

## I. Summary

- **Yaakov Prepares To Meet Esav.** On the journey home, fearful for his family's safety, Yaakov sent a conciliatory message to Esav via messengers (angels), who return with the news that Esav was approaching with 400 armed men. Fearful that Esav would try to carry out his previous intention of killing Yaakov, Yaakov divided his people and possessions into 2 camps (so that one could escape if the other was attacked), prayed to Hashem and sent a succession of valuable gifts to Esav.
- **Yaakov Wrestles With An Angel.** Yaakov helped his children and wives cross the ford of Yabok. Yaakov remained alone that night (i.e., the night before he met Esav), during which an angel (Esav's guardian angel) appeared and wrestled him until dawn. Although the angel injured his thigh (thus we don't eat the sinew of an animal's thigh), Yaakov overcame him and refused to release him until the angel blessed him. The angel blessed him and told him that Hashem would change his name to Yisroel (which means to "prevail over the Divine [i.e., the angel]").
- **Yaakov & Esav Meet.** When Yaakov saw Esav and his followers approaching, he placed each of children in front of the child's respective mother. In front of his entire family, Yaakov met Esav and bowed down to him seven times. Miraculously, Esav was greatly touched, ran over to Yaakov and embraced him, and they wept. Hashem's promise of safety on the journey home had been fulfilled.
- **The City of Shechem.** After Yaakov and Esav parted ways, Yaakov traveled to Shechem (in Israel), where he purchased some land, pitched a tent and gratefully built an altar to Hashem. Dinah (Yaakov's daughter) was kidnaped by the prince of Shechem, but was rescued by her brothers Shimon and Levi, who punished the perpetrator and all those who had either aided him or could have helped Dinah but didn't.
- **Yaakov Returned to Beth-El.** At Hashem's bidding, Yaakov returned to Beth-El, where he built another altar in gratitude to Hashem. Hashem appeared, renewed His promise to give Canaan to Yaakov and his descendants, and renamed him Yisroel.
- **Rachel Died.** As the family left Beth-El, Rachel died while giving birth to Binyomin and was buried in Bais Lechem (on the road to Bethlehem), where Yaakov erected a monument on her grave site. (Yaakov chose this site because he foresaw his descendants passing it on the road to the Babylonian exile, and Rachel would "weep for her children" [Jeremiah]; to this day, people pray at Rachel's tomb for her to intercede with G-d on their behalf.)
- **Yaakov Reaches Chevron.** Yaakov finally returned home to Chevron, where he was reunited with Yitzchak. Yitzchak died at age 180 and was buried by Yaakov and Esav. As there wasn't enough room for both Yaakov and Esav (who had become quite wealthy) to live together, Esav resettled in Mt. Sair (in land of Edom), a land which he and his descendants inhabited for many years to come.

## II. Divrei Torah

## A. Lilmode U'ilamed (Rabbi Mordechai Katz)

- **Yaakov's Humility.** Yaakov was afraid and distressed when he heard Esav was approaching. Did he doubt that Hashem would live up to His promise to protect him? No, Yaakov doubted whether he had lived up to Hashem's expectations and was thus deserving of Hashem's protection. This is the nature of a true Tzaddik — he knows that Hashem will always be true to His word; however, he constantly checks his own deeds to make sure he is worthy of Hashem's kindness. We too should act in this manner, and not take for granted Hashem's kindness.
- **Yaakov's Prepares To Meet Esav.** When Yaakov heard that Esav was approaching, he prepared to meet him in three ways — he gave gifts to appease him, prayed to Hashem; and prepared for war. What do we learn from this? When problems arise, we should try to solve them peacefully. At the same time, prayer is an invaluable aid at times of crisis. Finally, we should do everything without our power to ensure our survival, rather than give up all hope or rely on miracles.
- **Steer Clear of Bad Influences.** Yaakov declined Esav's offer to stay with him after their reunion because he feared Esav's negative influence. A man had been a failure at everything he tried. He seemed at a dead end in life, when he decided to try a new career path — to become a wagon driver. He went to the guild to submit his application. The guild members doubted that he was qualified in light of his dismal track record, but agreed to give him a chance by putting him to a test of wits. "What would you do if your wagon got stuck in mud?," they asked. "I would get a lever and pry it out," he answered proudly. "And if that didn't work?," they continued. "I would get a rock to raise it even higher," he responded. "And if the mud was too deep for even that?," they continued. "I would get out and let the horses try to pull the wagons out." "And if that didn't work?," they asked. To this he had no answer and asked them what they would do. They replied "we would have been sure to avoid the mud in the first place." We, too, must avoid the pitfalls of corrupting influences.

