

In one chapter of our sidra this morning (Chapter 36), the Torah mentions no less than four times the relationship between Esau and Edom: either their identity, or that Esau is the ancestor of Edom. The commentators seem not to have noticed this repetition.

Esau was born precociously mature:
full of hair and, as Rashi points out,

הבשר האדום האדום / א לא יוכלו, let me have some of this red food. The food was processed, cooked, all done. Edom thus implies the same idea: completion, maturity, finished development. Therefore the equation of Esau=Edom is symbolic of the static, of one who has arrived, one who experiences no development or growth, one who has no place to go.

The exact opposite is true of Jacob. He is born as a straggler: יַעֲקֹב יֵצֵא מִבֶּטֶן . He follows Esau out of the womb and into life. He hangs on to his brother's coattails, or, to use the original biblical idiom, his hand holds the heel of Esau: יָדוֹ בְּעֵקֶל עֵשָׂו, hence his name יַעֲקֹב (Jacob). He is hesitant, diffident, backward. His insecurity and weakness plague him all his life. And therefore he must always struggle. And struggle he does! We read of the wrestling with the angel, an incident that is crucial in the life of Jacob. As a result of this encounter, his name is changed to "Israel," as we read: וְיִשְׂרָאֵל, because you fought with God and man and you prevailed. Notice that the name יִשְׂרָאֵל does not incorporate the word גִּבּוֹר, the concept of triumph and victory, important as they are, but rather מִלְחָמָה, the concept of struggle. The identification of Jacob=Israel symbolizes development, growth, progress, the good

fight to grow and transcend oneself.

Hence, the proximity of the two portions presents the student of the Torah with a study in contrasts between the one brother who arrives on the scene already finished, and leaves it in the same manner, experiencing no change of growth; and the other brother, who begins very low indeed and then, by sheer will and resolve and determination, struggles to superiority and triumph.

I mention this not only as the explanation of a number of biblical verses, but because it incorporates a major insight of Judaism. Judaism is predicated on man's self-transformation. The concept of *נחמיה* or repentance does not merely mean to experience regret and mend one's ways, as much as it implies the concept of spiritual movement, of growing, of changing for the better. Scholars have already pointed out that whereas Judaism emphasizes becoming, the Greek philosophers, from Parmenides to Plato and beyond, have idealized the concept of being, the perfect state in which no change occurs.

In the Jewish tradition, angels are referred to as *מלאכים*, as those who stand, or are static; whereas man is called a *חַי*, one who goes and progresses. Thus in the vision of the prophet Zechariah, God promises Joshua the High Priest that if he obeys the will of the Lord *אם תלך בפי ה' אלהיך*, I will give you the capacity for going, for moving, walking, progressing amongst these (angels) who stand in one place.


There is an interesting if quaint controversy amongst great Jewish authorities about the relationships of angels and humans. Maimonides and Ibn Ezra maintain that angels are at a higher level than man, because angels are purely spiritual whereas man is subject to all the weaknesses of the flesh. Saadia Gaon maintains, on the contrary, that man is superior because he is possessed of freedom of the will. R. Hayyim of Volozhin offers a compromise in an attempt to resolve this controversy. Angels, he maintains, are initially on a higher level than man. But man, if he properly exercises his freedom, can grow from a much lower station to a much higher one. By virtue of spiritual struggle he can achieve an eminence that is greater than that of the angels.

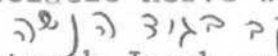
This capacity for growth, for emerging from "Jacob" to "Israel," should be the source of great encouragement for parents. As one who often listens to parents unburden themselves of worries, I strongly recommend the biblical figure of Jacob to your attention. Parents sometimes are concerned that children show no


motivation, that they seem to be limited in their talents and in their will. Certainly we must do whatever we can to help them. But there is a danger of over-intervention with the resultant resistance and the conflict that it engenders. But, after having done all we can and should, parents also should have a measure of confidence that as human beings, and especially Jewish human beings, it is possible and even probable that our young people will eventually struggle, transform themselves, and grow. They will recapitulate the adventure of Jacob-Israel.

Of all the things we must give thanks for in this great country, is that growth has been characteristic of America as well. It is true that in recent years the counter-culture has vigorously objected to this country's lack of sufficiently rapid growth. Of course, in its violence and its extremism, it often was destructive rather than constructive. But now that the movement seems to have spent itself, and America is getting back on an even keel, it is well to remember that if we stop growing and changing and moving on in the right direction, we will be false to our own heritage.

