



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

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### A History Of The Future?

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered December 8, 1973)

In times of stress, there is a natural tendency to look for solutions in the occult. In periods of crisis and uncertainties, we try to lift the curtain of time and peer into the future by unearthing in ancient texts of hoary prophecies the secrets of events that have not yet occurred.

This is an understandable feeling, but I am not happy with it. In the last several weeks I have received several letters from friends and family in Israel, reporting to me about (or including newspaper clippings of) a book recently published which predicted the Yom Kippur War, and later developments which have not yet taken place. Also, a number of Hasidic teachers have made predictive announcements about current events in Israel. My answer to all of them was: abandon your naivete! True bitahon or emunah (faith or confidence) does not need arcane hints or mysterious allusions. It is not necessary to interpret every crisis and imminent confrontation between superpowers as the biblically prophesied מלחמת גוג ומגוג (the fateful War of Gog and Magog). I remember in my own lifetime how the theme of this biblical war of “the end of days” was applied in contemporary fashion, successively, to the wars between Germany and America, Germany and Russia, Russia and the United States, Russia and China, China and the United States, and this past month, between Russian and the United States. One imagines, from all this speculative talk, that the Messiah is about to call his first press conference...

It is interesting that the author of the book I mentioned, on the basis of his exegesis of several difficult verses in Daniel, predicted that Israel would achieve a stunning victory in the month of Heshvan. Well, unfortunately, Heshvan has come and gone and we are now in Kislev, and Israel still has won no astounding victories.

Yet I would not want it to be thought that I in any way deny prophecy, or the ability of prophetic texts correctly

to predict future events. It is just that I am distrustful of the tendency to rely upon our imaginative interpretations implicitly, as if our salvation will come from speculative commentaries. But I do believe that there are certain historic patterns that tend to repeat themselves throughout human history. Moreover, I accept fully what our Rabbis said: מעשה אבות סימן לבנים, the biographies of the fathers anticipate the history of their descendants. The best place to look for such historic patterns is in the life of the Patriarchs, and it indeed happens that specific events of our own days reveal the contours of occurrences of long ago.

So, despite my own skepticism – or, perhaps, because of it, since I feel more confident when I approach such a difficult task critically – let me invite you to explore with me one such pattern of מעשה אבות in biblical history, and wonder with you if this is not סימן לבנים, a history of the future; whether or not the story of Jacob is a parable for Israel today.

The biblical tale is simple and austere in the outlines of its drama. Esau has sworn to kill Jacob for supposedly stealing from him the blessings of their father Isaac. Esau was now marching against his brother, and Jacob was afraid. He divided his family, preparing for a massacre, and hoping that at least part of them would survive. Jacob then crossed the river and ויותר יעקב לבדו, Jacob remained alone. He is then attacked by a mysterious antagonist who struggles with him until dawn and injures Jacob in the thigh, so that he leaves the battles limping. The unknown assailant wishes to leave, but Jacob will not let him go כי אם ברכתני, until you will give me your blessing. The blessing is given, and Jacob is told that his name would henceforth be not “Jacob” but “Israel.” The next day, Jacob proceeds to his encounter with Esau, and there is no bloody massacre, but instead, they meet and part in peace.

The Rabbis flesh out this story by adding a number of

details. For instance, on the biblical verse that ויירא יעקב מאד, וייצר לו, that Jacob was very frightened and sorely afraid, the Rabbis say that two synonyms for fright are used in order to indicate that not only was Jacob afraid of being killed, but he was equally afraid of killing others.

They say that the general strategy of Jacob included preparation for three policies: לדורון לתפילה ולמלחמה, he prepared himself to give gifts to appease Esau; he prayed to God; and he made all preparations for war in case the two previous approaches failed.

Who was this assailant? The Rabbis answer that it was שרו של עשו, the guardian angel of Esau; as it were, the spiritual cause of Esau. What did this angel look like? There are many answers. Some say כרועה צאן נדמה לו, he appeared to Jacob like a shepherd. Others answer: בארכיליסטים, an arch-thief. Others say פרמקוס, a magician. And yet others say בדמות תלמיד חכם נראה לו, he appeared to him in the guise of a scholar.

Why did Jacob request a blessing from this stranger? The Rabbis answer: the whole battle was over the legitimacy of the blessings that Isaac had given to Jacob. And these blessings primarily concerned the right to Eretz Israel. The angel of Esau argued that the blessings of Jacob were illegitimately obtained, and therefore the Land of Israel belongs to Esau. Jacob was willing to settle in the battle if at least Esau would concede the justice of Jacob's claim, his cause, the right of his title to the Holy Land.

I have told the story as simply as I can. Let us now go to the dangerous part -- the drawing of parallels.

