

Chazal examine Reuven's act of impetuosity and totally exonerate him. As far as they are concerned Reuven did not sin at all. The Torah's view is from the perspective of who the individual was. On Reuven's spiritual level, this is considered an immoral act. One does not tamper with another's right to conduct his marriage as he sees fit. Yaakov was the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of that generation, the *b'chir ha'Avos*, chosen one of the Patriarchs. Reuven may have had strong feelings concerning his father's choice, but he should have kept them to himself. Just because we do not agree with a *gadol* does not sanction our taking the law into our own hands.

Yet, there will always be those zealots (or extremists) who decide on their own that Reuven acted inappropriately. They use the Torah's wording as support for their erroneous views and misplaced zealotry. Indeed, *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 55b) say: *Kol ha'omer Reuven chata eino ela toeh*; "Whomever claims that Reuven sinned is nothing more than mistaken." I was always bothered by this statement. Why would someone condemn Reuven when *Chazal* clearly exonerate him, stating unequivocally that Reuven was not a sinner? I figured that some people seek to stir up trouble. They must find demons beneath every situation. *Baruch Hashem*, I just came across an explanation from the *tzaddik*, **Horav Ezra Barzal, zl**. He questions *Chazal's* statement, *eino ela toeh*, "is nothing more than mistaken." Why do they not simply say: *Kol ha'omer Reuven chata – toeh*; "Whoever says that Reuven sinned is mistaken"? Why add, "he is nothing more than mistaken"? He explains that any person who suggests that Reuven might have sinned is not only mistaken concerning Reuven, but his entire life is one big mistake! He obviously is incapable of viewing the *Shevatim* and all of our great leaders in their proper perspective. One does not question Reuven's actions, because he does not understand who Reuven is!

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, Shlita, relates that one day (the then young) (*Horav*) *Yosef Dov (Berel) Soloveitchik, zl*, said over a *vort*, original Torah thought, to his father, the venerable **Brisker Rav, zl**. He noted that, concerning *Yitzchak Avinu's* love for Eisav, the Torah writes, *Va'ye'ehav Yitzchak*, "and Yitzchak loved," in past tense; this is in contrast to its description of Rivkah *Imeinu's* love for Yaakov, *v'Rivkah oheves*, "And Rivkah loves," in the present tense. He explained this based upon the words of *Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 5:16), "Every love that is dependent upon something- when that something becomes null and void – so does the love. On the other hand, a love that is not contingent upon a specific thing – it will last forever." Yitzchak loved Eisav because *tzayid b'fiv*, "game was in his mouth." Rivkah had no ulterior reasons for loving Yaakov, other than the fact that he was Yaakov. Yitzchak's love for Eisav ceased because it was love for a person due to a specific quality, which, once it became null, no longer engendered his father's love. His love for Yaakov, however, is eternal.

When the *Brisker Rav* heard the *dvar Torah* from his son, he became all shaken up and raised his voice, "Berel!" *Azoi rett men oif di Avos*; "Is this how we speak concerning the Patriarchs?" (Do we refer to their love as being the type of love that "regular" people have? Contingent love is a term that is applicable to such angels as the Patriarchs.)

In a lecture to *mechanchim*, Torah educators, *Horav Aharon*

Kotler, zl, quoted *Chazal* (*Shabbos* 112b), *Im reshonim bnei malachim, anu bnei anashim. V'im rishonim bnei anashim – anu ka'chamorim*; "If the previous Torah leaders are viewed by us as being on the same spiritual plane as Heavenly Angels, then we are like men. If, however, we view the earlier leaders as men, then we are not more than donkeys."

Rav Aharon quoted **Rav Akiva Eiger, zl**, who explained this pragmatically: How do we view the Torah leadership that has preceded us? If we view their qualities as being angel-like, we perceive them as being so much more elevated than we are. Then we are people. If, however, in our eyes, they are no different than we are -- they are human beings, great human beings, but human beings nonetheless-- then we are nothing more than donkeys. We must understand the concept of *yeridas ha'doros*, the decline of generations. As we view the *gedolim* of past generations, we indicate our own qualification to be included in the human race. If we do not perceive the difference of our generation, our *gedolim*, and the past generations – then there is something wrong with us. This is how we must approach the study of Torah, recognizing that the individuals about whom we are studying are in a league that is very distant from our own.

