



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Vayishlach 5782

Sincerely Yours

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered December 11, 1965)

Hypocrisy is rightly a despised trait, and the word “hypocrite” a harsh and contemptuous epithet reserved for vile people. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that the popular condemnation of insincerity is not always matched by a correspondingly universal abstention from this vice in the affairs of man in society. Every day many thousands of letters are written in which the writers employ varied devices ranging from subtle deviousness to outright deceit, and compound their crime by signing the letters, “I am, sincerely yours...”

What is a hypocrite? According to the dictionary definition it is one who pretends to be something other than what he really is (usually one who pretends to be better than he really is) or to feel what he does not really feel. Hypocrisy is feigning, acting a part, pretending. Perhaps a better word is the Hebrew *tzeviut*-literally; coloring, dyeing. Hypocrisy then, is giving an impression which does not correspond with the facts, it is the incomensurateness of the inner fact and the outer appearance.

Our prophets stormed against hypocrisy. Our Rabbis thundered against it. The Talmud quotes King Yannai advising his wife, Queen Salome, “do not be afraid either of the Pharisees or those who are not Pharisees; fear not only those hypocrites who act like Pharisees, who believe like Zimri (an ignoble person) and expect to be rewarded like Pinhas (the saintly priest of Israel).”

In that case, we are presented with a problem by today’s Sidra. We read this morning, in very few lines, that Reuben sinned with Bilhah, the concubine of his father Jacob. If the Bible said so, it is the truth. Yet the Talmud advises us that *מעשה ראובן נקרא ולא מתרגם*--the story of Reuben should be read but not translated. It once was the custom that the Torah would be read as we read it, and then one person would be assigned to translate it publicly into

Aramaic, the vernacular at that time. But an exception was made of this story of Reuben, and when one Rabbi insisted that the story of Reuben be read in the Hebrew but left untranslated, he was congratulated by his colleagues. But is this not hypocritical and insincere? Is not the suppression of the truth hypocrisy, and is not every instance of hypocrisy deplorable?

The answer is: no, it is not hypocrisy or insincerity, although it suppresses the broadcast of a true event. And, if one should insist that this is hypocrisy, then with full respect to all our honorable prejudices, certain forms of such insincerity are not malicious but wholesome and healthy. Not in all ways must one’s appearances be thoroughly equivalent and correspond to his inner thoughts. To speak a conscious untruth aiming at personal gain or creating a favorable image and false impression, is a foul act. But to refrain from telling all I know and consider to be true, either because I am unsure how that truth will be interpreted, or out of respect for the sensitivity and feelings for others--that is an act of civility, not insincerity.

Thus, in the affair of Reuben there were many mitigating factors, and varying interpretations are possible, as indeed many of them appear in the Talmud. A direct translation into the vernacular is, therefore, misleading and the cause of much misunderstanding. Furthermore, it is bad enough that the Torah preserves a sacred record of Reuben’s misdeed, and there is no need to add salt to the wounds of a cherished forebear even if he is no longer in the world of the living.

It is an *averah* to lie; it is no *mitzvah* to tell all I know, even if it is the truth. There is a law in the Shulhan Arukh that if a man has, Heaven forbid, lost a close relative for whom he must mourn, but he is unaware of his loss, then one ought not to apprise him of it within thirty days of the death, for then he would be obligated to observe

all of the Shivah. One may not give a false answer upon interrogation, but one ought not volunteer this kind of information, and if he does he is considered a kesil, a fool. A fool, indeed! Hypocrisy is not avoided and insincerity not served by mindless chattering and compulsive loquaciousness!

Too much cruelty has been practiced under the guise of honesty, too much frightful foolishness excused as frankness, too many assaults on the feelings of others carried out under the pretense of sincerity. Is it hypocrisy for a teacher to refrain from telling a slow student that he is unintelligent? Is it commendable sincerity to tell every homely person, “you are plain-looking and unattractive?” No, it is not. (In fact, Hillel taught that one must even tell an unattractive bride that she is beautiful and charming.) The truth should be spoken, not blurted out. If you hear a performer or entertainer or artist, and have adverse criticism--even if it is constructive--then Jewish ethics and derekh erez advise you: wait for a propitious time before offering your comments, do not offend the innermost feelings of another human being. If you apprehend a friend in embarrassing circumstances, performing an evil deed, it is a mitzvah to reproach him. You are not free to withhold your comment. But the rebuke must be administered gently, considerately, delicately. The Torah commands us, הוּכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ, you shall reproach your friend. And the Rabbis add: אַפִּילוּ אֶלֶף פְּעָמִים, even a thousand times. On this, one of the great lights of the Musar movement commented: this means that the single rebuke must be broken into a thousand pieces and offered in tiny doses, lest the person you seek to correct should become the victim of painful insult.

