

VAYISHLACH

INSPIRATION

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CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV

ויקח מן הבא בידו מנחה לשש אחיו
(בראשית ל"ב:ד)

And he took from that which he had in his hand a gift for his brother Esau. (Bereishis 32:14)

"That which he had in his hand," the Sages say, refers to precious stones and pearls (Yalkut Shim'oni, Bereishis 32, 131). When he wanted to impress Esau, Jacob sent him everything he had: jewels, he-goats, she-goats, ewes and rams, bucks, camels, kine and bulls. The Jew is willing to give away all his possessions to avoid an edict or an expulsion, to free the head of the community from prison, and such like. But as our Sages have wisely noted, that which he had in his hand refers to profane things, not sacred ones. All the gifts, all the sacrifices, all the tributes which the Jew

brought to the lords of Esau during that long night, consisted of profane objects: everyday possessions, goats and sheep, precious stones, political rights. As long as Esau received only that which [Jacob] had in his hand, goods which can be bought and sold, Israel exhibited submissiveness and inferiority.

But when Esau wanted a gift of Jacob's sacred objects—the holiness of family life, Shabbos, kashrus, accepted beliefs and traditions; when Esau demanded that Jacob compromise his Torah and his way of living—a remarkable transformation occurred within Jacob. Suddenly the quiet, unassuming Jew became a hero, full of strength and stubbornness. The crooked back straightened, the pitiful eyes began to spit fire, and Jacob refused Esau's request

withchutzpah and determination: And he commanded the first one, saying, "When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you, saying: 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and for whom are these before you?' You shall say, '[I belong] to your servant Jacob; it is a gift sent to my master, to Esau'" (verses 18-19). Jacob told those who represent him in that dark Diaspora night, in the kingly palaces of Germany, Poland, and Russia: Esau will begin to debate with you, to ask you about your beliefs, hopes, and ideals. He will propose, Travel and we will go, and I will go alongside you (33:12). He will suggest that his religion and Judaism can easily merge, that all can live together peacefully. Tell him that we can cooperate, as long as we are dealing with profane matters, with business, with

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FEAR AND EMUNAH



On a recent trip to Washington DC, I visited the memorial of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was President of the United States during the Great Depression and World War II.

Inscribed on the wall in large letters was a quote from his first inauguration speech: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." This idea got me thinking about the nature of fear, and how Judaism handles the topic.

In Psalms 23, King David wrote, "Even when I walk in the valley of darkness, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff - they comfort me." (Psalms 23:4). According to this, a person with faith in G-d should be fearless. But in our lives, even as faithful Jews, we have fears. Does that mean we do not have enough Emunah?

Another example of dealing with fear is found in this week's parsha. Yaakov is traveling back to the Land of Canaan. He

hears that his brother, Eisav, is organizing an army. In response, Yaakov gets ready to meet Eisav by preparing for war, praying to G-d, and sending gifts. Yaakov fears the impending meeting with his brother, as it says, "Jacob became very frightened and was distressed" (Bereshit 32:8).

Yaakov is a righteous man full of belief in God. So why is Yaakov afraid? Does he doubt that God will protect him? Does this fear show that Yaakov's belief may not be whole?

The commentator Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel (1437-1508) explains that Yaakov's fear is not an expression of a lack of Emunah, but similar to the fear a warrior experiences when he enters battle. A true warrior has fear of death and recognizes danger, but does not let his fear overcome him. The Torah does not require a person to deny their natural fear or doubts when they're in a difficult situation. The Torah treats this

fear as a challenge to a believer.

The true test of our Emunah is our ability to overcome our fears. A true believer is not free of fear, but works to overcome it. Yaakov did not run away from his problem. When Yaakov finally faced his brother, he was challenging his fear, thus showing Emunah that God would protect him. When they meet, they end up embracing, and they leave on peaceful terms.

What can we learn from this? We can learn that the Torah does not expect us to be free of fear in order to show our faith in G-d. Fear is natural. When one experiences fear, it is important not to brush it away and deny it. Running away from our fears does not free us from them. Emunah lies in our ability to overcome our fears.

Daniella Mikanovsky is a member of NCSY's National Teen Board.

FIVELIGHTS

5 INSPIRATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS ON THE PARSHA

1

What does keeping kosher have to do with Yaakov's wrestling match?