To me, Esau is represented by today's Arabs. I know that many people will object and maintain that the appropriate biblical symbol for the Arabs is Ishmael. However, that is not necessarily so. Some anthropologists maintain that Palestinians are ethnically different from other Arabs, and hence not, in all probability, descended from Ishmael. Furthermore, if one wishes to play on names, Esau is identified as Edom, the "red one," and clearly Red Russia is behind the Arab cause today. Moreover, and more seriously, in the prophets, such as Obadiah, and much more explicitly in the medieval commentators such as Ramban, Esau always represents whoever it is who seeks to destroy Israel, no matter what his ethnic descent.

The Arabs of today, like Esau of old, swear vengeance against Israel. The fear of the Israelis in our day, like that of Jacob, is not only that they will be killed, but equally their revulsion against killing others.

That stark biblical phrase, ויותר יעקב לבדו, "and Jacob was

left alone," was never more true than it is today, when we are isolated from all the world.

We too have a triple approach. We are prepared, no matter how hawkish our views, to give Esau his doron (gift) – some of the occupied territories. We approach the future, despite our depression, with tefillah or hope; and we are, of course, prepared for milhamah (war).

Our struggle with the angel of Esau is the core of all our current entanglements and difficulties. All the wars we have fought in the past 25 years have concerned the right of the Jews to the Land of Israel, assured us by the blessing of Abraham transmitted to Jacob through Isaac. The claim of our antagonists is that Jacob stole that blessing, with stealth and deceit, and therefore it is not rightly ours.

Our Arab-Esau enemy appears and has appeared in various guises. For some he is the רועה צאן, the shepherd; this is the romantic image of the bucolic Arab or the bedouin, reminiscent of Lawrence of Arabia or Hollywood's Sheik of Araby. Many of us see the Arabs as ארכיליסטים, a murderous figure, looking collectively somewhat like Arafat, with the sneer of Ibn Saud. Yet others see them as magicians, פרמקוס, who can dig their fingers into the dirty sand of the desert and pull out infinitely rich oil wells. And now we have learned, to our great regret and at our expense, that our כדמות תלמיד חכם נראה לו, Arabs are not all fools, are not all primitive, that they can be shrewd diplomats who know how to isolate Israel by concerted action.

We emerged from this most recent encounter צולע על ירכו, injured and hurt, having lost our finest and our best, the young men who were killed or wounded or missing.

Thus far, it certainly seems as if the story of Jacob is the history of the future. What of the rest of the story?

I do not know, nor can anyone know. But if the rest of the story does follow true to the Patriarchal pattern, and one certainly hopes that it will, if life will follow the script of Scripture, then somehow or other our right to the Land of Israel, to our autonomous existence as a free State, will be legally acknowledged and morally confirmed by all the world. שרו של עשו, the Angel of Esau, will recognize us. The Arabs themselves will declare that our home is not "Jacob" but "Israel," that is, that our rights to the Holy Land are beyond moral reproach.

Indeed, that is already partly the case as the Arab nations declare, for the most part, that they are willing to accept the existence of Israel. Although all of us who have lived through the Holocaust recognize that when they speak

about pushing Israel back “to the borders of 1967,” that is only the first step to pushing us back to the borders of 1947, nevertheless there has been some movement. And the encounter with Esau may yet turn out to be not another bloody war, but, after all, a peace conference!

Admittedly, there are many differences between the story of Jacob and our contemporary condition. Certainly Jacob was much more of a dove than a hawk, too much for the taste of most of us. Indeed, the later Jewish tradition castigates Father Jacob for being overly deferential to Esau. And yet, the same plot may hold its general outlines.

We may have to give Esau his *doron* or *minhah*, his gifts of occupied territory. We may emerge from this encounter limping. But we must never despair! We will survive and our right to Statehood will be recognized.

Such is the pattern of Jacob’s life. Is it a paradigm for us? Dare we hope so? I think we may, although we may never feel any certainty about events of the future.

It is true that we may have to give more of a *doron* or *מנחה לעשו*, more of our territories, than we want or certainly ought to.

Nevertheless, listen carefully to the following Midrash, the report of what one great Sage told us. His words are recorded in the Midrash called *תנחומא ישן* (וישלח י”א):  
אמר ר’ הושעיא אמר לי זקן אחד, אומר לך סיבו של מדרש,

וכשתהא דורשו אמור אותו משמי, עתיד עשו להחזיר ליעקב כל מה שנטל מיעקב, שנאמר מלכי תרשיש ואיים מנחה ישיבו (תהלים עב י), מנחה יביאו אין כתיב כאן, אלא מנחה ישיבו, אמרתי לו הוא זה הדבר הטוב, ומשמך אני דורשו, א”ל ומה אם שנתן לו מדעתו ודחק עליו שלא היה מבקש ליטול, שנאמר ויאמר עשו יש לי רב (בראשית לג ט), הוא מחזיר, דברים שנטלו מישראל באונס, על אחת כמה וכמה, באותה שעה הודיתי לו.

