

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 8 #7, November 27, 2020; Vayeitzei 5781

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

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Thanksgiving week is a good time to give thanks that we are Jews – and to honor our Patriarchs. They are great role models for us: Avraham for chesed, Yitzhak for strength and continuity, and Yaakov for Emet (truth). My interpretation below departs substantially from traditional Orthodox understanding. What I write here takes what I have learned from various sources and applies it to situations involving the Patriarchs.

When we meet Yaakov, he extorts the birthright from Esav, pretends to be his older brother to take the blessing that his father intended for Esav, and matches deception for deception with Lavan for twenty years. Are these the actions of a man of truth? A traditional view would state that it was acceptable for Yaakov to take Esav's blessing, because his mother's prophecy indicated that Yitzhak's blessings should go to Yaakov, not Esav. Also, the traditional view is that one may deal with a deceptive person by also acting deceptively. Yaakov, however, learned from Lavan that his deception caused pain to others. He therefore worked to leave his deceptive habits behind, make amends for the pain he caused to those close to him, and remake himself into a man of truth.

Yaakov was not the only patriarch to grow in midot (personal qualities) over his lifetime. Avraham and Yitzhak also grew, as we learn from the Torah. God tested Avraham ten times to see how he would react and to teach Avraham to have complete faith in Him. When Avraham went to Egypt during a famine, he told Sarah to pose as his sister, fearing that Paro would kill him to take Sarah as his wife. If he had complete faith in God, he would have been honest with Paro and trusted that God would protect him and Sarah. (A traditional view would be that one should be careful and protect the lives of his family members when encountering danger.) After God promised Avraham that he would have many descendants, and Sarah was still barren, Sarah gave her handmaid (Hagar) to Avraham to have a child. If Avraham and Sarah had complete faith in God, they would not have tried to fulfill God's promise through a second wife. Only at the Akeidah, when Avraham and Yitzhak got up early to follow God's command, did Avraham (and Yitzhak) show complete faith. They went up the mountain for a sacrifice to God, without any animal, expecting to sacrifice Yitzhak. Avraham trusted God's promise of descendants through Yitzhak and obeyed God's command – not knowing how God would resolve the command to sacrifice Yitzhak and His promise of many descendants through Yitzhak. At this point, Avraham reached his full potential – complete faith in God and His promises.

The only story we read focusing solely on Yitzhak is when he moved around, dug wells that his father had originally dug years earlier, and obtained hundred fold crops whenever he planted. Yitzhak, however, had problems all the time with non-Jews when he built a home and tried to settle down. Only when he realized that the great crops were a tool to enable him to move around and speak out in God's name, as his father had, did Yitzhak find peace with his neighbors. Yitzhak had the strength to cope with neighbors and to observe (and pass along to Yaakov) the mitzvot of his father. Once he started moving around and calling out in God's name, Yitzhak reached his full potential.

Although our tradition states that Yaakov studied at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, his real learning came from attending graduate school by living with Lavan for twenty years. When Lavan deceived Yaakov by sending Leah rather than Rachel to spend the night with him after supposedly marrying Rachel, Yaakov immediately internalized the personal pain of being deceived. He suddenly realized how his father and brother must have felt when Yitzhak unknowingly gave Esav's blessing to Yaakov. (Yaakov resolved to do what he could to repair this pain once he returned home.) The lesson was

very costly to Yaakov. Once married to Leah, he was guaranteed to be unhappy in marriage. Marrying both sisters made each jealous of the other. God increased the pain by making Leah fertile and Rachel infertile (for many years).

Yaakov's personal growth as a man of truth accelerates at the end of Vayeitzei, after Yaakov and family quietly leave. Lavan follows, and he catches up with Yaakov's family on the way back to Canaan. For the first time in the Torah, we read that Yaakov confronted Lavan, told him twenty years of grievances from Lavan's constant deceptions, and put up a mechtiza – a barrier separating Yaakov's family from Lavan's territory. He told Lavan not to cross to Yaakov's side, and he vowed that his family would not go back to Lavan's side. Yaakov would not return to the University of Deception, and he warned Lavan not to come near his family again.

Sefer Bereishit covers sibling rivalry over many generations – from Kayin and Hevel, to Yishmael and Yitzhak, then Esav and Yaakov, and later among Yaakov's dozen sons. Sibling rivalry starts with murder (or manslaughter), then belittling laughter, rage and treats of murder, and finally sending a problem child away (back to Egypt). Perhaps the ultimate tikkun for sibling rivalry required a trip to Egypt. Manasseh and Ephraim seem to grow up without any sibling rivalry, and Manasseh does not object when his grandfather favors his younger brother with the blessings of a first born. The Sefer concludes with peace and contentment among Yosef's sons – a model for future generations, including our own.

As I write Thanksgiving night, I count the blessing of nearly fifty years of friendship and tutoring from my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l. Rabbi Cahan taught me how to see God's hidden face in the world and, especially, when unexpected good things came to me. Years of Shabbat Torah discussions in shul and when I asked questions gave me more insights into the Torah, mitzvot, and rich lessons from our faith. Our family has additional blessings from various Rabbis – both personal friends and clergy at the seven shuls with which we have close ties. For me personally, my close friend Rabbi Yehoshua Singer from Am HaTorah in Bethesda, MD always reads and sends me valuable comments and corrections on early drafts of my weekly Devrei Torah. Yes, blessings are here if we look – many reasons to give thanks.

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Nossan ben Pessel, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhak Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.**

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Hannah & Alan

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**Drasha: Vayeitzei: Well Check-Up**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Fleeing from his brother Esav, Yaakov travels to his uncle Lavan in Charan; as he nears the town, he sees a peculiar sight. He sees a field and in the middle of it, he spots a well with a large rock placed upon its mouth. Three flocks of sheep with their shepherds nearby are standing near it, waiting to be watered. But the shepherds are just standing and waiting. It

seems that they have no work to do and are about to take the sheep back to their pens. The flocks are crouching and waiting for something. Yaakov is very curious. So Yaakov greets them, "My brothers!" he begins. "Where are you from?" They tell him that they are from Charan. Yaakov inquires about the welfare of Lavan and his family, and then Yaakov asks the question. "The day is yet large; it is not yet time to bring the sheep back. Why don't you water the sheep and continue grazing?" (Genesis 29:4-7) Rashi explains the verse in detail. "If these are your sheep," Yaakov asks, "then why don't you give them their water? And," Yaakov continues "if you are working for someone else, then why are you just sitting here?" The shepherds explain to Yaakov that they would like to water the sheep but unless a large group of shepherds arrive, they cannot. It is impossible to lift the rock and draw water. Therefore they sit and wait each day until enough shepherds arrive to give lift the rock (Genesis 29:8). It seems to be a fair and understandable exchange except for one word. Yaakov began the conversation with a term of endearment. "My brothers!" No pun intended, but Yaakov did not know these shepherds from Adam!

Why did he begin his question with words that seem to show an affinity that could not have yet been forged? He just met these men, why does he call them brothers?

**I recently heard a wonderful story about someone I know dearly: A prominent Chassidic Rebbe was not feeling all that well so his doctor recommended that he go for a comprehensive cardio-vascular examination including a stress test, echo-cardiogram and a slew of other tests would be beneficial. He recommended a prominent cardiologist, Dr. Paul Fegil (not his real name), who headed the cardiology department of a large medical center in Manhattan.**

**Waiting for the doctor to arrive, the Rebbe felt very uncomfortable in the unfamiliar surrounding. He barely responded to the nurse's questions pertaining to his medical health and history. The nurse was frustrated as the Rebbe almost refused to discuss his symptoms. It got worse. When the nurse began attaching electrodes to all parts of his chest, he began to sweat. He became so nervous that the monitors and other meters connected to the wires began to pulsate wildly.**

**The nurse was astounded by the very erratic movements on the heart monitor. Never having seen lines jump off the monitor like that, the nurse quickly ran out of the examining room to summon the esteemed cardiologist immediately. Meanwhile, the Rebbe was still sweating profusely as his heart was pounding wildly.**

**All of a sudden the door opened and in walked Dr. Fegil. He was a distinguished looking man with graying hair a warm smile and a small leather yarmulke on his head. He stood at the opening, and exclaimed to the Rebbe. "Sholom Aleichem! Rebbe! HaKol B'seder? Is everything OK?" Hearing those familiar words, the Rebbe became startled. He picked up his head and saw the doctor. He could not believe it Dr. Paul Fegil was one of his own! Almost magically, the bells and whistles that were muddling the monitor suddenly stopped. Immediately all the readings showed a sign of a very normal heart beat! Minutes later the Rebbe told the nurse every one of his maladies and his entire medical history as well!**

**Dr. Fegil looked at the nurse and laughed. "Sometimes a few haimishe words can fix more problems than open-heart surgery!"**

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, explained that Yaakov approached a group of shepherds whom he had never met. He wanted to admonish them in a gentle manner while finding out what was transpiring at the well. After all, he was puzzled, why were they just sitting around waiting. However, Yaakov was smarter than just to criticize. He knew that unless he both called and considered them as brothers they would turn a deaf ear.

It was only after they explained to him that until all the shepherds gathered to lift the rock, they could do nothing, did Yaakov understand that his complaints were unjustified. But Yaakov had no problems presenting his critique to the shepherds for one simple reason. He began with one simple exclamation. "My brothers." Yaakov approached them by exclaiming, "Brothers! Where are you from?" The moment he initiated the concept of brotherhood, any suggestion — even criticism — would be allowed. Criticisms, even constructive ones, are difficult, but Yaakov taught us a lesson: Before you can espouse your druthers, make sure that you are talking to brothers!

Good Shabbos!.

## Le Grande Thanksgiving

by Art Buchwald \*

This confidential column was leaked to me by a high government official in the Plymouth colony on the condition that I not reveal his name.

One of our most important holidays is Thanksgiving Day, known in France as le Jour de Merci Donnant.

Le Jour de Merci Donnant was first started by a group of Pilgrims (Pèlerins) who fled from l'Angleterre before the McCarran Act to found a colony in the New World (le Nouveau Monde) where they could shoot Indians (les Peaux-Rouges) and eat turkey (dinde) to their hearts' content.

They landed at a place called Plymouth (now a famous voiture Américaine) in a wooden sailing ship called the Mayflower (or Fleur de Mai ) in 1620. But while the Pèlerins were killing the dindes, the Peaux-Rouges were killing the Pèlerins, and there were several hard winters ahead for both of them. The only way the Peaux-Rouges helped the Pèlerins was when they taught them to grow corn (mais). The reason they did this was because they liked corn with their Pèlerins.

In 1623, after another harsh year, the Pèlerins' crops were so good that they decided to have a celebration and give thanks because more mais was raised by the Pèlerins than Pèlerins were killed by Peaux-Rouges.

Every year on the Jour de Merci Donnant, parents tell their children an amusing story about the first celebration.

It concerns a brave capitaine named Miles Standish (known in France as Kilometres Deboutish) and a young, shy lieutenant named Jean Alden. Both of them were in love with a flower of Plymouth called Priscilla Mullens (no translation). The vieux capitaine said to the jeune lieutenant :

"Go to the damsel Priscilla (allez très vite chez Priscilla), the loveliest maiden of Plymouth ( la plus jolie demoiselle de Plymouth). Say that a blunt old captain, a man not of words but of action (un vieux Fanfan la Tulipe), offers his hand and his heart, the hand and heart of a soldier. Not in these words, you know, but this, in short, is my meaning.

"I am a maker of war (je suis un fabricant de la guerre) and not a maker of phrases. You, bred as a scholar ( vous, qui t'es pain comme un étudiant), can say it in elegant language, such as you read in your books of the pleadings and wooings of lovers, such as you think best adapted to win the heart of the maiden."

Although Jean was fit to be tied (convenable très emballé), friendship prevailed over love and he went to his duty. But instead of using elegant language, he blurted out his mission. Priscilla was muted with amazement and sorrow (rendue muette par l'étonnement et la tristesse ).

At length she exclaimed, interrupting the ominous silence: "If the great captain of Plymouth is so very eager to wed me, why does he not come himself and take the trouble to woo me?" (Où est-il, le vieux Kilometres? Pourquoi ne vient-il pas auprès de moi pour tenter sa chance?)

Jean said that Kilometres Deboutish was very busy and didn't have time for those things. He staggered on, telling what a wonderful husband Kilometres would make. Finally Priscilla arched her eyebrows and said in a tremulous voice, "Why don't you speak for yourself, Jean?" (Chacun a son gout.)

And so, on the fourth Thursday in November, American families sit down at a large table brimming with tasty dishes and, for the only time during the year, eat better than the French do.

No one can deny that le Jour de Merci Donnant is a grande fête and no matter how well fed American families are, they never forget to give thanks to Kilometres Deboutish, who made this great day possible.

\* The late Art Buchwald wrote this column in the 1950s or 1960s, when he was a reporter for a U.S. paper printed in France. He reprinted it each year until he passed away. I am not trying to relate this material to the Parsha. For optimal humor, show it to someone who studied French (as I did in high school and college). For this version: [https://theboldsoul.lisataylorhuff.com/the\\_bold\\_soul/2013/11/explaining-thanksgiving-to-the-french-yeah-good-luck-with-that.html](https://theboldsoul.lisataylorhuff.com/the_bold_soul/2013/11/explaining-thanksgiving-to-the-french-yeah-good-luck-with-that.html) The Washington Post printed this column, with slightly different openings, for many years.

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## **Vayeitzei: How a Baby Is Made**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2016, 2020

How is a Baby Made? More specifically, what determines the future characteristics of the child? One answer emerges from the story of Yaakov's breeding of the sheep, an answer that seems to be endorsed by the Talmud: a child's character is shaped by what the mother and father were thinking and doing at the time of conception.

The Gemara in Nedarim (20a-b) has an extended discussion about which, if any, acts of marital sex are discouraged or forbidden. Yochanan ben Dahavai states that the reason children are born lame, mute, deaf, or blind, is because husband and wife were engaged in improper sexual behavior with their bodies (certain sexual acts), their ears (what they were listening to), their mouths (where they were kissing), or their eyes (where they were looking). This statement parallels the belief, widespread in the ancient world, that the thoughts or actions of the parents can imprint themselves on the fetus being conceived. In his book "Natural History," Pliny the Elder (1st century CE) states:

*... [T]hat a great many accidental circumstances are influential (that is, exert an influence on the fetus)—recollections of sights and sounds and actual sense-impressions received at the time of conception. Also a thought suddenly flitting across the mind of either parent is supposed to produce likeness [in the fetus] (7:2).*

This understanding of fetal development is implicit in the story of Yaakov and the rods (30:37-39). To ensure that Lavan's flocks give birth to striped and spotted sheep, Yaakov peels white streaks in wooden rods and places them where the sheep will see them when they copulate. And, lo and behold, this works:

*And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth sheep striped, speckled, and spotted (30:39).*

Bereishit Rabbah (VaYeitzei, 73:10, Vilna edition) illustrates the validity of this science in the case of humans with the following colorful story:

*There is a story of a black man who was married to a black woman, and she bore him a son who was white. The father seized the son and came to Rebbe and said to him, "Perhaps this is not my son." Rebbe replied, "Do you have portraits in your house?" He said, "Yes." "Are they black or white?" [Rebbe asked.] "They are white," [he replied.] "It is from this that you have a white son," [Rebbe responded to him.]*

Although this science has now been displaced by the science of genetics, its acceptance by Bereishit Rabbah and the Talmud need not bother us from a faith perspective. Regarding issues of science, Rambam writes that the Rabbis were no more advanced than the experts at their time, and did not always understand the science fully (Guide to the Perplexed, III:14). But what are we to make of the Torah's story? Doesn't the Torah implicitly recognize the validity of this false scientific belief? It does not. The Torah relates that Yaakov operated with this belief, but it does not tell us why, in fact, the flock gave birth to spotted and striped sheep. Indeed, the next statement in Bereishit Rabbah attributes these births to a different cause altogether:

*Said Rav Huna of Beit Horon: Ministering Angels would carry sheep from Lavan's flock and come and place them in Yaakov's flock [at the time of copulation]. This is what is meant by the verse,*

*"[And the angel said:] Lift up your eyes, and see – all the rams which leap upon the cattle are striped, speckled, and spotted." (31:12)*

According to Rav Huna, while Yaakov might have thought that his success was due to the striped sticks, it was really all God's doing, and it was done by using a good old-fashioned science: mating the ewes with the right type of rams. This seems to be the pshat. The Torah presents us with two contrasting explanations for Yaakov's success: the sticks and the mating with the rams. The first represents Yaakov's efforts, the second, the actual truth which the angel reveals to Yaakov ("lift up your eyes and see..."). The moral here is one which runs through many of the Yaakov narratives: while Yaakov exerts great effort to achieve his goals, often by engaging in subterfuge, his success is not a result of these efforts but rather of God's promised protection. This lesson is finally learned by Yaakov in next week's parasha, when, faced with Esav's approaching army, he abandons his plans and strategies and turns to God for help and salvation.

As far as the science of external influences is concerned, other rabbis, in addition to Rav Huna, rejected it as well. In Nedarim, Rabbi Yochanan (not to be confused with Yochanan ben Dahavai) dismisses the position of Yochanan ben Dahavai and his concerns regarding certain forms of marital sex. He states that no particular act of marital sex is forbidden or discouraged. In so doing, he rejects the notion that such acts impact fetal development and states that this belief, held by certain rabbis, is not actually true, nor is it relevant for matters of halakha.

Despite Rabbi Yochanan's rejection of the position, the belief in this science does not fully disappear. A number of Rishonim state that a couple should still avoid some of the activities mentioned in the Talmud to "play it safe," and protect against the possible impact that these activities might have on their child. In addition, in a different passage, the Gemara (Berakhot 20a) relates the following story about none other than Rabbi Yochanan himself:

*Rabbi Yochanan used to go and sit by the gates of the mikveh. He said: When the daughters of Israel come up from immersing themselves, they look at me and they have children as handsome as I am.*

This passage is shocking for a number of reasons. First, Rabbi Yochanan was not concerned that he would have improper sexual thoughts. Second, it indicates that it would be acceptable for a woman to be thinking of another man (here, Rabbi Yochanan) while having sex with her husband. Finally, as it relates to our topic, it appears that Rabbi Yochanan believed that one's thoughts during sex could, in fact, impact the formation of the fetus. It is thus all the more significant that he rejects the halakhic implications that this would have for restricting certain acts of marital sex.

Possibly, Rabbi Yochanan distinguished between actions and thought. One's actions do not influence the development of the fetus; one's mental state and thoughts do. This conclusion is implicit in the final statement in the passage from Nedarim. The Talmud states that while there are no sexual acts that are off-limits, there are times when sex is forbidden because of the emotional and mental state of the participants. Specifically, the Talmud states that the couple may not have sex if the act is devoid of any sense of intimacy or connection. They may not engage in sex when one of them is drunk or asleep, in the absence of full consent, or while imagining having sex with a different person.

Here too, the Talmud connects this to the character of a child born from such a coupling: children conceived during such moments will turn out to be rebellious and sinful. Immoral acts during conception impact the moral character of the child. It is the moral character of the act which matters, not the particular physical activity engaged in. Through limiting this "science," the Talmud moves from a focus on sexual acts to a focus on sexual ethics.

The story does not end there. Given that what really mattered was a person's thoughts at the time of conception, a number of Rishonim, and in particular the Kabbalists, such as the author of Iggeret HaKodesh, directed the man to focus his thoughts on the Divine to ensure that the child would be wise and God-fearing. [The emphasis here and elsewhere on the man's thoughts and role during sex in contrast to the woman's is a topic for another time.] Some contemporary poskim push back on this and state that the purest thoughts that a person can have during sex is to be focused on his or her partner and the intimacy between them.

Yaakov's attempt to breed sheep based on a belief in a particular science is a lesson in how human efforts can so often be misguided, and in the need to put one's faith and trust in God. At the same time, The Talmud's narrowing of the scope of this science, and the resultant conclusions for the marital life of a couple, demonstrate that our human efforts are best directed to partnering with God, to believing in the truth of God's Torah and to interpreting and applying it so as to best shape our religious lives and values.

## **Vayeitzei: Same Old**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\* © 2020 Teach 613

Yakov had to flee from his parent's home. His brother Esav was angry with him and wanted to kill him; so flee he did.

The Torah records the event. "And Yakov left Be'er Sheva, and he went to Charan." Rashi asks: Why does the Torah have to tell me that Yakov left Be'er Sheva-- Let it just say that he went to Charan? Rashi answers that the Torah wishes to highlight the significance of Yakov leaving Be'er Sheva. "When a Tzaddik (righteous person) is in the city he is its glory, glow, and pride. When he leaves, the city's glory, glow, and pride, are diminished." Therefore, the Torah specifically wants to record the significant and sad moment that Yakov left Be'er Sheva.

Interestingly, although the Torah values the Tzaddik and declares that he is the "glory, glow, and pride of a city," not everyone sees the value in such people. The Talmud in Sanhedrin (100a) records, for example, that some people teased and said, "Of what value are Torah scholars-- Have they ever declared a raven to be kosher-- Have they ever declared a dove to be non-kosher?" In the minds of these teasers the righteous people were too predictable. They couldn't find anything novel that these people had ever done.

Particularly noteworthy is that the Talmud does not respond to these teasers. To this great "insult" of "same old" the Talmud does not offer a response. Rabbi Ahron Kotler explains that it is as if the Talmud is smiling "uh-huh," and saying, "That is precisely true. It is through accuracy, and through reliable transmission of the tradition, that the Torah scholars make their primary contribution."

This concept that "same old" is not necessarily an insult, is not limited to Torah scholarship. Actually, it is a healthy attitude for life. Some people are troubled about things that are "same old." Often the correct response is, "Yes, it is same old. But that is truly monumental."

I once encountered a written interview of a certain celebrity in which he explained why he was divorcing his wife after 20 years of marriage. He was asked, "Was anything wrong?" He responded, "No, nothing was wrong. It's just that it was always 'same old.'"

He was asked if he had children from this marriage. He responded, "Yes. Two lovely children." When he was asked about his relationship with his soon to be ex, he said, "It's okay."

The interviewer then asked about the family. He replied, "Oh, they are nice people. It's just that it's all just 'same old.'"

I thought to myself: What would the Talmud say about such a person? It would probably go something like this. "Fool! What you consider an insult and disappointing is actually a significant accomplishment. What you call, 'same old' is quite monumental. It is all that has happened in 20 years of marriage. It is the children, the family, and many wonderful relationships."

Sometimes in parenting as well, we may experience "same old" syndrome. The days, months, years, may seem somewhat repetitive. It seems like it is all about school, homework, meals, and bedtime. And then it starts again. Yet, if we stay on track the results are monumental.

Rabbi Mendel Kaplan was fond of describing life as a piece of chewing gum. It has a little flavor... but mostly it is chew, chew, chew. "Same old" may be less exciting than you were expecting, but if you do it with diligence you will get to smile - as the Talmud smiles at this "insult"-- because in the end you will have something wonderful to show for your efforts.

\* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.

## Don't Underestimate Yourself: Thoughts for Parashat Vayetsei

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel\*

Jacob was having a life crisis. He had to flee because his brother Esav wanted to murder him. He was leaving from his parents' home with no idea when he would be able to return to see them again. He was alone, heading to a new land where his future was uncertain.

Along the way, he sleeps and has an amazing dream—a ladder connecting earth and heaven, with angels ascending and descending. He receives a glorious message from God that he and his descendants will inherit the land, will be numerous, and will be a blessing to all the peoples of the world. God promises to protect Jacob.

Jacob awakens and realizes that he had a communication from God. He was awed. “And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said: surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it (ve-anokhi lo yadati)—Bereishith 28:17. This verse is generally understood to mean that Jacob had not realized that God was with him at this particular place.

**I suggest an alternate interpretation with a different translation: “Surely the Lord is in this place, but I did not even know who I am (anokhi—myself, lo yadati—I did not know.) Jacob had originally thought of himself as an insignificant person caught in the midst of a seemingly hopeless situation. He was a refugee, a person without a home, without status, without family or friends. But then God appeared and assured him: you are somebody, you are precious to Me, you have a great future. Jacob is stunned. I did not know that I was valuable, I did not know my own worth. Anokhi, lo yadati. Myself, my personal significance—I did not know!**

Jacob came to recognize what all humans need to recognize: our lives have significance, we have goals to strive for; we are not lost and forgotten. We should not underestimate ourselves.

Let us look again at Jacob's dream. He envisioned “a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Bereishith 28:12). Rabbinic commentators have noted the anomaly that Jacob saw angels ascending from earth to heaven, although one would normally have thought that angels would first be descending from heaven to earth.

Perhaps the dream is alluding to how to cope with difficult situations. We first must draw on our own inner strength and let our dreams yearn upward; we must send our “angels” on an ascending path; we must let our minds rise above our actual setting so that we can expand our vision. Once we've done that, then the Lord sends His angels down to help us achieve our goals.

To overcome feelings that our lives are contracting, we need to have ideas, dreams and goals that are expanding. Otherwise, we sink into the prison of despair. We must believe in ourselves and our ability to grow.

Jacob needed to develop self-worth; he had to learn that his life meant something, that God expected great things from him.

If we can dream Jacob's dream and let our “angels” ascend heavenward, we can attain inner freedom and wisdom. If our “angels” will aspire and rise, then we may hope that the Lord will send His angels from heaven to help us on our way. [emphasis added]

\* Jewishideas.org. **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

## Thoughts for Thanksgiving

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel\*

President George Washington proclaimed Thursday November 26, 1789 as a day of national thanksgiving to God "for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us."

The Jewish communities in the United States of that time rejoiced in the role they played in establishing this new country. Already in 1784, leaders of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City (founded 1654) had sent a letter to Governor George Clinton on behalf of "the ancient congregation of Israelites" in which they said: "Though the society we belong to is but small, when compared with other religious societies, yet we flatter ourselves that none has manifested a more zealous attachment to the sacred cause of America in the late war with Great Britain....And we now look forward with pleasure to the happy days we expect to enjoy under a constitution wisely framed to preserve the inestimable blessings of civil and religious liberty."

A new country was born, and the Jews had participated in its formation. They were equal citizens in the United States. This was not true of Jews in any country in Europe or in the Muslim world. American Jews were the first in the history of the diaspora to be citizens on an equal footing with their non-Jewish neighbors, and to have actually participated in fighting for the independence of a new nation.

When President Washington called for a day of Thanksgiving, Jews observed this day with joy and pride. At Shearith Israel in New York, the Rev. Gershom Mendes Seixas arranged a suitable service of prayer, and delivered an address in which he called upon Jews "to support that government which is founded upon the strictest principles of equal liberty and justice."

In subsequent years, days of Thanksgiving were similarly celebrated at Shearith Israel and the other early Jewish congregations. These days were invariably proclaimed in the name of the American people, and were meant to be observed by each citizen according to his or her own faith. In 1817, New York State established an annual observance of Thanksgiving Day. Shearith Israel held services on each subsequent year--except 1849 and 1854. In those two years, the Governor of the State had addressed his proclamation specifically to "a Christian people" instead of to Americans of all faiths. Other than these two years, Thanksgiving has been proclaimed for all Americans, each according to his and her own faith.

It is sometimes heard in Orthodox Jewish circles that Thanksgiving Day is a "non-Jewish holiday" and should not be observed by religious Jews. This view is historically wrong and morally dubious. Thanksgiving Day is a national American holiday for all residents of the United States, of all religions. Jews participated in Thanksgiving from the very beginning of the United States' history. This national holiday belongs to Jews as to all other Americans. It is altogether fitting that Jews join fellow Americans in observing a day of Thanksgiving to the Almighty for all the blessings He has bestowed upon this country. Jews, in particular, have much reason to thank God for the opportunities and freedoms granted to us in the United States.

In his famous letter to the Jewish community of Newport in 1790, President Washington wrote: "May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants--while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid." These are words, expressive of the American spirit at its best, for which we can be thankful.

Happy Thanksgiving.

\* Jewishideas.org. <https://www.jewishideas.org/article/thoughts-thanksgiving>

## **Parshas Vayeitzei – The Inextinguishable Spark**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

It is well known that a critical element of a Torah lifestyle is improving one's interpersonal conduct, and there are many mitzvos concerning our dealings with others. This is in fact a lifelong task. For while the principle concepts of proper interpersonal conduct are often straightforward, the practical application of these principles to real life circumstances can often be subtle, confusing and difficult. How honest are we obligated to be in business? How careful do we have to be about speaking ill of others? When we do need to speak ill of others, what are we allowed to say? May we remain silent when someone is entering into a bad partnership? These and so many other questions arise throughout our lives on both large and small issues.

One of the most difficult areas of interpersonal conduct is the area of respect, particularly for those we know well. When we know thoroughly of another's errors and failings we feel that they have forfeited any right to be respected. If it appears that someone needs to be corrected or reprimanded, we may even feel justified in using any manner of criticism with no concern for the other person's dignity.

If there was ever a man whose conduct eroded any respect he may have deserved, Lavan was that man. From their initial encounter, Lavan was seeking to take advantage of Yaakov in sly and treacherous ways. Going so far as to give Yaakov a different wife than had been promised without even telling Yaakov, leaving him to find out for himself after the wedding, Lavan's treachery knew no bounds. After twenty-two years of such treatment, Lavan chases after Yaakov as he heads home to his parents. Although, G-d appeared to Lavan and warned him not to deal with Yaakov for good or for bad, we can see from Lavan's protestations to Yaakov what his intentions were. He would gladly have taken back everything he had given to Yaakov - wives, children and flock, and sent Yaakov back home single, childless and penniless. After all the other treachery, Lavan now claims that Yaakov doesn't deserve any of what he has received and in fact it all really still belongs to Lavan.

Yet, the Rambam tells us that even as Yaakov rebuked Lavan, he maintained his respect for Lavan in an extraordinary and subtle way. After Yaakov and Lavan have each spoken their mind, Yaakov calls his brethren to eat. (Bereishis 31:46) The Rambam explains that the brethren here are Lavan's brethren and that Yaakov was making as if to invite them to join along with Lavan. Yaakov did not explicitly invite Lavan himself, for the respect due a father-in-law is such that he should be treated as if everything is his and he doesn't need to be invited. (The Sforno explains the same when they eat after making a treaty. See Bereishis 31:54.) Even a father-in-law like Lavan is a father-in-law and must be treated with the full measure of respect and dignity.

