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Facing Our Realities

Many events in the life of Yaakov and his family continue to unfold in Parshas Vayishlach. The parsha relates to us many of the occurrences that take place, including:

After twenty years in Charan, Yaakov Avinu returns to Eretz Yisrael with his wives, children, and flocks. The first hurdle he must overcome is the meeting with his brother Eisav, from whom he fled so long ago. He prepares for the meeting in three ways - with gifts, with prayer, and for war. On the night before the confrontation, he is left alone and wrestles until dawn with a mysterious adversary, emerging wounded in his thigh and with a new name, Yisrael. The meeting itself ends in peace, and Yaakov settles in Shechem, where we learn of the taking of Dina and the vengeance of Shimon and Levi. From there Yaakov is called up to Beis El, where he builds an altar and Hashem renews His promise. On the road to Efrat his beloved wife, Rachel, dies giving birth to Binyamin and is buried by the roadside in Kever Rachel. The parsha closes with the death of Yitzchak and the generations of Eisav, as Yaakov's family finally takes root in the land.



Rabbi Zev Leff

There is much to learn, many insights to consider and an infinite number of lessons to be learned from this parsha - and from every word of Torah!

However, as space is limited, we must choose one lesson weekly to study, contemplate, and hopefully apply to our own lives.

Let us focus on the *pasukim* that tell us of the battle - an all-night long wrestling match - between Yaakov and his arch-enemy, *sar shel Eisav*, with dust from their feet reaching the *kisei ha'Kavod*.

The pasuk tells us that: וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר, *and Yaakov was left all alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn* (Bereishis 32:25).

Rashi, quoting the Medrash, notes that this man was the '*saro shel Eisav - the heavenly power (guardian angel, so to speak) of Eisav*.' When the angel sees that Yaakov will not concede defeat, and that he cannot overcome Yaakov, the angel injures Yaakov in the socket of the thighbone. When the

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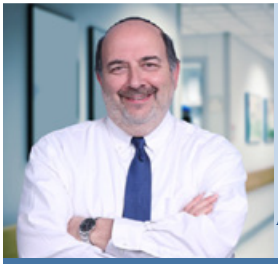

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angel asks Yaakov to free him, for it is his turn to sing shira before Hashem (32:26-27 with Rashi), Yaakov replies that he will not send him off until he (the angel) blesses him (Yaakov). The angel blesses him by changing his name to Yisrael, and the confrontation leaves Yaakov injured and limping, but far from defeated.

As we quoted above, it is well known that the mysterious *Ish* was the *sar shel Eisav*. However, the Rashbam offers a different - and fascinating - explanation of the *Ish*.

ויאבק - מלאך עמו, שלא יוכל לברוח ויראה קיום דברו של הקב"ה שלא יזיקהו עשו, *And he wrestled - an angel wrestled with him so that he could not flee, and so that he would see the fulfillment of Hashem's word, that Eisav would not harm him* (Rashbam to 32:25).

Rabbi Zev Leff *shlita* explains that the *Ish* was Yaakov's *own angel*, whom Hashem had sent, specifically to keep Yaakov in place so that *he could not run away*.

From here, Rabbi Leff proposes, we learn that one cannot run away from his problems. At some point, Yaakov was going to have to face Eisav, and the confrontation was going to happen. If it wasn't "today," it would be "tomorrow." And if not tomorrow, then next year or the year after that. Running away from Eisav would solve nothing, and so, Hashem sent Yaakov's own angel to prevent him from fleeing!

The lesson for us is clear, even though at times, it may be very difficult. We all face situations in life that require us to confront events, places, or people that make us uncomfortable, are painful for us, are frightening, or seem "too big" to face. While all of our feelings may be valid and true - based on that which faces us - running away from what we must eventually confront will neither help us, nor solve our problems for us.

With trust in Hashem, and in our own capabilities (not always an easy task, though a necessary one), along with the correct tools to navigate life, we learn from Yaakov that running away is not a solution.

Fascinatingly, the Rashbam further notes that Yaakov was struck and left limping because despite the fact that Hashem had promised him protection, *he tried to flee nevertheless*. The Rashbam notes this is a pattern we see in Tanach: anyone who goes against Hashem's will, or refuses to go where Hashem sends him, is punished. He brings examples from Moshe who is stricken at his place of lodging after he tries to avoid leadership (Shemos 4), Yonah who is swallowed by the fish after running away from his mission, and Bilam, who was left lame after going against Hashem's will (Bamidbar 22:22-25). (Rashbam to 32:29)

Hashem will always do His part, yet the nature of *olam ha'zeh* is that we must do ours.

In building our own selves, in our relationships with others, and in our connection to Torah, mitzvos and HKB"H, we must rise to the occasions of life, seek guidance when we are unsure of the proper path to take, pray for success in our endeavors, and be courageous to face our situations



and "problems" in life.

Yaakov *Avinu* limped into the morning, yet he forged ahead, and walked toward Eisav anyway. The meeting ended in peace, not because the fear was gone, but because - with Hashem on his side - he faced it.

We each have something we are walking around, and toward. A hard conversation. A relationship that needs repair. A truth about ourselves we would rather not face. Yaakov's fight teaches us that Hashem does not send an angel to carry us away from it. He sends one to keep us there, so we can face it, come through it, and emerge even stronger.

Yaakov went from the dependency of his Yaakov essence (holding on to his enemy's heel), to becoming his Yisrael essence - one who struggled, strove, and overcame.

The challenges we face in life are often difficult, and while our instinct may be to "flee," by facing our realities, like Yaakov, we pray that we merit to find the blessing that awaits us on the other side.

■ **בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום**

Michal Horowitz is a Torah educator who lectures nationally throughout the United States, as well as internationally. Thousands of her shiur recordings are available online. She is a regular presenter for the OU Women's Initiative and the author of Abled: Living With a Disability, a Torah View (Mosaica Press). Michal lives in Woodmere, NY, with her family.

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