*Rabbi Hoshiah said: I met an old man who told me, “I will relate to you a beautiful Midrash, and when you preach it, mention it in my name. And that is, that Esau will some day return to Jacob all that he had taken from Jacob. How do I know this? Because the prophet said that “the Kings of Tarshish and Iyyim will return a gift to Jacob.” It does not say that they will bring a gift, but that they will return a gift.” I replied to the old man: “that is a beautiful thing, and I shall repeat it in your name.” He then concluded by saying to me: “Now, if Esau will return to Jacob that which Jacob gave him willingly, how much more so is it certain that those things that he took from Israel by force will he return to him!”*

To which we may respond: וזהו הדבר הטוב, that indeed is a good word, something worth believing in and hoping for in the future. And we add one word: הליאי!

*Read more at [www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage](http://www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage).*

## The Gift

*Dr. Erica Brown*

In one of the most tender scenes in all of Genesis, Jacob and Esau reunite. Much has happened in the intervening years since they lived under the same roof as brothers. Jacob left his parental home alone and as a fugitive from his raging brother. He returned with a large retinue of wives, children, and sheep. Esau left for Mount Seir to become a nation of his own. When the two meet eyes, the Torah invites us into this exchange of high emotion: “Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept” (Gen. 33:4).

After they separated and Esau surveyed Jacob’s household and the many gifts Jacob brought for him, Esau sought clarification, “What do you mean by all this company which I have met?” He answered, “To gain my lord’s favor” (Gen. 33:8). Jacob was so nervous about this meeting that he tried to mollify Esau with presents. Jacob

may have tried with these gifts to compensate Esau for stealing Esau’s birthright. Jacob may have tried to impress Esau that he was a changed man, a man of wealth and stability.

But Esau was interested in his brother, not his brother’s offerings. “Esau said, ‘I have enough (*yesh li rav*), my brother; let what you have remain yours” (Gen. 33:9). *Yesh li rav* can also be translated as “I have a great deal,” as if Esau was stating that he, too, had accumulated wealth since the two met. He no longer needed the largesse of an inheritance. Jacob was insistent, “But Jacob said, ‘No, I pray you; if you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably. Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty.’ And when he urged him, he accepted” (Gen. 33:10-11). The face of a potential murderer had

softened, for Jacob, into an image of God. Esau understood that rejecting Jacob's gifts was a way of rejecting him. Accepting these gifts was an acknowledgment that time had changed these brothers.

The expression, "I have enough" was understood by Biblical commentators in a variety of ways.

Rashi, basing himself on a midrash, states that "with these words he [Esau] admitted his [Jacob's] right to the blessings." In other words, Esau had made peace with the past and accepted Jacob's place as spiritual heir. R. Ovadiah Sforno regards Esau's answer more sharply: "I most certainly do not need this gift," as if Esau were telling Jacob that he needed no handouts from a rich younger brother. Ha-emek Davar states that with these three words, Esau was communicating two messages. Esau had plenty and did not need more and that Jacob was his brother, not his master, and, therefore, did not need to give him tribute. Radak, Rabbi David Kimche, may offer the most emotionally intuitive interpretation of this statement: "After all these years, Esau finally acknowledged that he had not suffered as a result of Jacob being blessed, so he was able to say, 'Keep what is yours!'"

This brief and poignant exchange makes us wonder about the purpose of gift-giving more generally. In 1925, Marcel Mauss, a philosopher and sociologist, wrote an important and oft-cited article, "Essay on the Gift." He combed ancient cultures and ethnographic data from America's Pacific Northwest and Polynesia to understand the role that gift-giving plays in societal structures. Giving a gift is perceived as an outward expression of generosity that emerges from the giver's own volition, will, and desire. But Mauss concluded from his research that gift-giving represents a "strict accounting system" that reflects rights and duties. Gift economies are those where there is an obligation to give, an obligation to accept, and an obligation to reciprocate. Just think of gift-giving within peer groups and the bottle of wine that gets transferred from house to house as a Shabbat gift.

The intricate system of reciprocity and expectation in gift-giving changes it from a magnanimous gesture to an expectation freighted with the anxiety of rejection. In a

gift exchange, there is always the worry that the parties will not match in cost or extravagance the gift of the other. Consider, for example, diplomatic gifts and what they symbolize. Or think of the difficulty of purchasing a gift for a superior. I dropped a question into a search engine: "What should you buy your boss as a gift? The screen was littered with tchotchkes, like an "Essence of Leadership" pen holder and "Great Boss" T-shirts. Coasters, key chains, and posters were all flush with inspirational quotes. But it's hard to imagine any boss happily wearing one of these shirts or hanging such posters. The gifts then go into storage to be regifted to someone else who also doesn't want them.

