

The Stranger Within by Rav Uri Etigson



Parshat Vayishlach tells of the frightening and fascinating confrontation between Yaakov and Esav. However, it raises many questions. Why did Yaakov send messengers to Esav in the first place? Yaakov was coming from the north, while Esav lived south of Eretz Canaan. Yaakov could have easily returned home without involving Esav at all. Why did Yaakov want this dangerous confrontation with Esav?

Clearly, Yaakov must have believed that Esav had already forgiven him, and he was hoping for a meeting of complete reconciliation with his brother. However, when Yaakov realizes that this is not the case, but rather that Esav is approaching him with an army, he begins to panic. He splits his camp in two in preparation for war, he frantically prays for divine mercy, and he tries to send his brother a gift of appeasement. Then in the middle of the night, all of a sudden we find Yaakov crossing the Yabok river with his entire family. He is not crossing over a bridge, he is fording the river, wading through water perhaps waist or neck high on treacherous, slippery rocks. Why is he endangering the lives of his family by crossing a river in the middle of the night with his wives and young children?

The answer must be that he is not crossing towards Esav, rather, he must be fleeing in a panic. Perhaps, Yaakov awoke in the middle of the night in a cold sweat and realized that come dawn Esav would be upon him and he would have no way of protecting his helpless family. Yaakov feared the worst and under the tremendous pressure he reverted to the tactic which he knew best, avoiding conflict at all costs. He had tricked his brother out of the Bechorah, then snuck behind his brother's back to get his father's blessing, and then fled home without saying a word to Esav. Throughout the years of Lavan trying to trick him, he never confronted Lavan; he just tried to

outsmart Lavan behind his back. Finally, when it came time to leave, he also snuck out without saying anything to Lavan. Ya'akov was an expert at showing his Akev – his heels; he was an expert at turning and running away from frightening situations. And now in his moment of truth, once again, Yaakov could think of nothing other than running away from Esav, even if it meant crossing the river in the middle of the night.

"And Yaakov was left all alone and a man struggled with him until dawn." Who was this nameless, faceless nocturnal stranger? And what were they fighting about?

Yaakov was all alone with himself. For the first time in his life instead of allowing the currents of life to push him in the direction of least resistance, he decided to turn and face himself. He was struggling with his own inner fears all night long, "Should I flee? Or should I stand to face Esav?" As he struggled, he became aware of his greatest weakness, his Gid HaNasheh, the point on the back of his leg which he usually used in order to flee and to retreat in submission to others. He felt the pain and the shame of almost giving in to his fears and fleeing once again. Yet, he stood his ground and struggled all night long. Thus, he was renamed "Yisrael" – 'the one who will struggle with powerful forces' – for he had been willing to confront the most powerful force – his own inner fears. Finally, as dawn broke, he overcame his fear and decided to stand to confront Esav. Hence, Yaakov named this spot "Pni'el" – "the face of god" – for he had faced his powerful inner forces of fear and overcome.

One more question remains. If Yaakov has now become Yisrael – the one who can struggle with the most powerful forces and overcome, then why doesn't he courageously turn to confront the evil Esav with a sword and vanquish him and the forces of evil, once and for all, in fulfillment of his mother's prophesy, and his father's blessing?

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Rather, he prostrates himself to Esav, and calls him "my master". It seems that Yaakov is right back to his old ways of avoidance. He has accomplished nothing.

On the contrary, Yaakov knows that the greatest victory possible in this situation would not be to destroy Esav, but rather to repair and restore his brotherly love, and to transform Esav back into his brother. Yaakov teaches us that the greatest victory over our enemies is to transform them into our lovers and allies. Similarly with the forces of evil and darkness in the world our greatest accomplishment is to take their power and transform them into light. Most importantly with the "stranger within us" – our own dark-side and negative traits – we must learn to harness their power and to use their potential for good.

