BS"D
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Potomac Torah Study Center
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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 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org**. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!**

Before the pandemic, Beth Sholom had a late maariv service at 8 p.m. Monday - Thursday evenings during standard time. Since the start of the pandemic, with mincha/maariv on Zoom, a large increase in our members working remotely, and decreased attendance in local shuls, many who would otherwise have attended a late maariv are instead davening mincha/maariv on Zoom. Some of our members take half an hour out of work for the Zoom service and extend their work time an extra half hour. Since we have not had requests for a late maariv at Beth Sholom, we have not planned for one for this winter. If anyone feels a need for this service (for a yahrtzeit or regularly), contact me at AfisherADS@Yahoo.com.

This Tuesday was November 9, the anniversary of Kristallnacht, which we now observe as Holocaust Memorial Day. Chabad Rabbis are observing the season with a four part course on anti-Semitism, a fascinating class through the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute. Congregation Har Shalom also featured Professor Michael Brenner, Director of the Center for Israel Studies at American University, presenting an outstanding seminar on anti-Semitism in Germany during the 20th Century (Morris and Lillian Cahan memorial scholar in residence last Motzi Shabbat and Sunday).

The interaction of Yaakov and Lavan illustrates the conflict between Jews and anti-Semites throughout history. Indeed, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, considers Lavan the first anti-Semite. (See his Vayeitzei Dvar Torah from 5777, "The Birth of the World's Oldest Hate," which I did not include this week, because I included it in my Devrei Torah for Vayeitzei last year.)

As Vayeitzei opens, Yaakov stops for the night (on his way to Lavan's home) and dreams of a ladder reaching to heaven, with angels going up and down, The parsha closes with Yaakov back in the same spot, this time encountering angels moving horizontally, some coming into Canaan and others leaving Canaan. Rabbi David Fohrman interprets that in the first dream, the ladder and angels connect earth and heaven. In the second dream, twenty years later, after struggling with Lavan, Yaakov finally confronts his uncle directly and calls him out for his years of manipulation and cheating. Now able to confront his enemy directly, Yaakov has earned the right to be Yisrael. In the dream closing the parsha, Yaakov represents the ladder. He now connects heaven and earth by bringing Hashem's message down to earth.

Yaakov's struggles with Lavan represent the Jews' conflicts with anti-Semites, a story that exists wherever and whenever there are Jews. Steinsaltz puts the lesson in a slightly different way. When Jews leave the ghetto and have daily contact with the outside world, we encounter hatred, deception, alienation, and self destruction – the world of anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism includes hatred from both non-Jews and Jews, including close relatives. The Torah lists Edom as another name for Esav (36:1). When B'Nai Yisrael are ready to enter and possess Canaan, after wandering in the desert for forty years, Edom would neither let the Jews pass over their territory nor sell them water or food. Esav's grandson Amalek (36:12) sired perhaps Israel's worst enemies. They attacked the weakest Jews in the Midbar and were so wicked that God ordered B'Nai Yisrael to kill every member of the tribe of Amalek.
Jewish history contains many incidents of both Jews and Jewish born converts to other religions who readily encouraged non-Jewish tyrants to harass and kill Jews. Yoma 9b discusses sin'at chinam, senseless hatred of some Jews for other Jews, as the reason for the destruction of the Second Temple. There are numerous articles about Jewish collaborators in concentration camps, for anyone who can stand to read about this evil. With so many non-Jews ready to oppress and even kill Jews, it is shocking that many Jews join their ranks. During the Greek and Roman periods, Crusades, and times of expulsion of Jews from Portugal and Spain, former Jews collaborated with non-Jews to betray Jews trying to escape from anti-Semites.

Although the Torah discusses people and events from more than three thousand years ago, the stories remain relevant. If we do not learn from history, our punishment is often to relive history. The struggles of Yaakov and Lavan should remind us that the struggle of Jews with anti-Semites and with traitors among our people are always present. One lesson from the Chabad series on anti-Semitism is that we cannot win through secular means. Anti-Semites attack us for being wealthy and for being poor, for being conservative and for being "progressive." Whatever the issue, whatever position Jews take is always wrong. The Chabad answer is that we can only defeat anti-Semitism by being true to our identity as Jews. When we follow the mitzvot, take our religion seriously, show up front that we are Jewish and proud to be Jewish, when we raise Jewish children and grandchildren – and give them the knowledge to remain Jewish – then we do our part. Other nations and people come and go over time. Only the Jews have remained for more than 3500 years. We are close to the smallest of all identifiable groups, yet we are the ones who persist. God tells us that the Jews will always be a tiny nation but will always be here. We must claim who we are and see that our grandchildren remain Jewish. I started learning this lesson from my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, more than fifty years ago, and I proudly teach it to my own children to transmit to their children and grandchildren.

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. 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.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Lifeline: Vayeitzei: It Can Only Hurt Not to Ask

By Rabbi Yaakov Menken © 2002

"And she [Leah] became pregnant again, and gave birth to a boy, and she said, 'this time I will give thanks to G-d;' therefore she called his name Yehudah; and she ceased to have children." [29:35]

This verse is explained by Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, from the Medrash Breishis Rabba: the matriarchs were prophetesses, and they knew that twelve tribes would emerge from Yaakov, and he married four women – thus when Yehudah, her fourth son, was born, Leah gave thanks because she had "taken more than her share."

This week I heard the same Dvar Torah from two different sources – by email from Rabbi Yehoshua Bertram, a teacher in Ohr Somayach whom I visited frequently for Shalosh Seudos when I lived in Jerusalem, and in person from **Rabbi Leonard Dickstein, *** a resident of Silver Spring, MD, who was speaking at the Sheva Brachos (celebratory meal during the week after marriage) of his daughter Miriam and David Zuroff. The coincidence is striking enough that I will repeat the Dvar Torah for you here, and do so in honor of the newlyweds – may they build a Bayis Ne'eman B'Yisrael (a "faithful home" in Israel) and enjoy many happy years together.

The Talmud, Tractate Brachos 7b, says the following: "Rebbe Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, 'from the day that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the world, there was no one who offered thanks to Him until Leah came and offered thanks to him, as the verse says, "This time I will offer thanks to G-d."'"

As Rabbi Dickstein pointed out, this is a difficult passage to understand – are we truly to believe that no one thanked HaShem previously? Perhaps the simplest answer is that the Torah itself has no previous record of such thanks. The Torah Temima points out, however, that the Talmud Bava Basra credits Adam HaRishon ("the first") with the original authorship of Psalm 139, which reads, "I will give thanks to You, for in an awesome way was I formed, Your works are wonders, and my soul knows this well." [v. 14] He then resolves this by distinguishing Leah's gratitude for a particular act of kindness bestowed upon her, from the more general thanks for G-d's wonders given by Adam. But in any case, however we set aside or reconcile this problem, another question immediately arises.

If indeed it is true that Leah was the first to give thanks, then one would have expected G-d to amply reward her for her conduct. What we see is just the opposite: that she was then given no more children for several years. Why was there no reward?

The answer is that gratitude alone is insufficient. It is far too easy to become complacent, to "count one's blessings" and fail to recognize the need for continued help.

Life's many challenges only come to a close when life itself comes to a conclusion ("after 120"). In the meantime, we always need help, and can never sit back and predict smooth sailing ahead. When Rachel finally became pregnant and had a child, she called him "Yosef", which means to add. In the midst of her gratitude, she said "Yosef HaShem li ben acher," "G-d should add another child for me." [30:24]

When praying to G-d, it's not only true that "it never hurts to ask" – it hurts not to ask!

* Rabbi Dickstein's wife was our sons' second grade Judaic teacher at the Hebrew Day School of Montgomery County.

https://torah.org/torah-portion/lifeline-5758-vayeitzei/

Our House Is a Very, Very Fine House

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

Yaakov is the first person in the Torah who articulates the idea of a house of God. "This is nothing other," he says upon waking up, "than the house of God and this is the gate to heaven" (Gen. 28:17).

The Rabbis point out the power of that concept of a house of God and its association with Yaakov. They cite the verse that envisions a future time when the nations will say: "Let us get up and go…to the house of God of Jacob" (Isa. 2:3). In Yaakov's naming, in his way of encountering God, Yaakov was different from those who preceded him. While Avraham saw God on the mountain, and Yitzchak meditated on God in the field, Yaakov connected to God's presence uniquely, in a house.

Why a house?

A house has walls, limits, and boundaries. The structure of a house presents a paradox. How can God, who is infinite and everywhere, be contained within a house? King Solomon declares this very absurdity when he dedicates the Temple: “Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built?” (I Kings 8:27).

While logically absurd, a house of God is also a religious necessity. If God is equally everywhere, on the mountaintops and the fields, then God is equally nowhere. Where is God to be found?

A house has boundaries; it inhabits a specific location and occupies a defined space. It is this finitude, this concreteness, that creates a place where God can reside, where God can be found.

Because it has limits and walls, it has an inside and an outside. An inside allows for closeness and for intimacy.

As we have learned so well in the age of COVID, everybody in a house is brought together as one unit, one family. The house defines them and their shared experiences as distinct from the larger world outside. In such a space, a person can be intimate with God. A person can cultivate with God a personal, direct relationship, one that draws on their shared experiences together. And those who gather together in such a house, can — as a community — both deepen their relationships with one another and also forge a collective connection with God.

A house provides shelter. It is a place of protection and caring. “And it shall be a shelter for shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for protection from storm and from rain” (Isa. 4:5-6). A house of God is a place where the troubled can find comfort, and the weary can find strength.

A house must also be built. You have to invest your passion, your time, and your energy to create something that will provide the protection, the warmth, and the intimacy that you desire. Our hard work in building a house and in turning a house into a home permeates its very walls and emanates from them.

So it is with our relationship with God and our relationship with others. These relationships do not happen by themselves. They exist and flourish because of the work we put into them, the connectedness and the intimacy, and the support and comfort that we give and that we receive.

Yaakov, who was running from a home of conflict and strife, sought a new home, a relationship with God that could provide him with the anchoring, security, and connection that he so desperately needed. Some of us, driven by religious passion, might need to go out and seek God in the fields and on the mountaintops. But so many of us, wherever we are coming from, need to find God in a house, in a home. It is this relationship — with God and with our families and loved ones — nurtures us, sustains us, and allows us to flourish.

Shabbat Shalom.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/11/our-house-is-a-very-very-fine-house/

Dreaming of Sheep

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2021

A dream is a fascinating experience. In this week’s Torah portion, Yakov had two.

The Parsha begins by telling us of Yakov’s first dream. “Behold a ladder was on the ground; its top reached the heavens. Angels were going up and down on it.” The Talmud explains that in heaven there was a spiritual image of Yakov in his ultimate greatness as father of the Jewish people. The angels went up and down to compare the current Yakov with the Yakov of destiny. Symbolically, Yakov would reach his potential by climbing the rungs of the ladder of life, one step at a time. This was Yakov’s first dream.

Yakov traveled to Lavan’s house where he worked diligently to earn the hand of Lavan’s daughters in marriage. After getting married, Yakov spent a few additional years working for Lavan in exchange for payment. The deal was that Yakov was to get the spotted animals that were born. At this point, Yakov had a second dream. In his dream he saw that a

multitude of animals would be born with the qualifying spots and would become his. This is exactly what happened. Miraculously, the flock produced an unusual number of spotted animals, and Yakov became very wealthy.

Awhile later, Yakov decided it was time to return to his father's home. He explained to his family that an angel appeared to him and said, "Lift your eyes and see that the flock is producing spotted children; I have seen all that Lavan has done to you. It is time to come home."

Most people understand the statement, "Lift your eyes and see the flock" as an observation by the angel regarding the miraculous blessing. "It occurred," said the angel, "because G-d saw all that Lavan did to you." Lavan tried so hard to cheat Yakov out of his wages that G-d had to intervene with a miraculous blessing.

But I once heard a novel explanation from a wise Jew. He said, the statement, "I have seen all that Lavan did to you," is the reason that Yakov must come home. Consider this: Before Yakov's stay with Lavan, when Yakov lay down to sleep, he dreamt of a ladder spanning the distance between him and heaven. He dreamt of angels, greatness, and destiny. Now, after spending twenty years in the house of Lavan, Yakov dreams about sheep, his wealth, and how to get what is rightfully his despite Lavan's trickery. When he "lifts up his eyes, he sees that the flock is producing spotted children." His dreams are no longer the dreams that Yakov is capable of. The angel says: "You've been away long enough. Yakov, it is time to come home."

When it comes to dreams, many people think that the content of dreams should be discounted. Great people, however, find that the dream process, occurring as it does when the body is relaxed, offers great insight into one's inner self. Pay attention to your dreams and you may be able to identify what is truly on your heart and mind.

Take for example a morning when you wake up with a brilliant idea. It may be an idea to do something helpful that will bring a warm smile to the face of your spouse. Or perhaps you have an idea of how to solve a communal impasse and make peace in a community. If that is what you thought of during the dream process, then we know what is truly on your mind.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky was a man who spent much of his day involved in counseling and Jewish education. The Rabbi would keep a pad of paper on his night table. As he explained, "During the day some of the toughest student-education questions are presented to me. Some I answer on the spot, but to others I don't have ready answers. As I sleep, solutions occur to me. When I awake, I must write them down before I forget them."

Dreams are a way for you to gauge your innermost concerns. As your body relaxes, what does your mind think of? A loyal worker, for example, might find that his mind wanders to innovations that will increase the effectiveness of the work that he or she does. A less diligent worker will likely dream of less meaningful things.

So, when you wake up in the morning, pay attention. If your dreams are on target with your priorities, then you are doing great. But if they aren't, try to refocus and reconnect with what is important to you. Yearn and pray for dreams that reflect your inner self. May your next dream meet your desired dream specifications.

Have a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org

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Confronting Our Enemies: Thoughts for Parashat Vayetsei

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

> *"And Jacob went on his way, and angels of God met him. And Jacob said when he saw them: 'This is God's camp.' And he called the name of that place Mahanaim"* (Bereishith 32:2-3).

These concluding verses of this week's Torah portion raise several questions. The angels that met Jacob are not reported to have said or done anything, only to have appeared. What was their mission? What did their presence accomplish?

Jacob acknowledged that the visit of the angels made this spot “God’s camp;” why then did he name the place Mahanaim, camps, in the plural?

This strange episode occurs at a particularly stressful time in Jacob’s life. He had just concluded a treaty with his hostile father-in-law, Laban. Although that confrontation was over, Jacob might well have wondered whether he could in fact trust Laban to keep his side of the covenant. Would Laban and his men sneak up and attack Jacob and family; would Laban kill Jacob and take the entire family back to his own home?

While worrying about Laban behind him, Jacob also was very worried about what lay ahead when he would have to confront his brother Esau. Would Esau attack and murder Jacob and family? Could Jacob possibly assuage Esau’s longstanding antagonism?

As Jacob anguished over these threatening possibilities, he must have been extremely jittery and unsure of his and his family’s future.

“Angels of God met him.” These angels did not have to say or do anything. Their very presence served to reassure Jacob of God’s providential care for him. He realized that he would be able to overcome the challenges that threatened him because he was in God’s camp — and God would protect him.

Jacob named the place Mahanaim, in the plural, because the camp served to protect him from two dangerous enemies, Laban and Esau.

Laban and Esau represent two different sorts of enemies.

Rabbinic literature depicts Laban as the archetypal sneak, cheat, and hypocrite. Laban seeks to out-maneuver others through devious means. He may appear to be sweet and generous while actually planning ways to destroy his victims. He is characterized as the classic example of the smiling person who stabs you in the back. He is dangerous because he is subtle. He preys patiently on his victims, uses many ruses to disarm opponents, and harms them when they least expect it. He lies, cheats, flatters…he does whatever is necessary to achieve his ends.

Esau is ruthless in a different way. He is not subtle and cunning like Laban. Rather, he is described in rabbinic literature as a violent and boorish thug. Esau is ready to confront his enemies directly and to prevail over them due to his physical strength. He is rough and blood thirsty. Although he is surely a dangerous opponent, one can easily detect his malice and can try to develop means of defense.

Jacob’s Mahanaim symbolized the need for the Almighty’s help in combating both types of antagonists. The angels’ presence enabled Jacob to gain confidence in his ability to survive the challenges he faced.

In our world today, we also confront the Laban and Esau types of enemies. Among the Labans are those who speak softly and self-righteously, as though they are being intelligent and objective in their views; and yet, who promote anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in scurrilous ways. The Labans of the media and academic left pose as supporters of human rights — but they assume that everyone seems to have human rights except Jews, especially Israeli Jews. These are very dangerous and insidious enemies, ruthless in their persistent denigration of Jews and Israel — denigration that leads to and encourages anti-Jewish, anti-Israel violence.[emphasis added]

As the Labans seek to dehumanize Jews and Israelis, **the Esaus seek to perpetrate violence against us. The Esaus are terrorists blinded by hatred. They train their children to hate and to murder. They glorify and honor murderers of Jews and Israelis. The violent Esaus and their supporters are dangerous; their “moral universe” is vastly different from ours. They promote and justify hatred and murder; they rejoice at the shedding of Jewish blood.** [emphasis added]

How nice it would be if angels of the Lord would appear before us to give us encouragement at a time of great crisis. How fortunate Jacob was to have received a visit from heavenly messengers as he confronted threats from Laban and Esau.

Absent a miraculous visit from angels, we ourselves need to combat the Labans and Esaus of our time and place. We need to maintain our own Mahanaim that will defend us from the constant immoral propaganda of media, academic and political pundits; and we need to be strong and smart enough to defeat the violent Esaus of our generation.

In the beginning of this week's Parasha, Jacob is reported to have had his dream in which he saw a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending it. In the dream, he received God's promise: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed. And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And in you and your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back into this land" (Bereishith 28: 13-15).

Let us remember this promise of God, and let us be strong, happy and confident.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/confronting-our-enemies-thoughts-parashat-vayetsei

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 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 Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

Thoughts on the Teachings of Elie Wiesel

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Elie Wiesel (1928-2016) won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. Actually, it was against all odds that he should have been alive, let alone become a powerful voice for world peace. When he was only fifteen years old, he — along with all the Jews in his town of Sighet — was rounded up by the Nazis and shipped to concentration camps where most of them were murdered. His mother and younger sister perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. His father died before war's end. His two older sisters survived. The young Elie Wiesel — a religious, pious young man — was spiritually scarred for life by his traumatic experiences in the hell of Nazism's death camps.

After the war, he was sent to France, along with other orphans. He could not then find words to describe the Holocaust. The pain was too raw and too deep. He found work as a journalist. In the early 1950s he interviewed the Nobel Prize-winning French novelist François Mauriac, who encouraged Wiesel to write about the concentration camps and to bear witness for the millions whose lives were snuffed out by the Nazis and their collaborators. This led to Wiesel writing an extensive work in Yiddish, later edited down and published in French in 1958, and in English in 1960: The Night. That book was widely read and acclaimed; and Wiesel went on to write many more books, win many awards, teach many classes, give thousands of lectures.

Upon moving to the United States in 1955, his career as writer and teacher flourished. He held professorial positions at the City University of New York, Yale University, and Boston University. He received numerous awards for his literary and human rights activities, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States Congressional Gold Medal and the Medal of Liberty Award. President Jimmy Carter appointed Wiesel chairman of the United State Holocaust Memorial Council in 1978. Shortly after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, he and his wife established The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity.

Elie Wiesel, a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, was not only to be a voice and a memorial for the murdered millions. His life's mission was to serve as a conscience to the world, to remind humanity of the horrors of war and mass murder, to help humanity understand that there should never again be concentration camps, genocide, ruthless and merciless tyranny.

Throughout his life, Elie Wiesel was a religiously observant Jew; but his faith in God — and humanity -– was conflicted, sometimes angry; in spite of his grievances, though, he sought to remain optimistic. "I belong to a generation that has

often felt abandoned by God and betrayed by mankind. And yet, I believe that we must not give up on either…..There it is: I still believe in man in spite of man" (Open Heart, pp. 72, 73).

Wiesel's approach found expression in his description of biblical Isaac, the son of Abraham who was brought to the mountain to be sacrificed to the Lord. At the last moment, an angel appeared to Abraham and commanded him not to put the knife to Isaac's throat. In Hebrew, the name Isaac (Yitzhak) means: he will laugh. Wiesel asked: "Why was the most tragic of our ancestors named Isaac, a name which evokes and signifies laughter?" And he provided his answer: "As the first survivor, he had to teach us, the future survivors of Jewish history, that it is possible to suffer and despair an entire lifetime and still not give up the art of laughter. Isaac, of course, never freed himself from the traumatizing scenes that violated his youth; the holocaust had marked him and continued to haunt him forever. Yet, he remained capable of laughter. And in spite of everything, he did laugh" (Messengers of God, p. 97).

Wiesel's religious worldview was strongly influenced by the Hassidic movement. He wrote much about Hassidic masters and drew heavily on their teachings. A central element of Hassidism was the role of the Rebbe, the rabbi and teacher, who was — and was expected to be — a tzaddik, a truly righteous person who was deemed to have great powers.

