem.
- 5- Shechem rapes Dina. Shimon and Levi kill the people of Shechem. Yaacov goes back to Beit Kel. Devorah dies. Hashem blesses Yaacov and changes his name.
- 6- Binyamin is born. Rachel Dies. Reuben moves the bed. Yaacov returns home to his father in Hebron. Yitshak dies. The descendants of Esav.
- 7- The children of Seir. The 8 kings of Esav. The chiefs of Esav.

10 Interesting and Important Rashis on Parashat Va'yishlach

- 32:15a- How often a man must be available to have relations with his wife
32:22a- Yaakov was angry that he had to go through all this with Esav

33:17a- How long Yaakov stayed in Succoth (this is important because it helps establish the timeline of Yaacov's life and when other events to place)

34:1a- Why the pasook calls Dinah bat Leah (as opposed to bat Yaakov)

35:1a- Why Dina was raped

35:8a/8c/9b- The implicit death of Rivka

35:17a- Where we learn out that all the shevatim were twins

35:22b- The sin of Reuven

35:29- Rashi proves the death of Yitshak is out of chronological order. Yitshak didn't die until after Yosef was sold.

36:5- Elifaz slept with his father's wife

****Note, this is just meant to spark interest. Please see the Rashis inside.**

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"And Ya'akob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (Beresheet 32:25)

Ya'akob Abinu was alone the night before he confronted Esav, and he was attacked by an angel that he fought off the entire night. Why was he alone? Rashi explains: "He had forgotten some small jars, and went back for them. From here we see that the righteous treat their property with care – so that they should not send forth their hands in theft." This explains why Ya'akob found himself alone on the far side of the river. Rashi implies that righteous people are especially careful with their "things" because they are so careful not to violate the laws of stealing. How can we understand this? How does their carefulness not to steal make their objects beloved to them?

Rabbi Reuven Noah Cohen gives a mashal in the name of Rabbi Yisrael Belsky zt"l. Someone learned the laws of lulab and etrog. But he didn't just learn them, he learned in great depth and understood them perfectly well. In addition to that he also visited the greatest Rabbis to watch how they picked out a perfect lulab and etrog. When the holiday was approaching he went to the big city to find the best ones. He applied into practice all that he learned for many days and searched the entire city until he purchased the four types that were perfect and beautiful.

He boarded his train to go home, but he was so tired that he fell asleep on the train. When the train pulled into his station, he suddenly woke up. However, he was so disoriented that he ran off the train forgetting on the train his beloved lulab and etrog, never to find them again.

Can we imagine the pain that he felt? It's not only the huge sum of money that he lost, but part of him was in that lulab and etrog. He gave so much of his time and effort to study, to research, to see the

great ones, to shop, to buy, etc. He felt he lost part of himself.

This is the way the great ones dealt with anything they bought with their money. They applied all the laws of Shulhan Aruch – Hoshen Mishpat, not less than they would do when they purchased an etrog. This is the effort Ya'akob made when he purchased a small jar. Now we can understand the statement, "The money of the sadikim is beloved to them more than their bodies!" Why? Because "they don't let their hands take anything that is stolen. They are so careful with everything they buy that it should be according to all the rules of the Torah, until part of themselves is in the purchase they make. Therefore, when Ya'akob forgot the empty jars, it was to him like the beautiful etrog that he bought with all the effort. Won't he go back for it? Rabbi Reuven Semah

"Esav ran toward his brother and hugged him...and kissed him" (Beresheet 33:4)

Rashi tells us that although it is well known that Esav hates Ya'akob, this time, when he saw Ya'akob bowing down to him, he was filled with pity and he kissed Ya'akob with genuine feeling. The Rabbis tell us that the way we feel towards others will reciprocally make them feel towards us, as the pasuk in Mishle (Proverbs 27:19) says: "ostk ostv ck if ohbpk ohbpv ohnf" - "As in water, face answers to face, so the heart of a man to a man".

