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## Vayishlach 5774

### Yaakov Avinu and Limud Hatorah

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

As the apparently harmonious reunion of Yaakov and Esav draws to a close (a reunion which, according to the rabbis, is actually more discordant than appears on the surface), the Torah recounts the following conversation between the brothers:

Esav: Let us travel ... and I will proceed alongside you.

Yaakov: My lord knows that the children are tender and that the sheep and cattle are a burden upon me. If they are driven hard for a single day, then all the sheep will die. Let my lord travel ahead of his servant and I will make my way according to the pace dictated by the cattle ... and by the children; until I come to my master at Seir. Esav: Allow me to assign to you some of the people who are with me.

Yaakov: For what purpose? Simply allow me to find favor in my lord's eyes.

After the conversation concludes, Esav returns to his home in Seir while Yaakov travels to Succot.

#### Questions

Why does the Torah record this dialogue? Are the brothers' travel arrangements so significant that they need to be detailed for posterity?

How does this seemingly innocuous conversation serve as an appropriate epilogue to the dramatic reunion between Yaakov and Esav and to the powerful events that preceded it?

Why does Yaakov tell Esav that he will join him at Seir, and then travel to a totally different destination?

#### Approaches

A: As usual, the pashut pshat of the Torah text conveys volumes. What seems, at first, to be an innocuous conversation is actually, upon examination, a critical negotiation. Years of separation and the dramatic reunion have all led to this one moment. The patriarch must now carefully delineate his ongoing relationship with his brother as he cautiously treads along the path between open hostility and "too much" harmony.

We find ourselves, again, at one of those quiet moments within the patriarchal era when a misstep on the part of one man can inexorably and permanently alter the course of our nation's history.

Against the backdrop of the preceding events and with the undercurrents beneath the diplomatic language revealed, the conversation between Yaakov and Esav might well read as follows:

Esav's opening gambit: "Let us travel ... and I will proceed alongside you ..." I am not going to let my brother out of my sight again. I will, therefore, suggest that we travel together towards a shared destination. If we move together through life, it will only be a matter of time before he and his family are overwhelmed by the strength of my presence and lose their uniqueness. Our camps will then coalesce and become one entity under my control.

Yaakov's rejoinder: "My lord knows that the children are tender and that the sheep and cattle are a burden upon me. If they are driven hard for a single day, then all the sheep will die. Let my lord travel ahead of his servant and I will make my way according to the pace dictated by the cattle ... and by the children; until I come to my master at Seir." Dear God, what a dangerous moment! At all costs, I cannot allow our camps to travel together. Our lives and our priorities are totally different. I must find a way to negotiate a severance from my brother. And yet, how can I do so diplomatically, without arousing his anger? Perhaps if I remind him that I will have to travel slowly and if I let him think that I will join him in Seir, he will go on alone, ahead of me.

Esav's second attempt: "Allow me to assign to you some of the people who are with me." Yaakov's trying to slip away! Not so fast! All I have to do is place some of my agents in his camp and, eventually, I will still be able to control him.

Yaakov's rejoinder: "For what purpose? Simply allow me to find favor in my lord's eyes." Oh, no, that's all I need – a fifth column within my own camp! I will just have to politely

refuse and again insist that all I want is good relations. Hopefully, my brother will then go on his way to Seir and I will go somewhere else entirely. By the time we reach our respective destinations, he'll get the message that I want to keep my distance. Hopefully he will come to accept that reality or, at least, he won't find it worth the effort to come back and find me.

B: In the light of day, we witness that Yaakov has learned well the lessons that were conveyed to him, dramatically and perilously, in the darkness of the night.

In our previous study (see Vayishlach 2, Approaches c) we noted that, on the eve of Yaakov's reunion with his brother, God caused the patriarch to struggle in mortal combat with a mysterious stranger, identified by the Midrash as an

angel, the spiritual representative of Esav. Clearly, on one level, this conflict was meant to warn Yaakov to see beyond appearances at the meeting with Esav the next day. In the most effective way possible, God teaches the patriarch the hard and bitter truth that, although things might seem harmonious on the surface, philosophical and even at times physical confrontation will define the relationship between the brothers until the end of days. In order to survive, Yaakov will be forced to build the relationship with his brother within clearly defined philosophical boundaries.