The Hassidic movement began with Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), born in a small town in the Ukraine. The Besht, as he came to be known, brought a message of hope to the poor and oppressed Jews. A man of humble origins, he taught that the less fortunate were beloved by God, "that every one of them existed in God's memory, that every one of them played a part in his people's destiny, each in his way and according to his means" (Souls on Fire, p. 25). The simple, unlearned Jew could serve God through piety, joy, song, love of nature. What God required was a sincere and pious heart. When people criticized the Besht for associating with lowly individuals, he replied: "A small Tzaddik loves small sinners; it takes a great Tzaddik to love great sinners" (Somewhere a Master, p. 65). This was a basic principle of Hassidism: love for our fellow human beings must resemble God's love; it reaches everyone, great and small.

The Besht's successor was Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezeritch. He drew hundreds of students and thousands of followers. To the more erudite, he taught the hidden truths of the faith. To the simple, he explained that their mere recital of the Sh'ma Yisrael prayer with proper devotion would make them worthy of redemption. The Maggid inspired loyalty. He was an excellent strategist and administrator and succeeded in spreading Hassidism throughout Eastern Europe. Although the Besht was the first leader of the Hassidic movement, it was Rabbi Dov Baer who established the role of the Hassidic Rebbe as a Tzaddik. "As he saw it, the Tzaddik had to combine the virtues and gifts, as well as fulfill the roles and obligations, of saint, guide and sage. Spokesman for God in His dealings with man, intercessor for man in his dealings with God" (Souls on Fire., p. 66). An essential role of the Tzaddik was to encourage Hassidim never to consider themselves as being useless, abandoned, or neglected by the Almighty.

As Hassidism grew and spread, new Rebbes emerged, each with his own distinctive style. The common denominator, though, was that each had to be a Tzaddik, a righteous person who could connect the people with God, and God with the people. Some Tzaddikim were ascetic and humble; others enjoyed a degree of luxury. Some were compassionate in the extreme, while others were more remote, less personally involved with the individual struggles of their followers. Some were expected to be wonder workers who could perform miracles; others were respected for their insistence on individual responsibility.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev (1740-1809) was known for his unlimited love of each Jew, even the most sinful and ignorant among them. The notables of Berdichev chided him for associating with people of inferior rank. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak replied: "When the Messiah will come, God will arrange a feast in his honor, and all our patriarchs and kings, our prophets and sages will of course be invited. As for myself, I shall quietly make my way into one of the last rows and hope not to be noticed. If I am discovered anyway and asked what right I have to attend, I shall say: Please be merciful with me, for I have been merciful too" (Ibid., p. 99).

A Tzaddik of a later generation, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859), was known for the rigorous demands he made on himself and others. He sought no compromises with truth, no short cuts, no evasions. Wiesel describes him as "the angry saint, the divine rebel. Among the thousands of Hassidic leaders great and small, from the Baal Shem's time to the Holocaust, he is undeniably the most disconcerting, mysterious figure of all. Also the most tragic" (Ibid., p. 231). The Kotzker always seemed to be yearning, to be reaching for something beyond. He once explained that the serpent in the Garden of Eden was punished and had to forever crawl in and eat the dust. It has been asked: why is eating dust a punishment? In fact, this makes it very easy for the serpent to eat without having to search for its sustenance. The Kotzer replied: "That is the worst punishment of all: never to be hungry, never to seek, never to desire anything" (Somewhere a

Master, p. 101). The Kotzker spent the last years of his life as a melancholy recluse. Yet, his sharp wisdom and keen erudition made him a sainted figure among his followers, and one of the most quoted Hassidic Rebbes through modern times.

Elie Wiesel was especially drawn to those Tzaddikim who were torn by internal conflict and doubts. Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz (1728-1791) taught that even if some questions are without answers, one must still ask them. Doubts are not necessarily destructive, if they bring one to a Rebbe. One must realize that others have gone through the same sorrow and endured the same anguish. “God is everywhere, even in pain, even in the search for faith” (Ibid., p. 12).

The Tzaddik invariably lives a double life. He must at once be a humble soul, aware of his limitations — and he must be a seemingly perfect person in the eyes of his followers. If he is too humble, he cannot gain their trust. If he thinks he indeed is perfect, then he is a deeply flawed human being. “A saint who knows that he is a saint — isn’t. Or more precisely, no longer is. A conscience that is too clear is suspect. To ever be clear, conscience must have overcome doubt. As Rebbe Nahman of Bratzlav put it: No heart is as whole as one that has been broken” (Ibid., p. 59).

Elie Wiesel was drawn to Hassidic masters who were epitomes of religious faith and leadership…and who had their own questions, self-doubts, feelings of melancholy. In spite of personal internal struggles, the Tzaddik had to be available to his followers with a full and loving heart. “Just tell him that you need him and he will receive you. Tell him that you are suffering and he will be your companion. Tell him you need a presence and he will share your solitude without invading it. This may seem unusual today, but in those days many Hassidic Masters treated their followers in that way, with similar compassion” (Ibid., p. 142).

Wiesel writes nostalgically, especially about the early Tzadikkim of Hassidism. But as the movement grew and expanded, it also lost some of the initial energy and idealism of its founders. Many different and competing groups emerged, each with its own Rebbe/Tzaddik.

To the outside observer, Hassidim appear to be cult-like groups blindly devoted to their charismatic Rebbes; they dress in distinctive garb, follow distinctive customs, and speak primarily in Yiddish rather than the language of the land. Yet, Hassidim are living testimony of the power of survival. Vast numbers of Hassidim perished during the Holocaust. Their communities in Europe were decimated. Yet, the survivors did not lose faith. They rebuilt communities in Israel, the United States and elsewhere; a new generation of Rebbes emerged, attracting thousands of adherents. Elie Wiesel’s emotional connection to Hassidism and Hassidim are an expression of his faith in humanity’s ability to overcome horrors…and survive with renewed vigor and optimism.

* * *

When it was announced in 1986 that Elie Wiesel won the Nobel Prize, many (including me) supposed it was the prize in literature. After all, he was a famous author of numerous highly acclaimed books. But the prize was not for literature, but for peace.

Apparently the Nobel committee thought that his universal messages relating to peace were more important than his literary production. Some have felt that Wiesel’s writing is overly emotional, sometimes pretentious; it tries too hard to appear profound. While his books will be read for many years to come, his role as a conscience for humanity was deemed most significant.

In presenting the Nobel Peace Prize, Egil Aarvik, chair of the Nobel Committee, said this about Wiesel: “His mission is not to gain the world’s sympathy for victims or the survivors. His aim is to awaken our conscience. Our indifference to evil makes us partners in the crime. This is the reason for his attack on indifference and his insistence on measures aimed at preventing a new Holocaust. We know that the unimaginable has happened. What are we doing now to prevent its happening again?”

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Vayeitzei – Talk to Yourself

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

The Medrash relates that Rabi Shmuel bar Nachman applied the following verses in Tehillim to Yaakov Avinu. "I raise my eyes to the mountains (*harim*), from where will my help come. My help comes from G-d, Maker of Heaven and Earth." (Tehillim 121:1-2) When Yaakov went to Charan to find a wife, he looked to his parents (*horim*) and his teachers and guides to see how they prepared to find a wife. He knew how Eliezer had gone to his mother's house with ten camels laden with gifts, whereas he himself was going to Charan empty-handed. (The Medrash says that either Yaakov had taken nothing with him, or that Eisav had chased after him and stolen what he had brought with him.) He then began to worry, "From where will my help-mate come?" How would he ask anyone to marry him, when he shows up empty-handed? At that point, the Medrash tells us that Yaakov stopped himself and said, "What? Am I losing my faith in my Creator? Heaven forbid! I am not losing my faith in my Creator! Rather, my help-mate will be from G-d. He will not let your feet falter, your Guardian shall not slumber. Behold He does not sleep and He does not slumber, etc." (Bereishis Rabbah 68:2)

Yaakov looked back at his parents' marriage and understood that offering gifts is a proper way to propose. Realizing that he did not have anything to offer, he began to worry that being unprepared he would fail in his efforts. He consoled and strengthened himself with his faith in G-d, trusting that G-d would provide him the means. However, the Medrash describes a very strange process by which Yaakov developed his faith in G-d. Yaakov spoke up and asked how he could possibly lose his faith in G-d, and then declared that he would not lose his faith. Only then did he say that G-d would help him and focus on messages of faith.

What was the purpose of Yaakov's speech? If Yaakov's faith was strong enough to rely on G-d, then he should have simply begun by reinforcing messages of faith. If, on the other hand, his faith was not strong enough for this challenge, then how would it help to note that he is losing his faith in G-d? Furthermore, the Medrash tells us that Yaakov didn't just think about these issues, but actively asked the question and spoke of his commitment to have faith out loud. Why did Yaakov need to speak it out loud?

We often think of speech as a means of communication between people. If the other person knows, then there is no need for me to speak. This Medrash is teaching us that there is another purpose to speech. Speaking words out loud can help to clarify our thoughts and concretize our emotions and commitments. Yaakov noticed that he was beginning to waiver in his faith, and he wanted to strengthen himself. However, before he did so, he first wanted to rally his mental and emotional energy in order to strengthen himself as much as possible. He, therefore, asked himself aloud, "What? Am I losing faith in my Creator?" Hearing those words leave his mouth charged and energized him to cry out, "Heaven forbid! I am not losing my faith in my Creator!" Once he had verbally expressed that commitment, he was ready to focus on messages of faith and reinforce his trust in G-d. Saying the words gave him clarity and deepened his commitment.

As we live through the ebb and flow of the traffic of life, there are times where we find ourselves dealing with difficult challenges where it is hard to be honest and maintain our moral standards. At those times, the Medrash is teaching us that we can use our power of speech to find our footing and regain our balance. We should stop and verbalize our surprise and then verbally express our commitment to our morals. This tool can help us to see more clearly and give us added strength in a moment of weakness.

This Medrash also underscores the importance of expressing our appreciation and recognition of others. If hearing myself verbalize my own thoughts can add clarity for me, how much more so does hearing my thoughts verbalized add clarity for someone else. Even if they know, it's worth the effort to say it.

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"Nothing Personal"

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Have you ever seen a movie where a criminal points a gun at a character and right before he squeezes the trigger says, "Nothing personal."

That was a rhetorical question. Of course you have. We all have. That dynamic is everpresent in the world of mafia movies and shows where the likes of Michael Corleone, Omar Little, and Tony Soprano justify murder by saying, "It's just business. It's not personal." Meaning if it was personal and you acted out of pure impulse without regard to the business utility of this snatching of a life, you would then be more morally culpable.

While we as law abiding, upstanding individuals, reject this line of reasoning in the world of crime, we do employ it in other less life-snuffing ways.

Take the world of business. Let's say you own a cookie shop and compete with the cookie shop down the road. Someone you know in shipping says there will be a shortage of flour but because he knows you, he can get you a bulk discount if you buy everything he has. (With the supply chain issues I keep hearing about, this is quite the opportunity.) But you know that if you buy everything, your competitor will have to pay double for supplies and be unable to compete with you. You'll probably drive him out of business with your less expensive but still top quality cookies. Is it immoral to make this move that would grow your business, but kill your competitor's livelihood?

I think many of us would say go for it. If you were buying up the flour only to dump it and to take away this person's livelihood that would be a personal attack and therefore bad. But since you're in the business you have to make a business decision and do what's right for your livelihood. It's not personal, so therefore we can be more comfortable with it.

So there is a difference between a personal conflict and a business conflict.

Konrad Lorenz, famed biologist, writer and philosopher, in his book On Aggression, documents this phenomenon all across nature, but in a slightly different context.

He draws a distinction between inter-species aggression (ex. predator vs prey or fish of one color and type vs another color and type) and intra-species aggression (ex. fish with the same stripes attacking each other).

He observed both in the wild coral reef and in the aquariums he built that fish with the same colors attacked each other more frequently and with more deadliness than fish of different colors. If you put two fish of the same stripes in the same tank, one would end up dead soon, or they would be fighting over territory until one succeeded in killing the other.

Lorenz stated that through his observations, "fish are far more aggressive toward their own species than any other."

He also noticed that the instinct and attitude towards killing was much more ferocious among fish of their own family. Predators rarely showed the same ferocity towards catching their prey than same striped animals did when chasing family off their territory. With predators and prey it's nothing personal.

Additionally, inter-species aggression has a much more apparent purpose as it creates an equilibrium. Predators would not overhunt because it wouldn't serve their purpose to destroy their food supply and through their hunting, they kept the prey population in check (Thank you spiders for not allowing flies to multiply too much.) We can compare this to a gangster who sees an advantage to having a legal system so he can make money doing his criminal work. But in intra-species aggression, the purpose to the killing eludes us more.

If you want a fuller explanation of this phenomenon, feel free to read Chapter 3 of his book. The most interesting explanation he gave was that this behavior allowed fish of the same type to spread out and use their specific talents for the good of the group. Similarly, it's bad for the community when we have too many general practice doctors, lawyers, or any profession practicing within a concentrated location. They would step on each other's toes and make it difficult for people who don't live there to seek their services. So intra-species aggression allows a species to spread out their talents over a greater location and thus helps us survive.

But if there's one thing we can get from this is that love, family and deep connection make life worth living but also have the potential to hurt.

One of life's greatest joys is to have love, but the ones we love have the potential to hurt us most. The worst personal conflicts we hear about can happen within families rather than from business competitors.

I've always wondered why Lavan tricks Yaakov and treats him so badly for twenty years. He was dishonest about which of his daughters he would marry, and about his wages. And at the end of the day, he shunned Yaakov personally, leading Yaakov to leave. Then Lavan was ready to kill him had not God intervened. This was all after Lavan took Yaakov in and called him "his family," which he was. If he was family, why was Lavan so malicious?

But maybe it was precisely because he was family that Lavan could wound him so deep. It was Intra-family aggression in full force.

Love is powerful. Powerful enough to fuel meaning, purpose, joy, community, endless beauty and accomplishments. But with that power comes the power to hurt, be hurt, and ruin. The Torah presents our relationship with God as a passionate love affair. God describes himself as jealous. When we are close, unbounded joy comes, but when we separate it stings and both God and us cry over the gaping wounds

What about the love in our life? Who do we love most? How much attention have we paid to that love? How do we deal with the and joy and pain that can come from such a relationship whether it's with a spouse, family, community, fellow Jews, or God?

With love, it's never "nothing personal."

Shabbat Shalom.

[Ed. Note: This Dvar Torah fits in with the theme that many of the leaders of anti-Semitism in history have been relatives of Jews – or self hating Jews.]

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Rav Kook Torah
Vayeitzei: The Rivalry between Rachel and Leah

Jacob did not have an easy life. He loved Rachel, but was tricked into marrying her sister Leah. And when he finally married Rachel, his home suffered from rivalry between the two sisters.

This strife was not limited to Jacob's household. It continued on in future generations: in the struggle between Rachel's son Joseph and Leah's sons; and in the conflict between King Saul, a descendant of Rachel, and David, a descendant of Leah. Why did Jacob need to endure so many obstacles when setting up his family — complications that would have such a long-term impact on future generations of the Jewish people?

The Present versus the Future

We live in a divided reality. We continuously deliberate: how much should we live for the moment, and how much should we work for the future? We must constantly balance between the here-and-now and the yet-to-come. This dilemma exists across all levels of life: individual, familial, communal, and national.

God's original design for the world was that the entire tree, even the bark, would taste as sweet as its fruit (Gen. 1:11). In other words, even during the intermediate stages of working toward a goal, we should be able to sense and enjoy the final fruits of our labor. When the world is functioning properly, the present is revealed in all of its glory and serves as a suitable guide toward a loftier future. In such a perfect world, our current desires and wishes do not impinge upon our future aspirations.

But the physical universe is fundamentally flawed. The earth failed to produce trees that taste like their fruit. We endure constant conflict between the present and the future, the temporal and the eternal. As individuals and as a nation, we often need to disregard the sensibilities of the present since they will not lead us toward our destined path.

Rachel and Leah

Jacob's marriage to two sisters, and the ongoing rivalry between them, is a metaphor for this duality in our lives.

Like all things in our world, Jacob's home suffered from a lack of clarity. Jacob should have been able to establish his family on the basis of an uplifted present, blessed with integrity and goodness. He should have been able to marry and set up his home without making calculations with an eye to the future. The natural purity and simple emotions of his holy soul should have sufficed.

Rachel, whom Jacob immediately loved for the beautiful qualities of her soul, is a metaphor for the simple and natural love we feel for the revealed present. Jacob felt that Rachel's external beauty was also in harmony with the unknown realm of the distant future.

But God's counsel decreed that the future destiny of the people of Israel belonged not to Rachel, but to Leah. 1 Leah would be the principal matriarch of the Jewish people. Yet this future was so profoundly hidden, that its current state — in Leah — was hidden from Jacob.

This concealed quality of Leah is embedded in the very foundations of the Jewish people. Because of the legacy of Leah, we can raise our sights afar, skipping over the present circumstances, in order to aspire toward a lofty future. Just as Jacob found himself unexpectedly wed to Leah, so too, the path of the Jewish people throughout history does not always proceed in an orderly fashion. The future often projects its way into the present so that the present time may be elevated and sanctified.

Two Kings and Two Messiahs

The rivalry between Rachel and Leah, the conflict between the beautiful present and the visionary future, also found expression in the monarchy of Israel. The temporary reign of Saul, a descendant of Rachel, struggled with the eternal dynasty of David, a descendant of Leah. 2

Even in the Messianic Era, the divide between Rachel and Leah will continue, with two Messianic leaders: the precursive redeemer, Mashiach ben Joseph, a descendant of Rachel, and the final redeemer, Mashiach ben David, a descendant of Leah.

Nonetheless, we aspire for the simpler state in which the present is uplifting, and by means of its light, the future acquires its greatness. For this reason, Rachel was always honored as Jacob's primary wife. Even Leah's descendants in Bethlehem conceded: "Like Rachel and Leah who both built the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11), honoring Rachel before Leah.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 44-46.)

FOOTNOTES:

1. Six of the twelve tribes of Israel, including those designated for spiritual and political leadership (Levi and Judah), were born to Leah.

2. Saul, who is described as “the most handsome young man in Israel, head and shoulders above the people” (I Sam. 16:2), was a natural choice for king. And yet God chose to appoint David — a simple shepherd boy whose leadership qualities even his own father failed to see — as the true king of the Jewish people. As God explained to the perplexed prophet Samuel: “Look not upon his appearance, or the height of his stature, for I have rejected him. For it is not as man sees [that which is visible] to the eyes; the Lord sees into the heart” (I Sam. 16:7).]

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYETZE_65.htm

Vayetse (5768) – Leah’s Tears

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

We sometimes forget that the phrase Keriat Ha-Torah does not simply mean “reading the Torah.” In biblical Hebrew the verb likro means not “to read” but “to call.” The phrase mikra’ei kodesh, “festivals,” literally means “holy convocations,” days on which the people were called or summoned together. Every seven years – in the command known as hakhel – the king was commanded to “read aloud [tikra] this Torah before them in their hearing [be-aznehem].” In the historic gathering of those who had returned from Babylon, Ezra “read [the Torah] aloud [vayikra] from daybreak till noon, in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand, and all the people listened attentively [literally, the ears of all the people were directed] to the book of the Torah.”

Keriat ha-Torah therefore means, not reading but proclaiming the Torah, reading it aloud. The one who reads it has the written word in front of him, but for the rest of the gathering it is an experience not of the eye but of the ear. The divine word is something heard rather than seen. Only with the spread of manuscripts, and then (in the fifteenth century) the invention of printing, did reading become a visual rather than auditory experience. To this day the primary experience of keriat ha-Torah involves listening to the reader declaim the words from the Torah scroll, rather than following them in a printed text. We miss some of the most subtle effects of Torah if we think of it as the word seen rather than the word heard.

There are many differences between sound and sight, and one has to do with time. We can see, but not hear, a sentence at a single glance. Listening, more than seeing, is a process extended through time. Halfway through a sentence, we can guess what will come next, but we cannot be sure until we have actually heard the words. That is why, for example, jokes are more powerful when heard rather than read. Crucial to a joke is the element of surprise. If we can guess the punchline, the joke is simply not that good. Listening, we are kept in suspense. Reading, we can go directly to the last sentence.

To give one biblical example: when Joseph is in prison, Pharaoh’s butler and baker both have dreams. The butler tells Joseph what he saw, and Joseph gives it a favourable interpretation. “Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position.” Emboldened by the good news, the baker too tells Joseph his dream. Joseph’s interpretation begins with the same words, “Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head,” but he then adds, “from the rest of you [me’alekha]; he will hang you on a tree.” This is humour at its blackest. The reason for its presence in the Joseph story does not concern us here, but the point is this: the Torah is written to be read aloud, and several of its literary devices depend on this fact, one above all, namely the power of the next word to confound our expectations, based on what we have heard thus far. Sometimes the result is humorous, at others the opposite, but in both cases the result is to make us sit up and pay attention. One of the most striking examples occurs in this week’s sedra.