Va'ani Tefillah

אתה קדוש... אתה חונן לאדם דעת. Atah kadosh... Atah chonein l'adam daas. You are holy... You favor man with knowledge.

Why is the *brachah* of *daas*, knowledge, wisdom, juxtaposed upon the blessing of *kedushah*, holiness? A person must realize what the source of his *daas* is. Wisdom, the ability to think, is derived from Hashem, Who is holy and pure. Thus, the person who is the beneficiary of this gift of wisdom must realize that this is no ordinary gift, because it is coming from no ordinary Benefactor. We are commanded to "cling to Hashem," *u'bo tidbak* (*Devarim* 10:20). As Hashem is holy, so must we strive to be holy. Our ability to think has enormous potential – which can go either way. We can – and should – sanctify our minds, so that the wisdom we express will be pure, untainted and holy. By acting G-d-like, we see to it that our minds maintain their sanctity by studying the *daas* of only individuals who, likewise, maintain themselves on an appropriate level of *Kedushah*. If we do not guard what enters into our minds, how can we control what goes out?

Sponsored

in memory of

Rabbi Louis Engelberg ז"ל

נפטר חי' כסלו תשנ"ח

Mrs. Hannah Engelberg ז"ל

נפטרה ג' טבת תשמ"ב

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

**Etzmon and Abigail Rozen
and Family**

Peninim is published weekly by *Peninim Publications* in conjunction with the *Hebrew Academy of Cleveland*, 1860 S. Taylor Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44118

©All rights reserved – prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

YOU TOO CAN SHARE IN SPREADING THE WORD OF TORAH

For a yearly subscription or Parsha sponsorship, please contact:

In Cleveland – Rabbi L. Scheinbaum (216) 371-7609 or (216) 321-5838 Ext. 165

Outside of North America – Mrs. A. Goldberg +972 2 532 6058

בית חינוך הרב דסלו-קליבלנד
**Hebrew Academy
of Cleveland**

Visit us at:
<http://www.hac1.org>

Design
by
Kenny
Fidler
kfgraphics

PENINIM
ON THE
TORAH



פנינים
התורה

Parashas Vayishlach

תשע"ז

פרשת וישלח

TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

הצילני נא מיד אחי מיד עשו

Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav. (32:12)

Yaakov *Avinu* had but one brother. Why, then, does he ask Hashem to spare him from his brother, from Eisav? His brother was Eisav. The *Zohar HaKadosh* teaches that when one prays he must be specific in his prayer, articulating exactly about what and for whom he is praying. In some instances, one refers to a close friend as brother. Indeed, Avraham *Avinu* referred to Lot, his nephew, as brother, *Anashim achim anachnu*; "We are brothers." Yaakov could also be referring to an Eisav who was not his brother. Thus, he said, "My brother, Eisav, to clarify exactly whom he meant. Nevertheless, he could have simply said, *Mi'yad achi Eisav*. Why does he reiterate, *mi'yad achi, mi'yad Eisav*?"

The **Bais HaLevi** distinguishes between: the enemy named Eisav, the brother, who harbors a vicious hatred towards Yaakov; and the *achi*, brother, who employs brotherly love to ensnare the unsuspecting Yaakov and causes his downfall through assimilation and, eventually, apostasy. One represents physical annihilation; the other symbolizes spiritual extinction. While both forms of destruction are devastating, when physical annihilation occurs, we, at least, die as Jews, connected with the Almighty. In contrast, when spiritual extinction occurs, we lose everything, our destiny and, eventually, our lives.

