

And as for me, I have given you Shechem – one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emori with my sword and with my bow. (48:22)

Rashi offers two interpretations of Yaakov *Avinu's* conquest of Shechem. The first interpretation is that Shechem is a reference to the city of Shechem, which Yaakov conquered through the agency of Shimon and Levi. After the two brothers slew the inhabitants of Shechem, the surrounding nations rose up against Yaakov, who returned their warfare and miraculously emerged victorious. Therefore, *charbi u'b'kashti*, sword and bow, are realistic weapons which enabled the Patriarch to best his enemies.

The second interpretation maintains that Yaakov refers to the birthright, the double portion, he wrested away from Eisav, who is here referred to as the Emori. Accordingly, “my sword and bow” are metaphoric names for the spiritual weapons employed by Yaakov to triumph over Eisav. *Rashi* defines *charbi*, my sword, as sharp wisdom, and the bow as prayer, which catapults the supplicant's entreaty to Hashem. **Gur Aryeh** explains sword and bow as references to prayer, which, like a sharp sword, pierces spiritual barriers Above and Below. It is like a bow in that an arrow's swiftness, distance and power of penetration are based on the pressure exerted on the bow. Likewise, the efficacy of prayer is determined by the degree of the supplicant's intensity in concentration and sincerity of feeling.

Targum Onkeles interprets *b'charbi u'b'kashti* as *b'tzalusi*, with my prayer and my entreaty. *Midrash Rabbah* interprets it as “with my *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim*, good deeds.” We wonder why *Rashi* chose to translate *charbi* as “sharp wisdom” and *kashti* as “prayer.” The other interpretations all use spiritual metaphors to define these two words. Why does he seem to reject the other interpretations and apply a physical/mundane metaphor instead?

The **Even Ha'Azul** derives a powerful lesson from *Rashi* – one which we should all put to good use. Prayer is critical. Prayer is important. One cannot make it through life without prayer, but one must know for what to pray. This is when *chochmah*, wisdom, common sense, practical thinking, comes into play. We often turn to Hashem with our laundry list of supplications and needs, which we have convinced ourselves are of utmost importance. We simply cannot live without them. Not only do we not need everything for which we ask, some of the requests might even be to our detriment. Therefore, wisdom is an inherent part of a preamble to prayer. We must set aside those things that we want and pray for those which we really need.

At times, the most practical prayer is simply: “Hashem lead me on the correct and appropriate course. You guide me, because I know I cannot possibly do it alone.” Asking for guidance is not a simple prayer. Common sense is an all-too-precious commodity, which regrettably is not available in excess. Let me add that nothing is worse than one who thinks he is wise when, in fact, his wisdom is a figment of his imagination.

The *Even Ha’Azel* concludes by observing what the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*, Men of the Great Assembly, took into consideration when they were *mesader*, organized, the formal daily *tefillah* service. The first three *brachos*, blessings, of the *Shemonah Esrai* are primarily praise to Hashem. Then we begin with our needs. Interestingly, the first blessing - which should set the tone for all of the rest - is, *Atah chonein l’adam daas*, “You graciously endow man with wisdom, insight, and discernment, Blessed are You, Hashem, gracious giver of wisdom.” Likewise, on the *Shabbos* prior to *Rosh Chodesh*, in the prayer, *Bircas HaChodesh*, Blessing of the New Moon, we entreat Hashem, *Sheyimalu mishaloseinu l’tovah*, “that our heartfelt requests will be fulfilled for the good.” Only Hashem knows what is truly good – and what is good for us. We ask that the blessing we receive from Him will be what He sees fit for us. We may have some difficulty accepting some of the “good,” but we trust in Hashem’s Divine wisdom and knowledge of “us.”