

# KushnerComments

## Parshat Vayishlach

Friday, December 16, 2016

תז כסלו תשע"ז

### From the Lower School

1. What part of the animal are Jews not allowed to eat because of Ya'akov's fight with the angel?
2. What did Eisav do when he saw Ya'akov?
3. What city did Ya'akov travel to after leaving Eisav?
4. What is the name of Ya'akov's 2nd oldest son?
5. Who was the last of the 12 tribes to be born?

— *Rabbi Aron Srolovitz, LS, Assistant Principal*  
Answers can be found on the last page.

### From the Middle School

#### The Power to Reinvent Yourself

Prior to his confrontation with his brother, Esav, Yaakov famously engages in a nighttime wrestling match. While the *passuk* simply refers to his adversary as an “*ish*” (a man), our rabbis teach us midrashically (Bereishit Rabbah 77) that the man was the angel of Esav. As they battle through the night, neither seems able to overcome his opponent. As the sun begins to rise, Yaakov demands a blessing and receives the name “Yisrael” because “you have a commanding power with G-d and with men, and you have prevailed” (Bereishit, 32:29).

The timing of this encounter seems quite significant. Why does Yaakov receive the new name Yisrael immediately before seeing his brother? Why does he receive specifically this name?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests that the answer lies in the appropriate name he received when he was born: Yaakov (heel). For his entire life, Yaakov was at Esav's heel: grabbing on to him at birth, stealing his right as the oldest child, deceiving his father

## From the Middle School

continued from page 1

Yitzchak using the words “I am Esav, your firstborn” (27:19) and eventually taking his bracha. Yaakov always wanted what Esav had, namely his strength and his father’s love.

As the story of Yaakov progresses, we see him try to unnaturally assert himself in the house of Lavan and struggle in confrontations. Now, immediately before the reunion with his brother, Ya’akov is thrust into another battle, one he cannot win. But at the end of the night, Esav’s angel delivers a key message to Yaakov. No longer shall his name be a reference to his stature relative to Esav; now Yaakov is his own man. His is Yisrael, a man who has feet in both the physical and spiritual worlds. He no longer has to compete with others. Yaakov can realize his own unique strengths and potential.

Many of us today struggle with our own self-worth relative to other people around us. We constantly look to see what others have and what we don’t and we assign great value to those things. Yaakov emerged from his battle not only with a new name, but a new self-image. With the confidence of being true to oneself, he was able to face his older brother. Sometimes, we need to remind ourselves of our own value and to be confident that we can each significantly impact the world around us with our own uniqueness.

— *Rabbi Aron Srolovitz, LS, Assistant Principal*

## From the High School

### Teaching By Example

Yaakov is regarded as a great man, as all of the Avot were. For much of the time in his early years, people largely tell him what to do and how to do it, such as Rivka telling him to pretend to be Eisav, Yitzchak telling him to go to Charan, and Lavan making him work in order for Yaakov to marry his daughters. After having eleven sons and a daughter, he is ready to leave Lavan’s home and encounter his estranged brother once more. This is the first time he is in control of his journey, and he is leading all of his family and his men. He has high expectations, but does he live up to them?

Rashi explains that before he meets with Eisav, Yaakov prepares in three ways: he sends gifts, he prays, and he prepares for war. When he hears that Eisav is coming with four hundred men, he doesn’t assume the worst of the man who wanted him dead. While still

## From the High School

continued from page 2

showing caution, he still treats his brother with respect and has hope that his brother will have mercy.

During the ultimate encounter with Eisav, Eisav kisses Yaakov. However, the word for “he kissed him,” “*Vayishakeihu*” (33:4), has a line of dots written above it in the Torah, implying that Eisav didn’t kiss him; he bit him. How did Yaakov react to this? He doesn’t do anything. He ignores it and maintains the new state of peace with his brother.

Afterwards, Yaakov builds an altar to thank God for the peaceful encounter. He never loses his faith in God throughout the whole episode. He also shows a good example for his young children, who all watch this encounter and will learn from the behavior of their wise father. This becomes clear multiple times during the lives of the children.

So did Yaakov live up to our lofty expectations of him? Unquestionably so. He gives us an example for us to use as a model in our own lives. He shows that any sin or act of meanness can and should be forgiven, and that one should always assume the best of people. Yaakov leads his descendants to great success, and this is just one of the important reasons why.

- Zach Marcus is a Sophomore at RKYHS

## Appreciation

Entitlement is the antithesis of appreciation. Expecting to receive gifts, live with comfort, and enjoy security corrodes character and corrupts relationships. Achievements must be earned and ownership is valued when it is a result of personal investment.

Yaakov, like Avraham before him, modeled the stellar traits of humility and appreciation. Immediately before meeting up with his brother Esav, laden with wealth, surrounded by his family and blessed with success, after 22 years of toil and moil, Yaakov expresses his doubts about his family’s future. Yaakov beseeches God, through a personal and poignant prayer, to grant him safe passage and security. “*Katonti mikol hachasadim*,” “I am unworthy of all of the kindness you gave to me” (32:12), Yaakov says to God, setting the frame for the formula of prayer for all future generations.

Despite the assurances his grandfather and parents received from God, over and over again, about the continuity and eternal nature

## From the High School

continued from page 3

of the Jewish people, Yaakov still felt that the blessings he received from God were never assured nor was he entitled to receive them. Rather, he looked at all of his blessings through the lens of personal virtue and worthiness. Having received the blessings of Providence in the past did not guarantee that he would continue to receive God's blessings in the future.

Rashi is troubled by what seems like Yaakov's lack of faith in God's promises to sustain and protect him and his family. Rashi attributes Yaakov's doubts and fears to a cost-benefit calculation: Considering the scope of his blessings over the years, Yaakov may have assumed that he used up all of the promised blessings. His blessings' account was nearing a zero balance.

Ramban disputes Rashi's explanation. The promised benefits were timeless and limitless and were not part of a debit/credit relationship. They don't expire. Instead, Ramban offers an insight into Yaakov's persona. Yaakov never felt worthy of the goodness that God granted him and saw every blessing as an additional gift, despite prophetic assurances. As a result, when faced with the imminent danger from his brother who was preparing to battle him with a large band of warriors, he turns to God in fear, concern, and worry.

Yaakov's character lessons are critical for children and adults alike. We own what we earn and need to be grateful for whatever we achieve. Success is never assured, comfort is never guaranteed and security is not sacred. No doubt that we work towards goals and take pleasure in achieving them, but the Yaakov model of assimilating success is to feel that we are required to earn our achievements and not feel that we are worthy of receiving them by dint of our relationships, talents, or skills.

- Rabbi Eliezer Rubin — Head of School

## Answers to questions on page 1

- (1) The *Gid Hanashe*/sciatic nerve (2) He hugged and kissed him
- (3) Shechem (4) Shechem (5) Binyamin

Shabbat Shalom from  
JKHA/RKYHS!