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Parshat Vayishlach

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LANDMARK DECISION

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week's portion entails many of the trials and tribulations that Yaakov Avinu endured, both on a national level and on a very personal one. First, he prepared to confront his brother Esav, the results of which would produce either war or reconciliation. Then he battled an angel who dislocated his sciatic nerve. Then finally, Yaakov confronted his brother, playing the role of diplomat-warrior. He carefully weighed how to treat him with Chamberlain-like appeasement or Churchill-like aggressiveness. He returned from that encounter unscathed, but not long afterwards, the Torah tells us that Yaakov's own daughter was brutally violated, which led to a war in which his sons decimated the city of Sh'chem. Then he endures the death of Devorah, who was his mother Rivka's nursemaid.

But all these roles that Yaakov plays — the angel-fighter, the warrior-diplomat, even the father whose daughter is attacked, are different than the role Yaakov must play in another tragic incident in this week's parsha. Yaakov simultaneously becomes a grieving widower during the birth of his final child, Binyamin, who is born an orphan for life. Rachel, Yaakov's beloved wife, dies in childbirth. Now a wayfarer on a trek to Chevron, Yaakov must bury his wife. But Yaakov does something strange. He does not bury her in the family plot in the M'aras HaMachpelah, which was bought by Avraham and reserved for the forefathers and their spouses. Yaakov opts instead to bury her where she dies in Bais Lechem (Bethlehem).

Surely Yaakov had no objection to travelling with a deceased whilst trekking to a final resting place. After all, he asked his own children to bring him from Egypt to Canaan after his demise, surely a longer and more arduous trek than Bethlehem to Chevron? Why then did he bury Rachel in Beth Lechem?

The Midrash tells us that Yaakov foresaw that one day Jews would be in exiled from the Land of Israel. They would plod down the road leading from Jerusalem toward the Rivers of Babylon. They would pass the Tomb of Rachel and they would cry. She in turn would join them in their prayers. Therefore Yaakov opted for a burial site for Rachel on the road to Babylon. But aren't there many places to pray? Isn't every stone on every road holy? And doesn't Hashem hear prayers and see tears even when they are not shed by a graveside? What gift did Yaakov give his children by relinquishing Rachel's eternal resting-place for a way station on the oft-traveled road of Galut? Is there perhaps an even deeper intent with Yaakov's plan?

Anatoly Sharansky's trials and tribulations from the time of his arrest in March 1977 through his release in 1987 includedn the Soviet Union's most notorious prisons and labor camps. It was a tormenting journey, but along the arduous term there were many encouraging little reminders that the One Above was holding his hand. One day during his trial, Sharansky's firmly requested to be allowed to select a lawyer of his own choosing rather than the stooge given to him by the Soviet authorities. The judge who presided over the kangaroo court reacted by declaring a brief recess and had Anatoly thrown into a tiny holding cell. There was hardly any light in the dank compartment, and there was nothing for Sharansky to do but wait for the proceedings to resume. To pass time he stared at the various curses and inscriptions scratched on the walls by prisoners who also sat and waited like he was for the decisions of their mortal fate. However, Anatoly did not notice the curses etched by the previous men that once sat in that cell. Instead, he saw a message of hope and inspiration scratched on the wall. A Magen David etched in the wall, stood out proudly amongst all the other frivolities of frustration. The words Chazak V'Ematz (Be strong and fortify yourself) were energetically etched underneath it. It was signed Asir Tziyon (Prisoner of Zion) Yosef Begun. Begun knew that like him others would pass this way and he engraved for them a mark of hope.

Yaakov realized that the experience of his personal pain should not be limited to his own personal suffering. He converted it into a message of hope and inspiration for the ages. Rachel was transformed from a symbol of despair and grief into a symbol of hope for eternity. Yaakov foresaw that one day the Jews would leave Israel, shattered and broken. By having Rachel's final resting place as landmark in their agonizing journey, they, too could garner a message of hope. They would see Yaakov's pain and remember his triumphant endurance. They would understand that despite his sad life, Yaakov persisted. His children united and his legacy was impeccably unblemished. And though he often stood on the desolate road surrounded by enemies, his future was never renounced. And his children's future, too, will never despair. For Rachel cries for them, and she will not stop until they return to their true borders.

Yaakov Did Not Rely Solely on Prayer

By Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah teaches us, according to Rashi and the words of the rabbis, that our father Yaakov prepared for his encounter with Eisav by adopting three possible strategies. They were mollifying Eisav with gifts, praying to God for deliverance and engaging in physical battle against him. The first strategy proved to be successful, though the Torah records for us Yaakov implementing his second strategy as well, with his heartfelt prayer to the Lord that he be spared from the murderous hands of Eisav.