Cultural critic and essayist Lewis Hyde wrote a book called *The Gift* that I once purchased at the J. Paul Getty Museum gift shop and could not put down. There he writes that common to each notion of a gift is "that a gift is a thing we do not get by our own efforts. We cannot buy it; we cannot acquire it through an act of will. It is bestowed upon us." Thinking of Hyde's words, we turn back to the Esau and Jacob encounter and realize that when Esau said to Jacob, "I have enough," he was not rejecting Jacob's gifts but bestowing upon Jacob the most potent gift of all and one that could not be purchased: his forgiveness.

Jacob came armed for this tense moment with an impressive cache of presents. Esau had none. There was no gift exchange or false attempt at superficial reciprocity. Esau gave Jacob the raw gift of his embrace and his tears. He gifted Jacob with a long-absent sense of fraternal feeling. With his three words, I have enough, Esau told Jacob that he no longer needed a birthright. All of the gifts before him were meaningless. All he needed and wanted was a brother. When Jacob declared that seeing Esau was like seeing God's face, Jacob, too, acknowledged the immensity of the moment. He, too, needed a brother. Jacob could never see God's face, but, if he could, it would be the face of acceptance and relief.

Leaders can bestow many gifts on others, but no gift is greater than emotional validation. When have you received this gift? Who in your life needs this gift? How will you pass it on?

## A Fine Mess You've Gotten Me into This Time

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

This week's parsha contains an account of the abduction and rape of Dinah by Shechem, the negotiations that Ya'akov's sons went through with Shechem and his father to get Dinah back, and the denouement of the entire drama, when Shimon and Levi wiped all of the males in the city and retrieved Dinah. Ya'akov, who did not take part in the negotiations, but rather let his sons take the initiative, expressed his displeasure to Shimon and Levi over their actions, but Shimon and Levi responded that they could not let the treatment of their sister as a harlot go unanswered. There is a great deal of discussion among the classical and later commentators about the different halachic opinions that were reflected in this controversy between Ya'akov and his sons. A study of the commentary of Ramban, with Rabbi Chavel's Hebrew notes, to this section will acquaint one with the major halachic approaches that have been offered. I would like to approach Ya'akov's reaction on a more basic level. Specifically, I would like to understand what Ya'akov meant when he told Shimon and Levi, "You have discomposed me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanite and among the Perizzite ; I am few in number and should the gather together and attack me, I will be annihilated - I and my household" (Bereishis 34:30). Why did Ya'akov place his emphasis on his own standing among the surrounding nations, by saying 'achartem osi' - i.e., you have discomposed me - when in reality it was the entire family that was now at risk, as he goes on to say?

Rabbi Hillel Lieberman, Hy"d (may God avenge his blood), one of the first victims of the so-called 'second intifada,' which was launched in September 2000 by the arch villain Y. Arafat, may the name of the evil rot, explained, in his posthumously published commentary, *Ahavas HaAretz*, that the actions of Shimon and Levi called into question, in Ya'akov's mind, the entire essence of the message that he was trying to convey to the world. The Talmud (Shabbos 33b), based on a verse in this week's parsha (Bereishis 33:18), tells us that when Ya'akov entered Shechem, he immediately enacted changes for the benefit of the city's inhabitants. He developed a coinage system for

them, as well as market places and bath houses. Citing Rav Kook in his *Igros Rayah* (volume one, pages 6-7), as well as in his commentary *Eyn Ayah* to Shabbos 33b, Rabbi Lieberman writes that Ya'akov, by doing this, was carrying out one of the tasks of the Jewish people, which is to bring benefit to the nations of the world. When a Jew exerts efforts in a certain place, continues Rabbi Lieberman, part of his personality becomes embedded there and identified with that place, as well. Therefore, Ya'akov felt that when Shimon and Levi wiped out the entire male population of Shechem, they undid the good work that he had done there, and sullied his own name. That is why Ya'kov told them, "you have discomfited me."

