

Peninim On The Torah

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Parashat Vayishlach

But he got up that night... and crossed the ford of Yabok... Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him. (32:23,24)

Chazal teach us that Yaakov Avinu had forgotten some pachim ketanim, small pitchers, and returned to retrieve them. They derive from our Patriarch's action that "to the righteous, their money is more dear to them than their bodies." They earn every penny diligently and honestly, thus everything they own is very dear to them. Is that a reason to endanger one's life? In fact, Chazal in Pirkei Avos 3:5, admonish us to beware of the night and to refrain from going out alone. "If a person is awake at night, or travels on the road alone... then he can blame himself if anything bad happens to him." The night is a time when the mazikin, spiritual demons, prevail. The road presents its own set of dangers. One who puts himself into a dangerous situation has only himself to blame if he suffers as a result of his foolhardy decision. Yaakov endangered himself for some little jugs that probably were not worth very much. Was it worth it? Was it the correct thing to do? Apparently, if Yaakov did it, it was the proper action to take - but why?

The Arizal explains that Yaakov viewed his material possessions as gifts from Hashem. When one receives a gift from the King of Kings, he makes certain not to lose it. We view our possessions as something we either purchased, earned or deserved. We look at all the parties involved in enabling us to acquire our material possessions - but we never think about the true source of all that income. From where did it actually come? The righteous understand that it all begins and ends with Hashem, the Source of all income. Therefore, they have a deep and abiding respect for their possessions, regardless of their monetary value. It is not what it is, but, rather, from Whom it comes.

Probably the greatest gift that we receive from Hashem is the gift of life. We have become so complacent with life that we fail to recognize its Source. I recently read a story about Horav Yaakov Kaminetzky, zl, that underscores this idea. His devotion to Klal Yisrael, to the Klal, general community, and the prat, individual Jew, was legendary. As a man of ninety years old, he was certainly entitled to take it easy, to have some "down" time for himself, but he was not that way. He would tell his Rebbetzin never to leave the phone off the hook - even during meals. "Picture the frustration," he would say, "of a person who calls, finds the line busy, and calls again - only to find the line still busy. Can you imagine his frustration? Besides, my feeling is that Hashem has granted me these extra years as a gift for me to use for others. How can I squander my time for my personal comfort?"

The Sanzer Rav, zl, would record in a notebook every single moment that he did not devote to Torah or mitzvos. One year, prior to Yom Kippur, he tallied up the minutes, and it totaled three hours. He then wept for three hours, asking Hashem for Divine forgiveness. Time is short; time is precious; time is a gift. It is not to be wasted.

Horav Meir zl, m'Premishlan would give everything away to the poor. He once remarked, "Every day I thank the Almighty that having money is not a mitzvah. If it were, I do not believe I could sleep a single night knowing that I have the means, while there are those less fortunate than I who are going hungry." When one recognizes that he has been granted a gift, he delves into the purpose of that gift.

And a man wrestled with him (Yaakov) until the break of dawn. When he (the angel) perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip; so Yaakov's hip-socket was dislocated...the sun rose for him...and he was limping on his hip. (32:25,26,32)

Yaakov's Avinu's handicap did not last very long. He was struck at alos ha'shachar, daybreak, and was healed by the zerichas ha'shemesh, rising sun. This implies that Eisav's guardian angel did not have the power to overwhelm Yaakov during a time that was either clearly night or clearly day. It was only during this small window of opportunity between alos ha'shachar and netz hachamah, daybreak to sunrise, that he was able to achieve a measure of success. What does this teach us? Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, explains this homiletically. Night and day represent clarity. Whether it is clear day or dark night, it is unambiguous. These two concepts reflect Klal Yisrael's spiritual condition when it is strong, conclusive and free of doubt. Under such conditions, there is no question concerning Klal Yisrael's ability to withstand challenge and triumph over adversity. This idea applies equally to the individual. When a person's beliefs are unequivocal, and his moral posture and perspective are not vague, he can overcome the trials that confront him. As long as he is rooted solidly in his Torah- study and ethical demeanor, he will triumph through every encounter with the forces of Eisav.

It is only when he is philosophically on shaky ground, when his emunah, belief in Hashem, is unclear, that his situation is compared to a twilight zone, which is neither dark nor light. It is not night, but it is also not yet day. This is symbolized by the period between daybreak and sunrise. It is no longer dark, but it is not yet fully light. During this period of obscurity, Eisav can grasp a foothold in us, squeeze himself in, and even, at times, succeed in swaying us.

Eisav's angel is the yetzer hora, evil inclination, who knows that it is during these times in which we are unsure of ourselves and our beliefs that he must launch his spiritual offensive against us. This is our weak point, and he will make the most of it. Our moment of indetermination, our lack of clarity, is his window of opportunity. He is sure to seize the moment. The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna interprets this idea into the pasuk in Bereishis 4:7, "L'pesach chatas roveitz." "Sin rests at the door." A pesach is an opening, a doorway. When man prepares the opening, when he opens the door, he allows the sin to enter. When there is doubt, it creates an access for the yetzer hora. Chavah said to the serpent, "Of the fruit of the tree... You shall not eat of it nor touch it, lest you die." (ibid.3:3) By saying "lest you die,"

she was implying that death was only a possibility. She was unsure. This allowed the serpent to penetrate the doorway that she created. Had she said, "You will surely die," with clarity and certainty, the serpent would not have had a chance.

This is the lesson of the gid ha'nashe, the sinew that moved out of place. Anything that is not in its place or in its proper perspective is in danger of falling prey to the winds of change. When we are firmly rooted in our heritage and strongly committed to transmitting the legacy to the next generation, nothing can stand in our way.

Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him...when he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip...Therefore, the Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the displaced sinew on the hip socket. (32:25,26, 33)

Yaakov Avinu's encounter with the guardian angel of Eisav is an experience that remains eternalized in the annals of Jewish history. There is more to this confrontation than meets the eye. The Zohar Hakadosh says that this encounter took place on the night of Tisha B'Av. When the angel succeeded in striking the socket of Yaakov's hip, it became a portent for the Jewish nation that Tisha B'Av would remain a day on which Eisav and his minions of evil would have the ability to prevail over us. The angel did not affect Yaakov, since he quickly healed from the mishap. It affected, however, the future generations of the Patriarch, an idea which is symbolized by the yerech, hip.

Children are referred to as yotzei yerech, those "who go out from the hip." Therefore, Tisha B'Av became a night when the forces of evil have prevailed against us. It was the night that the meraglim, spies, returned and disparaged Eretz Yisrael. It was the night that Klal Yisrael overreacted and wept for no justifiable reason. Hashem declared, "You cried needlessly; I will give you a reason to cry for generations." Tisha B'Av commemorates that fateful night with its own set of tragedies: the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash and a number of other calamities that have taken their toll on our People. In other words, it is not that the Ninth of Av became a day that denotes negativity and tragedy because of what has historically occurred on that day. Rather, there are "good" days and "not such good" days - days which for some reason have been rendered as days that are not fortuitous for Jews. Horav Zvi Hirsch Broide, zl, explains that time, as it was originally created, stands still. We travel through time, and there are "station" stops during the calendar year which are designated by Hashem and maintain the same attributes and spiritual context as that date held in the original calendar of creation. Thus, Shabbos has been imbued with the exact forces that prevailed in the original Shabbos Bereishis of Creation. Pesach has the same forces that are endemic to geulah, liberation. Adar has the qualities inherent in simchah, joy. Av is a month during which misfortune has had its reign. The Ninth of Av is a day that from the creation of time has been designated for trouble and calamity. We have only to peruse our history to perceive this reality.

It is due to this that Eisav's angel chose this unfortuitous night to challenge Yaakov. He knew that the forces of evil and impurity have greater power on this night. Indeed, the Chasam Sofer posits that Hashem enabled the meraglim to return to their camp three days earlier than planned. He did not want them to be on the road during the Ninth of Av, because of that day's negativity. It would be too much of a challenge for them. Regrettably, despite returning early, they nonetheless fell into the trap of Tisha B'Av, memorializing it forever as a day of even greater calamity.

Interestingly, the Zohar HaKodesh says that eating on Tisha B'Av is tantamount to eating the gid

ha'nashe. Furthermore, the Sifrei Kabbalah say that the three hundred and sixty-five prohibitive mitzvos each correspond to one day of the yearly calendar, and the mitzvah of gid ha'nashe coincides with the Ninth day of Av! Apparently, there are times in the Jewish calendar that are propitious, and there are times that are not. This awareness gives us all the more reason to acknowledge and appreciate the good fortune that Hashem provides for us.

Yaakov arrived intact at the city of Shechem. (33:18)

The first place of significance that Yaakov Avinu visited upon returning to Eretz Yisrael was Shechem. The Ramban applies the rubric of Maaseh Avos siman l'banim, "all that occurred to the forefathers is a portent of what will happen to their descendants on a general, national level." Indeed, Shechem was the first place that Klal Yisrael conquered upon entering the land. Avraham Avinu also first approached Shechem when he entered Eretz Yisrael. On the very day that Klal Yisrael entered the land, they went to Har Gerizim and Har Eival, which are situated in the Shechem district. Something about this place must have caused Avraham, Yaakov and Klal Yisrael to commence their relationship with Eretz Yisrael at this specific location.

The Shem MiShmuel gives us a deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of the place called Shechem. When Yaakov arrived in Shechem, he experienced an unfortunate incident in which his daughter, Dinah, was violated by Shechem ben Chamor, who was the area's ruler. After his beastly act, he asked for Dinah's hand in marriage. The condition that Yaakov's sons demanded, in order to grant permission for this union, was that all the men in the city circumcise themselves. Shechem agreed, and the rest is history.

Interestingly, when Shechem asked for Dinah's hand, she is referred to by the Torah as "the daughter of Yaakov." She had a name. Why is she not referred to by her name? The Avnei Nezer, father of the Shem MiShmuel, explains that he was not merely interested in satisfying his physical desires, he wanted Dinah because she was "Yaakov's daughter"! He wanted to be a part of Yaakov's unique world. In truth, this is implied by the name "Shechem," which means "segment" or "portion." He sought a portion of Yaakov's family. He did not want Dinah simply as a wife, but also to share in his future father-in-law's distinction. This attitude is in contradiction to the general position which one who seeks to convert to Judaism must maintain. A ger tzedek, righteous convert, should feel privileged to be a part of Klal Yisrael. Shechem, however, felt that Klal Yisrael owed him something!

Every word in the Hebrew language describes the essence of its subject. Thus, the word shechem aptly describes the individual who was named Shechem. It was not a coincidence that he and the city's inhabitants lived in Shechem. They all personified the meaning of shechem - segment, portion. Each person wanted his own portion in life. They all sought individuality, significance and personal distinction. Being a part of a larger entity, of a community, of an organization, was not for them. Shechem was a place that infused its inhabitants with a feeling of importance and worthiness.

The character trait signified by Shechem is a double-edged sword. One can apply it positively, saying that bishvili nivra ha'olam, "the world was created for me." He can perform one mitzvah and have the privilege of tipping the scales of merit in his favor in order to save an entire world. Having a feeling of self-worth and self-confidence is extremely important in one's quest for Torah distinction.

On the other hand, if one misapplies this character trait, it can lead to his downfall. He becomes so obsessed with furthering "himself," his goals and objectives, that his principles and his position on

everything revolve around himself. He becomes so self-oriented that he will not permit anything to stand in the way of his personal achievement. He becomes so arrogant that people, society and even G-d may not dispute him. Such a person refuses to accept criticism, so that he can never be corrected. He is perfect in his own eyes.

In other words, the middah of "shechem" is something we all need in varied dosages in order to succeed in life. Like all therapeutic devices, however, too much can be destructive. To succeed one must be driven. He must be able to triumph over challenge and adversity, to stand up for what he believes. In order to complete a project of significance, one must feel good about himself, or else the project is doomed from its inception. The flip side is obvious. Personal empowerment and independence can lead to arrogance. Self-sufficiency and inflexibility are the precursors of haughtiness. The shechem character trait has to be carefully blended into the human persona, so that it does not overpower the individual, undermining his potential for success.

This is why Klal Yisrael began their assault on Eretz Yisrael through the city of Shechem. Until that time, they had been living in the wilderness, the descendants of slaves- certainly not what we would consider the necessary attributes for conquering a land. This was probably the greatest enterprise that they ever encountered. It would demand an incredible amount of self-assurance and drive to overcome the awesome and daunting task that confronted them. They received their boost of energy and self confidence in Shechem. It launched their mindset and energized their drive to conquer, to succeed, to triumph for Hashem.

There is a caveat that must be observed in Shechem. Too much indulgence in the character trait of shechem can lead to self reliance and arrogance. The Avos attempted to ameliorate this fear, to prevent plunging into the trap of shechem. Avraham and Yaakov, who were paragons of humility and self-effacement, sought to temper the shechem effect on future generations. Their visitation to Shechem ensured that the positive aspects of Shechem could be employed when necessary, and a proper perspective on life and success could still be retained. Through the established rule of Maaseh Avos siman labanim, they transmitted this ability to their descendants, so that they could receive the proper inspiration from this place without losing the balance between self-confidence and arrogance.

