

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYISHLAH

DECEMBER 1, 2012

17 KISLEV 5773

**DEDICATIONS:** For a Refuah Shelemah – Yosef Mordechai Ben Rachel and Eliyahu ben Regina

Begin Barech Aleynu on Tuesday Night December 4<sup>th</sup>

## FRIDAY NIGHT

- Mincha at 4:10 – Followed by Kabbalat Shabbat and Arbit (Candle Lighting: 4:10)

## SHABBAT SCHEDULE

- Shharith: 9:00 - Benai Asher Youth Program 10:45 – 11:45 Mincha at Noon or following Kiddush given by the Ostrovsky family In Memory of Son, Husband, Father - Dr. Moshe Chaim Ostrovsky
- Shabbat ends at 5:10 - Return for Arbit and Havdala at 5:25  
Movie night continues 7-8:30. We will alternate throughout the winter with movies and games. Please join us!

**WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE** Shharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

**Sunday Funday announcement** – see attached flyer. We are also looking for teenage volunteers to run rides. Setup and cleanup.

**Learn to Speak Hebrew!** We have started a class weekdays immediately following shacharit for 5-10 Minutes. We will speak Hebrew. Improve our vocabulary and learn the basics of grammar. Everyone is invited!

## Storm Relief

Please be aware that UJA Federation and Avi Chai will be providing tuition assistance for parents who have been affected by Hurricane Sandy. Application will be available in the next few days.

In order to qualify for this assistance, you must be registered with FEMA. The FEMA application deadline is tomorrow, November 29th. For assistance, you can call the FEMA Help Line at 1800-621-3362.

## Class Schedule

We look forward to setting up a new class schedule in the coming weeks

We are planning to schedule a class again on Halacha, one on Perasha and hopefully another with Rabbi Yenay.

please reply to  
[ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com)

**Take a peek into Kosher Culinary Arts School in Jerusalem with my daughter Mikhayla who is going through a rigorous 6 month program. [bitemebymik.blogspot.com](http://bitemebymik.blogspot.com)**

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100

**Editors Notes**

This week has been a difficult week in the community. A number of dear people passed away. My mother's cherished cousin Mrs. Gitta Sultan - Gitta bat Nizha, Mr. Leon Cattan - Eliyahu ben Selma, Mr Caesar Zeit - Ezra ben Esther, Mr. Harry Ashkenazi - Aharon ben Yafa who was one of my brother Ruby's best friends when growing up and of whom I have countless childhood memories, and Mrs. Marilyn Falack - Mazal ben Rachel. May the families be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Marilyn Falack was a very special lady who impacted the lives of my wife Chantelle and me and whose example played a tremendous part in how we looked at our role in raising our children. Growing up in the community everyone "knows" everyone else, but we really got to know Marilyn and her wonderful husband, may Hashem bless him, Cookie about 16 years ago when we both happened to arrive in the same Mexican village with our children for winter vacation. And over the years I had the pleasure of helping Marilyn and Cookie in the design and furnishing of their homes.

Unfortunately Chantelle being locked to her father's bedside these past few weeks, and with me focusing on our town's

recovery from the storm, we were unable to make a condolence call and express ourselves to the family.

My father always taught us and still dos that everyone we meet in life we meet for a reason and we must take the lessons of those meetings with us.

Human nature leads most of us to judge a book by its cover. When one met Marilyn and Cookie, the first thought was Ken and Barbie. Two beautiful people, but within minutes one realized that their interior beauty far outshined their looks.

Marilyn showed us that there is nothing more important than family. She was an example of someone dedicated to raising the finest children, advocating for them and sacrificing anything and everything to insure that no stone would be left unturned in the pursuit. She taught us that it was up to the parent to research every avenue and to find the specific path for each child as no two children are the same. I know that Chantelle in raising our own children and in helping others took Marilyn's words to heart and from time to time turned to her for support and advice. We are indebted to her and along with the entire community mourn the loss of this special star.

May Hashem bring comfort to her mother, Mrs Ray Cohen, to her husband Cookie, to her incredible daughters Linda Massry, Rachel Pardo, and Allison Sultan and to her wonderful sisters, Barbara Chasser, Jacqueline Marcus, and Susie Erani. May Hashem bless the entire family to find strength and continue in the pursuit of helping others that is the attribute of this special family.

