

5785 - Genesis 32-36 - Vayishlach (And he sent)

THE TRUTH OF JACOB¹

I am humbled by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant. (Genesis 32:11)

When Jacob left his father's home in Be'er Sheva and set out for Charan, he was a lone, penniless pauper fleeing for his life. Twenty years later, he returned a wealthy man, with a large and growing family, an army of servants, and immense flocks of sheep and cattle. G-d's promise to him—"I will be with you, and I will protect you wherever you will go, and I will bring you back to this land"⁽¹⁾—had been fulfilled in every respect.

Instead of bolstering Jacob's ego, instead of giving him confidence in his continued success and reassuring him that Esau's new plans against him would come to naught, all this had the very opposite effect. **G-d's blessings made Jacob more diminished in his own eyes, less sure of himself, more fearful of his enemies.** "I am humbled" he cried to G-d, "by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant."

What prompted such a reaction in Jacob? **Would not the more natural response be that a show of kindness by G-d to a person should increase his self-regard rather than diminish it?**

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad chassidism, addressed this question in a letter he wrote following his release from prison in 1798. Rabbi Schneur Zalman was arrested and charged with treason, on the basis of petitions to the Czar by opponents of chassidism. After fifty-three days of imprisonment, he was exonerated of all charges and freed. The event (celebrated to this day on the 19th of the month of Kislev) marked the decisive victory of the chassidic movement over its foes, and the onset of a new, expanded phase in the dissemination of chassidic teaching.

Upon his release, Rabbi Schneur Zalman dispatched a letter to all his followers **warning them against any feelings of pride and superiority over their opponents as a result of their victory.** He began his letter by quoting Jacob's words, "I am humbled by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant." Why did the divine kindness generate a feeling of humility in Jacob?

But this, explained Rabbi Schneur Zalman, expresses **the difference between a person who is ensnared in the trap of his own ego and the person who has a true perspective on himself and his relationship with G-d. To the self-absorbed person, a kindness from G-d is a favor to him, and proof of his own significance and worth.** So the ultimate effect of the experience is a distancing of the person from G-d: **a greater**

emphasis on himself and his own needs, and a diminished connection with the source of blessings that have been granted to him.

To the spiritually aware person, however, **a kindness from G-d is, first and foremost, an act of divine love: G-d is drawing the person closer to Him.** And **the closer one comes to G-d, the more one realizes one's own insignificance in the face of the divine infinity.**

This is "the truth of Jacob": Because the cardinal law of reality is that "all before Him is as naught,"⁽²⁾ it follows that the more "before Him" (i.e., closer to G-d) a person is, the more "as naught" the person perceives himself to be.

"Therefore," Rabbi Schneur Zalman concluded his letter, "I come with a great call to all our community regarding the many kindnesses which G-d has exceedingly shown us: Assume the attribute of Jacob.. Do not feel yourselves superior to your brethren; do not give free rein to your mouths regarding them, or hiss at them, G-d forbid. **I strictly warn: Make no mention (of our victory). Only humble your spirits and hearts with the truth of Jacob ...**"⁽³⁾

THE HUSK

The ego, however, is not without its uses. The sages of the Talmud declare:

A student of Torah should possess an eighth of an eighth⁽⁴⁾ of pride ... which crowns him as a husk to a kernel.⁽⁵⁾

The analogy employed by the Talmud—"as a husk to a kernel"—explains how on the one hand, ego is a necessary component to our existence and growth, yet on the other hand, can be a distancing factor between ourselves and our source.

To grow and develop, the kernel requires sunlight and rain. But sunlight and rain are also the greatest threats to its survival. If the kernel were to be completely exposed to its sources of nourishment, it would be scorched by the heat of the sun and rotted by the moisture falling upon it.

Hence the husk—a hard, tough shell which encases the kernel or fruit, bearing the brunt of the sun's rays and deflecting the drops of water falling from above. The husk shields the kernel from the sun and rain while absorbing enough energy and moisture to sustain it and fuel its growth.