Furthermore, there is a decent, beneficial, and honorable kind of hypocrisy which is not insincere, and without which society might well collapse. There are certain conventional fictions that are apparently untrue, but that suggest a kind of truth far beyond the reach of normal comprehension. Jewish law, for instance, aims at producing perfect individuals and a holy society, a kehillah kedoshah. Yet it knows full well, as King Solomon taught, ki adam ein tzaddik ba-aretz asher yaaseh tov ve'lo yeheta--that no person in the world is perfectly righteous and blameless. Halakhah grants each person a hezkat kashrut, a presumption of innocence and virtue; yet it knows full well that, as the Bible teaches, yetzer lev ha-adam rak ra mi-ne'urav-- man's innate disposition is towards evil. Is this

hypocrisy? If it is--we should all be in favor of hypocrisy! For without it, all law and religion must progressively be reduced and diminished to the lowest level of common practice. This spells the death of all ideals. Just as a child who errs and stumbles, yet is trusted by a parent, and feels that the parent has an opinion of him that is higher than his poor reality, is inspired by this discrepancy to fulfill the higher image; so with the Jew and his Halakhah: he is imperfect and faulted, yet because he is granted the hezkat kashrut and told that he incorporates the Image of G-d, and is expected to live up to it, he will strive to do just that, lest he suffer inner embarrassment and shame.

This week the Supreme Court has been deliberating on the problems of censorship and pornography. This brings to mind a fascinating article I read in a national magazine (Harper's, March 1965, by George P. Elliot) in which a principle similar to the one we have been discussing was put forth. The author believes that the law should banish pornography, but not enforce this regulation. He asks: is it not, however, hypocrisy to outlaw pornography if we know well that it will be sold surreptitiously? He answers: “The law should rest content with a decent hypocrisy,” and ban obscene literature in the marketplace even if it knows that it will be sold under the counter, where the law will not and cannot bother with it. Law is the way that society approves and disapproves of certain acts. “A certain amount of official hypocrisy is one of the operative principles of a good society.” Unenforced laws express society's goals and ideals and visions. Law is meant not only to punish, but also to educate to higher standards. “Civilization behaves as though men are decent in full knowledge that they are not.”

Judaism cannot take exception to this doctrine. When, at the beginning of the Emancipation, non-Orthodox Jews did adopt an opposite point of view they began to prune the laws and cut down the Halakhah to fit current, prevalent practice. As a result, they discovered--as we well know in our days--that when you do this, Judaism begins to crumble and Jews begin to vanish. If Jewish laws are abandoned because they are not universally observed, Judaism becomes nothing but a sanctimonious self-approval for spiritual failures, a vacuous “hekhsher” for not-so-kosher Jews.

That is why we ought not to be impressed or depressed at the cries of hypocrisy often hurled at Orthodox synagogues that disapprove of travel on the Sabbath,

though many of its members violate that standard; that insist upon full meticulous observance of kashrut, though some members in the privacy of their homes or when away from home, do not live up to this ideal. If a standard is set, the congregation must live under the impression that the ideal is a reality; and all who fail to conform must suffer the pangs of guilt. If that is a fiction, it is a splendid and sublime fiction, on the way to becoming a luminous truth.

Finally there is a form of feigning or pretense which is not only necessary and permissible, but the highest rung that men can reach. We read last week that Jacob, after twenty years with Laban, decided to return to Canaan and the inevitable confrontation with his vengeful brother Esau. This came about, the Torah tells us, immediately after the birth of Joseph. Why just then? The Talmud answers, referring to this morning's Haftarah, that the House of Joseph is regarded as a flame, and the House of Esau as straw; in other words, that Joseph for some reason is the ideal antidote to Esau's hatred. The Midrash introduces this answer with the following four words which are most significant: *mi-shenolad sitno shel Esav*, upon the birth of Joseph who was the "Satan" of Esau! Joseph is considered the "Satan"--the adversary or antagonist--of his uncle Esau. One of the great Hasidic rabbis of the Sochotchower dynasty explained this as follows. Esau was a hypocrite. Outwardly, he was a pious individual. He would approach his blind father, Isaac, with such questions as: *ketzad me'asrin et ha-teven*, how does one offer a tithe of salt or straw--although he well knew that such objects do not require any tithe. He put on an act; he pretended to be pious and observant. At the same time, inwardly, he was a *rasha*, vile and wicked and cruel. Now, Joseph was also guilty of pretense--but in the exactly opposite way! Outwardly, our Tradition tells us, he was a callow youth. He was a *mesalsel be'saaro*, the sort of youngster who would stand for hours in front of a mirror teasing his hair. He occupied himself with *maasei naarut*, the latest fads and fashions of the contemporary youth. An outside objective observer would gather that he was nothing more than a shallow childish youngster with nothing better to occupy his mind than the style and the length of his hair! Yet, as we know with the benefit of hindsight, this young Joseph was anything but a Biblical Beatnick; he was a true *tzaddik*, a man of utter piety and complete self-discipline, who incorporated within his conscience the *demut diyukno shel abba*, the spiritual image of his saintly father!

This too, then, is a form of pretense--but how delightful and noble! To achieve inner dignity and not brag about it; to attain greatness and not exhibit it; to reach spiritual heights and not display them--this, if it be hypocrisy, is the saintliest insincerity, the most precious pretense within the capacity of man to attain.

The gem of character recommended by the Talmud was incorporated in the famous legend of Jewish tradition about the Lamed Vavnicks--the thirty-six hidden *tzaddikim*, or righteous men. In every generation, according to this legend, there are thirty-six righteous people of whom no one knows; sometimes they themselves are not conscious of it. Yet it is because of their inner, hidden, disguised saintliness that the world is sustained. Without them, divine wrath would turn all the world into a primordial chaos. These Lamed Vavnicks are patterned on the character of Joseph: outwardly mediocre, ordinary, plain, and unimpressive, whilst inwardly made of the finest spiritual stuff, righteous, self-sacrificing, and utterly moral.

