

The parsha begins with the confrontation between Yaakov and Eisov.

Yaakov originally left Eretz Canaan because Eisov wanted to kill him. Now that he is coming back, years later, he doesn't know what to expect regarding Eisov's disposition towards him. Hashem promised Yaakov that He would guard him from harm wherever he will go and return him to Eretz Yisroel. Hashem will not forsake Yaakov until He fulfills all His promises. Yaakov had a direct promise from Hashem! So why is he still nervous?

Rashi explains that Yaakov is afraid that one of two things will happen – either he will be killed or he will have to kill Eisov.

Why is he afraid of killing Eisov if his life is in danger? Apparently even a justified killing does damage to the neshomo. It desensitizes one to the tzelem Elokim of another human being. Dovid Hamelech was restricted from building the Beis Hamikdash because he was a warrior and was involved in a lot of bloodshed – even though all of his wars were waged with Hashem's approval. A Kohen who commits murder cannot perform birkas kohanim. Murder – even justified murder – desensitizes one to the other's tzelem Elokim.

This is why Yaakov Ovinu is afraid of either being killed or having to kill.

The remaining question is, why is Yaakov afraid of being killed if Hashem has already promised his survival? One answer Chazal give is that even after a promise from Hashem, you still have to be worthy. Yaakov can tell Eisov that even while he was in Lovon's house, he remained pure and uncorrupted. But in front of Hashem's exacting standards, Yaakov isn't so confident.

Another reason to be worried is that perhaps Yaakov used up all his zechusim on things that are not so essential. The fact is that Yaakov emerged very wealthy from Lovon's house. His wives have given him eleven outstanding sons. He has received a lot of blessings up to this point.

The Rambam is very clear that everything and anything that happens to us in this world is a result of an exact calculation of s'char and onesh. Nothing happens at random – not even the smallest inconvenience like searching for small change, and not the smallest convenience like getting all green lights in city traffic. It is all calculated in s'char and onesh.

Being wealthy and having a large family after being poverty-stricken is not something to take for granted. Perhaps he was already rewarded? Yaakov didn't want all these good things to detract from the zechusim he needs in order to be worthy of the greater promises Hashem has made to him. So Yaakov davened that he is overwhelmed by all the kindness that he has received from Hashem. He requested that these kindnesses from Hashem until now not be put on his cheshbon to detract from his zechusim.

Then Yaakov davened to be saved "from the hand of his brother, from the hand of Eisov." Why the repetition? Chazal explain that there are two types of enemies people have in general and the Jewish people have in particular. Sometimes our enemies present themselves as brothers – as allies. Sometimes they present themselves as who they really are – as Eisov. Meforshim remark that Lovon's name means 'white' because Lovon presented himself to Yaakov as completely innocent and white – "Why did you run away from me without telling me and not let me kiss my daughters and grandchildren goodbye?" When in truth, Hashem warned him the night before not to say anything to Yaakov – neither

good or bad – since even Lovon's goodness is rotten.

Yaakov split his whole camp into two in the middle of the night and he is approached by a man while he is alone. They wrestled until morning. The fact that Yaakov was alone at the time is very significant. This 'man' is really a maloch who represents Eisov.

Chazal tell us that everything in the physical world has a spiritual counter-part in Heaven. Before Yaakov confronted Eisov in the physical world, he struggled with Eisov's maloch in a spiritual battle. Since he won over Eisov's maloch in this spiritual struggle, this determines the outcome of the struggle when he will confront Eisov the next day. The maloch asked to be released from Yaakov so that he could sing shiroh to Hashem. Yaakov first demanded that he give him a brocho. The brocho is that Yaakov's name is changed to Yisroel.

What does the word 'Yisroel' mean? Onkelos explains that he fought with an angel in front of Hashem. In Yaakov's struggles, the audience is Hashem.

When we go through nisyonos in life, we have to remain mindful who our main audience is. The yesod of the idea of 'shivisi Hashem l'negdi somid' is that Hashem is the only audience that matters.

The spiritual highpoint of Avrohom and Yitzchok's life was the Akeidah. It was the height of their growth in ruchniyus. But the only one they did it for was Hashem. Eliezer and Yishmoel did not accompany them up to Har Hamoriah. No-one was watching but Hashem. The entire time Yaakov is living with Lovon, no-one would have known if he stole something once in a while or slacked off in shepherding the sheep once in a while. Yaakov is now at a critical point in his life when he struggles with Eisov's maloch. The posuk emphasizes that he is alone. No one is watching but Hashem.

The Kohen Godol going into the kodesh hakodoshim on Yom Kippur is the holiest person going into the holiest place at the holiest time of the year, to achieve kapporoh for all Klal Yisroel. It is a peak moment. The Torah says no-one is allowed to be in the Heichal at the time. Only Hashem is his audience.

The ability to focus on who is our real audience, is not so simple.

Akavya ben Mehallalel was one of the greatest tannoim. He disagreed with the rest of the Sanhedrin on four issues. The time came to appoint a new av beis din of the Sanhedrin. They offered him the position if he would retract his controversial opinions. He refused. He said he would prefer to suffer ridicule and humiliation his whole life rather than compromise on the truth for one moment – and be a rosho before Hashem. If he would accept the position and enjoy all the status and honor of being the head of Klal Yisroel, it wouldn't be worth it to betray Hashem and His Torah.

There is only one audience that matters. That is Hashem alone.