Shechem was a holy place with incredible potential. Yet, it was a place that has been recorded in the annals of Jewish history as one of disaster and strife. It is not the place that is inherently bad. Shechem can bring out the best in a person, but if not checked and tempered properly, it can lead to personal disaster. The sale of Yosef resulted from the brothers' refusal to submit to his leadership. The monarchy of Klal Yisrael was split due to Yerovam's arrogance, his refusal to accept the Davidic monarchy and the authority of the Bais Hamikdash. Shechem empowered them. It also set them up for destruction. Is that not the story of life? The greatest good can suddenly, with too much indulgence, become destructive.

The angels returned to Yaakov. (32:7)

It is noteworthy that the wicked Eisav was able to gaze and converse with Heavenly Angels and it had virtually no impact on him. He continued along his way as if nothing incredible had transpired. On the other hand, when Eisav met with Yaakov Avinu, his whole attitude changed. The hardened criminal, the nefarious rogue who had no respect for anything - not even Heavenly Angels - was moved

by the visage and presence of a tzaddik, righteous person. Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, explains that this is not an anomaly. Indeed, Eisav, having been raised in the home of the Patriarch Yitzchak, had a clear idea of what a tzaddik looked like and the spiritual plane that a tzaddik could achieve. Therefore, when Eisav came face to face with his brother, the tzaddik, his entire being changed. He could not act with the same evil that was so much a part of his psyche. True, he did not permanently change and remained the evil Eisav until his last moment, but for the time that he was in Yaakov's presence, he was a changed man.

It is related that when the Alter, zl, m'Novardok visited a small town where some of his yeshivah's alumni lived, he was told about one of his ex-talmidim, students, who had left the fold and become an agnostic. Despite every attempt by his host to dissuade him, Rav Yoizel insisted on meeting with this young man. Their conversation ranged through many topics, but Rav Yoizel did not succeed in generating a positive change in the young man. Yet, he was not deterred. He said, "He will no longer perform an aveirah, sin, with the same enthusiasm and satisfaction as before. I have given him a conscience that has diminished his desire to sin."

This is the impact of a tzaddik's gaze. In the Kisvei, Writings, of the Talmidei Ha'Arizal, it is related that the Ari was able to gaze upon an individual's forehead and perceive the aveiros b'shogeg, unintentional sins, that he had committed. So powerful was his holiness, so compelling was his perception. He felt that it was all revealed on a person's countenance. How much more so can we be inspired by a tzaddik's countenance.

Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him. (32:25)

This is the sad commentary on the Jews' history throughout the millennia: Yaakov Avinu was left alone. A minority among the nations, a lamb among the wolves; this is Klal Yisrael's lot. But, it is also our distinction - "Behold! It is a nation that will dwell in solitude" (Bamidbar 23:9) - and, perhaps, our salvation. As long as we do not assimilate, there is hope for our future. As long as we dwell in solitude, we remain distinct. This idea applies equally to the individual Jew. True, togetherness is vitally important, but not to the extent that one loses his individuality. Every person should be a distinct entity. Horav Uri, zl, m'Streisk, encouraged every Jew to take time out during the day to meditate upon who he is and what is his mission in life. One who does not do so, places himself in danger of losing his identity and fails to actualize his inherent potential.

If the individual loses his identity it undermines the entire purpose of unity. Rav Uri commented that it is a well-known axiom that every Jew is represented by a letter in the Torah. If any letter is damaged or missing, the Torah is rendered invalid until the correction is made. Likewise, if any single Jew is missing from the Jewish nation, he must be restored. We know that if any letter in the Torah touches another letter, it must be separated. Why? If the letters represent the Jewish People, what is wrong if they adhere to each other? We derive from here that unity does not supercede individuality. Every Jew is an individual - a status that should be recognized and empowered. Let us use the letters of the Torah as our guide to true unity.

Then he (the Angel) said, "Let me go, for dawn has broken." (32:27)

Rashi explains that the Angel that had been contending with Yaakov Avinu throughout the night asked to be released. It was his turn to sing Shirah, Hashem's praises, as part of the Heavenly chorus. It is noteworthy that from the time that this Angel had been created, the opportunity to sing Shirah before Hashem had never materialized until that very day. Why? Horav Moshe Soloveitchik, zl, cites his grandfather, Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, who explains that in order to understand this anomaly, it is essential that we have a deeper comprehension of the Angel's function. The Angel representing Eisav is the Satan, "aka" the yetzer hora, evil-inclination. An Angel sings praises before Hashem when this Angel carries out his function and purpose in being created and causing a Kiddush Hashem. Then, he expresses his praise to Hashem for granting him the opportunity to fulfill Hashem's Will.

Although the yetzer hora, alias the Satan, was created for the purpose of leading man to sin and then serving as his prosecutor, he does not really want to succeed at his position (as an Angel of Hashem). Indeed, he does not want man to listen to him. He is created to encourage man's downfall - and man is instructed to resist and overcome his blandishments. Hashem does not create evil, nor does evil emerge from Him. Thus, the Satan is an Angel with a difficult vocation - he is both Eisav's Angel and an Angel of Hashem.

The Angel that fought with Yaakov had regrettably been successful until he met Yaakov. Every person whom he had attempted to dissuade from any form of religious or ethical commitment fell prey to him. He succeeded, but, in effect, he lost. He still could not sing Shirah before Hashem. He had not yet catalyzed anyone to come closer to Hashem - until he confronted Yaakov. Here was a challenge. He tried very hard, using every philosophical argument that he could conceive. But, he could not sway Yaakov. This was a spiritual conflict of epic proportion - and the Satan lost to the ish tam, perfect and wholesome man, whose life was filled with Torah and mitzvos. Finally, the Satan could return to Heaven to sing Hashem's praises. He had fulfilled the purpose for which he was created. He lost.

No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael. (32:29)

We are taught by Chazal that maasei Avos siman la'banim, the experiences of the Forefathers are a portent for the events that will befall their children. While this principle is true regarding all three of the Patriarchs, it has stronger application concerning Yaakov Avinu, who is the ancestor of Klal Yisrael exclusively. When Saro shel Eisav, the Angel of Eisav, conferred the name Yisrael on Yaakov, he thereby sent a message to his descendants.

As Yaakov prepared for his encounter with Eisav, a remarkable incident took place during the night. While Yaakov was all alone in the bleak darkness, someone suddenly began to wrestle with him. Chazal tell us that this "someone" was an Angel representing Eisav. It was his old enemy, attempting to stack the deck, to prevent Yaakov from returning to his homeland. Chazal describe this Angel in different terms, which imply his appearance and the methods he employed to beat Yaakov. Some say he appeared to Yaakov as a strong-armed robber, a vicious bandit, weapon in hand, poised to steal and kill. Others say he came dressed in the garb of a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, assuming the position of sage, counselor, resorting to prejudice and deception, in order to frustrate Yaakov's efforts at return. Yet another interpretation contends that he appeared as a shepherd, using the guise of simplicity, faith, morality and love to convert Yaakov and subvert his efforts to continue on.

Yaakov fought valiantly and, subsequently, won. True, he sustained a crippling blow;

nonetheless, his determination and fortitude triumphed. He was even able to elicit a blessing from the aggressive Angel.

Horav Aharon Soloveitchik, zl, draws an inspiring and meaningful picture of this scene and derives a number of significant lessons. Throughout the millennia, we have struggled and contended with the representatives of Eisav. Throughout the long darkness of galus, exile, we have suffered as they made every attempt to thwart our mission and discourage our beliefs. They have appeared in all forms. At times, Eisav's emissary came as a robber and a murderer, pillaging and humiliating, destroying and persecuting us for no apparent reason other than the fact that we were Jews. There were other times, when he came as "achi," my brother, sweet, charming, seeking to lure us away with his pagan glamour and false facade. Then there is a third scenario that even at the break of dawn, when the darkness of exile begins to lighten, when the principles of enlightenment and democracy are becoming part of a world order, when we, as Jews, are "supposedly" accepted, we will still have reason to fear the pernicious Eisav. At this time, he will send his emissary guised in the robe of scholarship, bedecked in ministerial garb, with one goal in mind - to dissuade the Jews from leading their own unique spiritual life. He often succeeds in convincing them to eschew their nationalistic aspirations, to renege on Judaism and assimilate with the greater world community. In the end, just as their ancestor Yaakov emerged victorious, so will we also triumph over this form of adversity and even elicit the praise and admiration of Eisav's descendants.

In the text of the blessing, Eisav's Angel says to Yaakov that his name will now be Yisrael, "For you have striven im Elokim, with G-d, and with people and you have prevailed." According to Targum Onkelos the term Elokim refers to Hashem, while the word im, usually translated as "with", now means "before". Thus, the word im has two meanings: Yaakov fought before G-d and with people and prevailed. Onkelos' translation teaches us that Yaakov's distinction was that he led a struggle against people - only it was before G-d. In other words, before G-d, in areas of theology and spirituality, a Jew cannot adapt to the prevailing environment. In matters of ethics and religion, there is only one path of belief - ours. A Jew must be an Ivri - on one side, regardless of who is on the other side. With regard to other areas, the sciences, civil matters, one may adapt a policy that pursues peace and harmony. It is only in the area of religion, "before G-d", that we are to be intractable.

Rav Soloveitchik derives another important lesson in our striving to maintain religious distinction. The Torah does not use the word nilchamta, you have fought. It uses the word sarisa, you have striven. Nilchamta implies a conflict entailing physical force and verbal abuse with the purpose of delivering a crushing blow to an opponent. Sarisa, on the other hand, intimates a striving towards leadership, succeeding by attempting to arouse the latent good, spiritual potential and noble qualities inherent in one's opponent.

Yaakov Avinu contended with Eisav's emissary before G-d. He did not use brute force, nor did he vilify him. He did not employ bans and anathemas, nor did he incite him with destructive criticism and defamatory statements. Rather, he struggled valiantly with courage and resolution, with dignity and firmness, with piety and a love for all people, with a burning desire to sanctify Hashem's Name. Yaakov endeavored to be a leader - not simply a winner. He sought to rule, not to vanquish. By asserting his own uniqueness, and by reconciling and unifying the various conflicting forces in the human soul, by harmonizing the Yaakov with Yisrael, the earthly with the Heavenly, he emerged victorious and succeeded in raising the banner of Hashem's Name. It is much easier to counteract the environment that is against us by sublimating its conflicting factors into one harmonious entity, than to fight it head-on. In a war, everyone is hurt. The goal is to strive to rise above challenge by earning the respect of others, and by demonstrating in a noble manner the folly of their intentions.

Devorah, the wet-nurse of Rivkah, died, and she was buried below Bethel, below the plateau; and he named it Alon Bachus. (35:8)

Rashi comments that the place where Devorah was buried was called Alon Bachus because Yaakov became privy to more bad news - he was notified that Rivkah, his mother, had also passed away. The Torah conceals Rivkah's passing so that people would not curse her as the one who had given birth to Eisav. Sifsei Chachamim supplements this by adding that due to the circumstances, it was only Eisav that was present at Rivkah's funeral. His profile was thus greatly emphasized by his singular presence. Interestingly, when Yitzchak passed away, the Torah did not feel compelled to conceal this news. Why was Yitzchak different than Rivkah? After all, they were both Eisav's parents. Apparently, it is because Yitzchak's funeral was attended by both his sons, while at Rivkah's funeral, only Eisav was present.

We suggest an alternative reason for concealing Rivkah's passing. There are those who will look for every opportunity to malign and revile one whose level of observance tends to gravitate to the right of their beliefs and practices. Imagine, the Matriarch Rivkah dies; a woman whose devotion to Yaakov was extraordinary and unique. Yet, at her funeral it was not Yaakov her "liebling" loved one, who was there. Instead, Eisav, the son who defines evil incarnate, who was her greatest source of pain and anxiety; he was the one who saw to his mother's burial. Let us now picture the funeral and ensuing conversations. Ostensibly, the focal point of every conversation would have been - where is Yaakov - the "good" son? Is he too busy "learning" that he could not "find the time" to attend his mother's funeral? Regrettably, for some people, this would be the thrust of their conversation. They view everything from a jaundiced perspective because they are obsessed with negativity. It has so clouded their ability to see clearly that they have developed a permanent myopia. Yaakov had good reason for calling this place Alon Bachus. Adding to his overwhelming grief over losing his beloved mother, Yaakov had to contend with the character assassination that continues to plague those who follow in his ways - to this very day.

Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before a king reigned over Bnei Yisrael. (36:31)

Chazal teach us that these eight kings that reigned in Edom even before Klal Yisrael had anointed their first king, were the result of Yaakov Avinu's referring to Eisav as adoni, my master, eight times. This reference attributing distinction to the evil Eisav caused a cosmic uproar, so to speak, that Yaakov was punished on a national basis. His descendants would not be privileged to have a monarch for many years. The Sefer HaRokeach notes that the Torah, in describing those eight kings, seems to categorize them into three distinct categories. Regarding some it mentions their city, while for others it mentions a war in which they prevailed over their antagonists. Last, is one who neither had a city, nor did he triumph in battle. Instead, he became ruler through his wallet, by purchasing the monarchy with his vast fortune.

Leadership is divided into these categories. There are those truly deserving of a leadership position. They have earned it and have proven themselves capable. There are also those who do not have the ability to lead, but they are, nonetheless, people of great strength and power. They impose

their leadership either by their own ability or through a following. Then there are those who have nothing - but money. They cannot lead, nor can they fight. They can, however, obtain the position of leadership through their machinations and wherewithal.

