



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה Parshat Vayishlach

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Hello, Welcome!

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

Thank you for joining us!

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

This week's Parsha details the encounter between the world's two opposing forces: good and evil, as manifest in Yaakov and his brother Esav. These two players are still center stage in today's world in the form of the Jewish people and the surrounding gentile nations.

The gentile world that persecutes the Jewish nation comprises two groups: the children of Yishmael - the Arab world, and the children of Esav - the Western world. Although we are currently suffering at the hands of Yishmael's children, they are not listed as one of the four exiles, Bavel, Persia, Greece and Edom. They have a different role vis-à-vis the Jewish people and rear their ugly head at specific times to address a specific flaw in the Jewish nation.

On the other hand, Esav's descendants comprise the Edom exile in which we have been for almost 2,000 years, since the destruction of the second Holy Temple.

Our Sages teach us that when Hashem punishes His people, both as a nation and as individuals, His goal is not to pain them and make them suffer for having transgressed His will, but, rather, it is designed to help them realize their mistake and teach them how to correct it. In the words of the Sages, this is called *מדה כנגד מדה* - *measure for measure*.

In accordance with this concept, each exile was different; each was the necessary environment to teach the Jewish people the lesson that they then needed to learn. Hashem placed them in a society that was corrupt to match the very area of their errant behavior. The goal was for them to see their flaw in its most unattractive light, as it is manifest in a society that let it get out of hand. This should be repulsive to the Jew and send him running back to the Torah, causing him to recognize the value that lies in the Torah way of life.

At the end of the second Holy Temple, baseless hatred and arguments between Jews were rampant. Indeed, the Sages teach us (Yoma 9b) that this was the reason that the second Temple was destroyed, and for which the Jews were sent into exile.

אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ובמצות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה חרב
מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם

*The second Holy Temple where the Jewish people were fully engaged in Torah study and mitzvah fulfillment, why was it destroyed? **Because there was baseless hatred among them.***

“Baseless hatred” means that there is no real reason to hate my fellow Jew. The reason why I hate him is because his very existence annoys me. I am so wrapped up in myself that I would feel better if no one else existed. I need no one else, and I wish that he would just get out of my way.

The deep psychological source for this attitude is **haughtiness** – **גאווה**, where my conception of myself is so compelling that I have no value or regard for anyone else such that his very existence is a nuisance to me. In that state, I am in violation of every law of the Torah.

Haughtiness is Edom’s overriding attribute; it is that of the Western world in which we live. Indeed, we are in this exile to correct this character flaw that prevents us from loving our fellow as ourselves.

What is the source of Edom’s haughtiness? This week’s portion reveals the secret.

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

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 via three tactics: a gift, prayer, and war.*

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, Yaakov's descendants would likely lose. Hence, Yaakov adopted 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 not on Yaakov's level and are, unfortunately, far from perfect in our service to Hashem, to take Esav head-on in battle would not succeed. Hence, the seemingly circuitous path that Yaakov took is the only path that can work for us.

First, Yaakov prayed fervently that Hashem save him from Esav (Genesis 32:12):

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. This way, 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.

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

The stage was now set. Yaakov did everything that 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.

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

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) וַיִּזְתֶּר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר
בו) וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּגַע בְּכַף יָרְכּוֹ וַתִּקַּע כַּף יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֶאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ
בז) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחְנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ כִּי אִם בְּרַכְתָּנִי
בח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב
כט) וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׁרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעִם
אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוֹכַל

25) 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 Esav’s “angel.” The battle lasted all night, and although Yaakov was victorious, Esav’s angel was able to injure Yaakov’s hip, causing him to limp. This battle between Yaakov and Esav’s angel was an *eternal battle*, which established the relationship between Yaakov and Esav – the Jews and the gentiles - for all time.

The Talmud (Avoda Zara 11b) tells us of a holiday that the Romans celebrated based on this encounter.

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל עוד אחרת יש [להם] ברומי אחת לשבעים שנה
מביאין אדם שלם ומרכיבין אותו על אדם חיגר ומלבישין אותו בגדי אדם הראשון
ומניחין לו בראשו קרקיפלו של רבי ישמעאל ותלו ליה [בצואריה] מתקל [ר'] זוזא
דפיזא ומחפין את השווקים באינך ומכריזין לפניו סך קירי פלסתר אחוה דמרנא
זייפנא דחמי חמי ודלא חמי לא חמי מאי אהני לרמאה ברמאותיה ולזייפנא
בזייפנותיה ומסיימין בה הכי ווי לדין כד יקום דין