Many times we feel stalemated in our relationships with others, and we look for ways to thaw the coldness between us. The Torah teaches us that if we could muster genuine good will towards others, be understanding of their ways and try to see them in a positive light, then the feelings will be communicated heart to heart, and we will see the same and more from them to us. Let's try it and we will benefit the most. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Drop by Drop

In less complicated times, disciplinary actions in school were simple: a child who misbehaved was kept late or given an extra assignment in order to atone for a behavioral transgression. One of the more popular techniques used by teachers was to have a child write a phrase over and over, at least 100 times. I will not talk in class – 100 times! I will not chew gum – 100 times! This practice was considered very successful in getting the child to stop a particular type of behavior.

The following story is told about how Rabbi Akiva became inspired to improve his life by a connection to Torah. One day, while caring for his flock, the shepherd Akiva noticed water dripping onto a stone. The drops were constant, falling one after another after another. They were almost all identical

in size, and all hit almost the same point on the rock, one after another. The little drops, he noted, had worn a hole right through the rock.

"If droplets of water can bore a hole through stone," he said, "then certainly a hole can be made in my heart of stone." It was from that point forward that he began to study and grow in spirituality until he became Rabbi Akiva, the giant of his generation.

Teachers of Mussar (Jewish Ethics) stress that people should repeat an important principle over and over until it becomes part of their personality and behavioral repertoire. It is not so important to learn new things all the time. It is more important to truly understand even the simplest of principles. For example, Messilat Yesharim says that reading his work only once will not benefit readers at all. Only after constant review and repetition will they be able to comprehend his words, understand them well, and use his teachings for personal growth.

In this age of merchandising and advertising, we are trained to expect that new is better. Maybe a new car has more features than the old one, or a brand of toothpaste includes a previously unavailable ingredient which does make the product better. But the constant pursuit of "new" is not necessarily the same as the constant pursuit of "improved." People must spend time with themselves, reviewing and repeating important rules, strategies, and lessons in order to make them part of their lives.

The next time you hear something that seems bright, innovative, or intelligent – or perhaps only just really true – start repeating it over and over until you get it down. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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We read in Parashat Vayishlah of the angel that attacked Yaakob Abinu as he made his way back to Eretz Yisrael from the home of Laban. The Rabbis teach us that this angel was Satan himself. Every nation has a heavenly angel that advocates on its behalf, so-to-speak, in the heavens. Satan "volunteered" for the job of being the angel of the nation established by Esav, which represents evil and the antithesis of everything that Am Yisrael is meant to represent. Satan's attack on Yaakob Abinu was launched in order to prevent Yaakob Abinu from establishing Am Yisrael, the nation that would, for all eternity, struggle against the evil of Esav. Fortunately, Yaakob Abinu won this battle, and although he was injured, symbolizing a diminution of Am Yisrael's power, nevertheless, he triumphed over

Satan and indeed we, his descendants, are still able to wage this struggle against the evil spiritual forces in the world.

Rav Elhanan Wasserman raised the question of why Satan waited until the emergence of the third of our patriarchs before launching this assault. Why did he not try to attack Abraham Abinu, who founded the nation that was destined to be Satan's nemesis? Wouldn't it have been wiser for Satan to try to "nip it in the bud", to cut off Am Yisrael at its very root, the moment Abraham Abinu came onto the scene? And even if, for whatever reason, Satan deemed it unwise to launch this assault against Abraham, why did he not attack during the time of Yishak? Why did he wait until the time of Yaakob?

Rav Wasserman answered this question by analyzing the particular points of strength of the three patriarchs. They were all towering spiritual figures, but each had his own "specialty," his unique forte, if you will. Abraham excelled especially in the area of Hesed, loving kindness. But although he bequeathed this quality to his descendants, and Am Yisrael has always distinguished itself through its generosity, charity is not a uniquely Jewish quality. Many gentiles are also selfless and giving, as are many non-observant and unaffiliated Jews. Satan did not launch his attack against Abraham, because a nation that is defined primarily by Hesed is not guaranteed to endure. He did not feel threatened by Abraham, because a nation built mainly around loving-kindness, as important as this quality certainly is, will not likely last.

Yishak, too, did not pose an immediate risk to Satan. Yishak, who was offered as a sacrifice, signifies the quality of prayer (which is associated with sacrifices). Prayer, like Hesed, is a crucial aspect of religious life, but does not guarantee Am Yisrael's survival. Many synagogues here in the United States and elsewhere were unable to continue past the first generation after their establishment. Satan did not feel threatened by Yishak because he knew that praying is not enough to produce another loyal generation of God-fearing Jews.