Now Yaakov meets his moment of truth. When all is said and done, Yaakov cautiously negotiates a severance from his brother. His successful completion of this delicate negotiation helps define the parameters for our nation's long journey across the ages.

## Bishul Akum: Coffee, Anybody?

*Rabbi Michael Taubes*

**T**he Torah relates that because Shechem, the son of Chamor from the Chivi nation, desired to be with Dinah, the daughter of Yaakov Avinu, Chamor, who was the prince of the area, approached Yaakov and his sons with the proposal that Dinah be given to Shechem as a wife and that the two communities be encouraged to intermarry with one another (Bereishit 34:8-9). This is the first occasion in the Torah where intermarriage is specifically brought up; commenting on the previous pasuk (ibid. verse 7), Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (Chiddushei Maran Ri"z HaLeivi Al HaTorah) points out, based on the Gemara in Avodah Zarah (36b), that the Beit Din headed by Shem, the son of Noach, had actually already, at an earlier stage in history, decreed against any intermarriage involving his descendants, who would later become the Jewish people, and a gentile. Clearly, then, as that pasuk indicates, a relationship between the daughter of Yaakov and someone from the Chivi nation was unacceptable, as it would constitute intermarriage.

The Mishnah in Avodah Zarah (35b) lists several items which may not be consumed if prepared by a non-Jew, even if all the ingredients are Kosher; among them are "shelakot," defined by Rashi (s.v. vehashelakot) as cooked foods, which are forbidden to a Jew even if cooked in Kosher utensils. The goal of this Rabbinic prohibition, Rashi (ibid.) explains, is to limit social interaction between Jews and non-Jews (where food often plays a significant role) in order to prevent

intermarriage; according to Tosafot later in Avodah Zarah (37b, s.v. vehashelakot), this is a very early Rabbinic decree (see, however, Chiddushei HaRitva ibid., s.v. vehashelakot). The Gemara itself identifies this concern earlier in Avodah Zarah (31b), stating that the beer of a non-Jew is prohibited out of concern for intermarriage; Rashi there (s.v. mishum chatnut) explains that if one becomes accustomed to drinking a non-Jew's beer, one may then come to attend his drinking parties and subsequently become attracted to a non-Jewish woman. It may be noted that the Rambam, in his Peirush HaMishnayot to Avodah Zarah (2:6), points out that there are other Halachic problems which may surface as well if a Jew attends social gatherings together with non-Jews. Nonetheless, the primary concern which motivated the Rabbanan to outlaw various products prepared by non-Jews, including foods cooked by them, was that of intermarriage, as the Rambam himself codifies in his Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Ma'achalot Asurot 17:9).

A subsequent Gemara in Avodah Zarah (38a) presents an important limitation to this rule prohibiting food cooked by a non-Jew, stating that any food which can be eaten raw is not subject to the prohibition, commonly known as "Bishul Akum," and may thus be eaten if it is cooked by a non-Jew. The Rashba in his Torat HaAdam (III:7) explains that the prohibition was enacted only with regards to foods whose status as edible items is determined by the use of fire.

Rashi in Beitzah (16a, s.v. ein bahem) asserts that the act of cooking does not contribute anything important to the basic nature of the food if it can be eaten raw in any case, and the Ran there (8b in Rif, s.v. im tzela'an nachri) adds that the concern of social interaction with the non-Jew is thus not the same, since his role in preparing the food is inconsequential.

The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (ibid.) then presents another limitation to the prohibition against eating foods cooked by a non-Jew, ruling that the restriction applies only to the type of food which is fit to be eaten at a royal table, that is, at a state dinner or banquet. The Rambam (Hilchot Ma'achalot Asurot 17:15) writes that since the purpose of this entire prohibition is to minimize social intimacy between Jews and non-Jews, it applies only to the kinds of food which one would ordinarily serve to guests. Although these two limitations appear independently in that Gemara, Rabbeinu Tam is cited in Tosafot there (s.v. ika beinaihu) as ruling that both are indeed accepted, because we follow the lenient position in matters like this which are Rabbinic in origin. The Rambam too (Hilchot Ma'achalot Asurot 17:14-15) rules that only foods which are not edible raw and which are fit to be served at a royal table may not be eaten when cooked by a non-Jew; the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 113:1) likewise rules accordingly.