## B. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

- **Once An Argument Is Over, Don't Say Anything To Arouse It Again.** "And Yaakov sent messengers before him to Esav his brother." The Midrash censures Yaakov for sending these messengers to Esav, for Esav had already calmed down about Yaakov taking the blessings from their father and was involved in his own matters. By sending messengers, Yaakov started up with Esav and aroused his anger. This is an important principle for two people involved in a quarrel. Once the matter has passed, don't say anything to the other person that would remind him of the matter. By bringing up the issue when it is not necessary to do so, you will start a new quarrel that is avoidable. Arguments should be forgotten, not remembered.
- **Do good deeds with great enthusiasm.** "I have lived with Lavon." Rashi comments that the word "garti" ("I have lived") in this verse has the numerical value of 613, the number of commandments. Yaakov was thus saying "I have dwelt with Lavon and kept the commandments; I didn't learn from his bad deeds." The simplest meaning of this verse is that even someone on Yaakov's high level could have been influenced

negatively and it was a real accomplishment not to have been. Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman quotes his Rebbe, The Chofetz Chaim, that this can be understood to mean that Yaakov was finding fault with himself. When Lavon did something improper, he did it with much energy and enthusiasm. Yaakov said about himself that his level in doing good didn't reach the same level as Lavon's when he did bad. The Chofetz Chaim used to say that today we need to learn from the energy and enthusiasm of the spiritual descendants of Lavon, so that we can do our good deeds with great enthusiasm.

- **Make Your Happiness Dependent Only Upon Yourself.** "And Yaakov remained alone". The Midrash states that just as Hashem is alone, so too Yaakov was alone. We see from this that the Sages saw the word "alone" to be a positive attribute and a form of emulating Hashem. It is exactly this trait that helped Yaakov be victorious in his forthcoming battle. This, too, was a great attribute of Yaakov's grandfather Abraham: he was willing to be alone for his spiritual ideals. In this light, said Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz, that we can understand the well-known Misneh is Pirke Avos that one is "wise" if he learns from everyone, "strong" if he conquers one's negative impulses, "wealthy" if he is joyous with one's share, and "honorable" if he honors others — all of these are within one's own control, and can be attained without anyone else.
- **View All Possessions As Hashem's Gifts.** "And Yaakov remained alone." Chazal explain that Yaakov remained behind to retrieve some small flasks. When we are aware that all that we have is measured out to us by Hashem for our benefit, we'll have a profound sense of gratitude. Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz cited the story of a philosopher who wished to be satisfied with the least amount of possessions that were actually necessary for survival. After thinking the matter over, he gave up everything he owned and kept only a pump to draw water from wells. Once, while he was walking on the road, he saw a caravan of people who stopped at a well and drank directly from it without any pumps or cups. He said to himself "Now I see that I don't need a pump." He immediately threw away the pump, his only remaining possession. From Yaakov, we learn otherwise. The spirit of the Torah is not to have nothing, but to have a deep appreciation for whatever we do have (Daas Torah: Bereshis). (Artscroll also notes on this verse that Yaakov's mission was to put holiness into the mundane; by imbuing the flasks with his characteristic of honesty, it too became holy; thus Yaakov stayed back to retrieve them. We, too, have the power to use imbue our possessions with holiness — e.g., using our money for charity; our homes for hospitality, etc.)
- **Realize That You Have (Get) What You Need.** Esav said "I have a lot"; Yaakov said "I have everything" — According to the Chofetz Chaim, Esav still wanted more, whereas Yaakov was satisfied with his lot. Regardless of how much you have, there is always much more that you can want. Having the attitude that you never have enough will cause you constant frustration. You will always focus on what you are missing and your life will be filled with anxiety and suffering. The attitude to internalize is that of Yaakov, "I have everything that I need". Of course, you have the right to try to acquire more, but if you are unable to do so, you will feel calm and serene. If you do acquire more, good; if not, it is sign that for your best interest you do not really need any more.