Tehi Nafsha Serurah BeSror HaChaim

**Week Five Hurricane Sandy Relief Efforts**

We head into the fifth week following Hurricane Sandy and I am seeing reality begin to set in for those most hurt. As I noted before, what began as "Baruch Hashem, we're OK" and as "We'll be fine, we don't need help", has changed to "wow, this is more than I imagined" and "Please, we need help".

This week we read about father Jacob's encounter with his brother Esav who is approaching with 400 men. We see that Yaakov is afraid. (Interesting is that the commentators tell us he is as afraid of being killed as he is of killing. Rabbi Milston reminded me of the words of Golda Meir - "When peace comes we will perhaps in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons, but it will be harder for us to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons." (Statement at a Press Conference in London, 1969)

The question many ask is why is Jacob afraid? Hasn't he been promised that G-d will be with him? And didn't that promise only occur a few days before? Doesn't Jacob trust G-d?

The Rabbis teach us that Jacob who fought the angel is very special. He is said to be half man and half angel and takes on a name similar to one of angels Yisra-el. So what does it tell us about someone who reached these high levels of spirituality, who heard directly from Hashem, who knows he has the merits of his father and grandfather to rely on that Jacob was afraid.

This experience with Sandy and the many victims have taught me that being afraid is a real emotion that comes even to someone with the greatest trust and bitachon in G-d. The Torah is telling us even

Jacob is still human and human beings become afraid. We may know that G-d is with us and trust that G-d will do whatever is best, but that does not mean we can't be afraid.

I've seen breadwinners look at the immediate future and simply not know what to do. They want to get back into their homes, but contractors want money up front that they don't have. Insurance, Fema and charities can help, but in most cases they will make up only a fraction of expenses and weeks go by before funds come in. And they are afraid. And it's ok to be afraid. And that's where we – the communities of their brothers and sisters- need to join forces.

In Long Beach we've come together and created a joint force of all the Synagogues, Rabbis and lay leaders and we face the daunting first task of 140 families who have been displaced. And of the hundreds of cars destroyed that are needed to get people back to work. We are not even thinking of the cost to rebuild our Synagogues. First and foremost we must help the people.

**The following is from an article that appears this week in Hamodia.** Those who are regular readers of the newsletter can see where it was edited, but they did a nice job. Also keep in mind that a million dollars breaks down to \$1000 a family or less to each of the 1000 plus community families affected in New York and New Jersey alone.

### **West Side COJO Raises \$1 Million for Hurricane Victims By Rabbi David Bibi**

While many New Yorkers lined Central Park West last week to see the Macy's parade, a few blocks away community members joined for a fund-raiser arranged by the Council of Jewish Organizations

(COJO) of the West Side in raising a million dollars to assist the victims of Hurricane Sandy. Representing the hard-hit community of Long Beach, I was invited to attend and offer some words from the perspective of those most affected. I was deeply moved by featured speakers Rabbi Ephraim Wachsmann, Rabbi Paysach Krohn and Rabbi Don Blumberg.

The program, "A Morning of Inspiration," lived up to its billing with Rabbi Blumberg, *Rosh Kollel* of the West Side, opening the *asifah* with warm and insightful words of compassion and unity with our Yiddishe brethren whose lives were devastated by Superstorm Sandy.

Rabbi Wachsmann used the example of Rochel Imeinu who imagined herself in her sister's position and refused to allow Leah to be embarrassed under the *chuppah* no matter the personal cost to Rochel. Rochel sacrificed herself to help her sister survive. He begged those listening to try to imagine what those suffering were going through and to sacrifice to help their fallen brothers get back on their feet.

My dear friend Rabbi Krohn moved us all to tears with story after story. He spoke of his young grandson who fled Far Rockaway and moved into the Krohn home with his family. At dinner one night the young boy turned to Rabbi Krohn and said, "Zeidy, we have become the *nebachs*." If this is what a young boy feels, imagine the helpless parents — many of whom do not have Zeidys and Bubbys to take them in — who a month after the storm are still at a loss and don't know what to do, where to go, or how to rebuild.

"We are heartbroken by the suffering of our brothers and want to show that we care and that we are making efforts to help out in this time of need," said Sam Domb, noted philanthropist and the

inspiration behind this initiative. The program ended with a moving rendition of *Kol Mi She'oskim* by Yehuda Green.