The question arises why Yaakov had to have alternate strategies in the first place. Was it not sufficient to rely on the power of prayer and God's original commitment to him that He would be with him and safeguard him from all harm? In the simplicity of faith, is that not sufficient for Yaakov, the chosen one of our forefathers?

I have often been challenged by problems that arise in life. I always prayed for God's help and succor. Sometimes my prayers were accepted and matters developed as I hoped for. There were other times that this did not occur. But I always had an alternate strategy – a doctor, a lawyer, an accountant, an advisor – that I followed in tandem with my prayers.

Someone once asked me if there was a lack of faith on my part when I insisted that the faculty members of my yeshiva own life insurance policies. Why not rely on prayer and Heaven alone? I replied that I was only following in the methods of my father Yaakov who also adopted alternate strategies and apparently did not rely on prayer alone. My critic thought my answer to be heretical. I thought that he was misrepresenting the Torah value of faith and wise living.

There is a common adage that God helps those that help themselves. To accomplish things in life, both spiritually and materially, effort and planning, devotion and industry must be expended. Once, in my yeshiva days long ago, I had great difficulty in understanding a difficult concept that was raised by one of the commentators to the Talmud. I asked my teacher whether prayer to Heaven would help me understand that concept. He answered that it would help only if one has truly exhausted one's own abilities to understand the matter.

I then realized that prayer was Yaakov's second strategy and that he felt it would help only if at first he employed it together with prayer – first the attempt to soothe Eisav's anger with gifts. Relying on prayer alone without the expenditure of one's own talents and resources is a way of getting away cheaply in the matter.

The famous rebbe of Sanz, Rabbi Chaim Halberstam stated: "First one must be prepared to tear out one's own rib before one can expect Heaven to intervene in one's stead!" Yaakov is prepared to risk all of his hard earned wealth, and in fact his life itself, when forced to deal with Eisav. Because of this, Heaven intervenes and Eisav conciliates with Yaakov. There is a lesson here for all of us.

In War, There Are No Winners

by Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Parashat Vayishlach describes Yaakov's feelings just before his fateful encounter with his twin brother Eisav - *Vayirah Yaakov meod vayeizer lo*, Yaakov was afraid and he was distressed.

Why is it necessary for both descriptions? Surely, if he was afraid he was distressed and if he was distressed then he was afraid?

The Netziv explains as follows: Yaakov was afraid lest he be killed and he was distressed because he was afraid. He knew that God had instructed him to make his way to the Holy Land. He knew that God would protect him, and yet, he still was nervous, he was full of fear and that distressed him because he felt that he should have conducted himself in a better way and he was letting himself down.

Rashi, as always, gives a masterful explanation. He explains, Yaakov was afraid lest he be killed and he was distressed lest he be forced to kill. It was Yaakov who realized that in war, there are no winners. Either your life is taken or for the rest of your life you have blood on your hands.

And so it is in every form of conflict, including domestic and communal conflict. Even when one is fighting *lesheim shamayim*, for the sake of heaven, there will always be pieces to pick up. There will be matters that one will regret.

Let us recall how even when facing a war which was inevitable and which he had to engage in, Yaakov was ever conscious of the destructive nature of conflict. Let us always strive to love peace and to pursue it.

True Wealth

by Adam Lieberman

Jacob saw his brother, Esau, for the first time after many years of hiding from him. During their childhood, Esau was angry at Jacob because he thought that Jacob had stolen his birthright. Jacob now wanted to give Esau some of his flocks as a peace offering, but Esau declined, saying:

"I have plenty ... let what you have remain yours." But Jacob said, "...I have everything." (Genesis 33:9-11)

There is a world of difference between what Esau meant when he said he has "*plenty*" and Jacob declaring that he has "*everything*". Esau, a selfish person caring only about his materialistic possessions, proclaimed that "*I have plenty*" because "*plenty*" is quantitative. His material possessions are what he saw as his net worth. If he would ever lose a majority of his possessions, then he would be plenty no more.

Jacob, however, who had his entire family with him, proudly declared, "*I have everything.*" Our most valuable and prized possessions will always be what money can never buy - our lives, our health, our families. For thousands of years, the wisest men have been preaching this truism. But why do we fail to embrace it?