Actually, Rav Kook, in his letter, gives a more detailed explanation of the reason why Ya'akov made the improvements in Shechem than that cited by Rabbi Lieberman. He writes that some people have the notion that a government based on Torah is not able to function in a structured, functioning society, or, to put it into modern parlance, "the real world." To dispel this notion, Ya'akov, who 'sat in the tents' (Bereishis 25:27) and personified the Torah scholar, made a point of establishing institutions in Shechem that would benefit the city. It was, in fact, in Shechem that the Jewish kingdom would, in the future, split into two, as a result of the people's rejection of the kingship of the House of Dovid. Part of this rejection, writes Rav Kook, was based on the erroneous notion of the incompatibility of Torah study, as displayed by King Dovid and King Shlomo, with a functioning society. Ya'akov, as the personification of the truth of Torah - as the prophet Micha (7:20) tells us, that God "grants truth to Ya'akov" - benefited Shechem and thereby demonstrated that the Torah is compatible with the 'real world.' Thus, the city of Shechem was imprinted with the character of truth as displayed by Ya'akov's synthesis of Torah and life in a functioning society. When his sons acted as they did in that city, Ya'akov felt that his imprint would be lost, and his impact on the future history of his people would thus be reduced. That is why he rebuked Shimon and Levi so stridently, and emphasized his personal stake in what they had done.

## Gid ha-Nashe or not, Here I come!

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Dec 4, 2014)

One of the most intriguing episodes in this week's Parsha is *va-ye'avek ish imo*—when Yaakov struggled with the Malach. And in the end that Malach injures Yaakov in his thigh, at the place of the Gid ha-Nashe. *Ve-hu tzole'a al yareicho*—and Yaakov ends up limping. Our commemoration of that is, *Al kein lo yochlu Venei Yisroel es Gid ha-Nashe asher al kaf ha-yareiach ad ha-yom ha-zeh ki nogah be-chaf yerech Yaakov be-Gid ha-Nashe*. We don't eat the Gid ha-Nashe *ad ha-yom ha-zeh* to remember that incident. There are numerous pshatim that the meforshim give as to the symbolism of avoiding the Gid ha-Nashe. What are we supposed to learn and take away from that?

The Seforno has a fascinating answer. He says that the Malach actually hurt Yaakov. He left him with a disability, as we can see from the fact that he was left limping. So Seforno says: Why do we not eat the Gid ha-Nashe? The Malach injured Yaakov's Gid ha-Nashe. Therefore, we throw the Gid ha-Nashe in the garbage to show that this injury was not chashuv, as we can live without it anyway. The enemy damaged the Gid ha-Nashe. So we say, ok, we can manage and eat meat without the Gid ha-Nashe. And the point of this Seforno is, it seems, that you can't be sure that nothing bad will ever happen. In life, there are always challenges and problems. There are real evil forces out there in the world that could indeed hurt someone. They

can take away part of them—damage their Gid ha-Nashe, so to speak. What's the point? We say to these forces: You know what? You can damage my Gid ha-Nashe. But I can live without it! I can take what I have left, eat it, and be satisfied. It's not up to us what circumstances Hashem deals us. What happens to us is not up to us. What is up to us is how we react to it. Some people let it demoralize them when something bad happens. There are people who get hurt and internalize that. And then, there are people who overcome it. We overcome our challenges by not saying that everything will be perfect, that we will not lose anything, and that our enemies have no power over us. Rather, we say that whatever circumstance we face, we are going to do the best of it, and whatever we are missing, we will do without. Whatever did not work out the way we want—you know what—we can live our lives anyway and make do with what we have. And perhaps that's what Seforno is telling us. *Al kein lo yochlu Venei Yisroel es Gid ha-Nashe*. We say to our enemies throughout our history: You can do whatever you want, but whatever you take away from us, not only can we live without it, but we can also flourish without it. We can make the best of our situation instead of crying over what we don't have. If we take this approach, we can succeed like Yaakov, overcome any difficulty, and ultimately emerge victorious.

Shabbat Shalom.

## In the Land of Curiosity

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

He looked out at a city of lights and searched for its unseen designer. Noticing that a human being finally discerned Him, the divine architect of this grand city looked back and revealed Himself to Avraham. For thousands of years people were too engrossed in survival mode to probe their world and pursue its Creator. By following his spirit of curiosity Avraham was first to discover a supreme being.

Four hundred years later that divine architect had receded from view and, once again, needed to be discovered by a human. The chosen and favored children of Hashem had been enslaved in a dark Egyptian exile.

Who would liberate them from slavery, march them to the mountain of Hashem, and deliver the divine will? Only someone whose imagination was ignited by curiosity. This shepherd, named Moshe, passed a blazing bush which was not incinerated by the red-hot flames. Halting to examine this strange marvel, Moshe heard the voice of Hashem dispatching him to a historical mission. Many had passed that bush before Moshe, but few had paused or taken interest of this abnormal spectacle. Most were either too intellectually lazy or too preoccupied to notice this physics-defying bush. Once again, it was human curiosity which brought Hashem into our dark world.

About nineteen hundred years later, curiosity once again revolutionized religious history. The Beit Hamikdash had been demolished and dark clouds of exile were swirling over Yerushalayim. In a dreary world without miracles or prophecy, we needed a great sage who could master the entire sweep of Torah and transmit it to future generations. We desperately needed Torah to be distilled for the torturous exile which awaited our people.