Proceeds from the relief effort will be distributed by a committee of West Side Rabbis and lay leaders. Michael Landau, Chairman of COJO, explained that the goal is to assist as many victims as possible. With that in mind the committee scheduled meetings with the various communities this week.

William E. Rapfogel, Met Council CEO, recognized by the entire community for his tremendous dedication, commented, "We are extremely grateful for the efforts of the West Side COJO and the Shuls of the West Side. Proceeds from this event will go directly towards serving the critical needs of our clients who are hurting and desperately want to get on the road to recovery. "It is an inspiration to see communities come together to lend a hand to their fellow New Yorkers. I hope other communities are encouraged to join together in this way, so that they may have an equally huge impact on the lives of their neighbors in need."

I can echo Willie's words. Walking around with hat in hand these past few weeks on behalf of my own small community and the Synagogues of Long Beach, it was a very uplifting experience to see the dedication of Mr. Domb, Mr. Landau and all the families from the West Side who were spared the hurricane's wrath but who let us know they were there to share our pain and lend a helping hand.

On behalf of the people of Sea Gate, Manhattan Beach, Belle Harbor, Far Rockaway, Atlantic Beach, Long Beach and Oceanside, we thank you. If you would like to organize a fundraiser and need help or information, please contact me, Rabbi David Bibi, via the Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach or at DavidBibi@gmail.com. Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

### Kabbalah Lights - Kabbalistic Insights into *Parashat Vayishlach*

"And Yaakov was very scared, and he was bothered" (Genesis 32:8)

After being away from home for more than 20 years, Yaakov was returning to his father's home with his 4 wives, 12 children, and much livestock. Concerned about the state of his relationship with his brother Esav, Yaakov sent messengers ahead to scope out the situation. They returned and reported that Esav was approaching Yaakov, and he was accompanied by 400 men. Upon hearing this, Yaakov became very fearful.

Rashi asks the obvious question. We know that Hashem had promised Yaakov that He would protect him, so what was Yaakov afraid of? Rashi answers that Yaakov was afraid that maybe while he was at Lavan's house, or on his way home, he may have sinned, and lost the right to Hashem's promise of protection. Although this certainly answers the question, as we will see, there is more going on than meets the eye.

Let's examine three of the surrounding circumstances.

1. Yaakov was scheduled to encounter Esav the following day. Later in the parasha we read that Yaakov fought with the angel of Esav, and angel we identify as the Satan. Their fight occurred on the eve of their encounter, lasted the entire night, and in the morning the angel dislocated Yaakov's thigh, causing Yaakov to limp. The Torah records that the dislocation of Yaakov's thigh is the reason that we don't eat the *gid hanashe* (lit. dislocated sinew), the sciatic nerve.

When did this fight occur? The Zohar says that each of the 365 days of the solar year corresponds to one of the 365 negative commandments. The sciatic nerve, *gid hanashe*, corresponds to Tisha B'Av, the day of destruction of the first and second temples. Putting these facts together with the Torah narrative, we deduce that the fight occurred on the eve of Tisha B'Av, and the encounter with Esav was scheduled to occur on the day of Tisha B'Av. This day is considered the most potentially negative day in the Jewish calendar. The Talmud says that the day is given over almost completely to the Satan to dominate in the world.

The prophet Jeremiah, in Eicha (Lamentations 3:8) says about the exile that followed the destruction of the first temple on Tisha B'AV, "Even though I may cry out and plead, my prayer is blocked (from being heard in Heaven)". Yaakov could not be certain that his prayer would be heard, due to interference from the spiritual influence of the day.

2. Another concern of Yaakov's is mentioned at the end of the previous *parashah*. The Torah says, "And Yaakov went on his way and he was met by a camp of angels of Hashem" (Genesis 32:2). The name of Hashem used in describing this angelic camp is E-lohim, the name of Hashem associated with strict judgment. So Yaakov is on guard that strict judgment is reigning in the world.

3. A third consideration has to do with the number 400. According to the Zohar, there are 400 spiritual forces of destruction that can be brought to bear by someone familiar with the occult arts. Yaakov feared that Esav was utilizing negative spiritual powers against him.