An interesting consequence of this teaching about Joseph and the legend of the thirty-six righteous people is: one must never scorn or slight any human being no matter how ordinary he appears. One must never disdain or underestimate any fellow man no matter what the provocation. You can never tell: he may be a hidden *tzaddik*, one of the thirty-six! He may be a Joseph whose shallow exterior disguises inner greatness! How often has a teacher found that a student who is quiet and withdrawn and retiring will suddenly, at the end of a term or a year or an entire school career, rise to the greatest intellectual heights. How often have parents found that children whom they did not suspect of anything beyond the average demonstrate, as they grow older, inner resources that amaze and delight their parents. Our Rabbis put it this way: *al tehi baz le'kol adam*, never scorn any person. You can't be sure of what they really are like!

In sum, hypocrisy is a contemptible vice, and sincerity a glowing virtue. But while sincerity calls for no falsehood, neither does it call for telling all that is within me, even if it is true, if telling this truth can hurt others.

Secondly, sincerity is not a reason to abolish unpracticed ideals and laws.

Thirdly, there is a kind of pretense which is saintly: that which urges me to develop my inner life without deriving the benefit of society's applause and approval.

We live in an *alma di'peruda*, an imperfect and fragmented world. For truth to be triumphant, it must proceed cautiously. We must give no quarter to falsehood, but we must remember that truth must often disguise itself in a thousand different garments--until that blessed day, the "day of the Lord," when man and society will be redeemed; when truth will be revealed courageously and fully; when this world will become transformed into an *olam ha-emet*,

Brothers Under the Skin

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

In this week's parsha, the Torah describes the meeting between Ya'akov and his brother Eisav, after they hadn't seen each other for twenty years. Ya'akov, fearing that Eisav still hated him and wanted to kill him, takes a number of precautions, to protect himself. Rashi cites the midrash which sums up these precautions as consisting of a gift to Eisav, a prayer to God, and preparation for war. When the brothers finally meet, the Torah tells us, "Eisav ran toward him, and he embraced him, and fell upon his neck, and kissed him; and they wept. Rashi mentions that there is a dispute in the Sifrei concerning the sincerity of Eisav's emotional response to Ya'akov's visit. However, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, in his commentary, notes that while one can give an insincere kiss, he cannot fake tears. Eisav's tears, says Rabbi Hirsch, indicate that he had true feelings for his brother. A spark of humaneness still existed within him, and Ya'akov was able to tap into it. Rabbi Moshe Einstadter, in his *Yesodos of Sefer Bereishis*, elaborates on this theme, and notes that we find such moments throughout history, when the 'vestigial spiritual essence' that existed deep within Eisav comes to the fore, illuminating Eisav's world like lightning against a black sky. The *Netziv*, in his *Ha'amek Davar*, notes that the word '*vayivku*' - 'and they cried' - is in the plural, indicating that once Eisav cried, Ya'akov cried, as well, thus foreshadowing those times in Jewish history when the descendants of Ya'akov and Eisav would share friendly relations, as occurred in the time of Rabbi Yehudah and Antoninus, and, the *Netziv* adds, at many other junctions in history. Following the approach of these commentators, it would be instructive to explore what it was that moved Eisav to unleash the good side of his personality when he met Ya'akov, since, as the rabbis tell us, Ya'akov's deportment with Eisav is meant to serve as a model for his descendants

a world of truth; when G-d's unity will be expressed in living the whole truth and nothing but the truth; and when men will confront their own selves in *emet*, in truth, and be truly devoted to each other, so that each man will be able to address his brother and say, in full and genuine honesty, "I am, sincerely, yours!"

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

in dealing when confronting Eisav's descendants.

Ramban, in his commentary (Bereishis 32:7-8), writes that even though Eisav originally showed hostility to Ya'akov and his messengers, in the end, when he saw the great honor that Ya'akov accorded him, his compassion was aroused, and he thought that Ya'akov had actually acknowledged his claim to the birthright, and he was therefore mollified. Ramban then paraphrases a verse in *Mishlei* (21:1), which reads, "*Like streams of water is the heart of a king in the hand of God, wherever he wishes, so He directs it,*" and applies it to human hearts, in general. One of the commentaries on Ramban, *Lev Tzion*, explains that, although it would seem that Eisav's response to Ya'akov was caused by Ya'akov's attitude to him, it was, actually, caused by divine intervention. However, I do not believe that this is the meaning of the Ramban's statement, nor that it is the meaning of the verse in *Mishlei*. Man has free will, and God is not a 'Grand Puppeteer' who controls their actions. This, in fact, is what Rav Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor of Kovno, the great nineteenth century authority in Jewish law, who often interceded with the Russian government on behalf of the Jewish people, writes in a footnote to his introduction to *Ayn Yitzchok*, a two volume work of halachic responsa. Explaining the same verse in *Mishlei* that is paraphrased by the Ramban, Rabbi Spektor writes that the verse does not mean to say that God determines how kings act. If this were so, then the kings of the nations could not receive reward for their good actions, or punishment for their bad actions. Rather, a king's heart is like a stream, or a river, which is described in the Talmud as being only one-third revealed, and two parts hidden. So, too, God arouses the heart of a king, inclining him to act in a certain way. However, the final course of action they take remains hidden in the recesses of their hearts, and up

to them to decide. I believe that this is what the Ramban means in regard to Eisav, as well. God aroused Eisav's heart to release his inner feelings of brotherly love for Ya'akov, and, seeing Ya'akov's deportment toward him, he did so. However, according to Ramban, this arousal of brotherly feeling was actually one-sided, because Ya'akov made Eisav think that he was acknowledging his superiority. In effect, then, Ya'akov was really fooling Eisav into reacting the way he did, and did not share in these feelings. As we have seen, however, the Netziv writes that Ya'akov, as well, shared in these feelings, as indicated by the fact that he cried along with Eisav. If all his overtures to Eisav were merely a ruse, it seems unlikely that he would have responded in this way. What, then, did Ya'akov do to stir up these mutual emotions?

