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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Minimal Attention Span

"Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (32:25)

We live in an era of distraction. Television advertising and music video driven by big BPM (bucks-per-minute) have accelerated the cutting rates of film and video to the microsecond. The ubiquitous cell phone interrupts thoughts, conversations and lives. Many do not think anymore – just surf through their thoughts. Now this and now this and now this. How long can a normal person hold an idea in his head? Everyone is invited to try it. Whoops? Try again! How long can the average person concentrate on an idea without any other thought intruding? Ten seconds? Twenty? Twenty is pretty “Olympic” in my own experience.

In this week’s Torah portion, an incorporeal spiritual force (*trans.* angel) attacks Yaakov and wrestles with him until the dawn. This angel was the protecting force of the nation of Esav. Why did the angel of Esav not attack Avraham or Yitzchak? Why did he wait for Yaakov?

This world stands on three pillars: On kindness, on prayer and on Torah. The three Patriarchs represent these three pillars: Avraham is the pillar of kindness, Yitzchak, the pillar of prayer, and Yaakov, the pillar of Torah. The Torah is the unique possession of the Jewish People. No other

nation in the world has the Torah. Therefore, an attack on Torah is the one that hits at the heart of Judaism.

The angel of Esav attacked Yaakov because he knew that the most effective way to destroy the Jewish People is to deter them from learning Torah.

Even though the angel of Esav was unsuccessful in his fight with Yaakov, he managed to damage him in the thigh. The thigh is the place in the body that represents progeny and the continuation of Jewish continuity. In the era before the arrival of the Mashiach, Esav will try to make it very difficult to educate our children with Torah. Torah demands commitment, application and concentration. The essence of Torah study is to be able to contain several ideas in one’s head and to synthesize and counterpoint these ideas. A distracted person cannot learn Torah. Our era is one in which distraction has become an industry.

In the generation before the Mashiach in which we currently find ourselves, maintaining a minimal attention span will be a gigantic battle in itself. May we all be successful with the help of Heaven.

Q & A

Questions

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Esav?
2. Why was Yaakov both "afraid" and "distressed"?
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Esav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov's leg?
8. Why did Esav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Esav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word nisa in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Esav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states, "The sons of Yaakov were twelve." Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Esav changed his wife's name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Esav's decision to leave the land of Canaan?

Answers

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Esav wouldn't see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Esav from gazing at her.
10. 33:12 - It means "travel". It does not mean "we will travel." This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean 'we' as it sometimes does.
11. 33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
12. 34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
13. 34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
14. 35:17 - His two triplet sisters.
15. 35:18 - Ben-Yemin means "Son of the South." He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
16. 35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
17. 35:29 - One hundred and eight.
18. 36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
19. 36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
20. 36:6 - Esav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be "foreigners in a land not their own." Therefore Esav said, "I'm leaving. I don't want the Land if it means I have to pay the bill of subjugation in Egypt."

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Family Matters

In the Torah portion of Vayishlach, Jacob's family is referred to as a *machaneh* (Gen. 32:9, 33:8) and *bayit* (Gen. 35:2), but, of course, the common Hebrew word for "family" is *mishpachah*, and the Biblical term for a "relative" is *she'er* (Lev. 18:6). In this essay we will discuss these various words for "family" by tracing their etymologies and seeking out their core roots to better understand exactly what they mean. We will also discuss the Hebrew word *pamalia* and discover interesting connections to English.

The grammarians unanimously trace the word *machaneh* to the root that means "dwelling" or "stopping over." According to trilateralists like Ibn Chayyuj, Ibn Janach, and Radak, that root is CHET-NUN-HEY, while according to biliteralists like Menachen Ibn Saruk, that root is simply CHET-NUN. As a biliteralist, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) also traces the word *machaneh* to the two-letter root CHET-NUN (and elsewhere to the monoliteral CHET), explaining its core meaning as the opposite of being in transit or travelling. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 1:32 32:3) explains that Jacob's family is called a *machaneh* because it is comprised of a group of people that temporarily "settled" in one spot *en route* to their final destination. Thus, the word *machaneh* is more accurately translated as "camp" rather than "family," and in most contexts in the Bible the word *machaneh* has a military connotation. The Biblical Hebrew word *machaneh* cognates with such Modern Hebrew terms as *tachanah* ("bus stop"), *chanayah* ("parking lot"), and *chanut* ("shop/store").

