

## OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

## Roots of Majesty

*“No longer will your name be Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with man and prevailed.” (32:29)*

One of the problems a writer has as he or she becomes part of the elder generation is that many of one’s go-to cultural references become redundant and/or incomprehensible. So, if “bee-hive hairdos for ladies” means nothing to you, please fast-forward to the next article in Ohrnet Magazine. Okay, so now for the rest of you baby-boomers who remember the “bee-hive,” you may also remember that to keep the beehive from collapsing required a prodigious amount of hair spray. There was one hair spray ad that I remember from the early sixties where a young couple runs toward each other across an idyllic Hawaiian sunset beach in deep slow motion. The young lady’s hair looks as rigid as a football helmet. Then, a deep, ridiculously resonant mid-Atlantic voice-over intones, “The closer she gets, the better she looks.” Having spent quite a lot of time in the Music Biz and rubbed shoulders with some of the most deeply ordinary beings to walk the planet, but whose choice of breakfast cereal is the stuff of informed public debate, I can tell you, “The closer you get the smaller they look.”

The Gemara (Mo’ed Katan 18a) says that Pharaoh was only one *amah* high – that’s the distance between your elbow and the end of your middle finger. His public image was vast, but the reality was tiny. I remember about two weeks after I arrived in Ohr Somayach as an *alter bocher* - a ‘mature’ bachelor - Rav Dov Schwartzman *zt”l* sent for me. I’d never met him before and had no idea who he was. I didn’t know that he was an unparalleled genius; that Rav Aharon Kotler, one of the Gedolim (leaders) of the previous generation and the founder of Lakewood Yeshiva, had chosen him to be his son-in-law. At first he seemed just rather avuncular. He kept his greatness well hidden. But the more I got to know him,

the bigger and bigger he became. The closer you got, the greater he looked.

When you read this it will probably be around the time of the *shloshim* of Rebbetzin Gittel Kaplan *zt”l*, wife of Rabbi Nissan Kaplan *shlit’a*, and daughter of the Gateshead Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Avraham Gurwicz *shlit’a*. Rebbetzin Kaplan was one of the most aristocratic people I’ve ever met. She had a refinement that breathed majesty without the slightest effort. She was universally loved. She was unassuming, unaffected. The closer you got, the greater she looked. She bore a terrible illness with grace and without a single complaint. She personified *chesed*, loving-kindness. At her *levaya* (funeral) the common theme of the eulogies was the diffident self-effacing way in which she made everything she did seem quite usual, as though there was nothing special. And how special she was! On her last *erev* Shabbos in this world, she rose from her hospital bed, her entire system, her kidneys, her liver, on the threshold of total collapse, and she went to the *Kotel* with her family, dressed like a queen ready to greet another queen – the Shabbat Queen. And all with unassuming majesty.

In this week’s Torah portion Yaakov is given a new name, “Yisrael.” The root of Yisrael is *sar* – a verb that means “to prevail,” but it can also mean “superiority.” Through his own struggle with the angel, the negative spiritual force of Esav, Yaakov raised himself to the higher level of Yisrael. It’s true that Yaakov was born with a proverbial spiritual “silver spoon” in his mouth. What greater *yichus* (lineage) can there be than to have Yitzchak as your father and Avraham as your grandfather? But he didn’t rely on his roots of majesty. He took all that was bequeathed to him and through his own efforts ascended to complete the royalty of Yisrael.

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Vayishlach: Nidah 44-50

### The Threshold of Understanding

*Rebbi said, "An extra measure of 'bina' was given to her."*

A series of *mishnayot* in our *perek* teach *halachot* in order of the ascending age of a person. The *mishna* on our *daf* informs us how to determine whether a young person has the required maturity for a *neder* to be binding (A *neder* is a vow that forbids something to the person making the vow.) In determining the validity of a *neder* it is of primary importance to determine whether the person understands the meaning of the vow and to Whom the vow is being made.

What is the minimum age requirement for a *neder*?