This depth of respect demanded for any and every human being, irrelevant of their conduct can be difficult to understand. An explanation for this demand can be found in the same incident. The Torah relates that the next morning Lavan kissed and blessed all of his children and grandchildren. The Sforno explains that the Torah is telling us of this blessing because the blessing is significant. The Torah wants us to understand that the blessing of a parent for a child which is given with all of his heart, is undoubtedly worthy of taking effect because of the G-dliness within every human being. When the parent is moved to bless their child, they tap into that G-dliness, and such a blessing has to have a direct impact. Even Lavan, at the height of his treachery, could not obliterate the G-dliness within himself. The spark within remained so strong, that when Lavan was emotionally moved to bless he expressed and connected with true G-dliness.

If this is true of Lavan, then it is certainly true of anyone we deal with. It is this inherent and inextinguishable spark of G-dliness which must be respected. No matter how wrong someone may be in the moment, no matter how low they have fallen, that G-dliness remains. That alone makes them deserving.

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## **Dvar Torah for Thanksgiving and Vayeitzei**

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

### **It's Thanksgiving!**

And just like this past year's Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succot, we will be celebrating this holiday under a different aura and in a different way.

But that doesn't mean we still can't be thankful. If Thanksgiving was a Jewish holiday, I'm sure we'd have all kinds of fun halachot detailing all we must do to fulfill the mitzvot of the day. How big does the turkey have to be? How many people must we have over? Must we call the wet bread we eat stuffing or dressing?

But the most important part of Thanksgiving that we must fulfill is to be thankful. Though of course this is a mitzvah we should fulfill everyday. We just pay more attention to it now. It's like Fathers or Mothers Day. In Jewish life, every day is a day to honor your parents and every day is a day to give gratitude.

To be thankful is a foundation of our religious life, the first word we say when we get up in the morning, and the linguistic origin for the word "Jew."

And in "Hilchot Thanksgiving," it's the one thing we have to do on this day even if we are doing the other things differently if at all.

So who/what are you thankful for? Feel free to email me your answer.

For me, it's hard to narrow it down. I can think of so many people and things that I'm thankful for and I'm sure you can too.

It helps to think of ourselves as having a "thankdar" where the different things we have gratitude for in this life blink around our center. With every passing day, different things move closer to our middle dot, i.e., the forefront of our consciousness. So I guess the real question is, at this moment what's at the center of your "thankdar"?

For me, the answer is clear. I am thankful for the people working at the grocery store. Man does not live by bread alone, but God made man that we should require food and not just Him.

For most of human history, food was much scarcer for most people. We were on constant edge that this year's crop would not be good. The tractate of Taanit in the Talmud is devoted to fasts declared by the Sages during times of drought. Rain literally meant life or death.

But not anymore. Today we have a constant stream of an ever widening variety of foodstuff whether it rains or not. Should the grocery store close, I have no idea how I would get food. Maybe if I grew up in a different place, I'd know how to hunt, fish and farm, but I didn't.

And in the middle of this pandemic, we have the people loading food onto the shelves, checking my purchases, and bagging my produce. We have truckers going cross country to make sure Americans are fed. So many people have lost food security, and we must help them, but it could have been so much worse.

Did you know that it's a halacha that we must show appreciation to those who serve us food by giving them to eat? (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim Chapter 169) Granted there are conditions that would make this law not apply strictly nowadays, but we see here the extreme sensitivity the Torah demands of us for those that give us food.

Not only that, but the Gematria for the Hebrew word for food, Ochel, is 51. This matches the word "YeHoDucha" (Psalms 45:18) which means "They will thank you". (The root of this word is "Hodu" which is also the Modern Hebrew word for turkey.) Every time we eat, we are filled with gratitude to God and for all of his agents that made it possible.

So the next time we shop, let us give heartfelt thanks to these unsung heroes who play such a vital role in helping us live another day. Even though you'll be wearing a mask there, they will be able to see that you're giving them a smile.

Happy Thanksgiving and Shabbat Shalom!

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## **Rav Kook Torah VaYeitzei: The Prayers of the Avot**

According to the Talmud (Berachot 26b), the Avot (forefathers) instituted the three daily prayers:

Abraham — Shacharit, the morning prayer.

Isaac — Minchah, the afternoon prayer.

Jacob — Ma'ariv, the evening prayer.

Is there an inner connection between these prayers and their founders?

Rav Kook wrote that each of these three prayers has its own special nature. This nature is a function of both the character of that time of day, and the pervading spirit of the righteous tzaddik who would pray at that time.

### **The Morning Stand**

Abraham, the first Jew, established the first prayer of the day. He would pray at daybreak, standing before God:

*“Abraham rose early in the morning, [returning] to the place where he had stood before God.”*  
(Gen. 19:27)

Why does the Torah call attention to the fact that Abraham would stand as he prayed? This position indicates that the function of this morning prayer is to make a spiritual stand. We need inner fortitude to maintain the ethical level that we have struggled to attain. The constant pressures and conflicts of day-to-day life can chip away at our spiritual foundation. To counter these negative influences, the medium of prayer can help us, by etching holy thoughts and sublime images deeply into the heart. Such a prayer at the start of the day helps protect us from the pitfalls of worldly temptations throughout the day.

This function of prayer — securing a solid ethical foothold in the soul — is reflected in the name Amidah (the “standing prayer”). It is particularly appropriate that Abraham, who successfully withstood ten trials and tenaciously overcame all who fought against his path of truth, established the “standing prayer” of the morning.

### **Flowering of the Soul in the Afternoon**

The second prayer, initiated by Isaac, is recited in the afternoon. This is the hour when the temporal activities of the day are finished, and we are able to clear our minds from the distractions of the world. The soul is free to express its true essence, unleashing innate feelings of holiness, pure love and awe of God.

The Torah characterizes Isaac's afternoon prayer as sichah (meditation): “Isaac went out to meditate in the field towards evening” (Gen. 24:64). The word sichah also refers to plants and bushes (sichim), for it expresses the spontaneous flowering of life force. This is a fitting metaphor for the afternoon prayer, when the soul is able to naturally grow and flourish.

Why was it Isaac who established this prayer? Isaac exemplified the attribute of Justice (midat ha-din), so he founded the soul's natural prayer of the afternoon. The exacting measure of law is applied to situations where one has deviated from the normal and accepted path.

### **Spontaneous Evening Revelation**

And what distinguishes Ma'ariv, the evening prayer?

Leaving his parents' home, Jacob stopped for the night in Beth-El. There he dreamed of ascending and descending angels and divine promises. Jacob awoke the following morning awestruck; he had not been aware of holiness of his encampment.

*"He chanced upon the place and stayed overnight, for it became suddenly night."* (Gen. 28:11)

The "chance meeting" — a spiritual experience beyond the level to which the soul is accustomed — that is the special quality of the evening prayer. The night is a time of quiet solitude. It is a time especially receptive to extraordinary elevations of the soul, including prophecy and levels close to it.

Unlike the other two prayers, the evening prayer is not obligatory. But this does not reflect a lack of importance; on the contrary, the essence of the evening prayer is an exceptionally uplifting experience. Precisely because of its sublime nature, this prayer must not be encumbered by any aspect of rote obligation. It needs to flow spontaneously from the heart. The voluntary nature of the evening prayer is a continuation of Jacob's unexpected spiritual revelation that night in Beth-El.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 65-67. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 109, Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 409.)

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### **The Birth of the World's Oldest Hate (Vayetse 5777)**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

*"Go and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to our father Jacob. Pharaoh made his decree only about the males whereas Laban sought to destroy everything."*

This passage from the Haggadah on Pesach – evidently based on this week's parsha – is extraordinarily difficult to understand.

First, it is a commentary on the phrase in Deuteronomy, *Arami oved avi*. As the overwhelming majority of commentators point out, the meaning of this phrase is "my father was a wandering Aramean", a reference either to Jacob, who escaped to Aram [Aram meaning Syria, a reference to Haran where Laban lived], or to Abraham, who left Aram in response to God's call to travel to the land of Canaan. It does not mean "an Aramean [Laban] tried to destroy my father." Some commentators read it this way, but almost certainly they only do so because of this passage in the Haggadah.

Second, nowhere in the parsha do we find that Laban actually tried to destroy Jacob. He deceived him, tried to exploit him, and chased after him when he fled. As he was about to catch up with Jacob, God appeared to him in a dream at night and said: 'Be very careful not to say anything, good or bad, to Jacob.' (Gen. 31:24). When Laban complains about the fact that Jacob was trying to escape, Jacob replies: "Twenty years now I have worked for you in your estate – fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for some of your flocks. You changed my wages ten times!" (Gen. 31:41). All this suggests that Laban behaved outrageously to Jacob, treating him like an unpaid labourer, almost a slave, but not that he tried to "destroy" him – to kill him as Pharaoh tried to kill all male Israelite children.

Third, the Haggadah and the seder service of which it is the text, is about how the Egyptians enslaved and practised slow genocide against the Israelites and how God saved them from slavery and death. Why seek to diminish this whole narrative by saying that, actually, Pharaoh's decree was not that bad, Laban's was worse. This seems to make no sense, either in terms of the central theme of the Haggadah or in relation to the actual facts as recorded in the biblical text.

How then are we to understand it?

Perhaps the answer is this. Laban's behaviour is the paradigm of anti-Semites through the ages. It was not so much what Laban did that the Haggadah is referring to, but what his behaviour gave rise to, in century after century. How so?

Laban begins by seeming like a friend. He offers Jacob refuge when he is in flight from Esau who has vowed to kill him. Yet it turns out that his behaviour is less generous than self-interested and calculating. Jacob works for him for seven years for Rachel. Then on the wedding night Laban substitutes Leah for Rachel, so that to marry Rachel, Jacob has to

work another seven years. When Joseph is born to Rachel, Jacob tries to leave. Laban protests. Jacob works another six years, and then realises that the situation is untenable. Laban's sons are accusing him of getting rich at Laban's expense. Jacob senses that Laban himself is becoming hostile. Rachel and Leah agree, saying, "he treats us like strangers! He has sold us and spent the money!" (Gen. 31:14-15).

Jacob realises that there is nothing he can do or say that will persuade Laban to let him leave. He has no choice but to escape. Laban then pursues him, and were it not for God's warning the night before he catches up with him, there is little doubt that he would have forced Jacob to return and live out the rest of his life as his unpaid labourer. As he says to Jacob the next day: "The daughters are my daughters! The sons are my sons! The flocks are my flocks! All that you see is mine!" (Gen. 31:43). It turns out that everything he had ostensibly given Jacob, in his own mind he had not given at all.

Laban treats Jacob as his property, his slave. He is a non-person. In his eyes Jacob has no rights, no independent existence. He has given Jacob his daughters in marriage but still claims that they and their children belong to him, not Jacob. He has given Jacob an agreement as to the animals that will be his as his wages, yet he still insists that "The flocks are my flocks."

What arouses his anger, his rage, is that Jacob maintains his dignity and independence. Faced with an impossible existence as his father-in-law's slave, Jacob always finds a way of carrying on. Yes he has been cheated of his beloved Rachel, but he works so that he can marry her too. Yes he has been forced to work for nothing, but he uses his superior knowledge of animal husbandry to propose a deal which will allow him to build flocks of his own that will allow him to maintain what is now a large family. Jacob refuses to be defeated. Hemmed in on all sides, he finds a way out. That is Jacob's greatness. His methods are not those he would have chosen in other circumstances. He has to outwit an extremely cunning adversary. But Jacob refuses to be defeated, or crushed and demoralised. In a seemingly impossible situation Jacob retains his dignity, independence and freedom. Jacob is no man's slave.

Laban is, in effect, the first anti-Semite. In age after age, Jews sought refuge from those, like Esau, who sought to kill them. The nations who gave them refuge seemed at first to be benefactors. But they demanded a price. They saw, in Jews, people who would make them rich. Wherever Jews went they brought prosperity to their hosts. Yet they refused to be mere chattels. They refused to be owned. They had their own identity and way of life; they insisted on the basic human right to be free. The host society then eventually turned against them. They claimed that Jews were exploiting them rather than what was in fact the case, that they were exploiting the Jews. And when Jews succeeded, they accused them of theft: "The flocks are my flocks! All that you see is mine!" They forgot that Jews had contributed massively to national prosperity. The fact that Jews had salvaged some self-respect, some independence, that they too had prospered, made them not just envious but angry. That was when it became dangerous to be a Jew.

Laban was the first to display this syndrome but not the last. It happened again in Egypt after the death of Joseph. It happened under the Greeks and Romans, the Christian and Muslim empires of the Middle Ages, the European nations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and after the Russian Revolution.

In her fascinating book *World on Fire*, Amy Chua argues that ethnic hatred will always be directed by the host society against any conspicuously successful minority. All three conditions must be present.

[1] The hated group must be a minority or people will fear to attack it.

[2] It must be successful or people will not envy it, merely feel contempt for it.

[3] It must be conspicuous or people will not notice it.

Jews tended to fit all three. That is why they were hated. And it began with Jacob during his stay with Laban. He was a minority, outnumbered by Laban's family. He was successful, and it was conspicuous: you could see it by looking at his flocks.

What the sages are saying in the Haggadah now becomes clear. Pharaoh was a one-time enemy of the Jews, but Laban exists, in one form or another, in age after age. The syndrome still exists today. As Amy Chua notes, Israel in the context of the Middle East is a conspicuously successful minority. It is a small country, a minority; it is successful and it is conspicuously so. Somehow, in a tiny country with few natural resources, it has outshone its neighbours. The result is envy that becomes anger that becomes hate. Where did it begin? With Laban.

Put this way, we begin to see Jacob in a new light. Jacob stands for minorities and small nations everywhere. Jacob is the refusal to let large powers crush the few, the weak, the refugee. Jacob refuses to define himself as a slave, someone else's property. He maintains his inner dignity and freedom. He contributes to other people's prosperity but he defeats every attempt to be exploited. Jacob is the voice that says: I too am human. I too have rights. I too am free.

If Laban is the eternal paradigm of hatred of conspicuously successful minorities, then Jacob is the eternal paradigm of the human capacity to survive the hatred of others. In this strange way Jacob becomes the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind, the living proof that hate never wins the final victory; freedom does.

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See <https://rabbisacks.org/birth-worlds-oldest-hate-vayetse-5777/>

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## **The Thanksgiving Jew** By Menachem Feldman\*

You may be surprised to hear that the word "Jew" does not appear in the Five Books of Moses. The Torah refers to our people as the Children of Israel, for we are the children of our patriarch Jacob, who was given the additional name "Israel." Israel fathered twelve children, who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

The name "Jew" comes from the name "Judah," which means "thanksgiving." Judah was the fourth son of Jacob and his wife Leah. As we read in this week's Parshah, "And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, 'This time, I will thank [odeh] the L rd!' Therefore, she named him Judah [Yehuda]."1

Why, then, are all Jews called by the name of just one of the tribes, Judah? What is it about thanksgiving that captures the essence of the Children of Israel?

Thanksgiving is easier said than done.

We often look around and wonder why some of the people around us are so ungrateful. Why don't our children appreciate all that we do for them? Why does our spouse not show gratitude? Why do our co-workers take us for granted?

To understand why the feeling of gratitude is so elusive, we must examine the Hebrew word for "gratitude," hodaah, the root of the name Judah. Hodaah also means "to acknowledge," as in acknowledging that another's opinion is correct.

Why do these two seemingly distinct ideas, thanksgiving and acknowledgement, share the same word? What possible connection do they share?

The answer is that the key to being thankful is acknowledging the other's perspective. To illustrate: a mother does so much for her child, yet does the child really appreciate it? The child may take the mother for granted, thinking that she is just doing what she is supposed to do as a mother. After all, argues the child, isn't this her job? The only way the child can genuinely feel grateful is if he adopts her perspective, if he appreciates all her sacrifices and all the time she lovingly dedicates to him.

The same is true of a spouse. We can say thank you for an act of kindness. But to truly feel grateful, we need to see the picture from the perspective of our spouse. We need to appreciate all the thought, feeling and energy that was invested in this one act. Only when we acknowledge and appreciate the other's point of view—hodaah—can we say todah, "thank you."

To be a Jew, then, is to possess the ability to see beyond the obvious, to acknowledge the other's perspective. To be a Jew is to experience the pain of others, as well as rejoice in their happiness as if it were our own. To be a Jew is to acknowledge and accept the perspective of hope and joy even in the midst of great hardship.

There is an ongoing and long-standing dispute between the creation and the Creator. Our perspective is that our life, health and success is due to our independent efforts, and that the only one we need to thank is ourselves. From G d's perspective, however, the entire Universe is being brought into existence every moment by the word of G d. From His perspective, the only true reality is the G dly vitality within every created being.

The Jew has the responsibility to see the world from G d's perspective, to cultivate the point of view that focuses on the spiritual rather than on the physical. The Jew possesses the gift of acknowledgement—and can therefore experience genuine thanksgiving.<sup>2</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 29:35.

2. Adapted from Likkutei Torah, Devarim 1a.

\* Director, Lifelong Learning Department, Chabad of Greenwich, CT. © Chabad 2020.

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## **Did Abraham Really Invent Monotheism? What About the Yeshivah of Shem and Eber?**

By Yehuda Shurpin \*

The short answer is no. The longer answer is . . . it depends on what you mean by “invent.”

One doesn't have to look too far in the Torah to find individuals who recognized and served “the one G d.” Aside from the more well-known biblical personalities like Adam and Noah, we also find people like Enoch, about whom the verse states, “And Enoch walked with G d,”<sup>1</sup> and Melchizedek, the king of Salem,<sup>2</sup> who “was a priest to the Most High G d.”<sup>3</sup>

What is more fascinating is the Midrashic story that Shem, son of Noah, and his great-grandson Eber (Eiver), actually set up a beit midrash, house of study, after the flood.<sup>4</sup> Not much is recorded about this school, but we can glean some details from the Midrash and commentaries.

### **Yeshivat Shem V'Eiver—The Academy of Shem and Eber**

What was studied at this academy?

In addition to learning about the oneness of G d and morality, they also learned the Torah laws as passed down from Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, etc.<sup>5</sup> The fact that they had knowledge of the Torah laws (before the Torah was given) is attested to in the Torah itself, where we read that Noah brought two of each non-kosher species into the ark and seven of each kosher species. How did he know which were pure? Obviously, he had learned Torah.

Abraham himself eventually went to learn for a time with Shem. Indeed, the Midrash explains that Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who blessed and greeted Abraham after he had fought with the four kings and rescued his nephew Lot, was none other than Shem, son of Noah.

Isaac, too, is said to have gone to the academy of Shem and Eber to learn after the incident of the Akeidah, when Abraham almost sacrificed him to G d.<sup>6</sup>

Later, when Rebbecca felt great pains during her pregnancy and “went to inquire of G d,”<sup>7</sup> it was to the academy of Shem and Eber<sup>8</sup> (who were themselves great prophets<sup>9</sup>) that she went. She was informed about the twins she bore and how each one was destined to be the progenitor of a great nation.

Finally, the sages point out that if you calculate Jacob's life, there are 14 years that are unaccounted for. They explain that according to tradition, after fleeing his brother Esau, he first spent 14 years studying in the academy of Eber (Shem had already passed away).<sup>10</sup>

This all leads to the obvious question: If there were a number of other individuals who believed in and served the one true G d, what was so special and unique about Abraham? And why do some call him the father of monotheism?

### **Abraham's Uniqueness**

Unlike Shem and Eber, who learned about G d from their own ancestors, Abraham, at least initially, came to the recognition of G d on his own. As Maimonides<sup>11</sup> eloquently puts it:

Though [Abraham] was a child, he began to think [incessantly] throughout the day and night, wondering: How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve.

He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him. Rather, he was mired in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idolaters. His father, mother and all the people [around him] were idol worshipers, and he would worship with them. [However,] his heart was exploring and [gaining] understanding.

Ultimately, he appreciated the way of truth and understood the path of righteousness through his accurate comprehension. He realized that there was one G d who controlled the sphere, that He created everything, and that there is no other G d among all the other entities. He knew that the entire world was making a mistake. What caused them to err was their service of the stars and images, which made them lose awareness of the truth.

Abraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he began to formulate replies to the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim and debate with them, telling them that they were not following a proper path.

He broke their idols and began to teach the people that it is fitting to serve only the G d of the world. To Him [alone] is it fitting to bow down, sacrifice, and offer libations, so that the people of future [generations] would recognize Him. [Conversely,] it is fitting to destroy and break all the images, lest all the people err concerning them, like those people who thought that there are no other gods besides these [images].

When he overcame them through the strength of his arguments, the king desired to kill him. He was [saved through] a miracle and left for Charan. [There,] he began to call in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one G d in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him. He would go out and call to the people, gathering them in city after city and country after country, until he came to the land of Canaan—proclaiming [G d's existence the entire time]—as [Genesis 21:33] states: "And He called there in the name of the L rd, the eternal G d."

When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain [them] to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are the men of the house of Abraham.

He planted in their hearts this great fundamental principle, composed texts about it, and taught it to Isaac, his son. Isaac also taught others and turned [their hearts to G d]. He also taught Jacob and appointed him as a teacher.

Thus, as the commentaries<sup>12</sup> explain, yes, there were individuals who not only served the "one true G d," but even at times went out to try to teach others to follow His ways, going so far as to set up an academy. So no, it would not be accurate to say that Abraham was the first monotheist.

However, Abraham not only came to the recognition of G d on his own, He, unlike Shem and Eber, was willing to sacrifice his life for his beliefs. Not only that, but he (unlike Shem and Eber who, for the most part, stuck to their own academy) took it upon himself to spread this knowledge of the true Creator to all people wherever he went. So although he certainly didn't invent monotheism, he was the first one to give his life for it and share it with the masses.

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Genesis 5:24.

2. Who is identified in the Midrash (Bereishit Rabah 44:7) as none other than Shem, son of Noah

3. Genesis 14:18.
4. While some posit that it is possible that Noah himself may have been the one who established the yeshivah, most seem to imply that it was Shem who established it (see citation regarding Isaac, Rebecca and Jacob, all of which only mention Shem and Eber).
5. See, for example, Zohar Chadash 22b.
6. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 56:11.
7. Genesis 25:22.
8. Midrash, Bereshit Rabbah 63:6; Targum Jonathan and Yerushalmi on Genesis 25:22.
9. See, for example, Tanah Debei Eliyahu Rabbah 24, Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 37:7.
10. Talmud, Megillah 17a.
11. Maimonides, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 1:3.
12. See, for example, Migdal Oz on Maimonides, Hilchot Avodah Zarah 1:3.

\* Noted scholar and researcher, content editor at Chabad.org, and author of the weekly Ask Rabbi Y column. Rabbi of the Chabad in St. Louis Park, MN. © Chabad 2020.

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## How Are You Faring in Haran?

by Chana Weisberg \*

This week's Torah portion begins with the word Vayeitzei, "he went out," and embodies the message of this parsha. Jacob went out from Be'er Sheva, and he went to Haran (Genesis 28:10).

In order for Jacob to become the patriarch of the Jewish people, he had to "go out," to leave the haven of an insular life, as well as the material and spiritual comforts of his home, and face the challenges of a hostile world.

Jacob leaves the spiritual idyll of Be'er Sheva in the Holy Land to travel to Haran. Be'er Sheva literally means the "well of seven" and metaphorically refers to the seven Divine attributes of the soul. Haran literally means "wrath," and was a place of lies, deception, struggle, and manipulation. In the materialistic, contentious land of Haran, Jacob marries and fathers the tribes of Israel.

Jacob's travel reflects the journey of all of our lives. A newborn baby's soul cries bitterly as it descends from its cozy, spiritual home to face a harsh, combative world, the antithesis of all things that the soul knew, loved, and was comforted by. Yet, in facing the many challenges and in staying strong to its values, the soul finds its mission and raison d'être.

"To Haran" is indicated by the Hebrew letter hei, ה, suffixed to the word Haran חרנה. Hei is the second letter of the name of G-d through which G-d created our physical world (Menachot 29b).

No matter in which city or country we currently live, we are all citizens of Haran. Each day, we face the challenges of our Haran life. And, as much as we want to protect ourselves and our children from the ravages of our world, it is precisely here that each of us fulfills the purpose for which our world was created.

To help make our world a better place—a home and haven for G-d.

-- From: Shabbas DeLights \*

\* **Shabbat DeLights** is a collection of essays on the Torah portion by acclaimed author, editor and teacher, Chana Weisberg.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 27, Issue 7

Shabbat Parashat Vayetze

5781 B"H

## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

### Light in Dark Times

What is it that made Jacob – not Abraham or Isaac or Moses – the true father of the Jewish people? We are called the “congregation of Jacob,” “the Children of Israel.” Jacob/Israel is the man whose name we bear. Yet Jacob did not begin the Jewish journey; Abraham did. Jacob faced no trial like that of Isaac at the Binding. He did not lead the people out of Egypt or bring them the Torah. To be sure, all his children stayed within the faith, unlike Abraham or Isaac. But that simply pushes the question back one level. Why did he succeed where Abraham and Isaac failed?

It seems that the answer lies in parshat Vayetze and parshat Vayishlach. Jacob was the man whose greatest visions came to him when he was alone at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next. In parshat Vayetze, escaping from Esau, he stops and rests for the night with only stones to lie on, and he has an epiphany:

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.... When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” (Gen. 28:12–17)

In parshat Vayishlach, fleeing from Laban and terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau again, he wrestles alone at night with an unnamed stranger:

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”... So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” (Gen. 32:29–31)

These are the decisive spiritual encounters of Jacob’s life, yet they happen in liminal space (the space between, neither a starting point nor a destination), at a time when Jacob is at risk in both directions – where he comes from and where he is going to. Yet it is at these points of maximal vulnerability that he encounters God and finds the courage to continue despite all the hazards of the journey.

That is the strength Jacob bequeathed to the Jewish people. What is remarkable is not merely that this one tiny people survived tragedies that would have spelled the end of

any other people: the destruction of two Temples; the Babylonian and Roman conquests; the expulsions, persecutions, and pogroms of the Middle Ages; the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth-century Europe; and the Holocaust. It is truly astonishing that after each cataclysm, Judaism renewed itself, scaling new heights of achievement.

During the Babylonian exile, Judaism deepened its engagement with the Torah. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem it produced the great literary monuments of the Oral Torah: Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara. During the Middle Ages, it produced masterpieces of law and Torah commentary, poetry, and philosophy. A mere three years after the Holocaust it proclaimed the State of Israel, the Jewish return to history after the darkest night of exile.

When I first became Chief Rabbi I had to undergo a medical examination. The doctor had me walking at a very brisk pace on a treadmill. “What are you testing?” I asked him. “How fast I can go, or how long?” “Neither,” he replied. “I will be observing how long it takes for your pulse to return to normal, after you come off the treadmill.” That is when I discovered that health is measured by the power of recovery. That is true for everyone, but doubly so for leaders and for the Jewish people, a nation of leaders. (This, I believe, is what the phrase “a kingdom of Priests” [Ex. 19:6] means).

Leaders suffer crises. That is a given of leadership. When Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of Britain between 1957 and 1963, was asked what the most difficult aspect of his time in office was, he famously replied, “Events, dear boy, events.” Bad things happen, and when they do, the leader must take the strain so that others can sleep easily in their beds.

Leadership, especially in matters of the spirit, is deeply stressful. Four figures in Tanach – Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Jonah – actually prayed to die rather than continue. This was not only true in the distant past. Abraham Lincoln suffered deep bouts of depression. So did Winston Churchill, who called it his “black dog.” Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. both attempted suicide in adolescence and experienced depressive illness in adult life. The same was true of many great creative artists, among them Michelangelo, Beethoven, and Van Gogh.

Is it greatness that leads to moments of despair, or moments of despair that lead to greatness? Do those who lead internalise the stresses and

tensions of their time? Or is it that those who are used to stress in their emotional lives find release in leading exceptional lives? There is no convincing answer to this in the literature thus far. But Jacob was a more emotionally volatile individual than either Abraham, who was often serene even in the face of great trials, or Isaac, who was particularly withdrawn. Jacob feared; Jacob loved; Jacob spent more of his time in exile than the other patriarchs. But Jacob endured and persisted. Of all the figures in Genesis, he was the great survivor.

The ability to survive and to recover is part of what it takes to be a leader. It is the willingness to live a life of risks that makes such individuals different from others. So said Theodore Roosevelt in one of the greatest speeches ever made on the subject:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.[1]

Jacob endured the rivalry of Esau, the resentment of Laban, the tension between his wives and children, the early death of his beloved Rachel, and the loss – for twenty-two years – of his favourite son, Joseph. He said to Pharaoh, “Few and evil have been the days of my life” (Gen. 47:9). Yet, on the way he “encountered” angels, and whether they were wrestling with him or climbing the ladder to heaven, they lit the night with the aura of transcendence.

To try, to fall, to fear, and yet to keep going: that is what it takes to be a leader. That was Jacob, the man who at the lowest ebbs of his life had his greatest visions of heaven.

[1] Theodore Roosevelt, “Citizenship in a Republic”, speech given at the Sorbonne, Paris, 23 April 1910.

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## Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had placed under his head, and set it up as a monument, and poured oil on the top of it." [Gen. 28:18]

Our Biblical portion, Vayetze, tells of Jacob's journey into exile and, not coincidentally, the first instance of a monument (matzeva) to God in Jewish history. Until this point, the great Biblical personalities have erected altars (mizbahot, singular, mizbeah), to God: Noah when he exited from the ark, Abraham when he first came to Israel, Isaac when he dedicated the city of Be'er Sheva, and Jacob on two significant occasions. An altar is clearly a sacred place dedicated for ritual sacrifice. But what is a monument? An understanding of this first monument in Jewish history will help us understand the true significance of the Land of Israel to the Jewish People.