The most basic meaning of the word *bayit* is "house." But sometimes, the word *bayit* means "family." For example, the Torah commands that when eating *Maaser Sheini* foodstuff in Jerusalem, "You and your *bayit* shall rejoice" (Deut. 14:26). As Radak explains in *Sefer HaShorashim*, in this case

bayit refers to the members of one's household, not to the literal edifice in which they live. The connection between "house" and "family" seems relatively intuitive, given that the members of a nuclear family typically live in one joint house (see also Rashi to Gen. 45:2 and 42:19).

Interestingly, when discussing this verse, Ibn Janach writes that *bayit* refers specifically to one's wife. This is in line with the Tannaic Sage Rabbi Yose (*Gittin* 52a), who said about himself that he never called his wife *ishti* ("my wife"), rather he always called her *bayti* ("my house"). Rashi explains that in using this appellation, Rabbi Yose recognized his wife's role as the mainstay of the house. Alternatively, perhaps Rabbi Yose referred to his wife as *bayti* because she modestly tended to remain ensconced within the confines of her home. The very word *bayit* may evoke this latter idea because Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word to the monoliteral root BET ("inside"), and indeed, the word *bayit* itself also means "inside" (Gen. 6:14, Ex. 25:11, 37:2, I Kings 7:9), just like the functional prefix BET does.

According to Menachem Ibn Saruk, the Hebrew word *she'er* bears three distinct meanings: "remnant," "food," and "flesh." Radak actually understands the "food" and "flesh" meanings of *she'er* to be related. He seemingly understands the commonality between them to be "meat," which serves as a staple food and also denotes fleshiness. This is similar to the Hebrew word *lechem*, which has the general meaning of "food," but also means "meat." The word *she'er* in the sense of "familial relative" is derived from the "flesh" meaning of the word, presumably because siblings and cousins share a common fleshy source in their common genealogical ancestor. Such usage is reminiscent of Adam's remark upon the creation of Eve: "This time, bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh..." (Gen. 2:23). In English too, we might refer to our kin as our "flesh and blood." Interestingly,

when the Torah obligates a man to provide his wife with *she'er* (Ex. 21:10), the Rabbis (*Ketuvot* 47b) disagree over whether this refers to “food” or conjugal intimacy (“flesh”) – both of which are legitimate meanings of the word.

Like the word *bayit*, *she'er* also refers specifically to one's spouse. This may be because of the sacred bond of flesh that exists between man and wife. In fact, this more specific meaning of the word *she'er* serves as the source for the halacha that a man inherits his deceased wife's property (*Bava Batra* 109b in explaining Num. 27:11) and that a Kohen may/must become impure to attend to his deceased wife (*Yevamot* 22b in explaining Lev. 21:2).

Rabbi Pappenheim reduces the word *she'er* to its two-letter core SHIN-REISH, which refers to a “focal point.” He collapses all the meanings of *she'er* into that main idea by noting that “food” is one of the foundations on which life hinges, and “relatives” can be traced to one common foundational forebearer.

We now turn to the most popular Hebrew word for “family” – *mishpachah*. Ibn Saruk, Ibn Janach, and Radak all trace this word to the trilateral root SHIN-PEH-CHET, but divide the core meaning of that root in twain: “maidservant” (like *shifcha*) and “family/clan/tribe” (like *mishpachah*). Thus, they understand that while both of these terms are derived from the same root, their meanings are not interconnected.

On the other hand, when Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Carpentras (an 18th century grammarian and *Dayan*) in *Ohalei Yehuda* traces the word *mishpachah* to the trilateral root SIN/SAMECH-PEH-CHET, he understands the other words derived from that root to be thematically related to *mishpachah*. In his estimation, the core meaning of this three-letter root is “attachment.” He explains that a “family” is a group of people who share a common genealogy and are thereby “attached” to each other. In a similar vein, he explains the word *shifcha* (“maidservant”) as referring to a female slave, who is “attached” to her mistress in the sense that she is supposed to attend to the household needs. This basic approach to the word *mishpachah* is also