In light of the above, an interesting question may be raised concerning drinking coffee prepared by a non-Jew: would it be subject to this prohibition against consuming something cooked by a non-Jew? (The assumption here is that there are, of course, no non-Kosher ingredients, which can be a problem with certain specially flavored coffees.) The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (37b) indicates that water is the prototypical example of an item which does not change fundamentally by being cooked, and is thus not forbidden if cooked by a non-Jew. Tosafot earlier there (31b s.v. vetarvaihu) assert that beer, which is essentially water mixed with various grains and brewed together, has the same status as water regarding this prohibition of food cooked by a non-Jew just as the berachah recited before the consumption of beer, despite the grain content, is shehakol, the same as that for water. In both cases, the other ingredients are considered secondary to the water. Based on this idea, the Pri Chadash (Yoreh Deah 114:4) rules that the same is true of coffee, which he holds may be drunk even if prepared by a non-Jew because the coffee beans are considered secondary to the water, and water is not subject to the prohibition of Bishul Akum.

This ruling is not universally agreed to, however; the Teshuvot Panim Me'iroh (2:62), for example, challenges this conclusion. The Pitchei Teshuvah (Yoreh Deah 114:1)

agrees that one should be stringent, if possible, especially in view of the fact that coffee is certainly served at a royal banquet, and the Yad Ephraim (commenting on the Taz, ibid. No. 1) writes that one should not make a habit of drinking coffee in a non-Jewish environment (see also Shu"t Radvaz 3:537). The Chida, in his Shiurei Berachah (Yoreh Deah 113:3) quotes that the AriZal did not drink coffee which was manufactured by a non-Jew and he writes that even those who allow it do so only as long as the coffee is not drunk as part of a social gathering together with non-Jews; this latter point is made as well in Shu"t Halachot Ketanot (1:9). Moreover, the Chochmat Adam (66:14) raises the issue of the Kashrut status of the "extras" that are customarily added to coffee, such as milk, which can sometimes be a problem, and the Noda BeYehudah (Mahadura Kamma, Yoreh Deah No. 36) brings up the concern of what kind of utensil is used to make or serve the coffee in, as other Kashrut issues may then become relevant. Rav Ovadyah Yosef (Shu"t Yechaveh Da'at 4:42) deals with that issue at some length, concluding that there is room to be stringent if the coffee is made or served by the non-Jew in a porcelain or ceramic mug and not a glass or a disposable cup.

But the Chatam Sofer, in his commentary on the Gemara in Avodah Zarah (31b, s.v. sheichar shel nochrin), accepts the lenient position, pointing out that with regards to coffee (as opposed, perhaps, to other brewed drinks), the ground beans are not completely absorbed into the water, but are rather left behind at the end of the brewing process. Only the flavor of the beans is absorbed; in essence, then, the final product is merely flavored water, and thus has the status of water for Bishul Akum purposes. The Aruch HaShulchan (Yoreh Deah 113:22) concurs, stating that the texture of the product is not impacted here by the cooking process. The Darkei Teshuvah (Yoreh Deah 113:2) affirms that the majority of authorities accept the lenient position here and he adds that even the AriZal was following a personal stringency, not meant for the general population (see also Shu"t Chikrei Lev, Yoreh Deah No. 36 and Ben Ish Chai, Year Two, Parashat Chukat No. 16). It should also be noted that the Rama rules (Yoreh Deah 113:11) that in any case of doubt concerning the issue of Bishul Akum, we may accept the lenient view; this too would seem to point to following those who are lenient regarding coffee cooked by a non-Jew. Indeed, as documented by Rav Ovadyah Yosef in the teshuvah cited earlier, the common practice throughout the Jewish world is certainly to allow the drinking of coffee made by a non-Jew, in accordance with the leniencies presented above.