An uneducated but curious farmer passed by a waterway, whose soft rushing stream carved out rock formations. His curiosity was piqued by watching soft water sculpt solid rock so he reasoned that Torah study, which is exhausting and difficult, could powerfully forge religious

identity. Convinced of the strength of Torah study, he altered his own life in mid-stream becoming Rabbi Akiva, one of our greatest Torah sages.

Three times in history Hashem was discovered through human curiosity, a basic trait which Hashem Himself imbued within us. We possess a thirst and a desire for knowledge and we utilize our curiosity to better study our world, engage new information, and find Him. We possess both instinctive curiosity as well as analytical curiosity. When we encounter something new, we instinctively approach it, explore it and try to better understand it. Additionally after we are familiar with an idea but we sense inconsistency or a gap in our knowledge, we feel compelled to explore resolve that gap.

Without intellectual curiosity human progress would be stalled. During the scientific revolution between 1500-1700 humanity exhibited uncommon curiosity in analyzing, organizing and dramatically transforming our world. Curiosity allows us imagine a better world, rather than the fallen one we currently inhabit. As George Bernard Shaw remarked 'Some men see things as they are and say why, I dream things that never were and say, why not' We idolize curiosity but don't always pay enough attention its perils. What are the religious risks of unhealthy or excessive curiosity? Adam, Eve and Pandora Man's original sin was caused by Adam and Eve's uncontainable curiosity. The glistening tree at the center of the garden was too enchanting and even though consuming the fruit would incite divine punishment, they could not contain their curiosity and their catastrophic decision wrecked human history. Drawing in part upon the Torah, Greek mythology describes a similar fall caused by uncontrollable curiosity. Pandora, the first woman created by the gods, could not contain her own curiosity, opened a

sparkly box which she knew contained pernicious contents, and unleashed misery upon humanity. Based upon this myth we refer to our own curiosity-driven miscues as opening a Pandora's box.

Like all human desires, curiosity overwhelms our better judgement compelling foolish behavior even when we are aware of its unfortunate consequences. Like any uncontrolled desire, curiosity counters our better moral judgement causing moral weakness or even actual sin.

Vertical thinking and horizontal thinking Curiosity also distracts our focus, causing our minds to wander and lose concentration. Our modern, noisy, and overstimulated world fascinates our curiosity, making it almost impossible to "live in the moment" and bring our full presence to our relationships. "Distracted thought" muddles our prayer, as we struggle to concentrate our wandering minds upon our dialogue with Hashem. Mental distraction obstructs our ability to deeply concentrate upon a single-minded issue. In the late 18th century, the great mussar school of Chelm emphasized mental focus as the source of moral development. Thinking deeply about life and values would, they contended, lead Man to a religiously directed lifestyle. Students actively worked to condition mental discipline and to avoid mental distraction. Mental exercises included thinking uninterruptedly about one particular item for lengthy periods of time. As curiosity always open new mental pathways, it constantly shifts our focus to new ideas, thereby preventing more penetrating analysis of any one idea. Curiosity induces horizontal thought, but depth demands vertical thinking. When we think wide, we don't always think deep. The addiction Curiosity is also addictive. Content providers in the media are skilled at tapping into our curiosity, tempting us with clickbait and leading us down endless internet trails of nothingness. We innocently click on a curious story and slowly wander off into hours of meaningless content. Curiosity only excites greater curiosity leading us on a journey which often feels like Alice in Wonderland. We awaken hours later realizing how much time we have wasted on nothingness. Curiosity, though initially innocent, ensnares us into the realm of the forbidden. It begins harmlessly enough, but we quickly discover that we have "innocuously" entered forbidden territory. This was precisely the pathology of Eve, who began by innocently touching the tree, but soon found herself innocently consuming prohibited fruit. Curiosity always poses the danger of "one thing leading to another". Social curiosity We crave relationships and we desire to

learn more about our surroundings and about the lives of other people. Social curiosity helps us build healthy interpersonal relationships, but it can also be morally destructive. Too much social curiosity about people's lives leads to shameful gossip and slanderous badmouthing. Even if conversation about people's lives isn't slanderous it is still inelegant. As Eleanor Roosevelt commented "great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events and small minds discuss people." The more we speak about people and their lives the more our minds contract. Unhealthy Social curiosity consumes discussion about people in place of more meaningful discussion about ideas. It provides a constant menu of mental junk-food. Worse, unbridled social curiosity can lead to voyeurism and delighting in viewing private matters of people's lives. The popularity of reality-shows brings out our worst voyeuristic tendencies Finally, our social curiosity takes us to 'places' we should not be visiting. It was Dinah's curiosity which

led to her assault and eventually to the murder of an entire city. Her family had just faced a terribly tense encounter with Esav and, looking to release that tension, she tours the neighboring city of Shechem, looking for some adventure or distraction. The midrash asserts that Dinah was physically hidden from Esav for her own protection. When our access to the world is stifled and our horizons are diminished, we become even more curious about the world around us. She passes through Shechem visiting her new neighbors but exposing herself to uncouth elements. Her social curiosity takes her places she shouldn't be visiting, and leads to her abduction. Curiosity is Hashem's gift to human and the trait we use to decipher our world and to disclose its Creator. Yet, as with every gift, it must be delicately balanced, especially in a world filled with shiny metal objects and a highway of distraction known as the internet.