Yet, Yaakov knows that in order to accomplish this transformation, he must sincerely believe in Esav and search for the G-dliness in him. Yaakov truly wants to find favour in his brother's eyes, but this must be mutual in order to be authentic. Thus, Yaakov says to Esav, "seeing your face is like seeing the face of G-d." Yaakov searches for the G-dliness in Esav. Perhaps, what he finds is that Esav has natural strength and confidence, which Yaakov sincerely admires because it is so opposite to his own natural disposition. Yaakov realizes that Esav truly has the potential to express the courage and power (Gevurah) of G-d in the world in a holy way. This characteristic is what he sincerely praises about Esav, his potential for holy strength. And Esav, at least for a moment, feels the admiration and love and gets in touch with his inner spark of holiness, and he is truly touched and moved to tears. Esav will not become our servant through force, but only once he sees the greatness and holiness of his brother Yaakov will he choose to willingly subordinate his power to the inner strength and holiness of Yisrael.

We are all the proud inheritors of the name Yisrael. We each have our own unique inner fears and barriers. Yet our heritage is a proud one of taking on the challenge of the inner struggle. Yisrael our father implanted within us the power to face our inner dark-side and to struggle with it. Ultimately Yaakov showed us the way to not only overcome our fears, but to take our very dark-side, and to harness it, elevate it, and transform it into the service of G-d. May we all merit to rise to this challenge, within ourselves, in our relationships, and as a nation!

Each one of us is given specific, unique, beautiful brachot by Hashem that pertain exclusively to who we are now and who we are going to become. These brachas can manifest themselves in character traits, experiences, surroundings, and challenges; sometimes clearly identifiable and sometimes hidden deep behind a mask.

Our forefathers were given three separate brachas, all of which concerned them at an individual level. However these brachas were not restricted to just our Avot, they are a message from Hashem to the entire Jewish nation.

In the merit of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, we learn as a nation that we should be as plentiful as the stars of the heavens (Bereishit 26:4), the sand of the seashore (Bereishit 22:17), and the dust of the earth (Bereishit 28:14). Netivot Shalom says that one of the many things that these brachot represent are three separate levels within our nation.

Stars are massive luminous balls of plasma held together by their own gravity, billions of miles away always remaining bright. These stars represent our Tzadikim who serve Hashem at high levels. Each star is a separate entity with intense light emanating from it independently, and one star does not need another stars light in order to glow. Like our Tzadik's who have tremendous greatness but unique ideals and viewpoints, stars hold themselves up unaided. It is hard to push all our stars together into one unit because each light is so great and perfect for the place that it radiates. Just like the clear brilliance of the star is seen, so too the holiness of Hashem can be found within these role models whose essence is doing His will.

Sand has an unbelievable ability to stop the waves that threaten to flood all creation. Without the barrier and protection of the sands, the powerful waters have the potential to destroy anything in its path. Each grain of sand on its own can accomplish nothing and will be swept away by the strength of the upsurge. However, when the grains are united, they have the potential to accomplish greatness, encompassing supreme strength, protecting all creation against the waves of the seas. Likewise Am Israel is the sands; each individual is a grain that completes the seashore. Unified, our power protects us against the destructive forces of our enemy, but alone, we will float away.

Unity is one level but there exists a stronger level, and that is to be the dust of the earth. Though sand may stand as one, it cannot weld together like the dust of the earth that sticks like glue. The dirt fuses together for salvation and only when stuck together can anything grow, and anything that exists is because of the growth of that dirt. All salvation sprouts from this ground, but only if it has mastered its togetherness can this happen. The Jewish people are the dust of the earth bringing spirituality to the world and revealing Hashem in everything. The salvation is being an Ohr la Goyim and showing through our actions that Hashem Echad.

Through the merit of our Avot, may we all strive to reach the achievements of our role models, the stars in the heavens, work towards a unified people like the sands of the seashore, and struggle to feel the pain of Am Israel like our own by sticking like the dust of the earth.



