

# THE COMMUNITY PARSHA SHEET



PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

London's Leading Young Professionals Platform and Jewish Communal Centre



**RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL**  
TAL Founder & Director

## BEYOND DESTINATIONS: THE MEANINGFUL PATH OF AM YISRAEL

A man once came to see a psychiatrist. "Why are you here?" asked the doctor. "I don't really know," replied the man. "My family insists that I have a problem." "So, what's the problem?" "I love pancakes," explained the patient. "But what's wrong with that? I also like pancakes a great deal!" "Really, doc? Then you must come to visit! I have 4,000 pancakes in my attic!" How badly do you love pancakes? Sometimes, our priorities stray. We immerse ourselves in the pursuit of wealth, neglecting our connections and straying from serving God toward self-service. This distraction leads to fleeting gains instead of seeking lasting peace for the soul. We need to grasp our true values and follow our faith. In our Parasha, Eisav and Yaakov finally meet up after many years of animosity; Eisav surprisingly hugs Yaakov and then there is an exchange of conversation. Eisav acknowledges all the gifts that Yaakov had sent him and says, "what is your relationship to this camp that I encountered?" And [Yaakov] said, '[I sent it] in order to find favour in the eyes of my master.' And Eisav said, 'I have plenty, my brother; let what you have remain yours.' ... [but Yaakov replied] 'G-d has been kind to me, and I have everything,' and he persisted and [Eisav] took." [33:8-9, 11] Rashi explains that "I have everything" means that Yaakov claimed to have all that

he needed. He was content. Eisav, on the other hand, said "I have plenty" – bragging that he had far more than his real needs. The Chafetz Chaim, notes that we can also read in these expressions two entirely different outlooks on life and money. Eisav said "I have plenty," but even a very rich person still desires more: "one who has 100, desires 200." Yaakov, on the other hand, said "I have everything," meaning that he did not feel any need to acquire more. Eisav wanted more and more money, while Yaakov was satisfied with what he had. His priority was ensuring that everything he possessed could be utilized in the service of G-d.

Those who set their sights on spiritual growth and accomplishment understand that, in terms of their materialistic standing, Hashem has sent them exactly what they need. Yesh li Kol! As we say in our daily morning blessings: "She'asah Lee Kol Tzarchee" – You have given me all of my needs. Happiness and satisfaction result not from what we have but rather, from how we deal with and view that which we have. Looking back at all the Avot we can see how they approached life. Not only was their focus on serving G-d, but whenever they were faced with challenges, they understood that they had been equipped with all the necessary tools to deal with the challenge – they had Kol – everything they needed. The only determining factor after acknowledging that they had everything was to put in the effort to succeed and rise above the challenge. There were times when it seemed that despite their effort, they did not achieve what they wanted, but nevertheless the

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Torah commends them.

Our Avot understood, that G-d is interested in the effort; the result of the effort is in the hands of G-d not the person.

On the third day after Avraham had his Brit Milah, he lifted up his eyes and saw three men standing in the distance. These three men were actually angels. He ran to invite them in and went through so much effort to prepare them a lavish meal, but he was in fact serving angels. The mitzvah of Hachnasat Orchim – welcoming guests is performed by inviting humans not angels!

So all that effort could be considered to be in vain. Yet G-d nevertheless considers the effort, and the intention and Avraham was rewarded.

Similarly, at the Akeida, Avraham went through extraneous pain and effort to offer up his son Yitzchak, only to be told not to go ahead with it in the end. One might think that since he didn't do it, there is no merit in his deeds, yet we mention the Zechut of the Akeida on Rosh Hashanah and in our daily prayers, as we are still enjoying the merit of his actions done thousands of years ago. It's the effort that counts, the ability to try and go for it even

against the odds.

This principle extends to Yitzchak's servants battling for wells that they had dug. The local shepherds heard about this and claimed ownership over them (Bereishit 26:20-21). The quarrel was so big, they named one well עסק, and the other one שטנה, representing the hardships and the fights that they had over the wells.

But the Torah doesn't tell us who won the argument and ultimately received the wells.

This implies an ongoing battle against our innate desire for immediate worldly pleasure, redirecting our focus toward serving God and attaining truth and eternal rewards. When confronting the evil inclination (yetzer hara), the objective isn't always outright victory; it's about standing resolutely and making the effort.

We are known as Am Yisrael - the people of Israel. Our name Yisrael comes from our third forefather – Yaakov. After battling the angel of Eisav, he persisted and asked the angel for a blessing. The angel tried to get out, but Yaakov persisted, eventually the angel revealed to Yaakov that G-d would change his name to Yisrael -

כי שרית עם אלקים ועם אנשים ותוכל (32:29) "Because you have battled with an angel and with people and you have prevailed." Our sages ask, if G-d is going to change his name to something that word should be Tugal (תוכל) – you prevailed and won the battle. Why was he named Yisrael?

The answer is that Yisrael represents the battle, and that is what counts in the eyes of G-d. The ability to choose good over evil, even when it's easier to be evil, the ability to serve G-d in a mundane physical world even when it's tough.

Yisrael imparts the importance of directing our attention properly. In fact, the word "Yisrael" can be rearranged to spell "Li Rosh" – "my head is mine." It signifies that I have mastery over my mind, having confronted and triumphed over the Yetzer Hara.

Yaakov and the Avot imparted a vital lesson: the pursuit of purpose and fulfillment hinges on three truths—to maintain focus, derive joy and content from our possessions along the journey, and recognize that genuine significance emerges from the effort invested, transcending the mere attainment of destinations, crafting the essence of a truly meaningful life.

Am Yisrael Chai!



