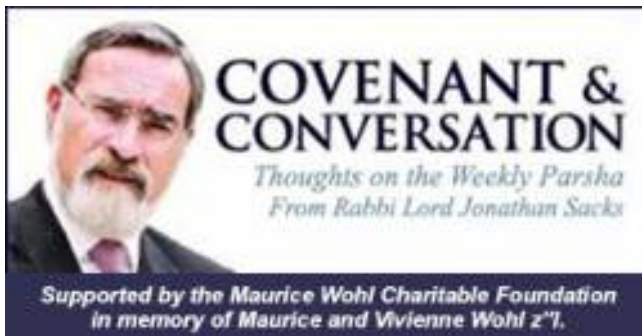


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Be Thyself

I have often argued that the episode in which the Jewish people acquired its name – when Jacob wrestled with an unnamed adversary at night and received the name Israel – is essential to an understanding of what it is to be a Jew. I argue here that this episode is equally critical to understanding what it is to lead.

There are several theories as to the identity of “the man” who wrestled with the patriarch that night. The Torah calls him a man. The prophet Hosea called him an angel (Hosea 12:4-5). The Sages said it was Samael, guardian angel of Esau

and a force for evil.¹ Jacob himself was certain it was God. “Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (Gen. 32:31).

My suggestion is that we can only understand the passage by reviewing the entirety of Jacob’s life. Jacob was born holding on to Esau’s heel. He bought Esau’s birthright. He stole Esau’s blessing. When his blind father asked him who he was, he replied, “I am Esau, your firstborn.” (Gen. 27:19) Jacob was the child who wanted to be Esau.

Why? Because Esau was the elder. Because Esau was strong, physically mature, a hunter. Above all, Esau was his father’s favourite: “Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob” (Gen. 25:28). Jacob is the paradigm of what the French literary theorist and anthropologist Rene Girard called *mimetic desire*, meaning, we want what someone else wants, because we want to *be* that someone else.² The result is tension between Jacob and Esau. This tension rises to an unbearable intensity when Esau discovers that the blessing his father had reserved for him has been acquired by Jacob, and so Esau vows to kill his brother once Isaac is no longer alive.

Jacob flees to his uncle Laban’s home, where he encounters more conflict; he is on his way home when he hears that Esau is coming to meet him with a force of four hundred men. In an unusually strong description of emotion the Torah tells us that Jacob was “very frightened and distressed” (Gen. 32:7) – frightened, no doubt, that Esau was

coming to kill him, and perhaps distressed that his brother's animosity was not without cause.

Jacob had indeed wronged his brother, as we saw earlier. Isaac says to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." (Gen. 27:35) Centuries later, the prophet Hosea says, "The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God." (Hos. 12:3-4) Jeremiah uses the name Jacob to mean someone who practises deception: "Beware of your friends; do not trust anyone in your clan; for every one of them is a deceiver [*akov Yaakov*], and every friend a slanderer" (Jer. 9:3).

As long as Jacob sought to be Esau there was tension, conflict, rivalry. Esau felt cheated; Jacob felt fear. That night, about to meet Esau again after an absence of twenty-two years, Jacob wrestles with himself; finally he throws off the image of Esau, the person he wants to be, which he has carried with him all these years. This is the critical moment in Jacob's life. From now on, he is content to be himself. And it is only when we stop wanting to be someone else (in Shakespeare's words, "desiring this man's art, and that man's scope, with what I most enjoy contented least"³) that we can be at peace with ourselves and with the world.

