

# GIFTS, PRAYER AND WAR

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week we read the parsha of Va'yishlach. "Va'yishlach Yaakov mal'a'chim l'fanav el Esav a'cheev [And Yaakov sent messengers/angels before him to Esav his brother]. [32:4]"

Yaakov, his wives and his children are on their way back from the house of Lavan to Eretz Yisroel [the Land of Israel]. Yaakov will now have to deal with Esav whom he knows has plans to kill him. He therefore sends messengers (actually angels) with a conciliatory message to Esav to gauge his reaction. They report that he and the four hundred henchmen he has in tow are not exactly exuding feelings of brotherhood.

Yaakov then makes the necessary preparations for this impending showdown. He prepared three means with which he'd deal with Esav: gifts, prayer and war.

The Ramban writes that, in addition to the many things that are taught to us by this parsha, it is a forecasting of what we, the descendants of Yaakov, will have to deal with throughout the generations with the descendants of Esav. We must, he writes, learn from Yaakov's method of dealing with Esav in order to successfully maneuver ourselves through the long Esav-exile that we will find ourselves in.

On the way to meeting Esav, Yaakov encounters and is accosted by the 'Sar' [ministering angel] of Esav.

Every nation, in order to exist in this physical world, must have a spiritual entity. That entity represents the spiritual potential contained by this nation, either in what it itself can accomplish or that which it can bring out in others.

"And Yaakov was alone and a 'man' struggled with him until the breaking of dawn. And when he (the angel) saw that he could not prevail against him (Yaakov), he touched his (Yaakov's) thigh (where it connects to the hip) and it became dislocated. [32:25-26]"

"And the sun rose upon him (to heal Yaakov's lameness-Rashi) and he was limping upon his thigh (when the sun arose-Rashi). [32:32]"

The Sefer HaChinuch writes that this battle between Yaakov and the angel was actually a microcosm of the battle that will rage between Israel and the nations, stretching throughout history until the time of the redemption. That angel tried to utterly destroy Yaakov, he wanted an early 'Final Solution,' but he was unable to. He did, however, cause Yaakov much pain and suffering, as the

nations will later cause to us. But, when the penetrating, clear light of sunrise arose, Yaakov was healed. So too, when we reach the stage of the redemption, when the understanding of all that transpired throughout our history will become as clear as day, we will be pure and healed, carrying no wounds from our struggle throughout history.

It is fascinating to see how the different twists and turns throughout our history are manifested in the different forms that our 'Shmoneh Esray' (the silent 'amidah' prayer) assumed.

The 'Shmoneh Esray', established by the Men of the Great Assembly, begins with praises to Hashem based on the prayer that Moshe had offered. Hashem is referred to as 1) 'Gadol', literally meaning 'big' and referring to His attribute of Kindness through which the world continues to exist; 2) 'Gebore', meaning powerful and referring to the many miracles Hashem used to protect His nation, Israel, from the many who tried to rule us and 3) 'Norah', meaning awesome and referring to Hashem having an awe-inspiring presence in the world.

The Talmud [Yuma 69B] teaches that the prophet Yirmiyahu [Jeremiah], upon seeing the nations dancing victoriously in the holy Temple they had destroyed, omitted the term 'Norah' [awesome] from his praises to Hashem. Similarly, Daniel, upon seeing the nations enslave Hashem's children, omitted the praise 'Gebore' [powerful]. This was the situation until the Men of the Great Assembly came along. They taught that, on the contrary, Hashem showing patience and allowing the nations to enslave us (as part of the heavenly plan leading toward redemption) is the greatest possible show of power. Hashem maintaining the one nation, Israel, amongst the seventy others, as a lamb existing amongst seventy wolves, is the most awesome thing possible. They therefore reinstated all three praises and established them as the foundation of our 'Shmone Esray'.

The Maharsha there explains this according to the historical changes that we were going through. Moshe, who saw Hashem's revealed miracles and His protection of Bnei Yisroel (the children of Israel) from the nations, praised Hashem as being 'Gebore' and 'Norah'. This status continued until the time of the destruction of the first Temple. Yirmiyahu saw the nations dance irreverently in the Temple and felt that the 'Norah' awe-inspiring fear was gone. He omitted it. Not having witnessed the nations actually enslaving Bnei Yisroel, he didn't omit 'Gebore' [Powerful].

Daniel, who lived during the time of the actual exile which followed the destruction of the Temple, and saw Bnei Yisroel being led away in slavery, asked: Where is His power? He omitted 'Gebore'. However, being that he didn't see the nations dancing in the Temple, he didn't omit 'Norah'.

The Men of the Great Assembly, who lived at the end of the seventy-year exile and who witnessed our being saved (the miracle of Purim, etc.) recognized that Hashem didn't cease to be 'Gebore' and 'Norah'. Rather, from the time of the destruction, the power and awesomeness of Hashem had gone through a transformation. His power no longer manifested itself in open, miraculous displays of strength. It now manifested itself in the more subtle display of Hashem's willingness to 'sit back' patiently and let things appear as if the nations are actually in control but actually using them as

pawns in bringing about the ultimate redemption. His awesomeness no longer manifested itself in His not allowing any nations to control us. It now manifested itself in His maintaining the sheep among seventy wolves. Being under the control of nations wanting to destroy us but keeping them at bay.

We stated above that one of the ways that Yaakov prepared for his encounter with Esav was prayer. Our present day prayer represents the understanding that our ups and our downs are all awesome displays of Hashem's strength as He shapes history to bring about the realization of Yaakov's glory. When the clarity of sunrise will chase away the confusion that the long night of exile had wrought.

Good Shabbos,  
Yisroel Ciner

---

Copyright © 1998 by [Rabbi Yisroel Ciner](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

---

The author teaches at [Neveh Tzion](#) in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).

---