

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

DVAR TORAH: YAAKOV & YISRAEL AND EISAV & LAVAN

Even after his name is changed to Yisrael, Yaakov's original name is retained. Throughout the Torah he is called both Yaakov and Yisrael. As opposed to Avraham and Sarah, whose earlier names Avram and Sarai are dropped totally, Yaakov and Yisrael coexist. The Netivot Shalom suggests that Yaakov-Yisrael's two names relate to two different forces he combated in his life, Lavan and Eisav.

Lavan represents flaws of the mind – beliefs, approaches, and outlook. Lavan's pronouncement, "The daughters are mine, the sons are mine, the sheep is mine, and everything you see here is mine" (Bereishit 31:43) is the classic arrogant, blasphemous denial. On Pesach night we say in the Hagaddah, "Lavan wanted to uproot everything," because he wanted to strike out at the mind, the seat of the soul.

Eisav personifies impurity of the body – physical lusts and aggression. The Sages say (Bava Batra 16b) that on the day he became bar mitzvah Eisav both had relations with a betrothed woman and committed murder. Eisav relates to the realm of action, stirring up the animalistic side of man.

The name "Yaakov" counteracts Eisav. This is hinted at when the Torah says, "His hand held on to Eisav's ankle," (Bereishit 25:26) meaning that Yaakov overcomes Eisav's body. "Yisrael" counteracts Lavan, who wanted to destroy the mind and soul. The letters of the word Yisrael can be regrouped to say, "Li Rosh" (לִי רֹאשׁ), meaning, "The head belongs to me." In other words, Yisrael is in control of the head, not letting it get contaminated by the Lavan force.

Torah strengthens us against both of these forces. The Torah protects against the evil inclination, Eisav's force, as the Gemara says, "I created the yeitzer hara and I created the Torah to counteract it" (Kidushin 30b). On the other hand, the Torah purifies and illuminates the Jew's intellect and mind.

These, in a much broader way, are two foci of Jewish life, holiness and belief. Holiness is the antithesis of Eisav and belief the antithesis of Lavan. They are also represented by the two messiahs, Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben David. Mashiach ben Yosef will conquer the Eisav force, as Yosef stood above negative physical desire, and Mashiach ben David, connected with the quality of Malkhut (Royalty), will bring the final redemption, conquering the Lavan force.

There is a big difference between the struggle over holiness and that over belief. Perfecting holiness demands superhuman power, special Divine assistance, whereas belief is embedded in the Jewish being. The tradition teaches that Mashiach ben Yosef must sacrifice his life for the struggle, but that the final redemption will come through belief, the natural possession of the Jew. Yaakov, when his name was changed, was told, "You have struggled with the Divine and with man and triumphed." Yaakov struggled both using his own powers against that which he could, and through Divine assistance against that which was beyond his ability.

In this pre-messianic period, the focus of our struggle is on holiness, counteracting the Eisav power. For this we require special Divine assistance. However, this special Divine assistance is available every Shabbat in the form of the Neshamah Yeteirah, the extra soul that we receive when Shabbat enters. The holiness of each Shabbat gives us the ability to rise in holiness, bringing the Mashiach one step closer.

SOURCE GUIDE: HOW TO TRIUMPH OVER AN ANGEL

This source guide is based on a comment by the Sfas Emes (Vayishlach 5636) about Yaakov's struggle with the angel. The full text appears here, with a translation and some explanatory comments. [The Sfas Emes on the Chumash and holidays was written by Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter ztl, the grandson of the Chidushei Harim, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir ztl, the first Gerrer Rebbe.]

This piece opens with the verse immediately following Yaakov's struggle with the angel.

<p>Bereishit 32:29 And he (the angel) said: Your name will no longer be called Yaakov; rather, it will be Yisrael, for you have struggled with angels and men and prevailed.</p>	<p>בראשית לב:כט וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יִעֲקֹב יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ כִּי אָם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעַם אַנְשִׁים וַתִּוְכַל.</p>
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Chazal (Berachot 13a) contrast Avraham's name change with Yaakov's. Whereas the name "Avram" is shed and never returned to, says Bar Kapara, the Torah continues to use the names Yaakov and Yisrael. These two names, he says, relate to two coexisting aspects of his identity.