Regardless of the means, they are, nonetheless, the king. They distinguish themselves by the respect accorded them by their constituents. One who is worthy of leadership will receive the respect and admiration of his constituency and peers. Alternatively, one who does not deserve the position, will not experience the respect that is concomitant to his station. We may suggest that the type of king that emerged was the direct result of how Yaakov emphasized the word "adoni". The greater significance he attributed to Eisav, the stronger was the king that reigned.

And his eleven children. (32:23)

Rashi notes that Dinah, Yaakov Avinu's daughter, is apparently not included in the count. Where was she when Yaakov presented his family to Eisav? Chazal say that Yaakov hid Dinah in a box, so that Eisav should not lay eyes on her. The Patriarch was punished for his actions. Dinah might have had a positive influence on Eisav, so Yaakov was punished by seeing his pure daughter defiled by Shechem, because he had deprived Eisav of a potential kindness. Chazal's words are compelling. Are we to expect Yaakov to place his daughter in a situation in which she might fall into the clutches of the man who redefined evil? Leah cried bitterly for quite some time, when she feared that she was destined to be joined in matrimony with Eisav. Yet, Yaakov is criticized, and even punished, because he did not make Dinah obvious to Eisav. Perhaps she could have saved him from iniquity. Where was Yaakov's sense of chesed, kindness, for his brother?

There are a number of explanations for Yaakov's attitude and the critique against him. Probably, the most well-known explanation is that of the Alter, zl, m'Kelm who said in Yiddish, Ehr hot gedreit de shlissel tzu shtark, "He twisted the key too tight" or "He closed the door too firmly." There are things in life which we are compelled to do. Closing the door on Dinah to prevent Eisav from seeing her is an example of one of those necessary actions we must take to uphold the sanctity of our home. We should do such things, however, with regret, with contrition, with conscience and with sensitivity towards another human being - albeit one who is wicked.

Horav Yeruchim Levovitz, zl, explains that this was the reason that the great Tanna, Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi, the codifier of the Mishnah, a man who gave up his entire essence for Torah, suffered bitterly and painfully for thirteen years. It was all because of a young calf who, when he was about to be slaughtered, ran over to him seeking compassion. He said to the calf, "Go, for this was why you were created." Indeed, he was correct. The greatest tikkun, rectification, occurs when an animal is ritually slaughtered and is able to sustain a human being who will study Torah. He should have, however, commiserated with the calf; he should have demonstrated a bit more compassion.

There is no question that Yaakov could not permit his child to be exposed to Eisav ha'rasha, but he should have felt bad that he could not give his daughter to his brother in marriage. Yaakov had already made up his mind. All avenues toward reconciliation with his brother were sealed. It was a hopeless endeavor. While this was certainly true, it nonetheless should have hurt.

Horav Nossan Wachtfogel, zl, adds that there are times when we triumph over those who would undermine the integrity of Torah. Without any doubt, this is something for which we strive with all of our might. Yet, it should not stimulate joy within our camp when we best our alienated brethren. It

should hurt us that circumstances have reached such a tragic juncture that brother is pitted against brother. Rav Wachtfogel relates that when the venerable Rosh Hayeshivah of Kelm, Horav Daniel Moshowitz, zl, was asked to sign a letter of approbation for a group of secularists, he refused. Afterwards, he was saddened by the fact that circumstances had deteriorated so much that he could not perform a favor for another Jew.

Rav Nosson adds that Horav Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor, zl, the Rav of Kovno, was well-known for relentlessly waging battle against the secularists who undermined Torah authority. Yet, when compared to another member of the Kovno Bais Din, judicial system, who was similarly inclined, he was considered placid. Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, applied an analogy to differentiate between the two. A homeowner, whose home was inundated with mice, brought a large cat to rid his home of the little pests. Rav Chaim explained that while both the homeowner and the cat seek to eliminate the mouse problem, the homeowner simply wants to be rid of them, while the cat enjoys killing and eating them.

Two people can perform the same maneuver, but there can exist a very wide gap between their respective attitudes. Rav Yitzchak Elchonon was compelled to battle to uphold the sanctity of the Torah, but he received no joy in having to place sanctions against other Jews who, to his chagrin, had strayed from the path of Torah Judaism.

Perhaps we might be able to expand on the above. Sensitivity towards another Jew is a definitive character trait. We have just shown how important it is to maintain another Jew's dignity and to regret when one must constructively criticize his friend. This idea likewise applies throughout one's interrelationships with his fellow man. There are times when people come knocking at our door, seeking funds for a host of worthy causes. They come in all manners of demeanor. Most are legitimate; a small minority, regrettably, are not. To some, we give a sizable contribution; to others, it is much smaller. How often do we pause to talk to them, to inquire about their welfare, to show that we really care about them as people, as human beings, as Yidden? Or, do we simply dismiss them with a check, making them feel like they are disturbing us?

In 1952, Eretz Yisrael was undergoing great economic hardship. People had no jobs and no money. The yeshivos suffered, as rebbeim were not paid on time. Under these conditions, poor people went from door to door begging for alms just to eat. Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, the Michtav M'Eliyahu, was the Mashgiach in Ponevez, and many of the city's poor would knock on his door, hoping that the compassionate Mashgiach would give them a few coins. Rav Dessler gave whatever he could, but this was simply not enough. At one point, he also had no money in the house. How could he turn away a broken Jew? He would invite the man in for a glass of tea. He would sit down and talk to him, reassure him, make him feel good. If Rav Dessler could not provide money, he could at least infuse the man with hope.

He would make the poor man comfortable and draw him into conversation. Mostly, these people were Holocaust survivors who yearned for their destroyed homes. The Mashgiach would inquire about their origins. They would begin to talk about the various Torah scholars in the many communities from which these people hailed. Usually, the poor man would leave Rav Dessler's house comforted, in good cheer, feeling far more dignified than if he would have been given a few coins. Rav Dessler recognized the Divine component in every person and catered to it. The world would be a better place, and we would be happier people, if we would follow his example.

Rashi cites Chazal, who explain that Yaakov Avinu had forgotten some pachim ketanim, small earthenware pitchers and returned to retrieve them. From the fact that the Patriarch returned for some small pitchers which could not have had any great value, Chazal derive that "to the righteous, their money is dearer to them than their bodies." They explain that a tzaddik's possessions have greater significance and value because their owners meticulously avoid any hint of dishonesty. Every cent they earn is done with consummate integrity. Money that is derived under such scrupulous standards has intrinsic spiritual value and meaning. Hence, Yaakov returned to fetch the small pitchers.

In the book, "Forever His Students," a collection of essays based upon the teachings of Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl, the author, Rabbi Baruch Leff, renders a deeper explanation into the philosophy of possessions. Ownership of an item grants one control over that item. There is a certain sense of domination that one has when he acquires an object. Even if he never uses it, the mere fact that it is his to do with whatever he pleases, is sufficient to catalyze a feeling of power. Ownership is power; ownership is control; ownership is domination.

He explains that our obsession with possession and power reverts back to the early days of mankind. After being banished from Gan Eden, Chavah bore a son whom she named Kayin. This name represents possession, kanisi, "I have acquired a man with G-d" (Bereishis, 4:1). She emphasized her acquisition, her part in the creation of a human being. This declaration has great significance in the post - Gan Eden period. It is a name that Chavah wanted to engrave in her psyche as she named her child Kayin. Why?

The Rosh Yeshivah explains that in Gan Eden, the concept of possessions did not apply. There was a boundless supply of everything. Nobody lacked anything. After being banished from this idyllic world, Chavah now realized that human beings will have to possess things in order to function in the world. Their possessions will identify who and what they are. She understood that in the new world, the drive for possessions will be obsessive. Thus, she wanted to set the tone for all possessions - it should be an acquisition with G-d. There has to be a higher purpose for ownership. The raison d'etre of possession should be of a sublime nature.

Yaakov Avinu took great pride in his possessions because they were all consecrated for a spiritual purpose. Nothing is to be wasted; nothing is to be discarded. It has spiritual as well as material value.

We can now posit a new dictum, "We are what we own." This means that what we possess, its purpose and use, defines us. Are we driven to amass more and greater materialistic possessions?

Owning something that has no spiritual value, that in fact is spiritually harmful, makes a powerful negative statement about us. In contrast, possessions that increase our spirituality, that engender positive spiritual growth within our homes, speak well of us.

Therefore Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the sinew of weakness. (32:33)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, translates nasheh as submission or lack of resistance. A nasheh is a creditor, which seems to have the underlying meaning of having given oneself - or something of one's own possession - into the power of another person. By tearing it, Yaakov Avinu's opponent had rendered the muscle of the hip attached to the bone powerless to control the leg. The loss of control

which Yaakov sustained from his opponent left him, in this respect, powerless, or without resistance. The tendon was there, the muscle was there, the leg was there, but its use was hampered. This loss, however, was only temporary, since once again the word *nasheh* came into play. Yaakov was a creditor. He had a large account to settle with Eisav, who owed Yaakov a great debt, one that Yaakov's descendants shall never forget to settle. Exactly how and for what purpose we are to commemorate this debt is a separate issue upon which Rav Hirsch comments. For now, I would like to go off on a tangent and focus on another aspect of the word *nasheh*, one that Rav Hirsch also mentions.

The plural of the word *ishah*, woman, is *nashim*, a word which has *nasheh* as its root. This would imply that women are creditors, having given something of themselves over to another. The change of *ishah* in the singular, to *nashim*, in the plural, is explained by Rav Hirsch as defining the singular woman's relation to her counterpart, the man, as that of a wife to a husband. She is then an individual unit, not something given over to the power of another. She is a co-worker, a full partner, placed equally opposite the man to complement him. In the plural, however, in the public relation of the female gender, her rights are represented together with that of her husband. Only in public life do women appear as *nashim*, the creditors of men, who have given over their power to them.

Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, elaborated on this theme. One Erev Shabbos he remarked to his son, in regard to the work his wife was doing in preparation for Shabbos, "In the next world, the women will be our creditors. We will have to give them spiritual remuneration for all the strenuous physical work which they did in the home - and we will come up short!" The Rosh Yeshivah would often expound on the incredible debt of gratitude a man has to his wife. He would cite Chazal, who comment that all the songs in the Torah are *kadosh*, holy, and *Shir HaShirim*, Shlomo HaMelech's Song of Songs, is *Kodesh Kedoshim*, Holy of Holies. Rav Mendel explained that *Shir HaShirim* is an allegory based upon the relationship between a man and a woman. A woman achieves the status of holy of holies because her entire nature, her very essence, is to do for others. A woman submits her entire being, both physically and emotionally, for her husband and children. All she asks in return is a little recognition.

The Mirrer Mashgiach, Horav Yeruchim Levovitz, zl, would say that man is like someone who plants seeds: he does not expect his action to produce immediate fruit. He knows that, in time, he will eat the fruits of his labor. In this world, we do nothing more than plant the seeds. We eat the fruits in the next world. *Iyov* said, "Man is created for toil" (*Iyov* 5:7). He works, but does not see the fruits of his labor.

Women exemplify this form of toil. They are committed to a form of labor that seems menial, such as maintaining a home and childrearing, activities which do not produce immediate fruits. They understand that their toil will ultimately make the difference in the way their children will blossom, as well as in the sanctity and serenity of their home.

Rav Mendel Kaplan was the product of a different generation. He would make a point of teaching his talmidim, students, lessons that were integral to life. He would constantly reiterate that "a woman's whole life is her husband, and, therefore, one must indicate his appreciation for whatever his wife does for him." He would often cite the Rambam who says that a woman determines the value of her life commensurate with what she feels she is worth to her husband. "A wife is not a *chavrusa*, study partner!" Rav Mendel declared. "Thinking in such terms can create problems and strife. One must maintain that whatever his wife does is good and nice - period. One who repudiates his wife, diminishing her feeling of importance, has robbed her of her life!"

And he (Eisav) asked, "Who are these to you?" He (Yaakov) answered, "The children whom G-d has

graciously given your servant." (33:5)

Children are a blessing from Hashem, a natural blessing - a gift which we often take for granted. We have gotten accustomed to a natural course of events whereby a young couple marry and are "expected" to, in the course of a short while, have children. Horav Moshe Shapiro, Shlita, observes from Yaakov Avinu's words that one must always recognize that whatever he has, regardless of its natural genesis, is a gift from Hashem. When Yaakov is asked, "Whose children are those?" he does not simply reply, "They are mine." He says, "These are the children that Hashem has seen fit to give me." Yaakov is acutely aware that if he has children, it is by design and a special gift from Hashem. He adds that they are his by the grace of Hashem. It is a *matnas chinam*, free gift, which he does not deserve.

This is so different from today's prevalent attitude, reflected by people expecting Hashem's gifts because they feel they deserve them. Yaakov Avinu sets the standard by which we should live. This principle should apply to every endeavor: from having children; to earning a livelihood; to success in Torah study. It is all the result of Hashem's graciousness. The sooner we recognize and appreciate the Source, the quicker and more stable will be the result.

We came to your brother, to Eisav; moreover, he is heading towards you, and four hundred men are with him. (32:7)

Rashi comments on the above pasuk, "You might think that he comes toward you as a brother. He is not. The four hundred men that he has gathered together are a war party, and you are to be the victim. Eisav is coming as Eisav!" Yet, despite Eisav's deep-rooted enmity toward Yaakov Avinu, when they met, Eisav embraced and kissed Yaakov Avinu. Was this accidental - or manipulative? Rashi cites the Midrash, that says that while it is a known axiom that Eisav despised Yaakov, at that moment, his feelings of brotherly love were stirred and, therefore, his embrace and the kiss were sincere. What brought about this total change of heart? Eisav left with one objective - to exact vengeance and kill Yaakov. Suddenly, his emotional disposition reversed and reconciliation was in the air. What happened? Rashi explains that when Eisav saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times, his compassion was moved. There is no question that if someone bows down to us a number of times, it leaves a strong impression. Was Eisav not above this? In the wake of a personal experience, Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, gave rationale to Yaakov's demonstration of reverence and Eisav's consequent transformation.

