

THE BATTLE WITH EISAV'S ANGEL ALWAYS KEEPS CHANGING

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 395, Free Will vs. Hashgocha Pratis. Good Shabbos!

The Battle With Eisav's Angel Always Keeps Changing

In this week's parsha we learn of the encounter between Yaakov Avinu [our father] and an Angel. Yaakov fought with this Angel the entire night until the morning, when the Angel finally gave up. Our Sages say that this Angel was the guardian angel of Eisav.

The Torah quotes an interesting dialogue between Yaakov and the Angel. The Angel asked to be released because it was morning and he had to go back to heaven. Yaakov responded that he would not release the Angel until he gave Yaakov a blessing. The Angel asked Yaakov what his name was and, when Yaakov answered, then told him that he would no longer be known as Yaakov, he would from here on be called Yisrael. Then Yaakov turned the tables, and asked the Angel what his name was. The Angel responded, "Why are you asking me what my name is?"

This is a very strange dialogue, to say the least. The Angel's response was not "I do not need to tell you my name" or "I am not allowed to tell you my name." Nor was it "I do not have a name." The Angel merely turned the tables and asked Yaakov, "How will you benefit from knowing my name?"

Why does Yaakov want to know his name? And what does the Guardian Angel of Eisav mean when he says "Why are you asking my name?"

Rashi alludes to these questions. Rashi explains the Angel's response as "we Angels have no set names -- our names are dependent on the current mission on which we are being sent."

This answer, however, does not fully suffice. The Angel in question DID have a definite mission. He must have had a name associated with that mission. We in fact know who he was. He was Sama-el, the archangel of Eisav. We continue to deal with him up until this very day. He has one function -- he is the instigator against the Jewish people. He is the embodiment of the Satan. He has one task in which he has been engaged in throughout the millennia. So why did he refuse to reveal his name to

Yaakov? What did he mean when he asked, "Why are you asking my name?"

I once heard a very relevant interpretation of this dialogue from Rav Chaim Dov Keller, the Rosh Yeshiva in Telshe of Chicago. The name of something defines it. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch compares the Hebrew word for 'name' (shem) with the Hebrew word for 'there' (sham). A name defines an object. It tells us where it is and of what its essence consists.

Yaakov told the Angel "We have had a battle and I know that this will be an ongoing battle. Explain your essence to me. What are you all about? Let me know your 'name.'" Yaakov was looking for the key to pass on to his children and grandchildren throughout the generations -- information regarding how to deal with the archangel of Eisav in this ongoing struggle. "Tell me the nature of our fight," Yaakov asked.

The Angel's answer to this question was "it does not help to know my name, because I am not just one thing that you will have to conquer." The Angel alluded to the fact that throughout the generations he would be changing. Sometimes he would be Hellenism. Sometimes he would be Socialism. Sometimes he would be Communism. All the tests and all the philosophies and all the battles that we have had to fight throughout the generations are embodied in this one Angel. He could in fact not define his essence for Yaakov because the nature of his essence (which represents our struggle with Eisav) keeps changing. Sometimes it pushes us from one direction, sometimes it pushes us from the opposite direction. It is always a different fight.

There is a dispute in the Talmud [Chullin 91a] whether the Angel appeared to Yaakov like an idolater or like a Torah scholar. Which is it? A Torah scholar looks a lot different than an idolater! What did he look like?

The answer is that he could be both. There is no one definition and there is no one battle plan. We can never say that we have conquered the archangel of Eisav because he can always rear his ugly head in a totally different manifestation in the future. When we look back 60 years ago, Normandy Beach was an awfully busy place. Today, there is nothing there but graves. Today the battle field is no longer at Normandy. In the middle 1960s the busiest airport in the world was not O'Hare (Chicago). It was De Nang (Viet Nam). Now, perhaps there are not even planes landing in De Nang anymore. The field of battle keeps changing. There is no point in fighting old battles. We always have to be alert for the new battle.

This is the archangel of Eisav. "It does not help for me to tell you my name. There is no battle plan. I cannot tell you this is who I am because I am ever changing."

"May you remove the Satan from before us and from behind us" [Evening Prayer Liturgy]. Sometimes the Satan steps in front of us and prevents us from doing Mitzvos. Sometimes the Satan appears in back of us and pushes us to do Mitzvos. That can also be the Satan. He has no strict definition as to who he is. He does not fit into easy definitions. He has no 'name'. The battle with the Satan which is the battle with the Yetzer Hara (evil inclination), which is the battle with the archangel of Eisav, is an

ever changing battle.

Yaakov Questions His Ability To Take Revenge Against Shechem

The Medrash says that when Dina was violated by the people of Shechem, Yaakov decided not to do anything until his sons returned from the field. He kept silent until they came back. The Medrash cites this as an example of the phrase in Mishlei "and a man of understanding will remain silent" [Mishlei 11:12]. The fact that Yaakov Avinu did not react was because wise men know to be quiet.

Rav Schwab offers an interesting interpretation of this Medrash. Why didn't Yaakov Avinu react? The verse [pasuk] says "A G-d of Vengeance is Hashem" [Tehillim 94:1]. The Talmud states [Brochos 33a] "great is vengeance, because it was placed between two names of G-d." Rav Schwab interprets this to mean that the license and ability to take revenge is something that remains in G-d's domain. It is not up to us.

Our Sages say that we should engage in all types of mitzvos even without the purest of intentions [Sotah 22b]. This applies to learning, to giving charity, to all types of observance. Despite this, when it comes to one area of life a person must be of pure intent. That is the area of vengeance and zealotry.

One who wishes to be zealous and take up the battle for the Master of the World, must be certain that his intentions are pure and he has no personal ax to grind. That is why G-d surrounds vengeance with His Name (in the previously quoted pasuk "Kel Nekamos HaShem").

It is very rare for man to be given the license to take revenge, because man is typically unable to do so with pure motivation. We are not pure of heart enough.

When Yaakov Avinu heard that his daughter was violated, he did not react. He knew that if he would react, it would perhaps be because he held this violation to be a personal affront against himself. The Gemara says that Yaakov had gone to Shechem and made coins for them. He set up a mercantile system for them. He set up bathhouses. He put Shechem on the map. What did the people of Shechem do in return? They took his only daughter and violated her. Consequently, he was not sure that his reactions would be solely for the sake of heaven and therefore refrained from taking revenge.

The brothers returned. They reacted because "an abomination has been done in Israel" [Bereishis 34:7]. Their objection was not framed in terms of the fact that it was their sister, but because objectively the act itself was a despicable act. Therefore their reaction was more pure of heart. Yaakov, the man of truth, who questioned his own motives, could not bring himself to take revenge. To him, the Medrash applied the accolade, "the man of wisdom will keep quiet."

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayishlach are provided below:

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