This is one of the great challenges of leadership. It is all too easy for a leader to pursue popularity by being what people want him or her to be – a liberal to liberals, a conservative to conservatives, taking decisions that win temporary acclaim

rather than flowing from principle and conviction. Presidential adviser David Gergen once wrote about Bill Clinton that he "isn't exactly sure who he is yet and tries to define himself by how well others like him. That leads him into all sorts of contradictions, and the view by others that he seems a constant mixture of strengths and weaknesses."⁴

Leaders sometimes try to "hold the team together" by saying different things to different people, but eventually these contradictions become clear – especially in the total transparency that modern media impose – and the result is that the leader appears to lack integrity. People will no longer trust their remarks. There is a loss of confidence and authority that may take a long time to restore. The leader may find that their position has become untenable and may be forced to resign. Few things make a leader more unpopular than the pursuit of popularity.

Great leaders have the courage to live with unpopularity. Abraham Lincoln was reviled and ridiculed during his lifetime. In 1864 the *New York Times* wrote of him: "He has been denounced without end as a perjurer, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler over the last agonies of an expiring nation."⁵ Winston Churchill, until he became Prime Minister during the Second World War, had been written off as a failure. And soon after the war ended, he was defeated in the 1945 General Election. He himself said that "Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." John F. Kennedy and

Martin Luther King were assassinated. When Margaret Thatcher died, some people celebrated in the streets.

Jacob was not a leader; there was as yet no nation for him to lead. Yet the Torah goes to great lengths to give us an insight into his struggle for identity, because it was not his alone. Most of us have experienced this struggle. (The word *avot* used to describe Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, means not only “fathers, patriarchs” but also “archetypes”). It is not easy to overcome the desire to be someone else, to want what they have, to be what they are. Most of us have such feelings from time to time. Girard argues that this has been the main source of conflict throughout history. It can take a lifetime of wrestling before we know who we are and relinquish the desire to be who we are not.

More than anyone else in Genesis, Jacob is surrounded by conflict: not just between himself and Esau, but between himself and Laban, between Rachel and Leah, and between his sons, Joseph and his brothers. It is as if the Torah were telling us that so long as there is a conflict *within* us, there will be a conflict *around* us. We have to resolve the tension in ourselves before we can do so for others. We have to be at peace with ourself before we can be at peace with the world.

That is what happens in this week’s parsha. After his wrestling match with the stranger, Jacob undergoes a change of personality, a transformation. He gives back to Esau the blessing he took from him. The previous day he had given him back the material blessing by sending him hundreds of goats, ewes, rams,

camels, cows, bulls and donkeys. Now he gives him back the blessing that said, “Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.” (Gen. 27:29) Jacob bows down seven times to Esau. He calls Esau “my lord,” (33:8) and refers to himself as “your servant.” (33:5) He actually uses the word “blessing”, though this fact is often obscured in translation. He says, “Please take my blessing that has been brought to you.” (33:11) The result is that the two brothers meet and part in peace.

People conflict. They have different interests, passions, desires, temperaments. Even if they did not, they would still conflict, as every parent knows. Children – and not just children – seek attention, and one cannot attend to everyone equally all the time. Managing the conflicts that affect every human group is the work of the leader – and if the leader is not sure of and confident in their identity, the conflicts will persist. Even if the leader sees themselves as a peacemaker, the conflicts will still endure.

The only answer is to “know thyself.” We must wrestle with ourselves, as Jacob did on that fateful night, throwing off the person we persistently compare ourselves to, accepting that some people will like us and what we stand for while others will not, understanding that it is better to seek the respect of some than the popularity of all. This may involve a lifetime of struggle, but the outcome is an immense strength. No one is stronger than one who knows who and what they are.

Shabbat Shalom

QUESTIONS (AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE)

1. How did Jacob find his inner strength and finally resolve the conflict with his brother?
2. What can you learn about leadership from the fact that we are called the Children of Israel?
3. Does Rabbi Sacks' theory unite all the other theories mentioned about who wrestled with Jacob that night?

NOTES

1. Bereishit Rabbah, 77; Rashi to Genesis 32:35; Zohar I, Vayishlach, 170a.
2. Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Athlone Press, 1988.
3. Shakespeare, "Sonnet 29".
4. David Gergen, *Eyewitness to Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 328.
5. John Kane, *The Politics of Moral Capital*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, 71.



