



Partners In Torah
San Diego Study Guide

תשפ"ג Parshat Vayishlach

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Partners In Torah San Diego

Mission Statement:

Partners In Torah San Diego is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah San Diego has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Welcome.

Thank you for coming.

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.

The Ramban prefaces his commentary to the second book of the Torah, *Shemot*, by writing.

השלים הכתוב ספר בראשית שהוא ספר היצירה בחדוש העולם ויצירת כל נוצר, ובמקרי האבות כולם שהם כעין יצירה לזרעם, מפני שכל מקריהם ציורי דברים לרמוז להודיע כל העתיד לבא להם

Scripture has concluded the book of Bereshit, which is the book of the creation of the world and every creature, and the events of our Forefathers, which were like a creation for their offspring because all the events that happened to them portend what will happen to their children in the future.

This is the concept called *The deeds of our fathers are a sign for their children*. How they dealt with their challenges created the *template* for us, their children, to follow when dealing with those same issues. If we fail to follow their path, we are doomed to fail.

The following story related in the Midrash illustrates this point.

מדרש רבה בראשית - פרשה עה פסקה ה
רבינו אמר לרבי אפס כתוב חד אגרא מן שמי למרן מלכא אנטונינוס. קם וכתב,
"מן יהודה נשיאה למרן מלכא אנטונינוס." נסבה וקרייה וקרעיה. אמר ליה,
"כתוב 'מן עבדך יהודה למרן מלכא אנטונינוס.'" אמר ליה, "רבי, מפני מה אתה
מבזה על כבודך?" אמר ליה, "מה אנא טב מן סבי? לא כך אמר 'כה אמר עבדך
יעקבי?'"

Rabbi Judah the Prince (Rebbe) told Rabbi Apos his scribe to write a letter from him to the Emperor Antonius. The scribe wrote: "From Rabbi Judah the Prince to the King Antonius..." Rebbe read it and tore it up. He then instructed Apos to write: "From your servant Judah to the King Antonius..." "Why do you lower your honor so much and disgrace yourself?" asked the scribe. Rebbe responded, "Am I any better than my grandfather Yaakov?"

Didn't Yaakov tell his messengers to tell Esav, 'so has Yaakov your servant said'?"

Rebbe carefully followed Yaakov's model vis-à-vis the posture that Yaakov had assumed towards Esav. Rebbe understood that if this is how Yaakov acted with Esav, then this is the way that we need to act with his descendants. If we take a superior or even equal posture in our dealings with them, we cannot succeed.

This week's Parsha details the encounter between the world's two opposing forces: good and evil, as manifest in Yaakov and Esav. These two actors are still center stage in today's world in the form of the Jewish people and the surrounding gentile nations of the world. It thus behooves us to examine how Yaakov dealt with Esav to determine how best to deal with our gentile adversaries today.

Although Yaakov was completely righteous, and, thus, could have defeated Esav summarily and solved the immediate problem, Yaakov knew that his progeny would not maintain the perfect degree of holiness that he had achieved. Hence, in a battle with Esav's forces, they would likely lose. Yaakov thus needed to adopt a strategy that would work even if his children were not perfectly righteous, a strategy that would guarantee the Jewish people's existence for all time. This insight will help us understand Yaakov's strategy and why it is essential for us to follow it. Because we are far from perfect in our service to Hashem and not on Yaakov's level, to take Esav head on and try to defeat him in battle would not succeed. Hence, the circuitous path that Yaakov took is the only path that can work for us.

Esav and his 400 seasoned soldiers were on their way to annihilate Yaakov and his family. In his effort to neutralize Esav, Rashi tells us that Yaakov employed a three--part strategy.

רש"י על בראשית פרק לב פסוק ט
והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה - על כרחו כי אלחם עמו התקין עצמו לשלשה
דברים לדורון לתפלה ולמלחמה.

Rashi (32:9, listing them out of order) explains: *Yaakov prepared himself for three things: a gift, prayer, and war.*

First, Yaakov prayed fervently that Hashem save him from Esav (Genesis 32:120:

(יב) הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו

Please save me from my brother, from Esav...

Yaakov then sent Esav a massive gift: 200 she goats, 20 he goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 nursing camels, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 she donkeys, and 10 he donkeys. Yaakov divided the gift into many groups and spread them out over several miles. Hence, when Esav looked down the road, he perceived a gift that went on and on. When Esav inquired, "What's this all about?" the messengers answered, "It's from Yaakov your servant, a tribute sent to my lord, to Esav." Yaakov's goal was to soften Esav by appealing to his love of money and possessions.

Our Sages explain how a bribe to Esav works. Esav's default position is always tilted against Yaakov, and because he automatically sees Yaakov in a negative light, the bribe counteracts his bias, evening out the scale.

