

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayishlach

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Coming soon: The Toronto Torah Parshah Podcast!

The Pursuit of Happiness

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

After much anticipation, Yaakov and Esav reunite. Though preceded by an arduous battle against a man suggested 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 returning 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."

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Summary

Continuing the theme of the previous chapter, we are told of another benevolent miracle brought by Elisha.

Na'aman, a successful officer in the Aramean army, has *tzara'at*. Upon the advice of his wife's Israelite maidservant, Na'aman seeks out a prophet in Israel to heal him of his affliction. The king of Aram supports his wishes and writes a letter to the king of Israel, asking the latter to heal Na'aman's *tzara'at*. The king of Israel is distraught upon reading the letter, believing that this is only a pretext for Aram to wage war against Israel when Israel fails to heal the *tzara'at*. The prophet Elisha hears of this and requests that Na'aman come to him for healing. (5:1-8)

Na'aman travels to Elisha and waits outside of his house. Without stepping outside, Elisha instructs Na'aman to immerse in the Jordan river seven times to heal his *tzara'at*. Na'aman angrily departs, complaining that Elisha didn't do anything, and that the rivers of Aram are better than the Jordan river. Nonetheless, Na'aman's servants encourage him to follow the guidance of

Elisha. They argue that Na'aman would have obeyed had the instruction been difficult, so certainly he should obey when the instruction is simple. He ultimately agrees and immerses seven times in the Jordan. When he emerges, Na'aman is clean of *tzara'at*. (5:9-14)

Na'aman returns to Elisha, proclaiming his faith in G-d. Na'aman repeatedly offers to pay Elisha for his services, but Elisha refuses to accept any payment. Na'aman also confesses that although he is now a believer in G-d, in the future he will have to escort the king of Aram to an idolatrous temple, where he may unwillingly bow to the idol. Elisha sends Na'aman back home. (5:15-19)

Elisha's servant, Gehazi, rejects Elisha's decision not to accept payment, and chases after Na'aman. He requests money and clothes in Elisha's name, allegedly to support visiting student prophets. Na'aman happily provides this. Gehazi pockets the money for himself and returns to Elisha. Gehazi lies about his whereabouts when questioned by Elisha. Elisha,

aware of everything that Gehazi did, curses Gehazi with Na'aman's *tzara'at*. (5:20-27)

Insight

Drawing on the gratuitous description of Na'aman as a great warrior in 5:1, a midrash explains that Na'aman was struck with *tzara'at* due to haughtiness. (Bamidbar Rabbah 7:5) But if this is the case, then Na'aman's quick cure is surprising. After all, at no point do we see an act of repentance from Na'aman. He simply obeys Elisha's instruction, immerses, and is cured!

Perhaps for Na'aman, complying with Elisha's direction is not so simple. As a proud commander, Na'aman could not bring himself to follow an illogical order. In fact, he says as much in his complaint of Elisha in 5:12. Therefore, when he submits to Elisha's will and immerses in the Jordan, Na'aman sets aside his pride and humbles himself in a true act of *teshuvah*. It is from Na'aman that we learn the strongest antidote to our arrogance: humility.

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It Happened in Israel: Ezra's Chareidim**Rabbi Steven Gotlib****Story**

It was on the 17th of Kislev that Ezra the Scribe went up to the Temple, tore his clothing, and ripped hair from his head in pain and protest. After bringing a sacrifice he, in full view of the public, dropped to his knees, prayed passionately, and cried to G-d in shame over the transgression of so many Jews who had just recently returned to their homeland from exile in Babylon. Men, women, and children gathered around to hear Ezra's resounding recitation of woe over the actions of their coreligionists.

What was the mass transgression, worthy of such a visible and visceral response? The Jews had just returned from exile only to take non-Jewish spouses. [Rashi contends that the marriages themselves happened in Babylon, but Bereishit Rabbah 18:5 and various commentators disagree.] Those who were watching and listening wept with Ezra, as Shechaniah ben Yechezkel vocalized what all were thinking: "We've sinned against G-d by marrying non-Jewish women, but there is still hope for us to make amends!" He then suggested making a covenant in accordance with the will of G-d and those who tremble at the Divine command. The men would expel the non-Jewish wives that they had taken, so that the Torah's laws could be obeyed. This was eventually done. (Ezra, Chapters 9 and 10)

Insight

The people mentioned by Shechaniah as trembling at the Divine command are referred to in the Hebrew text as *ha-chareidim be-mitzvat Elokeinu*. Most people nowadays would associate the word *chareidi* with something like "Ultra-Orthodoxy." This is more or less consistent with the interpretation offered by the Talmud (Bava Metzia 33b) where those whom Yeshayah calls *chareidim* (Yeshayah 66:5) are present-

ed as learned *talmidei chachamim* who each master particular areas of Torah.