Esav and His Henchmen

On his way back to the land of Israel, Yaakov is gripped with fear. Someone is waiting for him and plotting his murder. Years ago, his brother Esav swore that he would kill him, but Yaakov had escaped. Throughout his years in exile, Yaakov had heard nothing from Esav. Now, as Yaakov makes his way back to the land of Israel, Esav -

who, it would seem, had been preparing for Yaakov's return and had intelligence-gathering scouts stationed along the border - makes his way to the showdown, accompanied by four hundred mercenaries.

The Land of Israel is apparently the crux of the issue. So long as Yaakov remained in exile, Esav was prepared to tolerate the situation; Yaakov's intention to settle in his land is not something Esav was willing to accept. In fact, generations later, this same dynamic repeats itself: When the exile of Yaakov's descendants in Egypt comes to an end and they begin their trek toward the Land of Israel, Esav's descendants, the Amalekites, attack them in an effort to halt their progress toward the Promised Land.

Rabbi Soloveitchik once commented that anti-Semites have a finely tuned radar for holiness. If you want to know what is holy, simply gauge what anti-Semites find most disturbing; circumcision, ritual slaughter, and Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel are all modern-day examples.

So long as Yaakov was far away from the Land of Israel, Esav was calm. Now, with Yaakov's return, confrontation becomes inevitable, and imminent.

The text of Parashat Vayishlach describes Yaakov's preparations for this confrontation in detail, but it also describes Esav's preparations - and the description should give us pause. At first glance the number of henchmen Esav enlists seems to be a completely random number, devoid of any significance beyond the impressive show of strength it is meant to convey. However, either

on a conscious or subconscious level, this number may contain a deeper message.

When God promised the Land of Israel to Avraham, a "price tag" was attached: **Four hundred** years of slavery would have to be endured as "payment" for the rights to the land. [1]reover, when Avraham made the very first acquisition of property rights in the Land of Israel, he paid precisely **four hundred** silver shekels for the family burial plot in Hebron.[2] other words, the number four hundred is inextricably connected to the Land of Israel.

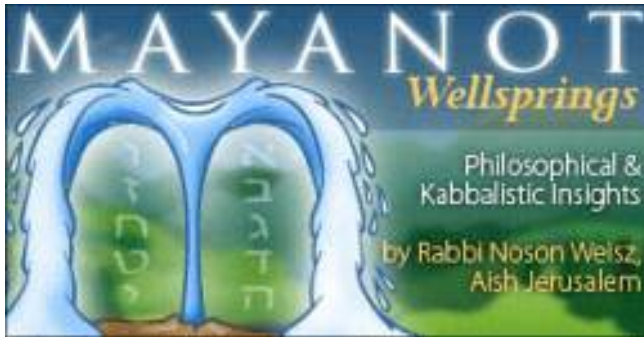
By all indications, Esav planned to kill Yaakov and re-stake his own claim to the land, but something happened that set his plan awry. According to one Midrash, as soon as the four hundred mercenaries saw Yaakov face-to-face, they abandoned their mission. Apparently, it wasn't Yaakov's mere physical strength that put them off; they were, after all, well-trained ruthless warriors. What they feared was Yaakov's holiness. As they approached their target, they saw Yisrael - a man who wrestled with, and vanquished, an angel. These brutes knew how to fight, but they did not know how to defeat an adversary such as this. In the words of the midrash, Esav's hired guns were afraid that Yaakov's fiery countenance would burn them alive.[3]

According to a second midrash, a similar thing had happened years earlier. Noting that the angels Yaakov observed in his vision were ascending and descending the ladder, the midrash points out an anomaly in the text: We would have thought that angels - heavenly beings, after all, would first descend to earth, and then return from whence

they came. However, the midrash explains, the angels had already come down to earth to see the face of the holy man of whom they had heard, the man whose likeness was engraved on the very Throne of God. The angels stood over Yaakov as he slept on the ground; they ascended the ladder to look at the Divine Throne, and then descended, once again, to compare the celestial image to the face of Yaakov.[4]