This is a very difficult avodah. But 'shivisi' is how the entire Shulchan Aruch begins. Keeping halacha properly means going through all one's regular daily activities – even in private – and knowing that you are acting in front of the audience of the King. This is what Yisroel means – struggling through life in front of the audience of Hashem.

This confrontation with Eisov and his maloch is a key event in Jewish history. We see that Yaakov emerged with an injury – an injured gid hanosheh – sciatic nerve. Because of this, Jews are forbidden to eat the gid hanosheh for all time – in order to remember this struggle

between Yaakov and Eisov and the damage that Eisov inflicted.

What is the deeper significance of the gid hanosheh being injured?

Chazal say that the maloch of Eisov wounded the supporters of Torah. Yaakov represents Torah and he is supported by his legs. One of his legs – those who support the Torah – got injured during this ideological battle between Yaakov's power of Torah, and Eisov's power which is the sword. In Parshas Toldos we spoke at length that Yaakov and Eisov represent two very different philosophies about what should dominate the world – spiritual values or physical power. When one rises, the other falls. They cannot both be dominant.

For Yaakov to remain victorious he has to stay true to everything he believes in and everything he represents. But here, the tomchei Torah are damaged. The tomchei Torah have an interesting and almost contradictory role in Yaakov's spiritual society. On the one hand, they are significantly involved in the material world, but they use their involvement in the physical world to support those exclusively engaged in spiritual pursuits. So we have two types of people who show dedication to Yaakov's spiritual goals. There are those who are actually learning Torah, and those who support them.

Yitzchok thought Eisov would be able to use his physical power and involvement in the outside world to support Yaakov. He wanted to give him the brochos of material success for that end. But Rivka knew the truth about Eisov – he was incapable of being a committed partner with Yaakov to spiritual goals. She arranged for Yaakov to get those brochos from Yitzchok so that he could get his material support from within himself.

So it falls upon Yaakov's tomchei Torah to use their involvement in the material world to support Torah. They were injured in this battle. Yaakov was victorious over Eisov and Torah will continue, although his sources of support were injured.

Hashem is guarding Yaakov at every step. Yaakov first sends messengers to deliver a welcoming message to Eisov. The midrash says they were actual malochim who gave a stern warning to Eisov and his henchmen not to harm Yaakov.

After Yaakov and Eisov part company, Yaakov travels to a place called Sukkos. Why is it called Sukkos? Because here is where Yaakov built a house – a mokom kavuoh, and then he built a corral for his sheep and goats – a temporary structure. Therefore the place is called Sukkos? Why? And what is more puzzling is that the midrash says we have a Yom Tov called Sukkos because of what Yaakov did in this place. What is the significance of all this?

There is a problem with Yaakov settling here in Sukkos for a period of time if he is supposed to be on his way to Yitzchok. Why is he building a house here if it is only temporary? Targum Yonason answers that this house that Yaakov built was a beis midrash. The significance is that even when staying somewhere for a short time, Yaakov made the effort to build a solid structure for his Torah learning while only making a flimsy structure for his flocks.

Yaakov is a very wealthy man with many animals to take care of, and he certainly could have justified making a bigger investment in maintaining his wealth. But Yaakov made a statement. His wealth doesn't dominate his time and efforts. Torah is the priority investment.

Immediately afterwards Yaakov arrived sholeim – whole – in Shechem. Rashi explains that his limp was healed. The tomchei Torah were healed from their injury inflicted by the maloch of Eisov. How? Because of the deep lesson taught in Sukkos. Yaakov's wealth does not occupy any major priority in his life. It is only a means to the greater end which is limud Torah. He makes this point especially now, when he is establishing his new settlement in Eretz Yisroel.

Maintaining proper priorities is very difficult when you are balancing two very different worlds – the world of material wealth and the world of Torah and spiritual goals. It is a very big challenge to maintain the right focus.

What does this have to do with the Yom Tov of Sukkos?

Sukkos is a time when a farmer has finished harvesting and storing all the produce of the past year. He is very satisfied with all the things he has accomplished. People who don't farm take stock of their profits at the end of the year to see how much they have prospered. Exactly at that time – when you are sitting comfortably in your home – the Torah says leave your secure home and enter a shaky, flimsy structure which is not rainproof. Remember that you are living under Hashem's protection alone. Work on your emunah that He will take care of you and protect you and don't let your success go to your head. Leave all the security and the comfort of your wealth and reconnect to your priorities.

Yaakov made a statement in Sukkos – my mokom kavuoh is the beis midrash and the flocks are temporary. It is not my main priority. Because of this, his injury to the gid hanosheh, to the tomchei Torah, was healed when he arrived in Shechem.

Yaakov was also sholeim b'momono at this point. Even though he gave away so many animals to bribe Eisov, he found that he didn't lose anything. Hashem decided how many animals Yaakov would have – even though it seems he needed to take a huge loss by confronting Eisov.

Yaakov was also sholeim b'Toraso – he didn't forget any of his learning throughout all the years in Lovon's house. Guarding Lovon's sheep night and day from the elements and from thieves, and raising his family. These were big distractions. True, a shepherd has pockets of open time during the day, and Yaakov used that time to review his learning. But Yaakov was also quite occupied trying to avoid all the trickery and thievery that Lovon was doing the entire time. Nevertheless, as he is making his wealth, Yaakov's temimus is preserved. His middoh remains the middoh of emes and Torah throughout.

Yaakov emerges as an odom sholeim – physically, financially and spiritually.