Rabbi Ya'akov Sakly, a student of the great medieval Talmudic authority Rashba, writes, in his *Toras HaMincha*, that even though Ya'akov knew that God was watching over him, and, moreover, sent him angels to protect him, he did not want to arouse Eisav's anger. Therefore, he sent messengers of peace to him, and Eisav responded in kind.

The True Ya'akov

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Nov 26, 2015)

A Mishna in Chulin(93b) teaches us: *Sholeyach adam yerech le-oved kochavim she-gid ha-nashe be-tocha mipnei she-mekomo nikar*. You can send a goy a gift (or a delivery) of the whole hindquarter of beef because it's clear where the gid ha-nashe is—it's noticeable. And the Gemara (ibid, 94a) asks: What if it wasn't? What if you made a mistake and it is not so easy to see? What's wrong with that—since a non-jew is permitted to eat it? And Shmuel says: it's because of g'neivas da'as. If you send him a steak, he will think it's kosher—and in a way, you are cheating him. He will think it's kosher when in reality, it's glatt-treif. But when you send him the whole hindquarter, he will see the gid ha-nashe there. And since he knows what he is getting, there is no g'neivas da'as involved here. Therefore, Shmuel says: From here, we see that it's *asur li-gnov da'as habriyos, ve-afilu da'as ovdei kochavim*. All halachos of g'neivas da'as are found in Maseches Chulin, in the seventh perek, named Gid ha-Nashe. So why is g'neivas da'as in Chulin and not in Baba Kama or elsewhere? So, on the basic level, that's how Gemora works—*me-inyan*

As soon as he heard that Ya'akov inquired about his welfare, he gathered four hundred men and sent them to greet him. Unlike Ramban, who understood this as a belligerent move, Rabbi Sakly understands it as a positive response to Ya'akov's overture, coming out of brotherly love. The proof to this explanation, he says, is the emotional reaction that Eisav exhibited when the two brothers actually met. If we add Ramban's invocation of the verse in Mishlei to this explanation, we can say that God aroused Eisav's heart to draw on his inner, brotherly love for Ya'akov, and Ya'akov's gesture of sending messengers to inquire about his welfare, and to seek peace with him, moved him to respond positively to this divine arousal. What we can take away from this encounter, then, as a lesson for future generations, is the importance of treating all of our fellow human beings with love and respect, as Ya'akov did when he sent his messengers to Eisav. When we do so, we may, with divine help, be able to tap into the inner feelings of universal brotherhood implanted deep within them, to our mutual benefit.

le-inyan be-oso inyan (and not so oso inyan), etc. But Rabbi Shalom Carmy pointed out to me that on a deeper level, what is going on in all these parshiyos is about Ya'akov. Why is he called Ya'akov? Because Eisav said: *va-ye'akveini zeh pa'amayim. Es Bechorosi lokach, ve-hinei ata lokach Birkasi*. What happened to Ya'akov? He tricked Eisav out of his Bechora; he swindled his father out of his Brochah. That's how he did things—as Rashi says: *ba ba-akeiva ve-mirma*. That's what Ya'akov's name connotes. Even in the last week's Parsha, we find that Lavan started up with Ya'akov by tricking him. And he responded in kind with a midah of *im ikesh titapal* (be crooked with those who are crooked)—with different types of unusually colored sheep, etc. We are not discussing whether Ya'akov was right or wrong in doing things this way. Ya'akov had good reasons for doing this, and it was all justified. But when some form of behavior is excusable, that doesn't mean it's ideal. Sometimes it's justified to go and trick your father and brother, or to deceive your father-in-law/uncle, etc. That was the best available option under the circumstances. But