Both angels and thugs immediately discerned the holiness of Yaakov; apparently, Esav saw it as well - and when he did, he abandoned any thought of claiming the holy Land of Israel for himself. He made his peace with his brother because it was obvious to Esav that he was "out of his league," and without further delay took off, just as his four hundred henchmen had done. It was clear to them all that the Holy Land was destined for this holy man and his descendants, the Children of Yaakov/Yisrael.

1. Bereishit 15:13.
2. Bereishit 23:15.
3. Bereishit Rabbah 78:15.
4. Bereishit Rabbah 68:12.



Nothing Personal

Jacob became very frightened and it distressed him. (Genesis 32:8)

All the commentators are bothered by an obvious question. God had promised Jacob protection twice, once on leaving his father's house, and once on leaving Laban's house. Armed with such express promises of protection, why was Jacob frightened of Esau?

Rashi (*ibid.*, 11) explains that Jacob was afraid that these promises had lapsed because of his mistakes. But there is another problem that needs to be addressed.

The question we must ask is: Doesn't God control what happens in the world? Why does it follow, that once he is bereft of the shelter provided by God's express promise of Divine protection, Jacob is automatically exposed to the dread of being murdered by Esau? Surely, neither Jacob nor the members of his household had committed any great crimes. It is difficult to imagine that Jacob was afraid that his wives or his children deserved to be murdered. So why was he afraid? Does evil happen at random in the world?

In fact this question is perhaps the most difficult of all the obstacles facing the potential believer. How can he think of worshipping a God that allows the indiscriminate slaughter of his own children? Didn't Abraham himself cry out in anguish when God informed him of the imminent destruction of Sodom:

It would be sacrilege even to ascribe such an act to You -- to kill the innocent with the guilty, letting the righteous and the wicked fare alike. It would be sacrilege to ascribe this to You! Shall the whole world's judge not act justly? (Genesis 18:23)

APPARENT SACRILEGE

And yet, this apparent sacrilege is a recurring fact in the real world, where the innocent are slaughtered more often than the guilty and in much greater numbers. Moreover, the Torah itself seems to state that this is Divine policy.

Rabbi Yosef taught: "We find written, *Not a single one of you may go out the door of his house till morning (Exodus 12:22)*. Once the Destroyer has been given permission to circulate he does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked; even more, he begins his dirty work by destroying the righteous first." Rabbi Yosef cried at his own teaching, "Are good men of so little value that they count for nothing at all?" Abaye told him, "On the contrary, this is a benefit conferred on the righteous" [this way they don't have to witness the destruction as they are taken first] as it is written, *because of the impending evil the*

righteous one was gathered in.
(Isaiah, 57) (Talmud, Baba Kama 60a)

How can we understand this?

To answer this question we must first answer another question. Where does the evil in the world come from?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto in his work Derech Hashem (Sec. 1, Ch. 5) offers the following explanation. Since the creation, God is only associated with the performance of good. Even when God sits in judgment it is only for good. His punishments are never vindictive. They are never allowed to slip out of His control. Retribution is always doled out by God "measure for measure" and its purpose is invariably therapeutic. This is not evil. It may be painful at times, but it is still good.

In contrast, evil is destruction for its own sake. The purpose of its destruction is never therapeutic and it is free of the restraints of proportionality. It takes the innocent along with the wicked and destroys everything in its path. God never engages in evil.

EVIL OPTIONS

Nevertheless, the evil in the world was also created by God. In fact, God created this evil even before He created the world as described in Genesis 1. Without evil there are no options in the universe other than various forms of good. In such a world the possibility of free choice is non-existent. The free will power possessed by man is totally irrelevant if he has no options from which to choose. If man was to be allowed to exercise

free will, the existence of evil in the world in some form was an absolute imperative.

