

G-DLINESS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayishlach

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Today's Learning:
Shevuot 1:2-3
O.C. 45:1-46:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 84 Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shekalim 19

This week's parashah describes the momentous confrontation between Yaakov and Esav when the former returned to Eretz Yisrael after 20 years with Lavan. R' Yitzchak Isaac Sher z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Slobodka Yeshiva in Lithuania and later on Bnei Brak; died 1951) observes that this parashah provides a glimpse of Yaakov's greatness and the contrast between him and Esav. At the same time, it teaches us the lofty heights that a human being is capable of reaching. He explains:

We read (Bereishit 33:20), *"He [Yaakov] set up an altar there and proclaimed, 'Kel, the Kel of Israel.'"* The literal translation of this verse, as just rendered, suggests that Yaakov called G-d, *"the G-d of Israel."* However, Rashi z"l quotes the Gemara (Megillah 18a) which reads the verse differently: *"He called him 'EL.' The G-d of Israel."* In other words, "He called Yaakov, 'EL.' Who called him that? The G-d of Israel called him that."

What does this mean? Needless to say, G-d was not ascribing divinity to Yaakov. Rather, the title *"El"* means that Yaakov had perfected his tzelem Elokim / Divine image. He had accomplished what man was put in this world to accomplish. He was as close to godliness as a person ever can be.

We find that Yaakov had attained extremely high spiritual levels even earlier. When Yaakov was fleeing to Lavan's home, Yaakov dreamt of a ladder on which malachim were ascending and descending. Midrash Rabbah records that the malachim were going back and forth between the human Yaakov and an image of Yaakov that was "engraved" on G-d's "throne," comparing the two.

The engraving of Yaakov's image on G-d's throne is meant to teach us what man is capable of achieving. We can only imagine how hard Yaakov worked on himself to attain that level.

In contrast, we do not find that Esav worked on himself at all. At birth, he was named, "Esav," which comes from the word meaning "complete." Just as Esav appeared physically complete at birth, so he represents those people who view themselves as spiritually complete, having no need to work on themselves. Such a person stands in sharp contrast to the ideal human represented by Yaakov. (Lekket Sichot Mussar, Vol. III, p.41)

"You shall say, 'Your servant Yaakov's. It is a tribute sent to my lord, to Esav, and behold he himself is behind us'." (32:19)

"Accept my tribute from me, inasmuch as I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of Elokim." (33:10)

Why did Yaakov tell his servants who took gifts to Esav to point out that Yaakov would soon follow in person? Also, what did Yaakov mean when he equated seeing Esav to seeing the face of Elokim? R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1783-1869; rabbi of Brody, Poland) explains:

Halachah requires that just as there were representatives of the kohanim and levi'im present in the Bet Hamikdash every day, so there must be representatives of the yisraelim present every day. The Gemara (Ta'anit 26a) explains this by asking rhetorically, "Is it conceivable that a person's sacrifice could be offered and he is not present?!" R' Kluger asks: Why is it so inconceivable that a person's sacrifice could be offered when he is not present?

Another question: We read (Bereishit 18:8) that when Avraham served food to his guests, *"he stood over them beneath the tree and they ate."* What does the Torah mean to teach us?

Says R' Kluger: When a person offers food to a guest, he may have one of two motives--either to feed a hungry person or to honor the guest. How can we tell what the host's motives are? When the main purpose is to relieve the guest's hunger, then the food is the main thing. The host need not "offer himself" to the guest as well, i.e., he need not be present. On the other hand, if the main point is to show honor to the guest, then the host's presence is more important than the food.

When we offer sacrifices in the Bet Hamikdash, we do so to honor Hashem. Obviously, he does not need our food. That is why it is inconceivable that our sacrifices could be offered without our representatives standing nearby. That also is why Avraham stood over his guests while they ate.

Although they may have been hungry (assuming he did not know they were angels), he wanted to honor them with his presence as well.