At first thought we might be inclined to guess the minimum age to be *bar/bat mitzvah* – the age when a minor becomes an adult. At this age we presume the person to have reached not only physical maturity, but also cognitive maturity. However, our Sages teach us otherwise. The section in the Torah about *nedarim* states, "When a person makes a vow to G-d, or takes an oath to forbid something to himself, he should not profane his words; he must fulfill all which he said." (Bamidbar 30:3) From here our Sages derive that even during the year prior to the age of *bar/bat mitzvah* one's vows *may* be valid according to Torah law. This is one of the rare exceptions in the Torah when a minor has the status of an adult.

In our *mishna* we see the onset of "the season of vows" begins for a girl at the age of 11 years, and for a boy at age 12. When a vow is made by a girl between ages 11-12 or by a boy from 12-13, we check to see if the vower has the understanding required for the vow to be valid. However, once the girl becomes 12 or the boy 13, the vows are *de facto* valid.

The *gemara* cites a *beraita* to point out that our *mishna*, which teaches an earlier age for the vows of a girl than for a boy, is the teaching of Rebbie, but is the mirror opposite of Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar's view. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar teaches that a boy can make a valid vow beginning at age 11, and a girl can do so only a year later, at age 12. Tosefot offers proofs that the *halacha* is according to Rebbie (see the commentary of the Rashash, who ponders the proofs, since our case is "a *stam* (unnamed) *mishna*

followed by a dispute in a *beraita*, in which case the rule is that the *halacha* is in accordance with what is taught in the *stam mishna*.)"

The Rambam offers a fascinating reason as explanation for the younger age of maturity for a woman. In his work call *Peirush Hamishnayot* he writes: "The age for a woman is earlier since women, in most cases, have a shorter lifespan than men." These words call out, "Explain me!" What is the connection between maturity and life expectancy, and what would we say nowadays when women outlive men in general (perhaps due to a dramatic increase in medical advances related to pregnancy and childbirth)?

I once heard the following answer to these questions, which is based in part on an idea from Rabbeinu Asher. According to the Rambam, she was given the necessary *bina* at an earlier age, just as she physically matures at an earlier age, in order to "compensate" for her shorter lifespan. The idea of "extra *bina*" is that she has more *bina* than a man her age. In addition, although life expectancies may change with time, there is a teaching that during the era known as "2,000 years of Torah," the parameters of Torah *halacha* were fixed, and later changes in the natural world – such as average lifetimes – do not affect the established *halacha*.

There is another aspect of the "extra *bina*" given to women as it relates to a *beracha* said by many women daily, "*Baruch Ata Hashem... she'ashani kir'tzono*," a blessing to Hashem "Who made me according to His will." I heard from Rav Moshe Shapiro *zatzal* that the wording of this *beracha* is in reference to the unique challenge, opportunity and blessing that a woman has as the only gender able to bring new life into this world (at least in the meantime). He pointed out that, since the stages of childbearing and childbirth are prone to be uncomfortable, painful and dangerous, it would be quite "sad" and not "Hashem-like" for a woman to *not* have an intrinsic desire to have children. It would literally be torture, physically and emotionally. Therefore, Hashem made Woman in a way that her will is aligned with His will, desiring to have children.

- Nidah 45b

## 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?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

## 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."

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# ASK!

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## Verses by Heart

Aviva wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

*My family went to my grandparents' house for lunch on Shabbat, and at the table I gave a 'dvar Torah' on the portion of the week. I quoted a couple of verses off by heart, but afterwards my dad mentioned that he thought he heard somewhere that one is not supposed to quote from the Torah by heart. I am quite embarrassed about this, in case it is true and I've done the wrong thing in front of Saba [grandfather] and all his guests. Can you please tell me whether this is true or not? Thanks very much.*

Dear Aviva,

In a sense, your dad is right, but there's no reason for you to be embarrassed. Here's why:

The Talmud states: "You are not allowed to say Torah verses by heart." However, we find many exceptions to this rule. For example, the Talmud relates that on Yom Kippur the *Kohen Gadol* used to say the public Torah reading by heart. Other *kohanim* also had certain verses to say during the Temple service, which they often said by heart. And it's a universal custom that we close our eyes when saying the verse, "*Shema Yisrael....*"

Obviously, this rule applies only under certain conditions. The commentators offer different explanations for when it applies.

According to many authorities, the prohibition applies only when you are helping other people fulfill a halachic obligation. For example, the public Torah reading cannot be said by heart because there is an obligation for the listeners to hear the Torah.