#### C. Majesty of Man (Rabbi Henach Leibowitz)

- **Fear And Faith.** "And Yaakov was greatly afraid and distressed . . ." When Yaakov heard the terrifying news that Esav was approaching, with an army of 400 strong, he became frightened and immediately took action. He prepared for battle, prayed to Hashem, and did teshuvah (repentance). The Midrash describes the fear experienced by the Jews centuries later at the time of Purim. When the Jews heard of Haman's wicked plot, they became mired in sadness and despair, giving up hope for salvation. They believed they were justified in their feelings since they thought they were emulating Yaakov. Nevertheless, the Midrash tells us that they did not interpret the situation properly. While on the surface the two fears seem identical, a deeper look reveals that they are miles apart — one destructive and one constructive. The Jews of Persia envisioned their catastrophic end and dragged themselves deeper into despair and sadness, rendering them incapable of helping themselves. Yaakov's fear, on the other hand, awakened and uplifted him. He transformed his fear into an impetus for action, strengthening himself spiritually through teshuvah and prayer, and physically with preparation for battle. Yaakov used his fear to reinforce his faith in Hashem's protection and to spur himself to action, thereby changing his "hopeless" situation into a "hopeful" one. His renewed trust in Hashem gave him peace of mind, comfort and security. This type of fear is a mitzvah and is mentioned in the Torah as an eternal example for us. We must examine our fears to see whether they are dragging us down or lifting us up. The more we trust in Hashem, the less we fear other things and people.

#### D. Peninim on the Torah (Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum)

- **Being Rooted In Family and Morality.** "And Yaakov was greatly afraid and distressed." Yaakov and Esav represented two distinct way of life, originating from two different sets of goals. Yaakov is characterized as a hard-working and loving man. Opposite him stands Esav, a man of "accomplishment", power and glamor. While Yaakov struggled to raise his family, educate his children and earn the privilege to be called a "Patriarch," Esav was simultaneously climbing only for political fortune, becoming a military leader whose wealth and strength were externally enticing. Yaakov vividly illustrates for us the importance of the former — being rooted in one's family and morality, rather than be focused solely on financial and political gain.

#### E. Wellsprings of Torah (Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman)

- **An Eternal Monument.** ". . . the same is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day." The text does not read "the same is the pillar of Rachel to this day," for Rachel for herself didn't need a monument. "One does not rear monuments to the righteous, for their words are their memorial." Righteous men and women don't need pillars of stone to perpetuate their memory. Thus, the pillar that Yaakov set up was intended only as "the pillar of Rachel's grave," marking the site of the grave so that those of her descendants who might wish to visit the grave and pray there might know where it is.

#### F. Love Thy Neighbor (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

- **One Is Obligated To Accompany People Who Leave Our Homes.** Yaakov was vulnerable to attack by the angel since he was alone. We are obligated to accompany our guests a distance of at least approximately eight feet, show them the way and warn them of any pitfalls.
- **When You Visit A Place, Contribute To Its Welfare.** When Yaakov arrived in Schehem, he contributed to its welfare (The Talmud differs on his contribution — some say he established markets, others says he set up bath houses). One must contribute to physical and spiritual betterment of his surroundings.

#### G. Living Each Day (Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

- **Changing character traits.** “Then he took from his possessions, to give to his brother Esav.” Ramban states that although Yaakov prayed to Hashem to be saved from his brother’s wrath, he knew that he shouldn’t rely on Divine miracles, but try to use any natural means available to save himself and his family; hence, the elaborate gift. Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz asks why did Yaakov’s salvation require Divine intervention? Isn’t it a natural phenomenon that two brothers, who have had their differences, meet after an extended period of separation and “let bygones be bygones”? Why could Yaakov not expect that his brother might have changed and forgiven him? Rabbi Levovitz answers: “this teaches us that changing one’s personality is indeed a miraculous feat. Esav hated Yaakov with a passion; for Yaakov to rely on a change in Esav’s personality would be equivalent to expecting a supernatural miracle.” Rabbi Levovitz expands on this to note that changing one’s personality is so difficult that it can’t generally be attained by unaided human effort. If we wish to change our personality, we must study Torah (both the ethical and halachic aspects) and implement it in our daily living, and pray to Hashem to remove all undesirable traits. We can’t do it alone. This is the meaning of the Talmudic note that G-d says “I have created a “Yetzer Hara” (evil inclination) and I have created Torah as its antidote.” (Bava Basra 16a).

