



Parshas Vayishlach

December 4, 2020

## A Taste of Torah

### Independence, the Key to Our Survival

by Rabbi Nesanel Kipper

Yaakov, after ferrying his family and possessions across the Yabok River ahead of his fateful meeting with Eisav, returns that night to the other side to retrieve some items he had left behind. It is here that Yaakov meets the angel, identified by our Sages the ministering angel of Eisav, with whom he will spend the night wrestling. Just before the Torah tells of this battle, it describes Yaakov as being *levado*, alone.

What does it mean that Yaakov was alone? The simple meaning is that he was all by himself and in a vulnerable state, providing this angel of evil with the opportunity to attack him – a less-than-ideal situation.

However, our Sages (Bereishis Rabbah 77:1) actually praise Yaakov for being alone. The Medrash explains that just as G-d is alone, so, too, Yaakov was alone. How are we to understand this praise of being alone, in what way is this state comparable to G-d being alone, and what exactly does G-d's aloneness mean?

Many sources discuss the concept of G-d being *ain od milvado* (there is no one but Him). This idea, based upon a verse in Devarim (4:35), means that nothing else and nobody else truly and fully exists except for Hashem.

How can this idea be applied to Yaakov? The comparison can be understood in light of an approach of the Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loew; 1512/1526-1609) in his Derech Chaim commentary to Pirkei Avos. The mishna (Avos 6:11) teaches that everything Hashem created in the world is meant to reveal His honor and glory. The Maharal asks a fundamental question: It would seem that Hashem's honor and glory is only revealed if we carry out His

will, which means keeping His Torah and mitzvos. How can it be possible that the realization of Hashem's will is dependent on Mankind, mere flesh and blood, beings who may choose to do otherwise?

The Maharal explains that in essence, there are two ways through which the world will come to reveal Hashem's greatness. The first is if humanity carries out the will of Hashem by fulfilling the mitzvos, and the second is that even if, G-d forbid, one chooses not to do the mitzvos, the punishment he will receive for transgressing will ultimately serve as a vehicle to bring about Hashem's greatness.

Using this concept, it can be explained that the idea of being alone refers to independence. The revelation of Hashem's honor and glory is not dependent or reliant upon anything or anyone. Regardless of what a person chooses to do, Hashem's honor and glory will ultimately be revealed. A person can either partner together with Hashem, or, if one refuses this option, his subsequent downfall will serve as a means to bring about Hashem's honor. Come what may, though, what Hashem wishes to occur will happen, as it is independent of any external force or factor.

During certain points in one's life, a person may feel that he doesn't possess everything he requires to succeed. One may be going through physical or emotional struggles. The environment might make it difficult for a Jew to do what he knows to be right. However, one's job is to serve Hashem and to keep the Torah and mitzvos, regardless of what life throws his way. The challenge, however, is finding the

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## Stories for the Soul

### Rules of Engagement

In 1978, then-Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin met with then-Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Before his meeting, Begin had travelled to the United States. During his visit, he met with the Mo'etzes Gedolei HaTorah, a body of the foremost Torah authorities under the auspices of Agudath Israel of America.

During that meeting, the subject of Begin's imminent meeting with Sadat was discussed. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, regarded as the foremost source of sound Torah-based advice of his time, provided guidance for Mr. Begin.

"Reb Menachem," he said, "you're going to meet with the Arabs. The approach that Jews take when dealing with the other nations of the world is found in the story of Yaakov's meeting with Eisav in Parshas Vayishlach. Yaakov did three things: He sent a bribe to placate Eisav, he prayed to Hashem, and he prepared for war, should else fail.

"You, too, must follow that directive. You must "send a bribe" – give him the proper respect and interact as diplomatically as possible. You must pray to Hashem for success in your mission. But you must also be firm and make clear that if need be, the Jewish People are ready to fight."

The Talmud teaches that the great sage Rabbi Yannai would often travel to Rome to advocate on behalf of the Jewish People. Before he would depart, he would review the section of Parshas Vayishlach to gain insight into how to deal with the Roman government. One time, says the Talmud, he neglected to do so, and his mission was unsuccessful. We must look to the Torah for guidance in all areas of our lives, including dealing with the nations around us.

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# Halacha Riddles

**Last week we asked:** What category of food, due to multiple opinions as to its exact identity, leads to many types of food requiring a *mezonos* blessing instead of *hamotzi*?

**Answer:** *Pas hab'a bikisnin*. The Gemara (Brachos 42a) states that this bread-type food requires a *mezonos*. There are three opinions among the Rishonim regarding the identity of *pas haba'ah bikisnin*. One opinion, the Rambam, is that it is a dough kneaded with other ingredients such as fruit juice or eggs whose taste is noticeable, or, according to some, that are in the majority relative to the amount of

water in the dough. A second opinion, Rabbeinu Chananel, says that this refers to a "bread" that has a filling such as fruit or cheese. A third opinion, Rav Hai Gaon, says it is a bread-type food that is dried and brittle, such as crackers and pretzels.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 168:7) rules that all three possibilities are regarded as *pas haba'ah bikisnin*.

It should be noted that there are many details and nuances to this halacha, and some notable exceptions.

**This week's question:** What type of food will require a different blessing depending on one's intention when eating it?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part VI

Rabbi Aharon ben Meir attempted to fill this temporary void left by the Babylonian yeshivos, and he made a very controversial declaration regarding the Jewish calendar. The Jewish calendar had always been determined based upon the decisions of the Sanhedrin and the monthly testimony of witnesses who had seen the new moon whose sighting signaled

the start of a new month. However, as it became increasingly difficult for the Sanhedrin to convene, it was decided that a permanent calendar needed to be created. In the year 358/59 CE, Hillel Hasheni (Hillel the Second; not to be confused with the more famous Hillel the Elder, who lived much earlier) and his colleagues created a fixed Jewish calendar featuring a nineteen-year cycle.

## A Taste of Torah

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strength to remain steadfast in one's service of Hashem. How is a person supposed to remain strong during times when there are so many obstacles in his path?

The Torah describes Yaakov as being alone. Yaakov's incredible greatness enabled him to be truly independent in his service of Hashem; none of the many challenges and tribulations he encountered slowed him down. This reality is born out during his struggle with Eisav's ministering angel, who, teach our Sages, is also Satan, the *Yetzer Hara* (Evil Inclination), and the Angel of Death – in a word, the source of evil. The *Yetzer Hara* throws everything

at us to stop our pursuit of doing what is right and serving Hashem. The Torah describes Yaakov as "alone" – independent and unaffected by external forces – at the moment of his great battle with, and victory over, the *Yetzer Hara*. There was nothing that could prevent Yaakov from remaining true to Hashem and triumphing over evil. We, as the descendants of Yaakov, have inherited that strength to withstand the challenges of the *Yetzer Hara*, independent of any circumstance we may find ourselves in. The battle may be difficult, but if we put in the effort to remain true to Hashem and do what's right, we'll find the resources and power we need to succeed.

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