In interviews with elderly people who look back on a life gone by, they dejectedly speak about how they should have spent more time with their families, taken better care of themselves, and certainly focused less on their careers. In fact, there isn't a headstone that could be found on a single grave site that states that the one buried achieved great success in business, real estate, athletics, or the arts. Rather, it proclaims the virtues that the deceased possessed as a grandparent, parent, sibling or spouse.

And this is the world's most ironic paradox. While society, the media, and the world-at-large shower accolades and praise on those who achieve business or personal success, when you pass away this isn't at all how your life is judged - by man or by God.

Monetary and career success are wonderful things. We're all designed for greatness and should strive to succeed and grow in many aspects of our lives. But it's the priceless things in our lives that we tend to take so much for granted and never fully appreciate until we, God forbid, no longer have them or are faced with a fear of losing them.

This is why Jacob knew he had *everything*. Is there not a dying wealthy person who would without hesitation give his entire fortune to live another year? How about for just another week? Would you ever want to switch places with him? Of course not. Yet, billions of people who still have so much physical life in them choose to walk the earth being unhappy, discontented, and miserable.

The reason for this is that they're usually focused on only the same things that Esau was. Their idea of wealth is exactly what the zombies of society and the media have said that it should be. So instead of appreciating and loving their tremendous and endless amount of true wealth that constantly surrounds them, they instead choose to dwell on missed and lost opportunities, the things they don't have, and all of the possessions they long for.

If you think about "what you have" in the same terms as Esau, then you are certain to have a life filled with frustration, disappointment, and unhappiness. But if you understand the life-changing statement of what Jacob said and you think about all of the irreplaceable and priceless things you have in your life right now, then you now will wake up each and every morning confidently knowing that you really do have *everything*.

“I have acquired ox and donkey, flock and servant and maidservant and I am sending tell my lord to find favor in your eyes” (32:6)

Yaakov was very wealthy and had a large amount of cattle and livestock. Why did he say that he an ox and a donkey, in singular form? Rashi answers that it is derech erez to refer to many animals as just one. Why is this derech erez? R' Moshe Feinstein answers in Darash Moshe that a person should not boast about his wealth. By saying that he had one animal, Yaakov was acting with modesty and derech erez. He did not flaunt the fact that that he actually had many animals. Another reason for Yaakov's derech erez is that this is a way of thanking Hashem for every animal that he has. If Hashem had given him just one animal, Yaakov understood that he would have had to be thankful for it. A person must be grateful for every possession that he has, whether he has a lot or a little. This attitude marked the difference between Yaakov and Esav. Esav said that he had more possessions than necessary. He was not thankful for everything because he felt that it was extra. Yaakov said that he had everything. Whatever Hashem gave him was all that he needed in life. Yaakov was thankful for every item in his possession because he understood that every little thing came from Hashem and had a purpose. If a person perceives that he has more than he needs for himself, perhaps he can use the excess to share with others and help them. No possession is extra and purposeless because it all comes from Hashem.

“Leah, too, came forward with her children and they bowed down; and afterwards, Yosef and Rachel came forward and bowed down” (33:7)

Rashi writes that although Leah and the maidservants bowed to Esav in front of their children, Yosef was concerned that Esav would see his mother's beauty and try to take her. In order to prevent this from happening, he bowed to Esav in front of Rachel in order to shield her from his view. We see the creativity of Yosef in preventing Esav from stirring up trouble. A person has to be creative in order to protect the Torah in various situations. We have to follow Yosef's example and always seek new approaches to ensure proper Torah observance. One example of this is using creative ideas to change conversations which are becoming full of gossip or other inappropriate topics. Creativity is vital in dealing with many situations in life. A person has to develop strategies to help others and also to help himself. Yosef's creativity was his one of his great characteristics. We also see his resourcefulness throughout the narrative of his experiences in Mitzrayim. Yosef developed strategies in order to lead Egypt through a famine and devised a plan to lead his brothers to repent for selling him before he revealed himself to them. We also have to be creative in our own lives so that we can continue to serve Hashem properly. One must be creative in order to resolve disagreements and fix other problems. Being proactive, like Yosef was, is the key to success.

“Yaakov arrived intact at the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan upon his arriving from Padan Aram, and he encamped before the city” (33:18)

Yaakov did not feel secure, even after Esav had gone home, until he finally arrived in Eretz Yisrael. One of the reasons that Ramban suggests for why Yaakov calmed down when entering Eretz Yisrael was because the merit of the land itself would protect him. Only once he had this special advantage did he feel safe. Ibn Ezra says that the Torah uses the word חלק, “portion,” in the following posuk with regard to his purchase of land because owning a portion in Eretz Yisrael is akin to having a portion in the World to Come. These two comments teach us the special nature of Eretz Yisrael and how important it is to feel connected to the land.