## Remembering the Beat of Our Own Heart

*Rabbi Efreim Goldberg*

**Y**aakov begins his conciliatory message to Eisav by saying, עם לבן גרתי – that he had been living with their uncle, Lavan, over the last twenty years (32:5). Rashi famously comments that the word גרתי in gematria equals 613, and thus Yaakov was indicating to Eisav that לבן גרתי ותרי"ג מצוות שמרתי, ולא למדתי ממעשיו ולא למדתי ממעשיו – "I have lived with Lavan, but I observed the 613 commands, and I did not learn from his evil ways." Yaakov professed that although he spent many years with his evil, corrupt uncle, he remained loyal to the Torah and was not influenced by Lavan's sinful conduct.

What was the source of Yaakov's extraordinary resilience? How did he succeed in maintaining his religious standards while living with such an evil person for so many years?

Rav Shlomo Wolbe (Shiurei Chumash) finds the answer to this question in the word גרתי, which is related to the word גר – "foreigner." Avraham Avinu told the benei Cheis גר ותושב אנוכי עמכם (Bereishis 23:4) – that he was a foreign resident, physically residing among them without actually being one of them. Similarly, throughout the twenty years that Yaakov spent with Lavan, he was a גר, a foreign resident who was just passing through. He didn't "unpack," get settled, or officially change his address, so-to-speak. This

is how he succeeded in maintaining his commitment to Torah. He always saw himself as a foreigner, as somebody different, who did not fully belong where he was. This is the key to resisting the natural process of assimilation. Although we must feel grateful for the freedoms we are given here in the Diaspora, at the same time, we must live with a sense of גרתי, that we are foreigners, that this is not where we belong, that we are different, and that we need to be different. This is how we can say גרתי ותרי"ג מצוות שמרתי while living among other peoples.

The Torah commands in Sefer Vayikra (18:3), ובחוקותיהם, לא תלכו – that we may not follow gentile customs. Even if a custom is not inherently forbidden, nevertheless, if it is associated with foreign nations, we must refrain from it. The word חוק used in this pasuk is related to the word חיק – "chest." If we accustom ourselves to the "heartbeat" of other nations, we forget about our own heartbeat. If we feel too comfortable with the חיק of the people around us, we are prone to abandoning our own חיק, neglecting our own heartbeat, our own cherished values and customs. We must therefore live with a sense of גרתי, recognizing that we are different, that we are just גרים, that we do not fully fit in, and this is the key to preserving our commitment to the תרי"ג מצוות.

# We Can Forgive the Arabs for Killing Our Children..

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

**A**s we increase our knowledge of Torah, we cannot help but realize how frequently we encounter revolutionary insights about life from seemingly insignificant verses in the weekly parasha.

In last week's Torah portion, Vayeitzei, Jacob decides that he can no longer live on the lam, and that after 20 years of running (according to other commentaries it was really 34 years), he must finally confront his brother, Esau.

In this week's parasha, Vayishlach, Jacob sends emissaries to inform his brother, Esau, of his impending arrival. The messengers return to Jacob and report that Esau is heading toward him, accompanied by 400 men. Jacob has no idea whether Esau's intentions are peaceful or hostile? The Torah informs us that Jacob was fearful. Scripture, Genesis 32:8, states: וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד, וַיִּצְרָ לּוֹ, and Jacob was very frightened and extremely distressed. Jacob divides his camp into two, so that at least half the people will be in a position to flee and survive a possible attack by Esau.

Why should Jacob be afraid? After all, he had previously received, (Genesis 28:13-15), G-d's promise of security. And why the double language of fear. Why is Jacob both "frightened" and "distressed?" Well, even under the best of circumstances, it is natural for a person to be afraid when confronted with a possible hostile attack. So, Jacob's fear is to be expected. And, though he has had G-d on his side until now, he may still be fearful that he perhaps no longer merits G-d's protection.