<p>Sfas Emes, Vayishlach, 5636 The Children of Israel merited these two names, and they relate to two aspects of his being, the body and the soul.</p>	<p>שפת אמת על פרשת וישלח, שנת תרל"ו וב' שמות אלו זכו בהם בני ישראל. והם בחי' הגוף והנשמה.</p>
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However, the name Yisrael means more than merely a person with a soul.

<p>Sfas Emes, Vayishlach, 5636 For every person must transform the body until the power of his soul rests on it. Then the person can be referred to as Yisrael.</p>	<p>שפת אמת על פרשת וישלח, שנת תרל"ו כי צריך כל אדם לתקן הגוף עד שיחול עליו כח נשמתו ואז נק' ישראל.</p>
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Yisrael is a person whose body has been transformed to the degree where "the power of his soul rests on it."

<p>Sfas Emes, Vayishlach, 5636 The matter of the war of Yaakov against the angel is as follows: For the level of a man's soul is higher than that of an angel, as is well known. But this is only true for the level of his soul. But the level of an angel's body is greater than that of a man's body. For a man's body is from the "World of Action". But our forefather Yaakov, may he rest in peace, transformed his body until he merited being a "chariot" for Hashem, may He be blessed. It turns out that his body was like a soul. Therefore even the material of his soul was able to fight against the angel.</p>	<p>שפת אמת על פרשת וישלח, שנת תרל"ו וענין מלחמת יעקב עם המלאך כי נשמת אדם גדלה מעלתה מהמלאך כידוע. רק שזה בבחי' הנשמה בלבד. אבל גוף המלאך גדלה מעלתו על גוף האדם. כי גוף האדם בעולם העשי'. אך יעקב אע"ה תיקן גופו עד שזכה להיות מרכבה להשי"ת. נמצא גם גופו כמו נשמה. ולכן גם בחומר גופו הי' יכול להלחם עם המלאך.</p>
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The competition between Man and Angel usually ends up in a draw, a tie – for Man's soul comes from a higher source than the Angel's but Man's body is lowly, physical, and coarse, while the Angel's soul is lower but his body is lofty and spiritual. Against this backdrop the Sfas Emes views the struggle between Yaakov and the angel. Yaakov beat the angel because not only was his soul higher, but his body had also been transformed and refined.

This explains a difficulty in the verse we began with. Why, if the names Yaakov and Yisrael are both used in Tanach, is Yaakov told "Your name will no longer be called Yaakov"?

<p>Sfas Emes, Vayishlach, 5636 This is what is meant by the verse, “Your name will no longer be called Yaakov.” The explanation is that even the body, referred to as “Yaakov”, is not merely body in the physical sense, but had transformed to spirituality like the soul.</p>	<p>שפת אמת על פרשת וישלח, שנת תרל"ו וז"ש לא יקרא שמך עוד יעקב. פי' שגם הגוף שמכונה בשם יעקב. איננו אצלו בבחי' גוף ונהפך לרוחניות כמו הנשמה.</p>
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Yaakov had reached the point where his body – “Yaakov” – was no longer purely physical. He is no longer merely Yaakov, but Yaakov and Yisrael, a soul in a refined body.

<p>Sfas Emes, Vayishlach, 5636 This is what is meant by “Yaakov came [to Shechem] complete (<i>shalem</i>).” For the body being in sync with the soul is referred to as “shalom”.</p>	<p>שפת אמת על פרשת וישלח, שנת תרל"ו וז"ש ויבוא יעקב שלם שזה ההשתוות הגוף להנשמה נקרא שלום.</p>
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Peace has both external and internal aspects. A country at peace is both free of struggles with other nations and also free of internal turmoil. Likewise a person whose soul and body do not struggle with each other because his body has been elevated and refined, can be called at peace.

How does this apply to all of us? What can we learn from Yaakov’s struggle with the angel?