“Now Yaakov heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah, while his sons were with the livestock in the field; so Yaakov kept silent until their arrival” (34:5)

Upon receiving the news that Dinah had been violated, Yaakov remained silent. On the other hand, his sons became extremely angry when they were informed about what happened. The Torah contrasts Yaakov's reaction to that of his sons to show us that Yaakov understood that one cannot let his emotions dictate his behavior. Yaakov remained silent because he knew that he had to conquer his emotions in order to act rationally and properly decide upon a course of action. His sons, although they were great people and meant well, allowed their anger to take over. It is important never to make impulsive decisions when emotions are running high. A person's emotions can blind him and lead to something drastic and unnecessary which the person will regret later on. Even though it is a justifiable feeling, the action cannot stem from emotions alone. It is always best to think things through before making decisions and use logic as the basis for decisions rather than emotions

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Hashem's Seal is Emes

By Sheldon Stern

The Baal Shem taught that everything we experience in this world is a message sent from Above. However, this presents a difficulty. Our senses are constantly inundated with information from myriads of sources, so how can we, as CSNY sang in "Almost Cut My Hair," separate the wheat from the chaff to discern G-d's thrust? As is so often the case, Rashi provides the answer. In commenting on the Ephod, one of the special vestments worn by the Kohen Gadol, our foremost commentator said, "Libi Amor Li" my heart tells me that it resembles the attire worn by French noblewomen astride their horses when they set out on a fox hunt. Of course, as Paul Harvey would say, we need "the rest of the story." When Rashi was a child he went to the Bes Hamedrash and beheld such a woman mounted on her steed. Rashi was quite upset for having taken an interest in the woman since he felt, and rightly so, that his constant devotion to Torah study would make him immune to such "immoral thoughts." Years later the Rabban Shel Yisroel was pondering the description of the Ephod, but he had no tradition on this matter from his teachers, and so he had an epiphany. He now understood, in retrospect, why he was drawn to that lass. So what do we see from this? Shlomo Hamelech stated in Mishlei 16:9, "The heart of a man plans his way, but the L-rd establishes his steps." (Tehilim 37:23 essentially says the same thing.) We're being taught a fundamental principle. Our steps, which alludes to all our actions, are guided from above. We must say then, that Hashem is able to filter our minds so that we, as the Band wrote in the "Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," "Take what you need and leave the rest." How Hashem does this is way beyond my pay grade, but suffice it to say that it explains why humans have selective memory. Imagine if we, as ELO sang, "Can't Get It Out of My Head." and you couldn't forget when you sold a stock that skyrocketed soon after. You get the point. I know that this intro is long-winded, but many years ago someone told me something that found its way into my memory bank. I'd like to share it now because it not only explains a verse in this week's Parsha but it offers a critical insight into the workings of the human mind.

In Genesis 32:4, Yaakov Avinu instructed his messengers to tell Eisav that "his servant" Yaakov stayed with Lavan and remained there until now. Then in the next verse, they were told to add that Yaakov acquired oxen and donkeys as well male and female servants. We understand the first missive. In Gen 27:40, Yitzchak acceded to Eisav's behest and "blessed" him. One of the things he told his "Bechor" is that he would serve his younger brother, however if Yaakov would give him cause, there would be a "rule reversal." Yaakov thus made it clear, by intimating that he stayed true to the Torah despite having lived with Lavan, that he still deserved Divine Protection. But why then "brag" about all his material possessions? Rashi answered that Yaakov made a point of emphasizing that his bounty was in the category of movables and so it didn't derive from their father's promise of Heaven and earth. But come now, Eisav was no fool, when he sold the Bchor as an adolescent it was with the idea that Yaakov would carry on the family's spiritual legacy while he would, as the Grass Roots sang, "Sha La, La, La, La live for today." So logic would dictate that seeing that his brother had succeeded in the material realm would do anything but assuage Eisav's ire. So this is where the preamble comes into play. Back in my single days I had an encounter which was forgettable except for my date's quote, "Everyone wants the same person, but some of us realize we don't have what it takes to get him(her) and so we settle for less." She was quite assertive on this point, but, at the same time, quite wrong. Yes, we might all be attracted to the same person(s) but relationships, in the Torah world, aren't supposed to be based solely on looks. Yaakov understood his brother and he knew what made him tick. Eisav didn't mind if Yaakov was wealthy; his only concern was that Yaakov shouldn't get anything in the material realm that was intended for him by their father. And so yes, Eisav's thinking was linear. Cattle and slaves didn't come from Abba's blessing and so Eisav wouldn't give them a thought. And we're all like that. This past week a frum Jew won the lottery. Many people wished him Mazel Tov online and they're sincere. We don't care if others succeed unless we think that they took it from us. And this is a major theme of the Torah. Today anti-Semitism is a reality that we must deal with. Paroah introduced the paradigm by telling his landmen that the Jews became rich and powerful "from them." And Avimelech's servants said the same thing about Yitzchak. And Lavan's sons repeated that mantra in last week's Parsha. Was it true? Of course not. But as Taylor Swift sang, "The haters gonna, hate, hate, hate." That Yaakov knew how to play the right cards in dealing with his venomous brother because he was able to think out of the box. Let me explain with a little help from George, the "silent Beatle." He had a beautiful song called "Within you and without you." It featured the line, "If you see beyond yourself then you will find peace of mind is waiting there." Yaakov's strategy was a stroke of genius, and he surely also had some serious Siyata Dishmaya, but at the root was his ability to look at Eisav from the latter's vantage point and not his own. So yes, that girl was wrong, but sadly most follow her gestalt and not Yaakov's. Can we emulate our Patriarch? As John wrote in "Imagine," it's easy if you try.