# Material Gains

Rabbi David Horwitz

**R**. Solomon Ephraim Luntshitz, in his work *Keli Yaqar*, comments at length on the following verses regarding Jacob's preparations for his encounter with Esav:

*That same night he arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After taking them across the stream, he sent across all his possessions. Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him... (Genesis 32:23-26).*

Why was Jacob left alone? Hazal write that he went back over the river to retrieve some small vessels that he had inadvertently left on the other side. From various biblical commentators, one would not derive the impression that Jacob did anything wrong with this act of retrieval. *Keli Yaqar*, on the other hand, most definitely thinks that Jacob did act inappropriately by demonstrating an excessive concern with objects of monetary value.

*Keli Yaqar* identifies the mysterious "man" who wrestled with Jacob as Samael, the demonic celestial officer who is the overseer of Esav. That follows an established rabbinic tradition, but he weaves this identity in with his homiletical point that the entire episode shows the spiritual peril in caring too much about material wealth. Utilizing the similarity between the word Samael and the Hebrew word to blind (*le-samei*) he points out that Samael's entire mission is to cause man to become intellectually blind. He identifies Samael with Satan, and further quotes the identification of Satan with the Angel of Death and with the Evil Inclination (*Bava Batra 16a*). Moreover, he compares his effects to those of wine. A drunk man loses his physical sight, and an intellectually blind mind loses his intellectual/spiritual sight. And one who loves material possessions too much becomes intellectually/ spiritually blind.

*Keli Yaqar* points out that like a flea; the Evil Inclination does not attack a man at his strong point, but at his weakest link. Samael knew that the strength of Jacob throughout the Jacob/ Esau encounter would be the level of his observance of the Torah. As long as Jacob did not sin, Samael could not attack him. When Jacob went out alone and he spiritually descended from his previous state, Samael trapped him. What did Jacob do that was terrible? He attempted to recover his *pakhim qetanim*, the small vessels, which were worth a bit of money.

*Keli Yaqar* continues that Jacob by his actions blinded himself, for "who is as blind as a lover of money?" Samael then

exclaimed, "Now is my chance to defile him and to cause him to become even more impure!" Commenting upon the word *levado* (by himself) he commented, Jacob committed an act of foolishness that was uniquely his own, and that most (!) people would not have done. Who could be so foolish as to put himself in danger for a small sum of money!

Immediately Samael began to wrestle with Jacob. His goal was to cause Jacob to deny God, and he thought that he might be able to do so, for one blinded by love of money might be led to any sin at all! Thankfully, he was not able to succeed completely, but he still was able to cause Jacob to limp. That is, *Keli Yaqar* continues, that he was able to blind Jacob's spiritual sight a little bit.

*Keli Yaqar* interprets the end of this biblical passage along the same lines.

*So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved. The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping on his hip. That is why the children of Israel do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob's hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle (Genesis 32:31-33).*

As *Keli Yaqar* explains, "The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel..." means that only the sunshine of spiritual clarity, which entails the rejection of the corrupting love of money, was able to save Jacob from totally falling into the clutches of Samael. But he was wounded, and he limped on his thigh, representing the fact that he did sin by turning lightly in the direction of inordinate love of money, by returning to fetch the *pakhim qetanim*. Consequently, his descendants would not eat the *gid ha-nasheh*.

*Keli Yaqar* understood that Jacob realized his error and did not repeat actions that expressed an inordinate love of money. That is the meaning of the verse

Jacob arrived safe (*shalem*) in the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan-having come thus from Paddan-aram- and he encamped before the city (Genesis 33:18).

Hazal homiletically interpreted: *Shalem be-Torato*. In light of *Keli Yaqar's* interpretation, this means, he no longer expressed the defective value of excessive love of money and objects of monetary value.

Elsewhere, in his comments at the beginning of Parashat *Va-Yetze*, where Jacob asks for bread to eat and clothing to wear (Genesis 28:20) *Keli Yaqar* quotes:

Keep lies and false words from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches, but provide me with my daily bread (Proverbs 30:8).