Then comes the day of harvest. The grain has ripened, the fruit has matured, and is now fit to fill its function as food, fodder, or seed. **The husk, no longer an asset but an impediment, is broken open, peeled off, and discarded.**

By the same token, **we require a certain degree of ego and self-regard, which serves us as the husk serves the kernel.**

¹ Yanki Tauber, *The Inside Story, Genesis*, (Meaningful Life Center), pp. 296-300.

A person's spiritual development is fueled by two primary nutrients: love and fear. Wherever we turn, we encounter the warmth and light of the love which G-d radiates into His world, and are alternately dampened by the dread that keeps us from evil. But if we were to indiscriminately expose ourselves to these forces, we would be destroyed. Unchecked passion invariably disintegrates into a consuming lust, while unmitigated fear results in soul-corroding timidity and inertia.

Hence the ego—a hard, tough shell which encases the soul, bearing the brunt of life's passions and deflecting its fears. Our sense of self prevents us from indiscriminately submitting to desire, and insulates us from the terrors that would otherwise petrify us into inaction. The inner voice that insists, "I am, resists and filters the passion and awesomeness of life, enabling the kernel within to grow and mature.

Ultimately, however, the ego is an impediment to the fulfillment of the purpose for which we were created. Ultimately, it must be discarded to reveal the selfless commitment to our Creator that is the core of our souls.

Every spiritual quest is launched by a stirring of the ego-by the desire to make something of oneself, to achieve, to conquer the citadels of truth and fulfillment. In the initial stages of this quest, our seeker's ego remains an indispensable component of our growing self, feeding us with stimuli and experience while shielding us from their excesses. But there comes a point at which the armor of self becomes a prison to be breached, freeing the supra-self of the soul to serve its Creator uninhibited by the constraints of ego.

(1) Genesis 28:15.

(2) Zohar 1:11b. Cf. Deuteronomy 4:35.

(3) Rabbi Schneur Zalman's great-grandson, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, once remarked: "If the Rebbe would have omitted the words 'with the truth of Jacob' from his letter, he would have gained 50,000 additional followers. But the Rebbe demanded truth."

(4) I.e, a modicum (*a measure*). Gra² sees the expression, "an eighth of an eighth," as an allusion to the eighth verse of the eighth *parashah* of the Torah—i.e., the verse, "I am humbled by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant ..."

(5) Talmud, Sotah 5a.

1. *G-d's blessings made Jacob more diminished in his own eyes, less sure of himself, more fearful of his enemies.*

a. Genesis 18:25-27

²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike ... Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" ²⁶The LORD said, "If I find fifty

righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ²⁷**Then Abraham spoke up again:** "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, **though I am nothing but dust and ashes ...**

b. Exodus 3:10-12

¹⁰So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." ¹¹But Moses said to God, "**Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?**"

¹²And God said, "I will be with you ...

c. Psalms 8:3-6

³When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, **"what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"**

⁵You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. **"You made them rulers over the works of your hands;** you put everything under their feet:

d. 2Corinthians 12:11-12

¹¹I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," **even though I am nothing.** ¹²I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles ...

1) 2Corinthians 11:12-15

¹²And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us **in the things they boast about (i.e., the "super apostles")**. ¹³For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Messiah. ¹⁴And no wonder, for **Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.** ¹⁵It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. **Their end will be what their actions deserve.**

2) Neither Abraham, Moses, David or Paul were "nothing"—they simply understood—like we should—**the difference between a person who is ensnared in the trap of his own ego and the person who has a true perspective on himself and his relationship with G-d**

2. *Rabbi Schneur Zalman was arrested and charged with treason, on the basis of petitions to the Czar by opponents of Chassidism ... Upon his release, Rabbi Schneur Zalman dispatched a letter to all his followers*

² Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman (1720-1797), known as the Vilna Gaon, the GRA (acronym for Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu), and even just "the Gaon," is considered one of the most important rabbis in Jewish history, and *Gadol HaAchronim* ("the

greatest of the last [of the great sages]"). The GRA is particularly identified as the leader of the opponents of the Hasidic movement, from which the term *Mitnagdim* ("opponents") is derived.

warning them against any feelings of pride and superiority over their opponents as a result of their victory.

a. Exodus 23:4

⁴¹"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it.

b. Leviticus 19:18

¹⁸"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

c. Proverbs 24:29

²⁹Do not say, "I'll do to them as they have done to me; I'll pay them back for what they did."

d. Proverbs 25:21-22

²¹If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. ²²In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

e. Romans 12:17-20

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone ... ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord (Deu 32:35). ²⁰On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head" (Pro 25:22).

f. 1Corinthians 13:6

⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

g. 1Peter 3:9

⁹Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

h. From the Passover Hagaddah

But as with the Ten Plagues, there is a story in the Talmud about the Egyptians who drowned: When the Israelites crossed over safely, the angels in Heaven began to sing in praise to God. But God looked down on the waters closing over the Egyptians, and ... "re-buked them, saying, **'The works of My hands are drowning in the sea, and you would utter song in My presence!'**" (Sanhedrin 39b).

3. *I strictly warn: 'Make no mention (of our victory). Only humble your spirits and hearts with the truth of Jacob ...'*

a. Matthew 8:2-4 (Luke 5:14)

²A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if

you are willing, you can make me clean." ³Yeshua reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. ⁴Then Yeshua said to him, **"See that you don't tell anyone.** But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

1) The fact that (Messiah) bade His patient present himself to the priests, and offer the usual sacrifices, should convince (the religious leaders) that He did not seek to undermine the Mosaic ritual ... **The proof is (Yeshua's) loyalty to the Law, not proof of cure**, which would be completely unnecessary before the priestly experts.³

b. Matthew 9:27-31

²⁷As Yeshua went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" ²⁸When (they) had gone indoors ... he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. ²⁹Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"; ³⁰and their sight was restored. Yeshua warned them sternly, **"See that no one knows about this."** ³¹But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

c. Matthew 17:4-9

⁴Peter said to Yeshua, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three *sukkot*—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Isa 42:1; Psa 2:7) ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, **terrified**. ⁷But Yeshua came and touched them. "Get up," he said. **"Don't be afraid."** ⁸When they looked up, they saw no one except Yeshua.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Yeshua instructed them, **"Don't tell anyone what you have seen,** until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

1) One of the most important examples of irony in Mark is **the messianic secret**: at a number of points (Yeshua) commands people not to tell anyone about what they have witnessed. Indeed, in some Jewish texts of this period it is stated that the identity of the messiah, or the time of his coming, is hidden until the very end (2Esd (4Ezra) 7.28; 1En 62.7; Pesach 54b; Sanh 97a). But in 1901, the German scholar William Wrede attributed the reason for these commands of secrecy not to (Yeshua) but to Mark's

³ Samual Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament*, (KTAV Publishing House, Inc., Anti-Defamation League of B'nei B'rith), p. 153.

own attempt to make sense of why more people did not embrace (Yeshua) as messiah during his lifetime. Despite the power of the messianic secret theme (**taken up also by Matthew and Luke, but almost totally lacking in John**), **it is still not clear what it would have communicated to the first audience**. The messianic secret could be a narrative technique, the use of irony to increase awe of (Yeshua) ... It may suggest to the audience that a "low profile" is the best response to persecution. It may also reflect Mark's tendency to contrast expectations of (Yeshua's) triumph with the difficulties (Yeshua) actually encounters, including the crucifixion. Mark thus carries the messianic secret through to the end by minimizing the apocalyptic expectations of vindication (ch 13) and the triumphal appearance of a risen (Messiah) (ch 16). The Gospel communicates the idea that (Yeshua's) messianic identity ironically includes suffering and death, and it cannot be fully understood until after his resurrection; thus the Gospel's audience fully understands (Yeshua's) significance, even though the disciples are depicted as not completely understanding it during his lifetime. Mark depicts a more human and vulnerable (Yeshua) than is encountered in the Gospel of John, for example.⁴

The deceptive simplicity of Mark came to be fully appreciated in the late twentieth century, as literary scholars and theologians alike took note of its arresting narrative realism ... the stories ... are told realistically and with evocative details of everyday life. Mark, more than the other Gospels, never loses sight of the real lives of ordinary people—the economic and the social, the earthly over the cosmic, the present over the future.