So God created evil. Even so He did not create it as an actuality. He set it up in the form of potential energy that is capable of transforming itself into kinetic energy only if given the opportunity. God created it in this fashion because He did not want to be associated with it. In fact, He is only to be associated with the Attribute(s) of Good because it is only good that He directs. The evil was designed in such a way that it runs on automatic drive without God ever needing to associate with it at all. The system God set up operates in the following manner.

Evil is akin to darkness while good parallels light. The relationship between good and evil is congruent to the one that governs the interaction between light and darkness. This means that a little bit of light has the capacity to banish a great deal of darkness. Similarly as long as the world is filled with the light of good, the darkness of evil is totally suppressed and exists only as a potential. It is only when people take free will decisions to turn out the light of the good that the darkness of evil is able to expand.

The Torah sums up the six days of creation with the following statement:

*And God saw all that He had made
and behold it was very good (Genesis
1:31)*

FULL OF LIGHT

Thus, when God handed man the world, man acquired a world full of light. The darkness was squeezed down to its smallest possible

expression. Had Adam followed God's command and avoided eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the evil and the darkness in the world would have been stamped out altogether.

When man ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he, not God, actualized the potential darkness of evil. He gave it expression in himself and in the world. He went from being totally good -- "an image of God" -- to being a mixture of good and evil.

To bring this down to earth let us examine some of our own attributes -- such as the phenomenon of rage.

A person walks in to his house unexpectedly and finds his wife having relations with another man. He flies in to a jealous rage and in the heat of passion murders them both. In the criminal record of all legal jurisdictions various versions of this crime appear countless times. Most jurisdictions are inclined to leniency toward this type of murderer. In fact, the "temporary insanity" defense has been argued successfully more than once in these situations and some of these murderers have walked out of the courtroom free men.

When you ask such murderers if what they did still makes sense to them in retrospect, they will often be the first to agree that their actions were totally contrary to reason. (After all, wives are not possessions and husbands do not have the right to take a life just because their feelings were injured and they felt betrayed.) The retribution was out of all proportion to the crime. It was not reason that prompted them to commit murder, but rage -- an urge that demanded them to destroy at any cost.

This urge to destroy that slips out of the control of reason is the quintessence of evil. Yet we do not recoil in horror and disgust at the news of such murderers, because, although we have never killed, most of us have struggled with the same type of rage and lost.

ACTS OF DESTRUCTION

How many of us can claim that we have never vented the inner rage and frustration brought on by life's many inevitable disappointments by directing wounding remarks at our spouses or children with the sole intent of hurting them as deeply as possible. Destroying someone's mood or his day is obviously not to be compared with the taking of a life, but it is also an example of engaging in destruction for its own sake. This type of behavior is also an expression of rage that has slipped free of the control of reason and, as such, it is also evil. The difference between ourselves and the murderers is a difference in degree, not a difference in kind. The evil of destructive rage is alive and well in all of us.

The tale of Romeo and Juliet is another example of evil that we are ready to condone. Frustrated by their families' reluctance to agree to their union, two young people take their lives. If my wish for romantic gratification cannot be immediately satisfied, I will destroy both the object of my desire and myself. This phenomenon is again quite widespread in our society in less extreme form. In search of the gratification provided by fresh romantic/sexual experience, seemingly responsible people regularly cause the breakup of families, inflicting irreparable psychological

damage on their children, their spouses and themselves.

Once again reason rejects this sort of behavior. The satisfaction of my own romantic/sexual craving does not entitle me to destroy any one else's mental health or happiness or even my own. This is another example of evil that we are all capable of.

This leads directly to the contemplation of the greatest evil that is in all of us, the evil impulse that renders all these other evils possible, our capacity to regard ourselves as the center of the universe. It is only this perception that enables us to perceive the satisfaction of our own selfish desires as being of such paramount importance that it even justifies the destruction of others. In a world run by God and created for a purpose, such an attitude is patently absurd.