Jacob, in flight from Esau’s anger, has travelled to the house of Laban. Arriving, he meets Laban’s younger daughter Rachel and falls in love with her. Laban proposes a deal: work for me for seven years and I will give her to you in marriage. Jacob does so, but on the wedding night Laban substitutes Leah for Rachel. The next morning, when Jacob discovers the deception, he protests, “Why did you deceive me?” Laban pointedly replies, “It is not the done thing in our place to give the younger before the elder” (a reference, intended or otherwise, to Jacob’s deception of Isaac, a case of the younger taking the blessing of the elder, Esau). Laban agrees, however, that in return for a further seven years’ labour, Jacob may marry Rachel. He will not have to wait until the seven years are complete, but he must, however, wait

for seven days until Leah's wedding celebration is complete (an early example of a custom we still keep: the week of sheva berakhot). The seven days pass. Jacob marries Rachel. We then read the following:

> *He also [gam] married Rachel, and he also [gam] loved Rachel . . .* (29:30)

The implication at this point is clear. The repeated word gam, "also," leads us to believe that the two sisters are equal in Jacob's eyes. The story of the deception has – or so we must suppose on the basis of what we have so far heard – a happy ending after all. Jacob has married both. He loves them both. The sibling rivalry that is so pronounced a theme of Bereishith (Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau) seems to be reaching a positive resolution. It is possible to love two siblings equally. The next word sends our expectation crashing to the ground:

> *…more than Leah* (29:30)

This is an ungrammatical construction. The words "also" and "more than" do not belong together in the same sentence. Either one loves X and also Y, or one loves X more than Y, but not both. The effect – like a sudden discord in the middle of a Mozart symphony – is strident and shocking. Jacob does not love the two sisters equally. He may love them both, but his passion is for Rachel. The next verse contains an even sharper discord:

> *God saw that Leah was hated [senuah]. . .*

This is a phrase that cannot be understood literally. The previous verse has just said that Leah was not hated but loved. The commentators and translators wrestled with this difficulty. Ramban (on his second interpretation) and Radak read the word senuah not as "hated" but as "[relatively] unloved." Yet though the text is semantically strange, is it psychologically lucid. Leah knew that Jacob's heart was elsewhere. She may have been loved but she felt the lesser love as a rejection. The words "God saw" mean that God felt her sense of humiliation. Laban's deception had human consequences, and they were tragic. Leah weeps inwardly for the husband she acquired as a result of her father's wiles, whose love is for someone else.

Only now, perhaps, do we understand the significance of the Torah's first mention of Leah:

> *Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. The eyes of Leah were weak (rakot), but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.*

The word rakot could mean many things: beautiful (Targum, Rashbam), weak (Ibn Ezra), or sensitive (Netziv suggests that Leah was unable to go out with the flocks because the bright sunlight hurt her eyes). The ambiguity is deliberate. Only rarely and sparingly does the Torah give us physical descriptions of its characters, and always for a reason that will eventually be disclosed (so, for example, we hear in 2 Samuel 14 about Absolom's hair; four chapters later we discover why: it became caught in a tree, which led to his death).

The meaning of the phrase "Leah's eyes were rakot," is (as Rashi, Radak and various midrashic traditions explain) "Leah was easily moved to tears." She was emotionally vulnerable. She had none of the resilience that might have carried her through her husband's attachment to her younger sister. She was thin-skinned, sensitive, attuned to nuance, easily hurt. She knew she was Jacob's lesser love, and it caused her pain.

The subtlety with which all this is conveyed is remarkable. The Torah has sketched Leah's portrait in a few deft strokes, each of which we will only hear if we are listening carefully. Nor has this been done for the sake of description. Rather, it has set the scene for the drama that is about to unfold – and once again we find it done with the utmost brevity and delicacy. In fact, unless we are paying the closest attention we will not notice it at all.

What follows next is, on the face of it, a simple account of the birth of four children. Beneath the surface, however, these verses are as eloquent as any in the entire Torah:

> *God saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb. Rachel remained barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, saying: "God has seen (ra'ah) my troubles. Now my husband will love me." She became pregnant again and had a son. "God has heard (shama) that I was unloved," she said, "and has given me also this son." She named the child Shimon. She became pregnant again and had a son. "Now my husband will become*

attached (lavah) to me," she said, "because I have given him three sons." Therefore he named the child Levi. She became pregnant again and had a son. She said, "This time let me praise (odeh) God," and she named the child Judah (Yehudah). She then stopped having children.

Read superficially, these verses are no more than a genealogy, a list of births, of the kind of which there are many in Bereishith. As soon as our ear is attuned to Leah's plight, however, we listen more carefully, and what we hear is heart-breaking.

Leah is pleading for attention. Each of the names of her first three children is a cry to her husband Jacob – to see, to listen, to be attached, to notice her, to love. Significantly, it is she, not Jacob, who names three of the children (The exception is Levi. The commentators who emphasise the plain sense of the text, Rashbam and Radak, assume that the "he" who names Levi is Jacob. Rashi, whose commentary goes deeper, says, on the basis of midrashic tradition, that it was an angel. Rashi has understood that a key fact about the four births is the absence of Jacob).

Sadly, the lack of relationship between Jacob and Leah at the birth of her children is carried through in the years to come. Jacob's relationship with Reuben, Shimon and Levi breaks down completely (with Reuben after the episode of Bilhah's couch, with Shimon and Levi after the incident with Shechem). On his death-bed he curses them instead of blessing them. Yet it is from Levi that Israel's spiritual leaders will eventually come (Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and eventually the cohanim and levi'im), and from Judah will come its kings (David and his descendants).

It is not only Leah's cry that Jacob does not hear. He fails equally to respond to Rachel's distress when she sees her sister having children while she has none:

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I will die." Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of G-d? It is He who has kept you from having children."

The sages noticed a parallel between Jacob's words here, and Joseph's at the end of Bereishith when the brothers fear that, now that their father is dead, Joseph will take revenge. Joseph comforts them, saying, "Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" Joseph uses the same words his father had said before he was born, but to opposite effect: to bring comfort. Using this contrast to maximal effect, the sages said about Jacob's reply to Rachel:

Said the Holy One, blessed be He [to Jacob]: "Is that the way to answer a woman in distress? By your life, your children will one day stand before her son [Joseph, who will answer them, Am I in the place of G-d?]."

What is going on in this intense and sometimes tragic drama between Leah and Jacob? Jacob is unlike the other patriarchs. If the word that comes to mind in relation to Abraham is chessed, kindness, and to Isaac pachad, fear, the idea that characterises Jacob is struggle.

Already in the womb he struggles with his brother. He competes with him for the birthright and the blessing. The defining scene in his life is his wrestling match at night with an unnamed adversary. Both his names – Jacob, "he who grasps by the heel," and Israel, "he who struggles with G-d and man and prevails" – convey a sense of conflict.

While Abraham and Isaac represent modes of being, Jacob stands for becoming. The gifts he has, he has fought for. None has come naturally. Jacob is the supreme figure of persistence. He is the man who said to the angel, "I will not let you go until you bless me." More than Abraham and Isaac, Jacob is the person who wrestles with life and refuses to let go.

The Torah describes him as an ish tam, sometimes translated as "a simple man" but better understood (according to R. Samson Raphael Hirsch) as "a single-minded man." The prophet Micah associated him with truth – "You give truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham." 15 Jacob's life embodies the fact that truth must be fought for with single-minded determination. It rarely comes without a struggle and the pain of experience. What is the truth at stake in Jacob's life?

There are many, but one is a truth about love. One of the most striking facts about the Jacob narrative is the frequency with which the word "love" appears. It figures once in the story of Abraham (Ber. 22: 2) 16, twice in the life of Isaac (24: 6717, 25: 2818, though there are also three references to Isaac's love of a particular kind of food: 27:4, 9, 14) 19, but

seven times in the case of Jacob (29: 18, 20, 30, 3220; 37: 3, 421; 44: 2022). Jacob loves more than any other figure in Bereishith.

But through painful experience, Jacob must learn a truth about love. There are times when love not only unites but also divides. It did so in his childhood, when Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. It did so again when he married two sisters. It did so a third time when he loved Rachel's child Joseph more than his other sons. What Jacob learned – and what we learn, reading his story – is that love is not enough. We must also heed those who feel unloved. Without that, there will be conflict and tragedy. That requires a specific capacity – the ability to listen, in Jacob's case, to the unspoken tears of Leah and her feeling of rejection, made explicit in the names she gave her sons.

I began by pointing out that the Torah was a text intended to be read aloud and listened to. It is the single greatest expression of faith in a G-d we cannot see, but only hear. Judaism is supremely a religion of the ear, unlike all other ancient civilizations, which were cultures of the eye. This is more than a metaphysical fact. It is a moral one as well. In Judaism the highest spiritual gift is the ability to listen – not only to the voice of G-d, but also to the cry of other people, the sigh of the poor, the weak, the lonely, the neglected and, yes, sometimes the un- or less-loved. That is one of the meanings of the great command Shema Yisrael, "Listen, O Israel." Jacob's other name, we recall, was Israel.

Jacob wrestles with this throughout his life. It is not that he has a moral failing. To the contrary, he is the most tenacious of all the patriarchs – and the only one all of whose children become part of the covenant. It is rather that every virtue has a corresponding danger. Those who are courageous are often unaware of the fears of ordinary people. Those of penetrating intellect are often dismissive of lesser minds. Those who, like Jacob, have an unusual capacity to love must fight against the danger of failing to honour the feelings of those they do not love with equal passion. The antidote is the ability to listen. That is what Jacob learns in the course of his life – and why he, above all, is the role model for the Jewish people – the nation commanded to listen.

How beautiful it is that this message – one of the deepest and most subtle in the Torah – is conveyed in a series of passages whose meaning does not lie on the surface of the text, but discloses itself only to those who listen to what is going on beneath the words: the unspoken cry, the implicit appeal, the unheard tears, the unarticulated pain. Those who wish to learn to listen to G-d must learn to listen to other people – to the kol demamah dakah, "the still, small voice" of those who need our love.

* https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5768-vayetse-leahs-tears/ 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.

When Jacob Discovered He Was Israel: An Essay on Vayeitzei

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) * © Chabad 2021

The outside world

At the beginning of the parshah, Jacob uproots himself and goes to Charan. All in all, even though his brother is not especially nice to him, Jacob lives in a place that is as good as could possibly be. His father is the outstanding spiritual personality of the generation, a respected and wealthy man. Presumably, Jacob has everything that he needs. Nevertheless, he leaves everything and departs for another country.

We can safely assume that, once he leaves, Jacob is immediately struck by the acute sense that the outside world is different from his former home. Home was full of holiness and all sorts of good things, whereas the world outside is bleak and spiritually barren.

One of the things that Jacob must learn to do upon recognizing this contrast is to make a new accounting of the world in which he lives: He now must struggle to maintain his inner spirituality. He could not have learned this lesson had he remained in the spiritual comfort of his home or the academy of Shem and Ever. The house of study is warm and pleasant; it is an insulated place, full of good Jews who are engaged in Torah and piety.

Jacob ventures outside and he sees that, in the outside world, things are not at all as they were in his old world. He must struggle to survive in a world where there are pitfalls, a world where he cannot continue in his old mode of life because he must live with the smarmy Laban in his pagan household.1

The question that arises here is how a person reacts when he leaves his comfort zone, his own small world, and is faced with a harsh, new reality. Ultimately, every Jew faces this problem, whether he is traveling to Charan or to a different place. Often, the first meeting with the outside world is a profound shock. When one sits in the house of study, one comes in contact primarily with the other people therein. When one inevitably leaves its halls, one begins to meet people from the outside world, who may be quite different from one's former friends.

A person can go for years interacting only with the Jews who share his bubble, those who are in his close circle, in his place or in his group. There may be arguments and disagreements among these people over minor matters, but on a fundamental level, these people all live in the same world. When one goes outside, however, and meets people who have never spent time at the house of study of Shem and Ever, nor visited the home of Isaac and Rebecca, he finds a world that is completely foreign to him. It is a world that does not understand the first thing about what motivates him in life — what he wants, what he aspires to, what guides him, and what agitates him.

An additional element that Jacob must deal with is much more pointed. When he arrives in Charan, he meets his uncle Laban, his uncle Elifaz, and the rest of his family. Upon meeting them for the first time, he is surely deeply shocked that these are his kin. This is how my relatives look, the people closest to me besides my parents?

What does one do when he meets his own flesh and blood and discovers that it is Laban? We must understand that Jacob was forced to cope with an extraordinary internal crisis. The "outside world" consists not of the heathens who are unrelated to him but, rather, of Jacob's own blood. Laban is not a distant person from another world; he is Jacob's uncle. Yet it turns out that, despite this, they do not belong to the same world at all; indeed, they have nothing in common with each other. These people are technically Jacob's family, but in actuality they are distant and foreign. How can Jacob deal with this traumatic moment of crisis and contradiction? This is Jacob's essential struggle, which at times, on the most basic level, is a struggle for spiritual survival.

From Jacob to Israel

All things considered, Jacob's relationship with Laban posed a great danger to him. To live with Laban for twenty years is not a simple matter. On the other hand, Jacob had much to benefit from the relationship, as he states, "With only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps."2 From this world, Jacob extracts something of major importance. He enters as Jacob, a single individual, and returns as Israel, leader of an impressive tribe. The difference is not just in the numerical increase of his family and camp. The Jacob who leaves Beersheba is a man who is incapable of engaging in a struggle. When faced with an obstacle, he tries to circumvent it rather than approaching it head-on. Even his name, "Jacob" — from the Hebrew "akov," meaning "crooked" or "twisted" — attests to his propensity to avoid any confrontation. When Esau enters Isaac's tent, Jacob exits through the other door; that is simply how he conducts himself. When Esau threatens him, Jacob's feet are already in Charan.

While Jacob as "Jacob" may be able to live comfortably in the bubble of his father's household, he cannot survive in the reality of the outside world, and he certainly cannot become a leader, the basis for a nation. He can only be an individual — a tzaddik, to be sure, but an individual nonetheless.

Only after Jacob encounters the angel — "For you have struggled with a divine being and have prevailed"3 — can he survive, growing into the leader he was destined to be. Without passing this test, Jacob cannot become Israel. Only when he resolves not to flee from his problems but to stand up and face them can he cease being Jacob the individual and return home as Israel. This is the beginning of a nation, the beginning of our enduring existence.

Story of the generations

In our time especially, we have regularly faced problems of this type. Rashi4 cites our sages' statement that "it is well established that Esau hates Jacob."5

Although Esau may have hated Jacob from the moment he was born, nevertheless, for a long while — maybe sixty years — a sort of status quo prevailed: They coexisted. One got the best of the other, one angered the other, who then struck

back, but all in all they lived in the same home and could have continued that way. At a certain stage, there came the tragic turning point when Esau decided, “Soon the days of mourning for my father will be here, and then I will kill my brother Jacob.”6 This was a drastic, fundamental change. Until now, although the two brothers did not love each other, they managed to coexist. Their hatred was silent — “the heart cannot reveal to the mouth”7 — they did not speak of it. Ultimately, Esau did not kill Jacob, but the reality had been changed nonetheless: The hatred was now legitimized.

Jacob was now forced — whether he liked it or not — to deal with this new reality and to assume the role of, “For you have struggled with a divine being and have prevailed.”8

Parshat Vayetze is not just the weekly Torah portion, and the problems that arise in it are not Jacob’s alone. This is the parshah of our era, of our age. When we move on to next week’s parshah, the story of Jacob’s struggle will still linger with us. This is the parshah in which we have been living during the last few generations, in the sense that we have suddenly been thrust into the world around us, forced to deal with the ramifications of this new interaction. And the question is: What does present-day Jacob do when he faces this struggle?

A distinction is sometimes drawn between “Israel” and “Elder Israel.” When we speak simply of “Israel,” of Jacob our patriarch, this refers to the actual person who lived in history. But when we speak of “Elder Israel,” this refers to the Jacob who still lives in our midst, who still lives within each and every one of us, and thus his spiritual work devolves upon all of us as well.

In the generations before ours, the world in many respects resembled Jacob’s parental home or the house of study of Shem and Ever — a self-contained world that provided, more or less, an organic and insular life. Nowadays, we face a world that no longer allows us to remain within our own small sphere, in the company of people who are the same as us. We have already left our parental home, and we are beginning to see that the world is not only physically vast but also full of hatred, division, alienation, and self-destruction. Even Jacob himself long ago ceased to be unified — the Jewish people has split into several factions, each faction continuously fragmenting internally.

This is the face of the world in which we live. It is a world that is very intimidating and very frightening, and its demands upon us are only increasing and expanding.

“None of you is distressed about me”

What does today’s reality require of the individual Jew, the one who sits in the academy of Shem and Ever, the “Elder Israel” within each one of us?

When the world is as it should be, each person needs only to look after himself. He gets up in the morning, works for eight hours, completes whatever other tasks need to be done, and at the end of the day he checks the Shulchan Aruch to make sure that he has not committed any transgressions. In this way, he lives according to the dynamic of his own life. But what if one feels more than his own distress, his personal pain; what if he feels that there is a sickness here that affects all of society? This feeling is described in Tanach as follows: “Truly it was our sickness that he bore, our suffering that he endured.”9 If one can bear the pain and suffering of others as though he feels it himself, one’s attitude toward the world will inevitably be affected.

When King Saul said to his courtiers, “None of you is distressed about me,”10 he was not complaining to them about failing to follow orders. After all, ultimately they gave up their lives for him. What he was lamenting was the fact that while his desires concerned the courtiers, none of them was so pained that he could not carry on. What hurts Saul is not his people’s performance (or lack thereof), but that they do not care; for when people care, things are done differently.

Aaron says to Moses, “Let her [Miriam] not be like one dead . . . It would be as though half of one’s own flesh were being consumed.”11 We are one family. Hence, when death strikes one part, one cannot ignore it, saying, “Rot has set in on my hand, leprosy has broken out on my ear, but I continue to be well.” When one becomes aware that leprosy has broken out on part of oneself, this produces an entirely different kind of response.

One must acquire and internalize a certain understanding, the sense that every fleeting moment that goes by is something that never returns. We are not talking here about a work ethic but about an inner understanding that despite everything that is being done, it is not nearly enough. The specter of lost time should agitate him. How can one allow himself to rest?

How can one sleep at night if the world is in such a state? If a person is hanging by one foot on the edge of a tower, he would certainly not choose that moment to take a short nap.

We should remember that everything that is being done to correct the problems plaguing the Jewish people, to help the spiritually destitute among us, does not meet even a tiny part of the need. What most people do is barely sufficient for their own obligations, let alone for the needs of the Jewish people. Indeed, there is much that needs to be done on this front.

When a person has an urgent feeling that he must take action in a certain way, then — even if he is not a leader but an ordinary individual who truly believes in some cause — it is impossible for his actions not to have repercussions all around him. Even one seemingly insignificant person can create around himself a circle of faith, which then, in turn, creates another circle. In this sense, although it often takes a great leader to instigate change, there is always a question that the individual must ask himself as well: How should he act and how should he live in a way that is consistent with his beliefs and principles?

Ascending and descending

In its commentary on Jacob's dream, the following midrash disputes whether the verse, "and angels of G d were ascending and descending on it,"12 is describing angels going up and down on the ladder or on Jacob himself:

> *According to the interpretation that they were ascending and descending on Jacob, the meaning is that they were exalting him but also degrading him, surrounding him, leaping around him, and maligning him. For it says, "Israel, in whom I will be glorified."13 [Said the angels,] "Are you the one whose image is engraved on high?" They ascended on high and saw his [ideal] image, and they descended below and found him sleeping*.14

The angels stand beside Jacob, leap on him, pinch him, and abuse him, asking, "Is this you, Jacob, whose image is found up in heaven — and here you are, sleeping? Is this what you do down here in this world?" The angels ascend and descend, and Jacob turns over onto his other side and continues sleeping.

If his image were not under the Throne of Glory, if angels of God were not ascending and descending on Jacob, then it would be perfectly acceptable for Jacob to sleep. After all, Pharaoh slept, Nebuchadnezzar slept — let Jacob sleep peacefully as well. But Jacob cannot sleep peacefully, because angels of G d are ascending and descending on him. He himself is the ladder that bridges the chasm between heaven and earth, on which all of existence ascends and descends.

Let us take this problem and apply it to the individual: A person sets out on a journey. After progressing for a while, he decides to rest for a bit. Suddenly, he has a vision: He sees a path connecting the upper worlds and the lower worlds passing through him. This is the path that passed through Jacob, and the path that passes through everyone who travels on the journey of life, no matter who he may be. This is the house of G d, this is a gate to Heaven — and at the transition point stands Jacob.