Fleeing the wrath of his brother, Esau, Jacob leaves his Israeli parental home and sets out for his mother's familial home in Haran. His first stop, as the sun is setting, is in the fields outside Luz (Beit El) – the last site in Israel he will spend the night before he begins his exile. He dreams of a ladder standing (mutzav) on land with its top reaching heavenwards, "and behold, angels of God are ascending and descending on it" [ibid. v. 12]. God is standing (nitzav) above the ladder, and promises Jacob that he will return to Israel and that this land will belong to him and his descendants eternally. Upon awakening, the patriarch declares the place to be "the House of God and the Gate of Heaven" [ibid. v. 17]. He then builds a monument (matzeva) from the stones he has used as a pillow and pours oil over it.

Jacob's experience leaves us in no doubt: a monument is a symbol of an eternal relationship. It is the physical expression of a ladder linking Heaven and earth, the Land of Israel and the Holy Temple of Jerusalem (House of God), which connects the descendants of Jacob to the Divine forever. A monument is a gateway to Heaven, a House of God on earth. The Land of Israel, with its laws of tithes, Sabbatical years and Jubilee, magnificently expresses the link between humanity and the Almighty, and the promise of Jacob's return from exile bears testimony to the eternity of the relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel.

Furthermore, a monument is made of stone, the Hebrew word for stone being even, comprised of the letters aleph-bet-nun. It is also a contraction of parent-child (Hebrew, av-ben) which also uses the letters aleph-bet-nun symbolizing the eternity of family continuity. And the monument is consecrated with oil, just as the Redeemer will be consecrated with oil – and herald eternal peace and redemption for Israel and the world.

In exile, Jacob spends two decades with his uncle Laban, who does his utmost to assimilate

his bright and capable nephew / son-in-law into a life of comfort and business in exile. Jacob resists, escaping Laban's blandishments, and eventually secretly absconds with his wives, children and livestock to return to Israel. Laban pursues them, and they agree to a covenant-monument: "And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a monument" [ibid. 31:45]. Here again, we find the expression of an eternal promise: Abraham's descendants will never completely assimilate – not even into the most enticing Diaspora.

The Torah continues: "And Jacob said to his brethren, gather stone, and they took stones and made a heap.... And Laban called [the monument] Yegar-Sahaduta, but Jacob called it Gal-Ed" [ibid. v. 46-47].

The wily Laban wants the monument to bear an Aramean name, a symbol of the gentile aspect of Jacob's ancestry, while Jacob firmly insists upon the purely Hebrew inscription of Gal-Ed – the eternal, Israelite language.

When they take their respective oaths at the site of the monument, the deceptive Laban still endeavors to manipulate: "May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor, the gods of their fathers, judge between us" [ibid. v. 53]. Jacob refuses to give an inch; this monument must give testimony to the eternity of his commitment to Israel, both the faith and the land: "But Jacob swore to the fear of his father Isaac" [ibid.]. Jacob's response is a subtle – but emphatic – rejection of Laban's attempt at assimilation.

Although this monument is erected with Laban after Jacob leaves his home, it is nevertheless still established in exile; therefore it is not anointed with oil. Whatever important role the Diaspora may have played in the history of Israel – as long as we maintained our unique values and lifestyle – the oil of redemption will emerge only in the Land of Israel. When Jacob returns to Beit El, the House of God, he will erect another stone monument in order to fulfill his oath [ibid. 35:14]. And, of course, that monument – erected to God in the Land of Israel – will be anointed with oil.

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### The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

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#### What's In a Name?

"Who am I?" This is the most powerful question that a person ever asks himself. For many of us, there are no easy answers to that question. We are uncertain of our own identities.

Social scientists believe that this question is typically asked by adolescents. After all, it is legitimate for young people to be unsure of who they are. The task of the adolescent is to begin to define his or her identity, to formulate tentative answers to the question, "Who am I?"

Often, however, individuals persist in struggling to answer the "Who am I?" question

## Likutei Divrei Torah

long after they have passed the stage of adolescence. The so-called "midlife crisis" can be understood as a time in life when one again asks himself the question, "Who am I?", and a crisis arises when no clear answer to that question emerges.

An important component in the formulation of an answer to the "Who am I?" question is the answer to another question, "What's in a name?" Each of us has a name, almost invariably given to us very early in our lives by our parents or parent figure.

I would like to suggest that our sense of personal identity is in a large part determined by the names that we have been given. Our names were chosen for us because they have a certain meaning to those who named us. When our parents gave us our name, they also gave us a message about whom they expected us to be. Whether we ourselves are conscious of that message depends upon how explicit our parents were in their choice of our name. But on some level, we know that our name was not randomly chosen, and to a greater extent than we realize, our self-concepts are shaped by our names.

In this week's Torah portion, Vayetze, no less than eleven newborns are given names. In every case, these names are given by women; by Leah and by Rachel. Each name is carefully crafted by these women and is designed, not only to reflect the emotions of the moment, but to shape and give direction to the destinies of each of these children.

Let us consider but two examples: Leah gives her third son the name Levi, which means "connected," or "attached." This reflects her confidence that with the birth of a third son, her husband, Jacob, will become more attached to her. But it is also a message to the baby Levi that he will grow up to be "attached" to others. In his lifetime, he is typically number two of the duo "Simon and Levi," secondary to his brother. And his progeny become "attached" to the Almighty and to all things sacred as the tribe of priests for the rest of Jewish history.

Leah then names her fourth child Judah, which means to praise or to thank, because of the special gratitude she experiences with his birth. And Judah ultimately, in his own life and through his descendants, gives praise to the Lord in his actions and with his words.

In more recent times, it has become rare for a Jewish parent to invent a new name for his or her child. The prevalent custom is to name a child for a deceased ancestor or for some other revered personage. The child who carries the name of a grandparent surely internalizes the message that in some way his life should reflect some of the values of that grandparent.

I know for whom I was named. He was my great-grandfather, my mother's mother's father, Tzvi Hersh Kriegel. He was an immigrant to

America, hailing originally from Galicia. His portrait adorned one of the walls of my grandparents' home, and it showed an immaculately dressed, bright-eyed but old-fashioned middle-aged man, with a luxuriant red beard. As a child, I learned much about him from his widow, my great-grandmother. I learned of his commitment not only to Jewish observance, but to all aspects of the Galitzianer culture, especially to its wry humor and nostalgic Chassidic tunes.

I visit his grave ever more frequently as time goes on. And I both consciously and unconsciously model myself after him. When I ask myself, "Who am I?", a significant part of my answer relates back to him and to his name bequeathed to me.

I have found myself preaching over the years to those parents who would listen that they should choose the names they give their children carefully, and that rather than choose a name because they like the way it sounds or because of its popularity, they should select a name of a real person, someone who stood for something, someone your child could eventually emulate.

In my Torah study and in my readings of Jewish history, I have noticed that during different eras, different names seem to predominate. I find it fascinating that the names Abraham, Moshe, David, and Solomon are today quite popular and have been certainly since the days of that second most famous Moses, Maimonides. Yet, in Talmudic times, those names seemed to have been quite rare. We find no major rabbis in the Mishnah or in the Gemara who carry the names of the aforementioned four biblical heroes. No Rabbi Moshe, no Rabbi Abraham, but strangely more than one Rabbi Ishmael. And of course, returning to this week's Torah portion, Judahs and Simons aplenty.

"What is in a name?" A message to help answer the persistent and challenging question, "Who am I?" As is so often the case in rabbinic literature, one question answers the other.

There is a passage in the works of our Sages which tells of the three names each of us has. There is the name which we were given at the time of our birth, which is the name we have discussed in this column. But there is also the name that we earn by our own deeds, the part of the answer to the "Who am I?" question that we ourselves provide.

And finally, there is a name that others give us, the reputation that we deserve. It is that name to which King Solomon in his Kohelet refers when he remarks, "A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth." And it is that very name which the Mishnah in Avot has in mind when it concludes that of all the crowns of glory that humans can achieve, there is one that stands

supreme: the keter shem tov, the crown of a good name.

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#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

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#### **What Took So Long for Yaakov to Remember to Daven on Har HaMoriah?**

Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and travels to Charan. He is headed back to the "Old Country," the birthplace of his mother and the place where uncle Lavan lives. Charan was in Mesopotamia – which today is in Turkey, near the border with Syria. At any rate, it is quite a distance from Eretz Yisrael. Rashi cites Chazal on the expression "Vayifgah b'Makom" [Bereshis 28:11] that Yaakov was struck by the fact that somehow, he passed the place where his father and grandfather had prayed and he did not stop to pray there himself. He therefore set his mind to return, and went back to Beis El.

The Gemarah in Tractate Chullin [91b] teaches that Yaakov's return to "the place where his fathers prayed" took place in a miraculous fashion, involving "kefitzas haderech" (allowing him to travel a great distance in a short amount of time). According to Chazal, the Almighty compressed the earth. Suddenly, Yaakov, who was already in Charan, miraculously found himself back on Har Hamoriah.

I saw an interesting question in a sefer called Machat shel Yad from Rav Yitzchak Frankel. Imagine if you know someone whose parents are buried in Paramus (New Jersey). The fellow is travelling on the New Jersey Turnpike and he passes the exit to Paramus. Suddenly, he thinks to himself, "I just passed the cemetery where my parents are buried. Since I am in the neighborhood, how can I not visit 'Kever Avos?'" He makes a U-turn, goes back a couple of miles, and comes to the cemetery.

That is not what took place here. "And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva..." [Bereshis 28:10] He leaves Be'er Sheva, which is approximately 50 miles south of Yerushalayim. He passes Yerushalayim and continues all the way to Charan – perhaps 500 miles to the northeast. Suddenly he says, "Guess what, I passed Yerushalayim and I did not daven over there!" What took him so long? Where have you been for the last 500 miles? It had to have taken him months to make this journey, and suddenly now he remembers that 50 miles out of Be'er Sheva, he neglected to stop at Har Hamoriah? The equivalent is to have parents buried in Virginia, and he drives from Maryland to Florida. Upon reaching Georgia, the driver suddenly shouts, "Woe is me! I passed Virginia! I need to turn around now and drive all the way back up Interstate 95!" That is what happened here. What was Yaakov thinking?

Rav Frankel gives an interesting answer. However, I would like to sweeten his answer with a very beautiful idea from Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky's Sefer.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Chazal say that when Rivka told Yaakov to run away and go to her brother's house in Charan, Yaakov did not go there directly. He spent fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. Until Yaakov was fifteen, Yaakov Avinu learned with his grandfather Avraham. At the time he was now leaving home, he was already in his sixties. He was known as "One who dwelt in tents." That means he had been learning for at least 45 years with his father Yitzchak. After learning so many decades with Avraham and Yitzchak, now he needs to learn fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever? Why? What was he missing?

Beyond that—we need to ask—was he not disregarding his parents' instructions? Imagine your father tells you, "Go out to the store and buy me a bottle of milk." You go outside and start walking to the grocery store. Suddenly you say, "You know what? I have not learned today." You take a short cut to the Beis Medrash. You stay there for five hours, then you leave, and on the way home, you pick up a bottle of milk at the grocery store. Your father will shout, "What took you so long? Did you go milk a cow? Where have you been for the last five hours?" You will answer, "I was learning in the Beis Medrash!" Very nice. However, when your father asks you to get a bottle of milk, you do not first go and spend five hours in the Beis Medrash!

Rivka told Yaakov to go to Padan Aram and stay there. Yitzchak told him to go find himself a wife from his mother's family. However, Yaakov spends fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever before doing anything else! How are we to understand this?

So, we have two questions: 1) Why did Yaakov need it? What was missing in his education until now that required him to spend fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever? 2) How can Yaakov justify seemingly ignoring his parent's directive for fourteen years, before traveling to Charan?

Rav Yaakov gives a very famous explanation. He says that Yaakov did need something at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever that he could not get at home from his father or grandfather. There was something in that Yeshiva that Yaakov had to learn, that he did not receive from his parents. What was that? Shem (the son of Noach) was a product of the Generation of the Flood (Dor HaMabul) and Ever (the great grandson of Shem) was a product of the Generation of the Dispersion (Dor Haflaga). Both of them not only survived, but thrived, in a spiritually hostile environment. The society and surroundings in which they grew up were the antithesis of the Divine Will and the antithesis of holiness. Somehow or another, they were able to overcome their surroundings and remain steadfast in their Service to the Almighty.

Avraham and Yitzchak raised children in pristine environments. The House of Avraham and the House of Yitzchak were mini Batei Mikdash (Holy Temples), or certainly at least mini Batei Kneses (Synagogues). When Yaakov learned with his grandfather and father, certainly he learned all the Torah and he learned to be a Servant of G-d and emulate all that Avraham and Yitzchak gave over to him. However, that would not help in Charan. Charan was a different environment. Chazal use the expression, “Why was it called Charan?” Rashi explains that the name comes from the term “Charon” (anger) – “Until Avraham came along, there was Charon Af (Divine Anger) in the world.” Apparently, Charan was not as evil as Sodom and Amorah, but it still incurred the wrath of the Ribono shel Olam.

Yaakov Avinu says to himself, “I am headed to Charan. I need to learn a spiritual approach which will teach me how to survive in such a corrupt environment.” That is why he went to study in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky also explains another teaching of Chazal with this idea: In Parshas VaYeshev, on the pasuk “And Israel loved Yosef more than all his sons because he was a Ben Zekunim (literally, a child of his old age) to him” [Bereshis 37:3], Rashi interprets the term Ben Zekunim as Bar Chakim—a wise son. Yaakov taught Yosef all the Torah he learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, in order to make him a wise son.

Why specifically that Torah? Why did he not teach him the Torah of Avraham? Why did he not teach him the Torah of Yitzchak? The answer is that Yaakov Avinu knew, at least b’Ruach HaKodesh (intuitively through the Holy Spirit of prophecy) that Yosef would wind up in an environment that was going to be hostile. He did not know exactly what was going to happen to his beloved son but he knew that Yosef would need to be in such surroundings. Therefore, Yaakov said to his son, Yosef, “I need to teach you the Torah I learned while in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever.” There is only one way you can learn how to survive when the environment is hostile to your Divine Service, and that is by studying the curriculum they taught in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever.

This is why the brothers were jealous of Yosef. “Why is father teaching only Yosef this special aspect of Torah? Why don’t we get that?” They did not understand that specifically Yosef was going to need this education. Yosef was going to go down to Egypt, and needed to survive there and set up an environment that would allow the rest of the family to come there and survive as well.

That is why Yaakov spent fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. Now that we know this, we can return to Rav Frankel’s question, and understand the following:

Yaakov spent fourteen years learning this special curriculum. He feels, “I am now prepared to go on to Charan.” Then he finally arrives in Charan. Picture the following analogy. There is a farmer from the Midwest. All his life he has been in “normal Kansas,” in the middle of the Corn Belt and the Wheat Belt. All he knows is farming. He is going to take the big trip to New York City. He looks at the maps and at the atlas. He looks at pictures and videos. He sees pictures of the big buildings and the skyscrapers. Wonderful!

He arrives in New York. He boards the subway. Suddenly the subway pulls into the Times Square subway station. Boom! Have you ever been to Times Square? The lights assault you. Despite all this preparation, the Kansas farmer is stunned by what he sees. He never dreamt of what Times Square was really like. (“One cannot compare hearing about something to seeing it”)

Similarly, Yaakov Avinu arrives in Charan. He thinks he is prepared. “I spent fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever preparing for this moment!” When he arrives in Charan, fear overtakes him. How am I going to survive? I do not think I can manage! So even after the fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, Yaakov was scared. He said, “You know what else I need? I need Zechus Avos (ancestral merit). I need to pray in the place of Har Hamoriah. I need to go back to pray in that holy place where my father and grandfather prayed because my Torah alone – even including all the Torah I learned at Shem v’Ever – will not be enough to get me through this.”

So now Yaakov is ready to go all the way back from Charan. Why? Because he needs the prayers! Then the Almighty did a great kindness for him. “I will bring Har Hamoriah to you.”

This explains why it took several hundred miles for Yaakov to realize, “How could it be that I passed the place where my parents prayed and I did not stop there to pray?” Until now, he thought he was prepared. However, when he saw the reality of what Charan was like—a city that was not only decadent, but was full of thieves and cheaters—at that point, Yaakov said, “I need more than the special Yeshiva training. I need special Tefilos (prayers) as well.”

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#### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

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#### **Being Jewish means being grateful!**

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What does the term Jew literally mean? The answer comes in Parashat Vayeitsei. The Torah describes the 22 year sojourn of Yaakov and his family in Mesopotamia. During that time, his wife Leah had the privilege of giving birth to six of his children. Six of the heads of the tribes. At the times of the births of the first three, she was feeling particularly sad and

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embittered and this was reflected in the names that she gave to them.

But when it came to the birth of her fourth son, she was overwhelmed with the feeling of gratitude to God and when she was informed that the child had been successfully delivered she exclaimed ‘HaPa’am Odeh et Hashem’ – ‘this time I will give thanks to the Lord’. Therefore she called his name Yehuda. Coming from the root ‘Todah’ which means thanks. Fascinatingly it was only Yehuda which was to be the tribe to survive intact – and the descendants of Yehuda to this day are called ‘Yehudim’ or Jews.

Therefore being Jewish has everything to do with being grateful. And this is reflected in our prayers in two different ways.

First of all, all of our thanksgiving prayers are recited while we stand. Such as psalm 100 ‘Mizmor Le’Todah – a psalm of thanks’, and ‘Vayevarech David’ in the early morning prayers, which includes terms of appreciation and thanksgiving. On Friday night we stand for the psalm of the day because in it we declare ‘Tov Lehodot LaShem’ – ‘it is good to give thanks to the lord’. We stand for ‘Modim’ in the repetition of the amida, for the Hallel prayer and so on.

Then there is a second way in which this is reflected in our prayers. During the repetition of the Amidah, the reader or Chazan recites the prayers on our behalf and we respond with Amen – with the exception only of one passage. When it comes to ‘modim’ – the prayer of thanksgiving, that is left up to each individual member of the community to recite.

The reason is there is no concept of ‘shlichut’ – ‘representation’ when it comes to gratitude. If someone has done me a favour, I myself should pick up the phone to thank that person, I shouldn’t leave it to others to thank that person on my behalf. And that is why Modim is recited by everyone.

From the time of the traumatic birth of Yehuda, as recorded in Parshat Vayeitsei all the way through to today, embedded within our Jewish psyche is indebtedness – ‘hakarat hatov’. As result, we should express our gratitude to all others who give assistance to us – but most of all we should express our gratitude to our creator. It is no wonder therefore, that the very first words we say when we get up in the morning are ‘modeh ani l’fanecha’ – ‘I give thanks to you o’ God’ – and these sentiments of gratitude accompany us right through every single day. Being Jewish means being grateful.

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#### **OTS Dvar Torah**

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#### **Rabbi Chaim Navon**

Prayer is, above all else, an intimate encounter between a person and God. The prayer’s content includes requests and supplications from God, but the essence of the prayer is

embodied, first and foremost, by the act of turning to Hashem. Content comes second.

The protagonists of the Bible, who yearn to see their wishes fulfilled, add another tier to their spiritual work: they address Hashem in prayer, entreating Him to improve their fate. Parshat Vayetze begins with Jacob's prayer and vow. He turns to Hashem and exclaims: "If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear..." (Genesis 28:20). When Rachel addresses Jacob, saying to him: "Give me children..." (ibid., 30:1), our sages explain that she entreated Jacob to pray to Hashem on her behalf. Anywhere our forefathers were, prayer was never far away.

Anselm of Canterbury, a clergyman and philosopher who lived in the 11th century, managed to devise the most sophisticated philosophical proof of the existence of God. His proof, which came to be known as the "ontological proof", has captured the attention of philosophers until today. Dr. Yuval Steinitz, before he became a politician, even wrote a book about it. Before formulating the ontological proof, Anselm prayed to God for three days. He cried and pleaded to God to allow him to find proof of His existence. Søren Kierkegaard, the 19th-century Danish philosopher, mocked Anselm. "Does a groom embracing his bride need proof of her existence?", he asked. By that same token, does someone praying to his God need proof of God's existence?

Prayer is, above all else, an intimate encounter between a person and God. The prayer's content includes requests and supplications from God, but the essence of the prayer is embodied, first and foremost, by the act of turning to Hashem. Content comes second. Our sages consistently refer to those engaged in prayer as individuals standing before God. Maimonides translated this into psychological guidance to the praying individual: "...while the heart should be uplifted as if one were in heaven" (Mishneh Torah, "Laws of Prayer", 5:4).

Compared our forefathers, who were privy to the secrets of redeeming prayer, their cousins from Haran were markedly different. When Lavan admits to Jacob that he received the blessings of property thanks to Jacob, he uses these words: "I have learned by divination that Hashem has blessed me on your account." This verse exposes Lavan's bizarre spiritual world. He learned from "divination", that is, he resorted to witchcraft and sorcery to learn that Hashem blessed him on Jacob's account. A modern-day version would be that someone realized that this week, Hashem would bless them financially by reading their horoscope. Before scoffing at Lavan, we had best examine our newspapers. Which subjects get more attention, the weekly parsha, or idle chit-chat about celebrities?

Rachel stole her father's idols (ibid 31:19), and our sages explain that she did so to help wean him off of his addiction to cheap parlor tricks. However, this doesn't have the desired effect on Lavan. He pursues Jacob, exclaiming, "Why did you steal my gods?!" (ibid., 30), without even noticing the inherent contradiction in what he was saying. What kind of a god could be stolen?

At the end of the parsha, the two branches of the family go their separate ways for the last time. They place a pile of rocks between them, demarcating the territory belonging to each branch. They speak different languages – Jacob speaks Hebrew, while Lavan speaks Aramaic. Their spiritual domains are also different: we have "the gods of Abraham" versus "the gods of Nahor" (ibid., 53). The servants of Hashem bid their last farewell to the idol-worshippers.

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### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

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**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky**

#### **Keeping the Dream of the Beis HaMikdash Alive**

Exile is a primary component of the life of Yaakov Avinu. In Parshas VaYitzei he had to leave Eretz Yisrael and later, in Parshas VaYigash, he left once again to spend the rest of his life in Mitzrayim. Chazal emphasize that we must learn from how our avos responded to the challenges that they faced. How did Yaakov survive being away from Eretz Yisroel for so long, first in the house of Lavan and then in Mitzrayim?

As Yaakov embarked on both of his trips to exile, he began by consecrating something for avodas Hashem. In Parshas VaYitzei he poured oil on a stone thereby dedicating it as the cornerstone of a sanctuary to be completed upon his return to Eretz Yisroel. When leaving Eretz Yisroel for Mitzrayim, Yaakov stopped at Be'er Sheva to offer korbanos; as his time in Eretz Yisroel was coming to an end, Yaakov dedicated those last moments to avodas haKorbanos. Sensing that in chutz la'aretz there would be no opportunity for avodas haKorbanos, he brought the last korbanos of that era.

As the period of korbanos was coming to an end, Yaakov was already preparing for the next stage of avodas haKorbanos. The stone he anointed was only the first step in the house of Hashem he planned to construct in the future. Similarly, Chazal teach us that as Yaakov went to Mitzrayim, he took cedar wood with him to enable his descendants to build a Mishkan years later. It was this vision that enabled Yaakov to survive a galus which would be devoid of the ultimate connection to Hashem that comes through the medium of korbanos. After returning to Eretz Yisroel, Yaakov lived in the house of Hashem which he had consecrated years earlier. As his descendants spent hundreds of years in the galus of Mitzrayim, they clung to the dream of their ancestor Yaakov that someday they would

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build a Mishkan using those very pieces of cedar wood dedicated years before.

Ma'asei avos siman l'bonim - the deeds of our forefathers are a sign for their children. We have been without a Beis HaMikdash for almost two thousand years. And yet, the Beis HaMikdash has remained a very real part of our lives. From our daily beseeching Hashem to rebuild it to our study of the intricacies of korbanos, the Beis HaMikdash has always remained a focal point of our lives. A nation that hasn't experienced the offering of korbanos for almost two thousand years continues to relive the glory of the Beis HaMikdash during Mussaf on Yom Kippur and during the Seder night. At the culmination of these highlights of the year, we fervently express our hope that the next year we will merit to celebrate these glorious days in Yerushalayim with the Beis HaMikdash rebuilt. Just as Yaakov taught us to look forward to the day when a stone would become a house for Hashem and cedar wood would be transformed to be a Mishkan, our prayers and study of korbanos will set the stage for the third Beis HaMikdash. The commitment to keep the dream of the Beis HaMikdash alive during galus did not begin with Yaakov; he knew this to be true because Hashem had already taught this to Avraham. At the time when Hashem promised Avraham to give his children Eretz Yisrael, Avraham asks Hashem through what merit will the Jewish People be granted Eretz Yisrael. Hashem responded that it is the merit of korbanos, to which Avraham responded by asking how will they merit to return to Eretz Yisroel after the Beis HaMikdash is destroyed. Hashem revealed to Avraham that the merit of learning about korbanos will enable them to return. It was this lesson of keeping korbanos an integral part of our lives, even in the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, that was transmitted to Yaakov. Yaakov in turn taught this to his descendants. The Jewish People have remained loyal to the dream of the Beis HaMikdash. May we merit to see this dream become a reality in our days.

### **Rabbi Mayer Twersky**

#### **Prescience and Prudence [1]**

עשרה דברים שאל אלכסנדרוס מוקדון את זקני הנגב כי אמר להם אידין מתקרי חכים אמרו ליה הרוואה את הנולד Alexander the Great posed ten questions to the Elders of the South ... He queried, "Who is considered wise?" They responded, "One who discerns the future." (Tamid 31b - 32a)

אמר להם צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם כי רבי שמעון אומר הרוואה את הנולד Rabbi Yochanan son of Zakai said to his disciples, "Go out and determine the upright path to which a person should always adhere" ... Rabbi Shimon averred "one who discerns the future." (Avos 2:9)

In Maseches Tamid, הרוואה את הנולד (one who discerns future implications, consequences and developments) is identified as the

quintessential wise person (חכם). In Avos, this quality is said to define a path (דרך).

Rambam[2] responds to this difference by (subtly) explaining that ראיית הנולד is both an intellectual virtue which defines the quintessential sage as well as a moral virtue which charts a path for life. [דרך, path, connotes a moral virtue because the Torah's moral code is encapsulated within the mitzvah of והלכת בדרכיו, you shall walk in the "path" of G-d.[3]]

Let us בסי"ד explain. An analytical bent allows one to recognize the logical implications and corollaries (נולד in a logically derivative sense) of what he sees. Thus, for instance, a sensitive, analytic mind recognizes that the cosmos attests to its Creator. שאו מרום עיניכם וראו מי ברא, אלה, "Lift your eyes upon high, and discern Who created these (astral bodies)" (Yeshayahu 40:26)[4]. That same sensitivity and analyticalness allow one to see within the present indications of the future. Thus, for example, Winston Churchill presciently recognized the dire consequences of German rearmament post World War I, and warned against its future catastrophic consequences which, in fact materialized.

Consideration of future consequences and repercussions is also a cardinal moral virtue. For purposes of illustration consider the following scenario. The hour is late at night, and a bookworm is spellbound by his latest literary expedition. The tome runs several hundred pages, which promises hours of reading delight. But said individual has to rise early for work the next morning. He places his bookmark, closes the book and goes to sleep. He thereby scores a moral victory by not losing himself in the present. The self-discipline of fully living the present moment informed by a consideration of the future represents a moral, rather than intellectual, virtue, discipline, and achievement.

At present, in New York, we are challenged to demonstrate both the intellectual and moral qualities of ראיית הנולד (anticipating the future). (This is equally true in many other places in the country and world, in some even more so.) Relative to many other areas, New York is well off. And yet the signs of the unfolding, dangerous wave are - at any rate, should be - unmistakable. The positivity rate continues to increase, the situation in neighboring states is even worse, the behaviors and businesses fueling the increase are not being (adequately) checked, etc. We must be רואה את הנולד, recognize the unfolding process. Both personally and communally we must adopt aggressive preventative measures. As individuals we must redouble our efforts. For instance, we should not be hosting visiting friends or non-nuclear family, avoiding all but the most essential contact, etc. Communally (at the very least) indoor minyanim must cease[5], etc. (This halachic determination follows expert consultation. Even if other physicians

offer differing assessments, we are obligated to act stringently upon maximal medical concerns. See Orach Chayim 618:4.)

We could ignore the unmistakable indications of the gathering Covid storm and await actual proof. But the proof will come in the form of illness, hospitalization, suffering and even death, ר"ל. Thus the intellectual abdication of being רואה את הנולד will exact a horrific price.

It is, of course, always a formidable challenge to accept restrictions and limitations (religious, social, economic, emotional, etc.) in the present because of concern for the future. Being רואה את הנולד demands intellectual sensitivity and acuity but also moral discipline and commitment. We are, however, capable of both. We can not settle for anything less because our lives hang in the balance.

[1] An adapted, at points abbreviated and at points elaborated, version of the Hebrew את הנולד, posted Nov. 18, 2020.

[2] Peirush Hamishnayos, Avos, ad loc.

[3] Shabbos 133b; Rambam, Hilchos Deos chapter 1.

[4] See also Rambam Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:5; Hilchos Avodah Zarah 1:3.

[5] Regarding the very complex issue of schools and Yeshivos whose population differs from those of shuls, and closure would, for many, disrupt, and even prevent, pursuit of livelihood, and which have no effective alternative, see the original Hebrew essay. Of course, a Rov may, after careful, soul-searching consideration, determine that, given his community's singular religious dynamic, Tefilah be-tzibur represents something even greater than itself. I.e., it serves as an indispensably vital religious-spiritual anchor. He may also determine after exhaustively exploring all possible (creative) options that under certain circumstances Tefilah be-tzibur is only possible indoors. These determinations may provide grounds for (somewhat) equating shuls and schools. (See the last of the short (Hebrew) responsa from (ע"ה אולו).) Even this communal calculus would not allow for high risk individuals to join. And, in general, it would not substitute for every individual making his own personal calculus as to the permissibility of his joining. Also, it should be emphasized that ר"ל at some point halachic considerations (even sans governmental prompting) might necessitate temporary closure of schools.

#### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah**

**by Rabbi Label Lam**

#### **His G-dly Image**

And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, and he went to Haran. And he arrived at the place and lodged there because the sun had set, and he took some of the stones of the place and placed them at his head, and he lay down in that place. And he dreamed, and behold! a ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of G-d were ascending and descending upon it. (Breishis 28:10-12)

and placed them at his head: He arranged them in the form of a drainpipe around his head because he feared the wild beasts. – Rashi

Our sages tell us that Yaakov had toiled day and night without sleep for fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Ever. Now suddenly he was

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falling asleep. Why did Yaakov put rocks around his head to protect him from the beasts? Can't beasts easily attack the rest of his unprotected body?

It's no mistake that the most valuable things find themselves behind the biggest barriers. No one is going to go waltzing into Fort Knox because there is so much gold there. In a similar way we can observe in the human anatomy how HASHEM has designed a cocoon shell for a cranium to protect our brains.

Shlomo HaMelech affirms this notion when he writes in Mishlei, "From all the things you watch, protect your heart (which = mind) because from it founts life. The Vilna Gaon explains that the word protect – "Netzor" employed for guarding the mind here, means an extra degree of guarding. So people protect their children, and they guard their homes. Many watch their money with great zeal. However, more important than all those valuable elements, the wisest of all men cautions, protect your mind because from it flows life itself.

I had been many times to listen to Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. give his famous Thursday evening Torah class. One time I approached him afterwards to ask him a question privately and that encounter is etched forever in my psyche. A fellow that I had been learning with in Manhattan was telling me about an Orthodox friend of his from his childhood that now was suffering with a personal problem. He tells me that their child of two or three years of age was acting peculiarly so they took him to a psychiatrist who determined that the child was already not the right gender.

I was shocked to hear this, that such an evaluation could be established as an indisputable fact in such a young child. Kids don't even know what they want from one moment to the next, so forget about being trusted to know what they want from one day to the next, and certainly not what they want for a lifetime. When I was a kid I wanted to be a monkey or superman, and look at how things turned out! I told my friend I would try to bring this question to Rabbi Miller.

Immediately after the class I walked over and I knew I had just one moment to express my question. I asked, "Is it possible that a young child can already be said to have a confusion of gender!?" He looked up at me with gentle but serious eyes and said, "We all have a variety of seeds of wickedness in the garden of our personalities. Have you ever looked down from the heights of a tall building and thought about throwing yourself down!?" (he paused dramatically) But you didn't did you!?" Then he just stood up with a slight chuckle and walked away.

I learned that the mind is a garden. The Maharal explains that that is why Mankind

was called Adam, because he was made from the dust of the earth –“ADAMA”. That means he is pure potential. His garden has to be weeded and watched with great care. Whatever seeds, whatever ideas that blow in and take root there can grow into something terrible or something great.

Maybe that's why the vision of a ladder unfolds before his inner eye representing the unlimited potential of man to reach from this dark and thick earth all the way up to heights of heaven. There are forces driving us up and down on this ladder and one must remain ever vigilant. Perhaps that's also why at that moment that Yaakov was protecting all the years of investment he had put into his mind in the house of his father Yitzchok and the Yeshiva of Ever. He wanted to guard himself from wild animals, outrageous spiritual forces that he might be vulnerable to while asleep.

Even if we want to say that he was genuinely concerned about physical animals, as well, even wild animals are known to be more scared of people than people can ever be of them. Like Daniel in the lion's den and the Jewish People amongst the nations, a holy visage and noble stature prevents them from looking at him as a mere piece of flesh. When the mind is guarded, he maintains his G-dly image.



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Parashah Talk Parshas Vayeitzei

Excerpt from **Darash Moshe**, by **RABBI MOSHE FEINSTEIN**, zt"l

Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Hashem is in this place and I did not know!" (28:16).

For what purpose did Yaakov mention this seemingly insignificant fact? Rashi explains that Yaakov's intent was: Had I known, I would not have slept in a holy place such as this. This is very difficult to understand. The Gemara tells us (Chullin 91b) that Hashem caused the sun to set early in order to cause Yaakov to sleep in this particular spot (Chullin 91b). The Talmud further teaches that the stones Yaakov had placed surrounding his head miraculously joined, forming one large stone. As the verse narrates, it was during this sleep that Yaakov merited receiving a prophecy from Hashem, as well as a promise of protection during his numerous travels. From all of these miraculous occurrences it should have been clear to Yaakov that it was the will of Hashem that he should sleep in this spot. Why, then, would Yaakov say that had he known of Hashem's presence he would have done otherwise?

The proper way to understand Yaakov's words is as follows. Yaakov thought that one is only considered to be serving Hashem when involved in spiritual pursuits such as tefillah and Torah study. Involvement in physical matters such as eating and sleeping, however, could not be considered serving Hashem, since they are not themselves mitzvos.

By performing miracles and causing Yaakov to sleep (a purely physical activity) on the future site of the Beis Hamikdash, Hashem sought to teach Yaakov that this is not the case. Hashem gave His Torah to human beings knowing that they are creations whose physical needs must be satisfied to facilitate their continuing ability to fulfill His commandments. It is His Divine will that these physical activities should be sanctified through their use as tools assisting people in their service of Hashem. In this way, these

activities can be raised to the level where they themselves become the fulfillment of Hashem's will.

It was this that Yaakov alluded to when he exclaimed "and I did not know." Yaakov exclaimed that prior to being taught this lesson, he did not know that a physical act such as sleeping could be sanctified to such a degree. Rashi (quoted above) explains that commensurate with Yaakov's prior understanding, had he known of the holiness of the site he would not have thought it proper to sleep there.

Taking note of this lesson, Yaakov said that the stone upon which he rested his head while sleeping should be a Beis Elokim. It was Yaakov's wish that the stone should serve as a reminder to the fact that a Beis Elokim is not only a place where one is involved in Torah and mitzvos. Even the seemingly mundane act of sleeping must be done with the proper intentions "so that a sleeping place, too, can reach the level of Beis Elokim."

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rav vayeitze last year From [jr@novell.com](mailto:jr@novell.com) Wed Jan 3 22:56:48 1996

### Shiur HaRav on Parshas Vayeitze

"And Yaakov continued on his way and met angels of G D. And when Yaakov saw them he said 'this is the camp of G D' and he called that place Machanaim." (Breishis 32:3)

The Rav (Rabbi Y.B. Soloveitchik z"l) analyzed the terms Machane (camp) and Machanayim (two camps) according to two different approaches.

1. Rashi interprets Machanayim as 2 Machanos two camps: one of Angels belonging to Chutz l'Aretz (outside the land of Israel) who escorted him to the border of Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel), and the second consisting of Angels who were to escort him into Eretz Yisrael.

2. The Ramban raises the following question on Rashi's interpretation: at this time Yaakov was still quite far from reaching Eretz Yisrael. How could one of the camps refer to angels of Eretz Yisrael? The Ramban is therefore of the opinion that these groups of angels were sent to reassure Yaakov. Yaakov was traveling through danger, exposed to enemies lying in ambush for him. The purpose of showing him legions of angels was to reassure him that his "camp" will never be left alone. For wherever his camp may go and how hopelessly outnumbered they may appear to be, there will always be a second "camp" of Malachei Hashem that will protect the camp of Yaakov. Yaakov has the G Dly strength in his "camp" and need not fear the earthly powers of his enemies. Machanayim refers then to the camp that was traveling with Yaakov and to the heavenly camp, the angels of G D who were sent to protect him.

The Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel on this verse indicates that the term Machanayim means the Beis Hamikdash. The sanctity of the Beis Hamikdash and its surrounding areas, referred to as Kedushat Machanot, increases in gradations, each of which is called a "camp" since they correspond to the different camps which the Jewish people consisted of in their sojourn in the desert. As the Rambam states (Hilchos Beis Habechirah 7:11) "There were three camps in the desert, and correspondingly three camps throughout the generations." In other words, besides the obvious sanctity of the Mikdash, the Mikdash and its surrounding areas also contained a Kedushat Machane (sanctity by camp) that derived from the three camps in the desert:

- 1) Machane Yisrael (camp of Israel) which is all of Jerusalem outside of the Temple mount. (Jerusalem is not simply a city, but rather it is an integral part of the Mikdash for several Halachic parameters.
- 2) Machane Leviyah (camp of Levites) which is the Temple mount.
- 3) Machane Shechina (the Beis Hamikdash itself).

Let us examine this Kedushat Machane more closely. Chazal say that Avraham called the place of the Beis Hamikdash "Har" a mountain, Yitzchak referred to it as "Sadeh", a field, and Yaakov referred to it as "Bayis", a house. The term house implies that there is an owner of the house who controls access to his house. There must be a protocol for approaching and entering the Bayis.

A camp, however, particularly a military camp, has a greater sense of equality among its inhabitants. The general and the private live together under the same conditions. The private can more readily approach the general and speak with him because of the shared cramped and difficult conditions than he could under more normal conditions.

The Kohen Gadol is called the watcher of the Beis Hamikdash, as it says in Zechariah (3:7) "And you [referring to the Kohen Gadol] will judge my House and watch my courtyards... The Kohen Gadol can invite his friends, i.e. the scholars and leaders of the generation into the home of Hashem. But what of the plain and simple Jew? How does he approach and enter the house of Hashem? Here is where the Machane concept comes in. The simple Jew approaches the Mikdash as a Machane. He, the lowly private, can enter the Mikdash and pour out his heart to the General himself without deference to the disparity between their "ranks".

"And I will meet with you there and speak to you from atop the Kapores between the two Kruvim..." (Shemos 25:22). The rendezvous of G D and Moshe Rabeinu took place in the Holy of Holies. What about the simple Jew? Where will he encounter G D? The Torah tells us (Shemos 42:43) that the altar in the Temple courtyard was the rendezvous for G D and Klal Yisrael. Any Jew could approach Hashem there.

Returning to our discussion, it is worth noting that it was Yaakov alone who recognized the Malachim as angels. To the rest of his entourage they appeared to be ordinary people. Yaakov said "This is the camp of G D" but he called the place Machanaim. By this he meant that each person, each Jew, has the ability to grow spiritually to the point where he too will recognize the angels as such. Machanaim two camps the earthly one which you see and the heavenly one which Hashem has provided to the Bnai Yisrael to protect them from their enemies. I, Yaakov, see them clearly and you, potentially, can see as well.

When Yaakov embarked on his journey to the house of Lavan, his impression of what the Mikdash was to be was that of a house, as he said "This is the house of G D..." (Breishis 28:17). The home of Hashem is exclusive; not all can enter. When he returned from Lavan, however, he saw the Mikdash as a camp where each Jew has the potential to raise himself to the level of seeing the angels of G D and to ally his own personal camp with the camp of G D.

(NB: When Avrohom went to the Akeida, he saw Mount Moriah from afar. He asked Eliezer and Yishmael what they saw; they saw nothing. He asked Yitzchak and Yitzchak saw a cloud of G D's glory over the mountain, as did Avrohom himself. In order to discern that there even is another camp beyond your own, one must be on a higher spiritual level. Avraham and Yitzchak reached that higher level and were able to see and distinguish the two camps while Eliezer and Yishmael had not and could not. This is similar to Yaakov, and his message to his children, that the level of spirituality one has achieved determines how much of the heavenly "camp" one is privileged to see.)

In summary, the Machane Elokim provided Yaakov with security and confidence to face his challengers as his camp included the Machane Elokim as well. Each and every Jew must strive to reach the spiritual level of perceiving the Machane Elokim that surrounds him.

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From: "Seth Ness <ness@aecom.yu.edu>"

Date: 12/1/95 11:31am

Subject: Eiyanim Latorah vayeitzei

Enayim LaTorah Publication of Student Organization of Yeshiva University  
Parashat Vayetzei

**The Twice Promised Land**

**by Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman**

Ha'aretz Asher Ata Shochveiv Aleiha Lecha Etnena Uleazaracha  
The land on which you lie, to you will I give it and to your descendants..  
(28:13).

The Talmud (Chulin 91b) remarks, "This teaches that G d folded the entire land of Israel and placed it underneath Yaakov, in order that it be easier for his descendants to conquer."

We find a similar statement in the Talmud in regard to Avraham. G d said to Avraham:

Kum Hithaleich Ba'Aretz Lerkach Ulerachbah Ki Lecha Etnenah  
Arise, walk in the land through the length of it and the breadth of it; for I will give it to you (13:17)

The Talmud (Bava Batra 100a) rules that this was not a legal act of acquisition; rather: "Out of affection for Avraham He told him so in order that it be easier for his descendants to conquer it." (R' Eliezer, however, quotes this verse as a source for his view that walking the length and breadth of a piece of property is an actual act of acquisition.)

We might ask: Why does Avraham pave the way for his descendants by traversing the land, while Yaakov does so by having the land fold up under him as he sleeps on it?

(Parenthetically: Hashem later says to Avraham, "Lezarachah Natati et ha'Aretz Hazot" "To your seed I have given this land" (15:18). Rash"i, following the Midrash, explains that the verse uses the past tense since G d's promise is as good as done prophetic past tense. But R' Yossi in the Yerushalmi (Challah 2:1) uses the past tense of this verse to prove that the Jews were in possession of the land of Israel from the time of Avraham and that, therefore, even grain that grew before they entered the land was obligated in challah. Why does Rash"i reject this explanation? If one examines the discussion in the Yerushalmi one finds that R' Yossi's statement is advanced on behalf of R' Eliezer, who holds that grain that grows outside of the land of Israel is normally exempt from Challah. Not surprisingly, then, it is consistent with R' Eliezer's own view in Bava Batra that Avraham performed a legal act of acquisition by traveling the land its length and breadth; according to this view, the past tense of the verse indeed implies that Avraham was already in legal possession of the land Rash"i, however, follows the view of the Sages in Bava Batra that walking the length and breadth of a piece of land is not a legal act of acquisition; accordingly, he follows the Midrash and explains the past tense of the verse as being an example of the prophetic past tense.)

After receiving this promise Yaakov vows:

"Vechol Asher Titein Li Aser A'asrenu Lach"

And of all that You shall give me I will surely give a tenth (ma'aser) to You (28:22)

We find that Avraham (14:20) and Yitzchak (26:12, see Rash"i there) also gave

maaser; only Yaakov, however, makes a vow to do so. Why should this be so?

To answer these two questions we must preface several items of information:

The Talmud in Yevamot (82b) states that the obligations of terumah and ma'aser took effect only after the Jewish people took possession of the land of Israel. This happened twice; first, at the time of Yehoshua, and again at the time of Ezra, after their return from the Babylonian exile. The Rambam (Shmita 6:16) distinguishes between these two acts of acquisition; the first was accomplished through conquest, whereas the second was accomplished through chazaka (a form of legal acquisition). (See there the ramifications of this distinction.)

Furthermore, the Rambam (Terumot 1:26) rules that at the time of the Second Temple the obligations of terumah and maaser were only Rabbinic, because only a part of the people were settled on the land of Israel. On a Biblical level these obligations require that all of the Jewish people be living in the land of Israel. The source for this ruling seems to be the Yerushalmi in Shevi'it (6:1; see Resp. Beit Halevi 3:1) which records the view that, at the

time of Ezra, the people accepted the obligations terumah and maaser of their own accord, rather than as a Biblical obligation.

The Yerushalmi finds a source for this in the verse in Nechemiah (10:1ff),  
□ And because of all this we make a covenant and write it... that we shall bring the first portion of our dough and our terumah... and the maaser of our land... □

In the light of the above, we can answer our first question by suggesting that when the Talmud in Bava Batra states that Avraham was told to traverse the land of Israel in order to pave the way for his descendants, the reference is to his descendants the time of the first acquisition of the land of Israel. As the Rambam writes, this acquisition was accomplished through conquest. Furthermore, it was only completed at the close of the seven years of division in which the boundaries of the tribes we aid out. Avraham's travels throughout the land prefigured the campaign to conquer the land and the laying down of its boundaries. But when the Talmud in Chulin states that G-d collapsed the entire land under Yaakov in order to make it easier for his descendants, the reference is to his descendants at the time of the second acquisition of the land of Israel. As the Rambam writes, that acquisition was accomplished through chazaka. Likewise, Yaakov's laying on the land was an act of chazaka, as we find bedding down on a piece of property is, under certain circumstances, an effective chazaka (hatzoat matzot; see Hil. Zechiyah u'Matanah, 2:4. Cf. Tzofnat Paaneach al HaTorah, Breishit 28). Accordingly, we find an answer to our second question; we understand why Yaakov's giving of maaser was preceded by a vow, whereas Avraham and Yitzchak gave maaser without a vow. As the Yerushalmi in Sheviit states, at the time of the second acquisition the Jews did not automatically become obligated in terumah and maaser; they made a covenant and obligated themselves. Likewise Yaakov, whose actions portended theirs, undertook a vow and obligated himself.

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reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Nov 25, 2020, 4:43 PM

subject: **Rav Frand - Inspiration Without Action**

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Parshas Vayeitzei

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion:

#1182 – Chasan Going To Work During Sheva Brochos / Leaving Chasunah Early. Good Shabbos!

Inspiration Quickly Dissipates If One Delays Taking Concrete Action

#### Inspiration Without Action

After Yaakov Avinu put his head on the rocks and had his famous dream of the ladder with the Angels ascending and descending, the pasuk says "And he took the rock that he placed beneath his head and he set it up as a matzevah (pillar). [Bereshis 28:18] The Ramban notes that by reading the pesukim we get the impression that Yaakov arose and he made the matzevah right there where he had been sleeping. The Ramban says, however, that this is not true. Rather, Yaakov took the rock upon which his head had been resting, and transported it with him to Luz, and that is where he erected his matzevah.

The question is why did Yaakov need to carry the rock all the way to Luz? There is no doubt that he could have found other rocks in Luz with which to build a matzevah. It is not like rocks are such a rare commodity in the Middle East!

This teaches us something that we have probably all experienced. When a person is inspired to do something, it is best to latch onto it right then and there. If a person hesitates, the inspiration often dissipates. A person may be momentarily inspired, but unless he acts upon the inspiration right away, with the passage of time the inspiration will evaporate. Yaakov Avinu was

afraid of this. He was afraid that by the time he reached Luz, he would be less inspired, he would procrastinate, and the act of establishing a lasting token to his inspiration of the moment would never come to fruition. In order to make sure that this would not be the case, Yaakov immediately began the process by schlepping the rock with him at all times until he was ready to establish it as a permanent testimony to his dream.

Human beings become inspired, but with the passage of time they tend to rationalize, or get too lazy, or whatever it may be. When inspiration occurs, people need to act on the inspiration immediately. If "immediately" is impossible, then at least take symbolic action to make sure that it will eventually get done. This is what Yaakov did by carrying the rock with him from the moment he woke up from his dream until he arrived in Luz. A Difficult-To-Translate Pasuk Addresses A Difficult-To-Understand Concept

In my opinion, the most difficult pasuk in the parsha to translate is Bereshis Perek 30 Pasuk 8. Leah had children and Rachel did not have children.

Following the path she saw from Sarah Imenu, Rachel gave her maidservant to her husband. At least Rachel should have a child through her maidservant so that vicariously she should be able to have children. The pasuk reads (following the birth of Dan): "She conceived again and Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, bore a second son to Yaakov." [Bereshis 30:7] The next pasuk explains the name Rachel gave to this son: "...Naftulei Elokim niftalti im achosei, gam yacholtee..." and concludes "...and she called his name Naftali." This is such a difficult pasuk! What do the words Naftulei Elokim niftalti mean? And what is the explanation of im achosei, gam yacholtee?

Art Scroll translates: "Sacred schemes have I maneuvered to equal my sister, and I have also prevailed." According to this translation "Naftulei Elokim" means "sacred schemes." I believe this translation is from Rashi. Rashi here struggles to explain this pasuk: "Menachem ibn Saruk explained it in the entry (in his dictionary) 'attachments from the Omnipresent I have become attached to my sister, (I intertwined, I became adhered to my sister).' Rashi gives his own interpretation – based on the expression 'Ikesh u'pesaltol' ([Devorim 32:5]); this implies some crookedness – 'I beseeched with many beseechments and turnings to the Omnipresent to be equal to my sister.'"

This has always been a difficult pasuk, at least for me. This year I saw the Malbim on this pasuk. The Malbim not only says a beautiful interpretation, but he says something which we all have to bear in mind from time to time. The Malbim, a master of the Hebrew language, explains the word Naftulei – like Menachem ben Saruk explains it – as relating to an attachment or seal (from the expression Tzamid pasil [Bamidbar 19:15] which means an attached covering).

Rachel says "The matter between my sister and me—why she had children and not I—is a matter which has been hermetically sealed by the Ribono shel Olam (Naftulei Elokim). This is an inaccessible mystery, sealed from the eyes of human beings. But Gam Yacholtee. But because of that I was able to persevere and I accepted my suffering with joy, for the L-rd is righteous and His Judgements are just.

The Malbim is saying that Rachel was asking the question that has bothered mankind from the beginning of time—why is there such a thing as Tzadik v'Rah lo (a righteous person who suffers) v'Rasha v'Tov lo (and a wicked person who prospers)? This is not fair! I was supposed to marry Yaakov. My father is a crook! He switched me for Leah. I knew this was going to happen and I had all sorts of plans with my future husband that we should not let this happen. And then, I let the "other" wedding go through and Yaakov married Leah. I was the righteous party here—and now she should have the children and not me? Not only does Leah have children, but Bilhah and Zilpah have children. Everyone has children except for me! IT'S NOT FAIR! It is more than 'not fair'. It is incomprehensible. It does not make sense!

Rachel asks – how can I withstand this phenomenon? She says "Naftulei Elokim" – I came to the conclusion that there are some things in life that are so sealed that human beings cannot hope to understand them. Because of that, I have faith that the Ribono shel Olam knows what He is doing and that He has a calculation behind this, and therefore I accept it. That is why "Im

Achosee gam yacholtee” – I was able to persevere in my rivalry with my sister.

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramcha”l) writes in the Daas Tevunos, “Whatever the Master Blessed be He does is certainly ultimately for the good. Whether He gives a person wealth or poverty, it is all to take corrective actions in this world (L’saken tikunim b’Olam). There are certain things in the world that need to be corrected. When people suffer troubles for what seems to be for absolutely no reason at all, somehow the purpose is “L’saken tikunim b’Olam”. This is what the great master of Kabbalah, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto writes.

How is this a “correction for the world”? We may never understand because it is Naftulei Elokim. This has been hidden and sealed by the Ribono shel Olam. Only at the end of days, perhaps then we will begin to understand it. Lavan Crosses Yaakov’s Red Line by Calling Him a Thief

Yaakov works for Lavan for many years. Lavan tried to steal him blind. Finally, Yaakov is given a message from the Ribono shel Olam that it was time to leave so he told his wives, “We need to get out of here!” Yaakov leaves with his family. Lavan realizes that his terafim (idols) are missing and chases after Yaakov. Lavan catches up with him and accuses him: “Why did you steal my gods?”

Finally, Yaakov gets angry at his father-in-law and lets him have it: “...What is my transgression? What is my sin, that you have pursued me? When you rummaged through all my things, what did you find of all your household objects? Set it here before my brethren and your brethren, and let them decide between the two of us.” [Bereshis 31:36-37] He goes on to movingly describe his own devotion and dedication to his job in the employment of Lavan, and how Lavan took every opportunity to detrimentally switch his wages and steal from him.

Think about this. Lavan has been cheating Yaakov and giving him a hard time for twenty-plus years. On the night of Yaakov’s wedding, Lavan switches daughters on him. Yaakov woke up the next morning and it does not say he lost his temper. All the years that Lavan swindled his son-in-law, it never says that Yaakov got angry at him or expressed resentment. Here, at the end of the parsha, finally “Va’Yichar Yaakov” (Yaakov became angry). If it would have been you or me, we would say this is a buildup of twenty years of frustration. It was the straw that broke the camel’s back, and Yaakov finally lets his father-in-law have it, like he should have done twenty years earlier.

But that is you and me—that is not Yaakov. Why, over here, does Yaakov finally get angry and let loose with a long shmooze which Lavan clearly deserved a long time prior to this incident? Why here? Why now?

Rav Yosef Salant, in his sefer Be’er Yosef, makes a beautiful observation. Until now, it was personal – between me (Yaakov) and you (Lavan). The switching of the daughters, the financial trickery—this was all personal and Yaakov was prepared to deal with it on his own. “But when you bring all of your men and you accuse me of ‘Why did you take my gods?’ you are calling me a thief in front of all of these people! This is a Chilul Hashem! The Gentiles will think – ‘Yaakov is a Ganaff’. Here I draw the line. This is it!”

Yaakov protests that this is an accusation which goes to the heart of his personality. “I am Mr. Emes L’Yaakov. I will not tolerate this Chilul HaShem you are falsely creating by accusing me of stealing from you.” Therefore, here he explodes in anger and sets the record straight. “There is one thing I am not. I am not a thief!”

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Shabbat B'Shabbato Parshat Vayeitzei (28 November 1998) SHABBAT ZOMET is an extract from SHABBAT B'SHABBATO, published by the Zomet Institute of Alon Shevut, Israel, under the auspices of the National Religious Party. Translated by: Moshe Goldberg

### **"LET THERE BE NO FAULT IN MY OFFSPRING"**

**by Rabbi Naftali Bar Ilan**, member of the Rabbinical Office, Rechovot

Yaacov made a vow on his way from Be'er Sheva to Charan: "The Almighty will be a G d for me" [Bereishit 28:21]. As Rashi explains, his prayer was, "Let me be worthy of His name from beginning to end, let there be no fault in my offspring." This was years before he had any children, but he already prayed that his children would continue in his path. And in the end, Yaacov achieved what his father and grandfather did not. As far as Avraham was concerned, Yitzchak was the only one who continued his way. Similarly, for Yitzchak, only Yaacov continued on the righteous path. Yaacov himself is not sure of his sons, asking, "Is there some fault among you? Is there anybody who does not stand with me in following G d?" [Rambam, Hilchot Keriyat Shema 1:4]. The reply is: "Hear, Yisrael that is, hear us, our father Yisrael our G d is one. And he replied, Blessed is the honor of His kingdom for ever." [Rambam, ibid]. This desire, to pass on the yoke of heaven to all his children, without any exception, is Yaacov's guiding principle throughout his life. At his first meeting with Yosef, after 22 years of separation, he didn't fall over him and kiss him, but he "recited the Shema" [Rashi, Breishit 46:29]. In spite of the fact that his sons had told him that Yosef had been killed by an animal, he still feared that they had a hand in his death, acting in a way more befitting Esav than Yaacov. When he saw that Yosef was indeed still alive, he cried out, "Shema Yisrael I am happy that all my children follow the path of G d." But Yaacov is concerned not only with his own children but with all of mankind. That is how Rashi interprets the first verse of Keriyat Shema: "G d, who is only ours for now and not the G d of all the nations, will in the future be a single G d, as is written, 'Then will I change the nations to speak clear language, that they will all call out in the name of G d' [Tzefania 3:9], and it is written, 'On that day, G d will be one and His name will be one' [Zechariya 14:9]." [Devarim 6:4]. The mitzva of "Love your G d" is not concerned only with the Jew himself and his family, but is interpreted to mean, "Cause Him to be loved by all mankind, as was your father Avraham, as is written, 'and the souls which he made in Chevron' [Bereishit 12:5]" [Sifri, Devarim 6:8]. Rabbi A.Y. Kook wrote in "Teudat Yisrael U'Leumi'uto" as follows: "It would be a mistake to leave nationalistic feelings in their natural state, in terms of materialistic desires, related to nothing more than the needs of life. It is necessary in addition to this to attempt to understand and to explain how our nationalistic feelings are related to the lofty goal of love for all mankind. This is our ultimate goal and desire." Yaacov's great vision, from the time he escaped all alone to Aram, and from then on, was that there should be no fault not only in him and his children, but in all of mankind as well.

<http://www.tzemachdovid.org/thepracticaltorah/vayeitzei.shtml>

#### **THE PRACTICAL TORAH**

#### **BY RABBI MICHAEL TAUBES**

#### **Parshas Va'Yitzei: Ma'aser Kesafim**

No definitive Halacha LeMa'aseh conclusions should be applied to practical situations based on any of these Shiurim.

When Yaakov Avinu, while running away from his brother Eisav, awakens after dreaming about the Malachim ascending and descending the ladder, he davens to Hashem, and vows that if Hashem will provide for his needs and see that he will return safely to his father's home, he will give Hashem one tenth of whatever he has (Bereishis 28:20-22). In the Da'as Zekeinim MiBa'alei HaTosafos (Ibid. Pasuk 20 s.v. Im), a Midrash is cited which indicates that Yaakov at that time instituted that one should give away one tenth of one's money to Tzedakah. Although the Torah itself clearly

presents elsewhere the Mitzvah to support the poor by giving Tzedakah (VaYikra 25:35, Devarim 15:7 8), no guidelines are given as to specifically how much money or what percentage of one's income must be given to Tzedakah in order to properly fulfill this Mitzvah. The idea of giving one tenth of one's agricultural produce to the poor is indeed documented in the Torah (Devarim 26:12); this is known as Ma'aser Ani, which was given in years three and six of the seven year Shemittah cycle. No other mention, however, of a requirement to give specifically one tenth of anything to the poor is found in the Torah.