We will discuss the number 400 more in the Gematria section to follow:

Let's summarize the milieu in which our narrative takes place:

1. Yaakov was met by an encampment of angels that signaled him that strict judgement was active in the world.
2. This meeting with Esav was to happen on Tisha B'Av, a day given over to the Satan.
3. Esav was approaching him with a possible spiritual threat compounding the physical threat.
4. Yaakov knew that prayer would be only minimally effective because of the date.
5. Yaakov feared that he may have sinned in Lavan's house or on the way home and lost his right to the promise of safety that Hashem had given him.

### Gematria from the Parasha

We see that the number 400 occurs in many places in the Torah narrative. Let's look at a few.

1. Avraham bought *Me'arat Hamakhpelah*, his burial place, and that of his wife, and others, from Ephron for 400 silver coins. Throughout the narrative, Ephron's name is spelled Ayin-Peh-Resh-Vav-Nun (gematria 406). In the last sentence, his name is spelled without the Vav, Ayin-Peh-Resh-Nun. The commentaries note that the gematria of Ayin-Peh-Resh-Nun is 400, indicating Ephron's wickedness. Ephron's intentions, as expressed by the number 400, were selfish and not benevolent.

2. Avraham was told that his children would be in Egypt for 400 years. The Arizal (Sha'ar Hakavvanot, Pesach) says that when Adam sinned, many sparks of holiness were scattered throughout the world, with a great concentration in Egypt.

Avraham's descendents would merit the land of Israel through their hard labor under the Egyptians, thereby freeing up the sparks. Egypt was a land the Torah describes as the iron furnace, thereby associating the number 400 with fiery cruelty.

3. In last week's parashah, Lavan and Yaakov parted ways and set up a pile of stones as a symbolic gesture. Lavan called it "*YeGaR sahaduta*". The numerical difference between what Lavan said "*YeGaR*" and what Yaakov says to Esav in this week's parashah "*GaRTY*" (see last week's parashah) is 400. Lavan was a practitioner of the occult arts. He admits to this several times, saying, for example, "I divined" (Genesis 30:27). Thus the number 400 is associated with the practice of occult arts

And now Esav is coming with this number (400) of heavily armed men. It would be appropriate, then, to say that Esav was approaching Yaakov burning like an iron furnace, fueled by selfish intentions, and supported by the practice of the occult arts. Scary!

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st 2nd & 3rd Aliyot: It's the year 2205 and Yakov is 97 years old. He sends messengers to greet Eisav and is informed that Eisav is approaching, prepared to do battle. He applies a three pronged strategy in preparation for the confrontation: a) Tefilah - prayer b) diplomacy c) war. Prior to the actual confrontation, Yakov bests Eisav in a spiritual battle with

Eisav's Angel, and earns the name "Yisroel." Due to the wound he sustained in the battle, G-d prohibits Yakov and his family from eating the *Gid Hanashe* - the sciatic nerve. Yakov and Eisav meet after 34 years.

4th Aliya: Yakov and Eisav agree to separate peacefully. Eisav returns to his kingdom of Seir, and Yakov settles outside of the city of Shechem.

5th Aliya: Dina is abducted and raped by Shechem the son of Chamor, and Shimon and Levi devise a strategy for successfully killing the entire male population of Shechem. According to Chazal, Shimon and Levi were 13 years old. Hashem (G-d) instructs Yakov to move to Beth El. Rivka's nurse Devora dies, and Hashem confirms the name Yisroel upon Yakov.

6th & 7th Aliyot: Rachel dies while giving birth to Binyamin and Yakov buries her in Beis Lechem. Following Rachel's death, Reuven switches the bed of Yakov from Bilha's tent to Leah's tent. Although Yitzchak will live another 21 years, the Torah relates his death at the age of 180 (2228). The remainder of Vayishlach lists Eisav's descendants as well as the specific Kings of Seir who ruled prior to King Saul - the first king of Israel. (2882)

This week's Haftorah is the Book of Ovadiah, which is the smallest book of the Prophets - only one chapter. Ovadiah lived during the time of Eliyahu, and the difficult reign of Achav and Ezevel (3043-705 b.c.e.) We were introduced to Ovadiah in the Haftorah of Parshas Vayera when Elisha miraculously helped his widow.