These three aspects of the evil that is part of the makeup of all human beings since Adam's fall provides the background to the three cardinal sins -- idolatry, murder, and illicit sexual acts (such as rape or incest). Rather than commit any of these sins Jews are commanded to give up their lives. The extent of the surrender to the evil impulse involved in the commission of these sins turns man from a being -- who even despite his fall is still a mixture of good and evil -- into a being that is purely evil, at least for the duration of the commission the act. Reason demands that a state in which one becomes the repository of pure evil must be avoided at all costs. Life cannot be preserved at the price of engaging in destruction for its own sake.

THE EVIL OF ESAU

Jacob feared Esau because Esau was evil. He was willing to murder his brother and wipe out an entire family as retribution for the wrong that had been committed against him, according to his perception. Reason rejects such a deed as being out of all proportion to the wrong suffered. As such, it is an expression of the evil force, the destructive rage that resides within the human breast.

As the world itself is a mixture of good and evil, it allows for the expression of this type of rage. The human being who is on an ordinary spiritual level needs the protection of God to avoid it, because he himself is tinged with the same evil impulse, albeit in less extreme form.

Only the greatest *tzaddikim*, who have brought themselves to a state of such spiritual perfection that they are no longer a mixture of good and evil but only good, have nothing to fear from the force of evil. Evil cannot penetrate a habitat that is filled with the light of good. When evil comes into contact with such an environment, it is again reduced to pure potential and can harm no one. But in the absence of the powerful light of pure goodness, evil always has the power to harm in some degree.

In his humility, Jacob did not feel that he or his family had attained such levels of spiritual perfection. Unless they enjoyed God's protection, they were vulnerable to Esau's evil power. As Jacob feared that he was no longer entitled to the special protection provided by God's express promise, he was understandably afraid of Esau.

JUSTICE

When God told Abraham of the impending destruction of Sodom, He informed him that He Himself proposed to carry out this destruction through the exercise of His own Attribute of Justice. Abraham justifiably protested with great vehemence that God Himself could not possibly perpetrate the evil of indiscriminate destruction; it would be an enormous profanity of His own Holy Name to behave in the same fashion as the forces of darkness and evil.

The relationship between Jacob and Esau has exactly the same dynamics as the relationship between good and evil. As this Talmudic analogy between the cities of Jerusalem and Caesarea, the seat of the Roman government in the Second Temple period, shows, in the end only one can survive.

Caesarea and Jerusalem -- if anyone tells you they are both in ruins, don't believe it. If anyone tells you that they are both thriving, don't believe it. But if they say that Caesarea is in ruins and Jerusalem is thriving, or that Jerusalem is in ruins while Caesarea thrives, you can believe it, as it is written, *I will fill the ruins* (Ezekiel 26) if this one is built, it is on the ruins of the other.

Rabbi Nachmon bar Yitzchok says this is written in the Torah: *Two nations are in your womb, two regimes from your insides shall be separated; the might shall pass from one regime to another.* (Genesis 25,23) (Talmud, Megilah, 6a)

Esau is the evil darkness that God set up before the emergence of Jacob into the world. He is the older twin. He is the foil against which Jacob must always test himself, the force of evil he must always overcome to survive.

Like all evil, Esau does not come directly under God's management. His might increases and decreases according to the fluctuation of the strength of the light brought into the world through the medium of Jacob's relationship with God.

HOLOCAUST

When the intensity of this light dims beyond a certain level, the evil rage of Esau spills out against Jacob and his children and goes on a rampage of wanton indiscriminate destruction that destroys the righteous along with the wicked. The result is mass destruction, a Holocaust.