Based upon a Posuk in Mishlei (3:9), however, the Yerushalmi in Peiah (Perek 1 Halacha 1, 3b) implies that one is required to give Ma'aser Ani, a tithe of one tenth to the poor, from all of one's possessions, not just from agricultural produce. This view is cited by the Mordechai, in his commentary on the Gemara in Bava Kamma (Siman 192, 53b in the Rif), where it is presented as a source for the Mitzvah to give Ma'aser Kesafim. Another source is found in the commentary of Tosafos on the Gemara in Taanis (9a) which expounds upon a Posuk later in the Torah (Devarim 14:22) that contains the seemingly extraneous double use of a word in relationship to tithes (A'ser Ta'aser). Tosafos (Ibid. s.v. A'ser) cites a statement in the Sifrei (which is not found in our current standard editions) that extrapolates from this entire expression that there are indeed two tithes which must actually be given. The first is the one tenth to be separated from one's agricultural produce, the second is the one tenth to be given to the poor from any other potential source of income, such as business or other capital gains that one may have. This too, then, is a source for the Mitzvah of Ma'aser Kesafim. It is worth noting that this same idea appears in the Yalkut Shimoni in Parshas Re'eih (Remez 493) and in the Midrash Tanchuma (Ibid. Ot 18), where it is mentioned that this gift of one tenth of one's business income should be given specifically to those who are involved in Torah study.

The implication of the above sources is that the obligation to give Ma'aser Kesafim to the poor is rooted in the Torah, a view which seems to be accepted by the Shaloh (Shnei Luchos HaBris on Maseches Megillah, Inyan Tzedakah U'Maaser, s.v. U'Mekol Makom), among others. Most other Poskim, however, do not consider this to be a Torah based obligation. The Maharil, for example (Sheilos U'Teshuvos Maharil Siman 54, 56), writes clearly that the Mitzvah of Ma'aser Kesafim is MideRabbanan, and he consequently allows for certain leniencies in this obligation. The Chavos Yair too (Sheilos U'Teshuvos Chavos Yair Siman 224), in a lengthy Teshuvah where he discusses, among other things, what exactly is considered income and how to treat business expenses in this regard, likewise quotes an opinion that the obligation of Ma'aser Kesafim is MideRabbanan, and that the Pesukim mentioned above are just a remez, a hint to the idea in the Torah. He notes there as well that the aforementioned Yalkut Shimoni (Ibid.) writes specifically that the Posuk in the Torah is only a remez. The Aruch HaShulchan (Yoreh Deah Siman 249 Sif 2) likewise writes that the requirement to give one tenth of one's money to the poor is only MideRabbanan, and it is merely hinted at by the Posuk in this Parsha (Bereishis Ibid. Pasuk 22) referred to above; the Ma'aser actually required by the Torah relates only to one's agricultural products, and is given to the poor only once every three years.

Still other authorities rule that giving Ma'aser Kesafim to the poor is required neither by the Torah nor by the Rabbanan, but is rather a Minhag, a proper custom. This position is articulated by the Bach, in his commentary on the Tur (Yoreh Deah Siman 331 s.v. Av), when he discusses what type of Tzedakah may be given with Ma'aser Kesafim money, as opposed to Ma'aser Ani money, and is agreed to by Rav Yaakov Emden (Sheilos U'Teshuvos Sheilas Ya'avatz Chelek 1 Siman 6) who, quoting the above cited Posuk in this Parsha (Ibid.), writes that giving Ma'aser money to the poor is a Middas Chassidus, an act of piety learned from Yaakov Avinu; he then proves that there is no actual obligation, even on the level of a Mitzvah MideRabbanan. In an earlier Teshuvah (Ibid. Siman 1), Rav Yaakov Emden quotes from his father the Chacham Tzvi that the Bach's position is correct, and he himself brings proofs to his father's view in a subsequent Teshuvah (Ibid. Siman 3).

The Chavos Yair, in the aforementioned Teshuvah (Ibid.), agrees to this position himself as well; this seems to be the majority view. The Pischei Teshuvah (Yoreh Deah Ibid. Sif Katan 12) notes that this position that giving Ma'aser Kesafim is only a Minhag was actually presented much earlier by the Maharam of Rothenburg. He then adds, however, that some hold that although it is only a Minhag, once one has observed the Minhag, he shouldn't stop doing so except in a situation of great need. Some of the above quoted Poskim discuss how many times one must observe this practice before it is considered that he has permanently adopted the Minhag.

One of the issues which depends upon whether giving Ma'aser Kesafim is an actual Mitzvah (from the Torah or from the Rabbanan) or whether it is simply a Minhag is the question of to whom one is required to give Ma'aser Kesafim money. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah Siman 249 Sif 1) writes that one must support the poor by giving them as much as they need, keeping in mind how much he can afford; giving one tenth is considered the average contribution, while one who wishes to be generous should give one fifth, as suggested by the Gemara in Kesubos (50a). The Ramo (Ibid.) adds, though, that Ma'aser Kesafim money must be used specifically to be given to the poor, and not for any other Mitzvah or to assist any other worthwhile cause. The Shach (Ibid. Sif Katan 3) quotes those who disagree and say that expenses for a Mitzvah which one otherwise would not have done may be paid for with one's Ma'aser money. The view of the Ramo (Ibid.) is most likely based on there being a strong connection between Ma'aser Kesafim and Ma'aser Ani; the latter had to be given to poor people and not used even for Mitzvos. The view of the other Poskim probably is that since giving Ma'aser Kesafim is simply a Minhag, its rules do not necessarily parallel those of the Mitzvah to give Ma'aser Ani. The Chasam Sofer (Sheilos U'Teshuvos Chasam Sofer Chelek Yoreh Deah Siman 232) makes this very distinction; in his previous Teshuvah (Ibid. Siman 231) he suggests that if when one first decides to undertake the practice of giving Ma'aser Kesafim, one has in mind specifically that he would like to use the money to pay for other Mitzvos or to support other charitable causes and not just give it to the poor, he may do so.

In terms of how to calculate one's income for the purpose of determining how much the one tenth is that he must give away, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Sheilos U'Teshuvos Igros Moshe Yoreh Deah Chelek 1 Siman 143) writes that money which is held back from one's paycheck for withholding taxes is considered as if it was never his, and thus is not viewed as part of his income; Ma'aser Kesafim need not be deducted from that portion of one's salary. This is unlike money which one actually has, but uses to pay for sales tax and the like, which is nevertheless considered part of one's income. He also discusses how to treat household expenses, such as funds needed for child support, in terms of whether such money is subject to Ma'aser Kesafim. Rav Yosef Karo, in one of his Teshuvos (Sheilos U'Teshuvos Avkas Rochel Siman 3), seems to rule that funds spent on all essential household needs are not subject to the requirement of Ma'aser Kesafim, but it is questionable as to whether or not this view is accepted; Rav Ovadyah Yosef (Sheilos U'Teshuvos Yechaveh Da'as Chelek 3 Siman 76 Ot 4) discusses this matter, quoting numerous opinions. It is worth noting that the Chofetz Chaim, in his treatise entitled Ahavas Chessed (Inyan Ma'aser Kesafim, Perek 18 Ot 2), offers specific guidelines as to how to properly observe the practice of giving Ma'aser Kesafim, including recommendations that one keep written records in a notebook about how much he gives to Tzedakah, as well as that one should take a reckoning of one's income and one's Tzedakah contributions once or twice a year. He adds later (Ibid. Perek 20 Ot 6) that one who is careful about giving Ma'aser Kesafim is treated as though Hashem Himself were his partner in business.

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subject: Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - Brothers in Arms  
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

## Parshas Vayeitzei Brothers in Arms

And Yaakov said to his brothers, ‘Gather stones!’...” (31:46)  
After spending twenty years in Charan, Yaakov flees with his family to Eretz Yisroel. Lavan pursues Yaakov with the intention of killing him{1}. However, Hashem intervenes and warns Lavan not to harm Yaakov{2}. When he confronts Yaakov, Lavan proposes a treaty. Among the terms of the treaty a landmark is designated on the border between Canaan and Aram which both parties agree not to cross with hostile intentions{3}. The verse records “Yaakov said to his brothers ‘Gather stones!’ So they gathered stones for a mound upon which they ate a meal{4}.” The commentaries disagree as to who the “brothers” of Yaakov are and what eating upon this mound signifies. The Ramban understands that the brothers are Lavan’s companions and the meal is part of the covenant, signaling mutual acceptance of the pact{5}. However, Rashi maintains that the brothers are, in fact, Yaakov’s children, and that they are referred to as “brothers” because they stand by Yaakov in battle and times of distress{6}. The meal, therefore, signifies Yaakov staking his claim to the area past the Aramean border{7}.

The bond between children and parents is even closer than that between siblings. How does the Torah’s referring to Yaakov’s children as his “brothers” reflect their commitment to their father in battle? What insight into the parent-child relationship is the Torah offering?

Commensurate to the responsibility a parent expects his child to assume, is the independence which the parent must be willing to allow his child to acquire. Parents must allow their children the freedom to stand on their own. Not given this freedom, a child will perceive himself as completely subordinate in his position vis-à-vis his parents, for they have always been his caretakers and providers. Consequently, he will never be in the proper state of mind to assume the mantle of responsibility required by his parents.

Rashi is explaining that Yaakov does not call his children “brothers” because they go to battle with him, rather, to assure that they would be able to go to battle with him. A child has a greater commitment to his parent than to his sibling. However, this does not ensure that he will be more effective in performing the task required. A child who views his parents as his protectors, will be ineffective in their defense. By Yaakov giving his children a sense of equality, he brings forth from within them a new level of responsibility which would be required in dire straits.

1.Yerushalmi, Pe’ah 1:1 2.31:24 3.31:44 4.31:46 5.Ibid 6.Ibid 7.Seichel Tov

## Working With Confidence

“And he said, ‘Look, the day is still long...” (29:7)

This week’s parsha chronicles Yaakov’s ascent as Patriarch of the Jewish people in the land of Aram. In Parshas Ki Savo, we encounter the precept of “bikurim” – “the first fruit”; coupled with his gift of first fruits, a Jewish farmer is obligated to relate a short synopsis of Jewish history which begins with Yaakov’s subjection to the deceitful Lavan. He declares “Arami oveid avi veyeiareid mitzraymah” – “An Aramean attempted to destroy my father and he (Yaakov) descended to Egypt{1}.” Why are our experiences in Aram critical to our heritage? Furthermore, why does the Torah juxtapose our Aramean experience with our descent to Egypt?

Upon Yaakov’s arrival in Aram, the Torah relates a seemingly unnecessary incident concerning the Aramean practice of retiring early to water their flock. Yaakov chides them concerning their work ethic, saying “If these are not your sheep, then you are negligent in your responsibilities to your employers, and if they are yours, then you are lazy{2}.” It would appear that Yaakov is behaving rather presumptuously for a stranger in a new city. Why does the Torah deem it necessary to recount this incident? The Torah describes Lavan as a “ramai” – “confidence man”, rather than a thief. Since this was a prevalent quality in the region, the letters of the word “Aram” and “ramai” are the same{3}. A ramai preys upon the basic human desire to gain something for nothing; he takes advantage of his victims by leading them to believe that they are getting the better part of a deal. Once the victims realize that they have been fooled, it is too late and they have only themselves to blame.

The basic quality which predisposes a person to becoming a ramai is not necessary evil. In order to be a successful ramai, a person must possess an inordinate degree of sensitivity, allowing him to perceive the needs and desires of his fellow man. A ramai uses his keen sensitivity to the disadvantage of his victims. It is this predisposition which our Patriarch Avraham and our Matriarchs Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah, all of Aramean descent, incorporate into Bnei Yisroel, and which provides Bnei Yisroel with the sensitivity to perform chesed – acts of kindness, the very fabric of our nation, in the correct manner. True chesed stems from the ability to recognize the needs and feelings of the recipient. The danger that accompanies this trait is the ability to take advantage of one’s fellow man. The antidote to this potential threat is offered in the historical synopsis recited by the Jewish farmer.

After recording our Aramean experience, which was critical for it incorporated into Bnei Yisroel the sensitivities inherent in the region, the Torah recounts our descent into slavery. A slave is, by very definition, a person whose existence hinges upon his substantiating himself through his work. Creating a strong work ethic which demands we substantiate everything that is given to us was the only manner to safeguard us from using our new-found talents in a malevolent manner. Ingraining into the very being of the Jewish people that we will accept only those gains for which we have worked, and revile benefiting from others undeservedly, was a necessary progression to prevent the nation from becoming the tricksters and confidence men of society. Yaakov is aware of the “ramai” quality inherent in the people of Aram. Seeing the shepherds lounging around the well in the middle of the day reflects this trait, which, if used malevolently breeds laziness and encourages a person to seek short-cuts in the manner of his livelihood. What he is teaching them when he enters the city is that by improving their work ethic they can utilize this quality in the greatest possible manner, being sensitive to the needs of others.

1.Devarim 26:1, See Rashi verse 5 2.29:2,7, See Rashi verse 4 3.See Rashi 29:12, 29:18

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**Shema Yisrael Torah Network**

**Peninim on the Torah - Parshas**

**פרשת ויצא תשפ"א**

**וַיֵּהוּב יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל ... וַיְהִי כִּימִים אֲחָדִים בִּאהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ**

**Yaakov loved Rachel ... and they seemed to him a few days because of his love for her. (29:18,20)**

*Targum Onkeles* translates *va'yahav*, and (he) loved... *u'r'cheim*, and (Yaakov) was sympathetic towards (Rachel). The accepted translation of *ahavah* is love. *Onkeles* seems to equate love with *rachamanus*, compassion/sympathy. *Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita*, explains that true love is derived from compassion/empathy. Furthermore, one whose love is not founded in sympathy loves only himself. He does not really love the other person. The well-known aphorism from the *Kotzker Rebbe*, זל, comes into play here. A *chassid* once remarked to the *Rebbe* that he loved fish. The *Rebbe* countered that veritably he loved himself, and fish satisfied him. If he truly loved fish, he would not eat them, since he was causing them to die for his satisfaction. The *Avos*, Patriarchs, loved others due to their sympathetic feelings towards them. Thus, their *ahavah* was founded in *rachmanus*.

To better understand this, I quote from *Horav S. R. Hirsch's* commentary to *Bereishis* 43:14, *V'Keil Shakai, yitein lachem rachamim lifnei ha'ish*; “And G-d, *Shakai*, grant you sympathy, in the presence of the Man.” He explains the term *rechem*, sympathy, as derived from *rechem*, womb. Familial love: parents to children, children to parents, and children to each other – is founded on the notion of the common womb from which they come. People confuse *rachamim*, sympathy with *rachamanus*, pity/compassion. This is an error, since pity is a far lower feeling than *rachamim*, sympathy. *Rav Hirsch* asks: “Which is rarer, which enables man more: to be moved to pity at another’s sorrow, or to be moved to joy at their happiness? Very few people do not feel pity concerning their fellow’s adversity, but how many also feel abundant joy when that same fellow wins the lottery and now has greater wealth than they have?”

*Rachamim* is derived from *rechem*, womb. One cares for another, because he feels a sense of oneness, of having emerged from the same womb. Thus, their relationship is of true empathy. As a parent is overjoyed with his/her child’s success, so, too, is a friend filled with happiness when his/her friend is successful. This is true love, focused on the other, not simply on oneself.

**וַיְהִי בְּבֹקֶר וַהֲנָה הִיא לֵאמֹר**

**And it was, in the morning, that behold it was Leah. (29:25)**

Yaakov Avinu was acutely aware of Lavan's corrupt nature. He made it a point to spell out clearly, *b'Rachel bitcha ha'ketanah*, he wanted to marry Rachel, Lavan's younger daughter. Not trusting Lavan to adhere to his word, Yaakov made up *simanim*, signs, which would signal to him whether Lavan had, in fact, made a switch. Rachel, however, was uncomfortable with the notion that her sister would be humiliated. So, she shared the *simanim* with her. She was certain that Yaakov would agree that it was wrong to allow Leah to be so shamelessly treated. Therefore, she did not ask, she acted.

Rachel's extraordinary act of *vitur*, concession, yielded her right to marry Yaakov, which would transfer the position of First Matriarch to her sister, Leah. One would think that Rachel's act of *vitur* cost her nobly. This cannot be further from the truth. Rachel was originally an *akarah*, barren woman. It is only due to her acquiescence in allowing Leah to take her place that Hashem blessed her with her son, Yosef. Furthermore, because of the *z'chus*, merit, of her *vitur*, Hashem allowed *Klal Yisrael* to return to the Holy Land. Rachel *Imeinu* gave our nation hope, all due to her special *z'chus* of *vitur*.

One should not think that Leah was any different. She, too, conceded. When she was pregnant with her daughter, Dinah, it was not originally Dinah. Leah knew that she was pregnant, and she knew that it was a boy. She prayed to Hashem to switch fetuses with Rachel (who was pregnant with a girl). She pleaded with Hashem that her sister be blessed with two sons; otherwise, she would have fewer sons than the maidservant wives, Bilhah and Zilpah. As a result, her daughter Dinah, who had been impregnated by Shechem, gave birth to a little girl who was shunned by her family and later sold to an Egyptian priest by the name of Potifar. Yes, Osnas *bas* Potifar ended up marrying Yosef, thus allowing her grandmother's act of *vitur* to come full-circle.

*Vitir* can be life-saving. *Horav Michel David Rozovsky, zl*, was *Rav* of Grodno. When he died in 1935, he left over two sons who were both brilliant scholars: *Horav Yehoshua Heshel, zl*, and his younger brother, *Horav Shmuel, zl*. Both were Torah giants who were capable of succeeding their father in the *rabbanus*, rabbinical leadership, of Grodno. The family of the deceased naturally wanted the older brother to assume his father's position, while the community was more enamored with the younger *Rav Shmuel*. When observant Jews are locked in debate and a solution to their issue eludes them, they seek the counsel of a *gadol*, Torah giant, who will offer a resolution. Thus, the two sides agreed to present their query to the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl*. The appointment was set for a week later at 10:00 a.m.

*Rav Shmuel* was aware of the meeting. On the designated day, he arrived at *Rav Chaim Ozer's* home at 8:00 a.m. He said that he did not want to waste the *Rav's* time. Therefore, it was not necessary to decide concerning the *rabbanus* of Grodno. He absolutely refused to assume the position which he felt should go to his older brother. He left no room for discussion. When the disputants arrived at the home of *Rav Chaim Ozer*, the *Rav* informed them that the decision had been made for them: *Rav Yehoshua Heshel* would be their next *Rav*.

It should have worked out. *Rav Yehoshua Heshel* was a brilliant *talmid chacham*. *Rav Shmuel*, however, had a certain way about him that caused the members of the community to gravitate to him – at the expense of his brother. *Rav Shmuel* felt that if he would leave, the community would take a more positive attitude toward his brother. Thus, without asking or telling, he performed the *Goral HaGra*. (This is a unique procedure attributed to the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*, which involves opening a *Chumash* to a random page, counting seven *parshiyos* and then seven *pesukim*. This is carried out only by holy people, who not only know what they are doing, but also how to interpret its message.) The *pasuk* that he discovered was: *Lecha Lecha*, "Go for yourself, from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you" (*Bereishis* 12:1). *Rav Shmuel* viewed this as a portent to leave Grodno and set sail for *Eretz Yisrael*.

Without fanfare, he immediately left, together with *Horav Zalmen Rotberg, zl* (son-in-law of *Rav Meir Karelitz, zl*). He arrived in the Holy Land alone, an orphan with no money, no family, but nonetheless, happy in his decision not to involve himself in *machlokes*, controversy. Eventually, he was asked to give a *shiur* in the nascent *Ponovezh Yeshivah*, where he became the premier *maggid shiur* of his day. Sadly, a few years after his arrival in *Eretz Yisrael*, World War II broke out and, among the multitudes of our brothers and sisters who were murdered by the accursed Nazis, was the Jewish community of Grodno, together with their beloved *Rav*. The only survivor of the *Rozovsky* family was *Rav Shmuel* who was saved in the merit of his *vitur*, concern for the feelings of his older brother. His acquiescence to leave a community where he was well-known, loved and respected, to go to a place where he was an unknown, with nothing and no one, took extraordinary courage, faith and resolution. He merited to establish thousands of *talmidim*, students, who themselves have transmitted Torah to many more. The Torah world is in his debt. They are all fruits of *Rav Shmuel's vatranus*.

*Horav Chaim Kreisworth, zl*, would relate his personal story in which his *vatranus* catalyzed the merit that saved his life. He was a young boy when his parents sent him away to *yeshivah*, which was quite distant from his home. The *yeshivah* had neither a dormitory nor a kitchen, thus relegating students to sleep wherever they could and eat "days." This means that on a daily basis, kind-hearted members of the community opened their homes and shared their meager meals with the boys. As a young student, *Rav Kreisworth* slept beneath a fruit stand in the market, and he had to walk four kilometers to the home where he received his meal. It took seven years before he was able to arrange a home near the *yeshivah* which provided him with a meal. Now, he was now able to sleep in the *ezras nashim*, women's section, of the local *shul*.

The first day of the new *z'man*, semester, a new student, whose vision was clearly challenged asked *Rav Chaim* where he could find a place to sleep and eat. The future *gadol* told him, "You will sleep in the *ezras nashim* and eat at the home of a member of the community who lives across the street from the *yeshivah*. He had relinquished his "bed and breakfast" to a boy who had difficulty seeing and would, therefore, neither be able to walk the four kilometers nor sleep beneath the fruit stand. *Rav Chaim* was back where he started.

Years passed, and the Nazis invaded the town. They went into the *shul* and rounded up the students. They had a list of names. As soon as they called a name, the student came forward and was shot, his body thrown from the window. On the first floor, the remaining students recited *Tehillim* and *Vidui*, Confession, knowing the fate that awaited them. They called out, "Kreisworth, Chaim!" As *Rav Chaim* walked upstairs, he prayed to Hashem, "*Ribono Shel Olam*, only You know what I did for the student whose eyesight was poor. Please, remember my act of *vitur* and allow me to live."

As soon as he concluded his prayer, one of the guards asked him, "Do you have parents?" *Rav Chaim* answered, "Yes." "I, too, have parents," the guard said. "I am certain that, just as my parents would want me to live, your parents also want you to live. I will shoot my gun into the air, and you will "fall" out of the window and lay among the dead bodies. When it is safe to get up, leave and run away. This is your chance to save yourself!"

Three hundred *yeshivah* students were murdered that day. *Rav Kreisworth* was the only survivor, all in the merit of *vitur*. He thought that he was doing a favor to another student who could not fend for himself. Instead, that student was the cause of his continued life. We never know that when we think we are helping someone else, we are actually helping ourselves.

ותאמר אל יעקב הבה לי בנים ... ויחר אף יעקב ברחל ויאמר התחת אלקים אנכי  
She said to Yaakov ... "Give me children" ... Yaakov's anger flared up at Rachel and he said, "Am I in the place of G-d?" (30:1,2)

Rachel *Imeinu* pleaded with Yaakov Avinu to grant her children. *Chazal* (*Midrash Rabbah* 71:7) explain that she was asking that he pray on her behalf as his father, *Yitzchak Avinu*, had prayed on behalf of his mother,

Rivkah *Imeinu*. Yaakov was brought to anger by virtue of her implication that he had the ability to give or withhold children. Then he added what appears to be a callous statement: “You say I should be like my father. He had to pray for my mother, because she, too, had no children. (If she would not have conceived, he would also have been rendered childless.) I, however, have children. It is from you that Hashem is withholding children – not from me.”

On the surface, to someone who is unschooled, Yaakov’s retort seems insensitive. This is not the manner in which one addresses anyone, let alone a barren woman who was pleading for a child. Furthermore, Rachel was no ordinary woman. She was his wife. *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, explains the rationale of Yaakov’s remarks. Rachel was well aware that Yaakov was the third Patriarch, and from him would emerge the *Shivtei Kah*, Twelve Tribes, who would comprise the nucleus of *Klal Yisrael*. The question was who – which wife – would merit to produce the greatest number of these sons. Yaakov was, thus, intimating to Rachel that, indeed, his father had to pray for his mother, because, if she had no child, *Klal Yisrael*’s future would have been impaired. No child – no *Klal Yisrael*. Yaakov, however, knew that he would father twelve sons, and he was on the way to seeing his mission realized. The present question was who would be the mother. This was Rachel’s issue for which she pleaded Yaakov to petition Hashem.

Clearly, this explanation somewhat assuages what seems to be Yaakov’s disregard for Rachel’s predicament. It does not, however, completely negate his attitude. Indeed, *Chazal* say that Hashem rebuked Yaakov for his words: “Is this the way you answer an aggrieved person? You will see that your sons (by your other wives) will stand (in submission) before her son” (when the brothers stood before Yosef [son of Rachel] viceroy of Egypt).

Hashem was alluding to Yaakov that Rachel not bearing a son would be a serious problem, because his other sons would one day need Yosef, Rachel’s son. Their survival depended on Yosef; thus, it would be prudent to take Rachel’s barrenness a bit more seriously. *Horav Avraham Pam, zl* (cited by Rabbi Sholom Smith in “*Rav Pam On Chumash*”), derives from this dialogue and commentary that one must go to great lengths to demonstrate great sensitivity when dealing with an aggrieved, distressed person. One who suffers from emotional distress or physical pain does not necessarily think or act rationally or with great care for another person’s feelings. They may lash out, say what comes into their minds, and let the chips fall where they may. Who cares? The general feeling is to “let them have it,” mete our rebuke and discipline without remorse. This is not the proper course to take. We must attempt to feel their pain, understand the adversity which they are experiencing, and attempt to alleviate their troubles in some way. While we might not succeed, we will have at least achieved two things. First, we show them that we care. Second, we debunk the notion that we are their enemy (which is sadly a common feeling that they harbor). If we cannot make the situation better, we should at least not make it worse.

In the parlance of *mussar*, ethical discourse, this is called *nosei b’ol im chaveiro*, to carry/share the yoke with his friend. All too often we want to help, but the extent to which we are prepared to go is limited. The following vignettes present instances in which our *gedolim* showed the way which should serve as our lodestar concerning behavior.

A baby boy was born to a young Bnei Brak couple. When the *mohel*, ritual circumcisor, came to examine the infant before the *Bris*, he was concerned with the baby’s color. A doctor was called to further examine the child and, after a battery of tests, discovered that the infant was suffering from a serious heart ailment that required surgery. The problem was that the surgeon was in Boston, and the doctor in *Eretz Yisrael* felt that the infant would not survive the trip. What does one do? The young father went to *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*, to seek his counsel. *Rav* Shteinman told him to make arrangements for the trip, and he gave his blessing for a *refuah sheleimah*. Three months later, the child had sufficiently recuperated that he could now have his delayed *bris*. The young father once again returned to

*Rav* Shteinman; this time, however, it was to request his presence at the *Bris* and ask that he accept the honor of being *sandek*, holding the infant during the ritual. *Rav* Shteinman replied: “You came to me originally the night before the *Bris* (three months prior). Surely one of the grandfathers or someone close to you had already been asked to be the designated *sandek*. This person has been waiting anxiously for three months for the infant to recuperate. He has been looking forward to this *Bris* for three months. Now, I should come along and take away his honor? Absolutely not.”

*Horav Meir Karelitz, zl*, married off his daughter to *Horav Zalmen Rotberg, zl*, who was *Rosh Yeshivah* of Bais Meir in Bnei Brak. A few minutes prior to the *chuppah*, *Rav* Meir approached *Rebbetzin* Greineman (who was *Rav* Meir’s niece) and asked her to walk down his daughter, the *kallah*, bride (rather than *Rebbetzin* Karelitz, the *kallah*’s mother), down the aisle. The *Rebbetzin* was surprised, but, knowing her uncle, she understood that there was a special reason for the sudden change in procedure. She asked her aunt, *Rebbetzin* Karelitz, for an explanation. The response was, “I will explain after the *chuppah*.” It troubled her, especially since she was younger than the *kallah*.

Following the *chuppah*, *Rav* Meir came over to his niece and explained his actions: “The *chassan* is an extraordinary young man, both in his erudition and character refinement. Sadly, both of his parents were murdered during the Holocaust. If he were to see his *kallah* walking down to the *chuppah* accompanied by both of her parents, it would be disconcerting for him. Why cause a young man to be sad on his way to the *chuppah*? In my desire to somewhat alleviate his pain, I asked you to walk down the *kallah*, so that she, too, would not walk down with her parents.”

This, in and of itself, is a testament to *Rav* Meir’s extraordinary sensitivity, but the story continues. When *Rav* Meir’s son, *Rav* Chaim Shaul, went to the *chuppah*, *Rav* Meir once again asked his niece to do the honors and walk the *kallah* down. This time, she was especially taken aback, since, *Baruch Hashem*, the *chassan* had both living parents in attendance. *Rav* Meir explained, “I am doing this not to cause my daughter (*Rebbetzin* Rotberg) undue agitation over the fact that her mother did not walk her down to the *chuppah*, yet walked her future sister-in-law down.” Another person’s feelings played a primary role in *Rav* Meir’s life.

*In loving memory of our father and grandfather on his yahrtzeit ז"ל אלחנן בן פרץ ז"ל*  
*Mordechai & Jenny Kurant Aliza Wrona Naomi & Avrohom*  
*Yitzchok Weinberger Dovid & Chavi Kurant Yossi & Chani Kurant Hebrew Academy*  
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## Parshas Vayeitzei: Yaakov's Vow

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### I. THE DREAM AND THE RESPONSE

At the beginning of our Parashah, we are told of Ya'akov's famous "ladder" dream at Beit-El, wherein God promises that he will give him the Land, many descendants, that he will be a blessing to all of humanity - and that He will protect and guard Ya'akov on his journey to Haran until he returns to the Land and realizes the fulfillment of all of these promises.

When Ya'akov awoke (the second time - look carefully at B'resheet 28:16-18) in the morning, he consecrated an altar and made the following vow:

"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear and I come again to my father's house in peace; Hashem will be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that You give me I will surely give one tenth to You." (Beresheet 28:20-22)

There are three difficulties inherent in this statement - and one which is external to it:

### II. ANALYZING THE TEXT: FIVE QUESTIONS

#### PROBLEM #1: "NEDER AL T'NAI"

The conditional vow - \*neder al t'ani\* is odd for several reasons:

- a) If the condition (God watching over Ya'akov) is a mirror of God's promise to him in the dream, why is Ya'akov phrasing it conditionally - "if God will be with me..." - isn't he fully confident that God will fulfill His promise?
- b) On the other hand, if Ya'akov's condition is somehow different than God's promise - why is Ya'akov "setting the terms" for God? Isn't that inappropriate?
- c) In any case, the condition seems unnecessary - if God doesn't help Ya'akov return to the Land, he won't be in a position to fulfill his vow. Ya'akov could have made an unconditional vow - and then, if God saw him safely back to the Land, he would fulfill it. If not, he would either be "stuck" outside of the Land, or dead; in either case absolved of his vow.