adopted by *HaKtav V'Ha'Kabbalah* (to Gen. 24:38) and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Lev. 25:5). Similarly, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) and Rabbi Zev Hoberman (1930-2012) explain that the root SHIN/SIN/SAMECH-PEH-CHET specifically refers to an extra appendage “attached” to something else. For instance, *sapachat* (Lev. 13:2) – a form of leprosy – is derived from this root. According to this approach, a *mishpachah* is called so because the children of the family's patriarch are like secondary “appendages” attached or ascribed to the family patriarch. Similarly, a *shifcha* is like an adjunct attached to the otherwise complete household faculty.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the word English *family* to the Latin *famulus* (“servant”), which was later expanded to refer to a group of servants that constituted a “household,” and eventually to any sort of entourage or retinue of troops or people. By the time English borrowed the word from French, it referred to any group of persons connected by blood or affinity. The English word *familiar* in the sense of “intimate” or “close relationship” also ultimately derives from this same Latin word. The actual Latin word for “family” was *domus*, which literally means, “house.” It is the etymological ancestor of such English words *domicile*, *domestic*, *domain* and *domination*.

Comparing the words for “family” in other languages to those in Hebrew brings us to an interesting point, because we see certain parallels in the literal meanings of some of these words. For example, the Hebrew *mishpachah* and the English *family* are both related to the concept of “servant.” The English word *family* whose etymology lies with a word that connotes a “group of troops” thus also resembles *machaneh*, which likewise has a military connotation. Similarly, the Latin *domus* and the Hebrew *bayit* both refer to “family,” but their core semantic meaning relates to “house/home.”

The word *pamalia* appears in several different places in the Talmud. Here is a sampling of those appearances:

- The Talmud (*Brachot* 16b-17a) relates that when Rav Safra would finish his prayers, he would offer an additional supplication that requested that G-d make peace within the

pamalia above and the *pamalia* below. Rashi explains that the “*pamalia* above” refers to the assembly of heavenly angels charged with the different nations, since discord among those angels translates into war among the nations. He also explains that the “*pamalia* below” refers to the assembly of Torah Scholars.

- Rabbi Alexandri (*Sanhedrin* 99b) said that anyone who engages in Torah for its sake brings peace between the *pamalia* above and *pamalia* below.
- The Talmud (*Chagigah* 13b) states that ever since the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, the “*pamalia* above” has been lessened (i.e., G-d’s angelic entourage has fewer members).
- According to Rabbi Yochanan (*Sanhedrin* 38b), G-d does not do anything without first consulting with His *pamalia*.
- Rabbi Yochanan further explains (*Sanhedrin* 67b, *Chullin* 7b) that the word for “witchcraft” (*keshafim*) can be read as an abbreviation of the phrase “those who deny the *pamalia* above” (*makchishin pamalia shel maalah*).
- In relating the tradition that Iyov was originally an advisor to the Pharaoh (*Sotah* 11a), the Jerusalem Talmud (*Sotah* 5:6) writes that Iyov was a prominent member of the Pharaoh’s *pamilia*, spelling the word *pamalia* with an extra YOD between the MEM and LAMMED.

There are numerous theories as to the etymology of the word *pamalia*. Rabbi Gedaliah Lipschutz (1756-1826) writes in his work *Regel Yesharah* (to *Derech Eretz Zuta*, ch. 4) that the word *pamalia* is not of foreign origin, but serves as an abbreviation of the Hebrew phrase *po maliyata* – “here is great esteem.” However, the late Rabbi Eliezer Herstik objects to this, writing that he fails to understand how this clarifies the word’s meaning. Maimonides actually writes in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (2:6) that *pamalia* is the Greek word for “camp”. (In standard editions of Maimonides’ work, this term is translated into Hebrew as *machane*, but the Kapach edition reads *tzava*). *Sefer HaAruch* similarly defines *pamalia* as a “group of soldiers.”

However, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Sefer Tishbi* explains that *pamalia* should be pronounced with an initial FEH instead of a PEH, as well as with a *chirik* underneath the MEM (instead of a PATACH). Based on this reading, he identifies the rabbinic Hebrew word *pamalia* with the Latin word *familia* (see below). Indeed, Alexander Kohut (1842-1894) bolsters this connection by noting that in the Jerusalem Talmud, the word is spelled with a YOD between the letters MEM and LAMMED.

