

Parsha Pearls

Vayishlach 5768

And Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until dawn (32:25).

There seems to be a dispute among the Talmudic Sages as to who this angel was. The most prevalent opinion (Bereishis Rabbah 77:3 and Tanchuma 8, quoted by Rashi) is that it was Esav's guardian angel, Samael.

But the Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 37) says, "The angel said, 'Let me go free.' Yaakov said, 'I will not set you free until you tell me your name.' Then the angel gave Yaakov the name Yisroel, like his own name, for his name was also Yisroel." What is the meaning of this puzzling passage?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1993) explained that there is actually no contradiction here. The Midrash says (Bereishis Rabbah 78:5) that Yaakov Avinu's face was engraved on G-d's throne. This means that G-d's glory is founded on the principle of truth, which was the attribute of Yaakov Avinu as it states, "Give truth to Yaakov" (Micah 7:20). The guardian angel of Esav, whom the Sages called Samael, is in charge of the opposite of truth, but he paints himself as a promoter of truth. This is why the Sages say (Chullin 91a) that the angel appeared to Yaakov as a Torah scholar.

This angel Samael called himself "Yisroel" because his whole essence was falsehood. Similarly, Esav's descendents established the Christian religion, which adopted the Jewish Bible as part of its

literature, yet interprets words in the Bible such as "Zion", "Jerusalem" and "Israel" as references to their own adherents and their own idolatry. And among our own people, the Reform Jews, who deny that G-d ever gave the Torah, call themselves "rabbis" when they should really be called "priests". They call their places of worship "synagogues" when in reality they are houses of emptiness and belief in nothing.

And people say that there is a state in the beloved Holy Land whose ministers, leaders and legislators are heretics and non-believers, who desecrate the holiness of G-d's people, and yet they gave their state the name "Israel"! (It is interesting that Rabbi Schwab says "people say" – perhaps he did not quite believe that such a thing could happen.)

The Torah continues, "And he saw that he could not overcome him, and he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Yaakov's thigh was dislodged as he wrestled with him." This symbolizes that Yaakov's attribute of truth was partially compromised. Therefore we pray, "And purify our heart to serve you in truth," until the time when "Yaakov will come in completeness to the city of Shechem" (33:18). Shechem is the initials of "shem kvod malchuso" – the name of the glory of His kingdom. And this is enough for

someone who understands. (Mayan Beis Hashoeva)

In this cryptic last paragraph, Rabbi Schwab may mean that Yaakov, the true Jewish people, the true Israel, is engaged in a struggle with the false Zionist "Israel". The Zionists saw that they could not completely defeat the true Jews, so they adopted a different tactic: they induced some of the true Jews to compromise their principles of truth. There have been rabbis who opposed Zionism, yet sanctioned some limited

cooperation with the Zionist system with the justification that this furthers their battle against it. This, says Rabbi Schwab, was compromising Yaakov's attribute of truth.

Rabbi Schwab was an active leader in Agudath Israel of America. However, it is known that he refused to attend conferences together with the Agudah rabbis of Eretz Yisroel, because he did not approve of their policy of cooperation with the Zionist government.