#### H. Darash Moshe (Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt”l)

- **“I have acquired oxen and donkeys”.** The word for “oxen” in this verse in the singular. Rashi comments that it is derech eretz (literally, “the way of the land,” but often used to mean “courtesy”) to speak of many oxen as an “ox”. How is this derech eretz? In the context of our verse, it is more courteous to speak of a single ox than to boast of one’s wealth. This form also suggests that Yaakov thanked Hashem for every single ox that he gave him, and thanked him that much more for the far greater bounty that Hashem bestowed upon him continually. This teaches that even when one is blessed with riches, he must not forget to thank Hashem even for the insignificant things he has.

#### I. Reflections on the Sedra (Rabbi Zalman I. Posner).

- **Simple Gratitude.** “I am too small for all the kindness you have performed.” What Yaakov had was not a reward for his righteousness – at least not in his eyes. In his hour of need, Yaakov prayed for G-d’s help, but emphasized his debt to G-d, rather than G-d’s obligations to him. Instinctively, we question G-d, but Yaakov’s approach is more honest. Instead of reproaching G-d, Yaakov examined himself and in honest humility felt himself lacking. The path is not an easy one, but if we sincerely want an answer, it may well be a direction worth exploring.

#### J. Soul of The Torah: Insights Of the Chassidic Masters on the Weekly Torah Portions (Victor Cohen).

- **Misplaced Fear.** The Levchivitzer, in his comment on the verse “then Yaakov was afraid and distressed,” asked why Yaakov was “distressed”? Yaakov realized that his fear was of man, and not of G-d. This brought him distress.
- **True Humility.** “I have been diminished by all the kindness.” The Rebbe of Lublin said that when we begin to understand all the kindnesses that are bestowed upon us, we become aware of our mundane existence. The S’fas Emes noted on the same verse that even after all of the kindnesses that were bestowed upon him, Yaakov did not become arrogant; rather, he became more modest and unpretentious.
- **A Caring Parent.** “And he [Yaakov] said I will not let you [the angel with whom he wrestled] go until you bless me.” The Karliner noted that the Jacob was not concerned for himself, but for his children.
- **True Contentment.** Esav said, “I have plenty, “whereas Yaakov said “I have everything.” To an Esav, no matter how much he had it is not enough. To a Yaakov, a satisfied individual, no matter what he has, he has everything. (The Strikover Rebbe).

#### K. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski).

- **Constructive Fear.** When Yaakov heard that Esav was approaching Yaakov was “greatly afraid.” Why was Yaakov afraid, particularly when he had been assured that G-d would protect him? Did Yaakov doubt that G-d would keep His promise? Rashi explains that Yaakov’s fear resulted from his concern that he had sinned and lost Divine favor. His fear was tied to teshuvah (repentance) and hope for salvation. While certain circumstances and events in our lives may warrant fear, the fear should be like that of Yaakov, which resulted in his (and each of us) coming closer to G-d through prayer and teshuvah.

#### L. Something To Say (Dovid Goldwasser)

- **True Enthusiasm.** When Yaakov sent messengers to his brother Esav, he told them to relay the following message: “I have sojourned with Lavon.” Rashi notes that the Hebrew word for “I have sojourned” has the numerical value of 613. Thus, Yaakov was alluding to the fact that he dwelt with Lavon and kept the mitzvot (i.e., that he didn’t learn from Lavon’s misdeeds). The simple meaning of this statement is that even someone on as high a spiritual level as Yaakov must be careful not to be negatively influenced by his environment. The

Chofetz Chaim, however, notes that this statement was actually self-critical. When Lavon did something improper, he did it with much enthusiasm. Yaakov was saying that his zeal in the pursuit of good deeds did not compare to Lavon's zeal in doing evil. Thus, though he sojourned with Lavon and observed the 613 mitzvos, he lamented that he did not emulate Lavon's enthusiasm.