Not all assimilation stories have a bad ending. The following vignette not only has a good ending, it also demonstrates Divine Providence and encourages us never to give up. We always have hope. We are all part of a Divine Plan. When they came to Auschwitz, entire families were separated one from another. Women were lined up on one side and "prepared" for their martyrdom. As the Jewish women were lined up to be searched, their clothing removed, two Polish women stood on the other side of the fence, hoping to catch anything of value the Nazis would throw away. These Polish women were poor farm people who used the adversity visited upon the Jews as an opportunity for their benefit.

Two women waited patiently by the fence. They were in dire need of warm clothes. The Jews would not need their warm clothing anymore. Suddenly, they saw a Jewish woman who had an aristocratic bearing. She wore a fur hat and a heavy coat. She was holding onto the coat for dear life. The way she seemed to be doting on it, it must be a very expensive coat. The Nazi came over to her and demanded that she remove her hat and coat, throw them both over the fence and continue walking in the line (which was

proceeding to the gas chamber). The woman refused to give up her coat. The two Polish women grabbed her and tore off her coat. The woman gave a shriek that was so loud it must have pierced the heavens. It was to no avail. The women were gone and, with them, the coat. The woman was taken to the gas chamber where she gave up her life to sanctify Hashem's Name.

The two women came home with their prize. They searched the pockets of the heavy coat and discovered jewelry. Yet, they sensed that the coat was still heavy. Finally, they decided to slice open the coat's lining in the hope that they would find more jewelry. How shocked they were to discover a beautiful, sleeping infant girl. They were overwhelmed with the child's beauty. One woman said to the other, "Listen, you have no children. You take the baby, and I will take most of the jewelry. This will be a reasonable trade."

They made the split, with the woman who took the infant keeping only a small amount of jewelry. There was one small chain which she placed upon the baby's neck. Years went by. The little girl was as brilliant as she was physically attractive. She possessed a sterling character as well as refined qualities and social graces. She majored in science and pursued a doctorate in medicine, graduating at the top of her class. Her Polish surrogate mother had excelled in raising her to be not only a successful physician, but also a complete *mentch*. Her surrogate mother became ill and passed away before she had the opportunity to share the details of her birth with her.

The other woman felt it incumbent upon her to clear the air. It troubled her that this wonderful young woman was living a lie. She was not a Polish Christian, and it was about time that she should be made aware of her true heritage. "You are not Polish," she began. Obviously, the young woman was shocked. "What do you mean?" she asked. "Your mother was not your real mother. Your biological mother was murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz. You are Jewish."

The young woman demanded proof that this new revelation was true. "Here is a bracelet with strange lettering that we took from your mother's coat. It is yours." Hearing all of this was truly a shock, and it demanded some time to digest. She decided to take time off from her work to fly to New York where she had heard there was a large aggregate of observant Jews. Perhaps, over time, she might clear her head and get to the bottom of her true identity. She went to Brooklyn where she met a group of *Chassidic* Jews. She questioned them concerning the inscription on her bracelet. They looked it over and read the words, *Shema Yisrael*. "Perhaps you should make an appointment with our *Rebbe*, our leader," they suggested. "He will advise you what to do."

The woman met with the *Rebbe* who listened intently to her story:

HEBREW ACADEMY OF CLEVELAND

“Your story is compelling. No doubt you are one of us. I encourage you to seek out your heritage. Go to the Holy Land and take a position as a doctor. Until now, you have treated gentile children. Now you will treat Jewish children. Hashem will guide you and you will achieve success.” She followed the *Rebbe’s* advice and made *Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael*, where she quickly worked her way up in the field of medicine. Before long, her fame as a compassionate and caring physician, who was an equally brilliant diagnostician, spread. She met a wonderful observant man, and they married and raised a family. Like the *Rebbe* had predicted, the pieces were falling into place.

Nonetheless, in the back of her mind, she was still troubled about the bracelet that had the words *Shema Yisrael* engraved on it. She felt that it had some significance. She prayed to Hashem, Who listened to her prayers.