The same principle reminds us of the Jewish community that we must not be satisfied with what we have. Any organization or institution that refuses to look upon itself critically and to experience change, thereby condemns itself to paralysis, and dooms itself to enshrine its failings and faults as a permanent part of its constitution. The survival of the Jewish community can only take place if there is viability, if there is the capability and the will for institutional change.

Of course, all this is not simple, not effortless, and not painless. Spiritual growth is always accompanied by anguish. That is why the Torah in this week's portion tells us that Jews are not permitted to eat the  the thigh-vein or sciatic nerve which is situated on the "hollow of the thigh":

 , because the angel struck Jacob on the hollow of the thigh in the thigh-vein. In other words, because in their struggle Jacob was wounded by the angel and suffered a dislocated hip, therefore we are not permitted to eat the sciatic nerve of animals.

Now, that sounds more redundant than explanatory. So what if the angel struck Jacob? Is it out of sympathy with Jacob as a victim that we refrain from eating the  ? Is it out of a sense of celebration of his triumph?

I believe it is neither. Rather, we are commanded this halakhah out of admiration for Jacob's struggle, because we are

proud of his growing pains. It is a commitment to embrace such growing pains for ourselves as we attempt to emulate his adventure of growth from "Jacob to Israel."

Similarly, the ³ in his commentary tells us that the ³ is associated with the hip: ³ is situated that the top of that organ which moves as man walks. What he means to say, I believe, is that the ³ is related to motion, going, progress, growth. It is a symbol of dynamism and the price one must pay for such struggle. Judaism has taught us through Jacob to be a ³, even if it hurts, unlike Esau.

It is a happy coincidence that we read this portion of Jacob's growth on the 19th day of Kislev. ¹⁹ is a great holiday not only for the Chabad community, celebrating the release from prison of the founder of the Lubavitch movement, but it has wider significance as well. For this very day, the 19th of Kislev 5733, is the 200th yahrzeit or anniversary of death of Rabbi Dov Ber, the "Great Maggid" of Mezeritsch. Whereas Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov was the founder of the Hasidic movement, he was primarily the charismatic figure who inspired others, But the brains of the movement, as it were, the man who became the great teacher of the most eminent spiritual personalities of his time, the one who formulated the world-view of Hasidism in a transmissible manner, was the Great Maggid. What he and Baal Shemtov and his students did is a tribute to the Jewish capacity for growth. Through Hasidism, Judaism experienced an infusion of vitality, it relearned the principle of self-transformation and renewal.

But what growing pains they experienced! There were recently published two bulky volumes of all the literature -- theological, polemical, and vituperative -- written against the Hasidim. Reading Professor Wilenski's collection of Mitnagdic writings is no pleasure. The Maggid and the Hasidic movement had to fight not only ³, human enemies, not only poverty and small-minded people, but ³, they had to struggle against veritable angels. For the Gaon of Vilna, by the unanimous consent of all Jewry, whether friend or foe, was the most unique personality in many, many generations, not only for the sheer genius of his intellect, and not only for the richness of his mystical visions and the voluminousness of his Kabbalistic and Halakhic writings, but also for the purity and saintliness of his character. He was the leader of the struggle against Hasidism. And yet, the Maggid and the Hasidim had to struggle against him as well, and as a result ³, it was Judaism

itself which triumphed and benefitted. In the struggle, as history was later to show, each side gave a blessing to the other, so that Judaism today is an amalgam -- or, better, a mosaic -- of the various life-styles and view points of the many authentic expositions of classical Judaism.

So, let us dedicate ourselves in the spirit of Jacob and in the memory of the Maggid to this principle of spiritual growth, of dynamic development, even if it hurts.

For this is implied as well in the festival of Hanukkah which we celebrate this week. The Halakhah decided with לְעֵשֶׂת נֵרוֹת and not with לְחֵד נֵר . We light candles, not to begin with eight and to end with eight for that is completely static; not to begin with eight and to reduce to one, as לְחֵד נֵר would have it; but rather the law is with לְעֵשֶׂת נֵרוֹת that $\text{וְהוֹדִינָהּ בְּכָל יוֹם וְיוֹם אֶחָד מֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹדִין וְהוֹדִינָהּ בְּכָל יוֹם וְיוֹם אֶחָד מֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹדִין}$, we must always add; we begin with one candle, and every day add another until we reach the climax, at the conclusion, of eight burning candles.

The concept of growth in the Hanukkah light is the symbol of higher and emergent development in the spiritual life of the Jew. $\text{וְהוֹדִינָהּ בְּכָל יוֹם וְיוֹם אֶחָד מֵהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹדִין}$. May we incorporate to our own lives this governing principle of never declining in sanctity, but always growing and increasing in the realm of the spirit.