<p>Sfas Emes, Vayishlach, 5636 For this struggle between body and soul goes on inside every Jew. And a person’s perfection corresponds to the degree that his body has been transformed.</p>	<p>שפת אמת על פרשת וישלח, שנת תרל"ו כי בכל איש ישראל יש מחלוקת זה בין הגוף והנשמה. וכפי תיקון הגוף כך השלימות שבו.</p>
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The Sfas Emes is here making two points:

1. Every person goes through the struggle between body and soul – in effect, playing out the struggle between Yaakov and the angel. Every person is asked, “Can you elevate your body so you are also – in some way – greater than the angel?”
2. There is a sliding scale of perfection. As we elevate and transform our bodies, we come closer to the perfection that Yaakov reached. The struggle between body and soul becomes less intense as the body becomes more soul-like.

<p>Sfas Emes, Vayishlach, 5636 Therefore Shabbat is referred to as “Shalom”. For it includes a transformation of the body like that of the World to Come. In the future, the bodies will indeed be soul-like. On the holy Shabbat there is a miniature version of this. Our bodies are somewhat transformed, each person according to how he has prepared himself through his actions during the six days of activity. Through that one merits on Shabbat a <i>neshamah yeteirah</i>, an extra level of soul that corresponds to the extent that the soul’s power has spread to the body.</p>	<p>שפת אמת על פרשת וישלח, שנת תרל"ו ולכן גם שבת נקרא שלום כי יש בו תיקון הגוף שהוא מעין עוה"ב. ולעתיד לבוא יהיו הגופות מתוקנים ממש כמו נשמות. ובש"ק יש מעין זה תיקון הגופות קצת לכל א' כפי הכנת מעשיו בימי המעשה זוכה בשבת לנשמה יתירה שהוא ע"ש תוקף התפשטות כחה בגוף:</p>
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Shabbat is our opportunity to try on the refined body of the World to Come. During the week we can direct our bodies to serve our soul’s needs, and merit, on Shabbat, a *neshamah yeteirah*, that he defines as a soul that transforms and influences the body.

A TILTED PLAYING FIELD, BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

The confrontation between Yaakov and Eisav upon Yaakov's return to Eretz Yisrael is designed to teach us about confrontations we face in our own lives. To Chazal, Eisav represents that which stands between us and Hakadosh baruch Hu, the Holy One, blessed be He, and our desire to come closer to Him. For Chazal, Eisav represents the yeitzer hara, the evil inclination.

The Torah states that at the conclusion of the six days of creation **וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד** – “Hakadosh baruch Hu saw everything that He had done and it was very good” (Bereishit 1:31). And the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 9:7) says: **וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד זֶה יִצְרַר הָרַע** – And it was very good – this refers to the yeitzer hara. For while it is true that unchecked sensuality and physicality blocks our connection to Hashem; if properly harnessed, their challenge unleashes our own spiritual energies.

In this week's parshah, Vayishlach, we find Yaakov wrestling with Eisav's guardian angel, who says, “Send me off, for the morning has risen.” And Yaakov responds, **לֹא אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ כִּי אִם בְּרַכְתֵּנִי** – “I will not send you away before you have blessed me” (Bereishit 32:27). Rashi explains: I want you to acknowledge the validity of the blessings which my father blessed me. Rashi (on Bereishit 32:29, based on a verse in Hoshea) also says that the angel told Yaakov: “Wait for my blessing until we meet later at Beit El,” but Yaakov did not agree, and forced the angel to bless him right then and there.

Why? Why was this so important to Yaakov?

Yaakov knew that the fateful meeting was yet to come. For him it was critical that before that meeting with Eisav would take place, Eisav, through his angel, would have already acknowledged that the ultimate victory was in the hands of Yaakov. The triumph of good is, thanks to Yaakov, built into the struggle. But what is the justification for having such a tilted playing field? The answer is that God's plan was always to give true good the advantage. The tov meod, the yeitzer hara, was always there to assist us, to present us with challenges so that we can most effectively fulfill Hashem's plan for us in this world.

With this insight we can march forward to meet our own challenges with increased confidence. We know that our sincere struggles must ultimately be crowned with success, as it says, **וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתוֹ שָׁם** – right there and right then he blessed him.

Good Shabbos.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Avraham Yitzchak ben Yonah, ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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