Ovadia's personal commitment and courage in saving 100 prophets from the purges of Ezevel (Jezebel) was rewarded

by himself becoming one of the prophets who would prophesies about the demise of evil and the ultimate salvation of the righteous.

The connection to our Parsha is the emphasis on Eisav's eventual demise. Yoseph, who is the positive manifestation of what Eisav could have been, will triumph in eradicating Eisav's evil influence from society. "...the house of Yoseph a flame, and the house of Eisav stubble. They will set them ablaze and consume them..." (1:18-19) Eisav had been given his chance of joining in the creation of the Jewish nation whose influence over society would redirect destiny. Instead of joining, Eisav challenged Yakov, and attempted to destroy him.

Throughout history, Eisav rejoiced in Israel's misfortune and boasted of his contribution to their pain and distress. Ovadiah's prophecy, portrays the times of Mashiach when justice will manifest itself in the "measure for a measure", of Eisav's destruction. Eisav, who destroyed the Bais Hamikdash and sent Israel into exile, will live to see the in-gathering of the exiled and the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash. He will experience the ultimate retribution of witnessing what might have been his own glory and triumph, if only he had chosen to do good, rather than bad.

Ovadiah is chosen to deliver this prophecy because he chose to do good over bad. As a servant to the evil Achav and Ezevel, he could have chosen a life of power and glory while carrying out their evil wishes. Instead, he chose to place himself in mortal danger to save the intended victims of Ezevel. In his capacity as the Navi, Ovadiah says to Eisav, "You have no excuse! Everyone is challenged and everyone must choose." Those who choose evil

will be destroyed, and those who choose good will witness Esav's punishment, and the coming of Mashiach. (1:21)

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

#### **“He put the handmaids and their children first.” (Beresheet 33:2) Rabbi Reuven Semah**

Ya'akob Abinu was facing great danger. The very survival of the future nation of Israel hung in the balance. His brother Esav was coming towards him with murder in his heart and a massive army (according to the Sages, and army of 160,000 men). Ya'akob divided up his family, lacing Bilhah and Zilpah and their children as the first line of defense. Then he put Leah and her children, and finally, Rachel and Yosef. Is it conceivable that Ya'akob would use his wives and sons, the holy tribes, as human shields for his other wives and children?

Rabbi Eliezer Schach zt"l explains in a most beautiful way, what Ya'akob did. Our Sages tell us that the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah were demeaned by their brothers, who called them slaves. This disparagement caused them much pain. Leah and her children knew that Ya'akob really intended to marry Rachel, which probably caused them pain as well.

The humiliation and suffering of the children of the maidservants were the very reasons Ya'akob chose to place them as the first defense against Esav. Pain and suffering cleanse a person from his sins, and thus creates merit. The merit of their suffering would serve as a shield to protect them, and by extension, those situated behind them. Leah and her children also had a certain amount of pain, so he

placed them second, in order that their suffering too would serve as merit and shield.

All of the nation is a single entity. Everything that happens to one of us affects all of us. Perhaps if we realize that pain is a merit that may shield all the Jewish nation, that perhaps somewhere in the world they were saved from a planned terror attack only in the merit of our suffering – we may find our situation a bit easier to handle.

#### **“I have sojourned with Laban” (Beresheet 32:5) Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

When Ya'akob sent messengers to his brother, Esav, he told them to relay the above message to his brother. Rashi comments that the word garti (I have sojourned) in this verse has the numerical value of 613, which is also the number of misvot in the Torah. By using this word, Ya'akob was alluding to Esav, “I dwelt with Laban and kept the misvot; I did not learn from his bad deeds.” The simple meaning of this statement is that even someone on the high spiritual level of Ya'akob could have been influenced negatively in the environment of a Laban; it was a substantial accomplishment that he withstood the test of living with the evil and dishonest Laban.

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman quotes his Rabbi, the Hafess Hayim, in saying Ya'akob's statement was actually self-critical. When Laban did something improper, he did it with much enthusiasm and energy. Ya'akob was saying about himself that his zeal in the pursuit of a good deed did not compare to Laban's zeal in doing evil. He says of himself, “Though I sojourned with Laban and observed all 613 commandments, I lament that I did not emulate Laban - my ardor in positive

pursuits did not approach Laban's enthusiasm in his pursuits of sin.”

#### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR Visit [DailyHalacha.com](http://DailyHalacha.com),**

What Was Esav's Angel Afraid Of? We read in Parashat Vayishlah the famous story of Yaakob's wrestle with a mysterious person who attacked him in the middle of the night as he made his way back to Eretz Yisrael. This assailant turned out to be Esav's heavenly angel. Our Rabbis teach that this angel came to defeat not just Yaakob, but his progeny, as well. This was, if you will, the first attempt at a “final solution,” to annihilate the Jewish people. Yaakob, as we know, survived the attack, though he was badly injured, symbolizing the fact that the Jewish people, his descendants, would be “injured” over the course of their history, but they would survive every attack made upon them.

The question arises, why did specifically Yaakob Abinu come under attack? If the evil angels in the heavens wanted to prevent Beneh Yisrael from coming into existence, why didn't they start their assault right at the beginning, with Abraham Abinu? And if, for whatever reason, they did not attack Abraham, why did they not launch an assault on Yishak? What was so special about Yaakob Abinu that Esav's angel found so threatening, thus prompting a violent assault?

Each of the three patriarchs excelled specifically in a distinct area of religious life, and bequeathed to us that particular quality. Abraham Abinu implanted within us the quality of Hesed, kindness and generosity, the desire to help others in need. Satan and his minions did not feel threatened by Abraham because kindness alone cannot ensure the perpetuity and eternity of the

nation. There are, thank G-d, many non-Jews and many non-observant Jews who also excel in this quality, who are kind, sensitive and caring. As much as we pride ourselves – rightfully so – on our nation's excellence in this area, we must acknowledge that other people share this quality of Hesed. And thus it alone cannot guarantee our continued existence as a nation. Hence, Satan did not feel threatened by Abraham Abinu.

Yishak Abinu, our second patriarch, embodied the area of Aboda (sacrifice), as he was placed upon the altar, prepared to sacrifice himself for G-d. In the absence of the Bet Ha'mikdash, sacrifices are replaced by prayer; this is how Aboda is expressed in our times. Prayer, too, cannot guarantee the success or continuity of a nation. All streams of all faiths build and attend houses of worship. As important and vital as Tefila is in Jewish life, it cannot guarantee our future, and thus Satan was not frightened or intimidated by Yishak.

The patriarch who did frighten the evil angels was Yaakov Abinu, who embodied the value of Torah study. Intensive, rigorous engagement in sacred texts is something unique to the Jewish people, and it is what has ensured our survival for millennia. This is what frightened Esav's angel. When he saw Yaakov Abinu's commitment to Torah, a commitment that would be passed down to his descendants, he realized he had to act immediately. If the Jewish people would retain that commitment – which, of course, we have – they would exist forever. It was thus specifically Yaakov Abinu who came under assault.

The Torah tells that although Yaakov triumphed over the angel,

he sustained a serious injury in his thigh. The Zohar comments that the blow to Yaakov's thigh symbolizes the blow that was dealt to the supporters of Torah. The thigh is what supports the upper part of the body, and Yaakov's injury thus represents the damage caused to the support of Torah. Indeed, it is far more difficult to raise money for a yeshiva than for Hesed organizations and for synagogues. Many people, Baruch Hashem, eagerly and generously respond to calls for funding to assist the needy or to build or expand synagogues. When it comes to supporting Yeshivot, however, people are often reluctant. This phenomenon is the result of the blow dealt to Yaakov's thigh, which impaired the base of support for his descendants' Torah study.

When we are approached with a request to support a Torah institution, the Satan works overtime to discourage us, planting in our minds all kinds of reasons and excuses for refusing. Satan knows that Torah learning is the Jewish people's greatest weapon against him, and he will therefore do anything he can to interfere with our support of learning. But if we overcome this challenge and offer our generous support to Yeshivot, then we defeat Satan, and help guarantee the continued existence and growth of the Jewish nation, that despite the injury to the "thigh," we will continue to live and thrive for all eternity.

### Rabbi Wein

In this week's Parsha, Yaakov sends emissaries to meet his brother Eisav. Midrash, as it want, supplies differing opinions as to who these emissaries were. In fact, Midrash again, as is usual with its insights, offers contradictory views. One

interpretation is that the emissaries were humans, servants and allies of Yaakov. A second view is that they were angels, heavenly messengers employed by Yaakov to safeguard him and his family from the malevolence of Eisav.