The old Orthodox Jewish community in Yerushalayim was boldly independent of the secular Zionist movement that viewed itself as the sole representative of the Jewish people inhabiting Eretz Yisrael. The Zionists harbored no love for the Orthodox Jew. More than once, the antagonism led to blatant physical hostility. Once, a group of thugs barged into Rav Yosef Chaim's house as he was studying with his grandson. They shouted all sorts of threats at him as representative and leader of the "traitors" who dared to undermine the leadership of the Jews of Palestine. Rav Yosef Chaim did not budge. Instead, he sat calmly staring at them, with pity and sorrow for those who had estranged themselves from their noble heritage.

They became so unnerved by Rav Yosef Chaim's response, that they began to make physical threats. The aged rav arose from his chair and began to unbutton his shirt, until he bared his chest. He looked them defiantly in the eye and said, "I am prepared to give up my life to sanctify Hashem's

Name. Shoot me - right here and now. I promise not to resist! We are not afraid of you or your threats. We seek only peaceful coexistence. As we have no influence on your sphere of activities, we ask of you that you not interfere in our matters of religion and permit us to operate independently. No threats will defeat us!"

It appeared as if they were about to attack the rav, when suddenly, they turned around and left. What happened that changed their minds?

Some time later, Rav Yosef Chaim explained that it was Yaakov Avinu and his behavior toward Eisav that inspired the way he acted toward the thugs. "Chazal tell us that it is axiomatic that Eisav hates Yaakov, but we must also remember that Yaakov hates Eisav as well." This is to be gleaned from the pasuk in Tehillim 139:21, "Those who hate you, I hate." Yet, when Yaakov saw Eisav coming towards him with four hundred men, he reacted by bowing down to the ground seven times. Yaakov acted wisely. He repressed his feelings of animosity toward Eisav, focusing instead on the positive aspects and character traits that Eisav possessed. He did this until he "reached his brother," translated figuratively, that he overcame his feelings of hatred until he could feel a true sense of closeness and brotherhood with Eisav. This genuine attitude of brotherly love that emanated from Yaakov transformed Eisav's hatred into love.

This is how we must relate to our brethren that have alienated themselves from the Torah way. Look for their positive traits; seek out the good in them. By judging them favorably, we will dispel their animus toward us. When I look at those men as brothers, it compels them to change their attitude toward me. It is difficult to hate someone who loves you. Let us learn from our Patriarch Yaakov how to deal with those who demonstrate malice toward us.

Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him... he struck the socket of his hip. (32:25,26)

The confrontation between Yaakov Avinu and the Sar Shel Eisav, angel of Eisav, is a seminal event in the history of our nation. This is the foreshadowing for the many confrontations, trials and tribulations we have undergone throughout history. Yet, throughout the many persecutions, we have survived and even thrived. Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, observes that there are three levels of Jewish status in galus, exile. The first is analogous to the status of Avraham Avinu. "You are a prince of G-d in our midst." The world respected him. He was free from jealousy, discrimination or harm. Not only was his Jewishness not a liability, it was actually beneficial to his maintaining a revered status in society.

The second type of status was that of Yitzchak Avinu. While he had great influence and was able to live a Jewish life among the pagans that surrounded him, he was nonetheless subject to envy, harassment and blatant bigotry - both economic and social. Yet, Yitzchak maintained his dignity. He continued prospering, but his profile was lower than that of his father. He saw the storm clouds of anti-Semitism gathering. He was acutely aware of what the future had in store for his descendants.

The third status is that of Yaakov Avinu. He suffered overt persecution, physical threats to his life, demeaning and derogatory remarks. He worked as a despised and lowly servant whose work was denigrated. Yaakov suffered, but persevered. He was obsequious, but persistent. He could not change the situation, living with enmity and derision all his life. What kept him going was his tenacity and faith. Indeed, the more he was hated, the more he was compelled to turn to his Jewishness for solace and strength.

We ask ourselves: Where are we today? We live sixty years after the perpetration of the greatest act of blatant anti-Semitism, the Holocaust. Regrettably, all too many of us tend - or seek - to forget that an entire world stood silent as we were brutally and mercilessly slaughtered. Our own host country, the United States, along with its president, turned a deaf ear to the pleas. The murder of the Jews elicited no sympathy in the media. There is no room in this paper to record the many omissions that would have helped our people. Moreover, we are discovering now that those, such as President Truman who seemed to be our friend, really viewed us as parasites.

Interestingly, the liberal New York Times, a paper not known for its support of the Jewish cause, some time ago ran an editorial that addresses the crux of German anti-Semitism. The editorial was entitled, "One Little Boy." It began by posing a series of questions: "Why the search for Nazis twenty years after World War II? Why does bitterness still burn as a hot coal in the hearts of millions throughout the world? Why are so many decent human beings unable to manage to find in their hearts the capacity to forgive and forget?"

One of the reasons may be a story that ran in this newspaper. A book has recently been published, documenting the fate of the one and one-half million Jewish children under sixteen years of age in Hitler's concentration camps. The following few sentences from the story are sufficient:

"Then the guard ordered the children to fold their clothes neatly and march into the gas chamber and crematorium. One little boy, less than two years old, was too little to climb the steps. So the guard took the child in his arms and carried him into the chamber." There is the reason - one little boy.

Six million is a figure that is incomprehensible. While we say it in one breathe, we really do not fathom the enormity of the statistic. One and one-half million children under the age of sixteen is a staggering figure, but it does not really tug at the emotions in the same manner that one little boy under the age of two who could not climb the stairs does. He was lifted up by the guard. This statistic bespeaks the fiendishness of the Nazis, the enormity of the outrage, the unspeakable magnitude of the disaster. If we are seeking insight into the hatred toward the Jews that embodied the Nazi, we have found it in the above article.

Today in the western world, this form of malignant hatred does not exist. Bnei Yishmael, the Arab nations, harbor a venomous hatred for everything Jewish, but "officially" they are not supported by the western world. Where does that leave us today? We might be tempted to say that we have achieved "Yitzchak" status. Some might even hypothesize that we are approaching "Avraham's" position. Time will tell whether this is true, or whether today is just another calm before the storm. The Bais HaLevi draws a parallel between assimilation and anti-Semitism. In other words, the more we attempt to acculturate and decrease the distinction between Jew and gentile, the more Hashem will turn the nations against us. We have the prescription for success. We now have to adhere to it.

What happened to the yerech Yaakov, the socket of the hip, where the angel seemingly bested Yaakov? What does that represent? Perhaps it refers to another form of enmity that is just as virulent and equally destructive - the hatred among brothers. The friction that exists between frum and non-frum, chiloni and chareidi, especially in Eretz Yisrael, is a new form of antagonism that has emerged. Moreover, the antagonism that reigns even among the various camps of the observant community is not only a chillul Hashem, it is delaying Moshiach Tzidkeinu's arrival. Regrettably, we have learned to cope with the external aggression, but the internal conflict seems to be eating away at the very core of our nation. Eisav's angel knew exactly where to strike to prevent Yaakov Avinu from moving forward. Throughout the darkness of night/galus, we prevailed - as Yaakov did. As light was approaching - as the light of Torah becomes stronger and begins to illuminate the world - we become bogged down with

petty machlokes, controversy, which prevents us from moving forward and reaching out to the wider community. Yes, Eisav's angel knew exactly where to strike.

Let them settle in the land and trade in it. (34:21)

It seems like a simple vocation: settle in the land and apply yourself to commerce. It seems simple, but - as we may note from the following narrative - there is a profound lesson to be derived from every endeavor in life. To those who view the various occurrences in their lives as "simple" happenings, they present nothing more than the perspective of a "simple" person. We can and should learn a lesson from everything that occurs. Otherwise, we continue to remain "simple."

Prior to his being revealed as the great tzaddik and rebbe, Horav Moshe Leib Sassover, zl, lived with his wife and children in abject poverty. One wealthy person in the town provided his family's support. One day, his benefactor asked Rav Moshe Leib, "Is this going to go on forever? Do you really think that an individual of your scholarship should live from week to week from my support? I will give you a sizable amount of venture capital to go to the market and try your luck. Hashem will surely bless your endeavor, and you will succeed financially."

Rav Moshe Leib took the advice and went to the market together with all of the other businessmen. Each individual businessman sought out the wares that he would purchase for resale, while Rav Moshe Leib went to the bais hamedrash to study Torah. At the end of the day, as everyone was packing up their wares, Rav Moshe Leib returned and wanted to purchase some commodities for resale. "Now you come," they exclaimed. "The market hours are over. We are packing up to return home. You are too late." Rav Moshe Leib had no recourse but to return home - empty handed.

When he arrived at home, his children ran out to greet him, asking, "Father, father, what did you bring us from the marketplace?" As soon as Rav Moshe Leib heard this, he fainted and became ill. He was taken to bed to recuperate. The benefactor who had originally given him the money came to visit him. Noting Rav Moshe Leib's despondence, he asked, "Rebbe, what is wrong? Did you lose the money? Perhaps you gave it all away to the poor? Tell me, and I will give you more money." After awhile, Rav Moshe Leib's color came back and he was ready to speak. He looked at his friend and said, "A person travels away from his home to the market for a day or two at the most. When he returns, his children ask him, Father, father, what have you brought for us? I had nothing to respond. How much more should I fear the day when I will have to go home to my final judgment, to the World of Truth where I will stand before the Heavenly Tribunal and be asked, 'What did you bring with you?'"

What will I answer then? Has my life been that replete with Torah and mitzvos that I am able to take off more time to spend in the market? What will I have to show for my stay in this world?"

"Rebbe, you are correct," said the man. "It is far better that you should spend your time immersed in Torah." It was soon after this incident that Rav Moshe Leib's reputation as a tzaddik began to spread and he became the famous Sassover Rebbe. He taught us not to ignore a simple occurrence. Furthermore, he immediately applied the lesson he gleaned to change the course of his life.

Eisav took his wives...all all the sons of his household...and all his possessions...and went to a land because of his brother Yaakov. (32:6)

Rashi cites the Midrash that attributes Eisav's departure to be "because of his brother Yaakov." Eisav said, "There is an obligation to fulfill the debt of Ki ger yiheyeh zarecha, "Your offspring shall be sojourners," i.e. the decree of exile, which was placed upon the offspring of Yitzchak. I will leave from here because I want to have no portion, neither of the gift that has been given to Yitzchak nor of the payment of the contract." Eisav understood that the blessings that were Yitzchak's were accompanied by a "debt" of servitude, a debt of exile. The Torah was given only to those who were liberated in Egypt, as is clearly stated in the first/introductory commandment. "I am your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt." Access to the Torah is approved only for those who suffered through the Egyptian exile. In addition, inheriting the land of Eretz Yisrael is inextricably bound with being a member of the nation that suffered in Egypt. Olam Habah, the World To Come, is also promised only to those who experienced the Egyptian exile. Eisav knew this, and therefore, left Yaakov. He understood what his descendants throughout the millennia did not. In order to receive the gift, one must pay his dues. Eisav refused to pay, thereby relinquishing his gift. Regrettably, he did not convey this message to his offspring.

Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him, so he divided the people with him. (32:8)

Should Yaakov Avinu have been scared? Should the person with whom Hashem spoke and promised that He would be with him and guard him wherever he went be afraid? Should the individual who was greeted by guardian angels be distressed? There is a reason why even the great saint Yaakov should fear - "he divided the people with him." There was a chasm in his people. A rift bifurcated among his people. This gave Yaakov reason to fear. If there was no peace among his people, they would become easy prey for Eisav. As long as a unified front prevailed, as long as harmony reigned in the Jewish camp, Yaakov feared neither Yishmael nor Eisav. Horav Mordechai HaKohen notes that when Lot was taken captive by the four kings, Yaakov's aged grandfather, Avraham Avinu, did not think twice about gathering together his "small army" to pursue Lot's captors. He was not afraid, and he triumphed, rescuing Lot. Yet, Yaakov was afraid of his brother. The grandfather had no army; yet, he had no fear. The grandson, however, was terribly distressed.

Yaakov was -- in reality -- no different than his grandfather. He was courageous, strong and willing to fight. He also would have taken on the four kings in order to save Lot. There was a fundamental difference between the two battles, however. Yaakov had no problem battling enemies from without, strangers who were dedicated to destroying him and his family. This time, Yaakov was up against a formidable enemy: the enemy from within, his own flesh and blood, his brother. He prayed to Hashem, "Rescue me, please from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav." There is no more bitter battle than a war between brothers.

When my brother Eisav meets you and asks you, saying, "Whose are you, where are you going, and whose are these that are before you?" (32:18)

Upon coming to this pasuk, The Chidushei HaRim, zl, would turn to his chassidim and say, "Note how these three questions have a strong similarity to the three queries which Chazal teach us are

the fundamental questions a Jew must ask of himself. Know these things, and you will not come into the grip of sin: know from where you came; where you will go; and before Whom you will give justification and reckoning (Pirkei Avos 3:1) Chazal give us the three keys to our spiritual survival. Are they different than the questions Eisav asked?"