Rabbi Yehuda quoted Shmuel to say: There is yet another holiday (a parade) that the Romans celebrate. Once every seventy years, they would bring a whole (unblemished) person (Rashi: representing Esav) and place him on the shoulders of a gimp (Rashi: representing Yaakov). They then dressed him (the whole person), in the clothing of Adam, and placed the skin of Rabbi Yishmael the High Priest’s face upon him (Rashi: When the Romans killed the 10 Holy martyrs, the Ceasar’s daughters requested that Rabbi Yishmael’s beautiful image be preserved, so they lifted his skin while he was still alive and preserved it. It still exists in the hidden Roman treasures.) they then would hang a necklace with an extremely precious stone around his neck, and adorn the marketplace with glittering precious stones. They would announce before him, “The prediction of the redemption (that Yaakov foresaw) is false! The brother (Yaakov) of our master (Esav) is a swindler! (because he “stole” the blessings from Esav)

Make sure you see this now, because you won't see it for another seventy years! What did the swindler gain with his trickery and the cheat with his cheating?" And they conclude, "Whoa to this one (Esav) when that one (Yaakov) rises up!"

The Maharal (R. Yehudah Loeb b. R. Bezalel, 1520-1609) reveals the deep meaning of what the Romans were trying to convey with this charade.

מהר"ל חדושי אגדות על עבודה זרה דף יא/ב

במאמר הזה באו לגלות ולבאר ענין כח מלכות רביעית עם ישראל .

In this passage the Sages revealed to us the essential trait of the fourth kingdom verses the Nation Israel.

Adam possessed two gifts from Hashem. One was that he manifested the **Tzelem Elokim** - צלם אלקים - the "Image of Hashem"- and the second was the special clothing that Hashem had made for Adam and Chava after they ate from the Tree of Knowledge Good and Bad. Yaakov inherited the first, and Esav inherited the second.

The *Tzelem Elokim* that Adam possessed was a reflection of his soul's holiness. Being the hand-crafted creation of Hashem, we must imagine that Adam had the ultimate *Tzelem Elokim*. Our Sages teach us that the place that the soul and body meet is in one's face. One's countenance is a reflection of his soul.

The Talmud tells us (Babba Metzia 84a) that Yaakov's countenance mirrored the countenance of Adam. Yaakov's holiness was on par with Adam's, and this was reflected in Yaakov's countenance.

שופריה דיעקב אבינו מעין שופריה דאדם הראשון

Esav, on the other hand, inherited Adam's clothing. These were the special garments that Rivka guarded for Esav and put on Yaakov when Yaakov went before Yitzchak to receive the blessings.

Yaakov and Esav's dispute revolved around who is Adam's true heir and worthy of the other's respect and deference.

Yaakov through his supreme efforts in Torah and service to Hashem achieved the internal holy essence of Adam, his *Tzelem Elokim*. He represented the true quintessence of Adam's greatness. Esav merely had Adam's clothing, something external to him. Esav may have looked like Adam while wearing his clothing, but this was just a façade. Esav was an evil person - nothing like Adam- though externally he may have looked like him. Mannequins wear clothing also, but it doesn't make them people. Royal clothing worn by a king make him royal, but the same clothing on a commoner look foolish.

Nevertheless, Esav's position was that "since I wear Adam's clothing, I represent Adam in the world. You are secondary and I am the primary force in the world worthy of your respect."

This is the essence of the debate. Yaakov puts in years and years of work on himself to achieve the **essence** of Adam - **פנימיות**. Esav, however, doesn't care about what's inside; his concern is with the **superficial** trappings, the external looks - **חיצוניות**. You put on a good face, and that is all that matters. This is what is important and worthy of respect in Esav's world.

This is why the Romans put the face of Rabbi Yishmael the High Priest on their man, to attempt to show that they, too, could have a holy countenance. Of course it was silly, because this was just a superficial mask. A holy countenance must shine forth from a holy soul within.

This was the meaning behind the valuable necklace and adorning the marketplace with precious stones to make it glitter and look important. This is all that is important to them, the glitter and how it looks. What is underneath is inconsequential.

The Maharal sums it up.

וכאשר תבין אלו הדברים על עומקם, תדע להבין ענין אומה זאת... שהם מייפים את האדם ונותנים כבוד ויופי ויקר עם חשיבות המקום שזהו ענין עשוי

And when you understand these matters in the deepest way, you will understand this nation... They beautify the person, giving him honor, beauty and respect for his appearance, and also for the place and house in which he lives. This is what is important to Esav.

Being in *galut Edom*, the exile of Esav's grandchildren, this characteristic captures the essence of our society as well. Starting with huge, elaborately decorated, ostentatious churches, filled with ceremonies of pomp and glory, but devoid of meaningful content or truth, our society is obsessed with looks. The most beautiful people receive all the attention. They are on the covers of magazines and on billboards everywhere.