Although Yaakov's prayer was answered, he still took this second step to create the template for future generations whose prayers may not be as pure and powerful as his.

The last resort, should the first two strategies fail, is war, for which Yaakov prepared by dividing his family into two different camps (Ibid 32:9).

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר אִם יָבוֹא עֵשָׂו אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאַחַת וְהִכָּהוּ וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר
לְפָלִיטָה :

9. For he said, "If Esav comes to the one camp and strikes it down, then **the remaining camp shall survive.**"

Yaakov recognized that some of his family may be killed in a war against Esav. At the same time, Yaakov was sure that Esav would be unable to kill them all. There would always be a Jewish nation. Our Sages learn this from the words - **The remaining camp shall survive.** This seeming observation is indeed a statement of fact; it will *always* be the case. Esav will *never* be able to destroy the entire Jewish nation. Even if he succeeds in destroying one camp, another will always survive. We see this truth from 3,000 years of Jewish history.

The stage was set. Yaakov did everything he possibly could to achieve the desired outcome. He prayed to Hashem, sent a bribe to appease his brother, and prepared for the ultimate last resort, war.

Yaakov's efforts paid off. The next day, when Yaakov and Esav finally met face to face, Esav embraced and kissed his brother. After a short exchange in which Yaakov convinced Esav to accept his gift, they parted ways peacefully, and the danger was, at least then, averted.

After all of Yaakov's preparations, the Torah informs us of a seemingly unrelated episode with Yaakov that occurred during the night before Yaakov and Esav met face to face.

The Midrash informs us that Yaakov had left a few small vessels on the other side of the river and went back to retrieve them. There, alone, Yaakov was attacked by a strange man. (Genesis 32:25-29):

כה) וַיִּנְתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיִּאָּבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר
כו) וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכַל לוֹ וַיִּגַע בְּכַף יָרְכוֹ וַתִּקַּע כַּף יָרְדֵי יַעֲקֹב בְּהֶאָבִקוֹ עִמּוֹ

כז) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָּ כִּי אִם בְּרַכְתָּנִי
כח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
כט) וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יִשְׁמְרֶךָ עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים
וְעִם אַנְשֵׁים וְתוֹכֵל

25) *And Yaakov was left alone and **a man** wrestled with him until the break of dawn. 26) When the man perceived that he could not overcome Yaakov, he struck the socket of Yaakov's hip; so Yaakov's hip socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him. 27) Then the man said, "Let me go, for the dawn has broken."*

28) *And Yaakov said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."*

He said to him, "What is your name?"

He replied, "Yaakov."

29) *He said, "No longer will your name be Yaakov, but Yisrael, **for you have striven with the Divine** (the angel) **and with man** (Lavan and Esav) **and have succeeded.**"*

Who was this *man*, and what was the battle about?

The commentaries teach us that this "man" who fought with Yaakov was really Esav's angel. He was fighting with Yaakov over the small vessels that Yaakov went back to retrieve. Esav's angel wanted to prevent Yaakov from taking them, but Yaakov fought valiantly to keep them. The battle lasted all night, and Esav's angel could not overcome Yaakov. In the end, Yaakov was victorious and kept the vessels.

After defeating Esav's angel, Yaakov would not let the angel go until he blessed Yaakov. With no choice, he blessed him by changing his name from Yaakov to Yisrael. Yaakov was satisfied with this and released the angel.

What could be the meaning of the battle over the small vessels? Why would Esav's angel want them, and why would Yaakov

risk his life to save them? Why was Yaakov satisfied with the blessing of the angel?

Rashi (32:29) explains the depth of what occurred.

לא יעקב - לא יאמר עוד שהברכות באו לך בעקבה ורמיה כי אם בשררה וגלוי פנים וסופך שהקב"ה נגלה עליך בבית אל ומחליף שמך ושם הוא מברכך ואני שם אהיה ואודה לך עליהן וזהו שכתוב (הושע יב) וישר אל מלאך ויוכל בכה ויתחנן לו בכה המלאך ויתחנן לו ומה נתחנן לו בית אל ימצאנו ושם ידבר עמנו המתן לי עד שידבר עמנו שם ולא רצה יעקב ועל כרחו הודה לו עליהן וזהו ויברך אותו שם שהיה מתחנן להמתין לו ולא רצה

Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov: *No longer shall it be said that you came about the blessings in a deceitful way; rather, you earned them openly with your victory. In the end (at a future time) Hashem will reveal Himself to you at Bet-el and there He will change your name and bless you. I will also be there and concede to you about the blessings. This is the meaning of the verse in Hoshea (12:5): "He struggled with an angel and prevailed, (the angel) wept and beseeched him: 'In Bet-el He will find us and there He will speak with us.'" For what was the angel weeping and begging? **Wait for Bet-el, until Hashem speaks to us there.** (He was crying and begging Yaakov to not force him to give the blessing here and now!) But Yaakov did not want this and forced the angel to admit to the blessing then and there. This is why the Torah (29:30) stresses that "the angel blessed him **there.**"*

The significance of the name change is that when Yaakov successfully diverted Yitzchak's blessing from Esav to himself, Esav cried out, "**Is it because his name was Yaakov that he outwitted me these two times? – He took away my birthright and see, now, he took away my blessing!**" There is a connotation to the word עקב -

akev -the root of Yaakov's name, that implies being devious and deceitful.

Yisrael, on the other hand, comprises two words: "*Yisra* – you were victorious, and *el*- over an angel. Defeating Esav's angel proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the blessing really belonged to Yaakov. Even Esav's heavenly advocate had to admit that Yaakov was entitled to the blessing.

Why was Esav's angel crying and begging Yaakov not to have to give him the blessing then and there? And why was Yaakov so cruel to the angel? Why couldn't he wait until Bet-el to receive the blessing with the concession of the angel there? What was so crucial about receiving the angel's blessing immediately?

The following explanation is from a lecture by Rabbi Moshe Shapiro ל"צ.

Approximately two years later Hashem told Yaakov (Genesis 35:1).

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל יַעֲקֹב קוּם עֲלֵה בֵּית אֵל וְשָׁב שָׁם וַעֲשֵׂה שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לְאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ בְּבִרְחֶךָ מִפְּנֵי עֲשׂוֹ אָחִיךָ

(1) *Hashem said to Yaakov, "Arise – go up to Bet-el and dwell there, and make an altar there to Hashem Who appeared to you when you fled from Esav your brother."*

What is the nature of this sacrifice that Hashem requested from Yaakov?

Our Sages explain that this was not the first time that Yaakov was in Bet-el. Twenty- two years earlier, when Yaakov left home to flee his brother Esav who had vowed to kill him, he slept at Bet-el. It was there that Yaakov had the dream with the ladder reaching the heavens with the angels going up and down it. Upon waking, he

made a promise that if Hashem will be with him and guard him, give him bread to eat and clothes to wear and return him to his father's home, he will bring a sacrifice of thanks to Hashem. Hashem told Yaakov that it was time to make good on that promise and bring the sacrifice, since all of the conditions had been satisfied.

With this, Yaakov said to his entourage (35:2,3).

(ב) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל בְּיָתוֹ וְאֶל כָּל אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ הִסְרוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכַר אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְהִטְהֵרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמֹלֹתֵיכֶם:
(ג) וְנִקְוָמָה וְנַעֲלָה בַּיַּת אֵל וְאֶעֱשֶׂה שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לְקַל הָעֲנָה אֲתִי בַּיּוֹם צָרְתִי:
וַיְהִי עִמָּדִי בַּדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הִלְכֹתִי

2) *So Yaakov said to his household and to all who were with him, "Discard all the alien gods that are in your midst; cleanse yourselves and change your clothes. 3) Then come, let us go up to Bet-el; I will make there an altar to Hashem Who answered me in my time of distress, and was with me on the road that I traveled.*

As Esav's angel told Yaakov, it was here that *Hashem* officially changed his name to Yisrael (*Ibid*, v.10).

(י) וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֱלֹקִים שְׁמֶךָ יַעֲקֹב לֹא יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל
הֲיָה שְׁמֶךָ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל

10) *Then Hashem said to him, "Your name is Yaakov. Your name shall not always be called Yaakov, but Yisrael shall be your name. Thus, He called his name Yisrael.*

In Bet-el, Esav's angel was prepared to concede to Yaakov being called Yisrael implying that he *earned* the blessings instead of stealing them. Having just purged all foreign gods from their midst they were all perfectly righteous, and, thus, worthy of it. When the Jewish people are perfectly righteous, Esav concedes that they are Yisrael and that he must be subservient to them. But for people who

are not righteous, Esav's angel contested Yaakov's right to the blessing, saying that such people are not worthy of the name Yisrael.

Our Sages teach us that the *small vessels* that Yaakov went back to retrieve represent the Jews who are far from perfect. Esav's angel claimed that once they veer from their roots, those Jews belong to *him* and do not merit the right to bear the name Yisrael. That is why he did not want to let Yaakov have the small vessels and bring them under his name Yisrael at that place and time. Because they are sinners, he felt that they were unworthy of the name Yisrael. Only righteous Jews like the ones at Bet-el are worthy of carrying that exalted name.