Based on what we have seen earlier, this explanation does not preclude those proffered by Maimonides and *Sefer HaAruch*, because “camp” and “group of soldiers” also fall within the semantic range of meanings implied by the Latin word *familia*.

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 8)

“The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
– they must be felt with the heart.”
(Helen Keller)

The second blessing concludes: “And You have brought us close to Your Great Name forever in truth, to offer praise and thanks to You and to proclaim Your unity with love. Blessed are You, G-d, Who chooses His people with love.”

Many ideologies and religions throughout the ages have claimed that they know and understand G-d. Our blessing is teaching us that the only belief system that is “*emet*” – absolute truth – is Judaism because it is based entirely on the Torah, which originates from G-d Himself. All other religions and philosophies were created by humans in order to have an attachment to G-d. On the other hand, the Torah was created by G-d, and was given to us, the Jewish People, so that we can be connected to Him in the most effective way possible.

However, living a life that reflects absolute truth can be challenging. Rabbi Shimon Schwab would say that ninety-nine percent *emet* is one hundred percent *sheker* (falsehood). Perhaps Rabbi Schwab’s insight casts a light on a verse in *Tehillim* (90:12). The verse states, “The count of our days, let us know, and we will acquire a wise heart.” The verse indicates that a person needs wisdom to successfully count the days of their life. What is it about counting days that is so complicated that it requires a wise heart? The answer is intriguing. There is a possibility that not every day that a person resides in this physical world can be included in the final tally of days that a person “lives.” Only days that are infused with Torah and mitzvahs are truly “countable” days, and thus the verse teaches us that one needs to be wise to recognize this truth!

Our blessing ends with the declaration that G-d “chooses” us with love. Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1849-1905) was the second Rebbe of Gur and one of the most brilliant and prodigious scholars of his generation, universally known as the *Sefat Emet* after his masterful multi-volume work covering virtually every aspect of the Torah. He points out that the blessing uses the present tense and not the past tense, as might be expected. In explaining why this is so, he offers a penetratingly beautiful explanation. G-d’s love for the Jewish nation is not something static that was established many generations ago and has since then remained unchanged. Rather, G-d renews His love for us each and every single day. This is because we declare our allegiance to Him and accept His Majesty upon us each and every day.

The Rabbis teach that G-d’s love for us and our love for Him is actually alluded to in the Hebrew words for “love,” *ahavah*, and for “one,” *echad*. *Gematriya* is a somewhat esoteric system that assigns numerical values to the Hebrew letters, and words sharing the same numerical value also share a deep and mystical connection. The word *ahavah* is comprised of the letters *aleph* (numerical value 1), *heh* (5), *bet* (2) and *heh* (5). Together they total 13, which is the same numerical value as for the Hebrew word “one,” *echad* – *aleph* (1), *chet* (8) and *dalet* (4). The most fundamental concept in the *Shema* is our declaration that “G-d is One.” Furthermore, when added together, the numerical value of *ahavah* and *echad* is 26, which is the same numerical value as the four-lettered ineffable Name of G-d.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1761-1837) was the outstanding scholar of his generation who was renowned for possessing breathtaking expertise in the entire gamut of the Torah, as well as complete familiarity with the entire extent of Jewish Law. He points out that the blessings before the *Shema* conclude with a declaration of G-d's love for His Chosen nation. He asks: "Why is it that the final concept we mention before accepting upon ourselves G-d's Majesty is His love for us? Are there not more crucial tenets that would assist us as we reach the sublime moment of accepting G-d as our King?"

Rabbi Akiva Eiger answers that the first paragraph of the *Shema* opens with the command to love G-d – "And You shall love the L-rd Your G-d." True love needs to be mutual. Healthy and nurturing love exists only when it is reciprocal. This is why we end the blessings before the *Shema* with the impassioned and rousing words, "Who chooses His people with love" – to emphasize that G-d's love for us is overarching, and that His love for us greatly assists our embrace of the mitzvah to love G-d, in return.

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Rosh Hashana 30-35

Who Will Build the Mikdash?