This Jacob, no matter who and where he may be, must remember that his obligation reaches to the sky because his image is engraved on high. It could be that, as far as one is concerned, it suffices that his image appears on his driver's license or passport. But the reality is that his image is engraved under the Throne of Glory, and as a result, there is more that is demanded of him; there is a higher standard. The top of the ladder reaches all the way to G d, and because of this, no person can pass himself off as insignificant. When Jacob understands this, he begins the process that creates Israel.

Jacob does not just represent the Jewish people. He is also just one man who leaves home and must now find his way in the world. And this Jacob must recognize the pinnacle of existence, the uppermost limit that he must touch. Seeing oneself as the center of a whole world is precisely what puts one's obligation on the highest possible level.

If no angels of G d are available to leap up and down on one's sleeping body, as they did to Jacob, then one must ask the angels' questions on his own. One must look in the mirror, saying, "Is this 'Israel, in whom I will be glorified'? Is this his image? That is all? Your image is engraved on high, and here you are, sleeping?" If even Jacob, who sat for twenty years in the beit midrash, is not permitted to sleep, certainly the same applies to the average Jew. The world turns continuously, without end, on this axis, on this issue, and the ever-recurring question is, "Your image is engraved on high, and here you are, sleeping?"

Parshat Vayetze is the story of our lives as human beings, our lives as Jacob's descendants. This problem of Jacob, the man who slept, is a problem that every person experiences. Jacob beholds a vision of a ladder, one end reaching to the sky and the other end set on the ground, and can only discern and recognize the meaning of the vision once he leaves his parental home. The vision of the ladder only makes sense in the context of the outside world. When he was studying in the beit midrash, he did not see angels of G d ascending and descending on him, for he did not know the extent to which the entire world depends on one individual — Jacob. It seemed to him that he could remain inside his box, looking after himself alone. Let the world endure through Shem and Ever, and others of their ilk who dedicate their lives to improving the spiritual lot of their fellow man.

The Talmud states, "The entire world was created only as company for this person."15 Each person must see his life in this light — that he alone is the justification of the world's existence, of its direction, and of its meaning. "For this is the whole man"16 — this is the person on whom the world's very existence depends. The world is the framework in which every person has the responsibility to live a meaningful life. When there are blemishes, this means that the ideal of "Israel, in whom I will be glorified" is not being realized.
What is required of man is that his image below should correspond to his image above, the image that is engraved on high. This is a very difficult, very demanding requirement, and even those who work on this with all their heart and soul, without stopping for even a moment — even they are asked, "Is this Israel, in whom I will be glorified?"

This matter depends neither on the luminaries of Israel nor on the tzaddikim of the generations, neither on our great sages nor on our national leaders. It depends on one man who, after years of spiritual work, steps outside for the first time. He begins to see how the whole world hangs in the balance over him, how all of existence hinges on him. Although, like the ladder in Jacob's dream, his feet stand on actual ground, perhaps even entrenched in the earth, his head reaches up toward heaven. There alone is the limit.

FOOTNOTES:

1. See Genesis 32:4 and Rashi's commentary there.

2. Genesis 32:11.

3. Genesis 32:29.

4. Genesis 33:4.

5. Sifrei, Numbers 69.

6. Genesis 27:41.

7. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 12:10

8. Genesis 32:29.

9. Isaiah 53:4.

10. I Samuel 22:8.

11. Numbers 12:12.

12. Genesis 28:12.

13. Isaiah 49:3.

14 Genesis Rabbah 68:12.

15. Berachot 6b.

16. Ecclesiastes 12:13.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4942513/jewish/When-Jacob-Discovered-that-He-Was-Israel.htm

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Vayeitzei: What is True Wealth?

An Insight from the Rebbe

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2021

The man [Jacob] thus became exceedingly prosperous (Genesis 30:43)

Aside from his material wealth, Jacob also attained true, spiritual wealth: he succeeded in raising all of his children to follow in the righteous ways of Abraham and Isaac, and did not produce a single wicked son (of the likes of Esau or Ishmael, who were born to his forbears Abraham and Isaac).

Jacob was able to do this because he synthesized the inspirational approach of Abraham and the self-disciplining approach of Isaac. By relating to G-d with simple sincerity, Jacob both transcended the differences between the opposite approaches of his forebears and was able to relate equally well to each of his children's different personalities. It was also because of his simple sincerity that Jacob was able to outwit the crafty, scheming Laban.

Jacob's example teaches us that while logic and reason have their place, the foundation of our relationship with G-d is simple, sincerity. This sincerity then enables us to relate effectively to others no matter how different they may be from us.

* — from *Daily Wisdom #1*

Gut Shabbos,

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Time for Love, Time for Justice

Judaism is supremely a religion of love: three loves.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deut. 6:5);

"You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Lev. 19:18);

And

"You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in a strange land." (Deut. 10:19) [1]

Not only is Judaism a religion of love. It was also the first civilisation to place love at the centre of the moral life. C. S. Lewis and others pointed out that all great civilisations contain something like the golden rule – Act toward others as you would wish them to act toward you,[2] or, in Hillel's negative formulation: Don't do to others what you would hate them to do to you. (Shabbat 31a) This is what Game Theorists call reciprocal altruism or tit-for-tat. Some form of this altruism, (especially the variant devised by Martin Nowak of Harvard called "generous") has been proven by computer simulation to be the best strategy for the survival of any group.[3]

Judaism is also about justice. Albert Einstein spoke about the "almost fanatical love of justice" that made him thank his lucky stars that he was born a Jew.[4] The only place in the Torah to explain why Abraham was chosen to be the founder of a new faith states, "For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." (Gen. 18:19) So why this combination of justice and love? Why is love alone not enough?

Our parsha contains a gripping passage of only a few words that gives us the answer. Recall the background: Jacob, fleeing home, is taking refuge with his uncle Laban. He falls in love with Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, and works for seven years so that he can marry her. A deception is practised on him, and when he wakes up the morning after their wedding night, he discovers that he has married Rachel's elder sister Leah. Livid, he confronts Laban. Laban replies: "It is not done in our place to marry the younger before the elder." (Gen. 29:26) He tells Jacob he can marry Rachel as well, in return for another seven years of work.

We then read, or rather hear, a series of very poignant words. To understand their impact, we have to recall that in ancient times until the invention of printing there were few books. Until then most people (other than those standing at the bimah) heard the Torah in the synagogue. They did not see it in print. The phrase Keriat ha-Torah really means, not reading the Torah but proclaiming it, making it a public declaration.[5]

There is a fundamental difference between reading and hearing in the way we process information. Reading, we can see the entire text – the sentence, the paragraph – at one time. Hearing, we cannot. We hear only one word at a time, and we do not know in advance how a sentence or paragraph will end. Some of the most powerful literary effects in an oral culture occur when the opening words of a sentence lead us to expect one ending and instead we encounter another.

These are the poignant words we hear:

"And he [Jacob] loved also Rachel." (Gen. 29:30)

This is what we expected and hoped for. Jacob now has two wives, sisters, something that will be forbidden in later Jewish law. It is a situation fraught with tension. But our first impression is that all will be well. He loves them both.

That expectation is dashed by the next word:

"mi-Leah", "more than Leah."

This is not merely unexpected. It is also grammatically impossible. You cannot have a sentence that says, "X also loved Y more than Z." The "also" and the "more than" contradict one another. This is one of those rare and powerful instances in which the Torah deliberately uses fractured syntax to indicate a fractured relationship.[6]

Then comes the next phrase and it is shocking.

"The Lord saw that Leah was hated." (Gen. 29:31)

Was Leah hated? No. The previous sentence has just told us she was loved. What then does the Torah mean by "hated"? It means, that is how Leah felt. Yes she was loved, but less than her sister. Leah knew, and had known for seven years, that Jacob was passionately in love with her younger sister Rachel, for whom the Torah says that he worked for seven years "but they seemed to him like a few days because he was so in love with her." (Gen. 29:20)

Leah was not hated. She was less loved. But someone in that situation cannot help but feel rejected. The Torah forces us to hear Leah's pain in the names she gives her children. Her first she calls Reuben, saying "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." The second she calls Shimon, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved." The third she called Levi, saying, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me." (Gen. 29:32-35) There is sustained anguish in these words.

We hear the same tone later when Reuben, Leah's firstborn, finds mandrakes in the field. Mandrakes were thought to have aphrodisiac properties, so he gives them to his mother hoping that this will draw his father to her. Rachel, who has been experiencing a different kind of pain, childlessness, sees the mandrakes and asks Leah for them. Leah then says: "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" (Gen. 30:15) The misery is palpable.

Note what has happened. It began with love. It has been about love throughout. Jacob loved Rachel. He loved her at first sight. There is no other love story quite like it in the Torah. Abraham and Sarah are already married by the time we first meet them. Isaac had his wife chosen for him by his father's servant. But Jacob loves. He is more emotional than the other patriarchs; that is the problem. Love unites but it also divides. It leaves the unloved, even the less-loved, feeling rejected, abandoned, forsaken, alone. That is why you cannot build a society, a community or even a family on love alone. There must be justice-as-fairness also.

If we look at the fifteen times the word "love," ahavah, is mentioned in the book of Genesis, we make an extraordinary discovery. Every time love is mentioned, it generates conflict. Isaac loved Esau but Rebecca loved Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, more than his other sons. From these came two of the most fateful sibling rivalries in Jewish history.

Yet even these pale into insignificance when we reflect on the first time the word love appears in the Torah, in the opening words of the trial of the Binding of Isaac: "Take now your son, your only one, the one you love…" (Gen. 22:2) Rashi, following Midrash (itself inspired by the obvious comparison between the Binding of Isaac and the book of Job), says that Satan, the accusing angel, said to God when Abraham made a feast to celebrate the weaning of his son: "You see, he loves his

child more than You." (Rashi to Genesis 22:1) That, according to the Midrash, was the reason for the trial, to show that Satan's accusation was untrue.

Judaism is a religion of love. It is so for profound theological reasons. In the world of myth, the gods were at worst hostile, at best indifferent to humankind. In contemporary atheism the universe and life exist for no reason whatsoever. We are accidents of matter, the result of blind chance and natural selection. Judaism's approach is the most beautiful I know. We are here because God created us in love and forgiveness, asking us to love and forgive others. Love, God's love, is implicit in our very being.

So many of our texts express that love: the paragraph before the Shema with its talk of "great" and "eternal love"; the Shema itself with its command of love; the priestly blessings to be uttered in love; Shir ha-Shirim, the Song of Songs, the great poem of love; Shlomo Albaketz's Lecha Dodi, "Come, my Beloved," Eliezer Azikri's Yedid Nefesh, "Beloved of the Soul." If you want to live well, love. If you seek to be close to God, love. If you want your home to be filled with the light of the Divine Presence, love. Love is where God lives.

But love is not enough. You cannot build a family, let alone a society, on love alone. For that you need justice also. Love is partial, justice is impartial. Love is particular, justice is universal. Love is for this person not that, but justice is for all. Much of the moral life is generated by this tension between love and justice. It is no accident that this is the theme of many of the narratives of Genesis. Genesis is about people and their relationships, while the rest of the Torah is predominantly about society.

Justice without love is harsh. Love without justice is unfair, or so it will seem to the less-loved. Yet to experience both at the same time is virtually impossible. Niels Bohr, the Nobel prize winning physicist, once discovered that his son had stolen an object from a local shop. He realised that he could have two separate reactions to the situation: he could view his son from the perspective of a judge (justice) or through his perspective as a father (love), but he could not do both simultaneously.[7]

At the heart of the moral life is a conflict with no simple resolution. There is no general rule to tell us when love is the right reaction and when justice is. In the 1960s the Beatles sang "All you need is love." Would that it were so, but it is not. Love is not enough. Let us love, but let us never forget those who feel unloved. They too are people. They too have feelings. They too are in the image of God.

[1] See also Leviticus 19:33-34.
[2] C. S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man, New York, 1947.
[3] See for example Martin Nowak and Roger Highfield, Super Cooperators: Altruism, Evolution and Mathematics (or, Why We Need Each Other to Succeed). Melbourne: Text, 2011.
[4] Albert Einstein, The World As I See It, New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.
[5] This has halachic implications. Keriat ha-Torah is, according to most Rishonim, a chovat ha-tsibbur, a communal rather than an individual obligation (unlike the reading of the Megillah on Purim).
[6] The classic example is the untranslatable verse in Gen. 4:8, in which Cain kills Abel. The breakdown of words expresses the breakdown of relationship, which leads to the breakdown of morality and the first murder.
[7] Jerome Bruner, Actual Minds, Possible Worlds (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 51.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And he dreamed, and behold 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. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed" (Gen. 28:12-13).

Dreams have a unique capacity to inspire us to aim higher, to remain focused on a distant goal even when the present circumstances give us little reason for optimism. But what happens when the gap between dream and reality seems insurmountably vast? Jacob's dreams throughout this week's Torah reading of Vayetze shine a bright light on this question, and offer important insights into his evolution as a person, as well as lessons about his descendants' mission in the world and destiny as a nation.

Jacob begins his journey from his father's home into exile with the loftiest of dreams: a ladder rooted in the ground while reaching up to the heavens with angels ascending and descending upon it. This visual symbolizes his and his descendants' Divine mandate: even in exile, to unify heaven and earth so that the Divine Presence can be manifest in the world.

Unfortunately, something goes awry along the way, as Jacob's long sojourn with his father-in-law Laban has a corrupting influence on him. In order to hold his own with his devious employer, Jacob perfects the art of deception, and in time, the bright nephew even out-Labans his clever uncle, becoming wealthy in his own right.

It must be said that Jacob has not completely forgotten the traditions of his youth, despite the distance from his parents' home: "'With Laban have I dwelt,' and the 613 commandments have I kept" (Rashi on Genesis 32:5) is what Jacob reports after the ordeal has passed. Although it may be true that, technically speaking, he has remained faithful to his roots, his focus of concentration has become the livestock on earth rather than the stars of the heavens.

Indeed, Laban has certainly corrupted his aspirations. Just look at his new dream after a period in Laban-land: "And I saw in a dream and behold, rams that leapt upon the sheep were speckled, spotted and striped" (ibid. 31:10). Jacob now dreams of material success devoid of any spiritual component.

It is upon coming to this spiritual nadir that he soon receives the life trajectory-changing command of the Divine messengers: "I have seen everything that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Beit El…now rise, leave this land and return to the land of your birthplace" (ibid. v. 13). In other words, leave the land of obsession with materialism. Return to the land – and to the dream – of your forefathers, who walked with God!

More than twenty years in the prime of one's life is a significant period. Jacob must have been devastated when he realized what had become of him and his dreams. He must have seen himself as an abject failure. He must have questioned whether he would ever succeed in achieving his original aspirations. He knows he must leave Laban before it is too late.

When he leaves Laban's home, with his large family in tow, he has a third dream, even more momentous than those that preceded it: "And Jacob went on his way and he was met there by angels of God…and he called the name of that place Mahanayim (Divine encampments of God's messengers)" (Genesis 32:2-3).

This dream, which concludes Parshat Vayetze, is a parallel to the one that opened the reading, with Jacob again meeting angels of God. This time, however, there is no ladder; but instead two distinct encampments, family compounds, one outside Israel and the other in Israel.

The message is dramatic: uniting heaven and earth requires more than ascending a spiritual ladder. It also requires making an impact on the world around us by building a family dedicated to God and Torah in the Land of Israel – and not to materialism in Laban's house of exile.

The fact that Jacob somehow manages to return to Israel – despite the inertia of habit and the comforts of his home in exile – is the reason, I believe, why he is called the 'chosen among the patriarchs' (Midrash Rabbah 76:1 on Genesis). Whereas Abraham obeys the Divine command to come to the land, and Isaac never leaves the land, Jacob returns to this land despite the sibling conflict that awaited him there.

Did Jacob's return to Israel mark the end of his difficulties and challenges? Certainly not. And so it is with his descendants. Disappointments and setbacks are inevitable, in a world still divided between the holy and the profane, the religious and the secular.

But if we keep our sights focused on preserving our Jewish heritage into future generations; if we wish to live a holistic Jewish life whose civic experience is guided by the Jewish calendar, and if our national dream is to create a society able to merge heaven and earth, then the only place where this can happen is in the land of our dreams and destiny, the Land of Israel. It is the land promised by God to Israel, the earth whose sacred gravestones below and whose dedicated mountain tops above are that very ladder which connects the human with the Divine, and the Jew to his eternal dream of a united world.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Inspiration Quickly Dissipates If One Delays Taking Concrete 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 Rochel did not have children. Following the path she saw from Sarah Imenu, Rochel gave her maidservant to her husband. At least Rochel 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, Rochel's maidservant, bore a second son to Yaakov." [Bereshis 30:7] The next pasuk explains the name Rochel gave to this son: "… Naftulei Elokim niftalti im acho-see, 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 acho-see, 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).

Rochel 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 Ribbono 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 Rochel 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!

Rochel 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!"

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Why isn't' there a parsha called 'Yaakov'? We have six parshiot named after people: Noach, Chayei Sara, Yitro, Korach, Balak and Pinchas. This week's parsha of Vayeitsei actually commences, "Vayeitsei Yaakov". Next week's will be, "Vayishlach Yaakov," and the one after will be, "Vayeishev Yaakov'". Here are three opportunities for a parsha to be called 'Yaakov' – yet instead, we opt for the verb that comes before his name?

In fact, these three parshiot form a group – Vayeitsei, Vayishlach, Vayeishev – and they teach us about the journey of life.

Vayeitsei – 'he departed from…' Vayishlach – 'He sent messengers to…' in order to discover what he would find when he arrived at his destination. And Vayeishev – 'He dwelled…' referring to the destination itself.

These three titles together present a powerful lesson about the journeys of our own lives. We shouldn't only depart from where we are and arrive at our destination. It's also important to prepare for where we're going and in doing so, derive meaning from the journey.

Yaakov himself did this towards the end of his life when he discovered that Yosef was still alive in Egypt. He took the family, 70 souls in all, on a journey there, and sent Yehudah ahead of the family to set up places of learning in Goshen, in Egypt, to guarantee that while away from home the Jewish people would remain true to our traditions and to Hashem.

In this context we can appreciate how important the lesson of Chazal is in Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, where we are taught,

"Know where you're coming from, where you're going to, and before Whom you shall be accountable."

Here we are being presented with the story of our lives from the moment we are born until the moment we pass away. We need to be preparing for the time when we will stand before our Creator, when our entire existence will be judged.

From the three sedras we're currently reading we should always remember: it's not just the vayeitsei and the vayeishev that count – where we're coming from and where we're going to – it's also the vayishlach, how we're conducting ourselves along the way.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Dreams In Normative Judaism

In this week's Parsha, Yaakov dreams about angels and ladders. This dream obviously has significance for Yaakov's life, and, according to Ramban and other commentaries, the future of the entire Jewish people. All dreams in the Torah have importance and meaning, for these were recorded for us, where others were not. Dreams are the key to Yosef's life and even non-Jews such as Avimelech and Pharoah have significant dreams. What about us? We all have has dreamed at one time or another and are curious about the meaning of the dreams. After many years of research, scientists are still not sure if dreams have the great significance that Freud claimed, little significance or no significance at all. What does Judaism believe? Do dreams today that we dream have meaning? Are the messages in dreams to be taken seriously by the Jew or not?

There are many Talmudic sources showing how all types of dreams have specific meanings. An entire chapter of a Talmudic tractate is filled with discussions on how to interpret each detail of every dream (The ninth chapter of the Babylonian tractate Berachot). For example, it states that three specific types of dreams which will occur in reality (Berachot 55b). When it says that dreams are one sixtieth of prophecy (Berachot 57b), it certainly means that dreams are to be taken seriously. Part of the Shema prayer that a Jew is recites before retiring at night, contains a blessing asking God to protect him or her from bad dreams (Hamapil prayer in the Siddur). On each Jewish festival, during the Priestly blessing, there is a custom to say a prayer that asks God to fulfill all the dreams that a person is unaware of, if they are good, and to convert bad dreams to good dreams. These and many other sources indicate that the Rabbis as well as the Torah attached significance to dreams, both in their Talmudic statements and the prayers they composed.

On the other hand, there are unambiguous statements in the Talmud stating that dreams are worthless and not to be taken seriously at all, indicating that there was absolutely no meaning attached to anyone's dream in the time of the Talmud as well as today (Horayot 13b and Gittin 52a). A third set of sources give some significance to dreams but modify their importance and impact. One statement says that not all the good in dreams are fulfilled totally but that not all bad dreams are fulfilled either (Berachot 55a). Rashi (commentary to Genesis 37:10) writes that every dream has some nonsense in it. Therefore, all three types of sources exist simultaneously: all dreams have significance, parts of dreams have significance, and no dream has significance. How are these major contradictions resolved? Which is the authentic Jewish approach?