"We derive an important lesson from here," says the Chidushei HaRim. "Even today, Eisav can ask these fundamental questions with one purpose in mind: to bring us to depression, to belittle us, to lower our self-esteem and self-confidence. Yes, Eisav asks the same questions that Chazal instruct us to ask of ourselves. There are, however, two disparate goals in these questions - and that is the "who" difference. One must be acutely aware of who is asking these questions."

And he took his two wives, his two handmaids, and his eleven sons. (32:23)

There seems to be a child missing. Yaakov had eleven sons and one daughter. What happened to Dinah, Yaakov's daughter? Rashi tells us that Yaakov hid her in a box, so that Eisav would not see her and want to take her for a wife. Yaakov was punished for this when Dinah went out and was violated by Shechem. He should have been sensitive to his brother's needs. Who knows? Perhaps Dinah might have influenced Eisav to initiate a positive change in his life. This is enigmatic. How can we expect Yaakov to marry his daughter to such an evil person as Eisav? Furthermore, we find that Leah was lauded for her excessive weeping when she entreated the Almighty that she not fall into Eisav's hands. If Leah was praised, how can Yaakov be criticized?

The Alter, zl, m'Kelm gives an answer to this question which can be applied to situations in which we must act in a manner that seems harsh and cruel - but necessary. He explains that Yaakov clearly had to protect his daughter. There is no way he could have permitted her to marry Eisav. Hiding her in the box was an action that he had to take, but, did he have to close the door with so much force? Horav Nossen Wachtfogel, zl, explains the Alter's statement with a similar thought from Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl. Chazal tell us that Rebbi, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, the great sage who was the codifier of the Mishnah, underwent thirteen years of terrible pain because of something he said to a calf that was about to be slaughtered. It happened that the calf ran away and hid beneath Rebbi's cloak, crying, "I do not want to be slaughtered." Rebbi responded, "Go. For this is for what you were created." Rebbi's response was considered heartless, and he was, consequently, punished. When we think about it, what did he do wrong? The animal was created to be slaughtered eventually. He was "telling it like it is." Is this a reason for him to endure thirteen years of excruciating pain?

Rav Yeruchem explains that, indeed, his response was correct. It was the tone of his voice that was wrong. He should have responded more compassionately, with greater empathy. This would have at least conveyed a message, "I feel bad for you and empathize with your pain, but that is the purpose of your creation." It is not what he did; rather, how he did it that made the difference.

Likewise, Yaakov understood only too well the danger of allowing Eisav to notice Dinah. He knew he had no recourse but to hide her from him. Yaakov's act of protecting his daughter, however, should have been carried with regret, with ambivalence, with a heavy heart. Apparently, it was not.

When we are compelled to act in a certain matter; when we must say no; when we have to reject someone justifiably, it should be done with a heavy heart. Otherwise, we may one day have to answer for our actions. An educator, at times, must take negative action against a student for appropriate reasons. It is certainly not something he enjoys doing, but it is necessary for the well-being of a class.

He must carry out the necessary action ruefully, as if he had no alternative.

And Timnah was a concubine of Eisav, and she bore Amalek to Elifaz. (36:12)

We have before us Amalek's roots. The archenemy of the Jewish people, the one who stands for evil - Amalek is Eisav's grandson. Amalek, a nation whose cruelty knew no bound and whose viciousness was unparalleled, was the son of Elifaz and his concubine, Timnah. Who was Timnah? Chazal tell us that Timnah descended from royalty. She was the sister of Lotan, one of the chiefs of Seir. Yet, she was so anxious to marry a descendant of Avraham that she said to Elifaz, "If I am unworthy to become your wife, let me at least be your concubine!" Chazal go further in describing her character. She had originally approached Avraham to accept her as a convert. Her base character was something she could not conceal from Avraham. He therefore, rejected her. She went on to marry Elifaz and to give birth to his son, Amalek.

Why did she become the mother of Amalek? Apparently, something was wrong if a woman who had such "noble" intentions was rejected by Avraham, yet she eventually married his great-grandson. Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that Avraham truly had just cause for dismissing Timnah, but it was nonetheless an act of total rejection. She begged for acceptance, and Avraham Avinu saw b'Ruach haKodesh, Divine Inspiration, that her character was deficient and, therefore, not worthy of induction into Klal Yisrael. He slammed the door in her face. While it was surely with good reason, it does not ameliorate the hurt and shame that accompanies total rejection. The end result of this rejection has been plaguing our People for thousands of years.

What an incredible statement; what a powerful perspective. This is the manner in which Rav Chaim perceived a subject, with depth and brilliant perception. He was able to pierce through the periphery surrounding a subject and arrive at its core. He was sensitive to people's emotions and perceived how they were affected by the actions of others in any way. He was known to take great pains not to impose on the feelings of others. He understood rejection and the overwhelming effect it could have on others. The following story, a story recounted often by Rav Chaim, demonstrates this idea.

During the Six-Day War, bombs were falling in many places in Yerushalayim. When the war broke out, many people crowded into the Mirrer Yeshiva dining room, which also served as the neighborhood bomb shelter. Among those who took refuge there was a lonely agunah, a woman whose husband had abandoned her some years earlier. She was a bitter, tormented person who lived alone and eked out her meager livelihood as a laundress.

They were all in the dining room as the shells were whistling overhead, striking dangerously close to the yeshivah. Suddenly, there was a direct hit; an explosion shook the building. People thought that for sure this was the end. They began to entreat Hashem crying out, "Shema Yisrael!"

At that moment, the agunah's voice rang loudly above the others. She cried, "Hashem Yisborach, my husband abandoned me for twenty years. I have suffered so much during this time - all as a result of him. Yet, I forgive him! You, too, Ribono Shel Olam, forgive Klal Yisrael for our sins!"

When Rav Chaim would relate the tragic plight of this broken-hearted woman, he would pause and cry. Then he would add - "It was her prayer that saved us!" It was the pain and anguish of a woman rejected and scorned that served as a zchus, merit, for all those in the building.

Rav Chaim explained that the humiliation of rejection, the knowledge that one is not wanted by

their fellow man, is the worst pain and hurt that a person can undergo. He would emphasize this while relating the story of the agunah. Her tribulation lay neither in her meager savings as a laundress nor in her responsibility of raising her children alone -- without the hope of ever having a partner. Her pain lay in the overwhelming awareness that she had been rejected - totally - by the very person who had chosen her to be his life's partner. It was an awareness that would haunt her throughout her life, a knowledge with which she was condemned to live to the day she died. It was this evaluation of her circumstances that magnified her act of forgiveness. Her zchus was now understandable.

While it is sometimes difficult to say "yes" when a parent asks for a second chance, a student begs for forgiveness, or a child says he is sorry for the "umpteenth" time, the "no" alternative carries with it awesome ramifications. Perhaps, we should think twice before choosing this alternative.

And he (Yaakov) said, "I will not let you leave, unless you bless me." (32:26)

Yaakov Avinu struggled through the dark night with an enigmatic figure whom Chazal say was actually the guardian angel of Eisav, identified with Samae-l, the personification of evil. We should address a number of issues in regard to the text. First, why did Yaakov deem it necessary to extract a blessing from Eisav's guardian angel? Did Hashem not already bless him? Was that not sufficient? Second, why did the angel ask Yaakov for his name? Did he not already know his name?

The Piazesner Rebbe, zl, explains that we have a well-known principle, "maase avos siman l'banim," "the deeds of the Patriarchs are a portent for their descendants." Yaakov encountered the angel and struggled with him during the night. He bested the angel, but not before the angel touched the hip-socket of his thigh. When the angel desired to leave, Yaakov asked himself, "Will this same pattern occur to my children? After enduring trials and tribulations, sufferings and persecutions, will their salvation be limited? Although their enemies will not succeed in vanquishing them, and they will not succumb to the pressures exerted upon them by their enemies, they will not emerge completely triumphant. They will regrettably, return to the situation which prevailed before the crisis.

They will not lose - but they will not win, either. "No, this cannot be" said Yaakov. Rather the following attitude will prevail: "I will not let you leave, unless you bless me." After the sufferings are over, Hashem must liberate my descendants decisively, not simply remove them from their immediate crisis. To suffer and to return to the same situation that led to the suffering is a flawed victory.

Eisav's guardian angel is known to us as Samae-l. In the future, during the Messianic times, the letter "mem" of his name, which symbolizes misah, death, will be removed, consistent with the Navi Yeshaya's prophecy, "u'bila ha'maves lanetzach," "and death will be swallowed up forever." What will remain of his name will be Sae-l which is the numerical equivalent of two of Hashem's Names yud, kay, vav, kay, and aleph, daled, nun, yud, which both equal 91. He will then be as a holy angel counted among the celestial princes of the Heavenly Kingdom. After Yaakov struggled with the angel, he repaired that aspect of himself that was in the angel, thus preparing the angel for future redemption. At that point in the narrative, the angel was already sanctified and was now seeking good for Klal Yisrael. The angel now asked Yaakov, "What is your name?" Yaakov replied, "Yaakov." The angel responded that the name Yaakov is related to another time, a time when Yaakov is "grasping Eisav's heel." This implies that all of the acts of deliverance will be yours in the beginning, ab initio, not following persecution. You have now, indeed, triumphed.

With these words, the Piazesner Rebbe gave a message of hope and encouragement to the hounded, ravaged Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto. He gave them a reminder that they were and always would be sarim, princes. He taught them that while the struggle between Yaakov and Eisav, between good and evil, pointed to a deeper, more profound connection between them, a time would come when evil's personification would be transformed and elevated, bestowing blessings upon Klal Yisrael. Indeed, the angel envisioned a greater deliverance for Yaakov than the Patriarch himself even requested. Yaakov merely asked to be saved from his oppressions and his troubles. The angel proceeds to bless him with the name of Yisrael, implying that the plans of his enemies will be foiled before they even begin. May we soon merit to enjoy this blessing.

And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn... Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn has broken." (32:25,27)

The city of Pressburg, Hungary was known for its Torah scholars and distinguished lay leaders. One individual whose reputation was quite well-known, deservedly so, was Rav Leib Mochiach. The name Mochiach means reprover, which aptly describes his vocation. He would arouse and inspire, reprove and encourage the community, focusing on ethical conduct. He would lecture on Ahavas Yisrael, the love one should manifest for his fellow Jew, and the kindness he should show him. He was wont to say, "In Heaven, one's level of tziddkus, righteousness, is measured in accordance with the degree of ahavas Yisrael that he demonstrates. This is the difference between a tzaddik gamur, complete, true tzaddik, and one who is not complete. A tzaddik who is not complete will love a rasha who is not a rasha gamur, not totally evil. A tzaddik gamur loves all Jews - even one who is a total rasha."

Now that we have an idea of what type of person Rav Leib was, we can better appreciate the following story: One night a fire burst out in the store of one of the distinguished lay leaders of the community. His merchandise was all destroyed, and the individual was left penniless. Early that morning, Rav Leib came to the home of one of the city's wealthy members and said, "Now, when everyone's hearts are filled with compassion for the terrible loss incurred by our friend, we should go out and raise money for him, to help him get back on his feet." "But, Rebbe," responded the man, "it is almost zman Krias Shma, the time to recite the Shma. Let us go to shul and daven. After the prayers, we will go fundraising."

Rav Leib looked at him and said, "Now I understand a comment made by Rashi which had always bothered me. Regarding the pasuk detailing Yaakov's struggle with Eisav's guardian angel, "And a man wrestled with him," Rashi comments, This is Eisav's guardian angel. On the other hand, later on, when Yosef was searching for his brothers and he was met by a man, Rashi comments, This is the angel Gavriel. Why is this ish, man, different than the individual who fought with Yaakov. How was Rashi able to deduce that the angel who wrestled with Yaakov represented Eisav, and the angel that met Yosef was Gavriel?

Now I understand. Concerning Yaakov it is stated that after struggling throughout the night and prevailing, Yaakov asked the man for one slight favor - to bless him. The man responded, I have no time, I must go sing shirah, a song of praise, and pray." Such a man can be none other than Eisav's guardian angel. Regarding Yosef however, it is stated that the man found Yosef wandering, lost in the field and inquired of him, What do you seek? One who sees a man wandering in the field and takes time to help him must be the angel Gavriel. Certainly, he also had to go pray, but he felt that to give

assistance to one who is lost takes precedence."

Incidentally, this is the custom as expressed by text in the Siddur. First, we say, Tzur Yisrael, Kumah B'ezras Yisrael, "Rock of Yisrael! Arise to the aid of Yisrael," Afterwards, we begin to pray the Shemoneh Esrai. A Jew in need takes precedence, even over prayer.

For You have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome. (32:29)

The text is enigmatic. One first triumphs over man, and then goes on to the spiritual challenges presented by Eisav's guardian angel. After all, is it not easier to succeed in the human arena than in the spiritual? Furthermore, where do we find Yaakov battling a human adversary? Indeed, this statement was made even before he met with Eisav. Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, takes a pragmatic approach towards explaining Yaakov's statement. Yaakov refers to no specific battle but, rather, to everyone's daily challenge: the challenge of fulfilling our responsibility in the two areas of our holy endeavor - bein adam la'Makom, between man and G-d; and bein adam la'chaveiro, between man and his fellow man. Man is confronted with constant challenges in these two arenas. His goal is to succeed in overcoming the hurdles that present themselves, impeding his way to success.

