

שמה קולנו



SHEMA KOLEINU: DIVREI TORAH FROM THE REBBEIM, TALMIDIM, AND FACULTY OF MTA

Parshas Vayishlach

פרשת וישלח

Brothers Collide

Noah Segelnick ('24)

In this week's *parsha*, *Parshas Vayishlach*, Yaakov had a critical encounter with Esav. Yaakov had just spent the last twenty years of his life living in his uncle Lavan's house. During this time, Yaakov managed to father almost all of the *shevatim* while resisting the terrible influence of Lavan. This was such an impressive feat that Yaakov felt it necessary to tell his brother the now famous line of, "*im Lavan garti*", which Rashi understands as containing the message of "*vitaryag mitzvos shamarti*," (*Bereishis* 32:5) telling Esav that despite living with his evil uncle for all these years, he still managed to keep all 613 *mitzvos*. However, despite all his merit from these accomplishments, the *pasuk* tells us that Yaakov was still very afraid of his eventual encounter with Esav. According to the *Da'as Zekeinim*, Yaakov's fear stemmed from the fact that while he was living with Lavan, Esav was able to fulfill the *mitzvos* of *kibbud av va'em* and living in *Eretz Yisrael*, while Yaakov couldn't. From

this, it is evident that these two *mitzvos* come with enormous *zechus* since Yaakov believed they gave Esav some potential power over him.

Even though Yaakov was frightened, he did not let that impact his planning. As Rashi says, Yaakov sent presents to Esav, davened to Hashem, and prepared his camp for war, in the event of a violent confrontation with Esav. In Yaakov's *tefillah*, he asks Hashem to save him from "*miyad achi miyad Esav*", "the hand of my brother the hand of Esav." This wording seems redundant. Esav is after all Yaakov's brother, so why is it necessary for him to reference Esav twice in one sentence? The *Beis Halevi* answers this question by stating the two references to Esav represent two different reasons that Yaakov feared Esav. When Yaakov mentions Esav, he is referring to the barbaric side of Esav, the person who would kill Yaakov if he had a chance. Conversely, when Yaakov mentions his brother, he is referring to Esav's brotherly side that would want to live with Yaakov in peace. This scared Yaakov because he had no

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interest in living with someone as evil as Esav. It is interesting to note that in the *pasuk*, Yaakov actually mentions his brother before mentioning Esav. This implies that Yaakov actually feared living with Esav more than death itself.

When Yaakov's meeting with Esav finally takes place, it becomes clear that Hashem answered both of Yaakov's prayers. Firstly, Yaakov is saved from physical danger when Esav decides to embrace Yaakov instead of attacking him with his four hundred men. Then, Yaakov is saved from spiritual harm when Esav surprisingly agrees to part ways with Yaakov despite originally requesting to travel together with Yaakov's camp.

Hopefully, we can take away a few lessons from this encounter. Firstly, we should recognize the importance of the *mitzvos* of *kibbud av va'em* and *yishuv ha'aretz*. Understandably, the *mitzvah* of living in *Eretz Yisrael* is one that many of us are unable to easily fulfill; however, almost every day multiple opportunities of *kibbud av va'em* present themselves. Yaakov's fear of this *mitzvah* as a *zechus* strong enough to potentially result in his defeat should encourage us to work on the performance of this crucial *mitzvah*. In addition, we can learn from Yaakov the importance of constantly looking out for our spiritual health. We should all try to emulate Yaakov and steer clear of the modern-day Esavs that may cause us spiritual harm.