This was Yaakov's message to Esav: I am not sending you a gift because I think you need it. I want to honor you, and I am following right behind my gift. And when Esav balked at accepting the gift, saying (33:9), *"I have plenty,"* Yaakov reiterated: Seeing your face is like seeing the face of Elokim, i.e., my whole intention was to bring an offering to someone who does not need it, merely in order to show him honor. (Ma'amar Esther to Esther 5:8)

"Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav, for I fear him lest he come and strike me down, mother and children." (32:12)

R' Shlomo Alkabetz z"l (1505-1584; author of the Friday night hymn Lecha Dodi, among other works) writes that Yaakov referred in this verse not (only) to Esav, but to Esav's descendant, Haman who planned *"to exterminate all Jews, young and old, children and women"* (Esther 3:13). Thus, immediately after Yaakov's prayer (32:14), the Torah says, *"He spent the night there."* Note that the final letters of the Hebrew words in this phrase spell "Haman." Also, the word *"ba'lailah"* / *"at night"* appears three times in our chapter, alluding to the three days and nights of the fast that Mordechai and Esther decreed. (Manot Ha'levi to Esther 7:7)

"And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain . . ." (Bereishit 34:25)

Rabbeinu Bachya z"l (Spain; 14th century) writes: It is fact of nature that the third day of a series is associated with weakness. Thus, a baby is considered most at risk on the third day after his brit milah, so that a baby who was circumcised on Thursday may be cared for on Shabbat in ways that might otherwise violate Shabbat prohibitions. Likewise, the "Anshei Ma'amad" / certain participants in the Bet Hamikdash service would not fast on Sunday as they would on other days of the week because Sunday is the third day after man's creation, which occurred on Friday. For this reason, Rabbeinu Bachya concludes, we recite a blessing on besamim / spices after Shabbat (the halachic beginning of the third day after man's creation) in order to invigorate the newly weakened soul through the good fragrance. (Be'ur Al Ha'Torah)

R' Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg z"l (rosh yeshiva in Berlin, Germany and later Montreux, Switzerland; died 1966) lists three additional reasons for reciting a blessing on besamim after Shabbat. All of these reasons are found in Rishonim / medieval sources.

- (1)** To reinvigorate the soul following the loss of the neshamah yeteirah / the "extra" soul that a person has on Shabbat.
- (2)** To mask the smell of the fire of Gehinom, which is rekindled after having rested on Shabbat.

(3) To give solace to the soul which is sad over the departure of Shabbat. (This differs from the first reason in that it does not focus on the loss of the neshamah yeteirah but rather of the Shabbat itself.) (She'eilot U'teshuvot Seridei Esh, O.C. No. 29)

Shemittah

This week we begin to discuss the concept of "Kedushat Shevi'it" the sanctity of the fruits of the seventh year. One of the basic rules is that the produce of shemittah may not be wasted. [Exactly what constitutes a "fruit of shemittah" is a separate and complex discussion.]

In conjunction with the Dvar Torah above regarding the use of besamim at havdalah, we begin with a halachah of shemittah-produce relating to havdalah.

There is a widespread custom to overflow the havdalah cup as an omen for blessing. One who recites havdalah over wine of the seventh year should not do this since he is causing the wine to go to waste. Likewise, those who have the custom to place a drop of havdalah wine in their eyes may not do this with the wine of shemittah.

In addition, an argument can be made that one is not even permitted to make havdalah with the wine of shemittah. The reason for this would be that, since it is customary that women do not drink the wine of havdalah, one who recites havdalah over wine of shemittah is causing it to become unusable by a large segment of the population, which is a form of "waste." (Sources: R' Yechiel Michel Tikochinski z"l, Sefer Ha'shemittah, ch.7, n.4; R' Y. Neuwirth shlita, Shemirat Shabbat Ke'hilchatah, ch. 60, n.55)

[Ed. note: One might ask: Why is overflowing the wine cup not prohibited at all times because it seemingly wastes food? There are different definitions of waste for purposes of shemittah and for general halachic purposes. In other years, the wine that is spilled out is not "wasted" because it has a purpose - to be an omen. With respect to shemittah, however, any conversion of a food item to a non-food state is considered "waste."]

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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