

Vayishlach

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Which was the real fight, the one with the “stranger” the night before, or with Eisav the next day? Clearly the one with the stranger since the confrontation with Eisav lasted very little time, was only a short conversation, and Ya’akov was on his way in peace in no time. He struggled with the stranger the *entire* night, and walked away limping.

Why were there two fights in the first place? Who was this stranger, why was he so violent, and what right did he have to change Ya’akov’s name, or least prophesy that it would later be changed? But we already know the answer to those questions, don’t we, after *Rasbi* explained it all. The stranger was none other than Eisav’s ministering angel who had come to admit the blessings belonged to Ya’akov and not to Eisav, and that his name would be changed because he “fought with an angel and with men, and prevailed.”

That makes the name *Yisroel* a warrior name, doesn’t it? Yes, but not in the classical sense of the term, evident by how the angel put himself first before Eisav, Lavan, and Shechem. The way the angel phrased it, he said, “You not only fought with an angel and won, but you also fought with bad guys too, and yet you still prevailed! That makes you *Yisroel!*”

But is it really easier to fight with an angel of God than with human beings? Perhaps not *physically*, but *spiritually*? For sure, if victory is defined in terms of spiritual success, not physical achievement. It’s not hard to remember that an angel works for God and has no power of its own. It is easy to forget that human beings also work for God, since they have free will and tend to get away with things we would have thought God would have stopped.

For example, we have little problem calling the *Sitra Achra*, despite all the evil he has caused, an agent of God. It is not so easy however to also call Hitler, *et al*, *ysv”z*, agents of God. We tend to look at the evil they do as their own, things that God

Himself does not support, and for which they will later be punished but good. . . even though in the back of our mind a little voice might be saying, “a person doesn’t even hurt their finger if it is not first decreed in Heaven” (*Chullin* 7b).

How much more so when what happens it is so much worse.

I recently saw in a *sefer* based upon the teachings of the *Mussar* giant, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *zt”l*, that when the Torah says, that God placed before us blessing and curse for us to choose one of them, it really means that a Jew can never except mediocrity. Either choose blessing, which means excelling spiritually, or curse, which means failing miserably. We may try to find some kind of balance between the two, but it doesn’t really work because it is not meant to work, at least for a Jew.

A large part of how far a person is willing to go to be their spiritual best or, *God forbid*, the opposite, depends on how spiritually astute they are at seeing God in everything and behind all that happens. Walking with God doesn’t just mean getting everything right. It means literally walking with God by never losing touch with the reality of God everywhere you go, no matter how distracting events can be, and how convincing people are that they act independent of God.

It’s a struggle. When Avraham had to deal with the Hittites, and especially with Ephron, he had to deal with them as people while never forgetting that God was using them to do His will, not their will. When Yitzchak was confronted by Avimelech, he had to act as if Avimelech was his own man, while never losing sight of the fact that he too worked for God. The same was true of Ya’akov with Eisav and Lavan, and especially with Shechem who even violated Ya’akov’s own daughter. It’s hard to see God behind all of that.

And when Moshe couldn’t quite do it with Pharaoh, questioning God about His management of the redemption process, God berated him saying:

“It’s too bad about the ones who are lost and can no longer to be found. Many times I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov as *El Shaddai*, and they never questioned Me, nor did they ask, ‘*What is Your Name?*’ I told Avraham, ‘*Arise, and walk the length and width of the land that I am giving to you.*’ (*Bereishis* 13:17). Yet when he wanted a place to bury Sarah, he couldn’t find anything until he purchased land for 400 *shekels!*” (*Sanbedrin* 111a)

We don’t need to ask how Moshe took the criticism. His personal greatness and life accomplishments tell the story on their own. He was no longer fooled by the people of this world, or the events of history. He saw God at all times, and recognized every challenge as an opportunity to be even greater than he already was, bringing him fulfillment in this world and a heck of a large portion in the next world.

That's what it means to be part of the Jewish people. That is what it means to be a Yisroel. It's not about fighting against others, but about using those "fights" and struggles that do come as stepping stones to even greater personal greatness, and an awesome portion in the World to Come. It's not just about being a different people, but about living on a different, higher spiritual track in life.

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