Ramban (v. 20) suggests that the conditional word \*im\* ("if") is sometimes used (as in God's own words to Ya'akov in the dream - v. 15 - see also Sh'mot 22:24) as "when". Here too, he suggests that Ya'akov is not making a conditional vow, rather a "delayed" vow - \*neder l'achar z'man\* - meaning, WHEN these things (which God has promised and which I am confident will come to pass) happen, I will... Although there are other examples of this usage, it is not the simplest way to read the text.

#### PROBLEM #2: HOW MUCH IS "VOW"?

**In Ya'akov's statement, where does the condition end and where does the vow begin?** The biggest question relates to the phrase "Hashem will be my God" - is this the end of the condition (as Sa'adiah, Rashi, Rashbam and Hizkuni understand) or is it the beginning of the vow/commitment (Radak, Ramban)? Either reading is difficult, as follows:

- a) If it is the end of the condition, how should it be understood? What must God do to "fulfill" His end of the bargain? If it means that God should be "with" Ya'akov (whatever that may mean - see Yehoshua [Joshua] 3:7), isn't this a restatement of the first phrase in the condition?
- b) If it is the beginning of the vow/commitment, what does it mean? What is Ya'akov committing to do in this phrase?

#### PROBLEM #3: MA'ASER

The final phrase of the vow seems a bit odd - after committing to have a special relationship with God, including (apparently) to worship Him at this spot, the climax of his statement - "...and of all that You give me I will surely give one tenth to You" seems incongruous. What is the import of this commitment?

There is one external difficulty:

#### PROBLEM #4: WHEN IS THE VOW FULFILLED?

Why was Ya'akov never "called" on this vow? Even though he returned to the Land, he didn't go directly to Beit-El for worship. Indeed, Rashi explains God's beckoning of Ya'akov to return to the Land: " '...I am the God of Beit - El, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth. ' " (31:13), in this light: " 'and made a vow to me:' - and now you must fulfill it" (Rashi ibid. - see also Ramban ibid). Rashi even sees Ya'akov's delay in fulfilling his vow as the cause for the Dina tragedy (see Rashi 35:1). In spite of this approach, there is no mention in the text of any failing on Ya'akov's part regarding his obvious delay in returning to Beit-El.

Examining one further difficulty in the text will help us understand Ya'akov's vow:

## **PROBLEM #5: "TOLEH B'DA'AT AHERIM"**

In the penultimate phrase, Ya'akov states: "...and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, will be God's house...". Although the commentaries understand some form of commitment on Ya'akov's part (e.g. to construct a sanctuary there [Radak], to worship there [Rashi]), the text is enigmatic. The simplest reading of this phrase is that this place (Beit-El) will be a house of God - but that is, of course, something which is out of Ya'akov's control. Whether the world recognizes the special nature of that location and, as a result, comes there to worship, is not something Ya'akov can guarantee - at best, he can endeavor to publicize the place and hope to attract worshippers. How can this be a vow, considering that its fulfillment is dependent on others (\*toleh b'da'at acherim\*)?

Returning to an earlier question, what is the significance of the commitment to tithe (the last clause of Ya'akov's vow)?

## **III. YITZCHAK'S FINAL BLESSING TO YA'AKOV: BE LIKE AVRAHAM**

Just before leaving his parents (and experiencing the vision which led to this vow), Ya'akov received one last blessing from his father - and this one was given with full knowledge of the recipient:

"...May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. May He give to you the blessing of Avraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, [the land] that God gave to Avraham." (28:3-4)

Ya'akov was blessed that he should be like his paternal grandfather, Avraham. One of the central features of Avraham's greatness was the recognition on the part of the people around him - including kings - of his special relationship with God. And that is exactly where tithing comes into the picture.

The one explicit instance of tithing found before Ya'akov was that of Avraham (Beresheet 14:17-20). Subsequent to his defeat of the four mighty kings, Avraham encountered the king of S'dom in the presence of MalkiZedeck, a "priest of the Most High God". MalkiZedeck blessed him and verbally affirmed Avraham's special relationship with God (as evidenced by his military and political power). In response, Avraham gave MalkiZedeck a tenth of his goods. This was, then, the proper reaction to public recognition of one's special relationship with God. Whereas pagan belief held that a person might be favored by the gods as a matter of fate or caprice, the approach of the Torah - which is consistently stressed and repeated - is that God's selection of an individual for blessing is a direct result of that person's saintly behavior (see e.g. Beresheet 6:9 and 18:18-19). Once someone is publicly recognized as being blessed by God, it is a supreme act of responsibility toward achieving the goal of publicizing God's Name (the Avrahamic mission) to demonstrate that His favors are bestowed upon the righteous. By tithing at that point, the righteous person shows that his special relationship with God is justified - and is accessible to other. Ya'akov knew that when he would be recognized by leaders as having a special relationship with God - that would be the point at which he would tithe.

## **IV. REEVALUATING THE VOW**

Now, let's look at the vow again and divide it a bit differently:

"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear and I come again to my father's house in peace; Hashem will be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, will be God's house; THEN all that You give me I will surely give one tenth to You."

Ya'akov is vowing that when the rest of the world recognizes his special relationship with God ("Hashem will be my God"), he will give tithes, as did his grandfather when he was recognized as being blessed by God. This recognition would come to pass, in Ya'akov's case, by God protecting and sustaining him in exile and bringing him back home. There is, however, more to the story. Once Ya'akov becomes recognized by leaders and their people as blessed by God, it follows that any site where he worshipped would become a place of prayer and worship for others. After all, imagine how we would flock to the original Luz/Beit-El if we could unqualifiably identify the location of Ya'akov's dream - and none of us ever met Ya'akov in the flesh! How much more so would someone who saw Ya'akov and recognized his special qualities want to go back to that pillar and worship there. Ya'akov is stipulating that even if God protects him, it will only be of value to the rest of the world once they recognize this and act upon that recognition.

At that point, his tithing will make the necessary statement of commitment to all of those values which it is his job to publicize - because his position will afford him that opportunity.

## **We can now answer all of our questions:**

- 1) Ya'akov's condition is not merely a mirror of God's promise - it takes the promise one step further. If God's protection leads to Ya'akov's public recognition as a recipient of God's blessing, then he will demonstrate the propriety of that selection by tithing.
- 2) The "condition" ends before the last phrase. The only commitment is found in the final phrase - to tithe.
- 3) The commitment to tithe is not so incongruous - since it is the only commitment made here. In addition, its significance is

understood against the backdrop of Avraham's tithing to MalkiZedeck.

4) Ya'akov was never "called" on this vow because he never vowed to go back to Beit El (read Beresheet 31:13 and 35:1 carefully) - rather, to tithe.

5) Beit-El becoming a place of worship was not the commitment - it was the final condition which would commit Ya'akov to follow Avraham's model and to give a tenth of everything with which God blessed him.

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**PARSHAT VAYETZE**

Is it acceptable for one to doubt a divine promise?  
 Certainly, if God makes a promise, we'd expect Him to keep it!  
 Why then does Yaakov Avinu vow to worship God only **IF** (and when) God fulfills His promise to return him to the Promised Land?  
 [See 28:20-22.]

Furthermore, why should Yaakov make a "neder" (vow) at all?  
 After all, neither Avraham nor Yitzchak ever made any sort of conditional vow after receiving their divine promises!

Why is Yaakov's behavior different?  
 In this week's shiur, as we study God's "hitgalut" (revelation) to Yaakov at Bet-El, we attempt to explain why.

**INTRODUCTION**

Our shiurim thus far in Sefer Breishit have discussed the 'bechira' process, i.e. how (and why) God chooses the Avot to become the forefathers of His special nation. We have shown how an additional element of this process unfolds with each time that God appeared (and spoke) to Avraham & Yitzchak.

Now, at the beginning of Parshat Vayetze, God's appears for the **first** time to Yaakov Avinu (see 28:10-17), promising him what sounds like the very same thing that He promised Avraham and Yitzchak. Nonetheless, Yaakov's reaction to this 'hitgalut' [revelation] differs drastically from that of his predecessors.

To understand why, we must first consider Yaakov's predicament **before** God appears to him at Bet-El.

**SOMETHING TO LOSE SLEEP OVER**

Recall from last week's shiur that the Avot themselves were not quite sure exactly **WHEN** or **HOW** this 'bechira' process would finally end. In Parshat Toldot it did become clear that the process would continue for at least one more generation: i.e. either Yaakov OR Esav would be chosen, but not both. Therefore, after the incident of the 'stolen blessing', Yitzchak blesses Yaakov that God should grant him with "birkat Avraham", i.e. he (to the exclusion of Esav) should become the chosen son (see 28:3-4).

Despite his father's blessing, Yaakov may have had ample reason to doubt this.

First of all, only the day before, his father had planned to give the primary blessing to his older brother Esav. Secondly, Yaakov's parents had just sent him **AWAY** from Eretz Canaan - to flee from Esav and look for a wife (see 27:43-28:2). Now if Yaakov is truly the chosen son, then it should be forbidden for him to leave Eretz Canaan, just as his father Yitzchak was prohibited to leave.

[Recall that during the famine, God did not allow Yitzchak to go down to Egypt (see 26:1-3). Likewise, when Yitzchak was getting married, Eliezer traveled to Padan Aram to bring Rivka back - Yitzchak himself was not allowed to go.]

Furthermore, when Yishmael and the children of Ketura were rejected from the 'bechira' process, they were sent away to the **EAST** (see 25:6). Now, Yaakov himself is being sent away to the **EAST** (see 29:1), while Esav, his rival brother, remains in Eretz Canaan!

Finally, even though his father had blessed him 'that God should chose him', nevertheless, Yaakov realizes that it is up to God alone to make that final decision, and not his father.

For all or any of these reasons, it is easy to understand why Yaakov may have needed some 'divine reassurance' before embarking on his journey to Padan Aram!

With these points in mind, we can begin our study of God's 'hitgalut' [revelation] to Yaakov at Bet-El to better appreciate the reason for his special reaction.

**YAAKOV HAS A DREAM**

As you review 28:10-15, note how Yaakov's dream begins with a vision [of God's angels ascending and descending a ladder /28:12] - followed by a direct message from God (28:13-15). Hence, we should expect for that divine message to relate to both that vision and Yaakov's current situation.

With this in consideration, let's discuss God's message to Yaakov - one pasuk at a time:

"I am the Lord, the God of Avraham and Yitzchak, the land upon which you are lying; I am giving to you and your offspring" (28:13)

As this is the first time that Hashem speaks to Yaakov, it may have made more sense for God to introduce Himself as the Creator of the Heavens & Earth? But there's a simple reason why he doesn't.

**DIVINE IDENTIFICATION & 'BECHIRA' CONFIRMATION**

Even though God had never spoken to Yaakov directly, it would only be logical to assume that he was very aware of God's existence as well as the various promises He had made to his father and grandfather. [Note especially 17:7-12 and 18:19!] Therefore, when God now appears to him at Bet El, the very first thing God must do is 'identify' Himself in a manner that is meaningful to Yaakov - i.e. as the God of his fathers.

Then, God immediately informs Yaakov that he is indeed the 'chosen' son, using the almost identical wording that He had told Avraham:

"... the land [**'aretz'**] upon which you are lying I have given to you and your offspring [**'zera'**]. And your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out [in all four directions]. and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (see 28:13-14).

Note the use of the key words - 'zera' (offspring) and 'aretz' (the Land). These are certainly typical of God's earlier blessings of 'bechira' to Avraham and Yitzchak (see 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8 & 26:3), and thus confirm Yaakov's 'bechira'. Note as well the key phrase emphasizing the purpose of God's nation - 'to be a blessing for other nations!'

[The significance of the phrase 'afar ha-aretz' [dust of the earth] will be discussed in Part II of this week's shiur.]

**DIVINE RE-ASSURANCE**

While the first two psukim of this 'hitgalut' sound very familiar, the third and final pasuk introduces an entirely new element:

"And behold, I will be with you, and I will protect you wherever you go and bring you back to this Land..." (28:15).

This 'extra' promise clearly relates to our earlier discussion of Yaakov's questionable situation. God must allay his fears by assuring him that **EVEN THOUGH** he must now leave Eretz Canaan, He will remain with him, take care of his needs, and ultimately bring him back - **BECAUSE** he indeed is the 'chosen' son.

**YAAKOV'S REACTION [and REALIZATION]**

Upon awakening from this dream, Yaakov not only recognizes the uniqueness of this site, but also makes an interesting statement: "And Yaakov awoke and stated: 'Indeed God is in this place, but I did not know'. Then in awe he stated: 'This [site] is none other than a **BET ELOKIM** [a house of God], and this is the gate of heaven" (28:16-17).

Yaakov's conclusion re: the uniqueness of this site is obviously based on the fact that He just appeared to him. Furthermore, his conclusion that "v'zeh sha'ar ha-shamayim" - this is the gateway to heaven - is clearly based on his vision of angels ascending and descending the ladder. However, this doesn't appear to be any obvious reason for Yaakov to conclude that this place is a 'bet Elokim' - a house of (or for) God! After all, there was nothing in his vision to suggest that he saw a 'house' of any sort.

The simplest answer would be to connect the two halves of Yaakov's statement. Namely, the very fact that this site is a 'gateway to heaven' renders it an appropriate place for a 'House of God'. However, Yaakov refers to the site first as 'Bet Elokim' and only afterward "sha'ar ha-shamayim". Furthermore, a careful reading of the pasuk shows that these two qualities stand on their own: "This is none other than Bet Elokim, AND this is sha'ar ha-shamayim." The fact that Yaakov divides his comment into two distinct sections suggests that he has reached two unrelated conclusions.

Did Yaakov see some sort of 'bet Elokim' in his dream, or is he 'predicting' that one day a 'bet Elokim' will be built here? At this point in the narrative, it remains difficult to reach any definite conclusion. However, a careful study of what Yaakov does next will clarify the deeper meaning of his statement.

"And Yaakov rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, and set it up for a pillar [**matzeyva**], and poured oil upon the top of it. Then he called the name of that place Bet-el [even though the original name of this city was Luz]." (28:18-19)

Why does Yaakov erect a "matzeyva", pour oil on it, and name this site Bet-el? In these actions, Yaakov is acting in a manner very different than his forefathers. Recall that after God had spoken to Avraham and Yitzchak, they both reacted by building a "mizbeyach" (an altar / see 12:7 & 26:24-25) - but neither Avraham nor Yitzchak ever put up a 'pillar'! Nor did Avraham or Yitzchak ever name cities in Israel!

As before, at this point in the narrative, it remains difficult to reach any definite conclusion concerning why Yaakov is doing so many different things. However, a careful study of what Yaakov does next will clarify the purpose of all of his actions.

#### YAAKOV'S NEDER

After taking these actions (in 28:18-19), Yaakov makes a vow. Note the wording of his promise and how he concludes his vow:

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

**IF** God remains with me and protects me... And I return safely to my father's house...

=> Then **this stone**, which I have set up as a **matzeyva**, will be a **bet Elokim - a House for God** - and from all that You give me I will set aside one-tenth" (see 28:20-22).

By following the 'if' & 'then' clauses of his vow, it becomes rather clear why Yaakov had set up this pillar (in 28:18) - it was simply in preparation for his vow that he plans to make (see 28:22), as that pillar will serve as the cornerstone of a House for God that Yaakov now promises to establish upon his return. To symbolically designate this site, his preparation (in 28:18-19) included anointing the pillar with oil; and as a statement of his intention - Yaakov names the site Bet-El - which basically means that this site will be a 'House for God'.

In other words, **all** of Yaakov's actions in 28:18-19 are in preparation for his vow.

Now we must return to our original question, i.e. what was it in Yaakov's dream that prompted him to make this 'neder' [vow]?

To answer this question, we must return to re-examine Yaakov's immediate reaction to his dream.

#### A PREDICTION - or A RESOLUTION!

Recall the difficulty that we encountered when trying to understand Yaakov's statement (after awakening from his dream) that 'this site is none other than the House of God' (in 28:17) - for there was nothing in his vision suggesting that he saw God's house, nor any obvious reason from him to predict its future existence at that site.

But now that we have seen Yaakov's ensuing 'neder' - his earlier statement of "ein ze ki im bet Elokim" (28:17) becomes most significant - for now we see that Yaakov was not making a prediction - rather **he was stating his resolve!**

In other words, Yaakov's reaction to his dream was not merely a statement of what he saw and felt, but rather a declaration of his

future intention - to build a House for God - and specifically at this site.

This now explains everything that Yaakov does after awakening from his vision.

- 1) He states his resolve to build a 'bet Elokim' at this site (based on what he saw /see 28:16-17), then:
- 2) He sets a 'marker' to remember this precise location (upon his return /see 28:18); then
- 3) He anoints that pillar with oil (see 28:18), symbolically designating its future purpose (compare Bamidbar 7:1 - noting how the Mishkan was also anointed with oil!); then:
- 4) He names the site 'Bet El', once again, reflecting his intention to return one day and build a House for God (28:19); and finally
- 5) Makes his vow to build this 'Bet Elokim' upon his successful return from Charan (see 28:20-22)

Even though we can now explain **what** Yaakov does, we still need an explanation for **why** he makes this resolution. In other words, we must try to figure out what was it that Yaakov saw (or heard) in that vision that prompted his sudden resolve to build a House for God. Secondly, we must also explain why Yaakov makes his resolution so 'conditional'.

To answer these questions, we must return once again to consider Yaakov's current predicament, in contrast to the lives of Avraham and Yitzchak.

#### WHY YAAKOV IS DIFFERENT

In the lives of Avraham and Yitzchak, being 'chosen' was much more than a 'one-way' relationship. After being told by God he was chosen, Avraham responded by building a "mizbeyach" and 'calling out in God's name' (see 12:6-8, 13:4).

Similarly, after God spoke to Yitzchak at Beer Sheva - re-iterating the blessing, he too built a "mizbeyach" and called out in God's Name.

This 'calling out in God's Name' - as Ramban explains - was how the Avot tried to 'make a name for God' by preaching his existence and by setting an example of the highest moral behavior (see Ramban on 12:8 and 26:5, see also Seforno on 26:5). This also foreshadowed the ultimate mission of God's special nation - acting as a model nation to make God's Name known to all mankind.

Certainly, we would expect Yaakov to act in a similar manner.

In fact, in this opening 'hitgalut' to Yaakov, in addition to the promise of 'zera v'aretz', God emphasizes the same key phrase: "...v'nivrichu b'cha - kol mishpachot ha-adama" - that through you (and your offspring) there will be a blessing to all nations - the same phrase that He had emphasized when He **first** spoke to both Avraham and Yitzchak! [To confirm this, see 12:2-3 and 26:3-4, and compare with 28:13-14!]

Furthermore, when God explains His purpose for choosing Avraham and his offspring (see 18:18-19), we find precisely this phrase emphasized:

"For Avraham will surely become a great nation ['goy gadol' - compare 12:2) - **and through him all nations will be blessed**. For I have known him **in order** [for the purpose] that he will command his children... and they will keep the way of God - to do 'tzedeq u'mishpat' [justice and righteousness] - in order to [fulfill the purpose] of what God had spoken about Avraham [that he would become a great nation]" (see 18:18-19)

[See this phrase also in 22:18, after the Akeyda!]

God reiterates this point to each of the Avot, for the goal of "ve-nivrichu becha kol mishpachot ha-adama" reflects the ultimate purpose of this bechira process.

In this sense, God's opening 'hitgalut' to Yaakov emphasizes not only his being the 'chosen son' [= 'bechira'], but also its **purpose**.

Therefore, when Yaakov receives this blessing from God, he is immediately inspired to act in same manner as Yitzchak and Avraham. However, his present predicament does not allow him - for he is now running away (penniless) from his brother who wants to kill him! He **cannot** build a "mizbeyach" (he doesn't have anything to offer on it!); nor can he call out in God's Name (no one is around to listen!).

Nevertheless, because he understands the deeper meaning of his 'bechira' - he immediately states his absolute resolve that when he returns to Eretz Canaan, and achieves a status where he too can 'make a Name for God' - he too will attempt to accomplish this goal. In fact, he is so inspired that he plans to elevate 'calling out in God's Name' a step further - by establishing a 'House for God'!

[To see how a 'House for God' will make God's Name great, see Melachim Aleph 8:14-20, 8:40-42 & 10:1.]

## WHY CONDITIONAL?

Now that we have explained both what Yaakov does, and why he does it, we are left with one last question - If Yaakov is so inspired to build this House for God, why does he make this promise 'conditional'? Let's first explain this question.

Recall that prefaces his promise to establish his 'matzeyva' as a 'Bet Elokim' with the condition: "If God will be with me, and take care of me, etc.". Why can't Yaakov simply state that he's going to do it - no matter what!

To answer this question, let's examine the 'conditions' of Yaakov's 'neder' - to determine their underlying reason.

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

- 1) IF God remains with me,
- 2) and He protects me on this journey, on which I embark,
- 3) and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear.
- 4) And I return safely to my father's house,
- 5) and [or then?] Hashem will be my God.
- 6) And this stone, which I have set up as a monument, will be a Bet Elokim... (see 28:20-22).

## IF OR WHEN

Even though it is unclear where precisely the IF clause ends and the THEN clause begins (see Related Topics section), the first four clauses are clearly all conditions, for they are almost identical to God's re-assurance to Yaakov that He will take care of his needs (during his stay in Charan :

"And behold, I will be with you (1), and I will protect you wherever you go (2) and bring you back to this Land (4)..."

[See 28:15, see also Rashi on 28:20, where he 'matches' them up more precisely:]

As indeed these 'conditions' are simply a repeat of God's reassurances, then it could be that Yaakov may not be doubting God at all, nor setting any conditions! Rather, he is simply explaining why he has to wait - before he can build this 'Bet Elokim'.

Recall, that the word "im" in Hebrew can also mean '**when**' (and not exclusively 'if' / see Rashi on Shmot 22:24).

In other words, Yaakov may simply be stating that: **WHEN** God fulfills His promises (in 28:15), then I will be in the position to build this Bet Elokim (and thus help 'make a Name for God').

Yaakov is not a 'doubter' - rather he's inspired to accomplish, but explains why he must wait until the 'time is right' before he can fulfill his stated goals.

You're probably asking - if so, why doesn't Yaakov actually build a Bet Elokim when he finally returns to Eretz Canaan? Well, that's not only a question for Parshat Vayishlach, that's what a good part of Parshat Va'yishlach is all about! And iy"ch, that will be the topic of next week's shiur! Till then,

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

Below - you'll find below some short discussions on additional topics relating to the above shiur

## RELATED TOPICS

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### A. TWO PARTS OF YAAKOV'S NEDER A CONDITION OR A PROMISE?

Review 28:20-22 and take note of how the 'neder' divides into two parts:

- 1) a CONDITION - IF... ; followed by:

2) a PROMISE (i.e. the vow) - THEN...

It is unclear, however, where the IF clause ends and the THEN clause begins. Let's take a look:

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

- 1) IF God remains with me,
- 2) and He protects me on this journey, on which I embark,
- 3) and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear.
- 4) And I return safely to my father's house,
- 5) and [or then?] Hashem will be my God.
- 6) And [or then?] this stone, which I have set up as a monument, will be a BET ELOKIM
- 7) and from all that You give me I will set aside one-tenth" (28:20-22).

The first four clauses are clearly part of the CONDITION, as they reflect precisely what God had just promised Yaakov in his dream several psukim earlier. [Compare with 28:15; see also Rashi.]

Similarly, the last two clauses clearly describe what Yaakov vows to do once the conditions are met. They describe Yaakov's promise to establish a Bet Elokim at this site upon his return from Charan and offer a tithe of his possessions.

However, the middle clause (5) - "and Hashem will be my God" - can go either way. Although it can refer to either a condition or promise, each option poses considerable difficulty. On the one hand, it doesn't appear to be a condition for two basic reasons:

- a) It does not reflect God's promise in 28:15 as do the other clauses.
- b) If this is indeed a condition, then it does not add anything to what Yaakov had already stated in his first clause - "If God will be with me".

On the other hand, it does not appear to be a vow, either. How could Yaakov possibly accept Hashem as his God only IF God fulfills His promises! Is Yaakov Avinu so 'spoiled' that he would accept God only if He is good to him?

The classical commentators tackle this question in their commentaries.

Rashi and Rashbam explain that it is indeed a CONDITION. Rashi brilliantly solves the first problem raised above [(a)] by explaining this phrase as a reference to God's earlier promise to Avraham at brit mila - "lihiyot lecha le-Elokim" (see 17:7-8).

Rashbam solves the second problem [(b)] by explaining this clause simply as a summary (or generalization) of the first three clauses.

On the other hand, Ramban, Radak, and Seforno all explain this clause as the VOW. They all solve the problem raised above (that Yaakov appears to accept God only on condition) by explaining that Yaakov vows to INTENSIFY his relationship with God should (or actually WHEN) God fulfills His promise. Surely, Hashem will always remain Yaakov's God no matter what may happen. But Yaakov promises that if (or when) he returns 'home' he will dedicate his entire life to God's service.

[I recommend that you see these "parshanim" inside.

Btw, Ramban adds an additional peirush, which he categorizes as 'sod', that explains the clause as neither a condition nor a vow; it is a STATEMENT OF FACT. Yaakov simply states that only when he returns home to Eretz Canaan will it (de facto) become possible 'for Hashem to become his God', since one cannot develop the fullest relationship with God outside of the Land of Israel. (I've toned down Ramban's statement in translation - see it inside (28:21) for a bit of a shocker.))

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### B. BET-EL / A SPIRITUAL INTERSECTION

In this week's Parsha we find the first biblical reference to the concept of 'Bet Elokim', a House of God. Though mentioned only once throughout Sefer Breishit, this concept constitutes one of the most fundamental religious principles in Chumash, as it

presupposes the possibility of man's visiting the house as a means to improve his relationship with God.

Yaakov's description of this site as both 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' and 'Bet Elokim' can help us understand the nature and purpose of the Bet ha-Mikdash and how it represents the potential heights of our relationship with God.

The 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' aspect of the Mikdash, symbolized by the angels ascending and descending from Heaven, suggests the possibility of a 'vertical' relationship, a conceptual connecting point between Heaven and Earth. Despite God's transcendence, a connection, and thus a relationship, can be attained.

In contrast, the 'Bet Elokim' aspect, a HOUSE on earth where Man can encounter God, implies the potential for a 'lateral' relationship. In this sense, the Mikdash serves as both a center for congregation as well as the means of dissemination. From this site, God's word and the recognition of His authority can be spread to all mankind.

[See Yeshayahu 2:1-5! This centrality may be reflected by the unique phrase at Bet El - "yama ve-keydma, tzafona, ve-negba," which might symbolize this dissemination of God's word to all four corners of the earth.]

From God's perspective, so-to-speak, the 'shechina' descends to earth by way of 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' and radiates via 'Bet Elokim' (in the form of His Torah) to all of mankind. From man's perspective, we gather at the 'Bet Elokim' to serve God, and through the 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' we can climb the 'ladder' of holiness.

## C. BET-EL & BET ELOKIM

In God's first 'hitgalut' to Yaakov, we find some additional phrases that can help us appreciate why Yaakov decides that this site should become a Bet Elokim. Let's take another look at the second pasuk of this hitgalut:

"And your offspring shall be like the AFAR HA-ARETZ, you shall spread out to the WEST, EAST, NORTH, and SOUTH (yama ve-kedma, tzafona, ve-negba), and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (28:14).

The first two phrases - "afar ha-aretz" and "east west north & south" - had been mentioned only ONCE before, i.e. when God affirmed Avraham's BECHIRA at BET-EL (after Lot's relocation in Sedom). Note the similarities:

"And God said to Avram, after Lot had parted from him, Raise your eyes and look out... to the NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, & WEST, for I give you all the LAND which you see... I will make your offspring like the AFAR HA-ARETZ..." (13:14-16).

Based on our earlier comparison between this 'hitgalut' to Yaakov (28:14) and God's earlier 'hitgalut' to Avraham at BET EL (13:14-16), we may offer a deeper interpretation of these terms.

As explained above, the two common phrases, 'afar ha-aretz' and 'yama ve-kedma...', suggest to Yaakov that he currently stands on the same site where Avraham Avinu built a MIZBEYACH and 'called out in God's Name'. This as well adds additional reason for Yaakov's resolve to make this site a BET ELOKIM.

[See also Devarim 12:5-12, and note the expression used numerous times in Sefer Devarim to describe the Mikdash - "ha-MAKOM asher yivchar HASHEM leshakein SHMO sham". Compare to the use of the word "ha'makom" in 28:10-22!]

However, God's hitgalut to Avraham in chapter 13, also took place in Bet-el (see 13:4, noting its context).

Notice, how the Torah describes this site as Bet-el, even though Yaakov only named that city over a hundred years later. The reason why is simple, because the Torah realizes that Yaakov's dream took place near the same spot where Avraham built his mizbayach! And in any case, the thematic connection, based on the above shiur, is rather obvious.

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note the emphasis and repetition of the word 'ha-Makom' in this Parsha - 28:11,16,17,19. Note the use of the term also in Parshat Lech Lecha, 13:14, at the Akeida - 22:4, and in Sefer Dvarim 12:5,11,14,18.

1. Try to explain the significance of this word specifically in the context of these parshiot.
2. Use this to explain Chazal's identification of this spot as the site of the Akeida on Har Ha-Moriah, and eventually the site of the Bet HaMikdash in Yerushalayim.
3. Read Ramban on 28:17 (including Rashi whom he quotes). Relate this Ramban and his machloket with Rashi to the above shiur.

B. Read Rashi on Breishit 2:7, and note the two explanations he cites from the Midrash on that pasuk - "vayitzer Hashem Elokim et ha-adam afar min ha-adama":

- a) 'afar' from Har Ha-Moriah
- b) 'afar' from the four corners of the earth.