4. *A person's spiritual development is fueled by two primary nutrients: love and fear. Wherever we turn, we encounter the warmth and light of the love which G-d radiates into His world, and are alternately dampened by the dread that keeps us from evil. But if we were to indiscriminately expose ourselves to these forces, we would be destroyed. Unchecked passion invariably disintegrates into a consuming lust, while unmitigated fear results in soul-corroding timidity and inertia.*

a. Deuteronomy 10:12

¹²And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to **fear the LORD** your God, to walk in obedience to him, **to love him**, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul ...

b. Psalm 33:18-21

¹⁸But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, ¹⁹to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. ²⁰We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. ²¹In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name ...

c. Psalm 103:11-14

¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; ¹⁴for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

d. Sirach 2:15-16 (NJB)

¹⁵Those who fear the Lord do not disdain his words, and those who love him keep his ways. ¹⁶Those who fear the Lord do their best to please him, and those who love him will find satisfaction in the Law.

e. 1 John 4:18

¹⁸**There is no fear in love**. But perfect love drives out fear, because **fear has to do with punishment**. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

- 1) The "fear of the LORD" is a good thing—in the Bible, it refers to **a deep reverence and respect for God, not a literal fear**. It is a profound understanding of God's power and authority, leading to a desire to obey and live according to His will. Essentially, it means to acknowledge God's holiness and act accordingly, often described as the "beginning of wisdom" as stated in the Book of Proverbs—it is NOT the same thing as being "afraid."
- 2) Our Torah tells you that you must not fear. Even if an army is charging towards you, you must not fear. For there is no danger worse than fear.⁵

But you are only human. Do you truly have control over the dread and panic pounding in your heart?

Yes. Not directly, but through the power of your mind. **If you will choose not to dwell on those things that instill panic and dread, those emotions will wither and fade.**

And the choice is yours. What do you want to speak about? What do you want to think about?

For **the thoughts of your mind are the conduit of life for the emotions of your heart.**

⁴ Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, Eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament, New Revised Standard Version*, (Oxford University Press), p. 57.

⁵ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4698720/jewish/A-Prescription-for-No-Fear.htm

- 3) Keanu Reeves once said: "**Pain changes shape, but it never disappears. You can't control what hurts or breaks you, but you can control how you choose to move forward.** Fight for what you love, because no one else will do it for you. Every moment in your life is an opportunity to change who you are. **Don't define yourself by what you lost, but by what you do with what's left.**"

In these words, Keanu Reeves captures the essence of resilience. Much like the Japanese art of *kintsugi*, our scars are not the end but a vital part of our story. Our wounds transform into strength, just as cracks repaired with gold make an object more beautiful and unique. **Through the process of overcoming, we become stronger and more radiant.**⁶

Footsteps in the Light: A Journey Through Life's Shadows

By Roderick Logan

Achievements glitter like stars in night,
Yet they're merely signs along my flight.
Not trophies earned nor medals won
Define the essence of who I've become.

It's in the steps through shadows deep,
In chosen paths and those fate made me keep,
That mold the clay of who I am today,
And shape tomorrow's self along the way.

Truth stands bright as the mountain's peak,
While trust marks the trail that we must seek.
For only through the bonds we weave,
Can truth's pure light we then perceive.

Though shelter calls to hearts that yearn,
This wisdom time has made me learn:
Real safety dwells not in walls we build,
But in honest hearts and trust fulfilled.

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⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/motivationquotes>