If we turn to Halacha (Jewish law), we might be able to see if a dream can have impact on Jewish action or specific Jewish laws, and, hence, be significant; or if it will have no impact on Jewish law, and, hence, be meaningless. Here, too, we are met with contradiction. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 30a) records an incident in which a person's father died and the son could not find some missing money. The father then came to the son in a dream and told him where the missing money was, but then added that it was designated as Second Tithe money and had to be used in Jerusalem. The son woke up and found the money in the precise place the father had indicated. Must he now spend that money in Jerusalem according to Jewish law? The Talmud says no, indicating that although the dream gave accurate information, it is not legally significant and thus the money has no special status. In codifying this concept, the Shulchan Aruch (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 255:9) records this incident as final Jewish law and reaffirms the apparent concept implied in the story in the Talmud, in the dream about money: dreams have no authority in determining Jewish law, and, hence, have no real meaning or significance.

On the other hand, the same Code, (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 210:2), records another law that seems to draw an opposite conclusion. If a man dreamed that he made a certain oath, the Shulchan Aruch offers two opinions as to how a person should react to this dream. One opinion says that he should ignore such a dream and the

other opinion says he should go to a Jewish court to have the oath annulled by judges. Then the Shulchan Aruch states we should follow the second opinion and have the oath annulled. Apparently, we do give authority to dreams in Jewish law. How are this contradiction and our basic question to be resolved?

Many commentaries try to resolve the issue by dividing up the dreams into categories. One explanation makes sense and resolve the contradictions. The Responsum of one noted fifteenth century scholar of Majorca, known as the Tashbetz, (Responsa of Tashbetz, Part 2, no. 128) distinguishes between some dreams that have significance and some that do not. He then concludes that Samuel's statement in the Talmud about demons is not to be taken literally but refers to insignificant dreams. Then, he gives the Halachik (Jewish law) status of all dreams, stating that since we do not know if a particular dream has significance, there is doubt about its legal status. According to Jewish law, in a case of case of doubt, we can never take away money from one party to another (Pesachim 9a and many other places in the Talmud) since in monetary matters, we adopt the lenient view that leaves possessions in current ownership. Therefore, a dream cannot force the son to give back the money to the claimant. However, when it comes to laws of man to God, any case in doubt is ruled more stringently (since there is doubt). Therefore, in the case of vows (which is man to God issue), we take the stricter view and force the person to annul the vow. This, then, resolves the difficulty in the Code of Jewish law. Others disagree with this view of the Tashbetz and make the legal distinction differently.

Another opinion is that we always treat dreams as insignificant except in cases of danger, which are looked upon as even more stringent than Jewish law itself. (Chulin 10a). Only in the case that is categorized as potential danger, such as the case of vows, would a person give significance to dreams and annul the vow. This concept of potential danger may help explain two other areas of Jewish law that give weight to dreams, even if they seem very strange in the twenty first century context. If a person is bothered by a dream that he thinks has significance, he should perform a ritual of reciting certain verses in front of three of his closest friends, to nullify the impact of the dream (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 220:1.). Since this ruling is subjective and applies only to those who are bothered by a particular dream, we may say that for this person, he considers the dream to be potentially harmful and dangerous and should follow the ruling in the Shulchan Aruch of what he should do. In a similar kind of ruling, Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Taaniyot 1:12) concludes that if a person experiences a bad dream he should fast the following day, even if it is the Sabbath, and should try to examine his ways and repent. Here, too, one may use the underlying reason of potential danger as the concept that led to this ruling. Since it is, once again, subjective (what is a "bad dream" to one person may not be to another), the ruling may be based on idea of potential danger in the mind of the person.

In summary, although all dreams in the Torah had significance, today some dreams may have significance, and some may not. There is disagreement on what constitutes a dream of consequence and what the proper reaction is, but if a particular person is bothered by a particular dream, Judaism says he should act upon such a dream.

***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

What's in a Name?
by Rabbi Gad Krebs

When it comes to naming children, the Jewish tradition has followed one of two main strands in determining name selection.

Some name their newborn after someone; deceased for Ashkenazim and even alive for Sephardim. The custom serves to promulgate the memory of the relative, and hopefully instil within the child the positive character and traits of their relative.

In a similar vein, some choose the names borne by giants of Jewish history, whose contribution to the Torah, the Jewish people and the world, warrant them to serve as the role model for the infant.

The second common practice is to turn the name into a blessing. The name becomes a conjugation of words – combinations of nouns, verbs, prepositions and adjectives – that combine to become a word rooted in the parental hopes and expectations for the child. This model finds significant support throughout the Tanach, most notably in our parsha.

Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben; for she declared, "It means: 'The Lord has seen my affliction'; it also means: 'Now my husband will love me.'"

She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This is because the Lord heard that I was unloved and has given me this one also;" so she named him Simeon.

Again she conceived and bore a son and declared, "This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons." Therefore, he was named Levi.

Leah, on seeing the sons that she had birthed, prayed that her husband would finally give her the attention she so desperately desired.

Rachel followed a similar pattern: "So she named him Joseph, which is to say, 'May the Lord add another son for me.'"

That being said, when we take a broad look at names of people and places in Tanach, one cannot ascertain whether the original formulation of those names followed a similar logic as described above or perhaps they are actually adjectives, describing the person or place post-facto.

And he named him Noah, saying, "This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, out of the very soil which the LORD placed under a curse." (Bereishit 5:29)

Rashi explains "He will ease from off us (ינחמנו) the toil of our hands. For until Noah came people had no agricultural instruments and he prepared such for them. …"

This verse couldn't have been stated at Noah's birth, for it is only after his invention of agricultural instruments that his name was warranted. We must conclude that either Noah's original name, unknown to us, was replaced when he invented the plough; or alternatively the name Noah was a conscious prophecy of what he would one day accomplish.

"And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel" (Genesis 14:1). Rav and Shmuel, one said: Nimrod was his name. And why was his name called Amraphel? As he said [amar] and cast [hippil] our father Abraham into the fiery furnace. And one said: Amraphel was his name. And why was his name called Nimrod? Because he caused the entire world to rebel [himrid] against God during his reign." (Eruvim 53a)

The name Nimrod or Amraphel, each according to his interpretation, is a description of the man's deeds and personality. It was either a nickname that stuck post facto or alternatively his name became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"Rabbi Yochanan said, Why was her name Ruth? Because David came forth from her and he serenaded (שריוהו) Hashem with song and praise." (Baba Batra 14b)

So was her name Ruth or did she become known as Ruth?

The same is true with regard to places. Amalek came and fought with Israel at Refidim. (Shemot 17:8)

It was called Refidim because Bnei Yisrael were raf yadayim (loose) in asking if Hashem was amongst them. (See Ba'al Haturim, Kli Yakar)

The most obvious and striking example would have to be Moshe. What did Aharon and

Miriam call him? Considering that Pharoah's daughter gave him the name, did they use his birth name (Tov, Avidgdor, Yered etc.) or did they follow the Biblical convention?

The tag with which we might have identified certain people and places at their time, and the names that are used in Tanach, are not necessarily the same. Every name in Tanach, those of heroes and villains, people and places, are very possibly only descriptive qualities of their characters.

For what use is a name if it doesn't tell me something about the person who bears it?

What might I have actually called these people had I lived amongst them? Well, that isn't clear at all.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org
Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger
Energized by Faith and Awareness of the Divine

It is hard to imagine what impression is left on a modern mind when the Torah records Yaakov Avinu performing for a woman who has caught his eye and seems to assign it significance in his character development. That is why the description of Yaakov's ability to single handedly remove a boulder which required the efforts of a team of shepherds to move is puzzling. This leads the Ramban to explain that Torah is teaching us what is best formulated by Yeshayahu Hanovi as the capstone of his first prophecy of comfort to our nation in exile, (40:30-31) "ויעפו נערים ויגעו ובחורים כשול יכשלו: וקוי ה' יחליפו כח יעלו אבר כנשרים ירוצו ולא ייגעו ילכו ולא ייעפו" - "The young will become tired and the young men will certainly stumble. But those who trust in Hashem will renew their strength...they shall run and not grow weary, they will walk and not become tired." These are the words of chizuk, of encouragement, to a people, newly robbed of the Beis Hamikdosh, Yerushalayim, and of all that they represent, as they brace themselves for a long and uncharted diaspora.

Most appropriately, Ramban's explanation matches well with the very beginning of this parsha, "Vayiso Yaakov raglov, vayelech artzo bnei kedem" – "Yaakov lifted his feet; he went to the land of the Kedemites." Interestingly, both the medrash quoted by Rashi and the literal interpretation of the Rashbam see in this phrase a light step, or a bouncy gait, and evidence of a newly found contentment, and even happiness. Having received Hashem's promise that He would always watch over Yaakov and return him to his father's home, Yaakov moved forward with renewed vigor.

Indeed, the phrase "kovei Hashem" is very hard to translate. Thus, Ramban's comment is extremely instructive. For Yaakov was not told that his exile would be easy or free of fear or pain of all kinds, as it surely was not. He was simply told that Hashem would watch over him and ultimately deliver him home.

Apparently, this awareness that characterizes "kovei Hashem" brings boundless energy, new life and happiness. Loosely translated, Yeshayahu's words of comfort read: The awareness of Hashem's presence and His accessibility will invigorate and refresh (see Step Lively and Watch the Opening Doors where we briefly develop this idea.)

The importance of Yesahayahu's teaching is underscored as this passage was selected as the haftora of Parshas Lech lecha. As such, it becomes descriptive of Avrohom as well, and is part of the readings that Chazal assigned to us as we begin to probe the lives and values of the Avos and Imahos.

Yeshayahu's promise became even more instructive to me many years ago when I heard Rav Yosef Adler, Rav of Congregation Rinat Yisrael in Teaneck and Rosh Yeshiva of TABC, explain the intriguing completion of the pasuk, "those who run will not grow weary and those who walk will not tire". Shouldn't the order be reversed? Should we not be informed that bitachon gives strength to those who walk and even to those who exert themselves more so and run? Surely, if the runners are refreshed then it becomes redundant to tell us that even the walkers will manage well.

Rav Adler pointed out that Yeshayahu well understood that human nature often can find the excitement for the quick sprint but not for the long haul, not for the "slow and steady", not for the daily grind.

In our circumstance, "corona fatigue" or "mask fatigue" illustrates that many will accept inconvenience and annoyances for the short term but will balk and get worn down over time, even though the results validate our caution.

In similar fashion, Chazal, by appointing this passage to be read after Lech Lecha, remind us that the strength and commitment that brought Avrom to Nimrod's furnaces in Kasdim may not at all assure that there is a wellspring of faith to support Avrohom through his wanderings, exiles, famines, battles, and childlessness.

Ramban's interpretation instructs us to appreciate that even after the passionate dedication that helped Yaakov study non-stop for fourteen years, he may need to tap into different spiritual resources to grow as he begins his twenty-year stint in the close precincts of Lavan.

This insight certainly resonates with so many of us as we contrast our youthful years in yeshiva with the ensuing stages of life that often replace spiritual growth with spiritual complacency. It is validated by so many of us annually who feel a spiritual drop off as the winter sets in and Ellul and Tishrei fade away.

Nevertheless, Chazal and Ramban explain to us that indeed faith and awareness of Hashem's concern for us do provide the inspiration and the tenacity for the many challenges that the long haul presents, even as they did for Avrohom and Yaakov.

I further found that this life lesson of Avrohom and of Yaakov was brought close to home and given greater texture by the following vignette in the recently published biography of the spiritual powerhouse, Rav Noach Weinberg zt"l (by Yonasson Rosenblum, page 178.)

Fulfilling one of Hashem's commandments should fill a person with joy, Rav Noach taught. That joy can be measured by the amount of energy one feels. If you do a mitzvah and do not have more energy than you did before, you are performing the mitzvah incorrectly, he told Rabbi Alon Tolwin, who was then giving a Gemara shiur at Aish HaTorah. The latter felt he could not stay up all night with an infant daughter who cried nonstop and be alert enough to teach Talmud the next day. Rav Noach disagreed and told him the nighttime shift was his so his wife could get some rest. His advice: "So get some energy. Realize that your little daughter has no one in the world except you; that when you hold her, she feels the love of Hashem. That has to energize you. Do it until you are so energized you are unable to go back to sleep. Then you will have made a breakthrough".

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Just Like His Name

And G-d remembered Rachel, and G-d hearkened to her, and He opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and she said, "G-d has taken away my reproach." So she named him Joseph, saying, "May HASHEM grant me yet another son!" (Breishis 30:22-24)

As each of Yaakov's children were born the Holy Torah takes the time to tell us their names and the reason for those names. There's a whole lot of naming going on. What's in a name? Plenty! A name describes a person's potential. A parent therefore is imbued with a touch of prophecy when giving their child a name.

I can tell a host of stories regarding the naming of each of my children. I will share one here now. My wife and I had already been blessed with three wonderful boys and she was expecting a 4th. It was Erev Shabbos – Tisha B'Av 28 years ago. The day that was to be the most austere and serious day of the year was being displaced with the splendor of Shabbos this year.

We were readying for that Holy occasion when my wife started to feel pangs, birth pangs. They were getting more intense and frequent. We quickly distributed the boys to kindly

neighbors and made our way to the hospital to be there before Shabbos!

At 8:17 that summer evening my wife gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Moments later we were sitting together in the hospital room singing Shalom Aleichem and Eishes Chayal, making Kiddush and enjoying the food we had brought along. It was surreal and serene.

We began to discuss names. We floated names that would be relevant to Tisha B'Av like, Menachem, or Nechamia. Neither of us had any clear preference. After the meal, my wife needed to rest and I started on a five mile trek back home.

All along the way I was mixing and matching names in my mind. I just couldn't shake this one name. Simcha Zissel! Every name somehow got connected to and mixed in with Simcha Zissel.

Three and a half miles along I found myself passing by my Rebbe's house. I knocked on the door. They had just finished their Seudah. He was surprised to see me. He asked me what had brought me there at this hour. I told him the good news that my wife and I just had a baby boy. He wished a hearty Mazel Tov and asked, "When was the baby born!" I told him with pride, "Moshiach is born on Tisha B'Av!" He asked again, "What time was the baby born?" I said, "8:17" (That was twilight time – no longer day and not quite night). He told me that he'll put on his Tefillin the 8th B'Av L'Chumra – to be strict.

I felt the air being taken out of my admittedly over inflated ego. He felt it too and he told me right away that the 8th day of Av is an auspicious day as well. I asked him what is so special about that day. He said, it's the Alter from Kelm's Yurtzeit. I said, "You mean Simcha Zissel!?" He acknowledged, "Yes!" I told him that I could not shake that name the whole way here!

The next day right after Shabbos I went to visit my wife in the hospital and I told her about the entire amazing dialogue. "So we have a name, Simcha Zissel!" My wife objected. "Simcha is often a girl's name and Zissel is more often a girl's name. I'm not naming my son with two girl's names!" So I went back to my Rebbe and the suggestion was made, that since I was working for Ohr Somayach which was named for Meir Simcha from Devinsk, who had no surviving descendants, perhaps we could combine the names together. My wife agreed and was delighted, and now this Meir Simcha Zissel has been generating a sweet and joyous light ever since, just like his name.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

"If You Give Me Bread to Eat and Clothing to Wear" - Harav Yehuda Amital, z"l

Ya'akov dreamt a dream, and behold, there was a ladder that was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky; and angels of God were going up and down on it. (Bereishit 28:12) The Midrash Tanchuma (Parashat Vayetze, 2) cites the view of Rabbi Berekhya in the name of Rabbi Chelbo and Rabbi Shimon ben Yosina that God showed Ya'akov the rise and fall of the empires of Bavel (Babylonia), Maddai (Medea), Yavan (Greece) and Edom (Rome). He then asked Ya'akov why he was not also ascending. The Midrash explains that Ya'akov was afraid that he too would fall, asking, "Will I fall just as the others did?" God answered him, "If you ascend, you will not fall." Nevertheless, he refused to ascend.

God offered Ya'akov the opportunity to become a superpower, like the four empires described in the dream. But when Ya'akov understood that those who rise to great political heights eventually fall, he was apprehensive, and therefore preferred not to rise.

Furthermore, when Ya'akov makes a vow to God the next morning, he does not ask for political dominance or even prominence. What is his request? "If God gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear…" (20). His request is most humble; he asks only for his physical sustenance, and does not seek sovereignty.

When Lavan tricks Ya'akov by switching Leah for Rachel, Ya'akov complains to Lavan, "Why did you deceive me?" Lavan responds, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older" (29:25-26). Whether or not Lavan was aware of what Ya'akov had done, the Torah clearly is aware of it. Ya'akov pays a price for his actions regarding the attainment of the birthright. Rivka took the steps she felt were necessary for the achievement of the blessing, but it turned out that the blessing in question was not the "blessing of Avraham," the transmission of Avraham's special heritage. That special blessing was given by Yitzchak to Ya'akov on a different occasion, at the end of last week's parasha (28:3-4). Rather, the blessing Ya'akov received while masquerading as Esav, "May God give you of the dew of heaven…" (27:28-29), was a blessing of physical prosperity and sovereignty.

In the end, Esav too received a blessing of physical prosperity, although he was not blessed with sovereignty over his brother, as this cannot be given to both. The Seforno explains (27:29, s.v. hevei gevir) that Yitzchak intended to give Esav the blessing of sovereignty, for he felt it was better for Ya'akov not to be burdened with the responsibility of running a sovereign state, fighting wars, etc. Furthermore, Yitzchak felt that it would be better for Ya'akov to be subject to his brother rather than to a foreign power. However, the promise of the land of Israel and the special heritage of Avraham were meant all along for Ya'akov, and as such were not included in the blessing he intended to give to Esav (and mistakenly gave to Ya'akov).

Despite the events of last week's parasha, we see from the episode of the dream and the oath that Ya'akov was not interested in building a world power, or even in political control. He is asked by God to ascend the ladder to political greatness, but he refuses. He prefers to ask God for bread and clothing, simple physical sustenance. In fact, Rashi (32:5 s.v, garti) points out that we never find that the blessing he stole from Esav - "Be master of your brothers" (27:29) – was fulfilled during Ya'akov's lifetime. Rather, the Midrash (Bereishit Rabba 78:14) explains, this goal will be attained at the end of days, with the fulfillment of the prophecy of Ovadya, "And liberators shall ascend Mount Zion to judge Mount Esav, and dominion shall be God's" (verse 21). *[This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Vayetze 5763 (2002). Adapted by Dov Karoll]*

Weekly Parsha VAYETZEI 5782
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In a few weeks, we will read in the Torah that the brothers of Joseph referred to him almost derisively as being the master of dreams. Yet we see in this week's reading that it is our father Jacob who is really the master of dreams.

Two of Yaakov's major dreams are recorded for us, and it is obvious from the story of his life that Yaakov is constantly guided and influenced by the dreams that he dreamt when he left the home of his parents and journeyed to an alien society.

Dreams are one of the most provocative and mysterious events that occur to human beings. They come to us on almost a daily or nightly basis. Early psychiatry held that dreams would be key to understanding human personality and reflect the emotional and mental stresses that exist in human life. The correct interpretation of dreams, according to this theory, help solve mental health disorders or, at the very least, help to diagnose them, so that perhaps they might be treated.

The Talmud teaches us that those dreams have the quality of being a minor type of prophecy. There is an entire chapter in the Talmud devoted to explanations and interpretations of dreams. The Torah itself teaches us that prophecy itself, except for the prophecy of Moshe, was always communicated through the medium of the subconscious and dreams.

Appreciating all of this will help us understand the story of Jacob and his survival in the house of Lavan. What is the secret of the strengths that Yaakov exhibits in being able to resist the culture of Aram and the influence of the house of Lavan? Jacob never forgets the dream of the ladder stretching from earth to heaven, of the angels, and of the message of God himself reassuring him of his protection and survival.

Dreams often become reality to the dreamer. And when they do, a great new force of self-confidence is given to the dreamer. There are dreams that we immediately forget upon awakening in the morning, and there are some dreams that remain with us, but they also usually are of limited influence, and after a length of time, they also disappear. It is only a great dream, perhaps even one that has frightening aspects to it, that remains embedded in our memory and consciousness. And it is this type of the dream that influences our behavior and drives us forward in our lives. This dream encompasses our ambitions, our energy, our creativity, and our direction in life. It becomes the source of our hopes, and the source of our disappointments, as well as our achievements and our shortcomings.

Our father Jacob is really the great dreamer of the family, who keeps the tradition of the Jewish people. He never seeks to escape his dream, but rather, devotes his entire life and being toward its realization and actualization.

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayetze (Genesis 28:10-32:3)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And he dreamed, and behold 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. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed" (Gen. 28:12-13).

Dreams have a unique capacity to inspire us to aim higher, to remain focused on a distant goal even when the present circumstances give us little reason for optimism. But what happens when the gap between dream and reality seems insurmountably vast? Jacob's dreams throughout this week's Torah reading of Vayetze shine a bright light on this question, and offer important insights into his evolution as a person, as well as lessons about his descendants' mission in the world and destiny as a nation.