One day she and her husband were taking a stroll in Yerushalayim, when they suddenly heard an explosion coming from the Sbarro restaurant up the block. This was the infamous terror attack on August 9, 2001, which took the lives of fifteen civilians and injured 130. As a doctor, she immediately ran to the scene of the bombing. When she arrived, she heard an elderly man moaning, “My granddaughter, my granddaughter!” She went over to him and questioned him. Apparently, he had been wheeling his infant granddaughter in her carriage, and they had been separated during the bombing.

The doctor accompanied him in the ambulance. When they arrived at the hospital, she told him that she would search among the children for his granddaughter. After searching from room to room, she found the child. How shocked she was to discover that the little girl wore a bracelet (*Shema Yisrael*) identical to hers! She returned to the child’s grandfather and conveyed to him the good news that his granddaughter was alive and well. She had sustained only minor injuries. She then asked him about the bracelet. He explained that, years ago, he had made two such bracelets: one he gave to his infant daughter; the other he gave to his granddaughter.

Well, anyone reading this knows the rest of the story. When she told the man that she, too, had such a bracelet, and she related her life story, it was apparent that after all of these years, she had found her father. Father and daughter had been reunited after a separation of a lifetime. Her father had survived the war, remarried and raised a family. He had always wondered what had happened to his infant daughter. Now he knew.

**ויצו גם אה השני גם את השלישי גם את כל ההולכים אחריו
העדרים לאמר כדבר הזה תדברון אל עשו**

He similarly instructed the second, also the third, as well as all who followed the droves saying, “In this manner shall you speak to Eisav when you find him.” (32:20)

The text seems to imply that Yaakov *Avinu* instructed each group separately. Why did he go to all of this trouble, reiterating the same thing to each of the groups? He could easily have called them all together and given one speech. **Horav Eliezer Sorotzkin, zl**, offers a practical insight. The whole idea of sending gifts, which clearly smacks of *chanukah*, sychophanting, is something that Yaakov was compelled to do under duress. Otherwise, such behavior is certainly below the dignity of such an eminent person. While it may be common fare in today’s society, it is something that one does only when pushed up against the wall in his dealings with the likes of an Eisav. Otherwise, *chanukah* is shameful, false, and inappropriate. Thus, to act publicly in such a manner is to be considered a *chillul Hashem*, a desecration of Hashem’s Name. If one “must,” he must, but do not call attention to it.

While this may appear to the reader as a sort of double standard, it is not. We live in a world in which the often-used standard for negotiations is the medium of “gifting.” If we seek a favor from a person (other than one who is Torah-oriented), we often have to do something in return. This “something in return” might be labeled a bribe or flattery, but it is, sadly, the way the secular world functions. At times, we, as Jews, must resort to the same form of negotiation, but we do not have to call attention to it or be proud of it.

ויותר יעקב לבדו

Yaakov was left alone. (32:25)

Yaakov *Avinu* went back for *pachim ketanim*, small jars. The Patriarch’s actions beg elucidation. Our commentators, each in his own manner, explain why Yaakov returned for a few small jars whose monetary value was probably negligible. *Chazal* explain that the righteous place a premium on their material possessions, because they represent items acquired under the strictest conditions of integrity. Anything that might even smell of a tinge of impropriety will not pass through their hands. Thus, Yaakov returned for these jars, because they represented the highest ideals of veracity. *Horav Chaim Vital, zl*, quotes his saintly *Rebbe*, the **Arizal**, who explains this further. *Tzaddikim* understand that whatever material possessions they have are gifted to them by Hashem. (We all talk the talk, claiming that “everything comes from Hashem,” but do we really believe it?) They understand that if Hashem does not “feel” that they need it, they would not have it. Thus, each and every article, regardless of its value, physical condition, or age is Heaven-sent. What right does one have to maintain a lackadaisical attitude towards it? This is why Yaakov returned in the middle of the night to collect his *pachim ketanim*.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, gives deeper meaning to the words of the *Arizal* with an analogy. There was a man who lived in abject poverty. Yet, despite all of the hardship, his greatest desire was to observe *mitzvos* fully. He commented that, due to his economically-challenged status, he was unable to even begin the day properly. Upon arising in the morning, a Jew should wash his hands to remove any impure (spiritually contaminated) spirit attached to him. Due to his extreme poverty, he could not even fulfill this most simple *mitzvah*, since he had no cup! One night, he dreamt that Hashem had heard his plea and had blessed him with a cup and bowl, so that he could now wash *negel vasser*. When he woke up that morning, he was excited to see the realization of his dream. There, next to his bed was a cup and bowl. His excitement was palpable. He could now wash in the morning!