So which interpretation is true? In addition, Midrash offers different insights into what occurred when these emissaries of Yaakov, whether angels or humans, actually encountered Eisav and his armed band. One opinion in Midrash is that Yaakov's emissaries were aggressive and threatening to Eisav, and actually inflicted blows upon his group. Another opinion in Midrash portrayed Yaakov's emissaries as being conciliatory, friendly and even subservient to Eisav.

So again, which opinion is true and accurate? We see that even within Yaakov his emotions are conflicted. He prepares for war, but at the same time is ready to pay heavy monetary tribute to Eisav.

Later in the Parsha, Yaakov wrestles with an anonymous adversary. Again, Midrash supplies different identities as to who this opponent was. Some say that he was an angel, so to speak, the guardian angel of Eisav. Others say that he was a human being, a highwayman and robber. Still others say that he was an intellectual and scholar. So, once more, we are faced with having to determine what we are to make of all of this. What is the moral insight that Midrash wants to communicate to us with all of these different opinions?

Abraham Lincoln, in one of his famous inaugural speeches to the American public, states that he prayed that "the better angels" within the individual would prevail, thereby ending slavery and

preventing deaths of hundreds of thousands of Americans in a bitter civil war. Whether angels or humans, Lincoln pointed out, is dependent on perspective.

Yaakov saw angels while Eisav saw only humans. What Yaakov saw as being reasonable, conciliatory and generous, Eisav saw as being threatening and aggressive. Someone may appear to be a scholar and intellectual, or even to be a friend, but may really be only a highwayman and a brigand.

Yaakov, who after his years in the house of Lavan, recognizes this dichotomy of perspective. He knows that Eisav does not see the world and life with the same view as he does. He hopes that Eisav will yet come around to viewing matters in the same perspective as does Yaakov. Though he prepares for war, which is Eisav's perspective, he combines it with cooperation and even tribute in order to achieve harmony and peace, which is his perspective.

This, I believe, is a fitting metaphor for our times and circumstances. The perspective of Yaakov – the State of Israel and the Jewish world generally – differs radically from the perspective of our enemies and even from our erstwhile friends. We hope to be able to change that perspective and align it more closely with our view. But until that happens we must deal with reality and be ready with both the sword and the olive branch, prayer and good deeds.

**Sir Jonathan Sacks  
Chief Rabbi of the United  
Hebrew Congregations  
of the Commonwealth**

**Fear or Distress?**

Jacob and Esau are about to meet again after a separation of twenty two years. It is a fraught encounter. Once, Esau had sworn to kill Jacob in revenge for what he saw as the theft of his blessing. Will he do so now – or has time healed the wound? Jacob sends messengers to let his brother know he is coming. They return, saying that Esau is coming to meet Jacob with a force of four hundred men. We then read:

Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. (32: 8)

The question is obvious. Jacob is in the grip of strong emotions. But why the duplication of verbs? What is the difference between fear and distress? To this a midrash gives a profound answer:

Rabbi Judah bar Ilai said: Are not fear and distress identical? The meaning, however, is that "he was afraid" that he might be killed. "He was distressed" that he might kill. For Jacob thought: If he prevails against me, will he not kill me; while if I prevail against him, will I not kill him? That is the meaning of "he was afraid" – lest he should be killed; "and distressed" – lest he should kill.

The difference between being afraid and distressed, according to the midrash, is that the first is a physical anxiety; the second a moral one. It is one thing to fear one's own death, quite another to contemplate being the cause of someone else's. However, a further question now arises. Surely self-defence is permitted in Jewish law? If Esau were to try to kill Jacob, Jacob would be justified in fighting back, if necessary at the cost of Esau's life. Why then should this possibility raise moral qualms? This is the issue addressed by Rabbi Shabbetai Bass, author of

the commentary on Rashi, Siftei Chakhamim:

One might argue that Jacob should surely not be distressed about the possibility of killing Esau, for there is an explicit rule: "If someone comes to kill you, forestall it by killing him." None the less, Jacob did have qualms, fearing that in the course of the fight he might kill some of Esau's men, who were not themselves intent on killing Jacob but merely on fighting Jacob's men. And even though Esau's men were pursuing Jacob's men, and every person has the right to save the life of the pursued at the cost of the life of the pursuer, none the less there is a condition: "If the pursued could have been saved by maiming a limb of the pursuer, but instead the rescuer killed the pursuer, the rescuer is liable to capital punishment on that account." Hence Jacob feared that, in the confusion of battle, he might kill some of Esau's men when he might have restrained them by merely inflicting injury on them.

