

# THIS LAND IS MY LAND"

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Vayishlach

### This Land Is My Land"

In our parashah, Yaakov meets Esav for the first time in more than 20 years. Near the end of the parashah, we read (36:6), "Esav took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household--his livestock and all his animals, and all the wealth he had acquired in the land of Canaan--and went to a land because of his brother Yaakov." R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes, perhaps quoting a midrash: Yaakov reasoned, "The wicked are never satiated in their desire for money." What did he do, therefore? He placed all of his wealth on one side and [a deed to] Eretz Yisrael on the other side, and he offered Esav a choice. Whereupon, Esav went to the Ishmaelites for advice. They said, "The Canaanites, the Prizites, etc. also claim the land. Take the money, and Yaakov will be left with nothing." Esav did so, whereupon Yaakov said, "Now leave my land." Esav did so, and as a reward, his descendants received the Roman Empire.

R' Palagi continues: In this light we may understand the verse (Yeshayah 58:14), "Then [i.e., if you honor Shabbat] you shall be granted pleasure with Hashem and I shall mount you astride the heights of the world; and I will provide you the heritage of your forefather Yaakov." Why is Eretz Yisrael called, "the heritage of [our] forefather Yaakov" rather than the heritage of Avraham or Yitzchak? Because it was due to the special efforts of Yaakov Avinu that Eretz Yisrael was preserved for us and for no one else. (Artzot Ha'chaim p.22)

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"Yaakov became very frightened . . ." (32:8)

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204) writes: It is not necessary for a prophet to be perfect in every way. However, any shortcoming that a prophet has is a "curtain" that separates him from G-d and "clouds" the prophetic vision that he sees. This is what our Sages mean when they say that Moshe Rabbeinu saw a clear vision, but other prophets saw only a cloudy vision. As proof that a prophet can be imperfect, Rambam cites our verse, in which Yaakov is frightened of Esav. This fear

apparently reflects a shortcoming, however subtle, in Yaakov Avinu's bitachon / trust in Hashem.

R' Avraham Halevi Horowitz z"l (16th century; father of the Shelah Hakadosh) asks: Why does Rambam fault Yaakov? After all, our Sages explain that the reason for Yaakov's fear was his concern that he had sinned and lost Hashem's protection. Furthermore, commentaries observe, even a person who has bitachon is not permitted to casually walk into a life-threatening situation!

R' Yosef Jacobs shlita (Yerushalayim) defends Rambam: Certainly Yaakov was correct to take steps to protect himself, e.g., by sending gifts to Esav and preparing for war. He was right to be cautious in case he had sinned and did not deserve to be saved miraculously, but he still should not have been frightened. That fear showed that his bitachon was not at the level that was expected of a person of Yaakov's stature. (Shemoneh Perakim im Be'ur Ve'inuyim, ch.7)

R' Elchanan Wasserman z"l Hy"d (rosh yeshiva in Baranowicz, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) also defends Rambam. He writes: Hashem had promised Yaakov special protection. It was that special protection that Yaakov was afraid he had lost due to some sin. Even so, Rambam is teaching us, Yaakov was not excused from having the basic level of bitachon that is a mitzvah applicable to every person. The overwhelming majority of people have never been promised special protection by G-d; nevertheless, we are expected to have bitachon that Hashem will act kindly toward us. Such bitachon would have led Yaakov not to be frightened. [Even if having bitachon does not guarantee a "happy" outcome, it reflects a person's confidence that G-d will never abandon him, which saves him from being frightened.] (Kovetz Ma'amarim: Ma'amar Al Ha'bitachon)

R' Shlomo Eliasoff z"l (1841-1926; leading early 20th century kabbalist; grandfather of R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l) writes: Why do our Sages criticize Yaakov for fearing that his sins had nullified G-d's promise to protect him; isn't a person supposed to be a yerei chet / one who fears sin? He answers: To be a yerei chet means to avoid situations where one might be tempted to sin; it does not mean to live in fear that one's sins will bring G-d's wrath on him. To the contrary, if G-d has made a promise to a person, it is wrong for a person to consider himself unworthy of seeing the fulfillment of that promise. This, writes R' Eliasoff, was Yaakov's error, and this was also the error of the Generation of the Exodus. The reason that generation repeatedly fell from the high spiritual level on which it existed was that the members of that generation did not believe in their own potential. (Quoted in Likkutei Niglot Leshem Shvo V'achlamah)