Only three mitzvot are given in the Book of Bereishis – *p'ru u'r'vu* (procreation), *bris milah* (circumcision) and *gid hanasheh* (the prohibition against eating the sciatic nerve). This last mitzvah occurs in our parsha, as a result of Yaakov's hip being dislocated in his struggle with Eisav's "guardian angel." The Torah tells us (32:33), "*therefore the children of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh to this very day.*" The Talmud (Chulin 101b) clarifies that, despite its narrative nature, this mitzvah was commanded at Sinai like the others. It is merely recorded at this point because of its relevance to the story. **But why should a dietary law be based on this incident?**

The Chizkuni explains that this prohibition is a penalty imposed because Yaakov's family let him go off on his own, which resulted in his being injured. Accordingly, **this mitzvah reminds us of our responsibility for one another.**

The Sefer HaChinuch says that this mitzvah symbolizes how the Jewish people will suffer at the hands of other nations – including our brother Eisav – but that **we will always endure.** God reinforces this message in our minds by attaching it to a mitzvah that constantly reminds us of Yaakov's struggle.

2

Giving charity is not easy. It's hard to give your hard-earned money, especially to support others who are studying Torah. This, explains the Zohar, is the subtext behind Yaakov's battle with Eisav's angel. The angel of Eisav couldn't find any weakness in Yaakov himself and thus struck him in the leg. What is the significance of this injury? The Zohar explains that **the leg represents those who support Torah financially** (תומכי תורה). Indeed, although we know that Zevulun gets the same reward as Yisachar, it is challenging to be a supporter of Torah.

3

When Yaakov was reunited with his brother, Eisav uncharacteristically embraced and kissed him, causing both of them to weep. The word "*vayishakeihu*" ("and he kissed him" – 33:4) has dots over it, indicating that there's more going on here than meets the eye. Some authorities say that everything Eisav did was motivated by his hatred for Yaakov except for this act, which was sincerely motivated by love. Others say that Eisav fell on Yaakov's neck in order to bite him, but that God miraculously hardened Yaakov's neck, causing both of them to cry from the pain.

While everyone else is trying to figure out Eisav's motivation, the Netziv is more concerned with Yaakov. Yes, Eisav did the kissing but both of them wept, from which we see that Yaakov's emotions were also aroused. Yaakov had endured decades of abuse, necessitated by Eisav's promise to kill him, **but he was willing to overlook it all because his brother had shown a willingness to make amends.** This, the Netziv tells us, is true of Yaakov's descendants as well. Despite the abuse that we endure, when the nations of the world make overtures of peace, Israel is willing to let bygones be bygones because, ultimately, they are our brothers.

4

When Yaakov sent messengers to Eisav, he told them to refer to him as "*your servant, Yaakov*" (32:5). Not only that, he referred to his brother as "*my master, Eisav*" even though Eisav was nowhere around (ibid.). He did this so that his messengers would internalize the message and treat Eisav accordingly. **But why did Yaakov go to such lengths to feed his brother's ego?**

Even though Yaakov had been blessed that nations would bow down to him (27:29), he chose to forgo his own honor in favor of diplomacy. **Yaakov knew that if he humbled himself before Eisav, Eisav would ultimately reciprocate.**

This lesson was not lost on Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. The Midrash relates an incident in which Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi wished to write a letter to the emperor Antoninus. When his secretary brought him the letter for his approval, he saw that it began, "From Yehuda the prince, to our master, Emperor Antoninus." Rabbi Yehuda rejected the draft and insisted that it be re-written "From your servant, Yehuda..."

The secretary balked; he was zealous for the honor of his teacher, who was a descendant of King David and head of the Sanhedrin. Nevertheless, Rabbi Yehuda held firm saying, "Do you think I'm better than our forefather Yaakov, who humbled himself before Eisav?" The revised letter was sent and it was favorably received. The gratified emperor replied, "You call yourself my servant but I would be honored to be your servant in the Next World."

5

Is being afraid a sign that one lacks emunah in Hashem?

In last week's parsha, God told Yaakov that He would be with Him and return him to the land (28:15). In this week's parsha, however, we are told that Yaakov was "*very scared*" and "*distressed*" (32:8). Doesn't this suggest a fundamental lack of faith on his part? Not at all! The Abarbanel posits that **fear is not a character flaw; rather, it's an inherent part of the human condition.**

Everyone is afraid sometimes. Avraham was afraid when he and Sarah passed through dangerous lands. Moshe was afraid when Pharaoh sought to kill him. David was afraid when Saul was pursuing him. None of them waited for a miracle to save them – they all took appropriate action.