But why the double language of fear? Why does the verse feature two aspects of fear, וַיִּירָא and וַיִּצְרָ, that Jacob was both frightened and distressed? Rashi provides an important, indeed historic, insight. Citing the Midrash Tanchuma 4 and Genesis Rabbah 76:2, Rashi notes, וַיִּירָא, Jacob was frightened—שָׁמָּה יִהְרַג, lest he be killed. וַיִּצְרָ, and he was distressed—אִם יִהְרַג הוּא אֶת אֲחֵרִים, lest he (Jacob) would have to kill someone else, which, of course, indicates that Jacob was distressed lest he would be forced to confront his brother, Esau, in self-defense and possibly kill him.

Does this interpretation sound at all familiar? It should, after all it is quite remarkable that in 1972 Golda Meir made a similar widely acclaimed statement. It is very likely that Mrs. Meir was not even aware that her statement was

an actual paraphrase of the scriptural commentators. Golda Meir is quoted as having said to the Arab nations: "We can forgive the Arabs for killing our children, but we cannot forgive them for forcing us to kill their children!"

It is told, that during the Holocaust, a Chassidic Rebbe, along with a number of his Chassidim, were imprisoned by the Nazis. A particularly cruel gestapo Commandant was placed in charge of the Chassidim. The Commandant detested Jews in general, and Chassidim in particular. One Friday afternoon, the Nazi decided that he could no longer tolerate the existence of the Chassidim. Summoning the Rebbe, he proceeded to advise him that this Friday evening would be the "ultimate" celebration of Shabbat. The Rebbe knew very well that it meant that it would be their final Shabbat in this world.

The Rebbe stoically informed his Chassidim and encouraged them to be strong. Despite their desperate circumstances, the Chassidim began to prepare for Shabbat as they would normally. They straightened out their clothes, washed themselves as best they could, so that they could feel at least some sense of the holiness of the day. Accompanied by vicious dogs, the soldiers arrived, and at gunpoint, marched the Rebbe and his Chassidim out to the field.

The Commandant shouted at the Rebbe, "Tell your followers to begin to pray!" With uncommon fervor and joy, the Chassidim began to sing, dance, and recite Kabbalat Shabbat—the prayers which welcome the arrival of Shabbat. The Commandant was thoroughly enraged by the Chassidim's enthusiasm, after all, they surely knew that they would soon breathe their last breath. Nevertheless, their joy and singing were undiminished!

The Commandant grabbed the Rebbe by his lapels, and screamed: "Rabbi, Rabbi, are your followers crazy? Don't they realize that in a few moments they are all going to die?" The Rebbe responded calmly, "Yes, they do." "Then why are they singing? Why are they joyous?" demanded the Commandant. The Rebbe looked the vicious Nazi officer straight in the eye and said, "If life has fated for us to be in this situation, we are joyous and happy knowing that we have been designated to be the victims, rather than the perpetrators!" That is exactly what Jacob stated. True, he was afraid that he might be killed. But he was even more

upset and distressed by the possibility that he may have to become a killer.

I've often stated that the bottom line of all Judaism is the sanctity of human life. That's why at the end of Shabbat, in the central Amidah prayer, included in the blessing of אַתָּה הוֹנֵן הָאָדָם דַּעַת, You, G-d, endow the human being with wisdom, is an additional prayer of Havdalah, a prayer which separates Shabbat from the rest of the week. After Shabbat, a similar prayer is repeated as part of a ceremony over wine, spices, and candles. The text of the Havdalah reads: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, Blessed are you L-rd Our G-d, King of the universe, הַמְבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל, G-d, You differentiate and discern between what is sanctified and what is not sanctified, בֵּין אֹר לְחָשֶׁךְ, between light and darkness, בֵּין יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַמִּים, between Israel and the other nations, בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְשֵׁשֶׁת יְמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה, between the 7th day and the other 6 days of creation. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', Blessed are You G-d, הַמְבַדֵּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֹל, Who distinguishes between what is sacred and what is profane.

The greatest gift of the human intellect is to be able to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, between what is sanctified and what is profane, between

that which is holy and that which is not holy. That ability to make moral distinctions, is a special, priceless, gift from the Al-mighty and the ultimate legacy that the Jewish people have a sacred responsibility to share with the world.

Consequently, it is the task of the Jews to live their lives preparing for the day, for the moment, when we may be challenged to make an instantaneous moral decision that has bearing on life and death. We dare not leave it to chance. That is why it is so important for every Jew to be thoroughly informed and knowledgeable Jewishly, especially when it comes to the critical questions of life and death.

In light of the many causes and movements now trying to diminish the value of human life by promoting such practices as euthanasia and mercy-killing, and the gross indifference we see at the extraordinary amount of violence and murder that is occurring in our country, it is critical that we, the Jewish people, redouble our efforts to communicate our vital message regarding the extreme sanctity of human life. It is our sacred duty to preserve that ultimate value and to influence others to do so as well.