

According to Nachmanides, the Book of Genesis, in particular the events in *Parshat Vayishlach*, foreshadow Jewish destiny throughout the generations. Midrash Rabba says that Rabbi Judah the Prince would study *Vayishlach* before meeting Antoninus, the Roman Emperor. The verse that epitomizes the symbolism of the Parsha is "And a man wrestled with him", portending the difficulties faced by the Jewish People throughout our long and difficult exile.

"And he erected an altar and he called *E-l Elokay Yisrael*" (33:20). Rashi interprets the phrase קל אלקי ישראל as referring to the name by which Jacob called his G-d: *E-l*, the G-d of Israel (Jacob). The Talmud (Megilla 18a) interprets the verse as saying that G-d called Jacob *El*. According to this opinion, the verse should be read as follows: G-d, who is אלקי ישראל, called him (Jacob) *El*, and the word *El* is to be treated as חול, or mundane, i.e. as any other word in the Torah and not as a name of G-d. A practical ramification of this dispute applies to a scribe writing a Torah, who must have the proper intent, כונה, when writing any of the names of G-d. According to Rashi, both these names, *E-l* and אלקי ישראל, must be treated as holy by the scribe. Failing to have the proper intent while writing either name renders the scroll blemished, פסול, and unusable. The Rav said in the name of his grandfather, Reb Chaim Brisker, that the rules relating to a scribe writing the names of G-d in a Torah work both ways. A Torah is considered blemished if the scribe lacked intent for holiness when writing a name of G-d in a context that requires such intent. Likewise, a Torah is considered blemished if the scribe writes a name of G-d with intent for holiness where a mundane context is required. According to Jewish Law, we follow Rashi's opinion regarding a scribe writing this verse, and treat both names as holy.

To explain the second opinion, that G-d called Jacob by the name *El*, we need to understand the meaning of the word *El*. The term *El* was used previously by Laban who said that he had the power to harm Jacob, יש לאל ידי. *El* means power, strength. On the other hand, the word איתן, a strong bulwark, is often used to express strength. Our Rabbis interpret the month of איתנים as the month in which the great bulwarks of the world, the patriarchs, were born. In the High Holiday *Piyutim* we say אהבת איתן אדונינו, G-d our Master should recall the love expressed by the patriarch Abraham, referred to as איתן. (The Rav noted that we must pause between the words איתן and אדונינו.) In Psalms, Abraham is referred to as איתן האזרחי. Maimonides (Hilchot Avoda Zara 1:3) also refers to Abraham as איתן. If the patriarchs are referred to as איתנים, why is Jacob referred to as *El* at this point in the narrative?

Aytan implies a natural, immovable strength extant from the dawn of creation. The section of עגלה ערופה in Deuteronomy uses the term נחל איתן which has two interpretations: a strong moving brook, or a field that is very difficult to cultivate. Something characterized as איתן can lose its strength if it is moved. On the other hand, something characterized as אל, retains its strength even when dislocated. Jacob is considered the chosen of the patriarchs. He accomplished something that neither Abraham nor Isaac did: he twice went into exile: to Laban's house in Charan and ultimately to Egypt. Abraham and Isaac represent איתן, they remained firmly rooted in the Land of Canaan. They did not experience extended exile [Abraham's journey to Egypt was short lived, as related in *Lech Lecha*]. G-d's divine direction led Jacob into exile to show that the Jew can endure exile and remain proud, strong, אל.

Jewish history is the story of exile. Jacob blazed the trail for the Jew in exile. His experience in Laban's house provided the Jew an example of how to withstand an exile that manifests itself in poverty and oppression, גלות מעוני. The Jew must also be able to withstand an exile that manifests in opportunity and plenty, גלות מעושר. He must resist the temptations to assimilate. Joseph was Jacob's partner or soul mate in exile. He received a double portion in the Land of Israel because he, among Jacob's children, endured exile the longest. Joseph showed that it is possible to reach the level of Viceroy of Egypt and still remain committed to Torah and Mitzvah observance. He demonstrated how to survive an exile of plenty.

Throughout our history, it would appear that the Jewish People remained more resolute in their faith when enduring exiles characterized by poverty than exiles characterized by wealth that afforded them opportunities to assimilate. The Rav recalled his youth, when Jews faced severely restrictive financial constraints, yet maintained a fierce, unshakeable commitment to Torah and Mitzvah observance. America, to this point, represents an exile of plenty. The massive levels of assimilation among American Jewry unfortunately indicate that we have not tolerated the exile of plenty well from a religious commitment perspective.

The prophet says Jacob's house will be flame, Joseph's house will be a huge fire that will consume the house of Esau. The Jewish People who survive the combination of exile characterized by poverty demonstrated by Jacob, and exile of plenty demonstrated by Joseph, will ultimately persevere and destroy Esau.

Not only were Jacob and Joseph similar in physical appearance, both set for us examples of spiritual survival under difficult circumstances, poverty and wealth. Our Rabbis say Jacob feared the legions of Esau. G-d reassured him that through

his dynamic strength, *El*, he would survive his enemies and exile. He should not be afraid. Jacob and Joseph, linked by their common experience of the pain of exile, will ultimately combine to destroy Esau.

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