

Jacob: Simple or Cunning?

By: Rabbi Yosef Vogel

The majority of people we know are pretty straight forward. Although they possess both strengths and weakness in varying forms, we can ascertain, roughly, who they are. It is those who are more complex, both in character and motive, with whom we are most intrigued, disappointed or sometimes even afraid.

Which leads us to the most ambiguous character in the biblical historical narrative. A person who on the one hand is described as “a simple man”, yet he manages to deceive his father by pretending to be his brother. He goes to a foreign and hostile land and enters into business with a most untrustworthy partner, who tries to deceive him every step of the way, yet walks away with great wealth.

It is for this reason that we have such strong feelings about Jacob. Rarely does a biblical character provoke such mixed and passionate feelings. Yet it is precisely Jacob, who more than the other patriarch, is considered father to the Jewish people. After all, we are called the “children of Israel”, (Jacob’s second name) . For it is Jacob’s life that most accurately sums up the story of our people throughout its history, particularly in challenging time.

The Jewish people have had to deal with adversity more than any other nation. Not only in its simple form but more often than not, in its most highly complex form. It is in responding to these challenges that we need to be most vigilant for sometimes they do not even appear to be a threat.

Jacob was a simple man with a good training by his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. He was “a simple man, dweller of the tent”, yet he also possessed a unique edge. He had a brother called Esau. From the early stages in his life he was exposed to cunning and deception and as a result had the special ability, both to be aware and to deal with these challenges accordingly.

It is this discerning ability to know the correct application for an appropriate response and which takes into consideration all factors of all parties concerned that Jacob possessed to perfection. In the words of King Solomon, “**A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; A time of war, and a time of peace.**”

It is this unique strength that best characterises Jacob our Patriarch, father to the children of Israel. It is this trait that has helped us survive as a people and which will ensure our continuity for eternity.

2 December | 6th Kislev

Vayeitzei

Shabbat Begins: 3:39 pm

Shabbat Ends: 4:47 pm