According to the Shulchan Aruch, the prohibition doesn't apply to a verse which is well known. So, for example, you can say by heart any verse from the daily prayers.

Other authorities maintain that there is no actual prohibition against saying verses by heart. Rather, it's preferable and it's a mitzvah to be strict and read the verses from a book.

One of the great pillars of halacha, Maimonides, does not even mention the prohibition of reciting verses by heart, indicating that he permits it completely. Some explain this as follows: Just as the Sages in the time of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi lifted the ban against writing down the Oral Torah, so too they allowed reciting the Written Torah by heart. Both steps were taken in order to safeguard the Torah and protect it from oblivion.

Ideally, you should look up the verses. But, if that's difficult or is a strain on your audience, you can be lenient, in light of all the various opinions and leniencies, as is the general custom.

It's not always easy to memorize text. Little Johnny was having difficulty memorizing Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." His teacher scolded him, "How can it be so difficult? Why, Abraham Lincoln wrote the entire thing while riding to Gettysburg on the back of an envelope." "Wow," Johnny said, "How did such a tall man fit onto the back of an envelope?"

- Sources: Talmud Gittin 60b; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 49; *Ibid.*, Mishna Berura 9; Aruch Hashulchan 49

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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*Synonyms in the Hebrew Language*  
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Good Morning Sunshine

When Yaakov gained the upper hand in his struggle against Esav's angel, the angel asked to be released, saying, "Send me away, *ki alah hashachar* – for the morning has arisen" (Gen. 32:27). *Shachar* lends its name to the daily morning prayers, *shacharit*. *Shachar*, in the sense of "morning," appears some twenty times in the Bible, although this pales in comparison to *boker* ("morning"), which appears more than 200 times. In this essay we will shed light on the difference between the words *shachar* and *boker*, as well as their Aramaic counterparts.

The Malbim (1809-1879) and Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) explain that *boker* stretches from *haneitz hachamah* ("sunrise"), i.e. when the sun is visible on the horizon, until either four hours into the day or noon (see *Berachot* 27a). Essentially, the period of time to which *boker* refers begins at sunrise and refers to the entire morning.

[However, Rabbi Wertheimer somewhat retracts his position, given that the Talmud (*Pesachim* 4a) highlights Avraham's zeal in following G-d's command to bind Yitzchak by noting that he woke up *before* sunrise. This is somewhat problematic because the Bible writes that Avraham rose in the *boker* (Gen. 22:3), which according to the above explanation starts only at sunrise.]

In contrast, the word *shachar* refers to a point in time earlier than *boker*. It refers to the crack of dawn, which is even before the sun rises. Indeed, Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (1500-1580), the author of the famous song *Lecha Dodi*, writes that *shachar* is not just a synonym of *boker*. Rather, it refers to the first rays of light that break through the night's darkness (hence, the English term *daybreak*).

Rabbi Alkabetz further explains that Psalms 22:1 compares *shachar* to an *ayalah* ("doe," a female deer) that jumps swiftly and unexpectedly, just as the first rays of light shine forth suddenly without warning (while, conversely, the onset of darkness in the evening is gradual and not as sudden).

Moreover, the planet Venus is called *ayelet hashachar* – "the morning star" – because it is often visible in the early morning before the sun rises.

Rashi (to Ps. 22:1) explains that *shachar* means "morning," and then cites Menachem Ibn Saruk that the word's primary meaning is "examining, investigating, discerning." For example, *shocher tov* (Prov. 11:27) refers to somebody who "seeks out" good. The Malbim explains that the type of "searching" connoted by the term *shachar* is consistent and persistent, just like the sun rises consistently every morning.

Ibn Ezra (to Gen. 1:5) and Radak (to Gen. 1:5 and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) explain that the basic meaning of the BET-KUF-REISH root from which *boker* derives is "seeking out/discerning/investigating." Only in the light of day – which obviously begins in the morning – can one discern the difference between various objects. During the evening or at night, the lack of light makes everything appear mixed up and one cannot discern the differences between them. (This is why the evening is called *erev*, which also means "mixture.") Thus, *shachar* and *boker* both mean "morning" as well as "investigating or probing" – a point made explicit by Ibn Ezra (to Ps. 63:2).