Yaakob Abinu, however, posed a grave threat to Satan. Yaakob is described as a "Yosheb Ohalim" ("tent-dweller"), a devoted student of Torah. His outstanding quality was Torah learning. Once Yaakob came onto the scene, Satan realized he was in trouble. A nation that devotes itself to learning and education is guaranteed to endure. If there are yeshivot where children are trained and educated to follow the nation's laws, values and customs, the nation will continue to reproduce itself, generation

after generation. And this is why Satan launched an attack against Yaakob. Seeing Yaakob's commitment to Torah, Satan realized that Yaakob is indeed capable of producing an eternal nation that will hinder his attempts to promote evil. He therefore attacked Yaakob, and although he succeeded in inflicting an injury, making it more difficult for Yaakob and his descendants to fulfill their mission in the world, Yaakob prevailed.

Needless to say, every aspect of Judaism is critically important and may not be ignored. But we can learn from Satan that Torah education is what holds the key to Jewish survival. Satan can handle packed synagogues on Shabbat and charity events, but Torah learning is his kryptonite. It is our greatest weapon against him.

In nature, there is a process called photosynthesis which is vital for life. Plants receive energy from the sun, and they process this energy in order to produce oxygen. Without this process, of course, we would not be able to live. In Judaism, we have another kind of "photosynthesis," which occurs not in plants, but within our precious children. The children receive the "energy" from the Torah, and with this spiritual force they produce our "oxygen"—the key to our survival. When we send our children off to school to learn Torah, we are doing our part to produce our nation's "oxygen," ensuring our continued existence. Torah study is the ammunition we need to fight the Satan. The more we invest in Torah education, the more successful we will be in this ongoing battle, and ensure that Kedusha will prevail and triumph over evil.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
COLLEGE CAMPUSES**

Recently there have appeared in a number of newspapers throughout the United States articles detailing the appalling anti-Semitism that exists currently on many American college campuses. American Jewish youth attend colleges and universities in greater proportion to their population than any other segment of the American public. It can be maintained that theoretically and proportionately speaking, these Jewish students are more subject to

hate speech and abuse than any other segment of the American student population.

This comes as a distinct shock to American Jewry which somehow believes that institutionalized anti-Semitism in American education is a thing of the past. Since there are no longer quotas on Jewish enrollment in American higher educational institutions and active discrimination against Jewish students by faculty, administration or other students, prejudice it seemed was a fast disappearing relic of the darker past.

However this rosy picture of Jewish attainment and acceptance is no longer true. From the upper echelons of the Ivy League schools to the almost unknown community colleges, the ugly truth is that anti-Semitism on the college campus is not only present but is accepted and sometimes even glorified.

The disease of anti-Semitism defies any known cure or palliative. It is unreasoning and unreasonable, destructive of all civilized norms and eventually leads to terrible political and social consequences. Any reasoned view of the history of anti-Jewish speech and behavior will reveal the dire consequences that eventually engulfed all of the societies that tolerated such hate and bigotry. One could expect that the intellectual bastions of society – its colleges and universities – would be the places least likely for anti-Semitism to flourish. Sadly, that is not the case at all. There are numerous reasons advanced to help explain why this troubling and dangerous phenomenon exists today. Some say that it is fueled by the Israel – Arab confrontation and the natural sympathy of the intellect to side with the poor underdog no matter who that underdog may be. Others have pointed out that there is a strong undercurrent of jealousy, especially amongst other minority groups, at the success, wealth, achievement and influence that the Jewish community has acquired in the United States today.

Envy is a very strong emotion that often leads to hatred and violence. And college campuses, traditionally, are the hotbeds of envy - intellectually, professorially and otherwise. All of this creates an environment where the age-old scourge of anti-Semitism can thrive and grow.

Another factor that is often mentioned is that colleges and universities always attract people who yearn for utopian ideals. But, since not one of these ideals has ever been realized in practice, there is always an active search for the scapegoats who somehow prevent the utopia from arriving. It is what the Soviet Union glorified as being “wreckers” and “saboteurs.”