The vice of excessive love of money does not mean that one should starve to death. One can (and should) certainly pray for his daily bread. Rather, one must realize that one's goals in life should be spiritual in nature. Jacob's mistake in

## Introspective Identity

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

It was an inevitable reality. Yaakov knew the day would come when he would have to face his brother, Esav. Would Esav be seething with anger or had he moved on? Could Yaakov and Esav rehabilitate their relationship or would they simply go their own ways? We could only imagine that these questions were on Yaakov's mind on the night before this fateful encounter. The Torah describes that as Yaakov readied his family he found himself alone as he gathered the familial possessions. It was at this moment that he is attacked by the "Ish" (literally man, Rashi identifies this "man" as the ministering angel of Esav) and they wrestle with one another throughout the night. Yaakov was injured but managed to stand his ground and kept his adversary restrained until morning. When the sun rose, the Ish requested that Yaakov release him. *"And he (the angel) said, 'Let me go, for dawn is breaking,' but he (Jacob) said, 'I will not let you go unless you have blessed me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' and he said, 'Jacob.' And he said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have commanding power with [an angel of] God and with men, and you have prevailed" (Genesis 32:27-29).*

This exchange seems a bit strange on a number of levels. Firstly, why is the Ish asking Yaakov his name? After all, they had been struggling with one another throughout the night. Secondly, it would appear that Yaakov's name is changed twice, one is the above-mentioned verse and a second time when God appears and says: *"... Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name."* And He named him Israel (Genesis 35:10). Why is this second changing of Yaakov's name necessary?

The Torah (Genesis 2:20) states that Adam named each of the animals. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba Chukas 19:3) explains that after Adam finished this important task, God approached him and asked, *"... and you, what is your name? He (man) responded, Adam, because I was created from the earth (adama)."* Man named each of the animals based on the qualities and characteristics he perceived in them. When God asks man, "What is your name?" He was asking how do you perceive yourself? And man answered, "I am from the earth." Adam failed to realize that the root of his name is also the same root as the Hebrew word "adameh, I will resemble." Man has a

attempting to retrieve his pakhim qetanim was in temporarily losing sight of that ultimate goal. His tikkun, as demonstrated by his returning shalem to Shechem, was in reestablishing his correct priorities in life.

choice – he can view himself as resembling the dirt or can view himself as resembling his Maker and Creator. He can choose to identify with the earth or he can choose to identify with the heavens. The choice is his.

A name captures the essence of an individual. The angel asks Yaakov, mah sh'mecha (what is your name)? He is asking Yaakov, how do you view yourself? What do you see when you look in the mirror? Yaakov responded, "I am Yaakov. I am the one who was trampled on (the root of the name Yaakov is eykev, heel), I am the one who is always running; I am the one who is unable to face others (he runs away from home and later from Lavan in order to avoid conflict)." *The Ish says, "Yaakov you are mistaken. Your name is no longer Yaakov, you don't have to run, you don't have to fear – your name is Yisrael, ki sarisa, you are a master, you have struggled but you are still standing. You have fought with both angel and man and you have stood your ground. You lived in Lavan's home, a spiritually hostile environment for over two decades and yet, you kept true to your Abrahamitic values. You have wrestled an angel into submission. You don't have to grab at anyone's heel; you don't have to flee in the face of adversity. You are Yisrael. Find the confidence to face your demons, find the confidence to confront your challenges, find the strength to see how much you have grown."*

The angel did not change Yaakov's name. In fact Rashi explains that the angelic Ish is foreshadowing what will occur later on when God appears to change Yaakov's name to Yisrael. The Ish is giving Yaakov important advice. The only way you will be successful in life is if you begin to view yourself in a different light. You have so much potential, you possess so much holiness but your self-perception is preventing you from seeing it.

Too often we fail to achieve, progress and grow because we have given up on ourselves, we feel unworthy. We know our faults and shortcomings and assume that we cannot achieve greatness. We assume that the person we have been until now is the person we must continue to be going forward. We assume we are "adama" and therefore, lower our expectations of ourselves. We must remember that we are the Children of Israel; we are the people who strive for "adameh." Let us find the strength to see the good, the beauty and the holiness that resides within.