Other terms derived from the BET-KUF-REISH root include *bikoret* ("investigation/inspection"), *bikkur cholim* (where one "finds out" what state the ill person is in and what can be done to help him), *bakar* ("domesticated cattle," which require attention and supervision), and *boker* ("cowboy" who attends to the cattle and "seeks out" greener pastures).

The root SHIN-CHET-REISH, which is at the core of the word *shachar*, is also used for other words. For example, the Bible uses the word *shacharut* (Eccl. 11:10) to refer to one's "youthful years." Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* explains that just like the "morning" is the beginning of the day, so too one's "youth" is the beginning of one's lifetime. Alternatively, Rashi explains that *shacharut* is related to *shachor* (the color "black") because one's hair tends to be

black/darker in youth than in old age. Additionally, the prophet Yeshayahu describes something inexplicable as something “that has no *shachar*” (Isa. 8:20) because metaphorically-speaking it has no light shed upon it.

The Talmud (*Yoma* 29a) assumes that *shachar* connotes morning as the end of the night. Rabbi Wolf Heidenheim (1757-1832) explains that *shachar* is a cognate of *shachor*, because the light of dawn banishes the darkness of night. Alternatively, yet along similar lines, *Peirush HaRokeach* explains that dawn is called *shachar* because the sky is still partially black/dark (especially on the western horizon).

But more esoteric sources intimate a deeper explanation. The *Zohar* (*Beshalach* 46a) reveals that immediately before dawn, the pitch black night’s sky becomes especially overwhelming and the sun’s light must penetrate that thick darkness. The British writer Thomas Fuller (1608-1661) famously expressed this idea in English: “It is always darkest just before the day dawneth.” The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) writes that the darkest part of the night is right before the crack of dawn, just like the exile will be most difficult immediately before the Final Redemption. According to this, *shachar* is related to *shachor* because the onset of morning breaks through the *darkest* or *blackest* point of the night.

The *Zohar*’s idea is quite empowering and inspirational, but how can we substantiate its claim from a phenomenological perspective?

Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935-2016) explains that the first ray of morning light overshadows the smallest stars and other weaker sources of light, making them no longer visible, as though they were “extinguished.” However, that first ray of light is so subtle that it does not provide any noticeable illumination by itself. Thus, right at dawn the sky appears to grow even darker – although, paradoxically, the increased darkness actually heralds the morning’s arrival. Others explain that the *Zohar* refers only to certain times of the month when the moon sets in the early morning before sunrise.

Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) points out that Targum Onkelos consistently, throughout the Pentateuch, translates both *shachar* and *boker* as *tzafra*. However, in the books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms – which incidentally share a cantillation system that differs from the rest of the Bible – Targum translates *boker* as *tzafra* and *shachar* as *kritzuta*.

The word *tzafra* is the typical Aramaic word used in the Talmud for “morning” and, interestingly, Rashi’s way of saying “good morning” was *tzafra de’mareh tav*.

Nachmanides (to Lev. 14:4) explains that *tzippor* (“bird”) is derived from *tzafra* (“morning”) because birds wake up early in the morning to start chirping. Conversely, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) writes that *tzafra* is derived from *tzippor*, because birds tend to chirp in the morning.

Rabbi Yaakov Zev Lev (1946-2018) in *Me’at Tzari* points out an apparent contradiction in *Peirush HaRokeach* about this point. In one place, the *Rokeach* (to Gen. 1:5) writes that the Hebrew word *tzafra* is derived from *tzippor*. In doing so he writes that the Hebrew word for “morning” (*shachar*) is related to “black” (*shachor*), and since “black” is reminiscent of the “blackbird,” the Aramaic word for “morning” (*tzafra*) is related to the “blackbird.” Plus, he writes that *tzafra* is derived from *tzippor* because birds tend to fly about early in the morning. These two explanations posit that *tzafra* is derived from *tzippor* (like Rabbi Marcus). Yet, elsewhere, the *Rokeach* (to Gen. 1:20) writes that the word *tzippor* is derived from *tzafra* (like Nachmanides), because birds tend to fly up high before sunup. In short, *tzafra* and *tzippor* are clearly linked, but it is hard to say which came first.