The Torah teaches us that in these two battlefronts, the one which is more difficult to master is the human challenge. Regrettably, there are some fine, upstanding observant Jews who do everything to satisfy the Torah demands which define man's relationship with G-d. They fall short, however, in the area of their inter-relationships with their fellow man. Yaakov Avinu triumphed in the area of the spirit and also succeeded in exemplifying himself in his ethical relationships with his fellow man.

There are volumes of stories which portray the care and sensitivity evinced by Jews from all walks of life and all areas of the religious spectrum. I recently came across the following narrative, which I feel depicts a unique aspect of sensitivity - one from which we can all learn.

Rabbi C.Y., Bloch, was a talmid, student, of the venerable rav and founder of Telshe Yeshivah, Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl. When Rabbi Bloch passed away in the early 40's, his position as rav in Jersey City was filled by Rabbi Chaim Levene, son of the Tzaddik of Yerushalayim, Horav Aryeh Levene, zl. When the chairman of the search committee called Rabbi Levene to notify him of their unanimous decision, he did not immediately accept the position. He asked for a week's time before he could respond. While his response was puzzling, the chairman agreed to wait. Only years later did anyone learn the reason for the delay.

Rabbi Bloch left an elderly widow. Before Rabbi Levene agreed to accept the position, he felt he owed her the courtesy of asking her permission. "You have always been the first lady of this congregation," he said to the widow, "and I am sure it will be difficult for you when someone else takes his place. I have come to ask your permission before I render my acceptance. If, in anyway you feel that you do not want me here, I will immediately leave."

Rabbi Bloch's widow began to cry as she responded to his sensitive words. "Now that my husband is gone, who is there that cares about me or thinks what I feel is important? I am so moved that you came here today." She paused for a moment and added, "Not only do I want you to stay and be the rabbi, but I now feel as if my own son were filling this position."

The relationship between the young rabbi and the widow continued for years. Every Friday morning, he would walk up several flights of stairs to her modest apartment and spend a quiet hour with her, sharing with her the latest community events. One might suggest that he was acting beyond the letter of the law. He was being a real mensch. I am not convinced that this is the case. The feelings of another Jew are as important to us as our own - especially those of a broken-hearted widow. He was acting in accordance with the law. It is just that he had a better understanding of the parameters of the laws of ethical conduct and sensitivity towards our fellow man.

Yaakov said to Shimon and Levi, "you have discomposd me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land."... and they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" (34:30,31)

If we analyze the dialogue between Yaakov Avinu and his sons, it becomes apparent that Shimon and Levi's actions were not really deemed inappropriate. They had every right to take decisive action against the people of Shechem. Yaakov's basic critique was from a tactical perspective. By the very nature of their actions, they would rile up the surrounding pagans, inciting them to take revenge. Indeed, regarding their response, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?", Yaakov seemed to keep quiet, indicating that he agreed with them. The Ramban questions their justification in killing an entire community when, in effect, only one person actually had perpetrated the heinous crime against Dinah. "How did Yaakov's righteous sons spill innocent blood?" asks the Ramban. He responds accordingly, saying that the people of Shechem had transgressed so many cardinal sins, such as idol-worship and immorality, that their rap sheet was long overdue for collection.

Why, then, does Yaakov curse their anger and punish them not simply for one generation, but for many generations? What did they do that would warrant such a response? Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, derives from here a profound lesson in regard to middos, character traits, and their refinement. It is a given that character refinement is one of the foundations of avodas Hashem, serving the Almighty. One who pays no heed to his middos will eventually become a "pera adam," wild, uncouth person. A laxity in middos development will ostensibly impede one's spiritual growth and relationship with the Almighty. After all is said and done, however, a deficiency in middos is basically a secondary flaw. In other words, one who serves Hashem, who is meticulous in all areas of mitzvah observance, who is pure of sin, is not derelict in his service to the Almighty just because he is a kaason, angry person, or an atzlan, indolent. While it is true that these character flaws can be the precursor of many sins, as long as he does not actually sin, his conduct should be considered to be satisfactory. This is what might be the usual way of looking at a deficiency in middos. We, however, perceive an altogether different understanding from Yaakov's rebuke to his sons. Shimon and Levi did not sin. Yaakov agreed with this hypothesis. Yet, the fact that their anger was so intense that it resulted in such action cannot be either ignored nor absolved. A flawed character trait is cause for punishment. It is a catalyst for a curse that will affect generations to come. Levi was the chosen one of the twelve tribes. Yet, he was compelled to move from place to place in order to expunge the middah of anger from his character. Reuven did not sin with Bilhah. Chazal attest to this fact. Yet, he lost everything. Kehunah, Priesthood, and malchus, monarchy, were once his, but he lost them as a result of his impetuosity. Why? He did not sin. Why was he punished for generations to come? While it is true that his actions were not iniquitous, they were the result of a deficient character trait.

We do not judge middos only commensurate to the actions which result from them. Middos that

are flawed are in their own right an evil for which one is held in contempt. Until one has succeeded in cleansing himself of a character flaw, he is in serious danger of acting in a manner unbecoming a Torah Jew. It is not the actions themselves that matter the most. Rather, it is the evil that precipitates them that is of much greater concern.

No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome. (32:29)

Yaakov Avinu emerged triumphant after his struggle with Eisav's guardian angel. Before departing, the angel told Yaakov that he would receive an additional name, Yisrael, a name which implies strength and superiority. Rashi explains that when the angel asked Yaakov for his name it was a rhetorical question. He was actually relating to Yaakov that he was entitled to Eisav's blessing. No longer would he go by the name "Yaakov," a name which implies deceit. The Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, explains this further. He reflects on the blessings which Yaakov received from Yitzchak, wondering why the circumstances had evolved the way that they did. Why did Rivkah Imenu have to instruct Yaakov to dress in Eisav-like clothes, employing guile-and perhaps deceit-to receive the berachos, blessings? Surely, there could have been a more dignified manner to secure the berachos.

The Rebbe explains that parnassah, earning a livelihood, has become more difficult with each ensuing generation. Indeed, in contemporary society, the challenges and trials that prevail can, at times, challenge one's spiritual stature. It is quite disheartening to observe how those who are far removed from a Torah lifestyle have succeeded in amassing great material wealth, while those who are dedicated to Hashem's Torah often live in abject poverty. With the extreme pressures of today's society, this can serve to distance one from Torah observance. Rivkah was suggesting this to Yitzchak when she sent Yaakov dressed in Eisav's clothes. She was telling Yitzchak, "Do you think our son Yaakov will be able to continue studying in the tents of Torah forever? How long will he be able to live in poverty while his brother Eisav lives off the fat of the land? The pressure might compel Yaakov to adopt a lifestyle suitable to Eisav. He might begin to dress like he does, speak like he does, and, ultimately, live like he does."

This was not the way, however, that Yaakov should have been blessed. He should not have received the blessing from a negative perspective, by default, simply because otherwise, he might defect and become like Eisav. Yitzchak should have given Yaakov the blessing as a reflection of Hashem's love for him, in an effort to provide him with all his needs. Even though he might not have been worthy, he should have been sustained. Is that not what a father would do for a son?

This is the underlying meaning of Rashi's words. The name Yaakov implies weakness. He received the blessings because otherwise he might have gone "off the derech," turning away from the prescribed faith as dictated by Hashem. No! The blessings were secured as Yisrael, a name signifying strength and sovereignty. This idea asserts that the Patriarch received the blessings from a positive position, because he was worthy of this gift. Eisav's angel conveyed this message to Yaakov. He had triumphed over Eisav, and over everything Eisav represented. He was now Yisrael. We are his descendants. May we be worthy of his name.

No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and

with man and have overcome. (32:29)

The names "Yaakov" and "Yisrael" allude to two distinct periods in the spiritual condition of our People. Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, presents an historical perspective based upon these two names. The name Yisrael, symbolizing strength and sovereignty, was evident in the period of "hod," glory, in the life of our nation: when Torah and mitzvah went side by side; when their study and observance were part and parcel of every Jew's "weltenshaung;" when faith in the Almighty beat in everyone's heart. A period of "shiflus," lowliness, was manifest in our nation: when we descended to the nadir of depravity; when many of our people, regrettably, turned their backs on their faith and ultimately on their Father in Heaven, when we attempted to acculturate and assimilate, striving to act like the nations around us. The name Yaakov was applicable during this latter period.

Chazal have taught us, "Yisrael, af al pi she'cha'tah, Yisrael hu," "Even though a Jew has sinned, he is still considered to be a Jew." Regardless of how deep we have descended, how far we have declined, we remain Hashem's nation; we are still considered Jews. The nations of the world are still by far more spiritually and morally deficient than we. During such a period, our People are not worthy of the name Yisrael, but we are still Jews; we are "Yaakov." The name Yaakov is taken from "his hand was grasping onto the akeiv, heel, of Eisav." Only as a result of the spiritual and moral dysfunction of Eisav's descendants, are we still considered to be the sons of Yaakov. In other words, it is not our own attributes, which have earned us this name. Rather, we are called Yaakov as a consequence of our relative superiority over Eisav.

David HaMelech says in Sefer Tehillim, 66:7, "He rules in His might forever, His eyes oversee the nations." When Hashem is about to judge Klal Yisrael with middas hadin, strict attribute of justice, He looks at the nations, at their abominable lifestyle, at their reprehensible activities and immoral behavior. He sees the vast distinction between their way of life and ours. Even after he has fallen prey to sin, the Jew is still on a much higher moral / spiritual plane than the members of the other nations.

This is the profound meaning of the Kohen Gadol's prayer on Yom Kippur, "A year in which Your people, the family of Yisrael, is not dependent upon one another, or upon another people." He implored Hashem that Klal Yisrael never be in the condition to be compared to the nations of the world. It should never happen that our only line of defense, our only justification for being sustained, is our relative good in comparison to the nations of the world. We ask Hashem for a year in which our own maasim tovim, good deeds, and positive behavior are our greatest advocates. Our splendor and majesty should justify our continued relationship with Hashem. When Yaakov Avinu triumphed over Eisav's guardian angel, he was blessed with the name "Yisrael." The majesty and splendor of Klal Yisrael should always be on a level to deserve the name that signifies strength and sovereignty. We should be worthy of Hashem's beneficence based upon our own merit - the merit of Yisrael.

Then Yaakov inquired, and he said, "Divulge, if you please, your name." And he said, "Why then do you inquire of my name?" (32:30)

Rashi explains that an angel exists only to perform Hashem's will, and his "name" reflects his mission. By asking the angel for his name, Yaakov Avinu sought to determine the nature of his mission. The angel replied that he had no established name, since the names of angels change in accordance with their mission. Horav Leib Chasman, zl, posits that when the angel responded, "Why then do you

inquire of my name?" it was a rhetorical question, constituting his response to Yaakov's query.

A person's name indicates his essence and true nature. Adam HaRishon gave names to all of the animals. He understood their intrinsic natures and "personalities," and he named them accordingly. He perceived their positive attributes that defined their essence, and he gave them names which corresponded to those characteristics. When we deal with evil, when we address the nature of kinaah, taavah, v'kavod - envy, lust and honor-traits that catalyze one's untimely spiritual - and, oftentimes, physical-demise, there is no essence, there is no internal nature. Evil has no foundation, no stability, no permanent basis. It is fleeting, as Shlomo Hamelech refers to the folly of life as "haveil havalim," "futility of futilities." He understood that the pleasures and allures of this world are passing and of no lasting value. When we examine the true nature of kavod, honor, we realize that it is all imaginary, truly "futility of futilities." Why would we care about its "name," if it has no essence? Eisav's guardian angel, alias Satan, also known as the yetzer hora, evil inclination, is well aware of the truth. He represents futility; he symbolizes illusion and delusion. He is nothing. He answers Yaakov, "Why would you ask my name?" A non-entity is not deserving of a name.

So Yaakov called the name of the place Peniel...the sun rose for him as he passed Penuel... (32:31,32)

Horav Yosef Konvitz, zl, one of the early pioneers of Orthodoxy in America, applied this pasuk to explain the dismal state of Jewish observance in the early part of the twentieth century. Most Jews at the time viewed every aspect of religious life with a haphazard, begrudging, even antagonistic attitude. Many were ignorant of Torah law. Some even acted l'hachis, deliberately transgressing Torah and mitzvos for profit or power. Kashrus, which in Europe was accepted by everybody, was unreliable at best. America was devoid of spiritual hope, posing an alarming threat to Torah-based Judaism. The European immigrants who came to the American exile, quickly became acculturated, adopting the attitudes and lifestyles of American life while retaining minimal ties to Judaism. As time went on, they assimilated into the American mainstream, ignoring their religious background and upbringing.

This was the scene that confronted the Torah Jew. What was he to do? Indeed, why was the American galus, exile, different from the previous exiles to which the Jewish people had been subjected? Never in our history had so many rejected the ways of their ancestors. Was America different, or were we different?

Horav Konvitz suggests that the answer to this riddle lies in Yaakov Avinu's struggle with Eisav's guardian angel and the apparent change in the name of the place in which their struggle occurred: from "Peniel" to "Penuel." When Yaakov was confronted with the challenge of finally coming face to face with his estranged brother, Eisav, he took his children, and "he brought them across the stream." He was separated from his children. The Torah states, "and Yaakov was left alone." He was without his children, and his children were without their father. Being alone, away from the support of his children, "a man wrestled with him." Eisav's angel succeeded in detaining Yaakov all night until dawn, causing his children to be alone, without direction, without protection all through the night.