The principle at stake, according to the Siftei Chakhamim, is the minimum use of force. Jacob was distressed at the possibility that in the heat of conflict he might kill some of the combatants when injury alone might have been all that was necessary to defend the lives of those – including himself – who were under attack.

There is, however, a second possibility, namely that the midrash means what it says, no more, no less: that Jacob was distressed at the possibility of being forced to kill even if that were entirely justified.

At stake is the concept of a moral dilemma. A dilemma is not simply a conflict. There are many moral conflicts. May we perform an abortion to save the life of the



mother? Should we obey a parent when he or she asks us to do something forbidden in Jewish law? May we break Shabbat to extend the life of a terminally ill patient? These questions have answers. There is a right course of action and a wrong one. Two duties conflict and we have meta-halakhic principles to tell us which takes priority. There are some systems in which all moral conflicts are of this kind. There is always a decision procedure and thus a determinate answer to the question, "What shall I do?"

A dilemma, however, is a situation in which there is no right answer. I ought not to do A (allow myself to be killed); I ought not to do B (kill someone else); but I must do one or the other. To put it more precisely, there may be situations in which doing the right thing is not the end of the matter. The conflict may be inherently tragic. The fact that one principle (self-defence) overrides another (the prohibition against killing) does not mean that, faced with such a choice, I am without qualms. Sometimes being moral means that I experience distress at having to make such a choice. Doing the right thing may mean that I do not feel remorse or guilt, but I still feel regret or grief that I had to do what I did.

A moral system which leaves room for the existence of dilemmas is one that does not attempt to eliminate the complexities of the moral life. In a conflict between two rights or two wrongs, there may be a proper way to act (the lesser of two evils, or the greater of two goods), but this does not cancel out all emotional pain. A righteous individual may sometimes be one who is capable of distress even when they know they have acted rightly. What the midrash is telling us is that Judaism recognises the existence of dilemmas. Despite

the intricacy of Jewish law and its meta-halakhic principles for deciding which of two duties takes priority, we may still be faced with situations in which there is an ineliminable cause for distress. It was Jacob's greatness that he was capable of moral anxiety even at the prospect of doing something entirely justified, namely defending his life at the cost of his brother's.

That characteristic – distress at violence and potential bloodshed even when undertaken in self-defence – has stayed with the Jewish people ever since. One of the most remarkable phenomena in modern history was the reaction of Israeli soldiers after the Six Day War in 1967. In the weeks preceding the war, few Jews anywhere in the world were unaware that Israel and its people faced terrifying danger. Troops – Egyptian, Syrian, Jordanian – were massing on all its borders. Israel was surrounded by enemies who had sworn to drive its people into the sea. In the event, it won one of the most stunning military victories of all time. The sense of relief was overwhelming, as was the exhilaration at the re-unification of Jerusalem and the fact that Jews could now pray (as they had been unable to do for nineteen years) at the Western Wall. Even the most secular Israelis admitted to feeling intense religious emotion at what they knew was an historic triumph.

Yet, in the months after the war, as conversations took place throughout Israel, it became clear that the mood among those who had taken part in the war was anything but triumphal. It was sombre, reflective, even anguished. That year, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem gave an honorary doctorate to Yitzhak Rabin, Chief of Staff during the

war. During his speech of acceptance he said:

"We find more and more a strange phenomenon among our fighters. Their joy is incomplete, and more than a small portion of sorrow and shock prevails in their festivities, and there are those who abstain from celebration. The warriors in the front lines saw with their own eyes not only the glory of victory but the price of victory: their comrades who fell beside them bleeding, and I know that even the terrible price which our enemies paid touched the hearts of many of our men. It may be that the Jewish people has never learned or accustomed itself to feel the triumph of conquest and victory, and therefore we receive it with mixed feelings."

A people capable of feeling distress, even in victory, is one that knows the tragic complexity of the moral life. Sometimes it is not enough to make the right choice. One must also fight to create a world in which such choices do not arise because we have sought and found non-violent ways of resolving conflict.