# Yaakov's Legacy and the Slaughter of Shechem

Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb

One of the most challenging stories in Sefer Bereishis is the abduction and rape of Dinah. After the actual assault, Shimon and Levi enter into what appears to be shocking negotiations with Shechem – Dina's actual attacker – and his father Chamor about creating a unified clan with merged personal and business interests. The brothers stipulate one precondition to the agreement, that Shechem and his group first circumcise themselves and “convert.” An agreement is reached and a few days after the actual circumcision the brothers launch a surprise attack, wipe out all of the males of the city, and retrieve their sister Dina.

Yaakov, who was absent from the negotiations and subsequent battle, expresses his displeasure to Shimon and Levi over their actions, and the back and forth between father and sons is both memorable and mysterious.

Yaakov denounces their actions because, “achartem osi,” these actions have “discomposed,” and made him abhorrent to the inhabitants of the land. This, Yaakov continues, has put the entire family in danger, after all, “va'ani m'sei mispar,” we are few in number and, “v'ne'sfu alai v'hikuni, v'nishmadeti ani u-besi,” we are thus vulnerable to attack. Amazingly, Shimon and Levi respond forcefully to their father's pointed criticism, maintaining that, in essence, there was no alternative, “ha-chu'zonah ya'aseh es achosenu” – could we allow Dina to be turned into a harlot (34:30-31)?!

There is a great deal of discussion among the commentators – both halachic and hashkafic – about the underlying values that are reflected in this spirited disagreement. However, there is a very basic question that can be asked about Yaakov's reaction.

Why does Yaakov start by placing emphasis on his own standing among the surrounding nations – by saying “you have discomposed me” – when in reality, as he continues, it was the entire family that was now at risk? The very act of mentioning his reputation – let alone doing so initially – seems out of place and requires understanding. Is Yaakov really concerned about being “liked”?

A few years ago I was fortunate to be part of a group that was allowed to visit Kever Yosef. The brief trip, supervised by the IDF and in the middle of the night, was very meaningful, but also poignant. Many will recall that in 2000, just hours after Israeli soldiers relinquished control of the area, Palestinian mobs ransacked and burned the holy and historic site. It is impossible to adequately describe – “eino domeh

shemiah k're'iyah” – the level of barbaric destruction that was visible even years after the fact.

In addition to the physical destruction, the mob also savagely murdered Rav Hillel Lieberman, hy”d, when he returned to the kever in attempt to retrieve a Sefer Torah.

Right before leaving Kever Yosef I had the unexpected privilege of meeting R. Lieberman's widow, who had returned to the kever – courageously and defiantly – so that her son could put on tefillin (a few hours later at a “vasikin minyan”) for the first time at the place that meant so much to her husband. During our brief conversation Mrs. Lieberman gave me a book, *Ahavat Ha-Aretz*, published posthumously, of her husband's thoughts on the weekly Torah reading. To meet her and receive this sefer at, of all places, Kever Yosef, was a confluence of events that I will never forget.

In this special sefer R. Lieberman suggests that to answer our question about Yaakov's criticism of Shimon and Levi, we must first understand the broader context in which this entire episode occurs.

The Talmud (Shabbos 33b) recounts that when Yaakov entered a city or general local he immediately enacted changes for the benefit of the city's inhabitants, such as developing a coinage system and building a bath house. Rav Avraham Yitzchok Ha-Kohen Kook explains that these weren't just incidental accomplishments, but that Yaakov understood these actions to be an essential part of his divinely mandated mission which included providing benefit to the people of the world. (Ein Ayah, Shabbos 33b)

R. Lieberman adds that the effort expended during these projects resulted in Yaakov becoming identified with the different areas he had benefited and contributed to. As a result, Yaakov felt that when the brothers wiped out the entire male population of Shechem they had nullified his good work and compromised his mission. In other words, when Yaakov said “achartem osi” he wasn't worried per se about his personal reputation; he feared that their actions compromised the message that he was trying to convey to the world.

R. Josh Hoffman pointed out that in a letter (*Igros Ha-Re'iyah*, v.3, pp. 6-7), Rav Kook further develops this idea in a way that also expands the relevance of its message.

It is a common assumption that people who live spiritually centered lives are too otherworldly to contribute to the “real world.” People involved with Torah are considered too esoteric – perhaps even eccentric – to relate to the needs and



concerns of others. Yaakov, whose life, according to Chazal, was primarily focused on the “tents of Torah study,” actively sought to dispel this notion by interacting with the people around him and establishing institutions that would benefit the general populace. Yaakov’s actions demonstrated the ultimate compatibility of Torah and world outside the Beis Midrash.