We Will Prevail

Noam Sheffey ('25)

In this week's *parshah* we see an event happen that currently affects our daily lives. After Yaakov travels across the river *Yabok* he goes back to retrieve the *pachim ketanim*, the small vessels he left behind. When he goes to get them he gets into a fight with the *saro shel Eisav*. At the end of the fight, Yaakov gets hit in the *gid hanasheh*, otherwise known as the sciatic nerve. Therefore the *pasuk* says until this day we do not eat from the *gid hanasheh*. However, the question is why do we make such a big deal about the *gid hanasheh*? Out of all the events that Yaakov experienced in his lifetime, why do we single out this one? Both the *Da'as Zekeinim* and *Baalei Tosfos* suggest that it's a reminder that the children of Yaakov left him alone on his journey. The children of Yaakov should not have left him alone. Therefore, we have this event as a reminder to not leave anyone behind. We must take this into account with the events happening today, and we must remember every Jew matters. Furthermore,

this battle between Yaakov and the *saro shel Eisav* could be looked at as the fight between the Jews against our enemies. Even though we have so many enemies, and we get beat up so much there will be a *geulah* to remind us that we will always win. Yet, the *Sforno* looks at this a little differently. He asks the same question on why we are focusing so much on this one event that forbids us from having the *gid hanasheh*. He says that this injury that Yaakov suffered is insignificant to us in how we view these events. We refrain from speaking about the *gid hanasheh* and Yaakov's injury because we want to focus on the victory and not the fight he had. The *halacha* tells us not to be focused on Yaakov's injury or fight, but rather to focus on Yaakov's triumph. We are meant to be focused on this massive win over the *saro shel Eisav*. Additionally, the *Sforno* says if anything, the injury is a footnote to what happened. This one instance is a great example of how we as Jews could view ourselves through history. Throughout the times we have had lots of battles that have led to lots of bruises and injuries. Yet, at the end of the day, we must not focus on our injuries but rather focus on the triumphs we have experienced. A great example of this is coming up as we are celebrating Chanukah. Despite having a tough battle we focus on our triumph and the miracle that was to come. Hopefully, as we are in a time of war we could see similar outcomes of the past, and prevail gloriously against our enemies.

Physicality: Good or Bad?

Dovid Winston ('24)

In this week's *parsha*, Yaakov Avinu commanded the *malachim* to tell Esav on his behalf that, "*im Lavan garti*,"—"with Lavan I have sojourned" (*Bereishis* 32:5). On this *passuk*, one of Rashi's *peirushim* is that "*garti*" has the value of 613 in *gematria*, meaning that, "*im Lavan garti vitaryag mitzvos shomarti*"—"with Lavan the wicked I have sojourned, but I kept all the 613 *mitzvos*." However, this is not readily understood for three reasons. First, the basic meaning of the word "*garti*" is *lashon geirus*—being a stranger—so what does observing all the *mitzvos* have to do with that? Second, if, as Rashi explained, Yaakov meant to say that he kept all the *mitzvos*, why did he have to tell that to Esav? Third, what are we supposed to take away from this explanation?

The *Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 47:6)* states that "*ha'avos hein hein hamerkavah*"—"the *avos* are truly the [Divine] chariot." As the *Alter Rebbe* explains (*Tanya*, chapter 23), this means that all of

their organs were completely subservient to the Divine will, just like a chariot is subservient to the driver, without any connection to worldly affairs. There are moments in which we may be able to reach this status of *merkavah*, such as when we perform a *mitzvah*, but this is only fleeting, and the next moment we may even do an *aveirah*, *chas vishalom*. The *avos*, on the other hand, were always in this state of *bittul*—nullification—to the Divine will.

The meaning of the *passuk*, “*im Lavan garti*,” is that all the worldly things that filled Lavan’s existence—oxen, donkeys, flocks, slaves, maidservants—were only “*garti*” to Yaakov, strange things, because Yaakov’s home, as opposed to Lavan’s, was the *neshamah* and paragon of Torah and *mitzvos*. This is clear from what is said later in the *parsha* (*Bereishis* 33:17), “*vayiven lo bayis ulemikneihu asah sukkos*”—“he built for himself a house and for his cattle he made huts.” The word “*lo*” means “for him,” his essence, which is his *neshamah* and everything related to it. It is for this that Yaakov built a home, a permanent residence. The *neshamah* within us needs no part in the physical aspects of the world, as it does not have any connection to the material world until it becomes clothed in a body. For things of *gashmius*, therefore, he built huts, temporary dwellings.