#### M. Torah Gems (Rabbi Ahron Yaakov Greenberg)

- **Infusing Holiness Into Our Daily Lives.** "I have sojourned with Lavon. . ." Rashi brings down that this reference implies that Yaakov observed the 613 commandments. Is there any surprise that he would have observed the Torah in Lavon's home? Rather, it appears that what Yaakov was stressing was "with Lavon" — even within the day-to-day life of Lavon's household, he kept the Torah — introducing holiness into even the most common task (R'Yitzhak Zelig Morgenstern).
- **United We Stand.** "And make your seed as the sand of the sea. . ." Just as one does not count grains of sand one by one, G-d relates to the Jewish people as a whole. (Penei Aryeh).
- **Reaching Out To Others.** "And Yaakov was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him. . ." Rashi comments that Yaakov had forgotten small jars and returned for them. Why would Yaakov have returned for these "small jars"? The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that this reminds us that each of us must rescue a "small jar" — even one individual who is unaffiliated. If we are willing to reach out to the unaffiliated, on both a communal and individual level, G-d will help us succeed in our efforts.

#### N. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin).

- **Good Communication Brings Closeness.** "And [Yaakov] commanded [his messengers] saying: this is what you should say to my master to Esav. This is what your servant Yaakov said: with Lavon I have dwelled and have been delayed until now." The Ohr Hachayim explains that Yaakov's intention in relating this information was to show his brotherly love for Esav. Sharing information is a sign of closeness and it was for this reason that Yaakov told Esav about both the good and bad that he had experienced. Being close to others requires that we open up and share our lives with them.
- **When Strongly Motivated You Will Be Able To Have A Positive Influence On Others.** "And the lad did not hesitate to take care of the matter because he wanted the daughter of Yaakov. . . and all of the males were circumcised." Shechem's desire to marry Dinah (Yaakov's daughter) was so strong that the most difficult things became easy. "He was successful influencing others because of the strength of his will." When we have a strong will for something, we have much more power to do it. When we want to have a positive influence on others, the stronger we feel the need to influence them, the more successful we will be.

#### O. Vedibarta Bam (Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky)

- **Esav's Hand.** "Rescue me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav. " Yaakov's only brother was Esav; why, then, did he specify "the hand of my brother, the hand of Esav"? Yaakov had two fears — physical and spiritual. If Esav and his army attacked him, he might be overpowered and killed. Alternatively, if he became friendly with him, Esav would have a negative influence on Yaakov's family.
- **The Pillar Of Torah Study.** Why did the angel wrestle with Yaakov and not with Abraham or Yitzchak? The world stands on three pillars: Torah Study, Service of Hashem (prayer), and Acts of Kindness. Each of the three Patriarchs was the prototype of one of these pillars — Abraham excelled in kindness; Yitzchak was associated with prayers; and Yaakov spent his time in the "tents" of Torah. The "man" who wrestled with Yaakov was the angel of Esav, the adversary of the Jewish people. Of the three Patriarchs, he had little to fear of Abraham, because the continuity of the Jewish people cannot be contingent upon acts of kindness. Nor can the posterity of the Jewish people be assured through the recitation of prayers. The secret of our existence is the study of Torah and the teaching of it to our children.

#### P. Rabbi Frand On The Parasha (Rabbi Yissocher Frand)

- **Observant But Not Religious.** So said Yaakov, "I lived with Lavon, and I have lingered until now. " Rashi interprets this verse as implying that although Yaakov lived with Lavon, he observed all 613 mitzvos and did not learn from Lavon's evil ways. However, if Yaakov indeed fulfilled all 613 mitzvos, then he certainly did not learn any of Lavon's evil ways which would have been in violation of the Torah. Rav Yaakov Ruderman explains this redundancy as follows: It is impossible for one to keep the entire Torah (to fulfill every mitzvah meticulously) and still emulate the lifestyle of Lavon. Unfortunately, some people may be observant and yet never think about what G-d wants of them (but rather only on what they want from G-d). Being "observant" does not necessarily mean that you are "religious".

#### Q. Windows To The Soul (Rabbi Michael Bernstein).

- **The Importance Of Torah Study.** Yaakov was separated from his family for 36 years. In addition to the 22 years spent with Lavon, he also spent 14 years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. The Talmud (Megillah 17a) tells us that Yaakov was not punished for the latter 14 years because learning Torah supercedes honoring parents. Learning Torah is, in reality, the greatest honor we can bestow on our parents; thus, there was no lapse in honoring his parents during these 14 years.