But now let's take a step back and recognize what this teaches us. Some years ago, I was at a certain shul for Parshas Vayishlach. The Rabbi wasn't there and someone went to the Bimah in his place. He quoted Gen 35:22 which says that Reuvein consorted with Yaakov's concubine. This fellow said, "Our Sages try to whitewash this incident, but everyone knows what really happened." No we don't. The Gemara in Shabbos tells us that Hashem's seal is Emes. All the practitioners of the Torah from Moshe Rabbeinu to the present are faithful to the principle of truth. Therefore, the Gemara is absolute truth. And the same for the Midrashim etc. But here's the catch. It's Hashem's truth not ours. What does that mean? When Paroah tried to convince his people that our ancestors got rich from the natives he was invoking the principle of "Zero Sum Game Theory." As Danny O'Keefe sang in 1967, "Some Gotta Win, Some Gotta Lose, Good Time Charlie's Got the Blues." But it's not true. The Gemara tells us that there will always be paupers, i.e. even in Yemos Hamoshiach. But that's not because it's the way of the world, rather it's because Hashem wants it to be so that Gevrim are given the opportunity for Zchusim. The Gemara in Bava Kamma tells us that man is a searcher. His quest is for truth, but again we must look for Hashem's truth. Can we find it? No, because our minds are limited, while Hashem is infinite, but as Robert Plant sang in Stairway to Heaven, "Here's some good news." We have two principles which function in a complimentary

manner. The first is Eilu Veilu Divrei Elokim. This means that Hashem can countenance multiple expressions of truth. As an example the Gemara teaches that the Halacha follows Bes Hillel, but by no means do we dismiss the views of Bes Shammai. But then there's the second concept, "Rachmana Liba Boi." "Hashem wants our heart." Joe Raposo wrote the classic, "Sing a Song." for Sesame Street in 1971. It became a big hit when the Carpenters covered it in 1973. It contains the line, "Don't worry that it's not good enough for anyone else to hear, just sing, sing a song." The Gemara in Chagigah teaches that Hashem judges us not only for our actions but also for our potential. When the Netziv was a child he was a poor student and his parents decided that he should be trained in some trade. He overheard them talking about this and put his nose to the grindstone. Many years later he looked back on his life and commented, "Had I gone the way my parents planned they would've held me accountable in Shamayim for not having written my Sefarim."