Yaakov’s displeasure with Shimon and Levi was thus based on a larger vision of the dynamic relevance of Torah and the responsibility of its adherents to the betterment of society. Even more than their physical wellbeing – which he obviously

## The Family of Eisav

*Rabbi Avraham Gordimer*

**T**he final segments of Parshas Vayishlach provide the genealogy of Eisav’s extended family. Based on Medrash Rabbah and Medrash Tanchuma, Rashi elucidates how Eisav’s clan was comprised of numerous people born of illicit relationships (“giluy arayos”) between a man and his daughter-in-law, a man and his step-mother, a man and his concubine, who was herself his daughter from another illicit relationship (!), etc.

Why was the family of Eisav marked by an abundance of such relationships?

Chazal explain that from the time of his youth, Eisav deceived Yitzchak by coming across as super-pious, whereas in reality he was engaged in the most heinous of sins. (Rashi on Bereshis 25:27, from Medrash Rabbah) We later read (Bereshis 26:34) that Eisav married when he turned 40 years old, whereupon Rashi comments (from Medrash Rabbah) that until this time, Eisav regularly engaged women in coerced, adulterous relationships, and that his marriage at age 40 was merely a hypocritical formality; Eisav wished to emulate his father Yitzchak by marrying at 40 years of age, but in essence, Eisav’s marriages were a facade, for the ideas of commitment and fidelity that marriage invokes were totally trampled upon by Eisav. Furthermore, the Torah writes, “And Eisav saw that the women of Canaan were evil in the eyes of his father Yitzchak, so Eisav went to Yishmael and married Machalas, Yishmael’s daughter.” (Bereshis 28:8-9) Rashi thereupon explains (from Medrash Rabbah) that by marrying the wicked daughter of Yishmael, Eisav merely added to the number of evil women in his household, for he retained his first wives as well. The thrust of this comment is, again, that Eisav was acting hypocritically, as he decided to marry the (non-Canaanite) daughter of Yishmael due to Yitzchak’s displeasure with Canaanite wives, but Eisav’s new marriage to this non-Canaanite wife failed to achieve

anything in terms of ridding his household of bad influences, and it in fact made things even worse.

As descendants of Yaakov we are heirs to his legacy and we too must maintain this twin-focus: Torah study and spiritual achievement along with a care, concern, and contribution to the world around us. It is a challenging responsibility, no doubt, but one which we are all capable of. To do any less – either one without the other – would be to fall short of Yaakov’s exalted legacy.

anything in terms of ridding his household of bad influences, and it in fact made things even worse.

Why is Eisav’s hypocrisy highlighted so?

As was explained in an earlier d’var Torah in this series, Eisav had a bifurcated approach to life. On the one hand, Eisav embodied the epitome of hedonism, while at the same time, he showed great honor to Yitzchak and retained a belief in the Torah. (That is why Eisav sought the berachos of Yitzchak so badly.) Eisav’s vision was that one could do whatever he wanted in his private life and be immersed in everything the Torah forbids, while at the same time, Eisav maintained, the Torah had its legitimate place, at least on a conceptual level. This notion is borne out by the Medrash which states that Eisav’s head was severed from his body and rolled into the lap of Yitzchak, to be buried in Me’aras Ha-Machpelah – whereas the rest of Eisav’s body remained without that holy gravesite. Eisav’s head represents Eisav’s conceptual acceptance of Torah, and his body represents his practical pursuit of hedone in total violation of the Torah; these two paths remained separate and inconsistent in Eisav’s world.

This explains why Eisav is portrayed as a hypocrite (to answer our question above). One cannot claim fidelity to Hashem while trampling on His laws; there is no such thing as acceptance of Torah on a cerebral or other plane while desecrating that same Torah in everyday life.