Jacob begins his journey from his father's home into exile with the loftiest of dreams: a ladder rooted in the ground while reaching up to the heavens with angels ascending and descending upon it. This visual symbolizes his and his descendants' Divine mandate: even in exile, to unify heaven and earth so that the Divine Presence can be manifest in the world.

Unfortunately, something goes awry along the way, as Jacob's long sojourn with his father-in-law Laban has a corrupting influence on him. In order to hold his own with his devious employer, Jacob perfects the art of deception, and in time, the bright nephew even out-Labans his clever uncle, becoming wealthy in his own right.

It must be said that Jacob has not completely forgotten the traditions of his youth, despite the distance from his parents' home: "'With Laban have I dwelt,' and the 613 commandments have I kept" (Rashi on Genesis 32:5) is what Jacob reports after the ordeal has passed. Although it may be true that, technically speaking, he has remained faithful to his roots, his focus of concentration has become the livestock on earth rather than the stars of the heavens.

Indeed, Laban has certainly corrupted his aspirations. Just look at his new dream after a period in Laban-land: "And I saw in a dream and behold, rams that leapt upon the sheep were speckled, spotted and striped" (ibid. 31:10). Jacob now dreams of material success devoid of any spiritual component.

It is upon coming to this spiritual nadir that he soon receives the life trajectory-changing command of the Divine messengers: "I have seen everything that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Beit El…now rise, leave this land and return to the land of your birthplace" (ibid. v. 13). In other words, leave the land of obsession with materialism. Return to the land – and to the dream – of your forefathers, who walked with God!

More than twenty years in the prime of one's life is a significant period. Jacob must have been devastated when he realized what had become of him and his dreams. He must have seen himself as an abject failure. He must have questioned whether he would ever succeed in achieving his original aspirations. He knows he must leave Laban before it is too late.

When he leaves Laban's home, with his large family in tow, he has a third dream, even more momentous than those that preceded it: "And Jacob went on his way and he was met there by angels of God…and he called the name of that place Mahanayim (Divine encampments of God's messengers)" (Genesis 32:2-3).

This dream, which concludes Parshat Vayetze, is a parallel to the one that opened the reading, with Jacob again meeting angels of God. This time, however, there is no ladder; but instead two distinct encampments, family compounds, one outside Israel and the other in Israel.

The message is dramatic: uniting heaven and earth requires more than ascending a spiritual ladder. It also requires making an impact on the world around us by building a family dedicated to God and Torah in the Land of Israel – and not to materialism in Laban's house of exile.

The fact that Jacob somehow manages to return to Israel – despite the inertia of habit and the comforts of his home in exile – is the reason, I believe, why he is called the 'chosen among the patriarchs' (Midrash Rabbah 76:1 on Genesis). Whereas Abraham obeys the Divine command to come to the land, and Isaac never leaves the land, Jacob returns to this land despite the sibling conflict that awaited him there.

Did Jacob's return to Israel mark the end of his difficulties and challenges? Certainly not. And so it is with his descendants. Disappointments and setbacks are inevitable, in a world still divided between the holy and the profane, the religious and the secular.

But if we keep our sights focused on preserving our Jewish heritage into future generations; if we wish to live a holistic Jewish life whose civic experience is guided by the Jewish calendar, and if our national dream is to create a society able to merge heaven and earth, then the only place

where this can happen is in the land of our dreams and destiny, the Land of Israel. It is the land promised by God to Israel, the earth whose sacred gravestones below and whose dedicated mountain tops above are that very ladder which connects the human with the Divine, and the Jew to his eternal dream of a united world.
Shabbat Shalom!

Time for Love, Time for Justice (Vayetse)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Judaism is supremely a religion of love: three loves.
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deut. 6:5);
"You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Lev. 19:18);
And
"You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in a strange land." (Deut. 10:19)[1]
Not only is Judaism a religion of love. It was also the first civilisation to place love at the centre of the moral life. C. S. Lewis and others pointed out that all great civilisations contain something like the golden rule – Act toward others as you would wish them to act toward you,[2] or, in Hillel's negative formulation: Don't do to others what you would hate them to do to you. (Shabbat 31a) This is what Game Theorists call reciprocal altruism or tit-for-tat. Some form of this altruism, (especially the variant devised by Martin Nowak of Harvard called "generous") has been proven by computer simulation to be the best strategy for the survival of any group.[3]
Judaism is also about justice. Albert Einstein spoke about the "almost fanatical love of justice" that made him thank his lucky stars that he was born a Jew.[4] The only place in the Torah to explain why Abraham was chosen to be the founder of a new faith states, "For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." (Gen. 18:19) So why this combination of justice and love? Why is love alone not enough?
Our parsha contains a gripping passage of only a few words that gives us the answer. Recall the background: Jacob, fleeing home, is taking refuge with his uncle Laban. He falls in love with Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, and works for seven years so that he can marry her. A deception is practised on him, and when he wakes up the morning after their wedding night, he discovers that he has married Rachel's elder sister Leah. Livid, he confronts Laban. Laban replies: "It is not done in our place to marry the younger before the elder." (Gen. 29:26) He tells Jacob he can marry Rachel as well, in return for another seven years of work.
We then read, or rather hear, a series of very poignant words. To understand their impact, we have to recall that in ancient times until the invention of printing there were few books. Until then most people (other than those standing at the bimah) heard the Torah in the synagogue. They did not see it in print. The phrase Keriat ha-Torah really means, not reading the Torah but proclaiming it, making it a public declaration.[5]
There is a fundamental difference between reading and hearing in the way we process information. Reading, we can see the entire text – the sentence, the paragraph – at one time. Hearing, we cannot. We hear only one word at a time, and we do not know in advance how a sentence or paragraph will end. Some of the most powerful literary effects in an oral culture occur when the opening words of a sentence lead us to expect one ending and instead we encounter another.
These are the poignant words we hear:
"And he [Jacob] loved also Rachel." (Gen. 29:30)
This is what we expected and hoped for. Jacob now has two wives, sisters, something that will be forbidden in later Jewish law. It is a situation fraught with tension. But our first impression is that all will be well. He loves them both.
That expectation is dashed by the next word:
"mi-Leah", "more than Leah."
This is not merely unexpected. It is also grammatically impossible. You cannot have a sentence that says, "X also loved Y more than Z." The "also" and the "more than" contradict one another. This is one of those rare and powerful instances in which the Torah deliberately uses fractured syntax to indicate a fractured relationship.[6]
Then comes the next phrase and it is shocking.
"The Lord saw that Leah was hated." (Gen. 29:31)
Was Leah hated? No. The previous sentence has just told us she was loved. What then does the Torah mean by "hated"? It means, that is how Leah felt. Yes she was loved, but less than her sister. Leah knew, and had known for seven years, that Jacob was passionately in love with her younger sister Rachel, for whom the Torah says that he worked for seven years "but they seemed to him like a few days because he was so in love with her." (Gen. 29:20)
Leah was not hated. She was less loved. But someone in that situation cannot help but feel rejected. The Torah forces us to hear Leah's pain in the names she gives her children. Her first she calls Reuben, saying "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." The second she calls Shimon, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved." The third she called Levi, saying, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me." (Gen. 29:32-35) There is sustained anguish in these words.
We hear the same tone later when Reuben, Leah's firstborn, finds mandrakes in the field. Mandrakes were thought to have aphrodisiac properties, so he gives them to his mother hoping that this will draw his father to her. Rachel, who has been experiencing a different kind of pain, childlessness, sees the mandrakes and asks Leah for them. Leah then says: "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" (Gen. 30:15) The misery is palpable.
Note what has happened. It began with love. It has been about love throughout. Jacob loved Rachel. He loved her at first sight. There is no other love story quite like it in the Torah. Abraham and Sarah are already married by the time we first meet them. Isaac had his wife chosen for him by his father's servant. But Jacob loves. He is more emotional than the other patriarchs; that is the problem. Love unites but it also divides. It leaves the unloved, even the less-loved, feeling rejected, abandoned, forsaken, alone. That is why you cannot build a society, a community or even a family on love alone. There must be justice-as-fairness also.
If we look at the fifteen times the word "love," ahavah, is mentioned in the book of Genesis, we make an extraordinary discovery. Every time love is mentioned, it generates conflict. Isaac loved Esau but Rebecca loved Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, more than his other sons. From these came two of the most fateful sibling rivalries in Jewish history.
Yet even these pale into insignificance when we reflect on the first time the word love appears in the Torah, in the opening words of the trial of the Binding of Isaac: "Take now your son, your only one, the one you love…" (Gen. 22:2) Rashi, following Midrash (itself inspired by the obvious comparison between the Binding of Isaac and the book of Job), says that Satan, the accusing angel, said to God when Abraham made a feast to celebrate the weaning of his son: "You see, he loves his child more than You." (Rashi to Genesis 22:1) That, according to the Midrash, was the reason for the trial, to show that Satan's accusation was untrue.
Judaism is a religion of love. It is so for profound theological reasons. In the world of myth, the gods were at worst hostile, at best indifferent to humankind. In contemporary atheism the universe and life exist for no reason whatsoever. We are accidents of matter, the result of blind chance and natural selection. Judaism's approach is the most beautiful I know. We are here because God created us in love and forgiveness, asking us to love and forgive others. Love, God's love, is implicit in our very being.
So many of our texts express that love: the paragraph before the Shema with its talk of "great" and "eternal love"; the Shema itself with its command of love; the priestly blessings to be uttered in love; Shir ha-Shirim, the Song of Songs, the great poem of love; Shlomo Albaketz's Lecha Dodi, "Come, my Beloved," Eliezer Azikri's Yedid Nefesh,

"Beloved of the Soul." If you want to live well, love. If you seek to be close to God, love. If you want your home to be filled with the light of the Divine Presence, love. Love is where God lives.

But love is not enough. You cannot build a family, let alone a society, on love alone. For that you need justice also. Love is partial, justice is impartial. Love is particular, justice is universal. Love is for this person not that, but justice is for all. Much of the moral life is generated by this tension between love and justice. It is no accident that this is the theme of many of the narratives of Genesis. Genesis is about people and their relationships, while the rest of the Torah is predominantly about society.

Justice without love is harsh. Love without justice is unfair, or so it will seem to the less-loved. Yet to experience both at the same time is virtually impossible. Niels Bohr, the Nobel prize winning physicist, once discovered that his son had stolen an object from a local shop. He realised that he could have two separate reactions to the situation: he could view his son from the perspective of a judge (justice) or through his perspective as a father (love), but he could not do both simultaneously.[7]

At the heart of the moral life is a conflict with no simple resolution. There is no general rule to tell us when love is the right reaction and when justice is. In the 1960s the Beatles sang "All you need is love." Would that it were so, but it is not. Love is not enough. Let us love, but let us never forget those who feel unloved. They too are people. They too have feelings. They too are in the image of God.

Toldot 5782

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

WHAT IF….

A: FAREWELL TO OUR HOLY MOTHER SARAH

Last week's parasha can be characterized as "the changing of the guard". From the generation of the founders to the generation of the successors. Our father Avraham passes away at the age of 175, and our mother Sarah at 127.

The Parasha Chaya Sarah begins:

ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים שני חיי שרה:

And the life of Sarah extended for one hundred and twenty and seven years; the years of the life of Sarah

Rashi explains the closing phrase: "… the years of the life of Sarah comes to equate all of her years which were "good".

Is this an accurate assessment of Sarah's life, that they were all good years? Didn't Sarah suffer the indignity of being abducted twice, once by Paro then by Avimelech the Philistine? Didn't she suffer years of barrenness, giving birth only at the age of 90? Didn't she accompany her husband Avraham when they left their regional settings, birthplace and immediate family?

But the point of this phrase is to inform us that Sarah, the little girl born to a family of idol worshippers, with all that it implies, at 127 years old looked back over all her years and understood that every one was essential in contributing to turning the little girl called Sarei (her name before being changed by Hashem to Sarah) into the illustrious matriarch of Am Yisrael.

Today, November 1st, my wife and I are celebrating 62 years of marriage. Two kids, a boy from Brooklyn and a good Jewish girl from the West Side of Manhattan, who one day in 1962 found themselves in a little wooden shack in Moshav Nechalim, a kilometer away from the Jordanian border.

We were the victims of our simplistic, superficial, minimalistic Torah education in New York, where a little Judaism is good but not too much. What did we know about the backgrounds of the Jews we were now living with; the sufferings of the Shoah survivors, and the Jews from the Melachs (ghettos) of Arab lands. What did we know of Golani, paratroopers, basic training, annual reserve duty, Palmach, Shmitta year, etc.? Of going to the local grocer to buy a half loaf of bread because that's what most of the people on the moshav could afford.

When growing up in a Brooklyn Italian and Irish Catholic neighborhood, I knew that they and the other billion or so Christians hated me. But now suddenly, we have another billion Moslems who consider my wife and me to be the enemy. I recall our first day of aliya in my Aunt Shoshana's home in Ramat Gan. I turned on the radio to hear some pure Ivrit, but wherever I turned the dial I heard Arabic. It finally dawned upon me how surrounded we were.

From the first moment we alighted from the great eagle that flew us home I realized that I was now a part of the 3500 years of my people's history; and from now on I would be taking my position "holding up the stretcher" of my people.

In her last day in this world, our mother Sarah reviewed her former life in Ur Kasdim devoid of HaShem and kedusha to her present status as matriarch of HaShem's chosen people. She closed her eyes and after reciting "Shema Yisrael" uttered one word to HaShem – "TODA".

When my time will come, I will look back to see from where I came and where HaShem had taken our family. I too will say "Shema Yisrael" and utter one word to my Creator – "TODA"!

B: GLOBAL WARMING

The present international conference in Glasgow Scotland (COP26) has been portrayed as "the world's last best chance to address the climate crisis".

Indeed, the globe is warming at a dangerous rate with climate disasters occurring more frequently all over the globe.

The conference has been called to seek remedies to prevent the ominous global disaster which would affect every human being.

If I was invited to address this august body of world leaders, I would say the following:

In Tractate Avoda Zara 3a, the Gemara states that in the future the gentile nations will be jealous of the reward that will be given to the Jewish people. HaShem will explain that the Jews earned that reward through their fulfillment of the Torah, even under the most horrific and inhuman conditions. All the same, HaShem will give the nations an opportunity to fulfill an "easy" mitzvah through which they will be tested; the mitzva of succa.

The nations will hasten to build succot on their rooftops. HaShem will then unleash the most intense sun's rays, and the globe will become very hot. After the nations receive permission to abandon their succot (in accordance with the principle that "one who suffers from residing in a succa is exempt from the mitzva"), they will kick down their succot and flee for their lives from the heat. Am Yisrael too, will leave their succot, but with great pain over their inability to fulfill the mitzvah.

Through this allegory, our sages aptly reveal how the world will look in the future.

At the end of the Second World War, the United Nations was established on the ruins of the "League of Nations", which had been established after the First World War.

The U.N. is the aforementioned "easy mitzvah", because a succah is defined as a "temporary home", and the U.N. delegates from all over the world reside temporarily in New York rather than in their permanent homes.

HaShem's "unleashing the sun" is a metaphor for the moral dilemmas facing the members of the U.N., first and foremost from the Iranian threat to annihilate the State of Israel, as well as worldwide anti-Semitism. The U.N. has not employed any means of punishing Iran, because when all is said and done, it is only Israel whom Iran threatens. The U.N.'s delegates continue to fail the "easy mitzvah" test, and we can begin the countdown on this evil organization's demise and the nations which comprise it.

But this is not just a metaphor. It is a prediction of what is awaiting humanity if they continue to renege on their moral responsibility, first and foremost with regard to HaShem's chosen nation.

Whatever the nations will decide at the conference will not change the dire fate that "nature" is imposing upon humanity. The only salvation for humanity is to renew its obligations and moral commitments of truth and acceptance that we are the Creator's chosen people.

C: WHAT IF….

Let's play "what if":

What if Paro would have submitted to Moshe's demands to permit the Jews three days of prayer plus one day of rest every week (Shabbat). Would the Jews still have insisted on leaving Egypt for the ominous, fierce desert or would they have rejected Moshe's plan?
What if the Meraglim (scouts) would have returned with a positive report and the Jews would have entered Eretz Yisrael in the second year of the exodus. Who would teach them all the details of the Torah, because HaShem in no way would permit Moshe to enter the land?
What if at the very harsh decision handed down by Shlomo HaMelech to cut the infant whose parentage was in question, the mother would not have urged Shlomo to give the baby to the other woman, would Shlomo have ordered severing of the baby?
Let's go a little further:
What if Medinat Yisrael would have been established 100 years earlier in 1848, and not 1948, when the greatest rabbis would have led the nation. Would there have been a Shoah?
What if Ben Gurion would not have agreed to the Chazon Ish's request to exempt all the yeshiva students from army service, where would the yeshiva world be today? But Ben Gurion did agree, so, in fact, the Torah kingdom we have today is the result of a decision taken by a man who was very far from Torah.
What if one or two of the recognized Torah leaders of American Jewry at the time of the establishment of the Medina would have called out to all Jews to make aliya, how would the Medina look today
What if all the thousands of shelichim of Chabad would have concentrated their efforts on influencing the Jews in Eretz Yisrael rather than being the world's biggest kosher caterers, how would our life be today?
But since all these "what ifs" did not occur, it is obvious that HaShem who directs all human actions yet retains His invisibility, did not want them to happen.
So, we must struggle on.
Shabbat Shalom
Nachman Kahana

Insights Parshas Vayeitzei .. Kislev 5782
Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig
This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of memory of Malka bas Yosef, Malka Levine. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

Night and Day
And Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan. He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set […] (28:10-11).
This week's parsha opens with Yaakov Avinu traveling to Charan to find a wife, following the behest of his parents Yitzchak and Rifkah. The Torah relates how he passed by the future home of the Beis Hamikdosh on Mount Moriah (see Rashi ad loc). According to Rashi, Yaakov felt it would be inappropriate to pass up the opportunity to pray at the same place his father and grandfather had prayed. Therefore, he returned to the place and instituted the evening prayer known as ma'ariv (see Rashi 28:17 and 28:11).
Chazal teach us that the three prayer services (shacharis, mincha, and ma'ariv) were established by the three forefathers: Avraham Avinu instituted shacharis, Yitzchak Avinu instituted mincha, and Yaakov Avinu instituted ma'ariv.
Yet this seems a little odd. We know that every day begins with the onset of the prior evening. That is, Monday begins at sunset on Sunday. Thus, the first prayer that we pray each day is ma'ariv. Wouldn't it be more logical for Avraham, being the first of the forefathers, to have instituted the first prayer service of ma'ariv? Why is it that Avraham instituted shacharis, the second prayer service, instead?
People often look at prayers solely as something that we do out of an obligation towards the Almighty. In other words, Hashem created man and prayers are what we do for him. While it is true that davening has a component of devotional service, the first time the Torah refers to the purpose of prayer it is in an entirely different context.
We find regarding the creation of the world: "These are the products of the heavens and earth when they were created on the day of Hashem's, God's, making of the earth and heavens. At this time there was no tree yet on earth and no herb of the field had yet sprouted for Hashem had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil" (2:4-5). Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem did not make it rain until man arrived and recognized what the world was lacking and he prayed for rain. At that point, everything began to grow. Hence, man's participation is required to make this world operate as it should.
From here, we find a critical aspect of man's responsibility in the world: as a partner to Hashem in creating a functional world. Prior to Adam's sin, man's contribution to the world was through his relationship to the Almighty and expressed through davening. This is how man fulfilled his responsibility to build and accomplish. Thus, we see that a very basic component of davening is an expression of what we contribute to the world as Hashem's partner.
There are two distinct components to every twenty-four hour period: day and night. They are not merely differentiated by whether or not the sun is above or below the horizon. Rather, they have completely different functions. Daytime is the period in which mankind goes out and contributes to the functionality of the world, while nighttime is the period when man feels connected to it.
In Hebrew, the word "yom – day" is masculine and "leila – night" is feminine. Day is the time for people to do and night is the time to connect. This also explains why when a woman tries to express an issue to a man he focuses on trying to solve it (the do/give aspect) even though she really just wants him to listen (the connect aspect).
Avraham Avinu is the av of chessed – which is the attribute emblematic of giving. This is why he was the proper forefather to institute shacharis, the daytime service that defines all prayers. This is also why every regular siddur (as opposed to a Machzor, etc.) begins with shacharis and not ma'ariv.
Family Not Friends
And it was when Lavan heard the news that Yaakov, his sister's son [had arrived], he ran toward him and he embraced and kissed him and brought him to his house […] Lavan said to him, "But you are my flesh and bone," and he stayed with him a month of days (29:13-14).
In this week's parsha we find a remarkable, if not outright shocking, distinction between when Eliezer the servant of Avraham Avinu went to visit Charan and the events that unfolded when Yaakov visited Charan.
When Eliezer arrived in Charan, charged with a mission to find a wife for Yitzchak, he was greeted by Lavan who made an extraordinary statement: "Come, O' blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside when I have cleared the house and a place for the camels?" (24:31).
Rashi (ad loc) explains that in saying he "cleared the house" Lavan was informing Eliezer that he had cleared out all the idols from the house. Meaning, Lavan knew that any servant of Avraham would find it abhorrent and downright repugnant to accept lodging in a home filled with idols.
Yet somehow, Yaakov, the greatest of our forefathers and grandson of Avraham, had no objection to staying in Lavan's home, which we know was replete with idols (Rachel takes some when they beat a hasty escape some twenty years later).