"At first, the lulav was taken (for the mitzvah) in the Mikdash for seven days, and in the Medina for one day. After the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai decreed that the lulav be taken for seven days also in the Medina, in memory of the Mikdash; and he also decreed that the entire day of waving is completely forbidden."

The *mishna* on our *daf* commences with this teaching, and Rabbi Yochanan in the *gemara* derives the concept of doing something as a "zecher laMikdash" – in memory of the Mikdash – from a verse in the prophecy of Yirmiyahu (30:17).

Regarding the first halacha in the *mishna*, what exact places are meant by "Mikdash" and "Medina"? One opinion is that Mikdash is the Beit Hamikdash, whereas Medina is Jerusalem and other places outside the actual Beit Hamikdash (Rashi). Another opinion is that Mikdash refers to all of Jerusalem, while Medina refers to outside of Jerusalem (Rambam). The definition of these two terms may have implications as to whether one is fulfilling a

Torah mitzvah or a rabbinical one in the place one is located after the first day of Succot.

The next halacha in the *mishna* teaches that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai also decreed that the entire day of waving is completely forbidden, as a *zecher laMikdash*. This halacha refers to when the earliest time the new crop of grain in the Land of Israel may be eaten each year. This halacha is called *chadash*, meaning "new." Two statements in the Torah address this issue but appear to be contradictory. The first part of one verse states that *chadash* is permitted right away on the sixteenth of Nisan when there is first light in the eastern sky ("*ad etzem hayom hazeh*"). But the latter part of the same verse states that *chadash* is permitted only after the *omer* offering is brought in the Beit Hamikdash ("*ad haviachem et korban*"). (Vayikra 23:14)

The *gemara* in Menachot reconciles and explains both parts of this verse. When there is no Beit Hamikdash and the *omer* offering can therefore not be brought, *chadash* is permitted from the very beginning of the day. However, when there is a Beit

Hamikdash, *chadash* is permitted only after the *omer* offering has taken place in the Beit Hamikdash. A *mishna* elsewhere in Shas teaches that people who live far from the Beit Hamikdash and do not know exactly when the *omer* was brought in the Beit Hamikdash may eat *chadash* from noontime (*chatzot hayom*), since the authority responsible for ensuring that the *omer* be brought as soon as possible is “not lazy” regarding their responsibilities.

Our *sugya* engages in a discussion of why Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai enacted a ban on *chadash* after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash for the entirety of the sixteenth of Nisan and not from *chatzot* – which is the latest time that we find in the Torah. The *gemara* explains that he was mindful and eagerly waiting for the Beit Hamikdash to be built very, very soon, and was concerned that people would eat *chadash* from the time they remembered that it was permitted on the previous year – which could result in transgressing the prohibition against eating *chadash*.

When exactly, asks the *gemara*, was a time the Beit Hamikdash would be built that would be cause for alarm that the ban against early eating of *chadash* would be transgressed? The conclusion of the *gemara* is that these times are late on the fifteenth of Nisan, close to sunset, or alternatively during the night between the fifteenth of Nisan and the morning of the sixteenth of Nisan. In these cases there would be insufficient time to complete all the steps necessary for bringing the *omer* until the end of the day of the

sixteenth of Nisan – thereby permitting *chadash* only from the seventeenth onward. For this reason he banned *chadash* for the entire day of the sixteenth.

However, before the *gemara* reached this conclusion, it suggested other dates when the Beit Hamikdash might be built that could pose a “stumbling block” for eating *chadash* before the permitted time. One of these dates is the fifteenth of Nisan (i.e. the first day of the Yom Tov of Pesach). Rashi asks: “How could the *gemara* suggest that the Beit Hamikdash would be built on Yom Tov or during the night between Yom Tov and the sixteenth? We have been taught elsewhere in Shas (Shavuot 16b) that the building of the Beit Hamikdash cannot take place on Yom Tov and also not during the night!” Rashi answers that building prohibited on Yom Tov and at night is when the building is done by human hands. The future Beit Hamikdash, however, will come “from the Hands of Heaven.” This is also the opinion of Tosefot in Masechet Succah which agrees with this explanation of Rashi, and both Rashi and Tosefot bring a proof from the verse in Shemot 15:17 which states, “*Mikdash Hashem Konenu Yadecha* – the Sanctuary, Hashem, *that Your hands established.*” (For further study of this topic, see the Rambam in Mishneh Torah who seems to disagree with the view of Rashi and Tosefot, and the manner in which Rav Yechiel Michal Tuchazinsky, in his work called *Ir HaKodesh V’Hamikdash*, offers a novel interpretation that combines the seemingly varying views.)