Yaakov fought valiantly with the angel and, by winning, established that even a Jew who has sinned still maintains the name Yisrael. As long as a Jew maintains contact with his Jewish identity, no matter how far he has strayed, he is still a Yisrael. His Jewish identity cannot be expunged from within him, no matter what. This is why Yaakov wouldn't let the angel go without conceding defeat and agreeing that even now his name is Yisrael. Yaakov argued that because I have defeated you over the *small vessels*, the name Yisrael applies to them as well. Since the name Yisrael means that "*I have sparred with an angel and won,*" my seed is indestructible and can stand up to any challenge. My children will always be called Yisroel no matter how far they may stray from the Torah. A spark of me will always remain within them. You must bless me here and now and admit to me that the name Yisrael applies to them as well.

This is an explicit teaching in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 44a):

אמר רבי אבא בר זבדא אף על פי שחטא ישראל הוא

Rabbi Abba bar Zavda said: "A Jew, even if he has sinned, is still a Yisrael."

This was Yaakov's major triumph over Esav's angel. If the angel had his way, none of us would today be considered members of the Jewish nation. We would have instantly lost our membership after committing our first sin. The name Yisrael would be the exclusive domain of the select few who could live a life without a single sin.

When Hashem spoke to Yaakov in Bet-el, He hinted to him that there would come a time when all his children would worship idols, but that they will nevertheless be brought back to Hashem.

Rashi says (*Ibid*, 35:11) that Hashem told Yaakov;

ד"א שעתידים בניו להקריב בשעת איסור הבמות כגוים בימי אליהו

There will come a time when your children will bring sacrifices [outside of the Holy Temple (which is prohibited)] just like the gentiles. This will occur in the times of Eliyahu the Prophet.

Achav, the King of Israel, and his queen Izevel (Jezebel) were ardent idolaters. They killed all the true prophets except for Eliyahu whom they were unable to catch. Achav and his wife believed in gods Baal and Ashera as to whom there were 450 and 400 prophets respectively. The Jewish people were unfortunately in the same camp.

In an effort to bring the Jewish people back to Hashem, Eliyahu challenged the 850 false prophets to a "duel." They would each build an altar and place an animal on it. The sacrifice that would be consumed by a fire that came down from heaven would prove the true prophet.

When Eliyahu built his altar, the prophet tells us (I Kings 18:31)

(לא) וַיִּקַּח אֱלֹהֵהוּ שְׁתֵּי עָשָׂר אֲבָנִים כְּמִסְפַּר שְׁבֹטֵי בְנֵי יִעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר הָיָה
דָּבַר יְדוּד אֱלֹהֵי לְאֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהִיָּה שְׁמֶךָ

31) Eliyahu took twelve stones corresponding to the number of the tribes of the children of Yaakov, to whom the word of Hashem came, saying, "Your name shall be Yisrael."

Here Eliyahu alluded to Yaakov's victory of over Esav's angel. These idolators are still the descendants of Yaakov's twelve sons and still bear the name Yisrael. They still have the indestructible spark of Yisroel inside them, and even though they worship idols and are very far from the truth, they can be brought back in an instant. This was Yaakov's accomplishment hundreds of years earlier when he defeated Esav's angel and extracted the blessing from him.

Indeed, when after the 850 false prophets finished with all their efforts and shenanigans nothing had happened, and Eliyahu's sacrifice, upon which he had poured buckets of water to heighten the miracle, was consumed by a fire that came down from heaven, the people all spontaneously fell on their faces and recognized Hashem as the real G-d. The verse tells us.

(לט) וַיֵּרָא כָּל הָעָם וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְדוּד הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים יְדוּד הוּא
הָאֱלֹהִים

39) The entire people saw (the fire consume the sacrifice) and fell on their faces and exclaimed, "Hashem - He is the G-d! Hashem – He is the G-d!"

In a second, the concealed spark of Yisrael became a raging fire, and the Jewish people returned to Hashem. *A Jew, even if he has sinned, is still a Yisrael.*

The wrestling match between Yaakov and the angel lasted until dawn. Our Sages explain that dawn symbolizes the final redemption, the coming of the Mashiach. This indicates that the battle for the “small vessels” will continue until Mashiach arrives. Some will claim that if a Jew has strayed, he is no longer a member of Yisrael and might as well just join the opposition. They’re wrong! This is what Yaakov successfully fought to combat. A Jew is always a Yisrael.

What could better describe the challenge that we face today as we prepare to welcome the Mashiach? Since every member of the nation Yisrael has an unextinguishable spark of Yisrael in him, we continue Yaakov’s struggle to connect him to his Forefather Yisrael.