People who were not born overly attractive spend their lives pursuing beauty by trying to make themselves beautiful through the many millions of products specifically made to make one look more beautiful. Walk into any drug store and notice the array of cosmetics on display. There are hundreds of products for the hair, the eyes, the skin, the nails, etc., each designed specifically to make each part of you look more beautiful and acceptable by society's standard.

There are as well many different diet programs, each promising to help one lose unwanted (unsightly) pounds and achieve the perfect weight. The many different exercise programs, each promising to provide a perfectly lean and muscular body. Then, there is the clothing industry that will sell you the perfect outfit that will make you look absolutely stunning! It's all about looks.

This is just the beginning. You must also have the trappings: The house, the car, the yacht, the summer home, the winter home; all the things that make you look successful. When you have the "look" of success, you have made it in Esav's world.

But what is it all for? What does it make **you**? Have you become a better person from it? It is meaningless and empty.

Not only that, the hurt, pain, and strife created by those who have versus those who have not is the source of so much suffering and evil. How many people were murdered or robbed for their money? How many family feuds, altercations, insults, and embarrassments were there because of money? The list goes on forever. But, if I get it and can show it off, I will be the envy of all my friends! That is the hallmark of Esav. It's worth everything to look good.

The "holiday season" that we are in always brings home Esav's superficiality. Look about and marvel at all the various decorations of lights, trees, Santas, mistletoe rings, reindeer, sleds, snowmen, etc., bedecking lawns and houses all over the world. Do any of the people who purchased these items know *why* they are displaying them on December 25? Do any of them know that the reason the tree is put into their houses and decorated with lights and other ornaments is because of a group called the Ashera Cult who joined the Christians? They would bring a tree into their houses once a year, decorate it with candles and ornaments, and then worship it. When the early Christians were recruiting new members, they invited the Ashera Cult members to join them. When the Ashera Cult told them that they needed to bring a tree into their houses once a year and worship it, the early Christians told them, "No problem! Just make that day December 25th and we will all be happy."

Because success in Esav's world is measured by what one has and the superficial trappings of the world, it is easy to be haughty about how you look and what you have. It is all right there in front of you. I have more than you! I look better than you! Look what **I** have! **I** am the greatest!

Yet, when one's greatness is measured by how he is doing *internally*, the work to improve his character - his essence- it is much more difficult to assess success. This is also something that nobody else knows about. One's internal growth is known by him alone. It has its ups and downs, and it is the work of a lifetime. It is humbling. This is the domain of Yaakov and the Jewish people: perfecting their character and living a perfect life.

In this charade that the Romans put on once every seventy years, they see themselves on the top of the world, in complete domination over the poor limping Yaakov. It is there that they proclaim, *"The prediction that the Jewish people will be redeemed is false!"* Don't you see? We are in charge! There will be no redemption!"

This was their intention in putting a whole man (Esav) dressed in Adam's clothing on top of a limping man (Yaakov). They wanted to show their dominance over the injured Yaakov.

Our Sages teach us that although the angel could not defeat Yaakov, he was still able to find a flaw that he could exploit, and, thus, injure him. If not for this imperfection, Esav could have no control over Yaakov at all. So, what is the source of Yaakov's injury?

The thigh represents one's offspring; what will come forth from him. The flaw that the angel found is that, in the future, Yaakov's children will abandon the Torah. This occurred in the times of the Greeks and in Spain during the Crusades. When the Jewish people abandon the Torah and its mitzvot, Esav has the power to rule over them.

In their parade they proclaimed, *"Yaakov stole the blessing from our forefather Esav. What did it help him? Does Yaakov look like he received the blessings from Yitzchak?"*

As we live in a world dominated by Esav, we can definitely understand his claim.

The Maharal explains that there is a modicum of truth to this claim. Had Yitzchak wanted to give the blessings directly to Yaakov instead of Yaakov receiving them indirectly, the blessings would never have left Yaakov. However, since Yaakov had to “steal” them, and they became his “in deceit”, he was able to lose them.

In the end they say, *“Whoa to this one (Esav) when that one (Yaakov) rises up!”*

They realize that the man on top is really dependent on the man carrying him. He can be thrown off at any time, and when the man on the bottom becomes strong, off he goes.

This will occur when Mashiach comes.

Our mission in this exile is to shun Esav’s superficiality and seek the *Tzelem Elokim* of Yaakov. We must not be content with looking beautiful and having lots of beautiful things. We must instead look for meaning and substance in life, things that improve the quality of who we are. There is only one place to find that; in the Torah and the mitzvot.

This will minimize our haughtiness and instill humility within us, allowing us to love our fellow Jew as ourselves. When enough of us do this, we will have learned the lesson of our exile and bring the Mashiach.