At first, Yaakov did not notice any change. Indeed, he was full of joy at having triumphed over Eisav's evil. Furthermore, he had spared his children from this frightful encounter. He, therefore, referred to the place as "Peniel," which means, "I saw Hashem and He turned to me, and saved me." Regrettably, his joy was short lived. When he saw the light of day, when the sun shone brightly illuminating the sky with its brilliance, Yaakov experienced a shock. He realized that leaving his children alone all through the bleak darkness of the night was a grave error. The chasm and void that now existed between these two generations was enormous. Suddenly, the "Peniel" transformed to

"Penuel," which means, "they (to his children) turned away." Yaakov was now "limping on his hip;" there was a hindrance in his ability to move, a rift had developed between him and his children.

This exposition of Yaakov's encounter with the angel, and consequent alienation from his children, is a homiletic exegesis. It, nevertheless, conveys a profound perspective on the significance of intergenerational relationship, the importance of parents and children maintaining a bond that is inseparable. The American exile was unique in comparison to our People's past exiles. In the past, entire families were always banished - together. We went as a People, we were driven out as a community. The heritage of the past went with us to our new home. Parents were not separated from their children, and children were not separated from their parents. Despite the bitterness of the exile, the persecution and pain notwithstanding, parents were present to guide, encourage and inspire their children. Chazal's dictum, "Everywhere Klal Yisrael was exiled, the Shechinah went with them," applied. We may add that parents need and thrive on having their children with them. More often than not, a parent will refrain from acting inappropriately out of respect for, and in deference, to his children. One who does not is manifesting significant relational issues.

The American exile separated families. In some instances, the parents remained in Europe while the children came to these shores to make a "better" life for themselves. Indeed, in most cases the material aspect of their lives changed drastically. Because there was no parental support and guidance, however, their spiritual dimension was destroyed. In other situations, the father came to America, leaving his children in Europe while he earned enough money to send for them. The children were without their father, and the father was without his children. He would work long, hard hours under the most inhumane conditions to eke out a living. Regrettably, without the support and encouragement of his family, his loneliness and slave-like labor took its toll on his spiritual status-quo. The American exile was an exile that took its toll on our People, precisely because we entered it not as a people, but as lost individuals, without leadership and guidance.

Eisav ran to meet him, and he embraced him and fell on his neck, and kissed him. (33:4)

The word "vayishakeihu," "and he kissed him" is marked with dots over every letter. Rashi cites one opinion in Chazal that contends that the Torah emphasizes Eisav's kiss to teach that he did not kiss him wholeheartedly. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai disagrees, asserting that Eisav would have preferred to eliminate his nemesis. In support of this idea, he cites the axiom, "It is a well-known tradition that Eisav hates Yaakov." At that moment, however, Eisav felt compassion towards Yaakov. He was moved, so he kissed him whole-heartedly. Whether Eisav's kiss was sincere or not, we are compelled to remember that Eisav's innate hatred is directed at us.

Nachlas Tzvi determines from the text of the phrase that Eisav's hatred is focused at "Yaakov." If an individual is one of Yaakov Avinu's children or their descendants, Eisav hates him. The reason is simply that he is a "Yaakov." If we were to accept this reality, we would be certain of its truth. Regrettably, some of us would rather delude ourselves than confront the truth. Nachlas Tzvi cites a story that occurred concerning Zundel Hagadol, who was appointed by Horav Chaim Volozhiner to represent the Jewish community to Czar Nikolai's court in St. Petersburg. When he was a young boy, his father had owned a tavern which catered to the gentile community. One day the son of the "poritz," major landowner and strong man, who was a non-practicing Christian entered the tavern. He did not

believe in the Christian messiah or religion. Yet, he had no compunction about going over to the young Zundel who was assisting his father to demand, "Why did the Jews kill the messiah?" The young boy wisely responded, "Look how your deep hatred for us has captivated your mind. While you state that you do not believe that the supposed Christian messiah ever existed, you do believe that we killed him!" This is so true. We are surrounded by self-righteous, moralistic gentiles, of whom many are neither religious nor ethical. Yet, when it comes to attacking or slandering the Jewish people, they discover their heritage. How hypocritical it is that those who throw the largest stones at us demonstrate as much respect for their own religion as they do for ours. If we acknowledge the preordained natural order of life which protects us from getting too close to these people, then we might learn to "appreciate" this hidden gift.

Alternatively, along the same lines, we suggest that the hatred is truly directed only at Yaakov. The name Yaakov implies weakness, ambiguity, lack of self-respect, and underhandedness - all the things that a Jew should not epitomize. Eisav hates the Jew that has no self-respect, who is weak and pitiful. He scorns us when we accept ourselves as losers. He envies us when we achieve the name Yisrael. He respects us when we act as the Chosen People, the nation that received the Torah, the People of the Book. He admires us for using the gifts that Hashem has endowed us with for the betterment of mankind. The name Yisrael implies strength and domination. Our ancestor earned this name, and we should continue to deserve to carry this name.

Eisav ran to meet him, and he embraced him and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And they wept.
(33:4)

In one opinion, Chazal comment that Eisav did not come to kiss Yaakov, but, rather, to bite him. Miraculously, Yaakov's neck turned into marble, blunting Eisav's teeth. This is the meaning of the words, "and they wept:" Yaakov cried because of the pain in his neck, Eisav cried because of the pain in his teeth. We may wonder why Yaakov's neck turned to marble and not one of the usual array of hard substances, such as iron or brass. Why was it a stone rather than a metal? In responding to this question, the Shem Mishmuel first looks at the context of the Midrash. There appears to be a dispute regarding the sincerity of Eisav's love when he met Yaakov. After careful examination, he suggests that the Midrash is presenting a discussion regarding two distinct perspectives on Eisav's meeting with Yaakov.

Originally, when Yaakov prayed to Hashem he had pleaded, "Save me please from the hand of my brother, from Eisav (Bereishis 32:12)." The commentators explain that the apparent redundancy of "my brother" and "Eisav" refers to two "hanhagos," directions, of Eisav's relationship with Yaakov. In one approach, he acts as Eisav, the enemy, determined to destroy Yaakov physically. In the second avenue of "attack," Eisav acts as "achi," a brother, who seeks to come close to Yaakov, to defile him with his perverted philosophy, to destroy him spiritually. The latter is more harmful than a physical attack. A relationship with Eisav, drawing near to his evil, could have catalyzed the end of Yaakov's spiritual mission. It could have meant the end of Klal Yisrael. Is it any wonder that we are taught that Yaakov's greatest fear throughout the generations has been primarily from "his brother" and only secondarily from "Eisav?"

If we are to assume that seeing Yaakov calmed Eisav's murderous intent, that being face to face with his brother aroused his feelings of mercy, then it was only the "Eisav" aspect that yearned to inflict physical harm upon Yaakov. This is consistent with the opinion of the Tanna who contends that Eisav set out with hatred and changed his mentality midway. The other Tanna feels that while his desire to

destroy Yaakov physically was quelled, his inherent, immutable desire to contaminate Yaakov with his warped, malignant lifestyle was not altered one iota. He still planned to destroy Yaakov; he just changed his approach. He did not seek to eliminate Yaakov; he sought to unite with him. Thus, both Tannaim in the Midrash are in agreement: Eisav simultaneously wanted to make peace and to attack, albeit on two different planes.

When Eisav attempted to inject his baneful beliefs into Yaakov, to lure him toward the iniquitous life that he exemplified, Yaakov's neck immediately transformed to marble. A vessel made of stone -- of which marble is an example -- does not contract tumah, ritual contamination. It is unlike its metal counterparts that are vehicles for contracting tumah. The message is simple: Yaakov is impervious to Eisav's advances. He will not be influenced by his allure, by his inauthentic friendship, by his proclamations of unity.

How was Yaakov able to resist Eisav? What inner strength did he possess that helped him to overcome Eisav's enticements? The Shem Mishmuel suggests that the answer lies in Yaakov Avinu's attitude. The fact that he was more concerned with his spiritual than physical well-being protected him. When Eisav challenged his spiritual strength, Yaakov was able to conjure his spiritual adrenaline to help him to confront Eisav in a constructive manner. He was able to succeed because it meant so much to him.

This idea is equally relevant to us. When we are unsuccessful on the spiritual front, it is because it does not mean as much to us as it should. If we would care about our spiritual well-being as much as our Patriarch did, we would likewise succeed in this realm.

The men were distressed, and were fired deeply with indignation, for he had committed an outrage in Yisrael by lying with a daughter of Yaakov...And they said, "should he treat our sister like a harlot?"
(34:7,31)

The incident concerning Dinah and her brothers' reaction to the outrage is considered one of the tzaros, anguishing experiences, to which Yaakov Avinu was subject. Yaakov criticized his sons' response in strong terms. Yet, if we think about it, were they wrong? Should they have sat by idly as a pagan defiles a Jewish girl? Are Jewish girls to be like hefker, as ownerless property? Bnei Yaakov were making a statement -- a strong one perhaps -- but a statement nonetheless. If someone attempts to take advantage of a Jewish girl, the response will be immediate and devastating. Why, then, was Yaakov upset with them?

We suggest the answer may be implied in the double meaning of the phrase "He had committed an outrage in Yisrael, by lying with a daughter of Yaakov." The Baalei Tosfos interpret this to mean that he had committed two wrongs: First he had defiled a Jewish girl, a member of Klal Yisrael; second, he had taken advantage of Yaakov's daughter, a member of a distinguished family. What was their real impetus; what really angered them? Was it the fact that she was a Jewess or that she was Yaakov's daughter? Was it the Jewish people that concerned them -- or was it their personal humiliation that provoked their anger? When they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" it seems they were overly concerned with their self-image: their sister had been violated.

Yaakov tells his sons, "Had your provocation been the same for any Jewish girl, I would have been accepting. But, I decry, however, the reality that you were influenced, by the fact that it was your sister that was hurt. A ben Torah reacts the same for all Jews, regardless of their family background or religious orientation. Whether it was their sister or another Jew's sister, it should effect an equivalent

response. We are all one family.

We suggest that this may be Chazal's fundamental critique of Yaakov: Denying the marriage of Dinah to Eisav. Chazal tell us that a major catalyst for the tragedy that befell Dinah was that Yaakov hid Dinah when he met Eisav. He ineffect was "told," "You refused to show kindness to your brother, she will be taken instead by an enemy. You refused to permit her to marry a man who is circumcised; she will instead marry an uncircumcised infidel. You refused to allow her to marry in a permitted fashion; she will instead be married in a forbidden manner."

How are we to understand Chazal's critique of Yaakov Avinu? Was he expected to give his pure and innocent daughter in marriage to Eisav ha'rasha, a man who set the standard for evil? Chesed, kindness, ends at one point and foolishness begins! The commentators offer a number of explanations for this critique. Probably the most common p'shat is given by Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, who says that while Yaakov certainly had to protect his daughter from marrying Eisav, he should have done it with extreme reluctance. It was something that he had to do - not something he wanted to do. Perhaps when he hid Dinah, he closed the chest just a bit more forcefully than was necessary. This slight deviation from perfection, on Yaakov's lofty spiritual plane, is viewed as sinful. Hence, we understand the punishment which he incurred.

We suggest that on some level, Chazal note Yaakov was acting on behalf of his daughter, but had this been someone else he might not have acted so decisively. Chazal detected a slight tinge of personal interest, a taint of nepotism - an attitude totally unbecoming Yaakov Avinu. The Avos were to be above acting on behalf of themselves. They were manhigim, leaders, who must remain objective at all times, under all conditions. The scales of justice for judging the righteous are on a completely different plane. What might be viewed as simple fatherly love for us is considered a lack of objectivity for Yaakov Avinu.

Timna was a concubine to Elifaz the son of Eisav. And she bore to Elifaz, Amalek. (36:12)

Chazal tell us that Timna was a "bas melachim" princess, who descended from an "illustrious" pagan lineage. Yet, she sought to convert. She came to each of the Patriarchs with her request, but they each refused her. She then went to Elifaz, the son of Eisav, and became his pilegesh, concubine. She said, "I would rather be a maidservant to this nation than be a queen by another nation. The product of this union was Amalek, the archenemy of the Jews. Why? Why did we deserve to have Amalek descend from her? It is because the Patriarchs should not have distanced her. They should have brought her under the wings of the Shechinah by converting her. Imagine the depth of judgement to which Hashem subjects His devotees. Hashem takes the Avos to task for a decision that was probably justified because the Avos certainly saw Amalakean middos, character traits, within Timna. Perhaps, however, they could have worked on purging those negative character traits. They could never find out who she might have become if they did not try. For this, we have suffered over the millennia at the hands of Amalek and his descendants. We still have a question that should be addressed: What was so bad about Timna that they refused to try - to attempt to set her straight, to have the light of Torah reach into her innermost being and illuminate the darkness? Is that not the essence of Torah? What was there about Timna that precluded all attempts at saving her?