that's not a basis for building Klal Yisroel. What happens in this week's Parsha? Ya'akov has his encounter with Eisav, and instead of tricking Eisav and giving him a runaround, he says: I am going to talk with Eisav. I will try to work it out with him face to face. And there is a root word that reoccurs many times in the first few aliyos in the Parsha. What happens? Ya'akov says: *Ki amar achapra fanav bamincha ha-holeches le-fanai va-acharei chein er'e fanav ulai yisa fanai. Va-ta'avor ha-mincha al panav, etc.* There is a continuous emphasis on *panim*. He is sending the flocks in front of him (*le-fanav*). He sees Eisav's *panim*, and Eisav sees his *panim*. And later: *Ki raisi Elokim panim el panim*. And again: *vayikra es ha-makom Peniel*. Why is he making such an emphasis on *panim*? Because what is the opposite of *panim*? It's the opposite of *eikev*. *Eikev* hints at sneaking up—*ve-ye'akveini zeh pa'amayim*, while *panim* implies face to face. In this week's Parsha, Ya'akov says: Maybe, until now, I used one *midah*, but that can't be the *maskana* of my life. That's not the goal; that's not the authentic way to live. That's was *hora'as sha'a*. Ultimately, I should act *panim el panim*. I'll talk to Eisav. I will work it out with him. I will fight with Eisav if I must. And, if possible, I will work it out with him. But either way, I will stand up to him *panim el panim*. And ultimately, this comes up when *vaye'aveik ish imo ad alos ha-shachar*. Before Ya'akov encountered Eisav, he met up with a strange being, *saro shel Eisav*. And he wrestles with him, and he fights with him, and he doesn't pull any *shtik* on him at all. He wrestles him, and he wins. And therefore, his name is changed from Ya'akov to Yisroel, *ki sarisa im elohim ve-im anashim ve-tuchal*. Instead of tricking and deceiving, he took on the fight head-on, and he won. He did it face to face, above-board, and was able to meet that challenge. He had faith in Hashem and

himself. He knew that now was the time to do it. And, of course, after this, Hashem changed his name to Yisroel. Once in a blue moon, we are still called Bnei Ya'akov, but ultimately, we are Bnei Yisroel. Because when you found a nation of Torah, it must be based on *chosamo shel HKBH emes*—on the straight and narrow, and not on *ve-ya'akveini zeh pa'amayim*. And through the ages, what reminds us of this transformation? What reminds us that there is a right way of doing things? And the truth is: maybe there is a *hora'as sha'a le-doros* as well. After all, while we cannot call Avraham by his old name Avram, nevertheless, it's still *mutar* to call Yisroel by his original name, Ya'akov. Sometimes it is necessary to have a *hora'as sha'a* in all kinds of historical circumstances. But ultimately, what is it all about? It's about being Yisroel. Which *mitzvah le-doros* reminds us of that? *Al kein lo yochlu Bnei Yisroel es gid ha-nashe ad hayom ha-zeh*. Throughout the generations, we have a reminder—we don't eat the *gid ha-nashe*. The *mitzvah* of *gid ha-nashe* reminds us of the basis of our nation. What we sometimes do—when we must—is not our essential nature. And ultimately, if you were to ask: What do you learn from the *mitzvah* of *gid ha-nashe*, you could not have done better than Shmuel in Chulin (94a). From the *mitzvah* of *gid ha-nashe*, in the *perek Gid ha-Nashe*, in the *mishna* of *gid ha-nashe*, we learn: *Asur li-gnov da'as ha-briyos—afilu ovdei kochavim*. Even if they deserve it, even if it's justified, even if it would be an *ok* thing to do. Ultimately, we do not live by *geneivas da'as*—even when it comes to *ovdei avodah zarah*. And even when it comes to Eisav *ha-Rasha*, we try to face him with strength, honesty, and straightforwardness. And *im yirtze Hashem*, we will continue to succeed.

A Little Less Confidence

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Ya'akov endures a lifetime of confrontation and chaos. He grappled with his father-in-law, warred with the local rapists of Shechem, and, toward the end of his life, emigrated to a foreign country – never to return to his homeland. Amidst all this drama, his tense face-off with his armed brother-flush with four hundred warriors-is the most perilous day of his life. Having been assured of Divine protection, Ya'akov should, logically, feel confident about his prospects. In addition to that divine

guarantee, Ya'akov enjoys the support and protection of a vast entourage of family, slaves and cattle. No longer a penniless and lonely man barely escaping Esav's clutches, he is now the leader of an impressive clan. Finally, he should take reasonable confidence in his past struggles, having survived twenty years of a devious father-in-law. As he faces off against Esav, Ya'akov has every reason for supreme confidence in his ultimate victory.

Yet surprisingly, he is agitated with worry. Nervous of

the outcome, he adopts numerous strategies to assure victory, or, at least, to limit the casualties. After dividing his camp into two factions and presenting gifts and tributes to his furious brother, Ya'akov desperately prays for Divine assistance. Conceding his fears to Hashem, he famously acknowledges: "*Katonti*" (literally "I am small") - an iconic phrase which perfectly captures his shrunken confidence. It seems odd that a person of such colossal faith and of such mighty religious achievement should feel so tiny.

Apparently, despite his past successes, Ya'akov has numerous reasons to doubt his future. Looking back, he has benefitted from two decades of extraordinary divine intervention. Not only did he survive "against all odds", but he returned as the wealthy head of an impressive family. Having received such profuse abundance perhaps the "divine well" now runs dry, and he can no longer expect future generosity. He doesn't take the past twenty years for granted.

Additionally, he was concerned with conspicuous shortcomings in his religious behavior. Absent for two decades, he wasn't available to tend to his aging parents - who incidentally, continued to be supported by his brother. Furthermore, Ya'akov had been missing from the land of Hashem for longer than either of his predecessors. Perhaps he can't just "parachute in" to the promised land after such a long absence and lay claim against a rival brother, who had "labored on" for two decades. Through no fault of his own, Ya'akov had lapsed in two crucial mitzvot and perhaps the "bill was due". Hashem doesn't round off our religious performance. Sins of the righteous are accounted for, just as merits of the wicked are considered. Despite his overall religious accomplishments, Ya'akov was concerned "shema yigrom hachet" - even minor sins would compromise his future. He remains vexed with uncertainty.