There's no shame in being afraid – that's actually beyond our control. The challenge is **in how we respond to our fears.** Summoning our courage and addressing our fears actually demonstrates our faith in God, that He will help us to overcome our obstacles.

SEE IT **INSIDE**

Parsha ideas that are so good, you have to see them inside!

RAMBAN 32:4	An allusion that the children of Yaakov will never be destroyed by Eisav
RABBEINU BACHAYA 32:11	Long-term lessons learned from Yaakov's tefillah
OHR HACHAIM 32:11	"Esav, I know it was you. You broke my heart. You broke my heart." The special prayer of a betrayed brother.
RAMBAN 32:17	There will always be some breathing room between our challenges.
BAAL HATURIM 32:26	Yaakov's fight was an attempt to take away his ability to serve in the Temple.
RABBEINU BACHAYA 32:29	The bracha that the angel gave Yaakov was also an admission.
SEFORNO 32:30	Why did Yaakov want to know the angel's name?
OHR HACHAIM 33:10	The man who has everything.
RAMBAN 35:16	Why Rachel is buried on the side of the road.

This parsha retells the story of Yaakov's fear prior to meeting Esav, and his subsequent struggle with Esav's angel. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks presents some moving comments on what, in fact, is our greatest fear:

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

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

Shakespeare said it best (in Twelfth Night):

"Be not afraid of greatness: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em."

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

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



CONVERSATIONS WITH RABBI IRA EBBIN



Rabbi Ira Ebbin is the Rabbi of Congregation Ohav Sholom in Merrick, NY.

HOW HAS WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS LIFE CHANGED SINCE YOU WERE A CHILD?

I think things that we accept as norms today in the Modern Orthodox world were considered novel when I was growing up in the 80s. After high school, it was pretty standard for boys to spend the year in Israel, but that was far from the accepted standard for girls. Of course, advanced Torah studies for women has jumped leaps and bounds in the last generation. My daughters will study Mishna and Gemara without a thought that this is something that most high school girls a generation

ago wouldn't have ever considered. I also see more leadership opportunities in shuls for women. The executive board in our shul consists of both men and women, while I recall an "old boys club" not that long ago.

WHAT TOPIC WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR SOMEONE WHO IS BEGINNING TO LEARN OR TEACH HALACHA FOR THE FIRST TIME?

I would recommend something about Tefillah or Brachot. For the uninitiated, it's easy to fall into the trap that Halacha is mundane and obsessed with minutia. Learning about Tefillah or Brachot would allow them to focus on a subject matter that is both practical as well as spiritual,

and they use it every day.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE STORY IN TANACH, AND WHY?

Chapter 19 in the book of Melachim Aleph. Eliyahu Hanavi has always fascinated me as a unique personality who was unsuccessful in persuading the people, nor was he able to understand the style that Hashem had hoped that he would use in leading. Chapter 19 is when God tells Eliyahu that his zealous approach will not succeed and that God cannot be found in the fire, nor the brimstone. Rather, God can be found in the "Kol Demama Daka" - the small, thin voice that we find inside ourselves when there is no one else to blame or turn to, other than our own selves.

CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV CONTINUED FROM FRONT

politics, with science, with goats, camels, and mules, with precious stones and pearls. If he wants a gift of that which he had in hand, he can have it; it is a gift sent to my master, to Esau (verse 19).

But the moment he demands more and begins to ask not for material possessions but for souls, for the holiness and purity of my family, my Sabbath, my God, you must give a different response. Should he ask, "Where are you going? To whom do you belong as a spiritual creature? In which God do you believe? Which holidays do you observe? What do you teach your

children?"—then you should begin to speak a different language, the speech of a victorious hero. You should stop beseeching and finding favor in his eyes. You should answer sharply and with pride: You shall say, "[I belong] to your servant Jacob's." (verse 19). I myself, my soul, my heart, my feelings, my hopes, and my beliefs belong not to you, but to Judaism. This is what Jacob announced throughout the generations to all his representatives. And when Esau persisted and demanded that which was sacred, then the passive man, the coward, the man who said three times a day: וְלִמְקֻלִּי And to such as

curse me let my soul be dumb, and let my soul be unto all as the dust, became a fighter who resisted Esau with great stubbornness.

(Days of Deliverance, pp. 136-137)

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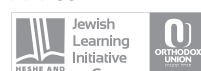
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