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, cites a story that occurred concerning the Chafetz Chaim that gives insight to the Patriarch's decision. The Chafetz Chaim permitted a student who was suspected of transgressing a number of sins to remain in the yeshivah. A short time later, a woman came to complain that one of the yeshivah students who ate his meals at her house was a mechutsaf, insolent. The Chafetz

Chaim immediately had the student dismissed from the yeshivah. When asked why he kept a student whose shortcomings amounted to much more serious sins than chutzpah, the Chafetz Chaim responded by citing the Mishnah in Avos 5:20 that says, "Az panim, the brazen-faced is headed for Gehinom; boshes panim, the one who is a shame-face will go to Gan Eden." What is the Mishnah teaching us? If the az panim does not repent, he will certainly be punished; if he performs teshuvah, why should he not be accepted in Gan Eden? Furthermore, why does the Mishnah emphasize the "az-panim" in this case more so than any other sinner? Does not anyone who sins go to Gehinom? The Chafetz Chaim explained that while teshuvah ostensibly "works" for every sin, the chances are that one who is brazen will probably not repent. This is indicated by the text that stresses the az panim, one who is brazen, as opposed to azus panim, brazenness. The person who is brazen, who is steadfast in his brazenness, will not repent. In order to perform teshuvah, he must purge himself of brazenness and arrogance.

Veritably, the student whose sins go far beyond chutzpah might presently be faced with a formidable challenge in his quest for teshuvah. There is, however, hope. The one who is an az panim, whose brazenness is uncontrolled - will not repent. He will continue along his negative path, arrogantly doing whatever he wants, unconcerned with the people he is hurting. Undoubtedly, if the "az panim" repents, his teshuvah will be accepted. Unfortunately, such a person rarely repents. He sees nothing wrong with what he is doing. Even if he were able to be introspective, his arrogance would never permit him to acknowledge the reality.

Amalek's most significant negative character trait is chutzpah. He is not "nispael", impressed, by anything. He fears no one and constantly demonstrates his insolence. The entire world feared Klal Yisrael when they left Egypt. Yet, Amalek was the first to challenge them. The Avos perceived in Timna, his mother, this tinge of "azus panim." They understood that one who possesses this middah will not repent; she will not be able to conform sincerely to Judaism. Thus, they did not accept her.

I have sojourned with Lavan. (32:5)

Yaakov Avinu implied his fortitude in maintaining his observance of the Taryag 613 Mitzvos, by using the term "garti" - as the numerical value of the word "garti" is 613. Why did Yaakov emphasize the fact that he observed the 613 mitzvos? Why could he not simply have said, "I did not learn from Lavan's actions; I have maintained my own spiritual level? Why did he stress his performance of the actual mitzvos? Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, notes that the catalyst for spiritual concern is not always complacency, degeneracy or free-thinking. Some individuals take the original pristine Torah and purposely amend it. They might supplement it with ideas and practices "borrowed" from contemporary society, or they might eliminate that which seems archaic. There are those who might even introduce a new Torah, a new perspective, a new set of laws, which they think is more "attuned" with society. The danger does not emanate from a lack of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, or from a disdain for the Torah and mitzvos. The problem occurs when we attempt to replace the Torah, to take the place of the Nosein HaTorah, Giver of the Torah. An individual who is antagonistic to Torah poses a greater threat than one who thinks he is "frumer", more pious, more devout than his fellow Jew.

Lavan had no desire to denigrate yiraas Shomayim; he did not seek to promote secularism. He simply wanted to "supplement" his own mitzvos and perhaps "amend" a few mitzvos. "Remain frum,

continue with your observance, just refocus yourself, de-emphasize certain mitzvos, while accenting others." This was Lavan's credo.

Yaakov Avinu realized the crucial importance of retaining the Torah in its pristine character, with its 613 mitzvos - no more, no less. He understood that Lavan's invidious approach was far more dangerous than a direct assault upon the Torah and mitzvah observance. He told Eisav, "I lived with Lavan, and I observed the Taryag mitzvos in their entirety. Lavan could not sway me - neither will you."

I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now.

Rashi cites the Midrash which emphasizes that the numerical value of the word "garti," "I have sojourned," is 613, corresponding to the number of mitzvos Hashem gave to the Jewish People. Hence, Yaakov implied to Eisav, "Though I have sojourned with Lavan, I have observed the Taryag mitzvos and have not learned from his evil ways." Yaakov stood firm and unafraid of Eisav, his spiritual level intact. Yaakov's comment to Eisav seems redundant. Certainly, if he had the fortitude to observe all 613 mitzvos, he surely did not mimic any of Lavan's negative actions!

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, infers from here that it is possible for one to be totally observant, keep all of the mitzvos, yet still be an "Eisav" in his everyday actions and demeanor. In the beginning of Parashas Kedoshim the Ramban refers to such an individual as a "naval birshus ha'Torah," degenerate with the permission of the Torah. Such a person observes the letter of the law, the technical requirements and practices, while acceding to self-indulgence, gluttony and debauchery. The Torah demands that a Jew sanctify himself in every area of life's endeavor. Yaakov Avinu did not only observe mitzvos; the mitzvos shaped his entire perspective of life.

And Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him. (32:8)

Simply, Yaakov Avinu was concerned about the potential for Eisav to harm him and his family. Rashi explains that Yaakov was afraid that he would be killed. He was also distressed that he would be victorious in the ensuing battle and kill others in the process. The Ralbag comments that since distress is a stronger form of fear than fright, the prospect of killing another human being was more upsetting than the risk that he himself might be killed. This demonstrates the remarkable virtue of Yaakov Avinu.

In the Talmud Berachos 4A, Chazal explain that Yaakov's fear emanated from a concern that "she'ma yigrom ha'cheit," perhaps he had sinned and consequently had forfeited Hashem's protection. What sin could he have committed? Targum Yonasan explains that Yaakov felt he was lax in the mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Eim, since he had been separated from his parents during his sojourn with Lavan. During this time Eisav was living at home and observing this mitzvah in the appropriate manner. Yet, Yaakov did not neglect the mitzvah. He just was unable to perform it, since he was not at home. Could he have forfeited Hashem's protection for this reason?

The common translation of the word "cheit" is sin. Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, cites Rashi in the Navi Melachim 1, 1:21 in which he defines the word cheit as a deficiency, a shortcoming or an imperfection. This sheds light on the concept of sin. Sin is an imperfection on the neshamah, soul, a blemish that causes a defect in the purity of the soul. Therefore, if one has not committed a sin, but has neglected to perform a specific mitzvah which someone else performed in his place, he is considered to be blemished in respect to the other person. While we may not consider this to be a sin, the Heavenly

perspective views this as a deficiency.

Yaakov certainly had not committed any sins. He was concerned, however, that Eisav had performed Kibud Av v'Eim while he had not. He was deficient in comparison to Eisav. We do not know the value of each individual mitzvah. The Heavenly Tribunal has a different manner for evaluating the significance of each mitzvah. Yaakov was concerned about his deficiency in this single mitzvah which Eisav had performed to a greater degree than he had. In his eyes this was a cheit, a blemish in his spiritual character.

Horav Gifter cites the Ramban who says that in order to merit eternal life in Olam Habah, one must perform at least one mitzvah properly with total devotion, l'shem mitzvah, for the sake of the mitzvah, with no manifest personal motives or vested interests. He must perform this mitzvah with love for the Almighty and a desire to do His will. Hashem has, therefore, granted us a multitude of mitzvos. While he intends for us to observe all of them, we will at least observe one correctly. It behooves us to approach mitzvah observance with the utmost care. We cannot determine which mitzvah will gain us entrance into Olam Habah.

Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. (32:25)

Rashi cites the Talmud in Chullin 9A that says that Yaakov had forgotten some pachim ketanim, small earthenware pitchers, and had returned to retrieve them. Chazal derive from the fact that Yaakov returned for some inexpensive vessels that "to the righteous, their money is dearer to them than their bodies. Since they earn every penny with great diligence, their integrity is impeccable, everything they own is very dear to them." Chazal's words obviously reflect a deeper meaning. We do not venerate an individual for exhibiting greater care for his material possessions than for his own body.

Horav Simcha Zissel M'Kelm compares this to soldiers who are permitted to take a number of sets of clothing with them during peace time. In contrast, during wartime, they must travel light. They leave behind anything that might restrict or hamper their movement. Thus, they are careful in the maintenance of their garments. This is all they possess, and they cannot afford to lose them. The same idea applies to the righteous. In their never-ending battle with the yetzer hora, evil inclination, they have little time or patience for mundane and material possessions. They take along only those articles that facilitate their spiritual development. Hence, they are diligent in caring for their material possessions. If they lose something, the time they use to replace it will interfere with their spiritual enhancement.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, cites the Yalkut Meom Loez and Horav Chaim Vital, zl, who emphasize the fact that the righteous acknowledge the source of their material possessions - Hashem. Appreciating their source increases their value. Horav Solomon offers a profound parable that sheds greater light on this idea. There was once a poor man who literally had nothing. Yet, despite his abject poverty, he continued to observe the mitzvos meticulously. He needed one item, however, in order to appropriately perform the mitzvah of Netillas Yodaim, washing his hands - a cup and bowl. Once, this man dreamed that the Almighty had noted his great poverty and extreme devotion to mitzvos and had given him a new cup and bowl for Netillas Yodayim. In the morning, the man woke. To his surprise, he noticed a brand new cup and bowl next to his bed. Words cannot describe the overwhelming joy that he had, knowing that Hashem had responded to his request. Before long, this poor man was blessed, and his material assets multiplied. He became a wealthy man. He purchased expensive furniture and

precious objects, filling his house to capacity. He decided to move out of his modest home into a house more becoming his present financial position. After the move was complete, the workers came to him to be paid. He first went through his entire house, taking inventory to make sure that everything had been transferred from the old house. Suddenly, he began to scream and berate the workers, "I am missing a very special vessel," the man complained. "Impossible," the workers responded, "we took everything from the house." The man would not listen. He returned to his home to look for his precious Netillas Yodayim cup. He searched for awhile until finally, to his excitement, he found his cup. The workers were naturally amazed by the wealthy man's reaction to finding this simple, inexpensive cup. "For this you made such a commotion? It is nothing more than a simple cup!" the workers exclaimed. "To you it may be a simple cup, but to me it is invaluable because I received it directly from Heaven. Indeed it is worth more to me than all my possessions!" responded the wealthy man.

The lesson of this parable is apparent. The tzaddik understands clearly that everything he possesses is a direct gift from the Almighty. He realizes the true source of everything he owns. He is aware that whatever he has is there for a specific purpose - to serve Hashem. Is it any wonder that he takes such extreme care of his material possessions?

Horav Solomon presents this idea as the basis for the difference in outlook between Yaakov and Eisav. He cites the Tanna Dvei Eliyahu that relates that while Yaakov and Eisav were still in the womb, they "divided" their inheritance of the two worlds, Olam Hazeh, this world, and Olam Haboh. Eisav chose Olam Hazeh with its material/physical responsibilities and benefits. Eating, drinking, marriage and children were just the beginning of the fruits of "this world." Olam Habah has none of these, but that did not deter Yaakov. When Eisav met Yaakov he encountered a man who had succeeded in this world. He had a large family, wealth, servants, all the signs of one who seemed to be enjoying this world. Eisav demanded an explanation from Yaakov. Olam Hazeh was Eisav's realm. This was not Yaakov's bailiwick. Yaakov explained that his possessions were gifts from the Almighty in order to facilitate his spiritual observance.

Eisav sought Olam Hazeh as an end in itself. Yaakov made use of Olam Hazeh only to further advance his spiritual development. Indeed, Yaakov has no right to appropriate Olam Hazeh for personal reasons, only to foster greater spiritual growth. When Eisav's guardian angel noticed Yaakov returning for the pachim ketanim, little pitchers, he thought that he might convince him that he is expending too much effort on behalf of his Olam Hazeh. He did not succeed - completely. He did blemish one area -- the gid ha'nashe, sciatic sinew -- symbolizing movement. As long as we move in the direction of our ancestor Yaakov, as long as Olam Hazeh remains only a vehicle for fulfilling our spiritual mandate, Eisav will have no power over us. If, however, we veer from Yaakov's perspective, if we move in the path forged by Eisav, squandering the material for personal use, we fall prey to Eisav.

Horav Solomon contends that this was Yaakov's message when he journeyed to Succos, a place named for the temporary shelters that he erected for his livestock. Targum Yonasan explains that first Yaakov built a Bais Hamedrash, a place for Torah study, which was the prime focus of his life. He then made temporary dwellings for his livestock, to imply that the material assets are only temporary. They have no permanence in our lives. We control our material possessions only as long as they are subordinated to our spiritual goals. Otherwise, our material resources control us.

We now understand why the Tur writes in Hilchos Rosh Chodesh, in the name of his brother, that the Three Festivals correspond to the Avos. Pesach is connected to Avraham Avinu, who baked matzos for the angels that visited him on Pesach night. Yitzchak, who was replaced on the Akeidah by a ram, corresponds with Shavuos, during which a Shofar, ram's horn, was sounded during the Giving of

the Torah, commemorated by the festival of Shavuous. Yaakov Avinu's act of building succos, temporary dwellings for his livestock, relates to the festival of Succos.

Although Avraham and Yitzchak's relationship with their corresponding festival is apparent, one might question the relationship between Chag Succos and Yaakov's shelters for his livestock. With the above appreciation of Yaakov's perspective on life in mind, we can now understand Yaakov's message to his children when he built the succos. Olam Hazei exists only to enhance Olam Habah. Our relationship to the material and mundane is temporary. During the festival of Succos, we move out of our permanent homes and dwell for the duration of the festival, in makeshift huts which are nothing more than temporary shelters. This teaches us the transitory nature of the material world. Yaakov Avinu's lesson is commemorated in the festival of Succos.