How do these two opinions relate to our analysis in this week's shiur?

C. See if you can connect the last section of this shiur to two other well-known Midrashim:

1. Opposite "Yerushalayim shel mata" exists a "Yerushalayim shel ma'ala" (Ta'anit 5a). [Relate this to the concept of "sha'ar ha-shamayim."]
2. Yerushalayim is known in the Midrash Tanchuma as "taburo (navel) shel olam" - the umbilicus of the world. [Relate this to the concept of Bet Elokim and the 'four directions'.]

D. Several related questions to think about which relate to next week's Parsha, as well:

1. Does Yaakov actually fulfill his 'neder' when he returns?
2. Is this "neder" fulfilled by Am Yisrael? If so, when?
3. Relate Yaakov's "galut" and his "neder" to the principle of "maase avot siman l'banim" and Jewish history

## **Parshat Vayeitzei: Measure for Measure**

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

### **INTRODUCTION AND QUESTIONS:**

As Parashat VaYetze opens, Ya'akov Avinu flees his murder-minded brother Eisav. The parasha splits neatly into three units, as Abravanel points out:

- 1) Ya'akov's flight from Canaan (home) and arrival in Haran, Lavan's abode.
- 2) The growth of Ya'akov's family and flock in Lavan's household.
- 3) Ya'akov's flight from Haran (and Lavan) back to Canaan.

We will focus primarily on the interactions of Ya'akov and Lavan throughout the parasha. Our main assumptions and main questions will be the following:

The Ya'akov we left at the end of Parashat Toledot was a person who came off significantly better than his brother Eisav, but who still displayed characteristics which left us wondering about his style in dealing with challenges. In particular, we were left wondering about his honesty and straightforwardness. But as we follow him through the events of Parashat VaYetze and VaYishlah, we will be able to watch as he overcomes his earlier personal obstacles and exhibits characteristics truly worthy of emulation.

As readers of the Torah, we are not patronizingly observing Ya'akov as he mends his ways; we should be joining him in this odyssey, and, I would suggest, may need to learn these lessons more than he.

### **QUESTIONS:**

- 1) What events take place in this parasha which shape Ya'akov's character?
- 2) Clearly, Ya'akov flees home to escape from his brother Eisav. But from a "divine plan" perspective, why has Ya'akov been sent to Haran, to his Uncle Lavan's house? What is he there to learn? And how can Lavan, his unscrupulous uncle, be the right kind of teacher to teach Ya'akov what he needs to learn?
- 3) Are there any signs that Ya'akov has changed? What events of the parasha indicate a change in the way Ya'akov deals with challenges?
- 4) Remember that VaYetze is a bridge between Toledot, where the Ya'akov-Eisav saga begins, and VaYishlah, where that saga concludes. That means that we should be looking for signs of transition and change, but not necessarily for decisive, dramatic events; decisive events usually come at conclusions, and, as mentioned, the conclusion comes only next week.

### **PARASHAT VAYETZE:**

Parashat VaYetze begins with Ya'akov journeying from home -- Be'er Sheva -- to the house of Uncle Lavan in Haran. Ostensibly, he is headed for Haran to accomplish two goals: one, to escape the murderous wrath of his brother Eisav, from whom he has usurped the blessings of the firstborn, and two, to find a wife among the daughters of Lavan. But as we will see, he must also go to Haran in order to spend twenty years under the careful tutelage of Lavan; Ya'akov has a lot to learn from his uncle, the grand-daddy of all swindlers.

Before we take a careful look at the interactions between Ya'akov and Lavan in the parasha, we should just take note of a few interesting patterns. These patterns deserve more development than we will give them, but we leave that for another time.

### **JUST LIKE GRANDDAD:**

The first pattern is a reversal of something we've seen before: Ya'akov leaves Canaan, the future Land of Israel, heading for an uncertain future in unfamiliar territory. Avraham, his grandfather, faced the same situation as he \*entered\* Canaan in obedience to Hashem's command. Both grandfather and grandson leave their homeland and birthplace; both grandfather and grandson receive a blessing from Hashem at this uncertain time. Note the great similarity of the two blessings:

### **TO AVRAHAM:**

BERESHIT 12:2-3 -- "I shall make you a great nation, and bless you, and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you, and ALL THE NATIONS OF THE LAND SHALL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU . . ." (14-15) Hashem said to Avram, after Lot had departed from him, "Raise your eyes and look, from the place you are, TO THE NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, AND WEST, for all the land you see, I SHALL GIVE IT TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN FOREVER. I SHALL MAKE YOUR CHILDREN LIKE THE DUST OF THE EARTH . . ."

### **TO YA'AKOV:**

BERESHIT 28:12-14 -- He dreamed: there was a ladder standing on the ground, with its head reaching the heavens, and angels of Hashem ascending and descending it. Hashem stood upon it, and said, "I am Hashem, Lord of Avraham, your father, and Lord of Yitzhak. The land you are lying upon -- I SHALL GIVE IT TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN. YOUR CHILDREN SHALL BE LIKE THE DUST OF THE EARTH, and you shall burst forth TO THE WEST, EAST, NORTH, AND SOUTH; THROUGH YOU, ALL THE NATIONS OF THE LAND SHALL BE BLESSED, AND THROUGH YOUR CHILDREN."

Ya'akov's return journey to Canaan at the end of the parasha also echoes the journey of his grandfather to Canaan:

#### **TO AVRAHAM:**

BERESHIT 12:1 -- Hashem said to Avram, "Go FROM YOUR LAND, your BIRTHPLACE, your FATHER'S house, to the land I will show you."

#### **TO YA'AKOV:**

BERESHIT 31:3 -- Hashem said to Ya'akov, "Return to the LAND OF YOUR FATHERS, to your BIRTHPLACE, and I shall be with you."

Ya'akov has come full circle by the end of the parasha, both paralleling and reversing patterns of his grandfather's life. In leaving home, Avraham journeys from Aram to Canaan, while Ya'akov, in leaving home, journeys from Canaan to Aram. Leaving his life behind and moving to Canaan is what enables Avraham to achieve his personal religious mission. In some parallel way -- as we will see -- leaving his life behind and moving to Aram is what enables Ya'akov to achieve his own personal religious mission.

#### **LAVAN -- MESSENGER OF HASHEM?**

What does Ya'akov gain from living in Lavan's household for twenty years? At first, from a cursory reading of the latter part of the parasha, the answer seems obvious: lots of sheep! Using his cleverness, he makes himself rich by shepherding Lavan's flock of sheep and reserving certain types of animals for himself. But in terms of his personal religious and moral development, what has he gained over this period?

Not long after Ya'akov's arrival in Haran, Lavan generously offers to pay him for his services as a shepherd. Uncle and nephew arrange that Ya'akov will work for Lavan for seven years to earn the hand of Lavan's beautiful younger daughter, Rachel. The seven years pass like days for the eager Ya'akov, but Lavan has a surprise waiting for Ya'akov at the 'altar':

BERESHIT 29:22-27 --

Lavan gathered all the local people and made a party. In the evening, he took Leah, his daughter, and brought her to him [Ya'akov], and he came to her . . . . In the morning, there was Leah! He said to Lavan, "What is this that you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I worked for you? Why have you deceived me?!" Lavan said, "It is not done, here, to place the younger before the older. Finish out this week, and the other one [Rachel] will be given to you also for work that you do for me, for another seven years."

Lavan paints the episode as a misunderstanding. He had "assumed" that Ya'akov had understood that the elder daughter had to be married off first, and that Ya'akov had known that the woman he had married the night before had been Leah. How could anyone have thought otherwise? Of course, Rachel as well can be Ya'akov's if he wants her -- but only for the going rate: seven more years! Lavan, of course, knows blessed hands when he sees them, and he sees them on Ya'akov, as he himself notes later on in the parasha. He will do whatever is necessary to keep his nephew working for him and making him rich.

But Lavan's language is a bit more pointed than this. He stresses that it is not done "HERE" to place the younger before the older. Lavan may not consciously intend to imply that there \*is\* a place where the younger \*is\* put before the older, but his language cannot fail to remind Ya'akov (and us) of the events of the previous parasha, when Ya'akov placed himself, the younger, before Eisav, the older. Lavan may be aware of this misdeed (the Torah tells us that upon his arrival, Ya'akov informs Lavan of "all these matters"), and reminds Ya'akov of it in order to silence him. But his motivation in deceiving Ya'akov is not to avenge the wrong done to Yitzhak and Eisav (the picture of Lavan as righteous avenger being somewhat improbable in view of his character and his activities in our parasha!), it is to make sure that Ya'akov stays on as his right hand man. The bigger picture, however, and the one which must appear before Ya'akov's eyes at this time, is that he has just received his wages, 'mida ke-neged mida,' measure for measure. He is being punished for his deceit, for usurping the blessings from his older brother.

#### **YA'AKOV GROWS:**

Being on the receiving end of a deception of this proportion is a learning experience for Ya'akov. Not only has justice been served in a retributive sense, but Ya'akov, in his bitterness at what has been done to him, also begins to appreciate the bitterness of Eisav's cry upon discovering that his blessings have been taken. As the sunrise stuns him with the revelation that the woman with whom he has shared intimacy is Leah and not the beloved Rachel, he begins to understand the "harada gedola ad me'od," the great trembling fear, which gripped Yitzhak when he realized he had been duped and blessed the wrong son. One of the reasons Ya'akov has been delivered by divine plan into Lavan's custody is so that he

can appreciate what it means to be the victim of a swindle. And one of the reasons Ya'akov is silent, that he accepts Lavan's terms, is because he realizes that Lavan has been the vehicle to deliver his punishment and teach him a lesson.

This is not a just a slap on the wrist. Lavan's deceit all but guarantees that Ya'akov will never be happy in marriage. He can either agree to work another seven years in order to marry Rahel -- in which case he can be sure that the two sisters will fill his life with conflict and jealousy in their competition for affection and fertility -- or he can abandon his love for Rahel and remain with Le'ah alone, frustrated with unrequited love for Rahel and bitter with lifelong resentment for the wife who married him in deceit. Ya'akov chooses to marry Rahel as well as Le'ah, and the center stage of the parasha is held by Le'ah's despair of ever earning her husband's love and by the jealousy and strife which erupts between the sisters over Ya'akov's affection and over fertility. The Torah is telling us that Ya'akov pays dearly for the blessings he stole.

### **SIBLING RIVALRY -- LEAH:**

BERESHIT 30:30-31--

. . . And he [Ya'akov] loved Rahel more than Le'ah . . . Hashem saw that Le'ah was despised, and opened her womb, but Rahel was barren.

Rahel is better loved, so Hashem "evens the score" by granting fertility to Leah and not to Rahel. This inequity makes no one happy, as the Torah goes on to report:

BERESHIT 30:32-35 --

Le'ah conceived and bore a son. She called him Re'uvein [= "see, a son!"], because she said, "For Hashem has seen my suffering, for now my husband will love me." She conceived again and bore a son. She said, "For Hashem heard ["shama"] that I am despised, and gave me also this one", and she called his name Shimon ["listen"]. She conceived again and bore a son. She said, "Now -- this time -- my husband will be drawn ["laveh"] to me, because I have borne to him three sons!", so she called his name Levi ["drawn to me"]. She conceived again and bore a son. She said, "This time, I will praise ["odeh"] Hashem," so she called his named Yehuda ["praise God"], and she bore no more.

Ya'akov is unmoved by Le'ah's remarkable fertility, despite her continued success at producing sons, certainly the preferred flavor of child in those times. The Torah traces Leah's hopes for Ya'akov's affection as they wax through the births of the first three sons and then wane with the birth of the fourth son and Le'ah's realization that Ya'akov will not love her for her fertility:

Name    Meaning

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RE'UVEIN ---> "Look! A son!"

SHIMON ---> "Listen!"

LEIVI ---> "Come to me!"

YEHUDA ---> "Praised be Hashem" (Le'ah has given up).

Le'ah can communicate with her husband only through the names of her sons because children are the only path she can imagine to her husband's affection; she knows that she alone can never attract Ya'akov, for, as the Midrash Tanhuma richly illustrates, Le'ah reminds Ya'akov of himself: just as Ya'akov executes the plan masterminded by his mother to fool his father, so Le'ah executes the plan conceived by her father to fool Ya'akov. Le'ah will always remind Ya'akov of his own guilt. Desperately, she tries to open the lines of communication by naming her sons as cries to her husband for love and attention, but by the fourth son, she senses her failure and thanks Hashem through the final name for at least giving her the chance to communicate with Ya'akov.

[In the Midrash Tanhuma, Le'ah responds to Ya'akov's accusation of deception by reminding him of his own deception of his father; Ya'akov in turn begins to hate her; and Hashem gives Le'ah children to help her attract Ya'akov's love.]

### **SIBLING RIVALRY -- RAHEL:**

Rahel is not comforted to see that Le'ah's fertility has earned her no grace in Ya'akov's eyes. She counts four sons to Le'ah's credit, which is four more than she can claim. She, too, becomes desperate:

BERESHIT 30:1-2 --

Rahel saw that she had not borne to Ya'akov, and she envied her sister. She said to Ya'akov, "Give me children . . . if not, I am dead!" Ya'akov became angry at her and said, "Am I in Hashem's place, Who has denied to you fruit of the womb?"

Barrenness would be a catastrophe under any circumstance; the fact that Rahel measures herself against another wife, and the fact that his wife is her sister, makes her struggle even more desperate. But, as Hazal point out, Ya'akov has no sympathy for her melodramatic outburst, although she is the wife he loves best.

Rahel gives her maid to Ya'akov as a wife in hopes of achieving fertility vicariously; when she does, she names her children to reflect her struggle, and in particular, her struggle with her sister ("I have struggled ["niftalti"] with my sister, and won!"). Le'ah responds by giving her own maid to Ya'akov, and the names of the children she bears reflect her rekindled effort to attract Ya'akov's attention by having children.

### **FERTILITY DRUGS?**

Rahel and Le'ah clash once again over the duda'im, the mandrakes, which Le'ah's son Re'uven finds in the fields and gives to his mother. Presumably, Rahel believes in their power as a fertility drug, so she asks Le'ah for some. Le'ah explodes in frustration: "Is it a small matter that you have taken my husband, that you now want to take my son's mandrakes as well?" Read, "You already have the love of the husband whom I want so much to love me, and now you want my help in having children so you can prevail in that category as well?!"

Le'ah eventually agrees to sell the mandrakes to Rahel for the privilege of having a night with Ya'akov, and when Ya'akov returns from a day in the fields, she informs him frankly that she has "hired him" ["sekhor sekhartikha"] for the night with her mandrakes. The Torah does not tell us how Ya'akov reacts to this information, but there must be something unpleasant about being informed by your wives that they consider sexual intimacy with you something that can be traded. Le'ah's role in this scene is most prominent, as she purposefully meets Ya'akov as he comes from the fields and lays claim to him for the night: "You will come to me, because I have 'hired you' with my son's mandrakes."

There may be a hint of an echo in this scene to the sale of the birthright, which Ya'akov bought from Eisav for a bowl of soup. The Torah there characterizes Eisav's attitude as "va-yivez Eisav et ha-behora" -- "Eisav treated the birthright with contempt." Perhaps Ya'akov is being punished for manipulating the impulsive, foresightless Eisav into treating the birthright with contempt by being treated with contempt himself.

Once Rahel has achieved fertility through the birth of Yosef, some stability comes to the household, and Ya'akov turns to the business of getting rich. He offers Lavan a deal too good to be true -- and it is -- and proceeds to build his flocks out of the flocks of Lavan.

### **A FASCINATING SIDE POINT:**

Ya'akov agrees with Lavan that as payment for tending Lavan's flocks, Ya'akov will keep all spotted, speckled and striped sheep produced by the flock. In order to minimize the number of sheep Ya'akov will receive, Lavan removes all of the spotted, speckled and striped sheep from the flock and sets them aside, so that even if they produce offspring like themselves, Ya'akov will not receive them since they are not part of the flocks he is tending. The Torah then describes how Ya'akov cleverly influences the genes of fetuses of the pregnant sheep by placing spotted and speckled objects in front of the sheep as they drink water from their troughs: this tactic changes the fetuses of the sheep, it seems, from plain brown or white to spotted, speckled, and striped. The result: Ya'akov walks away rich, as almost all of the sheep bear animals with the markings favorable to him.

Of course, it is generally understood nowadays that looking at things during pregnancy does not affect the characteristics of the fetus. So how was Ya'akov's strategy effective? Was it a miracle? From the way the Torah presents Ya'akov's activities, it certainly doesn't sound like it. In an article in Tradition (1966, vol. 7, p. 5), Dr. William Etkin, a biologist, offered the following novel interpretation.

Later on in the story, Ya'akov describes to his wives that an angel had visited him in a dream and shown him that all of the females of Lavan's flocks had **\*\*already\*\*** been impregnated by speckled and spotted male animals -- meaning that they would produce spotted, speckled and striped offspring. Although Lavan had removed the spotted and speckled sheep from the flock to make sure Ya'akov earned little, Hashem foiled his plan by having those sheep impregnate the females before Lavan separated them off from the flock. The angel had told Ya'akov that Hashem had done this because He had seen how Lavan had mistreated Ya'akov.

Etkin suggests that this vision was a divine revelation that all of the female sheep had **\*\*already\*\*** been impregnated by speckled and spotted sheep, and it hinted to Ya'akov to suggest the "speckled and spotted" plan to Lavan as his wage plan. Lavan, of course, had no idea that the animals had already mated with the speckled and spotted males, thought Ya'akov's plan ridiculous, and promptly removed all the speckled and spotted adult animals so that no further speckled and spotted animals would be produced from the flocks under Ya'akov's care. All of Ya'akov's shenanigans with peeled sticks and his other machinations to get the animals to view certain patterns of colors and shapes were only to fool Lavan and his suspicious sons, who believed (along with most other folks at the time) that viewing patterns could affect heredity. They would have been doubly suspicious if Ya'akov had not gone through these motions, and would have assumed that Ya'akov had simply stolen the spotted and speckled animals from their private store of spotted and speckled sheep.

### **STEALTHY THEFT:**

Ya'akov continues his pattern of avoiding facing challenges directly as the parasha draws to its dramatic close. Stealing away stealthily, he and his family run away without telling Lavan they are going. He has good reasons: Lavan and his sons have become openly resentful of his growing wealth at their expense, and Hashem has commanded Ya'akov to leave Haran and return to Canaan. Once he has become rich, he calls a conference with his wives and tells them his plans and these reasons. Normally, biblical men do not consult their wives on decisions, but since Ya'akov is planning to sneak away, he needs everyone's agreement and cooperation. Ya'akov reveals here that Lavan has been trying to cheat him for the last six years as he builds up his own flock, and that Hashem has stood behind him and foiled Lavan's schemes. But the Torah also communicates clearly that sneaking away is the wrong way to end this relationship:

BERESHIT 31:20-23 --

Ya'akov **STOLE** the heart of Lavan the Aramean by not telling him that he was **RUNNING AWAY**. He **RAN AWAY** with all that was his; he arose and crossed the river, and turned toward Mount Gilead. It was told to Lavan on the third day that

Ya'akov had RUN AWAY. He took his brothers with him and chased after him . . .

As far as the Torah is concerned, Ya'akov's pattern of theft continues with this flight. He stole the birthright from Eisav, stole the blessings from Yitzhak and Eisav, stole away from Be'er Sheva to avoid Eisav, and now he steals away again. The word "bore'ah" (bet, reish, het) is given special prominence here in order to remind us of an earlier "bore'ah" -- when he fled from Canaan to Aram. Just as he ran then from Eisav instead of facing him and seeking a resolution, so he now runs from Lavan instead of facing him and taking leave in a proper -- although more risky -- fashion. Taking leave in the normal fashion is risky because Lavan is capable of feats of deceit that Ya'akov knows he may not be able to anticipate and control. Rather than take this risk, he bolts.

### CONFRONTATION AND TRANSFORMATION:

Finally, after three days of pursuit, Lavan and his men confront Ya'akov. Lavan delivers an angry speech, accusing Ya'akov of two different thefts:

BERESHIT 31:26-30 --

Lavan said to Ya'akov, "What have you done? You have \*stolen\* my heart! You have treated my daughters like captives of the sword! Why did you sneak to run away, \*stealing\* me and not telling me -- I would have sent you off with gladness and songs, with timbrel and lyre! You did not allow me to kiss my sons and daughters -- indeed, you have done foolishly! I have the power to do evil to you, but the God of your fathers said to me last night, 'Take care not to speak to Ya'akov, whether good to bad.' Now you have gone, because you wanted so much to go to your father's house -- but why have you \*stolen\* my gods?"

Ya'akov trades an accusation of theft for an accusation of theft, responding that he ran away because he was afraid that Lavan would \*steal\* his daughters away. Indeed, Lavan's past dishonesty on the issue of his daughters supports Ya'akov's accusation. On the question of Lavan's stolen gods, Ya'akov is certain that Lavan has made this up and that no one from his camp has stolen them -- otherwise Ya'akov would never have pronounced a death sentence on the thief. Ya'akov invites Lavan to search his belongings.

Lavan accepts the invitation, but as he searches, Ya'akov, who is sure that this is all a charade, an excuse for Lavan to sift through his belongings, gets angrier and angrier. Finally, he explodes, and in this explosion, through the ensuing confrontation, "Ya'akov" begins to rise to "Yisrael":

BERESHIT 31:36-42 --

Ya'akov became enraged, and he fought with Lavan. Ya'akov began and said to Lavan, "What is my crime, what is my sin, that you have chased like a fire after me? You have felt through all of my possessions -- what have you found that belongs to you? Place it here, before my brothers and your brothers, and they will judge between us! For twenty years I have been with you: your sheep and goats never lost child; I never ate your rams. I never brought you a torn animal -- I took responsibility for it myself when you sought it of me, whether stolen from me during the day or night. During the day drought consumed me, and frost at night, and sleep evaded my eyes. It is now twenty years that I am in your house; I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your sheep, and you switched my wages ten times! If not for the God of my fathers -- God of Avraham and Awe of Yitzhak -- Who was with me, you would have sent me out empty-handed! My suffering and my hard labor did Hashem see, and chastised [you] last night!"

Ya'akov never really believed that someone from his camp had stolen Lavan's gods, but he contained himself because of the chance that someone had taken them without his knowledge. But now that Lavan has searched everywhere and found nothing, Ya'akov's fury bursts forth. Since the accusation about the gods was obviously false, Ya'akov demands to know why Lavan has pursued him. Moreover, the accusation of theft and dishonesty stings Ya'akov painfully, as his twenty years of meticulous honesty in tending Lavan's sheep are rewarded with an accusation of theft. Twenty years of frustration pour out of Ya'akov, and we -- and Lavan -- learn for the first time just how seriously he has taken his responsibilities as shepherd. He has been scrupulously honest, going further than legally necessary, paying out of his own pocket for sheep destroyed by predators or stolen by thieves. He has suffered physically as well, exposed to the elements and deprived of rest. And Lavan can accuse him of theft!

The secret tragedy which makes us cringe as we hear Ya'akov pronounce a death sentence is that Rachel has indeed stolen Lavan's gods. But the situation provides Ya'akov with an opportunity for growth. Finally, instead of running from the challenge or attempting to avoid it with cleverness, Ya'akov takes Lavan on directly and indignantly. This is the first visible step in Ya'akov's growth to "Yisrael," a process which will become much more explicit and reach completion in Parashat VaYishlah. He ran away to avoid Lavan, and even this confrontation itself was initiated by Lavan, not Ya'akov, but now that it is before him, he addresses it as the "ish yode'a tsayid," the hunting man, who channels his aggression into constructive paths, actively pursues his goals, and confronts his enemies and challenges. Ya'akov is aggressive and direct, no longer cunning, subtle and clever. And Lavan, surprised, blusters, boasts, but backs down:

BERESHIT 31:43-32:1 --

Lavan answered and said to Ya'akov, "The daughters are my daughters, the sons my sons, the sheep my sheep, and everything you see is mine. As for my daughters, what can I do to them now, or to the children they have borne? Now, let us make a covenant, me and you, and it shall be a witness between us. If you afflict my daughters, or if you take more wives in addition to them, no one will be there [to see], but know that Hashem is witness between me and you . . . I will not pass this pile, and you will not pass this pile or this altar, for evil" . . . Lavan awoke in the morning, kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them, and went and returned to his place.

Lavan has no response to Ya'akov's outburst because he knows Ya'akov has dealt with his sheep honestly and self-sacrificingly. And he is convinced that Ya'akov has not stolen his gods. But he cannot explicitly apologize, so he blusters, claiming that everything that is Ya'akov's is really his, that he is letting Ya'akov keep these things out of generosity, insisting that he means no evil toward his daughters or grandchildren. Lavan realizes how foolish he looks accusing Ya'akov of theft and dishonesty, so he must shift the focus: he demands that they make a covenant. Suddenly Lavan, who is more responsible than anyone else for the fact that both of his daughters have married the same man, has developed great concern for their welfare and wants a guarantee that Ya'akov will not mistreat them! This is surely disingenuous, as Rahel and Le'ah testify earlier that their father has 'sold them away,' that they are estranged from him, and that he intends to give them nothing of his estate. But Lavan must save face, so he pretends that his real mission is to extract a guarantee from Ya'akov to treat his daughters fairly. And for good measure, he adds a phrase about his and Ya'akov's not harming each other. But Ya'akov has won, and Lavan goes home without his gods, without his daughters, and without his sheep.

At the very end of the parasha, as at the very beginning, Ya'akov has a vision of angels. And just as then, they come at a time of uncertainty for him, as he struggles to redefine himself and prepares to face his brother, Eisav. Next week we will accompany Ya'akov as he confronts Eisav and transforms himself into Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom



## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### “Two Torahs”

*“And Yaakov departed...” (28:10)*

My daughter is studying for a Master’s degree at arguably the best university in Israel for her particular subject. Nearly all of the other students there are from Tel Aviv and Hod HaSharon and she is one of less than a handful of Orthodox women there. When asked to speak about herself, she said, “I am married to an *avreich* who immerses himself in Torah night and day, and I have no interest in changing who I am.” She said, “I am ‘different’ than you. I respect you. I respect what you have to teach me here, but I have no interest in becoming like you. And if I do become like you, then we will both have ‘lost.’ Because I treasure my religious values and way of life, and you need skilled Orthodox women professionals in this particular field.”

Later, she told me that she would never have even thought of doing this Master’s in such an environment had it not been for the *chinuch* (education) of her home. Our house, thank G-d, has always seen a procession of Shabbat guests of all shapes, sizes, and persuasions — especially when we used to live across the street from Ohr Somayach.

You can bring your children up in one of two ways. One alternative is that you can try to ‘insulate’ them totally and cut yourself off to the maximum degree from any negative lures of the secular world. But even this might not be hermetic enough. I once heard a parable from Rabbi Yaakov Hillel *shlit’a* about a king who was so concerned for his son’s

purity that he locked him up in a tower with the windows shuttered so he could not see the street. One day, the shutters flew open by mistake, and, there in the street was a lady of questionable morals. The prince said to his father, “Father! What is that?” “Ech! It’s a dog, my son!” To which the son said, “Daddy, get me a dog, please!” Ivory towers are not foolproof.

Alternatively, you can face the challenges of the modern world and give your children a pride and a love of Torah Judaism that you hope and pray very hard will inoculate them against the cesspools of society at large. There’s no guarantee in either choice.

We chose the second route, but, to be honest, I don’t think we had much choice. Maybe if I’d been younger when I became observant, I could have attempted to do a major personality graft, learned Yiddish, as well as Hebrew, diminished interaction with secular relatives, and started a completely new identity (and changed my name back to my father’s original name of Spivack). As it was, we opened our house pretty much to everyone on Shabbat, and my children grew up understanding that we were Torah Jews, and there were other people, including their grandparents, who were not as observant.

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky *zatzal* comments on this week’s Torah portion that Yaakov learned “two

Torahs,” so to speak. One was the teaching of his father Yitzchak, which he learned in his first sixty-three years. This was a Torah where father and son learned together in an atmosphere hermetically sealed from the corruption of Canaan. However, to survive the spiritually toxic environment of Haran in the company of Lavan and his cohorts, Yaakov needed the Torah of Shem and Ever. For Shem had lived together with the generation of the Flood, and Ever had lived with those who had built the Tower of Babel. Yaakov’s sojourn of fourteen years with them inured him to the spiritual dangers of Haran.

To be a parent in today’s world is an unprecedented challenge. To succeed we also need these two aspects of Torahs. We need the unshakeable commitment and faith in the Torah of truth that was given to us at Mount Sinai. And that we continue to study nowadays, and try to fulfill its mitzvahs, down to the finest detail. But we also need to remember that the Torah is a Torah of love, tolerance and compassion. With these two together, with the help of Hashem, we can protect our nearest and dearest from the worst that the world has to offer.

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## TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

### *Pesachim 9-15*

#### No Third Meal?

*Rabbi Elazar ben Yehuda from Bartuta taught in a beraita, “When Shabbat is the day before Pesach, one should burn all of his chametz before Shabbat... and leave over only enough chametz food for two meals for Shabbat, to be eaten up until four hours of the daytime.”*

There is a type of conundrum when Shabbat is the day immediately before the first day of Pesach (as is planned for the upcoming Pesach of 5781, aka 2021). On the one hand, there is a mitzvah to eat three meals on Shabbat (as taught in Masechet Shabbat 117b and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 291). However, we are not allowed to eat chametz after the first few morning hours on Shabbat when it is *erev* Pesach. Since the normal meaning of a meal according to halacha is “a meal with bread,” how can we have a third meal on this Shabbat? We cannot eat chametz on Shabbat afternoon for the third meal. Also, we cannot eat matzah on Shabbat afternoon so that we will have a hearty appetite for matzah when we eat it for the mitzvah of matzah at the Pesach Seder.

There is a gamut of *Poskim*, from different places and eras, who make a variety of rulings regarding the third meal of Shabbat in this case.