He was not alone. While he was momentarily worried by the uncertainty of "*katonti*", Dovid Hamelech is continuously haunted by lack of religious confidence. Facing seemingly endless enemies, he feels lost, taking no solace in any assured outcome. Utterly unconvinced of future security, he desperately clings to Hashem for hope and survival. The sins of his past gnaw at his conscience, thwarting any future optimism. Ya'akov experiences a flash of uncertainty but in the book of Tehillim, Dovid is unceasingly immersed in religious insecurity.

Ya'akov in parshat Vayishlach and Dovid Hamelech in the course of Tehillim, showcase the important balance between religious confidence and doubt. Proper

calibration of the two is vital for personal achievement, emotional health and, even more so, for religious success. It is obvious that healthy confidence in our abilities and talents is crucial to our general successes. It generally improves our self-esteem, leads to better decision making and motivates hard work.

Confidence is even more crucial for healthy and lasting religious growth. The very concept of religious duty and mitzvah observance, exerts formidable pressure upon us. Religious shoulders carry great weight and heavy expectations. Too much pressure can quickly spiral into religious despondency, emotional anxiety and obsessive behavior. Too much failure and guilt can create a perpetual sense of religious disappointment. Religious observance isn't meant to suffocate our emotional happiness nor to cause excess religious nervousness. Serving Hashem is meant to transform us into better and happier versions of ourselves, endowed with the quiet confidence which only faith and belief can supply. Religion and emotional anxiety are a volatile mix - and one which rarely lasts. Ultimately, too much stress and too much emotional disquiet is unsustainable, and persistent nervousness or guilt often "eject" someone from orbit of religion. For religious life to be successful and sustainable it must be anchored in the calm confidence of religious success.

As important as confidence is, it is also crucial to sense "under confidence" and to feel uncertainty. Healthy self-doubt is a gateway to personal growth. Supreme confidence blinds us to ideas beyond our own imagination, whereas intellectual humility compels us to probe for the truths we don't yet possess. Doubt for the layman is integrity for the scholar. Healthy self-doubt invites self-critique, opening our hearts to the input and corrective wisdoms of others. Our culture imbues the value of strong confidence, sometimes to the detriment both of intellectual flexibility and attentiveness to differing views.

Self-doubt is even more valuable in our religious practice and experiences. Religion can be defined as an endless pursuit of the Unreachable. Often, moderate religious success breeds contentment and religious stagnation. The final section of masechet Berachot comments that righteous people have no respite either in this world nor in the next. Constantly striving for greater spirituality, religious people should always be stretching their religious horizons. Confident in their religious practice they, none the less, should not be content with their current religious level. We are searching for the infinite. In that search there

is little room for contentment.

Secondly doubt and insecurity helps us retain our humility. Self-introspection and self-scrutiny evoke our fragility and our dependence upon a Higher Being. There is a thin line between confidence and swagger and healthy self-doubt prevents us from crossing it.

Proper “confidence calibration” yields a life of “poise”. People of poise are fully aware of their talents just

Wrestling With G-d and With Man

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week’s parsha, Parshas Vayishlach, we learn of the historic confrontation between Yaakov and Eisav, after they have been apart for twenty years. Yaakov, having fled his home to save his life from before his brother who vowed to kill him, is now en route back to Canaan, after twenty years of working for Lavan. He is returning along with his four wives, twelve children, many flocks and servants. Fearing the wrath of his brother Eisav, Yaakov prepares for war. He divides his family into two camps, to ensure that one will survive if the other is attacked, he sends gifts to Eisav and he prays to Hashem to save him.

The night before he is to meet Eisav, Yaakov finds himself alone by the Yabok River, where a mysterious Ish - identified by the Sages as the Sar shel Eisav - confronts him and wrestles with him all night long. As the morning dawns, the angel’s time has come to sing shira (songs of praise to G-d in Heaven) and he asks Yaakov to release him from the epic battle in which they are engaged. Yaakov replies: *לֹא אֲשַׁלְחֶךָּ כִּי אִם-בְּרֵכָתִי*, *I will not send you away until you have blessed me.* The angel asks for his name, and he replies: Yaakov. And the angel says: *וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד*, *No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, rather, Yisrael. For you have striven with G-d and with men and have overcome* (Bereishis 32:25-29).

Interestingly, a few perakim later, we find that once again Yaakov is informed of his name change, this time by G-d Himself. *וַיֹּאמֶר-לוֹ אֱלֹהִים, שְׁמֶךָ יִקְרָא עוֹד יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד*, *and Hashem said to him: Your name is Yaakov. No longer will your name be called Yaakov, rather, Yisrael will be your name. And He called his name Yisrael* (35:10).

Ha’Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l teaches: “We find two places where Yaakov learned of the changing of his name:

as they admit their limitations. Religiously “poised” people innately feel confident in their relationship with Hashem. This security provides inner equilibrium and composed religious practice. However, they always doubt their accomplishments, seeking new vistas for religious opportunity, rather than resting upon past laurels and prior accomplishments. They feel at once, large and small.

once from the angel who fought with him prior to his confrontation with his brother Eisav, and once from Hashem Himself. There is an interesting, and noteworthy, difference between the two. When the angel informed Yaakov about the name change, he gave a reason for it, stating: *כִּי שָׁרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעִם אַנְשִׁים וַתּוֹכַל* - ‘For you have striven with G-d and men, and you have overcome.’ However, when Hashem informed Yaakov of the name change, no reason is given.