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

A Historic Struggle

After twenty years in Lavan's home, with his family completely grown, Yaakov sets off to resettle in the Land of his fathers. He prepares for a face-off with his brother Esav, who has been plotting to kill him for some 35 years.

This encounter is even more consequential than it seems. Just as Yaakov and Esav are at odds with each other here, so they stand opposed to each other for the duration of history. Yaakov has spent the last twenty years raising his children; he is the hard working family man. Esav has spent this time becoming a political force, the leader of an army, a chief of his tribe. Yaakov represents family life, serving others, and seeing to their welfare and happiness. Esav represents the glitter of political power and might. The struggle between them and the outcome of this struggle foreshadow a raging battle that has haunted humanity for thousands of years. In the words of Rav Hirsch:

"Is it sufficient just to be a human being, and are political power and social creativity of no significance unless they lead to the loftiest of all human aspirations, or, on the contrary, does everything that is human in man, in home, and in family life exist only to serve the purposes of political triumph?"

The night before this fateful encounter, Yaakov experiences an even more fateful encounter, with his brother's angel. This adversary wrestles with Yaakov the entire night, as Yaakov attempts to protect himself. The angel realizes that he cannot prevail against Yaakov, and he is able only to injure his leg. The angel then asks to be released, for the dawn is breaking, but Yaakov refuses let him go until the angel blesses him: "You will no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have become the commanding power before G-d and men, since you have prevailed."

As long as the night prevails, Yaakov's adversary appears to have the upper hand, but as soon as day breaks it is Yaakov who sets the terms to end the struggle. All he asks is that instead of hatred and hostility, the adversary – other nations – extend their blessing and support. During the long night of exile that enemy seeks to destroy Yaakov, quashing his identity and extinguishing his values. While the enemy, reincarnated in every generation, attacked throughout our long bitter history, *he saw that he could not prevail* – nothing would extinguish us or force our complete assimilation. Yaakov sought not to destroy the other; he wanted only not to fall, and in that he succeeded. The goal of history – realized at daybreak – is the recognition that happiness and progress depend on those principles which Yaakov has lived by throughout the ages. No longer shall he be known as "Yaakov" – he who holds on to the heel – but rather "Yisrael" – he who shows the world that G-d towers above all.

This final blessing, we are told, will happen "there." There, where Yaakov stood, poised to return to the Land of his future, set on a course to build the Jewish People. It is "there" that the angel blessed Yaakov, by changing his name. And it is "there" – on the soil of our Promised Land and en route to our promised future – that we stand today, waiting for dawn to break, for Yaakov, the downtrodden, to be recognized as Yisrael, who has taught the world the way of G-d.

- Sources: Bereishet 32:8; 32:27-32; *Collected Writings, Vol. VIII, "The Jewish Wayfarer's Sustenance," p. 229*

Perek Shira: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONGS OF THE FIELDS

*The fields say: "Hashem founded the earth with wisdom;
He established the heavens with intuition." (Mishlei 3:19)*

The fields sing of the interrelationship between the earth and the heavens. Hashem fashioned soil with G-dly wisdom, infusing it with nutrients necessary to grow all types of vegetation. He hung the heavens above with intuition, such that they would continuously bring rains upon the soil and the sun would shine appropriately for each season.

On a deeper level of understanding, the way that the earth is dependent on the heavens can be applied to

Man. Man is a "miniature world." The soul corresponds to the heavens and the body represents the earth. Just as the earth is tiny compared to the astronomically vast heavens, the body is incomparably smaller than the soul. And just as the soil is dependent upon the heavens for its life-giving rains, so too the body needs spiritual sustenance in order to actualize its potential. This potential is always there, beneath layers of earthliness, planted by Hashem with wisdom, waiting to be cultivated by the wise.

• Source: Kol Rinah

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav.

That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together.

Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that

Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit milah*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister.

G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Torah portion concludes by listing Esav's descendants.