The Gulag was filled with millions of these hapless victims of the failure of Marxism to bring forth the brave new world that it had promised. In the eyes of many intellectuals today, for some unknown reason the Jews remain the obstacle to world peace, the eradication of poverty and misery for all and the great new world of the future.

It is the state of Israel, not North Korea, Iran, Venezuela or any of the other nations of the world, which is the reason why the world does not live in peace and harmony yet. And unfortunately on most college campuses, this nonsense is expressed, taught, validated and accepted. Is there any wonder therefore why anti-Semitism is so strong and virulent on college campuses?

The American Jewish community, if not American society generally, is awakening to the depths of this problem. It is beginning to realize that anti-Semitism hiding behind the right of free expression is an existential threat to the American Jewish community and therefore indirectly to American society itself. Student campuses today are unruly places with the presence of all sorts of fringe organizations and wacky causes. Jews have obtained rights and stature on those campuses that previous generations of American Jews never dreamt of even asking for. Yet Jewish uncertainty and insecurity on American college campuses is real and palpable. Young Jews have earned the right to wear a kippah on college campuses and in their classrooms but today many feel that they do so at their own peril. Jews have hunkered down and assumed a low profile attempting to avoid the confrontations with the militant campus organizations that promote and advance anti-Semitism. Whether or not this tactic is the correct one, and will prove successful in the long run, remains yet to be seen.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Jewish Journey

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 God.

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, Simon 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 God – and we are merely there as God’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 God. 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 God, 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. He loves God 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 God – 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, “God is truly in this place but I did not know it . . . This must be God’s house and this the

gate to heaven" (28:16-17). None of the other patriarchs, not 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/God, which leaves him limping but permanently transformed – the only person in the Torah to receive from God an entirely new name, Israel, which may mean, "one who has wrestled with God and man" or "one who has become a prince [sar] before God". What is fascinating is that Jacob's meetings with angels are described by the same verb 'p-g-sh', (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 God."

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 God. He is the one who, at the very moments he feels most alone, discovers that he is not alone, that God 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 God.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
This is actually for next week's portion, but we're running ahead !**

"And his master saw that Hashem was with him; and that all he did, Hashem caused to prosper in his hand" (39:3)

This that Joseph prospered was not merely a gift from Hashem, but it was bestowed upon Joseph because he correctly utilized every circumstance. Instead of becoming depressed and embittered by the un-dreamed of catastrophe, that a darling son of a wealthy father was suddenly snatched from his home and sold as a slave among foreigners, Joseph reacted with exemplary uprightness of character.

He had been brought up to understand that Hashem controlled and devised all circumstances, and therefore instead of falling into the degraded ways of a slave-boy he sought to make the best of his life at every step. He lived even now as a son of Jacob, with all the high aspirations that Isaac and Abraham had transmitted. He was faultlessly loyal to his new master, and everything that he did was performed with diligence and energy, in accordance with his father's ways (see 31:38) of loyal service to Laban. Because all that Joseph did was approved by Hashem, therefore "all that he did, Hashem caused to prosper in his hand."

But the verse does not state merely that Hashem caused everything to prosper in Joseph's hand, but it states that "his master saw that Hashem was with him; and (his master saw) that all that he did, Hashem caused to prosper." Joseph's success in everything was so phenomenal that even the Egyptian master recognized the hand of G-d. Joseph himself surely understood that his success was solely from G-d, despite Joseph's exceptional talents and his loyal devotion and diligence.

Pharaoh, too, said subsequently: "Could we find anyone such as this, that the spirit of G-d is in him?" (41:38).

Joseph was very likeable and very capable. Yet his success in everything was so phenomenal that despite Joseph's talents it was clear that Hashem was prospering his efforts.

This is a model provided by Hashem by prospering the efforts of a conscientious man that:

- A. Fears G-d (as in 39:9) & "It is G-d whom I fear" (42:18)
- B. Possesses good character (as Joseph demonstrated by showing concern for the other prisoners in jail)
- C. Must have Energy in order to accomplish (Joseph was a leader in all stages of his life)

Adapted from "The Beginning" By R' Miller ZT'L