Rashi explains, on our *daf*, that when Rabbi Elazar ben Yehuda says in the *beraita* to save enough

chametz for two meals, he means, “and not three meals, since although on Shabbat there is a mitzvah to have a first meal on Friday night, a second one on Shabbat morning and a third one in the afternoon, on *erev* Pesach it is forbidden to eat a meal from the time for *Mincha*.” It appears from Rashi’s words that in this situation no third meal is eaten on Shabbat.

In addition to Rashi’s explanation, there is at least one other approach found in the writings of the Rishonim. According to them, when Rabbi Elazar ben Yehuda said to keep chametz for “two meals” for Shabbat, he was not indicating that this quantity of chametz would provide for only two meals on Shabbat. Rather, he meant that the amount of chametz that would normally be consumed in two meals on a regular Shabbat, would suffice for three meals on Shabbat that is on *erev* Pesach. A person should have the second and third Shabbat meals in the first hours of Shabbat morning, with *birkat hamazon* and a pause between them. Since he eats the meals within a relatively

short time period, he will manage with half the normal amount of chametz at each morning meal. Accordingly, there are in fact three Shabbat meals: one at night and two in the morning, during the time when eating chametz is still permitted. (*Tosefot on Shabbat 118a, Tosefot HaRosh, Magen Avraham*)

The Rema in Orach Chaim 444 offers another option. On Shabbat afternoon a person can fulfill the mitzvah of the third meal with an alternate meal of “fruit, fish and meat.” (See the Aruch Hashulchan 444:5 for a fascinating, novel approach to the reason for the Rema omitting the possibility of egg matzah for the third meal, the order in which the Rema presents these items of food, and a possible reason for not allowing *kneidlach* for this meal that is not related to the issue of *gebruks*.)

A personal anecdote: Prior to our marriage, my wife and I had been accustomed to follow the Rema’s ruling, eating the likes of *kneidelach* and salads for the third meal. However, shortly after our marriage, there was a case when Shabbat was *erev* Pesach and, for personal reasons and in consultation with our Rav, we ate two meals in the first hours of the morning, as the Magen Avraham suggests as an option. After early morning prayers, we had a meal with pita and a little something (I forget exactly what) and said *birkat hamazon*. We then got up from the table and went for a walk in the neighborhood before returning to a second morning pita meal, finishing the pita and finishing the three required Shabbat meals. To be honest, it was somewhat rushed and not exactly my idea of an *oneg Shabbat* – and I also felt that having the two meals so close together in time was like a loophole and “trick” – and, after speaking with our Rav, we returned to our previous “*kneidelach* in the afternoon” custom, as per the Rema.

Another apparent option for the third meal that is cited by halachic sources is the practice of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to learn Torah in lieu of eating. It is written in the name of the Gaon from Vilna that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s behavior

shows that there is no proper solution for this dilemma. Rabbi Avraham Azulai, a kabbalistic Master, suggested a seemingly different message from Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. He wrote that the optimal way of fulfilling the mitzvah of eating the third meal on Shabbat *erev* Pesach is to “consume a meal of Torah study.”

A completely different approach is found in the brilliant writings of the Aruch Hashulchan. He asks why Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai did not also have fruit, which would serve as the third meal of food, as we see in the ruling of the Rema. Due to this question and other considerations, the Aruch Hashulchan suggests that when Shabbat is on *erev* Pesach we are *not* commanded to eat three meals. Only two. When something is not possible, or if our Sages found reason for us not fulfill a mitzvah or for them not to enact a mitzvah – there is no command to fulfill a certain mitzvah in that case. For example, we do not fulfill the mitzvah of eating three meals when Yom Kippur is on Shabbat, and we do not fulfill the mitzvah of shofar or lulav when Rosh Hashana is on Shabbat or on Shabbat during Succot, respectively. Likewise, there is no mitzvah to eat a third meal on a Shabbat that is on *erev* Pesach. This would explain Rashi’s mention of only two meals on this Shabbat. (As might be expected, there is much discussion of this subject in a large array of *Poskim* and Torah commentaries, which include consideration of other factors, such as whether the third meal may be fulfilled when eating in the morning, or only in the afternoon – possibly at that time with egg matzah and depending on one’s custom.)

*\*Author’s note:* Please see the brilliant mini-series in Ohrnet Magazine by my dear friend and esteemed Torah scholar Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, *shlita*. The series is called *The Rare Calendar Phenomena of 5781*, and this week’s installment, part 5, has a section dealing with the subject of three meals on Shabbat *erev* Pesach. I am certain that you will find it to be enlightening and that it will serve as a catalyst to pursue increased Torah study. Learning his writings is an *oneg Shabbat* – and an *oneg* anytime.

• *Pesachim 13b*

## VAYEITZEI

### Questions

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Beer Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. G-d compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with *shalom*." What did he mean by "*shalom*"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rache'ls handmaiden?
14. How do you say *dudaim* in Arabic?
15. "G-d remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this weeks Parsha?
19. Who was Bilhah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into *Eretz Yisrael*?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (*Yasmin*).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldn't be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel asked G-d for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahaduta*, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of *Eretz Yisrael*.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Castle in the Sky

**L**eah named her youngest son Zevulun, saying, “This time my husband will live with me (*yizbeleini*), because I have birthed for him six sons...” (Gen. 30:20). The word *zvl* refers to a prominent dwelling place – a sort of castle or palace, if you will. There are two more Biblical characters whose names seem related to the word *zvl*: Zvl was a city official in Shechem who remained loyal to the local Jewish warlord Abimelech (see Judges 9), and Jezebel was a Tyrian princess who married Ahab the King of Israel and pushed him toward idolatry. In this essay we will explore five different words in Hebrew/Aramaic that refer to a “castle” or “palace” – *zvl*, *armon*, *apadna/padan*, *tirah* and *paltin*. In doing so we will seek out the etymologies of these apparent synonyms to help us understand how they differ from one another.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 30:20) writes that the word *zvl* does not simply designate a mere dwelling-place. Rather it denotes a home that completely meets all objectives of the one for whom it is intended. For example, the Talmud says (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a) that the term *zvl* there refers to the Holy Temple. Indeed, most of the times this word appears in the Bible, it unambiguously refers to that Holy Edifice (I Kings 8:13, II Chron. 6:2, Isa. 63:15). Rabbi Hirsch explains that *zvl* denotes that place as the fitting location for G-d’s presence to rest. He further notes that the common Mishnaic word *zevel* (“fertilizer”) serves a similar function, as it readies the ground to be a fitting “dwelling place” for seeds so that they may flourish and thrive there.

When the prophet Habakuk reflects back on Joshua stopping the movement of the sun and moon (Joshua 10:13), he says: “The sun and moon stood in their *zvl*” (Hab. 3:11). The commentators

(see Targum and Radak there) explain that in this context *zvl* refers to the place in which the sun and moon typically “dwell,” and is another way of saying that they stood still in their tracks. Indeed, our Rabbis teach us that *zvl* is the name of one of the seven heavens (*Chagigah* 12b).

In Ugaritic, Akkadian, and other Semitic languages, cognates of *zvl* mean “to lift” or “to elevate” (*zabalu*). Based on this, Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffmann (1843-1921) suggests that the Biblical term *zvl* refers specifically to a lofty abode that is located in a high place, like the Holy Temple (which stood atop a mountain) or like the place of the celestial luminaries (which are up in the sky). He notes that an Arabic cognate of *zvl* refers to “butter” or “grease” because such oily grub “rises” to the top when mixed with water.

Before we begin exploring some other Hebrew words that are similar to *zvl*, I would like to digress a bit and speak about the English words *palace* and *castle*, and the differences between them. The English word *palace* or *palatium*, in the sense of a vast and luxurious residence that belongs or belonged to an important person, is ultimately derived from the proper name *Palatium*, which was one of the hills in Ancient Rome where imperial palaces were built. In Rabbinic literature, the Late Hebrew cognate of *palace* is *paltin/paltrin* (see *Sanhedrin* 2:3, 10:5). According to a renowned language scholar, the Late Hebrew word *paltrin* is actually derived from the Latin *praetorium* – which refers to the official residence of a Roman governor or general – and is seemingly based on the interchangeability of LAMMED and REISH.

In contrast to the word *palace*, the English word *castle* (related to the French word *château*, and

ultimately derived from the Latin *castellum*) originally meant “encampment” or “village.” Later, it came to refer to any large building or series of buildings that were constructed for defense purposes. In that sense, a castle refers to any sort of fortress or stronghold. Often, the terms *palace* and *castle* converge in one building, but they are not actually synonyms. Rather, the English word *palace* denotes a royal residence and the opulent lifestyle associated with wealth, while *castle* denotes a fortified structure regardless of its lavishness or extravagance. With these nuances in mind, we can better understand the different Hebrew words for “palace” and “castle.”

The most common word for “castle” or “palace” in Hebrew is *armon* (which appears 32 times in the Bible). Ibn Janach and Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim write that the root of *armon* is REISH-(VAV)-MEM, which means “height.” This root relates to “palaces,” as they are typically tall buildings. Radak also cites this explanation, but ultimately concludes that *armon* is derived from its own root, ALEPH-REISH-MEM. Menachem Ibn Saruk similarly traces *armon* to the quadrilateral root ALEPH-REISH-MEM-NUN. [Ibn Janach invokes the interchangeability of LAMMED and REISH to explain that *almon* (Yechezkel 19:7, Isa. 13:22) means the same thing as *armon*.]

The Hebrew word *apadna* appears once in the Bible (Dan. 11:45), and the commentators explain that it refers to a “palace.” When *apadna* appears in the Talmud, it sometimes does not actually mean a full palace, but rather a den that is especially grand or kingly. This follows from Rashi (*Bava Metzia* 35a, *Bava Basra* 6b, *Shabbat* 77b) defining *apadna* as a “royal triclinium,” which basically means a fancy dining room. This word appears in the story of Rava dreaming that his *apadna* and Abaye’s *apadna* fell (*Berachot* 56a), in the story of the debtor who owned two *apadnas* (*Ketuvot* 91b), and in the various cases in which Rav Nachman allowed creditors to take away a person’s *apadna*, or threatened to do so (see *Bava Kama* 21a and *Bava Metzia* 35a, *Ketuvot* 50b).

According to Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983), *apadna* comes from Old Persian – a language that descends from the Indo-European linguistic family.

On the other hand, Dr. Chaim Tawil actually traces this word to the Akkadian *appadanu*, which he understands to mean “a colonnaded audience hall.” According to Dr. Tawil, the word is of Semitic origin, and not Indo-European. Indeed, an Arabic cognate of this word, *fadan*, means “palace” or “high tower.”

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the word *apadna* to the biliteral Hebrew root PEH-DALET, which means “redemption” or “freedom” (like in *pidyon* or *pedut*). One derivative of this root is the word *efod* (“vest” or “apron”) which is a sort of royal vestment worn by people who were “free” and “not indentured” (e.g., see I Sam. 2:18, II Sam. 6:14). In the same way, he explains that the word *apadna* refers to the sort of luxurious domicile where a free man might live.

Taking this a step further, Rabbi Pappenheim also suggests that the Biblical Hebrew word *padan* denotes an independent region that had its own sovereignty and/or was free from paying imperial taxes. He thus explains that the term *Padan Aram* (Gen. 31:18, 35:26 and 46:15) refers to the “Free State of Aram” as opposed to other polities which existed in the Aram area. [The classical understandings are that *padan* means “field/plain,” or that it refers to the “twin” cities of Aram Naharayim (Haran) and Aram Zoba (Aleppo), which stood on opposite sides of the Euphrates.]

The word *tirah* appears seven times in the Bible (Gen. 25:16, Num. 31:10, Yechezkel 25:4, 46:23, Song of Songs 8:9, Psalms 69:26, and I Chron. 6:39). It seems to refer to some sort of enclosed “castle” or “fort” – perhaps a “fortified village.” Ibn Ezra (to Gen. 25:16) writes that *tirah* means the same thing as *armon*.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim finds that the root of *tirah* is the two-letter string TET-REISH, which means “straight line.” Other tributaries of that root include *tur* (“row”), *matarah* (“target” or “goal,” which one shoots straight towards), *matar* (“rain” that shoots straight downwards), and more. He explains that *tirah* is related to this root because it denotes the fact that the castle is typically

constructed by arranging various rows (*turim*) of boards. Radak also derives the word *tirah* from *tur*, adding that castles are typically built with rows of hewn stone.

Alternatively, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *tirah* relates to the concept of *netirah* (“safeguarding,” “protecting”), which, in turn, also stems from the TET-REISH root. He explains that the constant vigilance and mindfulness needed to watch over something (*netirah*) means that one’s thoughts must be kept “straight” on it and may not deviate. Two related corollaries are the words *tahor* (“pure” or “clean,” a state which can only last if one carefully *watches* to make sure the pure item is not sullied), and *iter* (“closed,” something so closely *protected* that it is totally “locked up” and cannot function). Based on this last example, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the word *tirah* refers to an impenetrable “castle” or “fortress,” whose defenses are so well designed that no one can enter or exit.

Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, similarly writes that the word *tirah* derives from the root TET-REISH (“guarding”), as it denotes a sort of “fort” or

“citadel” built to protect a king’s subjects. He also writes that a *tirah* is generally built with a wall surrounding it and is thus similar to the Hebrew word *atarah* (“crown”) – a special ornament that goes around a regal head. He explains that *atarah* is derived from a combination of the roots AYIN-TET (“cover”) and TET-REISH (“guard”). (Interestingly, Rabbi Chelouche claims that the English word *tower* is actually derived from the Hebrew word *tirah*. That said, linguists say that the English *tower* comes from the Latin *turris*.)

To conclude, I’d like to offer a way of differentiating between all the terms we discussed. Firstly, *armon* is used both in the context of a king’s residence (II Kings 16:18, I Kings 15:25, Jer. 49:27), and in the context of a fortified stronghold used for defense (Prov. 18:19, Lam. 2:5, Mic. 5:4); thus it resembles both *palace* and *castle* in English. Secondly, the Hebrew word *apadna* seems to line up with the original meaning of *palace* as relating to the lap of luxury, and, thirdly, the Hebrew word *paltin/paltrin* is even a cousin of the English word *palace*. Fourthly, *tirah* seems to be associated with buildings used for defense purposes, thus aligning that term with the original meaning of the English *castle*. Finally, the term *zvil* somehow fits in to all of this, I’m just not sure exactly how.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rcklein@ohr.edu](mailto:rcklein@ohr.edu)

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## COMING BACK TO LIFE EVERY DAY — PART 1

*“My G-d, the soul You placed within me is pure. You created it, You fashioned it, You breathed it into me, You safeguard it within me, and eventually You will take it from me, and restore it to me in Time to Come. As long as the soul is within me, I gratefully thank You, Hashem, my G-d and the G-d of my forefathers, Master of all works, L-rd of all souls. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores souls to dead bodies.”*

The depth and significance of this blessing are almost limitless. Contained within its few lines are several tenets that are fundamental to the foundations of Jewish belief. Perhaps the first place to begin is with the opening words of the blessing.

*“My G-d, the soul You placed within me is pure.”* What is the soul and how are we supposed to define it? It is a problem, because the more spiritual something is, the harder it is to describe in physical terms. And, of all our faculties, it is the soul that it is the most acutely spiritual of them all. Our Rabbis describe the soul as being a part of G-d Himself (see Alshich on Genesis and Tanya chapter 2, based on the Book of Iyov 31:2). It is the soul that is the Divine “sparkplug” that gives us the ability to transcend the physical and connect to the spiritual realms.

The soul is truly something wondrous because it is not uniform. Each person is the recipient of their own individual and unique soul. And the soul is the most sublime dimension of all because it reflects the Divinity within mankind. This is what the opening words of the blessing are conveying. Found within each person is a part of G-d that is exclusive only to them. It is a part that is fashioned by G-d Himself, specifically for that person. For this very reason, the first sentence ends by telling us that the soul is pure. G-d is pure — therefore, the part of Him that resides within us is also pure.

The inference of the blessing is truly startling. The soul remains pure regardless of our sins. Our Rabbis explain that when we go to sleep at night, our souls go through a process of Divine cleansing. The sins that were accumulated throughout the day are removed and stored away in the spiritual realms. They remain there, either until the person repents or until the person passes from this world, at which point they will have to give an exact accounting of their actions. On reawakening in the morning, the soul is restored to the person in a pristine state. This is, perhaps, the most astonishing act of kindness of all. Because without this overnight cleansing, each day’s spiritual grime would be added to the already overwhelming amount that had accumulated throughout a person’s life. There would be such a buildup that even if a person managed at some point to harbor thoughts of repentance and a desire to return to G-d, he would not be able to penetrate the manifold layers of sin. And that would be the biggest tragedy of all, as it would render a person incapable of reconnecting to his beautiful and chaste soul.

So, this is the reason for the blessing beginning with a declaration that the soul is pure. The nocturnal purification is a Divine act of pure, unadulterated benevolence. It is an affirmation that each and every morning begins unencumbered by previous sins and mistakes that were made. And it is our daily task to try to protect and shield the soul to the best of our ability so that its purity remains discernable. Because, by doing so, the soul retains its spiritual integrity.

In effect, our blessing is telling us that, as each day begins, its uncharted spiritual potential is waiting to

be discovered and explored. And the most effective and potent tool at our disposal to reveal all of its sublime possibilities is our freshly cleansed and pure soul.

*To be continued...*

*Please note that there are two opinions as to where this blessing should appear in the order the Torah Blessings. The Tur, Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, rules that it should be recited immediately after the blessing for the bathroom. The Mechaber, Rabbi Yosef Karo, rules that it should be recited at the end of the Torah Blessings. Both opinions are accepted within Jewish Law and are followed according to the customs of each community. Accordingly, each person should follow their own family or community custom. Anyone who is unsure as to what the correct order is for them should consult with a local Orthodox Rabbi.*

*Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet on  
The Morning Blessings  
by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer  
[www.ohr.edu/morning-blessings](http://www.ohr.edu/morning-blessings)*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14-year stint in the Torah Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the Beit Hamikdash. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and Earth. G-d promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive.

Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel's older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and

Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissaschar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef.

Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

## Behold! A Ladder of Lessons

**O**n Yaakov's way to Charan, he encounters "the place," where he falls asleep for the night. He did not just chance upon any place. The verse describes an "encounter" – literally, *he was struck* by the place. This specific place fascinated and captivated him. Although he was deeply moved by the grandeur of the place, which was at the border of the land of his future, he nevertheless lay down and slept in this place.

In his sleep, he has a vision. In the textual description, the word "Behold!" appears three times, each time heralding a new lesson for Yaakov to learn. Behold! Yaakov envisions a ladder; a ladder which was "set up toward earth and whose top reached to heaven." The ladder was not there by chance – it was deliberately set up from on high toward the earth. But the purpose of the ladder is not descent, but rather ascent – its top reached toward heaven. This is the first lesson of the ladder. Man's destiny is not to be found below on earth, but should be sought from above. Everything earthly is meant to ascend to a lofty goal.

*Behold! Angels of G-d were ascending and descending "against him."* He sees that man's fate is not decided on earth, in the physical world. He sees that G-d's messengers ascend the ladder and look at the ideal image of man as he should be, and then descend and compare the ideal image to the image of man as he

actually is. By this standard, they then deal with him for good or for bad. The Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 68:12) explains that the angels ascended on high and found Yaakov's image engraved as Israel glorifying G-d, but when they descended they found him sleeping – sleeping in the very place that was meant to awaken in him a higher awareness of his mission. The angels sought to harm him, but at once...

*Behold! G-d stood beside him.* While the angels see everything and every person strictly as they are and where they are, G-d stands by the person in His attribute of mercy. In this way, G-d not only sees the past and the present, but also sees and shapes the future, so that the kernel of good that lives in a person in potential is nurtured and developed.

Taken together the message of the ladder for Yaakov and all his descendants is this: Man was put on this earth with a higher purpose and he is constantly being measured and compared to the higher self of his potential. Yet, when he fails that higher calling, G-d stands beside him to preserve the good in him and enable him to develop and reach that potential.

- Sources: Commentary, *Ber.* 28:12

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# THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

## (Part 5 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

### Erev Pesach that Occurs on Shabbat

In the previous installment we discussed that this year there will be a *Purim Meshulash*. Yet, whenever this occurs, there is an even greater phenomenon with great halachic ramifications that will occur exactly one month later: *Erev Pesach on Shabbat*. When this happens we need an entirely new rulebook on how our Pesach preparations are supposed to ensue.

For example, the Erev Pesach *Taanis Bechorim* (fast of the firstborn) gets pre-empted two days earlier to Thursday. Perhaps more importantly, *Bedikat Chametz* cannot be done the night before Pesach as usual. Since Erev Pesach is Shabbat, *Bedikat Chametz* must be performed on Thursday night instead. But that means that the burning of the *chametz* has to take place on Friday morning, on *Erev Erev Pesach*. But we can't recite *Kol Chamira*, as we still need to save some *chametz* for the Shabbat meals (remember, Shabbat is Erev Pesach), and it is forbidden to eat matzah on Erev Pesach. So we need to keep some *chametz*. Yet, all of the *chametz* has to be finished before the "end of the time for eating *chametz*" on Erev Pesach.

So what are we to do? How are we to have our Shabbat *seudot* (meals)?

The answer is to leave over only a small amount of (hopefully not crumbly) *chametz* for the *seudot*, such as using pita for *Lechem Mishneh* on Friday night, *daven k'Vatikin* (at sunrise) and immediately start the Shabbat morning *seudah* afterwards. Alternately, there is another minority opinion – albeit one many Ashkenazim do not necessarily concur with – to have this Shabbat morning *seudah* with *matzah ashira*, i.e. Egg Matzah. Many *Poskim* maintain that exclusively on the morning of Erev Pesach (even when it is on Shabbat), Ashkenazim may indeed use *matzah ashira* for their *seudah*.

Optimally, one should "split" the morning *seudah* in order to be *yotzei* eating *Seudas Shlishit* (the third Shabbat meal) as well. This entails very close timing, as well as a sufficient break (and perhaps a walk) between the two meals, and making sure to finish all *chametz* before "*Sof Zman Achillat Chametz*." Afterwards, getting rid of the rest of the *chametz*, brushing off and cleaning up any *chametz* crumbs, rinsing and cleaning off hands and mouths, and reciting *Kol Chamira* – need all be done before the final time for burning the *chametz*. Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin advised that these *chametz seudot* should be served on disposables, thus enabling a much faster and easier cleaning up process.

Anyone who wishes to eat *Seudas Shlishit* afterwards cannot eat challah or matzah, and must eat other foods, such as fruit or *shehakol* items instead. As there is no way to be fulfill every matter in a *lechatchilla* way in this situation, including eating a *Hamotzi Seudat Shlishit* after *davening* Mincha, many *Poskim* advise eating matzah balls (*kneidlach*) on Shabbat afternoon after an early Mincha, for at least a *Mezonot Seudas Shlishit* (more germane for those who are not *makpid* on *Sheruya/Gebrochts*). This solution is due to the fact that one may not fulfill his matzah obligation on the Seder night with cooked matzah. Hence, *kneidlach*, although made with matzah-meal, are nonetheless permitted to be eaten on Erev Pesach. On this Shabbat Erev Pesach afternoon,

when neither *chametz* nor *matzah* may be eaten, this becomes an optimal way to fulfill the *Seudas Shlishit* obligation.

## No Seudat Shlishit?

There is an alternate view, that of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, that he would be involved in Torah study in lieu of *Seudat Shlishit* when Erev Pesach is on Shabbat. The Vilna Gaon writes that this shows that the Rashbi held that on this special day, as there is no full proper solution to fulfill *Seudat Shlishit* after *Zman Mincha* with bread, “*ain takana l’davar klal*” – there is no proper solution for this dilemma. Noted Kabbalist and ancestor of the Chida, Rav Avraham Azulai writes that the “*Mitzvah hayoter muvcheret*” – the optimal manner to have “*Seudat Shlishit*” in this situation – is “*lehashlim seudah hahi b’Divrei Torah*” – to have this “*seudah*” with *Divrei Torah* instead.

The *Aruch Hashulchan* maintains that this proves that on this special Shabbat Erev Pesach there is no actual obligation to have a *Seudat Shlishit*. Just as when Yom Kippur occurs on Shabbat, it pushes off some *mitzvot* of Shabbat, and when Rosh Hashanah, Succot or Purim fall out on Shabbat (like this year), the respective *mitzvot* of Shofar, Lulav, and Megillah get pushed off (as detailed previously), so too when Erev Pesach occurs on Shabbat, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was “*osek b’Torah*” instead, as the *mitzvah* of *Seudat Shlishit* got pushed off as well.

An important reminder for this marathon Shabbat: As it is the Shabbat that is immediately preceding Pesach, one may not perform any preparations on Shabbat for Yom Tov, and all Seder preparations may only begin from *Tzeit Hakochavim*, after reciting “*HaMavdil Bein Kodesh L’Kodesh*,” either by itself or as part of “*Vatode’ainu*” in the Yom Tov Maariv.

*To be continued...*

Written l’zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzecha l’yeshua sheleimah teikif u’miyad.

*This author wishes to acknowledge Rabbi Shea Linder’s excellent article on this topic.*

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Love of the Land, written by RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt”l • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE  
NEWMAN • Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO z”l / DANIEL FREEDMAN

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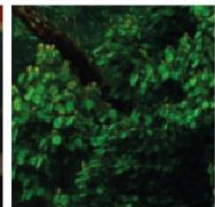
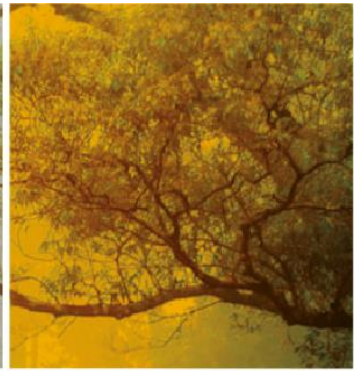
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## [A Sephardic Vision for Arab-Israeli Peace](#)

Byline:

Daniel Bouskila



For centuries, Sephardic Jews of Arab lands lived in relatively peaceful coexistence with their Arab-Muslim neighbors. While never perfect, life for Jews in Arab lands never reached the horrible pogroms continuously experienced by Jews living under Christian rule in Europe. Indeed, the Golden Age of Spain took place under Islamic rule, and only after the Catholics re-conquered Spain from the Muslims were Jews subject to the brutal inquisition and subsequent expulsion from Spain in 1492.

This relatively peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Jews is a far cry from the state of war between Israel and her neighbors in the modern Middle East. Historians will attribute this change to various political factors in the Middle East and the world, but many today will blame religion as a major stumbling block toward recapturing peace between the two peoples.

But can the voice of religion bring about a positive change? Rav Bension Meir Hai Uziel believed it could.

Born in Jerusalem in 1880 under Ottoman rule, Rav Uziel became the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Jaffa in 1911, and was later the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine (1939-1948) and then of the State of Israel (1948 until his death in 1953). As such, he was a leader through three administrations in the land of Israel, and throughout his career — no matter who ruled the land — he sought peace and reconciliation with his Arab neighbors.

A deep believer in the power of religion as a medium to foster positive and peaceful relations, Rav Uziel issued a powerful message to the Arabs following the United Nation Partition Plan in November 1947:

“To the heads of the Islamic Religion in the Land of Israel and throughout the Arab lands near and far, Shalom U’vrakha. Brothers, at this hour, as the Jewish people have returned to its land and state ... we approach you in peace and brotherhood, in the name of God’s Torah and the Holy Scriptures, and we say to you: please remember the peaceful and friendly relations that existed between us when we lived together in Arab lands and under Islamic Rulers during the Golden Age, when together we developed brilliant intellectual insights of wisdom and science for all of humanity’s benefit. We were brothers, and we shall once again be brothers, working together in cordial and neighborly relations in this Holy Land.”

Rav Uziel sought to re-create the atmosphere once lived by his Sephardic ancestors, and he felt that the true message of peace was deeply embedded in religious texts. In April 1948, on the last Passover before Israel declared her independence, Rav Uziel issued a stirring message of peace

rooted in the Passover narrative:

“It is not by sword nor by war do we return to our ancestral homeland, as we do not desire war, bloodshed or loss of life. Our sages expressed a deep Jewish value by refraining from reciting the full Hallel (Psalms of Praise) on the seventh day of Passover, for on that day, the Egyptians drowned in the sea, and God declared: ‘My beings are drowning in the sea and you sing Hallel?’”

Rav Uziel then deepens his peaceful message:

“Indeed, Passover teaches us to love all those around us, including our declared enemies, as it is written: ‘You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land’ (Deuteronomy 23:8). This means that we do not bear any vengeful grudge toward Egypt or the Egyptians for the suffering and enslavement we endured in their land, rather we only remember that we were strangers in Egypt. We forget all negativity and recall only whatever positive treatment they gave us.”

Mindful that his Arab audience included present-day Egyptian Arabs, Rav Uziel used the Egypt of the Passover story as a subtle hint for contemporary reconciliation between Jews and Arabs. Despite any negative relations between Jews and Arabs, “we do not bear any vengeful grudge toward Egypt and the Egyptians.”

In a poetic metaphor on Jews having been strangers and slaves in Egypt, Rav Uziel wrote:

“We once again reach out to our Arab neighbors in peace, for our sole desire is to live together with you in this Holy Land that is sacred to all nations. Let us engage together in fruitful labor for the sake of peace for all inhabitants of this land. Let us work together, using all of our diversity in religion, beliefs, customs and languages, so that we can build and assure absolute freedom and equality for all inhabitants in this land. Let us together recognize that only God is the ultimate ruler over the earth, for we are all ‘strangers in God’s world.’”

As a “lover of peace and pursuer of peace,” and as a Chief Rabbi who creatively used his position as a leader and his Sephardic ancestry as a medium to seek peace, Rav Uziel never stopped talking or dreaming about peace between Jews and Arabs.

It’s unfortunate that Rav Uziel was not appointed as a special political envoy to help establish political relations with Arab leaders in 1948. Had that been the case, relations between Israel and her Arab neighbors might have taken a very different course.

Byline:

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