As opposed to Targum Onkelos, Targum Yonatan (to Gen. 19:15; 32:27) translates *shachar* as *kritizin*, while Targum Neofiti (there) simply Aramaicizes the Hebrew word *shachar* into *shachara*. Rabbi Moshe Kosover of Beit Chilkayah suggests that the Aramaic word *kritzuta/kritizin* (“dawn/morning”) is related to the word *kritzah*, “winking” (Ps. 35:19, Prov. 6:13, and *Yoma* 19b). He explains that just as a wink is a small gesture that hints to something bigger, so too the dawn portends the imminent coming of daylight.

*For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rcklein@ohr.edu](mailto:rcklein@ohr.edu)*

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**R**eturning 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 Parsha concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

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## LOVE OF THE LAND

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### A Measure (for Measure) of Salt

**W**hen the angels destroyed Sodom and rescued the family of Avraham's nephew Lot from the destruction, they warned these fleeing refugees not to look back upon this destruction. When Lot's wife ignored this warning and looked back, she turned into a pillar of salt.

The Midrash explains that she was punished measure for measure. When her husband asked her to provide some salt to flavor the meal of his angelic guests, she refused, and even scolded him for introducing such "corrupt" practices in the utterly inhospitable culture of Sodom.

She sinned with salt and was punished with salt.

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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NEWMAN • Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO z"l / DANIEL FREEDMAN

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Esav's Sword in Yaakov's Hand

**A**fter 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.

Yaakov has spent the last twenty years raising his children; he represents family life, serving others, and seeing to their welfare and happiness – the voice of Yaakov. Esav has spent this time becoming a political force, the leader of an army, a chief of his tribe; he represents political power and military might – the sword of Esav.

Yet in the fateful encounter, we see in Esav a flash of the gentle voice of Yaakov – an awakening of human emotion and brotherhood in Esav's heart. And in the next episode we see briefly the sword of Esav in the hands of Yaakov's sons.

Shimon and Levi, avenging the kidnapping and violation of their sister Dina, plot to kill Shechem and Chamor, the perpetrators. Had they stopped there, the brothers certainly would have been in the right. But they did more: they deceived the entire city, attacking and killing unarmed men, made vulnerable by their own plot. They made all the inhabitants pay for crimes of their leaders. Yaakov immediately berates them for the shame they brought on the family, for wreaking havoc and making Yaakov's family odious in the eyes of the local inhabitants.

What is striking about the scene is that it seems as though Shimon and Levi have the final word. In response to Yaakov's chiding, they say *shall we allow them to treat our sister like a harlot?* Here, their motive is revealed: their outrage at Shechem and Chamor for violating a vulnerable friendless foreign maiden – and not just any maiden, *their sister* – make Shimon and Levi realize that there are times when even the family of Yaakov must take up the sword in defense of purity and honor. As long as

men on earth will respect the rights of only those who have power, Yaakov will have to know how to wield the sword. They did not *want* to act prudently; they wanted to teach the world a lesson – Yaakov's daughters will not be left vulnerable.

But they don't really have the last word. Killing innocents is going too far, and Yaakov rebukes them again, decades later, on his deathbed. The 'blessing' on his deathbed is an interesting one: a simultaneous curse of their excessive violence and a blessing of their motivating force of brotherhood. *Shimon and Levi are brothers; however, instruments of violence are their means of acquisition... my honor must not join their assembly, for in their anger they murdered men... cursed be their anger for it is fierce, and their fury for it is cruel. I will divide them in Yaakov and scatter them in Israel. (Ber. 49:7)*

Shimon and Levi's purpose was noble and holy. Courage and brotherhood were indispensable for Yaakov's family to mature into a nation. And they have remained indispensable during our long and tortured history. If not for this display, we may have thought that Jewish pliancy and aversion to bloodshed is born of a cowardly spirit. But Shimon and Levi show that the essence of Jewish brotherhood is rooted in courage – we too can lift up the sword of Esav when the situation demands. Our gentleness and humanness is not to be confused with spinelessness.

Ultimately, Shimon and Levi are dispersed among Israel. This simultaneously achieved the preservation of their noble fighting spirit and a muting of their excessive force and impetuosity. The people of Israel would need these spiritual reserves – in tempered form – to survive its march through history.

- *Source: Commentary, Genesis 38:25-31, 49:7*



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