How is it possible that Yaakov was agreeable to staying in such a home? Perhaps even more peculiar, what was so obvious to Lavan that he knew that he had to clear out the house for Eliezer but not for Yaakov?
The difference between these stories is also relevant to our generation and the challenges that many families currently face.
A person who is shomer shabbos should feel very uncomfortable in a non-shabbos environment, such as being in a room where many people are watching television or talking on their telephones. Therefore, one should try to do whatever can be done to avoid those types of situations.

But one of the outcomes of the Bal Teshuvah movement is that these newly observant Jews are now thrust into family situations where many or even most of their nuclear families do not keep shabbos or kosher. Consequently, their homes on shabbos exude very little of a true shabbos atmosphere. What are they to do? Should they return to their parents' house for a simcha such as a nephew's bar mitzvah even though their shabbos atmosphere would clearly be adversely affected?

The answer is a resounding yes. When it comes to family we must avoid breaking any Torah or Rabbinic laws, but we must also do everything in our power to maintain a close family relationship, even if participation makes us uncomfortable. This is because a connection to one's family is paramount to one's wellbeing.

This is the difference between the two stories. Eliezer is merely a servant seeking a wife for his master's son; he has no familial responsibility to stay connected to Lavan and his family. On the other hand, Yaakov was arriving in his uncle's home and hoping to marry one of his cousins. His obligations to tolerate being uncomfortable far exceeded that of Eliezer. This was obvious to Lavan who knew that Yaakov was hoping to become his son-in-law. This is why he felt no obligation to remove the idols from his home.

Did You Know...

In honor of Levi's birth in this week's parsha, we thought it appropriate to mention the following amazing discovery that is unfortunately not well known. This is based on an article written by Rabbi Edward Davis of Young Israel of Hollywood, Florida.

BIRKAS KOHANIM WRITTEN IN SILVER… An archeological discovery in 1979 revealed the pesukim of Birkas Kohanim (Bamidbar 6:24-26) in what appears to be the earliest biblical passage ever found in ancient artifacts. Two tiny strips of silver, each wound tightly like a miniature scroll, bearing the inscribed words, were uncovered in a tomb outside of Jerusalem and dated from the 7th century BCE – easily 400 years before the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Many of the modern biblical "scholars" have claimed that the Torah was man-made and was probably written at the time of the first exile in the 6th century BCE, when the Jews were exiled to Babylonia. What this archeological discovery proved was that the words of the Torah predate what these "scholars" have been insisting for many years. This discovery was brought to light through the use of advanced imaging systems by scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which made the writing legible and proved that it was truly Birkas Kohanim as we know it.

*This also debunks the ridiculous notion that Israel is a "settler colonial state" that is occupying Palestinian territory. Archeological evidence of Jews in 7th century BCE supports Israel as the native land of the Jewish people.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 13 November 2021 / 9 Kislev 5782
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Vayeitzei
How Long is the Coast of Britain?

"And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it." (28:12)

Benoit B. Mandelbrot (1924-2010) was a Jewish Polish-born French-American mathematician and polymath. "What is the essence of a coastline?" he once asked. Mandelbrot asked this question in a paper that became a turning point for his thinking: "How Long is the Coast of Britain?"

Mandelbrot had come across the coastline question in an obscure posthumous article by an English scientist, Lewis F. Richardson. Wondering about coastlines and wiggly national borders, Richardson checked encyclopedias in Spain and Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands, and discovered discrepancies of twenty percent in the estimated lengths of their common frontiers. Mandelbrot argued that any coastline is, in a sense, infinitely long. In another sense, the answer depends on the length of your ruler.

"Consider one plausible method of measuring. A surveyor takes a set of dividers, opens them to a length of one yard, and walks them along the coastline. The resulting number of yards is just an approximation of the true length, because the dividers skip over twists and turns smaller than one yard — but the surveyor writes the number down anyway.

"Then he sets the dividers to a smaller length — say, one foot— and repeats the process. He arrives at a somewhat greater length, because the dividers will capture more of the detail and it will take more than three one-foot steps to cover the distance previously covered by a one-yard step. He writes this new number down, sets the dividers at four inches and starts again.

"This mental experiment, using imaginary dividers, is a way of quantifying the effect of observing an object from different distances, at different scales. An observer trying to estimate the length of England's coastline from a satellite will make a smaller guess than an observer trying to walk its coves and beaches, who will make a smaller guess in turn than a snail negotiating every pebble."

If we measure our ascent on the spiritual ladder of our life like a snail, we will become disillusioned very quickly, for life has many twists and turns and setbacks. But if we take the satellite view, each one of us can follow in the footsteps of our father Yaakov — the ladder that is set on the ground but whose head reaches the heavens.

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chiefrabbi.org
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah Vayeitzei: After Covid, will we go back to sleep?
10 November 2021

How do we respond to extraordinary experiences? If I were to give a subtitle to Sefer Bereishit, the Book of Genesis, it would be the Book of Dreams. Not only does this book of the Torah present us with details of the dreams themselves, but more importantly we're told how the dreamer reacted.

In Parshat Vayeitzei we are given a description of Jacob's famous dream of the ladder, which spanned the distance from earth up to the heavens. How did Jacob react when he woke up? The Torah tells us (Bereishit 28:16),

"Vayikatz Yaakov mishnato vayomer," – "Jacob woke up from his sleep and he declared,"

"Achein yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh." – "Behold the presence of God is in this place."

That was how he responded. He recognised the presence of God, and he continued to do so for the rest of his life; indeed we speak about it to this day.

Let's now have a look at a dream of Pharaoh King of Egypt, as described in Parshat Mikeitz (Bereishit 41:4, Bereishit 41:5). There the same term 'vayikatz' is used.

"Vayikatz Paroh," – "Pharaoh woke up,"

"vayishan." – "and he went back to sleep,"

"Vayichalom," – "And he had another dream."

What a remarkable dream Pharaoh had just had! In the course of time he would discover that it would provide for him and his people a secret to their survival! Yet his reaction was that he turned over and he went back to sleep.

Herein lies a very powerful message for us all. So often it's not just in dreams that we might see something remarkable. More than that, we actually have exceptionally powerful experiences in our lives. Hashem is trying to say something to us.

What will our response be? Will it be just to turn over and ignore it, or will we respond in an appropriate way?

During the past year and a half every single one of us has experienced something unprecedented; we've all had our own personal, family, communal, national and global experiences. We have been able to learn so much from the pandemic. And now that b'ezrat Hashem we are

gradually moving out of it, what will our response be? Will we just go back to the way we were before? Or will we learn some lessons and guarantee that as a result of this extraordinary experience our lives will forever be changed for the better?

Let's always see to it that when it comes to those unusual and extraordinary moments of our lives, our response should be the response of Jacob, and not the response of Pharaoh.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeitzei

Reuven at Three Didn't Know Choshen Mishpat, but He Knew Right from Wrong

The pasuk says "Reuven went out in the days of the wheat harvest; he found mandrakes (dudaim) in the field and brought them to Leah his mother; Rochel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's dudaim.'" (Bereshis 30:14). Rashi comments on the words "in the days of the wheat harvest" that this is a testimony to the greatness of the Shevatim (Tribes). It was the harvest season for wheat, meaning that there was wheat lying around and yet they did not send forth their hands to take something that did not belong to them. Reuven only took wild growing mandrakes, a type of ownerless flower.

The Tolner Rebbe asks two interesting questions on this Rashi.

First: What kind of "praise of the Shevatim" is it to tell us that Reuven was not a thief?

Second: Regardless of how we answer this first question, why would Rashi say that this incident is praise for "the Shevatim". All we know is that Revuen did not steal. Why does that reflect on all his brothers, to make a general statement of praise about "all the Shevatim"?

The Tolner Rebbe further points out that the Seder Olam, which describes the chronology of all the personalities of Tanach, says that Reuven was born in the year 2193 from Creation, and Yissochor (who was conceived following this incident with the mandrakes) was born three years later. So how can Yissochor be praised for an incident that occurred before he was even born? Reuven picked these flowers for his mother when he was only three years old. If so, what is the point of evaluating the righteousness of the act of taking the mandrakes? Does a three-year-old understand the concept of property rights and the fact that it is wrong to take something that belongs to someone else? Considering his age, why in fact did Reuven not take the wheat and give it to his mother?

The answer is that Reuven did not know the severity of the sin of theft, but he did know the values of his parents. It must have been such a prominent concept in his father's house that someone else's property is OFF LIMITS, that this three-year-old recoiled at the thought of taking something that was not his. This was not because he maturely understood Torah or Hilchos Gezeilah in the Rambam or the Choshen Mishpat section of Shulchan Aruch. He did not know any of that at this stage in his life. But from growing up in a house whose motto was "Titen Emes L'Yaakov…" (Micha 7:20), theft was such an anathema that even a three-year-old would not touch it.

A famous Gemara (Succah 56b) comments that a child's conversation in the market place inevitably reflects things he heard from one of his parents. A child's mode of conversation and what he says reflects what is going on in his parent's home. The praise of the Shevatim is that even toddlers in that family, because of the education they received at home from their earliest ages, recoiled from taking things which did not belong to them. All the Shevatim were like this, because they all grew up in Yaakov Avinu's house, an atmosphere which constantly stressed the middos of honesty and integrity.

Was It a Message from G-d or Wishful Thinking?

The Tolner Rebbe has a further thought which clarifies a peculiar insight in the parsha, based on a schmooze of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz in Parshas Vayechi.

The Almighty came to Yaakov after twenty years of service in Lavan's house and told him, "It is time to leave. Go back to the Land of your fathers and your birthplace." (Bereshis 31:3). If we study the pesukim which follow, we see a strange phenomenon. Yaakov Avinu tells his wives that an Angel of G-d appeared to him the previous night and told him that they need to leave. "What do you think—should we leave or should we not leave?" They respond with their opinion that they should leave, but they justify that decision based on financial and familial interpersonal issues: "Do we yet have an inheritance portion in our father's house? He considers us like strangers, for he sold us and he also consumed our money. For all the wealth that the L-rd has rescued from our father belongs to us and our children. Thus, all that the L-rd said to you, you should do!" (Bereshis 31:14-16)

This is a mind-boggling parsha. First of all, Yaakov seems to weigh whether or not to listen to what Hashem commanded him based on the advice of his wives, and second of all, his wives seem to make their calculation based on resentment of their father and financial calculations, mentioning Hashem's command merely as an afterthought! How do we understand this strange conversation Yaakov has with Rochel and Leah?

We have mentioned this question in previous years. An additional question here (mentioned by the Chizkuni) is the following: When Yaakov receives the message from Hashem, he is told directly (Vayomer Hashem el Yaakov): "Return to the Land of your fathers and your birthplace and I will be with you". However, when he relays the dream to his wives, he does not say he heard this message from Hashem; he says he heard the message from "Malach haElokim" (an Angel of the L-rd).

Which was it? Was it a direct communication from Hashem or a message from an Angel? (The Chizkuni makes note of this discrepancy and explains that the original communication was indeed from a Malach as Yaakov told his wives, But the pasuk, in mentioning the original communication, does not bother to mention that detail, since at any rate it was a Divine communication.)

In Parshas Vayechi, there is a beautiful teaching from Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. The pasuk says "But as for me—when I came from Paddan, Rochel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still about a beras of land to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem" (Bereshis 48:7) Yaakov Avinu tells his son Yosef: I want you to bury me in Eretz Yisrael… Rashi there explains that Yaakov is offering an apology to his son: Even though I am asking you to trouble yourself to bury me in Eretz Canaan, I did not do the same for your mother. I buried her on the road because she died near Beth Lechem (and I did not schlep her to the family burial plot in Chevron). I know that you have complaints against me about this, but you should know that the reason I buried your mother there was not because I was lazy. It had nothing to do with the weather or any excuse of that nature. You should know that I buried her based on the word of G-d that she should be of aide to her descendants at that burial spot when the Jewish people will be exiled from the Land of Israel by Nevuzradan as it is written: "A voice is heard on high, Rochel weeps for her children…" (Yirmiyahu 31:14) That is why I buried her there.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks: Why does Yaakov Avinu need to go through this whole shtickle Torah with Yosef: You should know it wasn't raining, and I wasn't lazy, etc., etc.? Say to Yosef straight out: "Listen, Yosef I know you have complaints against me, but I buried her there because I was commanded to do so by the Almighty. End of discussion!

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains an important principle of life: We hear what we want to hear, we see what we want to see, we believe what we want to believe.

Yaakov Avinu had doubts. He told Yosef: Don't say that I got the message of G-d wrong. Don't say that I misinterpreted it. Don't say that G-d told me something else, but because of my negiyus (bias) – because it was too hard, because it was too far, because it was too rainy – I misinterpreted what the Ribono shel Olam said because people hear what they want to hear and believe what they want to believe. Yaakov Avinu needs to emphasize that there was no bias here. He could have

easily brought Rochel to the Me'Aras haMachpelah. It would not have been difficult for him to do that. Consequently, Yaakov is emphasizing "I did not misinterpret the Almighty, because I had no personal agenda which would have caused me to do so."

The Tolner Rebbe uses this insight of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz in Parshas VaYechi to explain this incident in Parshas VaYetzei.

Yaakov Avinu hated being in the house of Lavan. During their final confrontation, he told it to his father-in-law like it was: "I worked for you for twenty years and during that entire time you were a crook. You cheated me day and night…" Yaakov Avinu cannot wait to get out of the house of Lavan. One night, Yaakov has a dream. An Angel comes to him in the name of the Ribono shel Olam and told him "Time to leave."

Yaakov Avinu thought to himself, "Ah, this is what I have been waiting for!" But he woke up the next morning and wondered, "Did I really dream that? Did I really hear that? Is that actually what the Malach said? Or perhaps I want to get out of here so badly that I started hallucinating! Maybe I am misinterpreting my dream and we should really stay here?"

Because Yaakov had these doubts, he decided to consult with his wives. Even though when I had the dream, I thought Hashem was speaking to me directly, I will tell them: "Listen here, last night I think a Malach came to me and I think that he told me in the name of Hashem that it is time to leave here. What do you think? Is there any reason not to leave?"

Yaakov feared that his negiyus (bias) caused him to misinterpret his dream, and was seeking reassurance from his wives that there was no reason not to leave.

Rochel and Leah assured him that there was absolutely no reason to stay. "Therefore, what you heard was not your negiyus – it was the truth. A Malach did come to you and tell you to leave, and therefore you should definitely act upon that vision!"

This is how to understand this parsha. Yaakov Avinu was so concerned about Emes (Truth), that he needed reassurance that what he heard was not just wishful thinking or a fantasized imagination of his subconscious desires. He expressed his uncertainty by emphasizing the role of the Malach (as opposed to a direct and explicit message from Hashem). His wives put his mind at rest, that he had no negiyus here, and that the message was an authentic one from Hashem, which should be acted upon.

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blogs.timesofisrael.com
Vayetze: Powerful Vows
Ben-Tzion Spitz

A vow is fixed and unalterable determination to do a thing, when such a determination is related to something noble which can only uplift the man who makes the resolve. - Mahatma Gandhi

Jacob is on the run. He is escaping his home in the land of Canaan from the murderous intent of his brother Esau. En route, he sleeps in a place that afterward will be named Bet El (House of God) where he has a dream. In the dream, he sees a ladder that reaches the heavens, with angels ascending and descending. God speaks to Jacob from the top of the ladder. God promises Jacob that He'll protect Jacob on his journey, bring him back home safely, and guarantees him the land and great progeny.

Jacob wakes from the dream, and he is in such awe of the event that he vows that God will be his God and that he'll tithe all of his gains to God.

The Chidushei HaRim on Genesis 28:20 examines the phenomena of making a vow. The Torah and Jewish Law take vows very seriously. The consensus is that vows should generally be avoided, but if made, they are legally binding and must be upheld.

The Chidushei HaRim explains that Jacob made the vow to bind himself closer to God. He had just experienced a divine revelation. He felt enormously close to God, but he knew the feeling wouldn't last. In that moment of divine closeness, in that moment of spiritual clarity, Jacob makes a vow. The intent of the vow is to find an additional way, another mechanism to keep himself bound to God even when the effects of the momentary clarity dissipate. The Chidushei HaRim states that Jacob pioneered this approach and opened the door for his descendants, the Jewish nation, to similarly bind themselves to God through positive vows during those moments of divine proximity. Such a vow can be extremely powerful.

He further adds that the angels in Jacob's dream were dancing. They dance as a result of our good deeds. If we were to realize the tremendous impact our good deeds and divine service have in both this world and in the upper worlds, we would never cease them.

May we always resolve to do the right things, whether we vowed or not.

Dedication - To the Israeli government finally having a budget.
Shabbat Shalom
Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

The Jerusalem Post
Parshat Vayetze: Delusions that lead to evil
Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

This week's Torah portion, Vayetze, brings together two people whose lifestyles were almost completely opposite of each other's – Jacob and Laban.

This week's Torah portion, Vayetze, brings together two people whose lifestyles were almost completely opposite of each other's – Jacob and Laban.

Jacob, escaping his brother's wrath, reaches Haran and meets his mother's brother, Laban, and his two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob loves Rachel and wants to marry her, but Laban obligates him to work for him for seven years first.

When the seven years are over, Jacob wants to marry Rachel, but Laban, under the cover of dark, tricks Jacob and has him marry Leah instead of Rachel.

Jacob wakes up in the morning to discover the deceit and is furious with Laban.

Laban responds by saying, "It is not done so in our place to give the younger one before the firstborn" (Genesis 29:26). He promises Jacob that he will be able to marry Rachel, but only after working for him for another seven years.

When those additional seven years ended, Laban asked his son-in-law Jacob to continue to work for him, this time for pay. But he repeatedly changed the employment agreement in a way that minimized Jacob's profits and increased his own. After another six years, Jacob wanted to leave Laban and return to Canaan, and to do so, he had to escape with his wives and children.

We might have expected Jacob to do what Laban would have done, to take – without Laban's knowledge – what he was owed or, at the very least, not to continue to be a devoted worker.

But when Laban chased and caught up with him, Jacob said: "Already 20 years have I been with you.... I have not brought home to you anything torn [by other animals]... from my hand you would demand it, what was stolen by day and what was stolen at night. I was [in the field] by day when the heat consumed me, and the frost at night, and my sleep wandered from my eyes" (Genesis 31:38-40).

For 20 years, he devotedly herded Laban's cattle, taking full responsibility for any mishaps. If an animal killed a sheep or if one was stolen, Jacob would not even report it. Rather, he would pay for it out of his own pocket. He took care of Laban's cattle in the heat of the day and the cold of the night.

On the other hand, Laban's behavior is curious. As far as he was concerned, he behaved with flawless integrity. On the other hand, we see how terribly he treated his own family. What led him to behave in such a way that even he did not pay attention to his own behavior?

The answer to this is in the continuation of the story. After Jacob complained about the way he had been mistreated through the years, Laban responded in a very strange way: "The daughters are my daughters, and the sons are my sons, and the animals are my animals, and all that you see is mine" (Genesis 31: 43).

Now it's easier for us to understand the depth of Laban's issue. His outlook is fundamentally distorted. He lives in a state of complete delusion. As far as he is concerned, his children are tools to answer his needs, his grandchildren are his private property, and Jacob's wealth – earned through hard work – belongs to him as well. With such a distorted perspective about property and people, it is no surprise that he deals with the people around him the way he does.

MANY OF us, without noticing, can develop a similar delusion. We might see the people who work for us as private property, our family members as tools for our needs. This perspective will inevitably lead to us to appropriate others' property for ourselves, not treating those around us with fairness and integrity, and not seeing anything wrong with our own behavior.

In order to avoid adopting such an outlook, we must adopt Jacob's perspective that sees everything in his life as a result of God's grace. When we see the world in this way, it will be easier for us to distinguish between our property and others', we will be able to treat our family properly, and we will be grateful for the Divine gift of being privileged to live alongside them.

Let us try to adopt Jacob's words of prayer, which we will read next week: "I have become small from all the kindnesses and from all the truth that You have rendered Your servant" (Genesis 32:10).

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah : Vayeitzei
Psalm 34: Freeing Ourseles from Bad Habits
Chanan Morrison

After recounting God's assistance to the righteous - and those struggling with impulsive behavior - the psalmist offers guidance how to grow spiritually and free oneself from bad habits.

פּוֹדֶה ה' נֶפֶשׁ עֲבָדָיו וְלֹא יֶאְשְׁמוּ כָּל הַחֹסִים בּוֹ.