Chanukah by *Layah Rosenzweig, Shana Bet*



Where were you last Chanukah? Were you with your parents? Were you on Machon Maayan's Eilat tiyul? Did you light with candles or with oil? Where you stressed out about college applications? Were you happy with your life? What were your struggles and goals then? Who were your close friends?

Where are you now? Where are you this Chanukah? Think about your friends that you have made this past year. Isn't it strange how a year ago you didn't know them, and now you can't imagine life without them? After spending a year in Israel, and now being back overseas, how has your outlook on life changed since last Chanukah? Do you see things in a different light? Are you more content with the way your life is going? Are you happy with the choices that you have made?

Chanukah is a time of thanks, for the light that has been given to you; it's a time of realizing the blessings that have been given to you, when you would not normally think about it. You just thought about where you were last year, now imagine where you will be a year from now, and how much G-d plays a role in getting you from one place to the next.

I can tell you that last Chanukah, I did not see the same light I see now. I didn't see Hashem's light and kindness in the events of my life. I also didn't appreciate Machon Maayan the way that I do now. Now I'm sure that you all do understand just how much the staff at this school cares about every one of you. If this is the time of thanks, I need to thank the staff at Machon Maayan. I can't even begin to tell you how much they have helped me. Whether it's helping me find a job, giving a good word to my family in America, or just being there when I needed someone to talk to, they have always been there for me in more ways than I can possibly express. Their support is what has allowed me to change and grow in the way and at the pace that I need. When they could have lost hope in me, they didn't. They saw my potential even when I couldn't see it myself. My blessing to you all is that you see how much is being given to you. And by next Chanukah you should be able to look back and realize how much you have grown. I also just want to thank G-d for guiding me to the path that I'm on now, and helping me see His light in the process. I hope and pray that you can all get to see that light throughout your lives.

WHERE IS SHE NOW? ALUMNA OF THE MONTH:

DALIA MILLER

'06-'07



Where are you these days and what are you studying?

I just finished my first semester of sophomore year at Goucher College in Towson, Maryland. It's been pretty exciting because I just declared my major in international relations and my minor in studio art, so I've started taking classes which have been truly challenging and engaging. I'm hoping that my major will give me the tools to become a more well informed and confident advocate for Israel - something that is greatly needed on college campuses. I'm also involved at the Hillel at Goucher and it's been pretty fulfilling to take to leadership skills that I gained from Machon Maayan and put them to good use helping create exciting religious and cultural Jewish programming on campus. I'm definitely enjoying my college experience but it has also definitely been a challenge being in an environment where there are only a handful of Orthodox Jews.

What do you miss most about Machon Maayan? Honestly, what don't I miss about Israel and Machon Maayan? I guess if I had to attempt this question the first things that come to mind are, being inspired daily by my teachers, rabbis and friends to expand my horizons and become a person well versed in my Judaism. Also, I'll always miss the view of the hills of Beit Shemesh from the windows in the Beit Midrash - there's nothing that can compare to that in America.

Any words of wisdom for this year's Shana Alef? Be open to the change that will come to you during your year. Allow yourself to engage in different concepts and ways of thinking that you may never have thought suited you before. You'll be amazed by how much you have learned grown by the end of your nine month journey. Most of all, have fun and get to know the AMAZING land that you're living in!

When do you plan on coming back to Israel? To put it plainly, Israel is always in my thoughts and I can't wait until I have the opportunity to return.

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From the Desk of Kaley M. Ames, '06-'07

To my dearest fellow alumni,

I was both honored and flustered to receive Leah's email asking me to write for this month's newsletter. What could I possibly write that would be both witty and inspiring? Encouraging and intellectual? Pushing the thought to the back of my mind did the trick of calming me down for oh, about a week. Then I smartened up and realized that hey! I went to Machon Maayan for a year and a half, and I had everything I needed to write a stellar dvar Torah. So here it goes.