So yes we all must sing, that is, express the ideas that each of us derive from the Torah. Even if they won't be "accepted" in this world, Hashem will surely "shep" Nachas. But there's a critical caveat. It all starts with the truth, and to find the truth one must eliminate the biases which cloud our thinking. Let's explore this idea. Rene Descartes said that to find the truth one must have a Tabula Rasa, a blank slate. Does that mean that when one turns 13 he must expunge everything in his personal data base? Of course not. Chazal tell us that Yaakov was the greatest of the Avos, but that's a bit difficult to swallow given all that Avraham accomplished. But it makes sense. Avrohom started his career as an idolater so we'll say he was at level one of the 50 gates of wisdom. For argument's sake we'll say he made to level 40. Yitzchok then built on what his father gleaned and reached the 45th gate. Finally Yaakov got to the 49th echelon. So using one parameter, personal growth, Avraham outstripped his children, but in fact Yaakov ended up on the highest rung. The point is that we definitely must take advantage of what came before us, so what did Descartes mean? We can't be married to any idea. Rambam said that he developed a system for understanding the Torah but if it was shown to him to be flawed, he'd scrap it and start all over. Total honesty. Or as John wrote, "All I want is the truth now, just give me some truth now." Let me share a story which will bring this point across. Growing up, a highlight of the year was Thanksgiving. My uncle Norman would come to the Lower East Side in the morning and take my parents, sister and I, along with my Babbi and Zeide, he was exemplary in his Kibud Av Vaem, to his house in West Hempstead. One year, Norman gathered the family, which included his brother Willie and his wife Shirley and we were escorted to the back yard, He then said, "I have a confession to make, there was a pregnant pause and then the blockbuster, "I'm now a registered Republican." It was total silence. You could have heard the crickets. Are there crickets in West Hempstead? My father's eyes almost popped out of their sockets. This was unthinkable. For Jews in the 1940's, there was the following expression, "Siz du drei(three) velts(worlds) Der Velt(Olam Haze), De Nexte Velt(Olan Habo) un Roosevelt. And Norman was violating this axiom. We see, in retrospect, that he was ahead of the curve. Now, let's take this one step further. Dovid Hamelech wrote, "Al Tivtichu Binidivim," don't trust noblemen. Does that mean we shouldn't accept the words of Roman senators or their American counterparts? Highly unlikely. It means that one shouldn't trust Gedolei Hatorah. Before you judge me insane, oh you did that already, let me explain. I started with Rabbi Friedman in 1990. Shortly thereafter I befriended someone. One day, he offered me a ride but before I could find a seat he had to clear away a trove of Rabbi Miller tapes. I remarked, "I see you're a big fan." He responded, "I tell everyone that I don't need my brain, I just follow everything he says." That is so wrong. Even if Moshe Rabbeinu would tell you something, you must then verify it and make it your own truth. Next, we'll consider the Rabbi who "Paskened" with regard to Reuvein. He happens to be a very fine person, so I'll be Dan Lekaf Zchus. He works in Kiruv and so he likely said to himself that no college age kid will buy what our Sages are selling i.e. that Reuvein moved his father's bed. But truth isn't negotiable and we can't put our personal stamp on it. The Ramban, hey equal time for those giants, in the introduction to his work on the Pentateuch stated, "What I know about the Torah, as compared to what there is to know is like the egg of a gnat compared to the entire Universe. When we recognize how little we actually know we'll develop the humility needed to approach the subject and we'll never consider dismissing the words of our Sages.

Until now, we've been following the premise that people are looking for the truth but that's far from a given. John wrote, in Strawberry Fields, "Living is easy with eyes closed, misunderstanding all you see." The obvious question, "If ones eyes are closed, how can he see anything?" Dylan provides the answer, "We all see the same things, we just start out from a different point of view." In fact, we don't have blinders on, but because of our prejudices we see things as we choose to see them and not as they really are. As Sergeant Schultz said in the 60's comedy Hogan's Heroes, "I know nothing, I see nothing." That's really no different from my friend, the Rabbi Millerite, who, as John wrote in the psychedelic, "Tomorrow Never Knows," "Close off your mind, relax and float downstream." i.e. I let Rabbi Miller do my thinking for me and I cruise through life. Basically, this attitude is an offshoot of, "Where ignorance is bliss, tis folly to be wise." Obviously, I'm not a fan of this approach, but that's not to say that searching for truth is necessarily a panacea. The Torah tells us that no one can see Hashem and live. What does that mean? A lot of things, but among them is that Hashem is total, unadulterated truth and as Jack Nicholson said in the 1992 film, "A Few Good Men," "You Can't Handle the Truth." When our ancestors received the Ten Commandments at Sinai the first two were delivered by Hashem directly and the Midrash teaches that the people "died" from the experience. So there are limits as to how much truth we can absorb. It would seem that Rambam's famous postulate is called for, as the Pretenders sang, "Middle of the Road" the Golden Mean. If total truth is beyond our capacity, at least people must abstain from blatantly lying. Oh do I deal with that online. The Yetzer hora convinces people that anonymity means that Hashem isn't paying attention. As Keats put it, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty that is all and all you need to know." With writing like that I think he could've started a band.