

SPREADING THE WORD

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva in the direction of Charan. (Bereishis 24:62-63)

It was our first exile, not yet as a people, but since "the actions of the fathers are signs for the children," it could easily have been. Like his father, and his father before him, everything Ya'akov Avinu did was on behalf of the nation he would eventually father. Whatever we have undergone as a people is rooted in what happened to our father, Ya'akov.

The amazing thing is how Ya'akov's exile began, and what caused it. As the Torah testifies, until his mother called him in to imitate Eisav and dupe his father into blessing him instead, Ya'akov Avinu sat in the tents of Torah study day and night, minding his own business. He only left the Bais Midrash to perform this remarkable act of deception that permanently changed his history for the worse, earning the eternal wrath of Eisav in the process, to honor the command of his mother.

Likewise, he only left home at her behest and his father's agreement, and for no personal reason at all. They sent him away from Eisav and to the evil Lavan's house, where he worked hard to build the foundation of the Jewish nation. And yet, as Rashi points out at the end of last week's parshah, he is held accountable for the 22 years he spent in Padam Aram during which time he could not honor his father and mother.

But he was there in the first place to honor his father and mother! Even when he spent six extra years accumulating wealth for himself after working the 14 years to marry Rachel and Leah, you can be sure it wasn't wealth for wealth's sake. We are taught over and over again how everything Ya'akov did, even when it seemed like he was doing it for himself, was really for the future of the Jewish people. If anyone epitomized the idea of doing everything for God's sake, it was him, and therefore, if anyone deserved a peaceful life, it was Ya'akov Avinu.

Yet, by the time he stands before Pharaoh at the age of 130, he is a worn man, so-much-so that Pharaoh is compelled to ask his age. Understanding what was at the root of the King of Egypt's question, he told him, "If you had to live through what I have gone through, you'd look worse!"

Hence, if anyone had justification to complain, it was Ya'akov Avinu. And yet, we are told, that he was punished for doing so. All he wanted to do was learn Torah and perform mitzvos, and yet Divine Providence sent him down another path which made doing so very difficult, and even though he survived all of it with flying colors, he is held accountable for the minuscule things he didn't.

What did this mean for Ya'akov Avinu, and by extension, what does it mean for us? The answer, for many, might be hard to swallow, which is one of the main reasons why we are still in exile to this very day.

The Kabbalah behind this answer is in another weekly parshah sheet that I send out called "Deeper Perceptions," which I mention here only so that readers will understand there is more to this story than will meet the eye in this week's Perceptions.

In next week's parshah, Ya'akov's family will meet with catastrophe when Shechem ben Chamor will kidnap Dinah, Ya'akov's daughter, and violate her. Then he will insist on keeping her and marrying into the family, contrary to everything Ya'akov's family had built up and were destined to accomplish. To make matters worse, this will happen after Ya'akov Avinu will have successfully overcome the Angel of Eisav and become "Yisroel," after which he survived his vengeful brother, Eisav, not to mention his evil father-in-law, Lavan. By the time he arrived in Shechem, he probably had thought he had gone through all he had to in order to fulfill his destiny. Boy, had he been wrong!

Hence, the rabbis struggled to find a reason for all of this, something Ya'akov Avinu must have done to warrant such heavy Divine retribution. Their answer: When Ya'akov and Eisav met, he hid Dinah from him so that Eisav would not see her and want to marry her. Had he allowed that to happen, perhaps Dinah would have been able to do a little outreach on Eisav and bring him back from the dark side.

That's funny, because the rest of Jewish parents throughout history have been told to keep their children away from bad influences, and we pay shadchanim good money to try and limit the possibilities of a "bad" shidduch. Because Ya'akov Avinu protected his daughter from a known felon he was punished by losing her to another one? Would Eisav have even listened to her had she married him and tried?

Perhaps not. However, apparently, for us, that is not the issue, as the Talmud states:

[At the time of the destruction of the First Temple] The Holy One, Blessed is He, told Gavriel, "Go and make a mark of ink upon the foreheads of the righteous so that the Damaging Angel cannot harm them, and a mark of blood on the foreheads of the evil so that the Damaging Angel can harm them." The Trait of Judgment said before The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe, What difference is there between the two?"

He told her, "These were completely righteous, and these were completely evil."

She said before Him, "Master of the Universe, They (the righteous) could have protested, and yet didn't?"

He answered her, "It is revealed and known before Me that had they protested, they would not have been listened to!" She answered Him, "To you it was revealed . . . but who revealed it to them?!" (Shabbos 55a)

In other words, our job is to try and teach people about mitzvos and help them return back to Torah. We can have our doubts about our chances of success, but that is between us and God; between us and our fellow Jews, we have to give it the best shot we can, especially if we don't want to be swallowed up by Divine wrath when God finally lowers the boom on a generation.

Apparently, Ya'akov Avinu had given up on his brother Eisav, and understandably so, from our point of view. However, from God's perspective, it seems, he should have kept trying anyhow, especially in the early years. After all, Yitzchak, their father, still saw in Eisav the potential to be a Dovid HaMelech, and as Rav Dessler says in Michtav E'Elياهو, he really should have been the fourth Forefather.

After all, success in outreach is purely a miracle, especially when you consider what some potential ba'alei teshuvah are up against—Western Society, family pressure, economic goals, etc.—and this is Lesson #1 for anyone planning to go into outreach. The best we can do is abandon ourselves to the will of God so that He can work His magic through us.

Just think about it. Had Ya'akov Avinu influenced his brother even just a little bit, perhaps he would have remained worthy of the right of the firstborn. And, had he remained worthy of the firstborn, perhaps he would have become fitting to receive his blessings, which would have finished the job and transformed him into an earlier version of Dovid HaMelech (red, ruddy, killing with his hands, etc.).

Had this been the case, then Ya'akov Avinu could have remained in his tents of study while Eisav ran the nation. And, rather than be forced to flee to Padan Aram to find a wife, someone could have gone for him, as Eliezer had done for Ya'akov's father, Yitzchak, sparing him the need to go into exile at all and allowing him to honor his father and mother in person, as Eisav did the 22 years Ya'akov was away.

As it says:

I am God; I called you for righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people's covenant, for a light to nations. (Yeshayahu 42:6)

As history has shown, if we don't fulfill that destiny, no one else will. If we don't positively influence the nations of the world, they will not figure out for themselves what Creation is about. Worst yet, they will become abusive and that always bodes poorly for the Jewish people, and has resulted in thousands of years of exile.

Hence, when the Torah tells us in last week's parshah that Ya'akov dwelled in the tents of Torah study, perhaps it isn't meant only as a praise. Maybe it is also alluding to why Ya'akov Avinu had to undergo all that he did, earning the wrath of his brothers and having to live in exile for 36 years, all the while dealing with the lowest elements of society.

If so, then the story of Ya'akov Avinu is also a very important warning to those of us for whom Torah

learning is top priority. Yes, we should do whatever we must to protect Torah and to learn it every chance we can, making sure that it survives forever (which it will anyhow). It is what we are all about as a people.

However, if we allow our devotion to Torah to completely sever us from the world around us, denying the rest of our people and the nations of the world the opportunity to know what God really thinks about Creation and man, then we will pay the price in the long run. We HAVE paid the price in the long run.

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Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org