

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

A STAIRCASE IN TZFAT

by Tzipah Wertheimer

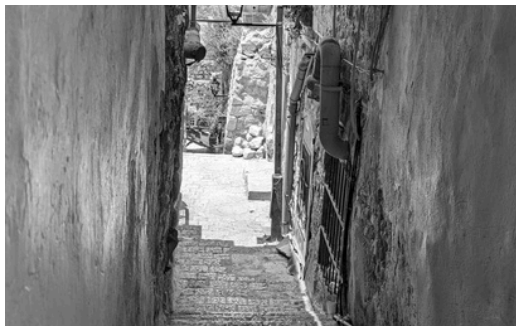
At the top of a very narrow staircase in the ancient city of Tzfat is an unassuming apartment that once housed a certain old lady. The story goes, that she kept a hot meal, ready and waiting in her kitchen every day, for Moshiach.

It's hard to imagine how someone who was literally expecting the Messiah to knock on her door at any minute, was also able to go to the market and carry out the nitty-gritty of daily life.

Yaakov journeyed to reunite with his estranged brother after 20 years. Has Eisav forgiven him for stealing the birthright? Does Eisav still want to kill Yaakov? Yaakov doesn't know so he covers all of his bases. He prays to Hashem for divine assistance, he creates a battle plan and he sends a large financial gift to Eisav as an appeasement.

Surely if his prayer would be accepted there would be no need for battling or gifts. So too with his other plans, if any one were fully successful the other two would not be needed.

Yaakov reached out in every possible way – not because he was uncertain but because he was human. He exercised all three (mutually exclusive) approaches with complete sincerity. It's a bit of a dichotomy but it's real. Perhaps this is how our old lady in Tzfat could carry on the daily chores while consistently expecting and anticipating the divine.




After executing these three plans, Yaakov meets the guardian angel of Eisav and they wrestle until daybreak. Yaakov is victorious, and just before departing the angel gives him the name Yisroel. From this point forward the Torah sometimes calls him Yaakov and sometimes Yisroel.

The name Yaakov is related to the word *eikev* which means heel, whereas the name Yisroel contains the word *Rosh* which means head. The two identities are opposite.

Yaakov is the one who bought the birthright for a bowl of lentils, while Yisroel is the one for whom the nation of Israel is named. Yaakov was destined for the birthright but it came to him in a roundabout way. Yaakov began wrestling in the night and Yisroel emerged victoriously in the daylight. One man – the father of our nation – embodied both personas, and so too we can all probably relate to both tenets.

"Yaakov" is engaged in the world around him, and the mitzvot have to emerge between the struggles.

"Yisroel" enjoys outright, straight-forward spirituality -- mitzvahs in public with no apologies.

Our forefather was both Yaakov and Yisroel. Therefore we inherit both streaks. Sometimes the Mitzvot come easily and naturally like Yisroel but other times the struggle is real and Yaakov wrestles the whole night before celebrating a victory. 

Just ת"ש Me A Question

Q: Who wrote the Haggadah?

A: Although much of the Haggadah is from the Mishna in the 10th chapter of Pesachim, it is unclear who compiled the Haggadah as we know it. The earliest Haggadah appears in the Siddur of Rav Amram Gaon (9th century) and Rav Saadya Gaon (882-942), i.e., the period of the Geonim.

Q: How can I attain energy and focus in Torah study?

A: The Lubavitcher Rebbe responded to such a question as follows (Igros Kodesh vol.15, p.238): When one repeats something regularly, it becomes their second nature. In order to ascend from level to level, one should indeed go level-by-level, not jumping from one extreme to another [as such a jump cannot be sustained]. Moreover, this ascent need be a result of vigorous effort, for as our sages tell us, "if one says that they succeeded without effort -- do not believe them."

Q: Why is Rosh Chodesh two days when the previous month was 30 days?

A: In brief, the Jewish calendar is based on the lunar cycle (although there is also a solar element).

Since a lunar month is ~29 days & 12 hours, we alternate months — one month is 29 days and then the next month is 30.

Before we had a fixed calendar, witnesses would come to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to testify that they saw the new moon.

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Yaakov Sends Angels

How Dare You?

by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

Rabbi Zalman Zezmer of Krislava, and would travel to different villages to share Chassidic teachings.

Arriving in Volozhin, he requested permission to speak from the brilliant Torah scholar Rabbi Chaim, the disciple of the famed Vilna Gaon. He spoke about the Torah portion of the week, Parshat Vayishlach, and concluded with a deep interpretation on the verse, "And Jacob sent angels to Eisav."

"In his spiritual service," Reb Zalman explained, "Jacob was involved in elevating holy sparks that had fallen into the material world, returning them to their source, that is, G-d Almighty."

"And that," continued Reb Zalman, "is what the verse, 'And Jacob sent angels to Eisav' is teaching, on a deeper level. 'Angels' refers to the fallen sparks of holiness. Jacob returns them to 'Eisav,' that is, to G-d Almighty."

Before Reb Zalman even had a chance to step down from the bimah, he was hit with criticism:

"How dare you refer to G-d Almighty by the name of the wicked Eisav?!" and, "Woe is to us for hearing such heresy!"

Overtaken by anger, the crowd began to assault Reb Zalman – making sure not to draw blood, which would be a violation of the Holy Shabbos, Heaven forbid.

In the middle of this tumult, Reb Chaim entered the shul. "What's going on?" he asked.



The gabbai explained everything and recounted the blasphemous teaching that Reb Zalman had related.

"Bring him to me," said Reb Chaim.

They schlepped Reb Zalman across the shul. "Chutzpah! How dare you make such a derogatory statement about G-d Almighty! Why did you think it was a good idea to refer to the Almighty by the name of the wicked Eisav?"

"I didn't make it up," replied Reb Zalman calmly. "our sages use that very expression."

After a few, long minutes, he said, "It seems to me that you are mistaken! As far as I can recall, there is no statement of our sages referring to G-d as Eisav, not in the Babylonian Talmud, not in the Jerusalem Talmud, not in the Midrash, not in Mechilta, and not even in the Zohar."

"Actually," said Reb Zalman, "it is quite a well-known statement: *The entire Torah is made up of the names of the Holy One, Blessed Be He!* The name Eisav also appears in the Torah, and is therefore also one of the names of G-d Almighty!"

A smile slowly spread across Reb Chaim's face. He instructed that Reb Zalman be left to go on his way, and that he should be compensated for any pain he was caused. ☺

Hayom Yom 16 Kislev

A fundamental principle of Chabad philosophy is that the mind, which by its innate nature rules over the heart, must subordinate the heart to G-d's service by utilizing the intellectualization, comprehension and profound contemplation of the greatness of the Creator of the universe.

Just Me A שו"ת Question cntd.

...They would gather on the 30th of the month – and if witnesses came, they would declare that day to be Rosh Chodesh (and the previous month would therefore be 29 days).

Since the 30th day of the month was always potentially Rosh Chodesh, whenever a month has 30 days, the 30th day is observed as Rosh Chodesh together with the next day, the first of the following month.

Q: I've heard of the concept of *makom kavua*, that is, that you are supposed to have a specific seat in shul. The other day I came to shul and someone was in my seat. What should I do?

A: Rav Huna said that the G-d of Avraham will help those who have a fixed place for prayer (Berachos 6b). Moreover, merely having a regular shul is not sufficient, but even within the shul one should have their regular seat (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 90:19).

That being said, a "fixed seat" is considered anything within four amos (i.e., 6 feet; Magen Avraham 34). So if someone is sitting in your seat, the best thing is not to make a big deal out of it and find another seat nearby.

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