Over the years, the poor man’s fortune changed, and he no longer was a poor man. He purchased furniture and various materialistic articles which most of us take for granted. At one point, his dingy abode did not suffice for the many things he had purchased. His wife suggested that they purchase a new and larger condo, as befits someone of his newly-acquired status. He agreed and, after making the necessary arrangements, he decided to move. He called a moving company to move his material belongings to his new state-of-the-art condo.

When the movers completed the job, they presented their bill and asked to be paid. The man said that he must first make certain that everything had been transferred from his old apartment. After going through everything, he declared that something was missing. The workers disagreed, claiming that they had removed everything from the apartment. “That is not true,” he said. “Something is missing.” He returned with the movers to his apartment and began to search. Finally, after hours, he located his “cup and bowl.” “This is what concerned you?” they asked. “It is nothing more than an old cup and

bowl. Who would care about something such as this?”

“You do not understand,” the man explained. “This cup is very dear to me, since I received it as a gift from G-d.”

This analogy illustrates for us the attitude of the righteous towards everything they own. It is a gift from G-d. True, it has been purchased with money (or credit card), but it is enabled by Hashem, thereby rendering it invaluable. The *Mashgiach* adds: “This is only when one appropriates the article through pure means, acting with integrity to the full letter of the law. Otherwise, if he commits any form of thievery, obtaining his material possessions in a less than truthful manner, it is really not his. Thus, it is not considered a gift from Hashem. Do we really want something that does not meet Hashem’s criteria for ownership?”

**ויאמר יעקב אל שמעון ואל לוי ענרתם אחי להבאישיני בישב
הארץ...ויאמרו הכוונה יעשה את אחותו**

And Yaakov said to Shimon and to Levi, “You brought trouble upon me by besmirching me among the inhabitants of the land” And they (Shimon and Levi) replied, “Shall he treat our sister like a harlot?” (34:30,31)

When do we act zealously, striking back with force? When do we placate, look for reasons and ways to seek a diplomatic solution? We see two contrasting approaches in our *parsha*, surprisingly from a father and his sons. Shimon and Levi struck with vengeance. They had no room for negotiation: If you touch a Jewish girl, you and your entire city will pay. Yaakov *Avinu* was not as quick to seek vengeance.

Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl, observes that both approaches have their place in Jewish life. When their sister, Dinah, was violated by Shechem, Shimon and Levi avenged her and her family’s dishonor. Their righteous indignation did not allow for them to be placatory in any way. This was a time for vengeance and reclaiming honor- not for diplomacy.

Yaakov *Avinu* viewed the tragedy from a different perspective. He understood the pain and disgrace that drove his sons to shed blood, but from his view, it was not the correct approach. He was concerned with the future of his family and how his sons’ violent reaction would possibly jeopardize the future of the Jewish People. As the Patriarch, his nature was to consider the full implications of his actions carefully. The same action that is correct and proper now might be harmful later on. Therefore, in the long run, impetuosity is a dangerous course upon which to embark.

We see the Patriarch taking such a position in his original confrontation with Eisav (at the beginning of the *Parsha*). The Torah indicates clearly that Yaakov had been prepared to fight – if necessary. He saw this option only as a last resort. He succeeded in quelling Eisav’s anger, diffusing that which could have turned into a tragic situation and transforming it instead into one of reconciliation and brotherhood.