From this, one can understand the connection between the basic meaning of the *passuk* and Rashi’s *drash*. In the sense that Yaakov was “*im Lavan garti*,” the *gashmius* was no more than *geirus*. They were not able to disturb his *ruchnius* at all, and he was ultimately still able to exclaim “*vitaryag mitzvos*

shomarti.” This is taken a step further by the next *passuk* (*ibid.* 32:6), in which Yaakov tells Esav, “*vayehi li shor vachamor tzon ve’eved vishifcha*”—“I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, slaves, and maidservants.” These things all became “*li*,”—“to [Yaakov],” part of his essence. Not only did the *gashmius* not weaken his *ruchnius* because it was only a state of *geirus*, but the *gashmius* was actually transformed into *ruchnius*.

The Medrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 75:6) says on that *passuk*, “*vayehi li shor...*” that “*chamor zeh melech haMashiach*”—“donkey” refers to King Mashiach.” As the Alter Rebbe explains (*Tanya*, chapter 37), the coming of *Mashiach* is dependent on us refining ourselves. Through each Jew’s purification of his body and portion in the world, as well as his utilization of the world for *kedusha*, *Mashiach* will be drawn closer. This explains the flow of the *pesukim* from “*im Lavan garti*” to “*vayehi li shor...*” Through the fact that the *gashmius* that surrounded Yaakov was merely on the level of *geirus*, in addition to Yaakov’s ability to turn the *gashmius* into vessels for *kedusha*, it is clear that he was ready for *Mashiach*. It is for this reason that Yaakov sent *malachim* to tell Esav this. Yaakov wanted to tell Esav that he had already completed his personal purification and that he was ready for *Mashiach*, thinking that perhaps Esav had done the same, so they could together bring the *geulah*. However, the *malachim* answered Yaakov that “*banu el achicha el Esav*”—“we came to your brother, to Esav” (*Bereishis* 32:7). From Yaakov’s perspective, it was “*achicha*”—his brother, ready to bring *geulah*, but from Esav’s side, he remained the same materialistic

A Short Vort

Flisha Cohen ('24)

וַיִּתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלֹת הַשָּׁחַר (בראשית לב:כה)

“And Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.” (*Bereishis* 32:25)

In this *pasuk*, the night before Yaakov is about to meet Esav, an angel comes and fights Yaakov. Rashi explains that this “man” who fought Yaakov was an angel representing Esav’s guardian angel. Since this happened the night before Yaakov was going to meet Esav, it symbolizes Yaakov’s confrontation with the challenges of what is going to happen next. The Radak adds a little insight on this. He says that this incident highlights Yaakov’s power, and his refusal to give up despite this challenge. He also says that this is sent from Hashem to show Yaakov that he should not fear Esav, because if he can beat this angel in a fight then surely he can beat Esav. This scene teaches us about the inevitability of facing challenges in our lives. Yaakov’s nighttime battle reflects our inability to avoid challenges whether they be internal or external. Rashi’s insight along with the Radak shows the importance of battling these challenges and facing them head on even when you’re alone. The lesson we can ultimately learn is that our spiritual and personal growth often comes from wrestling with life’s challenges, and coming out of those challenges a bigger and better person.

person who lacked refinement, and would be unfit to bring *geulah*.

Torah and all of its teachings are eternal, for every Jew, in every time, and in every place. What we can learn from this episode is that each Jew must know that even if his surroundings seem to be dark, without *kedusha*, and lacking the proper purification for *geulah*, one must prepare himself in every way, "*tzon ve'eved vishifcha*," to bring the final redemption. How then, do we prepare ourselves? "*Im Lavan garti*." One must know that the entire world is nothing more than a temporary dwelling awaiting refinement, as Dovid Hamelech wrote in *Tehillim* (119:19), "*geir anochi ba'aretz*"—"I am a stranger in the land."