**RABBI DAVID BAADANI**  
*Director - TAL Chazanut Program*

**PARSHAT VAYISHLACH**

When Yaakov Avinu prepared to meet Esav, the Torah tells us he did three things: he sent gifts, he prepared for war, and he prayed. Three completely different approaches, even contradictory ones. Gifts are about closeness and peace. Battle is about distance and defense. Prayer turns away from both and says, It's not about him; it's about G-d.

So which is it? Is Yaakov the man of peace, the warrior, or the man of faith?

Our sages tell us that Yaakov wasn't being inconsistent, he was being perfectly human. Every force in nature does one thing,

always the same way. The fire burns. The river flows. The sun rises and sets. But the human being is not bound by nature. The human being was created b'tzelem Elokim, in the image of G-d, meaning, we can choose. We can rise above instinct and habit. We can do what the moment demands, not what our nature dictates.

That's what Yaakov was showing us. When kindness was needed, he gave. When strength was necessary, he prepared. And through it all, he prayed, because he knew that ultimately, it's all in G-d's hands.

To say, "That's just the way I am" is not humility. It's a denial of your divine nature. Animals can say that. Angels can say that. But a human being can change. We can go against our own nature, because our true nature is

divine, and G-dliness is not limited by any nature.

Change isn't easy. Growth never is. But to stay the same is to live beneath your potential. You were created with the power to choose, to adapt, to respond consciously to every moment. That's what makes you G-dlike.

Yaakov didn't just prepare for battle with Esav, he prepared for the lifelong battle within us all: the struggle to live as souls in a world of habits and reactions. His message is timeless. You don't have to be stuck. You can be kind without being weak, strong without being cruel, spiritual without escaping reality.

Because being human means being flexible, not unstable, but alive. Not predictable, but purposeful. And when you live that way, you become what you were meant to be: a reflection of the Infinite in a finite world.



## RABBI BENJI STONE, TAL Chavruta Program

*Tehillim for Our Times; Chapter 14: למנצח לדוד אמר נבל בלבן אין אלקים*

### AN UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTION - PART 1

Rav Huna, the famed Talmudic sage, was an extremely wealthy man. On a cloudy day, he would ride through town in his golden carriage looking to see if there were any walls lining the road which might collapse under a heavy rain. He would then order that those walls be knocked down and rebuilt. If the owner could not afford to cover the cost then Rav Huna himself would put forward the funds (Taanit 20b).

One day Rav Huna went down to his cellar and noticed that four hundred of his barrels of wine had turned to vinegar. Rav Yehudah and other sages of the time became aware of this and they suggested that Rav Huna should examine his deeds. Perhaps he had sinned, bringing this

damaging event on himself as divine retribution. Rav Huna was shocked at the suggestion

"Do you suspect me of wrongdoing?" he protested.

The sages responded;

"And do you suspect Hashem of treating a person harshly without justification?" (Brachot 5b)

Subsequently, it emerged that Rav Huna had erred in connection with his payment of employees and he took it upon himself to put the matter right. Shortly thereafter, the vinegar in his barrels transformed back into wine.

When we experience hardship in our lives we tend to think super-critically, trying to work out how we can remedy our situation through whatever means are available to us. We might also try to identify key moments when we may have taken a wrong turning leading to the particular mess in which we find ourselves.

At the same time, we might also

consider our situation as the product of hashgacha pratit (divine will) and take comfort from the fact that the events we experienced are, for whatever reason, in our best interests.

This attitude is certainly valid. However, there is also an uncomfortable question that we all need to ask ourselves when we experience life-challenges. It is the question that even a great sage such as Rav Huna was required to ask himself.

"Are you behaving in some manner which is causing Hashem to treat you in this way?"

It is not pleasant to think that we are the cause of our own troubles. However it is important not to shy away from this possibility because resolving our behaviour in some minor way could be the key to deliverance from any challenge we are facing.



## HALACHOT BY RABBI ELI MANSOUR

The Meaning of the Phrase "Baruch Gozer U'mekayem" in Baruch She'amar

Baruch She'amar – the blessing with which we introduce the Pesukeh De'zimra section of the morning prayer service – begins with a series of phrases that open with the word "Baruch," praising G-d for various qualities. First, we praise Him for pronouncing that the world should come into existence ("Baruch She'amar Ve'haya Ha'olam"). Later, we praise Him for His compassion on the world's inhabitants ("Baruch Merahem Al Ha'beriyot").

There is, however, one phrase in this series which requires some explana-

tion: "Baruch Gozer U'mekayem" – "Blessed is He who decrees and fulfills [the decrees]." It seems that we praise Hashem for carrying out His decrees – even when He issues harsh decrees against someone. We must ask why we give praise to Hashem for this quality. Should we rejoice over G-d's carrying out decrees of punishment?

One explanation is that the word "Mekayem" in this phrase refers not to the fulfillment of the decrees, but rather to G-d's sustaining the individual. We give praise to Hashem for the fact that even when He issues a harsh decree against somebody, and brings upon him some

sort of hardship or crisis, He is "Mekayem" – He holds the person by the hand, helping him get through this difficult ordeal. Whenever Hashem presents a person with a challenge, He equips him with the strength to overcome the challenge, to past the test that he now faces. We are assured that no matter what we are dealing with, Hashem is "Mekayem" – He is helping us get through it. We thus praise Hashem for mercifully helping people even when they are deserving of hardship, by holding their hand and giving them the strength, fortitude and capabilities they need to persevere.



# WEEKLY PARSHA OVERVIEW

## Parshat Vayishlach

Returning 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 Torah portion concludes by listing Esav's descendants. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy.

Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

**Rabbi Sinclair,**  
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**Q**

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?

**A**

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.