“In order to understand the reason for this differentiation, we must first explain the meaning of the reason given to Yaakov by the angel. The angel told Yaakov he was worthy of the name Yisrael because ‘he strove with the Divine and with man and overcame.’ What was the nature of this striving to which the angel referred?”

Rav Moshe explains that, “A person is faced with many challenges in this world. It is his role to meet those challenges and remain steadfast in his faith and fear of Hashem. Life’s challenges mainly fall into two categories. First, there are the personal struggles that every person has within himself. Our yetzer harah, evil inclination, is always trying to tempt us to transgress the laws of Torah in search of imagined material gain. Hashem granted us the yetzer harah for our benefit, to ensure that we would always have free choice - and thus, be deserving of reward in the World to Come.

“... There is, however, a second type of challenge that is sometimes even more difficult than the first. This is the challenge of people. In every generation, there are those people who try to persuade and prevent us from adhering to the tenets of our Torah. This is an adversary we constantly face, and with much effort, we must fight against.

“The angel told Yaakov that in the past he had been

successful on both of these fronts. 'For you have striven with the Divine' refers to one's ongoing battle with one's Divinely given yetzer harah. 'And with man,' refers to the various people who tried to stop Yaakov from pursuing his spiritual goals (See Rashi to Bereishis 32:29 - 'For you have striven with men: This refers to Eisav and Lavan.'). For this reason, the angel told Yaakov he was worthy of having his name changed to Yisrael."

Hence, the declaration of the angel that Yaakov's name would be changed to Yisrael commemorates Yaakov's past internal and external battles, and his new name would be a testament to his victories and triumphs over all the forces that sought to dissuade him from his mission of avodas Hashem.

"Hashem, on the other hand, was not referring to Yaakov's past. In changing Yaakov's name to Yisrael, Hashem was assuring Yaakov that all the future generations of Klal Yisrael would be worthy of the name Yisrael; that they all would contain learned, G-d fearing individuals who would neither give in to the persuasions of the yetzer harah - our internal battle, nor bend to the will of corrupt and wicked people - our external battle" (Darash Moshe, v.II, Artscroll, p.69-70).

In living up to our title of the Bnei Yisrael, we are

Davening For Our Children

Rabbi Yossi Goldin

This week's parsha opens with the reunion between Yaakov and Eisav. As Yaakov prepares for this momentous event, the Torah outlines three different strategies that he employs towards ensuring a successful meeting. Firstly, he sends gifts to Eisav in order to appease him and show that he is approaching with only the best of intentions. Secondly, he creates a contingency battle plan, splitting up his own camp into two groups so that, if one is attacked, the other can escape. And finally, he davens to Hashem, asking Him for protection from Eisav and his influence.

Many commentaries over the years have used Yaakov's actions as a model for our approach to moments of conflict and challenge. First of all, we must do all we can to avoid the confrontation. If avoidance proves impossible, we must prepare for the conflict/challenge with a two-pronged approach- we must do our השתדלות by investing the effort to face the approaching test successfully, and we must also

charged - and blessed - with a unique mission. Each one of us must contend with our internal forces that seek to distract us from our life mission of living lives of Bnei Torah. And each of us must fight mightily against the society in which we live; a society whose very fabric and essence is the antithesis of Torah ideals.

A bachur once asked Ha'Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman zt'l (whose 4th yartzheit is on 24 Kislev, zy'a) to recommend a mussar sefer that would help him improve his middos. R' Aharon Leib replied, "Do you think I have a classified sefer the yetzer harah doesn't know about? It doesn't matter which mussar sefer you learn from. The main thing is that you have to have a serious desire to improve your middos. If you try and improve, you will be able to outflank the yetzer harah" (Reb Aharon Leib, Artscroll, p.142).

Yaakov Avinu himself was successful in overcoming his struggles in both realms, and hence, he merited the name Yisrael. Hashem then promised him that in the future, his children, the Bnei Yisrael, would be successful as well, continuing on the path of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov/ Yisrael, meriting - and living up to - the essence of our name.

turn to Hashem for help and protection, recognizing that ultimately not everything is under our control.

When it comes to parenting as well, this two-pronged approach should form the basis of our fundamental strategy. Firstly, we must strive to be the best parents that we can be- by putting in the time, thought and effort essential to our success. As we have mentioned before, we should not assume that we will simply "figure this parenting thing out." Being a parent demands placing a tremendous amount of reflection and care into how we can best raise our children.

But after we have done what we can, we should never underestimate the other major aspect crucial to our success as parents- davening to G-d about our children. The importance and power of davening- particularly for success in the chinuch of our kids- is something that often gets overlooked.

We often put a lot of thought into certain aspects of how

we raise our kids- where to send them to school, to camp, etc. We also give of ourselves totally to encourage them to become the people that we dream for them to be. Yet as our children get older, we come to realize that, as with everything in life, there is so much about our children's lives that we cannot control.

This realization can be difficult to confront. It is at that point that we are meant to turn to Hashem and daven for help. In doing so, we recognize that ultimately, we are not raising our children alone, but are, in fact, doing so in partnership with G-d. There are so many factors that contribute to whom our child becomes- and to the potential success of our endeavors- that are beyond our control. The child's innate characteristics and traits, whom he meets and befriends, events and incidents that occur to him and around him in his lifetime, are all out of our hands. We must recognize how much we depend on G-d for success in raising our children- and we must daven on their behalf on a daily basis- not just in times of crisis or when something goes wrong.