Indestructible Yisrael

Yoni Jandhasetti ('26)

In this week's *parsha* we hear that Yaakov and Esav reunite together. When Yaakov is trying to make Esav accept the gifts he prepared, Esav responds that he has plenty and that Yaakov should keep the gifts. Yaakov then says back to Esav that Hashem has

been kind to him and he has everything. Rashi explains that when Yaakov says he has everything, he means that Hashem has given him all that he needs, while Esav arrogantly made it known that he had more than he needed. Another interpretation of this interaction is that they reflect different perspectives on the world and their possessions. "Plenty" here could mean that although Esav has a good deal of assets, he always desires more. In contrast, Yaakov saying he has everything could mean that he believes that as far as materialistic things, he doesn't lack anything. We see from here the difference between the brothers, that Yaakov was satisfied with what he had and needed nor wanted anything additional, while Esav was never satisfied with what he had and was always flaunting his wealth.

Esav's guardian angel wrestled with Yaakov over the blessings from Yitzchak. During the fight Yaakov explained that he deserved the blessings more than Esav because his descendants would accept the Torah and study it. In response to this, Esav's angel claimed that towards the end of exile, the majority of Jews would become neglectful towards providing

Yahrzeits & Insights: This Week in Jewish History

Jake it Slow! - Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman zt"l



The Ponevezher Rav, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, was once riding on the subway in New York City late at night.

He noticed a group of hoodlums glancing furtively in his direction. He sensed that they were about to accost him, and he was carrying a large sum of money that he had raised for his Yeshiva. Thinking quickly, he took a note out of his pocket and approached the group. Pointing to an address that was written on the paper, he asked in broken English, "Can you please tell me how I get to this address?"

Smiling slightly at the naïveté of the elderly rabbi, the leader of the group replied, "We'll do even better – we will take you there. Just get off at the next stop with us, and we'll show you where it is."

When the doors of the train opened at the next station, the Rav made a sweeping gesture toward the doors with his hand, honoring his "escorts" to alight first. After they stepped off onto the platform, the Rav readied himself as if he were to step down as well. He dallied just long enough to allow the doors to begin sliding shut, and then he quickly retreated into the subway car, leaving the group of thugs stranded on the platform as the train pulled away with him safely inside of it!

When he returned to the Yeshiva, he recounted the incident and expressed his gratitude for the great *Chesed Hashem* that he experienced. The Talmidim were astonished at the Rav's astuteness and genius, at how the Rav devised such a clever plan extemporaneously.

The Rav corrected them dismissively, "Please don't think that I'm so clever to have devised such a genius plan on my own; I just know how to read a *pasuk* in the Torah!"

To his bewildered audience, which included Rav Abba Grossbard, the Rav explained:

"The Torah tells us in *Parshas Vayishlach*, that after Yaakov makes peace with Esav, the latter offered to travel together with the former. Yaakov, of course, preferred not to have the company of his wicked brother, but did not want to frustrate the fragile peace agreement that they had just managed to reach:

"Let my lord go ahead of his servant....", he told Esav,

".....ואני אתנהלה לאטי לרגל המלאכה אשר לפני ולרגל הילדים עד אשר אבא אל אדני
שעירה
(בראשית לג:ד)

"..... and I will make my way at my slow pace according to the gait of the flock before me and the gait of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir."
(*Bereishis* 33:14)

"In truth," explained the Rav, "Yaakov had no intention of traveling to Seir. He knew that living in close proximity to Esav would be unwise and dangerous – both pragmatically and existentially. But he avoided insulting Esav by telling him to go ahead, and that he (Yaakov) would catch up. I learned from this *pasuk* that when a Jew must extract himself from those who might cause him harm, he can do so by pretending to go along with them, but moving at a slower pace and leaving them waiting for him. That is what I did on the train; I was simply following the plan of Yaakov Avinu!"

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support to the people who study the Torah, and this would cause them to become much less devoted to their learning. This is our first insight into the true meaning of the battle, the ever present importance of Torah and the struggle to continue to learn through difficult times.

However, there is more to discover. During their fight, the *pasuk* tells us that the angel struck and dislocated Yaakov's upper thigh bone. The Zohar explains that the "upper thigh bone" refers to the supporters of Torah study. This is what it means when it says that, just as a person's thigh supports his body so that he can stand, supporters of Torah help people so that they can learn. When the angel struck Yaakov, he became vulnerable with the respect to the contributors towards Torah study. This revelation shows the true meaning of this conflict.