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"He [Yaakov] set up an altar there and proclaimed, 'Kel, the Kel of Yisrael'." (33:20)

R' Yitzchak Isaac Sher z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Slobodka Yeshiva in Lithuania and later on Bnei Brak; died 1951) writes: The literal translation of this verse, as just rendered, suggests that Yaakov called G-

d, "the G-d of Yisrael." However, Rashi z"l quotes the Gemara (Megillah 18a) which reads the verse differently: "He called him 'EL.' The G-d of Yisrael did." In other words, "He called Yaakov, 'EL.' Who called him that? The G-d of Yisrael 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)

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"Two of Yaakov's sons, Shimon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and they came upon the city confidently . . ." (34:25)

Rashi comments that Shimon and Levi are called "Dinah's brothers" because they risked their lives for her. R' Meir Zvi Bergman shlita (a rosh yeshiva in Bnei Brak) explains:

It is natural for one to risk his life to save himself, and also to do the same for one's family. This is what Aharon meant when he pleaded with Moshe, when Miriam suffered from tzara'at (Bemidbar 12:12), "Let her not be like a corpse, like one who leaves his mother's womb with half of his flesh having been consumed!" Rashi explains: Aharon argued that if Miriam continued to suffer, half of Moshe's flesh would be consumed because he was her brother.

Rambam explains the obligation to give charity as arising from the fact that we are all G-d's children. This means that we are all brothers, and, "If one brother will not have mercy on another brother, who will have mercy on him?" This is the meaning of the obligation to "Love your fellow as yourself," adds R' Bergman. Train yourself to feel that we are all G-d's children, and it will come naturally to treat others like your brothers. (Sha'arei Orah, Vol. I)

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## Memories of Yerushalayim

R' Ben-Zion Yadler z"l (1871-1962; the "Maggid / preacher of Yerushalayim), writes in his memoir, B'tuv Yerushalayim:

I feel obligated to record in writing the procedures for hashgachah / supervision over the commandments relating to the Land [i.e., the agricultural mitzvot]. These procedures were established by the earlier sages. As, thank G-d, I merited to be personally involved in this matter, having been appointed by the sages of Yerushalayim--at their head, our teacher R' Shmuel Salant [1816-1909; Rabbi of Yerushalayim] and the sage, the Aderet [R' Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim; 1845-1905] zt"l--I will now relate these matters.

This aspect of the Torah is not generally known, and even many poskim / halachic authorities addressed it only briefly, for they thought that it would not be relevant until the days of mashiach, as is true of the laws of sacrificial offerings. I have seen many people who made aliyah from the Diaspora and did not understand how severe are the relevant prohibitions, for they were not accustomed to them--especially the laws of terumah and ma'aser, which, as is well-known, involve a greater sin than eating non-kosher meat.

In the settlements close to Yerushalayim, the supervision was the responsibility of the rabbis of Yerushalayim. I was their agent, and whenever a question came up, I informed them. Then, some of them would travel with me to investigate the facts and issue a halachic ruling.

Once I traveled to the settlement of Motza with R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and R' Mordechai Leib Rubin zt"l. . .

In those days [early 20th century], I delivered many derashot about this, in which I explained the prophecy of Malachi, at the very end of the books of the Prophets. There it says that Hashem will prosecute the Jewish People for the sin of not separating terumah and ma'aser. It says (Malachi 3:8), "You say, 'How have we robbed You?' -- through the ma'aser / tithe and the terumah / priestly gift." The prophecy ends (3:23), "Behold! I am sending you Eliyahu the prophet . . ." This indicates that this prophecy speaks of the time just before mashiach comes. Throughout the exile we wondered: How can Hashem prosecute us for the sin of tithes, a mitzvah which does not apply in Lithuania, Poland, America, Germany, or France? It never occurred to us that we would merit to separate terumot and ma'asrot before mashiach comes. But, now that Hashem has given us the privilege to come to Eretz Yisrael and thousands are engaged in agriculture, we are obligated in this mitzvah. Unfortunately, many people are lax about this. Some export their produce to the Diaspora and feed it to their fellow Jews, who thus commit a sin they could never have committed otherwise. In this light, we understand Malachi's prophecy.

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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