

## Parshat Vayishlach

### The Basis of Jewish Unity

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(Adapted from ["One Nation in the Land" - Jewish Unity](#))



On the pasuk in this week's parsha, "Esav took ... all the **souls** (*nafshot*) of his household" (Bereishit 36:6), Chazal comment in the Midrash:

Regarding Esav, six people are mentioned, and it says about him many "souls," as it says, "Esav took ... all the **souls** (*nafshot*) of his household." (Bereishit 36:6) However, regarding Yaakov, there were seventy people, and it says one soul, "All the soul (*nefesh*) who emerged from Yaakov's loins were seventy soul." (Shemot 1:5) Rather, Esav, who serves many gods – it says about him many souls; Yaakov, who serves one G-d – it says about him one soul.

What is the significance and the meaning of this distinction?

R. Shneur Zalman of Ladi (the first Lubavitcher Rebbe) provides a concise definition to the concept of Jewish nationalism – one soul in separate bodies:

They all fit together, and they all have one Father. Therefore, all of Israel are called "brothers," literally, on account of the root of their souls in the single G-d – just that their bodies are separate.

Rav Hutner zt"l, one of the great Jewish thinkers of our time, formulates this idea as follows:

The whole of Knesset Yisrael does not mean the sum of all the parts of the individual people of Bnei Yisrael. Rather, the idea is the opposite; the whole of Knesset Yisrael is a single unit, of which the individual people are parts of it.

This distinction between Israel and the other nations is further alluded to in the precise language of Chazal. On the verse, "Israel encamped (*vayichan*) there opposite the mountain," Rashi cites Chazal's comment: "**As one person**, with one heart." This statement is said in praise of Israel's unity. We find a similar, though oppositely worded comment, regarding the Egyptians, who chased Israel, "With one heart, **as one person**." Rav Hutner zt"l explains that the order is reversed because Israel's inherent unity leads to their common interest, whereas the Egyptian's common interest leads to their unity:

Since [Israel] are one person, and the individuals in them are like the right hand and the left hand of one body – therefore, they are of one heart and all want this encampment of Mt. Sinai. *Vayichan sham* – as one person with one heart. Egypt is different ... Because they all want this journey of chasing after Israel – therefore, they all joined to a common goal, and they are with one heart, as one person.

The unique nature of Jewish unity is because Jewish nationalism and unity does not flow from human agreement to a social contract. Rather, it is the direct result of a Divine creation – "This nation (*am zu*) I have formed for Me, will say My praise." (Yeshaya 43:21) The numerical value of "zu" (13) is that of *echad* and of *ahava*. The author of the *Beit David* summarizes this idea as follows:

Just as the Creator, blessed be He, is the simple and absolute One ... in the same way, correspondingly, the holy Jewish people – since their souls emanate from the source of unity, as the Sages refer to it, "A part of G-d above" – therefore they also must unite together, to be close and bound to one another, more than the unity of one body composed of many limbs. This is because the root of their soul is the unity where there is no separation and division at all.

The root of Jewish unity is thus in their single inner quality, in the Divine creation of the single soul, which becomes individualized in different bodies, as one soul which gives life to a body of many organs.