

Points to Ponder
Vayishlach 5776

And I had an ox and a donkey (32:6) – The Brisker Rav ztl. reportedly once quipped that if one gives too much credit to the accomplishments or goals of a Rasha, it is possible that one will become swayed by his ways. When one objectifies the actions, then one does not learn to make those actions into goals. In other words, one learns to appreciate the positive actions of someone with ulterior motives will help one be careful not to be swayed by those ulterior motives.

And he took his 11 children (32:23)- Rashi notes that Yaakov hid Dinah in a box so that Eisav should not take her and marry her. **Rashi** adds that Yaakov was punished for this with the episode that happened with Dinah thereafter. **Rav Dovid Povarsky ztl.** asks why this was a punishable offense if, after all, one is not permitted to marry his daughter to an Am HaA'retz (Pesachim 49b) He answers based on the comment of the Alter of Kelm that the punishment was not for not marrying her off to Eisav but rather for locking her in the box with a force. In other words, it should have bothered him that he could not share his family with his brother instead of being comfortable with the concept.

Your name shall no longer be Yaakov rather Yisrael because you have fought with people and been successful (32:28) – Why is the Jewish name Yisrael a stress on the battle and not on the success? **Rav Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** explains that the greatness of Yaakov was the battle. He stood his ground and did not allow the Sar of Eisav in. He remained alone in that quest but he still did not give in. The idea of VaTuchal is based on Siyata D'Shmiya -- not on the person. The name needs to speak to the person – the person of Yisrael must be ready to stand his ground and allow room for Yishuas Hashem.

And he camped at the base of the city (33:18) – The Talmud (Shabbos 33) identifies a number of possibilities as to what Yaakov did in order to improve the quality of life of the people of Shechem. **Rav Schachter Shlita** noted that we Jews always seem to understand that when we get the gifts of the world, we cannot just hide in our Battei Medrashos and Battei Knessiyos – we need to offer thanks to improve the world. This is part of the Hakaras HaTov that we owe to the Ribbono Shel Olam for Hatzalah.

If you will be like them as they have a Bris Milah (34:15) – The Sanz-Klausenberg Rebbe ztl. once noted that unity is achieved within Klal Yisrael when people seek ideological common grounds. The ideological common ground we share with Jewish brethren needs to be with Torah standards – for without it, we cannot allow our standards to be “watered down.”

And Reuven went and he removed the beds from the tent of Bilha the Pilegish of his father (based on Rashi to 35:22) – The interpretation and result of the actions of Reuven versus that of his intentions seems to be a major discussion among all Torah commentaries. **Rav Dr. Benny Lau Shlita** explains that Reuven is actually a complex character in Tanach. On the one hand he is the quintessential oldest child who stands in for the parent and is the locus of what is right or wrong to think and do (hence the story with the dudaim and the offer to take Binyamin with the counter offer of Es Shnei Banai Tamis) in order to demonstrate his responsibility. But at the same time his actions show an impulsiveness in carrying out the responsibility that is not always sound. Hence Yaakov blesses him Pachaz KaMayim. We can learn a sense of Achrayus from Reuven and the emotional pull but we need to put it into context when responding.

Because they had too much wealth and thus were unable to live together because of their cattle (36:7) – Rav Yerucham Soloveitchik ztl. explained that the Beracha of Eretz Yisrael being Eretz HaTzvi –

that the land like the skin of the deer always fits its inhabitants (See Gittin 57a) is true only for the inhabitants. However, once the inhabitants push one another around because of pursuit of wealth, then there is no room for the inhabitants.

Haftorah: You are very despised (Ovadiah 1:2) – Rav Aharon Kotler ztl. used to point out that the punishment of being exceedingly despised is fitting to Eisav who seems to be confused in why he lives. The fact is that Eisav who was to rule in matters of this world, fails the test of finding purpose in those matters. He remains uninterested in the Keshet with Hashem that can be easily found in that work and, as a result, undoes the keshet. Accordingly, his whole existence is quite pointless and Bazui.