However, an alternative, and perhaps more widely relatable, understanding can be found by looking at Rashi on the relevant Torah verse. In his comment to Ezra 10:3, Rashi defines the *chareidim* as those who demonstrate proper fear of Heaven (*yirat shamayim*). This is consistent with Rashi's commentary to Yeshayah 66:5, where he interprets the term *chareidim* as referring to "those who rush, trembling, to draw themselves near to G-d's words."

In other words, being *chareid* is about more than just sitting and learning for hours on end. It is also absolutely essential to be G-d-fearing, such that we rush to fulfill our obligations and responsibilities in this world rather than only grudgingly accepting them. Furthermore, to paraphrase an unpublished talk by one of the *roshei yeshiva* of Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, the opposite of *chareidi* is "socially Orthodox", someone whose observance is entirely a function of being raised in an Orthodox community rather than any personal relationship with G-d. A *chareidi* Jew determines his or her values by looking inward towards Torah and the Divine relationship, rather than by looking outward at their surroundings. This is a concept that all Jews can take to heart.

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Biography

Rabbi Shlomo Y. Zevin

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin was a Rabbi in Tel Aviv, judge in the Chabad Beit Din, member of the Chief Rabbinate's Rabbinical Council, and the first editor of the Talmudic Encyclopedia.

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef was born in what is today Belarus, in 1890. He was raised in a Chasidic environment, but he studied in Lithuanian yeshivot, such as the Mir Yeshiva. He was ordained by Rabbi Shemaryahu Noach Schneerson, leader of the Kopust branch of Chabad chasidut; the Rogatchover Gaon, Rabbi Yosef Rosen; and by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, author of the *Aruch HaShulchan*.

At a very young age, Rabbi Zevin began his rabbinic career as Rabbi of the town of Kesmerov. In 1936 he moved to Eretz Yisrael, becoming Rabbi of the Chabad community in Tel Aviv. After two years, he moved to Jerusalem. He was one of the leading Religious Zionist Rabbis, and he was elected several times to the Chief Rabbinate's Rabbinical Council. He would celebrate Yom Ha'Atzmaut with a *seudat mitzvah* feast, and recited Hallel (without a berachah).

Rabbi Zevin was a talented writer, authoring numerous books on a wide variety of topics. *LaTorah v'laMoadim* presents homiletic ideas on the parshah and Jewish festivals; *Moadim baHalachah* offers in-depth analysis of the laws of Jewish festivals. He analyzed different ways of learning in *Ishim v'Shitot*, and he composed a collection of Chasidic stories in the book *Sippurei Chasidim*.

In 1942, Rabbi Zevin and Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan founded the Talmudic Encyclopedia project. Rabbi Zevin planned the entries and topics to be discussed, as well as the broad principles of what should be included in the Encyclopedia. Rabbi Zevin was the main editor of all twelve volumes that came out in his lifetime. The Encyclopedia is well-accepted across the Torah world, and is used by Rabbis, rabbinical judges and *roshei yeshiva*.

Rabbi Zevin was extremely devoted to the Talmudic Encyclopedia. Even when his name was proposed for the Chief Rabbinate, he refused, saying that he must devote himself entirely to the Talmudic Encyclopedia. Rabbi Zevin received the Israel Prize for this work, in the category of Rabbinic Literature, and he also received the Rabbi Kook prize twice. Rabbi Zevin passed away in 1978.

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Torah and Translation

The Light or the Fire?

Rabbi S. Y. Zevin, HaMoadim baHalachah, Chanukah

Translated by Rabbi Yehuda Mann

שאלה זו יש להציג בנר חנוכה: מה מצוותה, להדליק אש או לעשות אור?... נחלקו בדבר בית שמאי ובית הלל: "פוחת והולך" או "מוסיף והולך".

האור משמש ביטוי ל"נר מצוה ותורה אור", ל"נר ד' נשמת אדם". אור הנשמה צריך לחדור לתוך כל הפנות הנדחות של האדם... ולהאיר את כל הרמ"ח והשס"ה שלו...

האש מסמלת את ביעור וכליון הרע, האש שורפת ומבערת את כחות הרע שנפש האדם פנימה, כדבר שנאמר "ובערת הרע מקרבך"...

ודאי אנו זקוקים לשני הכחות, לאש ולאור, אבל נחלקו שני ה"בתים" של שמאי והלל איפה להעמיד את הדגש החזק, מהו העיקר ונקודת הכובד בעבודת האדם. בית שמאי, כדרכם, מחמירים. אי אפשר לאדם להתרומם להאור העליון אלא אם כן יבער וישרוף את כל כחות הרע שבקרב... בית הלל מקלים. אדרבה, על ידי אור של התורה ממילא יגרש את החושך של הרע, מעט אור דוחה הרבה חושך מאליו...

ובימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול חשמונאי ובניו, היו שתי התופעות הללו - אש ואור. בתחילה השתמשו החשמונאים באש הקודש לבער ולכלות את הטומאה של תרבות היונים שהשתלטה על בארץ... "ואחר כך באו נינד וטהרו את מקדשך", אור התורה הוא במקדש ובכל הארץ, וליהודים הייתה אורה, זו תורה.

ונחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל על איזה משתי התופעות אנו עושים את הזכרון לדורות, בית שמאי לשיטתם, אומרים: הזכרון הוא לאש, לביעור הרע וכליון הטומאה, ובית הלל, כדרכם, סוברים: הזכרון הוא לאור...

ומאליו מובן, שאם העיקר הוא שריפת הרע וביעורו, הרי כל מה שהאש שורפת יותר, הולך ופוחת יותר הרע המתבער... פוחת והולך.

ואם הזכרון הוא האור, הרי כל מה שדולק יותר, מאיר יותר... מוסיף והולך. והלכה כבית הלל...

It is then understood that if the main point is burning evil and eradicating it, the more the fire burns, the less there is evil to destroy... it gradually decreases.

And if the commemoration is [for] the light, the more the light is lit, the more it spreads light... It gradually increases. And the law is like Beit Hillel...

This question should be presented regarding the Chanukah candles: what is the mitzvah - to light fire or produce light?... This was a dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel: whether to reduce the candles as Chanukah goes [from 8 to 1] or to increase the candles as Chanukah goes [from 1 to 8].

The light expresses the saying that "the commandment is a mitzvah, and the Torah is light," and the saying that "the lamp of G-d is the soul of man." The soul's light should penetrate into the most distant corners of the person... and enlighten all 248 [body parts] and 365 [sinews]...

Fire represents the destruction and extinction of evil. The fire burns and destroys the evil force in the man's soul, as the Torah says, "You shall destroy evil from your midst..."

Certainly, we need both powers, the fire and the light, but the houses of Shammai and Hillel argued which power to emphasize, what is the essence and the focus of the weight in a person's service. Beit Shammai are stringent, as is their way. One cannot be elevated by the higher light unless he destroys and burns the evil characteristics that lie within him... Beit Hillel are lenient. On the contrary, with the light of Torah one can expel the darkness of evil that lies in him. A small part of light can drive out plenty of darkness...

In the days of Matityahu son of Yochanan the high priest and his sons, there were these two phenomena - fire and light. At first the Hasmoneans used the holy fire to destroy and eliminate the impurity of Greek culture that took over the land... "And later, Your sons came and purified Your Temple." The light of Torah shone in the Temple and in all of the land, "and the Jews had light," meaning Torah.

And Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel argued which of these two phenomena we should commemorate across the generations. Beit Shammai, following their view, said to commemorate the fire, destroying evil and eliminating impurity. And Beit Hillel, following their view, said the commemoration is for the light...

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All in-person indoor classes require vaccination and other protective measures

Monday-Thursday

10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)

Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook

Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

Shabbat November 19-20

After 8:00 AM shacharit R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Simcha Suite (men)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Weekly Class, Shaarei Tefillah

Sunday November 21

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

9:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, Postmodernist Jewish Thought, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university) *not this week*

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Eruvin, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613 (univ)

10 AM to NOON: CHANUKAH LEARNATHON!
IN PERSON AT SHAAREI TEFILLAH! Or on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/chanukathon>

Idan Rakovsky: Miracles, Nature and the Candles In Between

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: Jews, Greeks and Beauty

Rabbi Yehuda Mann: Oil or War: Which was the Miracle?

Rabbi Chaim Metzger: What Angered the Maccabees?

Light Refreshments Served

3:00 PM Psychotherapists Denise Lawee and Noah Tile, and R' Mordechai Torczyner
Jewish Perspectives on Mental Health, for Limmud—register at <https://limmud.ca>

Monday November 22

8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud>

Tuesday November 23

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 2), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 8-9), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday November 24

6:15 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Beitzah, Shaarei Shomayim and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/beitza>

10:00 AM R' M Torczyner, The House that David Built, #3 of 3 ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

8:15 PM R' Chaim Metzger, Artscroll Through the Ages, BAYT and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/translated>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah Chabura, Clanton Park

Thursday November 25

8:30 AM R' Chaim Metzger, Trei Asar, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/trei> (university)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 22), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, email yemann@torontotorah.com for location (advanced, men)

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Gemara Bava Batra, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

Friday November 26

8:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 *advanced*
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

Coming Up!

November 26-27: Shabbaton at BAYT— "Jews and Greeks"!

8:15 PM - Special Friday Night Panel Discussion

Shiurim and Divrei Torah all day!

November 28: Chanukah Learnathon at the Forest Hill Jewish Centre!