All good is individualized and personal. What is good for A is often harmful to B. Wealth may be excellent for the temperate character but it leads the impulsive into overindulgence. The Attribute of Good is always necessarily precisely fine-tuned and delicate. All evil is impersonal and egalitarian. As its aim is only to destroy all in its path, it takes no interest in the fact that it is destroying A rather than B.

Israel has its share of both public and private travail. Individual problems are marks of the Attribute of Justice, an example of Divine Providence. As such, problems are therapeutic in nature and are doled out by God measure for measure.

Events of great destruction -- like the Holocaust -- are the expression of the force of evil. Only those who are saved are marked by Divine Providence. The ones who perish are destroyed by the evil.

THE BATTLE WITH AMALEK

We, the Jewish people have inherited the duty to conduct Adam's war against evil in the form of the commandment to battle with Amalek, who is the quintessence of Esau.

*For the hand is on the throne of God;
the Lord maintains a war against
Amalek from generation to
generation. (Exodus 17:16)*

The hand of Amalek reaches all the way to the throne of God. God cannot stop him without wiping out the evil in the world, and such an act would also eliminate the possibility of free choice and leave the world bereft of its purpose.

The duty to stop the evil belongs to us, not God. We must bring the evil in ourselves under the strict control of our reason, aided and guided by the commandments of the Torah. If we crush the inner darkness within our own hearts the destructive powers in the world also come under the control of reason. The light of civilization scatters the darkness of the primitive urge to destroy.



The Name of the Angel

And Yaakov asked, and said, "What is your name please?" and [the angel] replied, "Why do you ask my name?" (Gen. 32:30)

Throughout the night, Yaakov struggled with the angel of Eisav, and he was victorious. Toward morning, the angel asks Yaakov to release him, but Yaakov refuses unless the angel blesses him. The angel informs Yaakov that his name will be changed to Yisrael. "And what is your name?" Yaakov asks the angel. But the angel's only response is a cryptic question, "Why do you ask my name?"

What is the implication of this dialogue?

According to our Sages, this angel was the guardian angel of Eisav, also known as Satan, also known as the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination. Rav Leib Chasman explains that, since the name of a person or being reflects his essence, when Yaakov asked the angel for his name he was actually trying to discover his essence. He was actually saying, "What are you all about, *yetzer hara*? What makes you tick? What is the secret of your power over people?"

And the angel replied, "Why do you ask my name?" In other words, explains Rav Leib Chasman, there is no point in asking this question. The *yetzer hara* is not a reality, only a figment of the imagination. It is an image that is conjured in the mind when a person is consumed by desire. But in reality, there is no separate entity called the *yetzer hara*. It is the person himself.

Sometimes, a person lies in the dark and sees huge shadows forming on the wall. He is terrified. Perhaps it is a bear, or an intruder. But then he flicks on the light and sees that it was nothing, only his own overactive imagination. This is the *yetzer hara*, a shadow in the night, a figure of fantasy, without reality, without essence. And when you flick on the light, you discover that nothing was there in the first place.

Rav Chaim Dov Keller offers a different interpretation of the dialogue between Yaakov and the angel. He interprets Yaakov's question along the same lines as does Rav Chasman. Yaakov wanted to know the essence of the *yetzer hara*, because he wanted to forewarn his descendants and fortify them against this formidable foe.

"Why do you ask my name?" the angel replied. "It is a pointless endeavor to prepare your descendants for their encounters with me. My mission is to test people, and in order to do this, I change form in every generation. The situations change, the temptations change, and I change. In one generation, the temptation may be idol worship, and that is where I concentrate my efforts. In another generation, it may be the heresies of so-called enlightenment, and that is where I concentrate my efforts. I am always

taking on a different form and changing my essence. Telling what my name is now would not help your descendants in the future."

In our own times, it seems to me, the changed form of the *yetzer hara* is the pursuit of wealth and worldly pleasures. Materialism is the bane of our generation. And that chameleon known as the *yetzer hara* is working actively to promote it.

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