Davening to Hashem for our kids can take many forms. For some it may consist of the special bracha that parents give their children every Friday night. Others have a custom to say a perek of Tehillim for each child every day. Whatever form our efforts take, however, the importance of keeping our children in mind during our tefillot cannot be overstated.

The story is told of a principal of a school in Eretz Yisrael who went to Rav Aryeh Leib Steinman to get advice about dealing with a problematic child, and to get permission to expel the student from the yeshiva. Rav Steinman turned to him and asked, "what is the boy's name?" The principal answered him. "And what's his mother's name?" Not sure

what Rav Steinman was getting at, the principal answered that he didn't know, but he could find out. Rav Steinman then responded- "what do you mean you don't know? Are you saying that you are thinking about throwing this student out, and you haven't even davened for him? How could that be!?" Part of being a mechanech, and parent, is to daven for those whom are under our care.

Recognizing this partnership with G-d can be incredibly meaningful and comforting. During moments of particular challenge and despair as we navigate this unfamiliar territory, we know that we always have whom to turn to for support- we are never alone, there is always more we can do. And this recognition can also be encouraging - as we are partnering with the best there is. Finally, davening to Hashem on behalf of our children has the added benefit of forcing us to think about, concretize, and verbalize the hopes and aspirations that we have for each of kids. While we may think about these goals often, it is important at times to reinforce them in a more concrete way and davening for them will help us do so.

On the eve of his meeting with Eisav, Yaakov underscored that, at moments of challenge and opportunity, Jews must strike a crucial balance. We must prepare and do all we can practically to be successful, and then we must turn to Hashem and daven that He help us as we move along our path.

We need to daven that to Hashem that He protect our children and give them the tools to be successful and productive in the ways that we dream for them. And of course, perhaps more importantly, we need to daven to Hashem that He should give us the wisdom and knowledge to make the right decisions in raising our children to be the best that they can be.

The Pursuit of Happiness

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

After much anticipation, Yaakov and Esav reunite. Though preceded by an arduous battle against a man suggest-ed by a midrash to have been Esav's representative angel (Bereishit Rabbah 77:3), the actual confrontation between the brothers is rather anticlimactic. After all of the build-up, the two share an embrace and even an apparently affectionate kiss before re-turning to their respective followers and continuing on their individual journeys.

However, if we look closely at a couple of relevant verses, we can discern an ideological war between the brothers. Yaakov offers Esav gifts, but the hunter responds, "I have plenty [yesh li rav]. Keep what is yours." (Bereishit 33:9) Yaakov, however, insists on Esav taking the peace offerings anyway, for "I have everything [yesh li kol]." (Bereishit 33:11)

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz highlights how this exchange demonstrates the core difference between

Yaakov and Esav's fundamental worldviews in his work, *Kli Yakar*: A person can have all of the gold and silver in the whole world, but still feel as though they are missing something meaningful. Likewise, a person can live a life of complete spiritual fulfillment and be happy with their lot in life even if they are lacking in possessions. Esav had much, but did not feel he had it all, while Yaakov had it all even without having much. Regardless of the material reality, Yaakov understood that he had all that he truly needed in his life. Yaakov embodied the famous teaching of Pirkei Avot 4:1: "Who is rich? One who is happy with their share in the world."

Rabbi Baruch Simon, one of the roshei yeshiva at Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, connects this concept with the very first comment of Rabbi Moshe Isserles (the Rama) on the Shulchan Aruch, in which he states that a person should always have in mind that Hashem is watching over and influencing their experience on earth. For once a person comes to that realization, they will be able to have a happier and richer experience.

This is not only a nice idea, but Rabbi Simon points out that it may have practical ramifications as well. In the Babylonian Talmud (Nedarim 38a), Rabbi Yochanan teaches that the Divine presence only dwells with those who are "mighty, wealthy, wise, and humble" and that "all of the prophets were wealthy." Maimonides quotes this position in both his Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 7:1) and his Shemoneh Perakim introduction to Pirkei Avot (Chapter 7). In the latter work, he explicitly clarifies that "wealthy" refers to those who have elevated their moral perspective and are thus satisfied with their lot in life.

In his *Guide for the Perplexed* (2:36), Maimonides makes it clear that prophecy can only come to those who have completely perfected themselves. Therefore, from his perspective, the ability to find happiness in one's lot is a sign of intellectual perfection to be sought after by all who are interested in attaining their full potential.

As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, zt"l wrote, "Happiness is not far away. It is here, but first we have to know how to look." (*Celebrating Life*, pg. 49) It is no surprise that Yaakov, regarded throughout Jewish tradition as representing the characteristic of Truth in its most pure sense, knew exactly where to look. But how might we go about looking for our happiness in the face of a world that seems so unhappy

sometimes? That's where the Rama's concept of placing Hashem in front of us at all times comes into play. It is by first recognizing that what we have in life is enough to make that kind of difference in the world, and finding happiness in that fact that we can then go out and actualize our potential most productively. By understanding that every moment deserves our full attention and contains infinite possibilities for us to awaken, we can learn to truly appreciate what we have and honestly say "yesh li kol - I have everything."