I recently realized that I am basically study Hellenism, and I want to make it my living. Classical studies, my major, is the study of secular philosophy (or in other words, the pursuit of atheism), combined with ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Babylonian and Mesopotamian mythology (or in other words, the study of avodah zarah), and ancient literature (or in other words, the exact opposite of the torah). Shocking right? The seduction and appeal of classical studies was confusing at first. No doubt I had been interested in the ancient world since I was a kid, but I never actually thought I would consider pursuing the study for my undergraduate degree, and even toying with the idea of getting my PhD. Don't get me wrong, I got a lot of flack from people, "nice Jewish girls don't read about Zeus and Aphrodite!" or "we beat out both the Greeks and the Romans, what could you possibly need to know?" It was definitely confusing, trying to mesh my passion for classical studies, and my life as a Jew.

As we all know, we are entering into one of the most fascinating holidays in all of Judaism. One of the most highly anticipated times of the year for toy manufacturers, Chanuka has been transformed into and "ish" holiday. Jews

that range from Observant to Jew"ish" celebrate the festival of lights with excitement. It is a holiday that yet again divides the Jewish people, but more in a subconscious than a conscious way. There are those who light their candles with fervor and thanks to the Almighty for raising His people yet again over the nations, and exemplifying that we are the true light and example for the other peoples of the world. That G-d is forever giving us miracles and re-birth. And then, there are those who light the candles because they identify more with a menorah slightly more than a Christmas tree, and they remember that there was enough oil to last eight days. So we are posed with the classic question, how do we rectify that we live in a modern world surrounded by the goodness that Hashem offers us, and not get completely sucked in to the point where we forget the cruxes of our heritage?

The great Rabbi Wexler once told me that it is the ability of a first rate mind to hold two opposing ideas at once. Out of everything he taught me, it is a sentence that I carry with me everyday (sorry Rav Wexler, there are too many notes from your class to carry them all around! One sentence has to do). But what does this mean? In practical application, it means that a first rate mind should be able to study other religions and cultures, and to be a Torah abiding, G-d fearing Jew. That one should be able to immerse themselves in the goodness of the modern world, of technology and modern literature, theater, music and culture, and yet never waver from the understanding that it is ultimately G-d who has given us this world of modernity to satisfy our religion and to ultimately make our Torah lives richer, and better. This is what Chanuka is all about (you were wondering when I was going to get there right?!)

No lies, I have studied the story of Chanuka from a purely academic setting and the Greeks were done it to every nation, trying to impose their cultural darkness onto other

nations and to take them over in an ancient pseudo-Nazi sort of way. It was a battle of light and darkness in the most classic sense and light triumphed. And now, in our modern times, it is a constant struggle to maintain our Judaism within the greater context of the ever growing technological world. Should we be like the Chareidim, who reject any type of modernity in fear? That is clearly not what G-d wants for us. Should we be Jew"ish", picking and choosing what works for our lifestyle? Clearly not. Many have recognized the goodness that comes with modern culture, that we can be Torah abiding Jews in a modern world and enjoy every aspect of this forever expanding technological world. Yet, at the end of the day, we return to the never ceasing wonder that this world is G-d's gift, and we are meant to live in it the way He intended for us. Judaism is a struggle, a fight. It is a ripe goodness that isn't meant to be easy, or we would take it all too for granted. When you feel the fight, that is precisely the moment to engage, to examine, to wonder, and to struggle. It is your neshamah grasping at the truth and begging you to hold on for dear life.

I wish you all a meaningful Chanukah wherever you are living!

If for some reason I haven't expanded on a thought you are more interested in, or you just want to say hi please contact me! Facebook, phone, e-mail, whatever! Remember, you all posses incredible feats of Jewish strength that has been dormant in many jews for centuries, work out your Jewish muscles and be a true or' l'goyim, a light unto the nations in a time filled with darkness.

I love you all.

Chag Sameach.

Kaley M. Ames