The actions of the *avos* are a predetermined sign to their descendants. In every generation, those who hate the Jews try to "wrestle" with us to try and weaken the determination of those who study the Torah. When they see the Torah learners are unable to be weakened, they aim instead towards the supporters of Torah, and do their best to weaken their continued support. Unfortunately, in this area, they succeed to undermine financial contributions to Torah. However, the Torah reveals to us that Yaakov continued to battle even after his "thigh support" was corrupted. This is a sign that the *talmidei chachamim* will continue their learning even after their financial help is compromised. In the end, Yaakov will emerge from this struggle and will become even more determined because of it as a result of being given the name "Yisrael".

But why is the name "Yisrael" so significant? The name didn't just end up being Yaakov's new name, but also ended up being a name for the Jewish people. Doesn't the name seem to have a negative meaning of fighting with Hashem? Shouldn't a name used so powerfully have a positive connotation?

Rashi gives a unique answer. Two *parshios* ago, in *Parshas Toldos*, Yaakov tricked his father into giving him the blessings that were intended for his brother Esav. While Yaakov had a good reason for it, he still had to disguise himself to get it. However, when he gets the name "Yisrael", Rashi states that it is an indication that from then on blessings will come to Yaakov through an open and noble manner. This also shows his complete victory against his brother's angel, that now he has earned it properly. The name Israel isn't about hostility and conflict, but rather it is about aiming towards goals and working to succeed in a noble way, even if it

means making hard decisions and overcoming difficult obstacles.

Esav's Embrace: The Influence of Desires

Yehuda Laub ('26)

In this week's *parsha*, we find Yaakov Avinu in a precarious situation, on the run from his brother Esav. The tension escalates as Yaakov is forced to confront Esav and his men. Surprisingly, the encounter takes an unexpected turn, as the *passuk* recounts,

וַיִּרְץ עֶשָׂו לִקְרַאתוֹ וַיַּחֲבֹקְהוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל-צַוְאָרוֹ וַיִּשָּׁקֶהוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ
(בראשית לג:ד)

meaning Esav embraced Yaakov, and they wept together. This raises a perplexing question: if Esav harbored such animosity towards Yaakov, why the sudden display of affection, let alone the emotional embrace?

Rav Elyakim Rosenblatt zt"l explained the following in a shiur. Esav's actions were not driven by a sudden change of heart, but rather by the overpowering force of his desires. Esav, consumed by a desire for honor and wealth, found himself unexpectedly gratified by Yaakov. The pivotal moment occurred when Yaakov instructed his servants to address Esav as "master" and bowed before him, endowing him with significant honor. Moreover, the generous gift Yaakov presented to Esav was not just substantial but filled with abundance, showering him with riches.

In this context, it becomes evident that Esav's overwhelming desires, namely for honor and wealth, led him to perceive Yaakov in a new light. The very person whom he considered his worst enemy became, in an instant, his best friend. The transformative power of desire, as depicted in this narrative, serves as a poignant reminder of its profound impact on human relationships and behavior. Esav's sudden affection for Yaakov emphasizes the influence that desires can have on individuals, altering their perceptions and relationships in ways that may seem contradictory.

Parsha Puzzlers!

1. How many times in the Torah is a tree used as a burial spot?
2. What name did Esav give Aholivama and why?
3. Which person mentioned in this week's *parsha* was "of no fixed address"?

Answers:

1. Twice, and both in *parshas Vayishlach*. In *Bereishis* 35:4, Yaakov buries the idols that were in his household under a tree near Shechem, and a few *pesukim* later (35:8), Devorah is buried under a tree near Beis El.
2. Esav called her Yehudis, hoping to fool Yitzchak into believing that she had given up idol worship (Rashi on *Bereishis* 36:2).
3. Baal-Chanan ben Achpor, one of the kings mentioned in this week's *parsha*, is the only king mentioned who does not have a place associated with his name. The Baal Haturim explains that he had many enemies and was therefore constantly on the run (Baal Haturim *Bereishis* 36:38).

These questions and answers were adapted from "Torah IQ: The Great Torah Riddle Book" with the permission of the author.

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