Now that we have presented the two approaches, apparently it seems that they are divided between youth and maturity – not simply in age, but in perspective. Young people often lack the willingness to compromise on principles. They are more than willing to go to battle to right a wrong – as evinced by Shimon and Levi. They are loathe to be considered weak. For them, this is an unforgivable failing.

Contrasting youthful exuberance and inflexibility are the wisdom and calmness evinced by experience and maturity. The advice of the elders often has a calming effect on the zealous nature of youth. The elders guide and temper, when the youth are willing to listen and heed their advice. To paraphrase the *Rosh Yeshivah*, “Their wisdom and breadth of vision can harness the well-intended yet reckless enthusiasm of others, ensuring that any action taken is the right one,

not only for the moment, but also for the longer term.” Yaakov *Avinu* exemplified such wisdom.

This does not in any way mean that we are to cast aside youthful enthusiasm. Indeed, the role of the younger *Kohanim* on the night of *Yom Kippur* is highlighted. Their task was to keep the *Kohen Gadol* awake by firmly reminding him of his responsibility. To fall asleep would mean risking the possibility of ritual impurity, which would invalidate him from performing the holiest service of the year. All night, they would snap their fingers and remind him to remain awake. They did this incessantly - but respectfully. Why use younger *Kohanim* (as opposed to older ones)? They represent youthful energy, which, in contrast to the wisdom of maturity, does not lead to being overly cautious and indecisive.

In his inimitable manner, *Rav Belsky* sums up what should be the perspective of Torah-oriented Jews concerning which approach to employ, given a time-sensitive situation when a decision is mandatory – immediately – if not sooner. In other words, we do not always have the luxury of seeking out *daas Torah*, the wisdom of Torah, as expounded by a Torah giant. Sometimes a person must rely on his own common sense, coupled with a profound understanding of how the Torah views his present predicament. The *Rosh Yeshivah* encourages us to learn from everyone: the people around us, our *rabbanim*, our friends, even from people who oppose us. If we can open our eyes to view the situation objectively, we are able to cultivate and blend the above two approaches, in order to decide which is most situation-appropriate.

The problem arises when we begin to fall spiritually asleep, when we are losing our grasp of a situation. This is when we must know how to “snap our fingers”, to wake up and maintain a clear perspective on the question before us. We may never lose our mind to passion, nor should we lull ourselves into complacency by remaining too calm. There is a happy medium between losing control, acting impetuously and listening to the voice of calm reason, to the point that we do nothing and allow everyone to walk all over us. Some people, however, are “happy” about choosing the “happy” medium. Their error (I think) is in comparing themselves either to Shimon/Levi or to Yaakov *Avinu*. Their approach worked for them, because they were spiritually on the plateau which permitted their actions. We are obligated to attempt to blend both approaches and seek the most appropriate option.

יילך ראונו ושכב את בלהה פלגש אביו

**Reuven went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine.
(35:22)**

Following the death of Rachel *Imeinu*, Yaakov *Avinu* established his primary residence in the tent of Bilhah, Rachel’s maidservant. Reuven, who was Leah *Imeinu’s* firstborn, considered this an affront to his mother. He said, “If my mother’s sister, Rachel, was my mother’s rival, does that mean that the handmaid of my mother’s sister should be her rival?” He felt that Yaakov should have moved into Leah’s tent – not Bilhah’s. To defend his mother’s honor, Reuven made the move into Leah’s tent, taking Yaakov’s bed and moving it into Leah’s tent. While this is all that transpired, the Torah takes a stark view of Reuven’s actions, considering it as if he had sinned egregiously. As a great person, his minor sin grew exponentially. Yaakov’s intentions were noble. He had labored fourteen years to earn Rachel’s hand in marriage. Despite not having as many children as her sister, Rachel still remained the *akeres ha’bayis*, mainstay of the household. In tribute to her memory, he assigned this honor to her maidservant. Furthermore, Bilhah was charged with raising the young Yosef and infant Benyamin, Rachel’s two orphaned children.