We can now also understand why Chazal and Rashi explain that Eisav’s family was comprised of the offspring of giluy arayos, and why the illicit relationships were of a particularly offensive nature (e.g. bearing a child with one’s step-mother and then marrying that child, etc.). The notion of marriage is one of fidelity; giluy arayos is the betrayal of that fidelity. Illicit relationships between married people who are also part of one’s extended family (father-in-law with daughter-in-law, man with step-mother, man and his concubine who is also his

daughter) are the ultimate manifestation of betrayal, for one shatters the marital fidelity commitment of a person to whom he is related and about whom he seemingly cares deeply. This is the true pinnacle of hypocrisy!

Eisav's hypocrisy, which enabled him to claim fidelity to the Torah while at the same time undermine it, became the hallmark of his progeny. Eisav's family arose as a result of

## Social Responsibility

*Rabbi Yaakov Werblowsky*

**T**he Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 9:14) contends that the basis for Shimon and Levi's annihilation of the city of Shechem was the people's violation of one of the Seven Noachide Laws. According to the gemara in Sanhedrin (56b), one of the seven obligations incumbent upon all mankind is the appointment of judges. In the Rambam's opinion, the function of these judges is to adjudicate cases involving violations of the other six Laws. Moreover, the Rambam believes that just as, according to the gemara in Sanhedrin, the violation of any of the mitzvos b'nei Noach (Noachide Laws) carries with it the death penalty, so too a community that does not properly dispense justice deserves death. Therefore, the townspeople of Shechem, who witnessed Shechem's abduction of Dinah and did nothing to punish (or correct) the injustice, were all considered chayavim misah, liable to death, and Yaaakov's sons were justified in executing them.

The Rishonim take issue with the Rambam's explanation on a number of points (see the Rambam's commentary to this week's Parsha), but one of the most striking explanations of the Rambam is brought in the Chiddushei HaRan (Sanhedrin 56b). He claims that the Rambam believes that generally, a non-Jew only receives the death penalty for actively transgressing a prohibition, not for passively failing to fulfill an obligation – with one exception. Not administering the requisite justice is a capital offense, as in our case of the people of Shechem, despite its being passive rather than active. The question, then, begs itself: why should this mitzvah break the rule?

Perhaps the answer lies in the phrase the Torah uses to describe the people of Shechem. After Yaakov's sons ransack the city, the Torah, seemingly to explain their guilt, says, "asher timeu achosam" – [the people] who desecrated their sister. As some Achronim point out (see the Or Hachayim Hakadosh), the Torah refers to all the city's inhabitants as the perpetrators of the horrific offense, even though it was presumably committed only by Shechem himself. One may suggest that, based on this

giluy arayos - the ultimate form of human betrayal - reflective of the bifurcated and illegitimate approach to life and personal character of Eisav, its patriarch.

pasuk, the Rambam concludes that a community which fails to judge and punish those who violate Hashem's will is held accountable as if it had committed the heinous crimes itself, and it is punished accordingly.

The source for such a concept is a gemara in Shabbos (54b), which states that the cow of R. Elazar ben Azarya walked outside on Shabbos sporting a strap between its horns, which is considered carrying and is prohibited. The gemara clarifies that it was actually R. Elazar's neighbor's cow, not his own, but since he could have prevented the transgression and did not do so, the Mishnah attributes the sin to him. The gemara then goes on to state this as a general rule, that anyone who is in a position to prevent a family member, member of the community, or anyone in the world from transgressing and shirks this responsibility is liable for their transgressions. (We should note that the implication of Rashi there is that this only applies to other Jews, which would preclude the use of this gemara as a basis to explain the Rambam.)

An even more striking consequence of such inaction is mentioned by the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah (4:1). There he maintains that one who is able to stop someone from heading or continuing down a sinful path and elects not to do so has committed one of the four sins which are so severe that Hashem does not allow him to do teshuva!

The message is quite clear. It is true that we are often not in a position to do anything about the wrongdoings we find around us in different settings. It is also true that we are not necessarily required to go out of our way to put ourselves in such positions. Nevertheless, there are situations where we can, reasonably, impact and correct the actions of others around us, especially since, as yeshiva students, we have been blessed with the chinuch that should make us more attuned to ratzon Hashem, the will of God. Because it is often uncomfortable to do so, it is easy for us to justify to ourselves the shirking of this responsibility. However, it is not a responsibility we can afford to ignore.