



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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Wrestling Toward Strength

Ya'akov spent much of his life wrestling his way out of peril. He entered the world pursued by an older brother who later vowed to kill him, and he fled eastward, seeking refuge in a distant land. For twenty long years he remained concealed in Lavan's home, shielded by Hashem yet surrounded by duplicity.

AVOIDING CONFLICT

Seven years into his exile, he suffered a crushing betrayal. Lavan swapped the bride he loved for the sister he hadn't chosen. Ya'akov didn't react in anger. He bore the frustration quietly and labored another seven years to marry Rachel.

But the manipulation did not end there. Lavan repeatedly shifted the terms of Ya'akov's wages, reshaping agreements at whim and without consent. Facing a relentless cycle of deceit, Ya'akov devised a quiet solution. He relinquished the entire flock,

asking only for the spotted and speckled—the weak and weathered animals that no shepherd desired. Through this measured retreat he eased the conflict and sidestepped a direct clash.

Eventually, troubling reports began to reach Ya'akov. Rumors circulated among Lavan's family, hinting at growing resentment. Sensing that his position was becoming unstable, Ya'akov once again chose to avoid confrontation. He gathered his household and quietly set out for Eretz Yisrael.

Yet his return was anything but simple. Esav was approaching with four hundred men, still carrying grievances from twenty years earlier. Hoping to ease the tension and prevent hostility, Ya'akov sent a substantial gift ahead, an attempt to calm Esav's anger before the two brothers finally met.

Time and again, when confronted by hostility, Ya'akov chooses a different path. He sidesteps confrontation, seeking peaceful ways to untangle himself from dangerous or volatile situations. He retreats when necessary, offers gestures of goodwill, and devises creative solutions when exploited. He rarely retaliates—and he never meets force with force.

THE WRESTLER

Until that lonely night at the Yabok. Alone on the far side of the river, separated from his family with no escape and no shelter, he

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is suddenly attacked by a mysterious figure. With nowhere to flee and no option to avoid the encounter, Ya'akov is forced into a struggle he cannot sidestep.

For the first time, he goes on the offensive. He wrestles through the night and prevails, holding his ground until his adversary pleads to be released.

In that moment, everything shifts. The man who consistently evaded confrontation becomes a figure capable of standing firm and fighting when necessary.

His name reflects this transformation. *Ya'akov* evokes holding on to a heel—an image of standing behind another and operating from a position of vulnerability. It also suggests circling around obstacles and navigating challenges indirectly, relying on ingenuity rather than confrontation.

But now he becomes *Yisrael*—a name that signifies struggling with adversaries and prevailing. The man who once maneuvered around conflict is recast as one who can meet challenges directly and overcome them in the open, without retreat or subterfuge.

QUIET STRATEGIES IN GALUT

Ya'akov's shift—from someone who survived through ingenuity and restraint to someone who could finally defend himself—mirrors the long arc of Jewish history.

For two thousand years, scattered across foreign lands, we seldom had the ability to “fight back.” As a vulnerable minority, facing discrimination and persecution, we had few avenues for active self-defense, political or military.

In difficult moments we relied on resourcefulness to endure. We used connections, negotiations, bribes, payments, and pacifying gestures to deflect hostility and lessen

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danger. And when those measures failed, we moved on, seeking places more welcoming or less threatening. We simply didn't possess the power to stand our ground and protect ourselves.

RETREATING NO LONGER

All that has now changed. We have a Land of our own and the autonomy to protect it. At last, we can defend ourselves, responding to our enemies not only with words and appeals but with strength. For the first time in generations we possess a Jewish army—an army that shields our people and our homeland.

October 7th was not the first pogrom in Jewish history; it was the first pogrom that was followed by a war. Earlier attacks were followed only by silence and then by the next wave of violence. This time, the Jewish people stood up and fought back.

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Even beyond Israel, Jewish communities have organized politically and socially to defend their rights and confront the tidal surge of Jew-hatred now sweeping across the world.

As history draws nearer to its conclusion, the people of Ya'akov have become the people of Yisrael. For many, this transition is not simple. We grew accustomed to retreat, compromise, and accommodation; for centuries, force was never an option. Now—baruch Hashem—it is, yet some still struggle to adjust. That is the nature of historical change: old reflexes linger even as new realities take shape.

We are living in the Yisrael chapter of Jewish history, not the Ya'akov chapter. The era has shifted, and so must we.

THE RESTRAINT OF "YISRAEL"

Yet, even Yisrael must navigate future confrontations with care. Strength does not erase the need for judgement. After wrestling with the mysterious figure and emerging victorious, Ya'akov could have allowed confidence to carry him into a direct clash with Esav. He might have abandoned his earlier plan of appeasement and relied solely on force.

But he does not. He measures every step, balancing readiness with restraint. He maintains his strategy: cautious preparation for

conflict alongside gestures meant to defuse it. This balanced approach succeeds. No blood is spilled, both brothers return home, and the crisis recedes—at least for that moment.

Ya'akov was not as fortunate in the aftermath of the crisis in Shechem. This time, his sons seized the initiative, attacking the people of Shechem after the abduction of their sister Dinah. Unlike Ya'akov, who consistently managed danger through strategy and restraint, they felt empowered to respond with force and to resolve the crisis through might.

Ya'akov is deeply troubled by their actions. He rebukes them sharply, uneasy with a path that abandons caution and invites needless peril. Decades later, on his deathbed, he again censures Shimon and Levi as he blesses his children. Their violent response had left a lasting mark on him, standing in contrast to the thoughtful and balanced approach he had always tried to embody.

Just because he has become Yisrael and now possesses the ability to defend himself directly does not mean that force should become his primary response. On the banks of the Yabok, with no escape and no alternative, he had no choice but to fight. But that moment was exceptional, not instructional. It reveals what he *can* do, not what he *prefers* to do.

Yisrael's instinct remains measured and strategic, not impulsively violent. That is why he criticizes his sons for rushing toward aggression in Shechem. Their instinctive reliance on force stands at odds with the careful balance he tried to uphold—a balance between strength and restraint, courage and judgment.

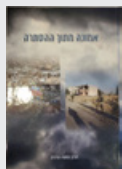
Though we have attained a Yisrael-like capacity to fight back against our enemies, we are not a bellicose people. Our instinct is still to seek peaceful resolution, to negotiate, to find

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common ground. When we are left without alternatives, we defend ourselves with strength and pursue justice against those who harm us. But even “Yisrael”, empowered and capable, often chose appeasement over violence.

As we live through the “Yisrael” stage of history, we must carry his lesson with us. Strength does not cancel the preference for peace. The ability to fight does not diminish the desire to avoid it. Our grandfather Yisrael showed that even when force becomes possible, the wiser path—whenever it can be taken—is the path of restraint and peace. ■



OU Press is honored to partner with Rabbi Moshe Taragin on his new volume in Hebrew regarding the recent war ('Emunah B'toch Hahastara). This remarkable book is also available in English, “Dark Clouds Above, Faith Below”

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