"God redeems the life of His servants; all who trust in Him will not be condemned." (Psalms 34:23)

This advice, Rav Kook explains, relates to one's self-image. Everyone suffers from character flaws. We can easily become trapped by our weaknesses, captive to our desires.

The psalmist suggests that we gain positive change by a resolute decision: We resolve to live a life of serving God, a life dedicated to holy aspirations, a life infused with acts of kindness and generosity. We identify ourselves as an eved Hashem, as "a servant of God."[1]

With this transformation of mindset, we free ourselves from the tyranny of negative desires and impulses. When we commit to live the life of Divine service, we are liberated from enslavement to our vices. "God redeems the life of His servants."

The psalmist, however, adds a caveat.

We tend to trust our natural inclinations, even though we know we are attracted to certain negative habits. If we fail to question our motives, we may stumble into the pitfall of undesirable conduct.

We should be circumspect of our impulses, guarding against destructive tendencies. We must place our faith, not in our own virtue, but in God. If we trust that God will direct our hearts, we can be assured of not stumbling.

By placing our trust in God and His Torah, we raise our lives from undisciplined habits and poor choices to the rare quality of holy splendor. Redeemed by the Divine light shining over us, our actions will be straight and true. "All who trust in Him will not be condemned."

(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol II, pp. 68-69)

1 James Clear called this building "identity-based habits." He explained that "The key to building lasting habits is focusing on creating a new identity first. Your current behaviors are simply a reflection of your current identity... To change your behavior for good, you need to start believing new things about yourself." (Atomic Habits, Avery 2018).

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayeitzei

פרשת ויצא תשפ"ב

ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע... ושמרתיך בכל אשר תלך... כי לא אעזבך.

Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva… I will guard you wherever you go… for I will not forsake you. (28:10,15)

Yaakov *Avinu* was compelled to make a hasty departure from Be'er Sheva. He would have loved living in the vicinity of his parents, but that would have meant putting his life in mortal danger. After Yaakov's "appropriation" of the *brachos*, blessings, Eisav swore that he would seek ultimate revenge. This was Yaakov's cue to take an extended trip. He stopped in Beis El, and, while he was there, he was privy to an incredible dream in which Hashem assured him of His Divine protection and blessing. It should have been all good, with the Patriarch calm and looking forward to settling down and enjoying the blessings. On the contrary, we find Yaakov distressed and filled with fear. *Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl* (*Pri Tzaddik, Vayeitzei*), explains that Yaakov was not so much concerned with his own life, as he was anxious that his own sins had brought him to this precarious situation. He cites the *Midrash Tanchuma* which is, at best, puzzling. The disciples asked their *Rebbe*, "What is the law concerning one who murders unintentionally?" The *Rebbe* replied, "One who kills unintentionally must flee to one of the *Arei Miklat*, Cities of Refuge, lest the *go'eil ha'dam*, blood avenger, exercises his right to take revenge and kill the murderer." At this point, the *Midrash* interjects and makes what seems to be an unrelated statement, "Yaakov fled to Charan to escape from Eisav. When Hashem saw Yaakov in great distress, He appeared to him."

A superficial reading of this *Midrash* would have one think that Yaakov *Avinu's* escape to Charan was in some way connected to the law of the *rotzeiach b'shogeg*, unintentional murderer, which could not have been further from the truth. Yaakov killed no one. If anything, it was the evil Eisav who planned to murder Yaakov – intentionally. If anyone should be required to flee, it should be Eisav. This, too, is unlikely, since anything that Eisav would do would be intentional. The dispensation of *Ir Miklat* does not apply to *meizid*, acting intentionally.

Rav Tzadok offers a powerful and illuminating exposition on original sin, its ramification, its effect on Yaakov, what we should learn from it, and how our lives should change accordingly. The origin of death lies in the sin of eating from the *Eitz Ha'daas*, Tree of Knowledge. As a result of eating from its prohibited fruit, death became part of life. From that moment, the concept of living forever was tabled and closed. Man would have to die. The mastermind behind the sin, the creature responsible for this first insurrection, was the serpent, who through guile and prevarication was able to convince Chavah to take a bite. Out of the goodness of her heart, she shared with her husband, because, after all, that is what a good wife does.

The serpent was cunning. It knew that a little lie would go a long way. It therefore told Chavah that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge possessed unusual mystical powers, and if one were to partake of its fruit, he/she would become G-d-like and be able to create universes. The serpent was audacious enough to say that Hashem was envious and could not tolerate any other creation. Thus, by prohibiting them from eating of the Tree's fruit, He was actually preventing them from becoming His equals.

This was not only a lie – it was the first lie. Imagine the evil of the serpent. The world had just been created, and it had to inject its own brand of evil in it. Death was Hashem's response to this evil. As a result, falsehood, deceit and deception – in their various forms – are considered the forces of death. [When a person lies, a little of him dies.] *Chosamo shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu emes*; the seal of Hashem is truth. Anything less than one hundred percent truth remains a lie.

Rav Tzadok cites an incident from the *Talmud* (*Sanhedrin* 97a) that buttresses this idea. In a certain community the citizens adhered to the highest standards of truth. The people did not tolerate any form of falsehood. Apparently, no one in the city had ever died young, through either illness or accident. One of the *Talmudic* sages, who was known for extraordinary integrity, moved to the community when he married one of the local women. They were blessed with two sons. On one

occasion, a neighbor came to visit his wife. Out of deference to her privacy, he told her that his wife was not home. (He felt that it was innocuous. She needed to rest, and he did not want to disturb her. Unfortunately, such "white" lies happen all of the time.) Immediately, his two sons died. When the citizens of the community became aware of the tragedy that had befallen the sage and his wife, and, by extension, the entire community, they realized that someone had uttered a word of untruth. The *tzaddik* was asked to leave the town. A breach in the standards of veracity catalyzes a visit from the Angel of Death.

Titein emes l'Yaakov, "Attribute truth to Yaakov (*Michah* 7:20). The Patriarch was the personification of honesty and probity. Although they were twins, Yaakov and Eisav could not have been more different. Yaakov represented truth; Eisav was the embodiment of everything false. Every day he would play out a ruse of fooling his father to believe that he was righteous and saintly. Truth lengthens life. Falsehood and deceit bring on death. Yaakov perceived that he was in danger of suffering an untimely death. This was an indication that somehow, somewhere, he must have been negligent in the area of truthfulness. The only time that his actions "bordered" on deception was when he presented himself as Eisav in order to obtain his rightfully deserved *brachos*. He had never lied. Every word that he uttered was true. Nonetheless, the entire scenario was a beguiling charade which might be perceived as verging on falsehood. For someone of Yaakov's spiritual stature, any form of unintended falsehood would be reckoned on the Heavenly scale as unintentional murder, which required the perpetrator to suffer the consequences.

Yaakov was not taking chances. If he was wrong, he would do what was necessary to expunge the taint on his character. When he saw that he was confronting adversity and trouble, he felt it was due to his unintentional lying. Hashem, Whose seal is truth and is the ultimate Arbitrator of truth, appeared to Yaakov in a dream and assured him that he need not worry. He would not be taken to task for his actions. He performed them under extenuating circumstances; they were appropriate and necessary. Hashem thus restored Yaakov's self-confidence, so that the Patriarch remained the exemplar of truthfulness and probity.

Telshe Rosh Yeshiva, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, exemplified the *middah* of *emes*. Indeed, every aspect of his life was regulated by truth. *Rav* Gifter would underscore the inexorable striving one must maintain in his search for the truth, applying an incident that occurred with *Horav Shimon Shkop, zl*. *Rav* Shimon was a *maggid shiur* in Telshe for twenty years. Following his first *shiur*, he was walking down the street. He felt that he had rendered a good *shiur* and was now mulling it over. In the course of his walk, he met the nephew of *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*. Their conversation focused on *Rav* Shimon's *shiur*. As he was about to take leave of *Rav* Shimon, the nephew gave him a strange blessing. "May you be *zoche*, merit, never to say the 'truth' in your *shiurim*." This blessing did not seem like a blessing. A *shiur* was all about explaining the passage in the *Talmud* in such a manner that all ambiguities were clarified, i.e. one presented the truthful understanding of the *Talmud*.

Seeing the look on *Rav* Shimon's face, the nephew explained that if he ever felt that he had discovered the truth, then possibly he would stop looking for it – which must never happen. One must constantly delve, search and yearn to find the truth. He must never feel that he has found it. The standard for truth is very high. It could also (in the minds of some people) be very low. As long as one strives to reach higher and higher, he will ultimately achieve a level of uncompromising honesty based on Torah values.

Rav Gifter demanded that truth be the moral compass of every endeavor. No area of life and human endeavor exists for which truth does not serve as its barometer. Telshe *Yeshiva's* official letterhead originally bore the name Rabbinical College of Telshe. He changed the letterhead to Telshe Yeshivah, because he felt that the term Rabbinical College unintentionally gave the message that Telshe is a school that produces rabbis. *Rav* Gifter felt that this was deceptive. The purpose of a *yeshivah* is to produce the next generation of Torah adherent Jews.

The *Divrei Chaim, Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl*, had two sons whose adherence to *emes* was classic: The *Shiniaver Rav, zl*, and *Gorlitzer Rav, zl*. The *Gorlitzer* once asked his brother, "We are both products of the same family and the same upbringing. Why is it that we hardly ever render the same opinion? I will explain to you the reason for this. When you see a mountain replete with *sheker*, falsehood, but buried deep within it is a miniscule element of *emes*, truth, you will do everything within your power to extricate it because of your deep abiding love for the truth. I, on the other hand, if I will see a mountain filled with truth, but I sense a tiny element of falsehood buried deep inside, will reject the entire thing. One drop of *sheker* tarnishes the entire mountain of *emes*." They both sought the unvarnished truth. The *Shiniaver* loved *emes*, and the *Gorlitzer* despised *sheker*. Two varied approaches to one objective.

ותקנא רחל באחותה

Rachel became jealous of her sister. (30:1)

Horav Shabsi Yudelewitz, zl (grandfather and namesake of the famous *maggid*), knew that his days on this world were numbered. He was not a well man to begin with, and the physical travail which he sustained emigrating to *Eretz Yisrael* during the turn of the century, followed by the poverty and hunger he experienced in Yerushalayim, had taken its toll on him. He knew that would soon go the way of all men. He and his wife had been assured early in their marriage by a great *tzaddik*, righteous person, that "In the future, you will give birth to a son who will grow up to be a *gadol*, a *tzaddik*, and a holy man." *Rav Shmuel Ahron, zl*, author of *Meilo Shel Shmuel*, and son-in-law of *Horav Aryeh Levin, zl*, was that child. *Rav* Shabsi was well aware that his young son was special. He did not waste a minute of his day, understanding that time is a gift from Hashem and thus sacrosanct. He was constantly learning. When everyone in his class in Yeshivah Eitz Chaim would go outside to play during recess, he remained behind learning, reciting *Tehillim*, anything that brought him closer to Hashem.

Rav Shabsi wanted to share a life lesson with his young son – one that would accompany him throughout his life's journey. He used the medium of a *d'var Torah* to convey his message. He quoted the *pasuk*, "Rachel became jealous of her sister" (30:1). Immediately, Shmuel Ahron started the rest of the *pasuk*, "She said to Yaakov, 'Give me children for if not, I am (as good) as dead.'" His father complimented him for remembering the *pasuk*. "When did Rachel *Imeinu* become jealous?" *Reb* Shabsi asked his son. "When Yehudah was born," was his immediate response. *Rav* Shabsi then began by enumerating Leah *Imeinu's* first sons: "Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and, although Rachel had not yet given birth, she did not indicate that she was in any way envious of her sister's good fortune. What was it about Yehudah's birth that provoked Rachel's jealousy to manifest itself, to the point that she told Yaakov *Avinu*, 'Give me children, for if not, I am (as good as) dead?' What was different about Yehudah's birth that engendered such a negative reaction?"

Shmuel Ahron sat patiently, waiting for his father's explanation. He sensed that his father had something important to say. "Listen carefully to what I will tell you," his father began. "When Reuven was born, the Patriarchal home naturally became filled with joy. This was the beginning of the *Shivtei Kah*. It was truly a special moment. Leah declared, 'Hashem has seen my troubles' (Ibid. 29:3,2). When her second child, Shimon, was born, Leah declared, 'Hashem has heard… and He also gave me this son' (Ibid. 29:33). Rachel was still without child, but we have no indication that she was anything but happy for her sister. She felt no jealousy. This emotion continued through Leah's third child, Levi, after which Rachel joined together with Leah in her hopes for a better future filled with joy. Still, she manifested no jealousy.

"It was when Yehudah was born that things changed – not because of Leah giving birth to another child, but because of how Leah expressed herself at his birth. *Atah odeh Hashem*; 'This time let me praise /thank Hashem.' The Torah then adds, 'Therefore, she named the child Yehudah' (ibid 29:35). This was the only time that we find Rachel showing any resentment concerning her sister's good fortune. Was it the fourth child that finally made her upset? No! She was jealous that her sister had given birth to a child who would serve as a vehicle for

praising Hashem, a tool to serve the Almighty. When Rachel realized that this child (because he was a medium for *hakoras hatov*, gratitude) would elevate Leah spiritually, she cried out in pain, because she, too, wanted to be spiritually elevated."

Rav Shabsi placed his hand on young Shmuel Ahron's head and said, "My son, I do not expect you to understand the depth of what I am saying to you. However, I sense that you grasp the basic idea. Prior to your birth, we were promised that you would become a true servant of Hashem. I am certain that you have the acumen to become a great scholar, but so did Eisav. We know what happened to him. You must make sure that as you grow older, that you direct all of your strengths, talents and skills toward one goal: spiritual growth, so that you serve Hashem on the loftiest level of your ability." Indeed, *Rav* Shmuel Ahron's life was a symphony of service to Hashem.

ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע

Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva. (28:10)

Rashi comments that as long as Yaakov *Avinu* lived in Beer Sheva, he constituted its *hod*, glory, *ziv*, splendor, and *hadar*, beauty. Once he left the community, these qualities left with him – a phenomenon that occurs whenever a *tzaddik*, righteous man, of repute leaves a circle of people. His influence, which consists of these three qualities, departs with him. We must add that every individual *tzaddik* has his own unique form of these qualities. Thus, even though Yitzchak *Avinu* and Rivkah *Imeinu* remained, their form of these qualities left a different impact on those around them. Theirs was a community blessed with three *tzaddikim*. When one left, his particular brand left with him.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains the difference between these three qualities and the interplay between them. The *tzaddik* is required to possess all three to be truly effective in influencing those around him. *Hod*, glory, refers to such radiance that can be transmitted from one person to another – specifically from *rebbe* to *talmid*, student. When Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to transfer his leadership of *Klal Yisrael* to Yehoshua, he was told, *V'nasata mei'hodecha alav*; "And you shall give of your glory upon him" (*Bamidbar* 27:20). *Ziv*, splendor, refers to a quality that emanates from within a person and shines forth. The shine of the sun is *ziv ha'shemesh*. Last, *hadar*, beauty, is reference to intrinsic, inherent beauty in an object similar to the beauty of an *esrog*. It is indisputably beautiful.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains why all three of these qualities should be inherent in a *tzaddik* if he is to inspire those in his immediate – and far-reaching – proximity effectively. *Hod* bespeaks the *tzaddik's* ability to interpret and explain the *halachah* and *aggada*, ethical renderings of the *Talmud* and *Midrash*, in such a manner that they continue to impact the *rebbe's/tzaddik's* lessons even when he is no longer present. Thus, in a sense, *hod* is different from *ziv*, which constrains the student from veering off the *derech*, path of Torah life, only as long as the *rebbe* is available to "shine" for him. In the *rebbe's* absence, however, the student must fend for himself, being open to the blandishments of society and his personal evil inclination, without the support of the *rebbe's* "splendor." This is when glory becomes an important factor, by transforming the student into a *koach*, power, unto himself, founded through the inspiration and support of his *rebbe's* glory. We observe this in Yehoshua, whose face shone by itself, albeit like the light of the moon, as compared with his *Rebbe*, Moshe, whose countenance shone like the light of the sun.

Ziv, splendor, demands that the *tzaddik's* greatness must radiate outwards in such a manner that all who see him want to be like him, to emulate his ways. This phenomenon will occur even without any outreach effort on his part. Simply due to his extraordinary splendor, people will be moved to be in some way like him. While *hod* requires effort on the part of the *tzaddik* to reach out and leave a lasting impression, *ziv* is a splendor of such distinction that it requires nothing other than a sense of being on the part of the *tzaddik*.

Last is *hadar*, beauty, which demands that the *tzaddik* maintain a presence and demeanor of such flawless rectitude that he is considered beautiful, in the sense that he is without blemish. He must reflect perfection in all his ways, such that he practices what he preaches. When people look at him, he is like a beautiful *esrog*. People choose the very best and finest <u>available</u> *esrog*. If there is a shortage of *esrogim*, and the only one that is available is not nearly as *hadar* as last year's *esrogim*, it is still considered beautiful. We judge beauty commensurate with its availability. In other words, we are well aware that in past years, we have been able to obtain *esrogim* of finer, more aesthetic quality and beauty, but this year this is what we have. It is then rendered to be beautiful. If, however, one sees no flaws in what is a second-rate *esrog*, then it is not beautiful. In this instance, beauty is not in the eyes of the beholder, but rather, in its true image – which in this case does not truly live up to accepted standard. Likewise, we do not expect Torah giants of our generation to be on the same level as the ones who lived a century earlier. To refuse to confront the reality of a descent in the generations, however, is to accept a flaw as beautiful and to undermine true greatness. In other words: the giant of our generation is <u>our</u> Moshe, but unquestionably, unfathomable spiritual distance exists between the two "Moshes."

Va'ani Tefillah

ונפשי כעפר לכל תהיה – *V'nafshi ke'afar la'kol tiheyeh*. And let my soul be like dust to everyone.

While we may not all crave attention, we do expect the people whom we benefit to manifest some measure of gratitude. In other words, no one wants to be taken for granted. The *Chasam Sofer* (commentary to *Chullin* 88) writes that the *tefillah*, *V'nafshi ke'afar la'kol tiheyeh,* teaches otherwise. We pray that we merit to be like dust/dirt, which is the source for providing nourishment to all; yet, everyone steps on it. Therefore, appreciation /gratitude from those whom we benefit should not be the barometer by which we measure the quality of our lives. We should still continue helping others, reaching out to those who have material/physical/emotional/spiritual needs – even if we will not receive honorable mention. This attitude should reign, even if the very same people whom we have benefitted reject, hurt, abuse us. We must remember that it is not about them – it is about us.

The *Sfas Emes* interprets the unchanging properties of dirt/dust as a simile suggesting how we, as Hashem's people, should react to the world society and culture in which we live. We see and hear events and occurrences that would otherwise negatively affect us. As Jews who believe in Hashem, our relationship with Him and our adherence to Torah and *mitzvos* does not change one iota. Whatever is placed in the ground eventually changes/decomposes. Dirt is immutable. It does not change; neither do we – regardless of what happens around us.

In loving memory of our father and grandfather on his yahrtzeit
אלחנן בן פרץ ז"ל נפטר י"א כסלו תשנ"ט
Mordechai & Jenny Kurant, Aliza Wrona
Naomi & Avrohom Yitzchok Weinberger, Dovid & Chavi Kurant
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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל

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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 became 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 is 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'nivrachu 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 'tzedek 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-nivrechu 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 makes 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 re-assurances, 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 my 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"h, 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.

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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" (Taanit 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

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 consistenly 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.

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 Cana'an (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 Cana'an.

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 Cana'an, the future Land of Israel, heading for an uncertain future in unfamiliar territory. Avraham, his grandfather, faced the same situation as he *entered* Cana'an 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 Cana'an at the end of the parasha also echoes the journey of his grandfather to Cana'an:

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 Cana'an, while Ya'akov, in leaving home, journeys from Cana'an to Aram. Leaving his life behind and moving to Cana'an 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, Rahel. 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 Le'ah, his daughter, and brought her to him [Ya'akov], and he came to her . . . . In the morning, there was Le'ah! He said to Lavan, "What is this that you have done to me? Was it not for Rahel 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 [Rahel] 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 Le'ah. How could anyone have thought otherwise? Of course, Rahel 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 Le'ah and not the beloved Rahel, 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 Leivi ["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
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'uvein 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 Cana'an. 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 Cana'an 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 Rahel 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 tsayyid," 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

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

How Long is the Coast of Britain?

"And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it." (28:12)

Benoit B. Mandelbrot (1924-2010) was a Jewish Polish-born French-American mathematician and polymath. "What is the essence of a coastline?" he once asked. Mandelbrot asked this question in a paper that became a turning point for his thinking: "How Long is the Coast of Britain?"

Mandelbrot had come across the coastline question in an obscure posthumous article by an English scientist, Lewis F. Richardson. Wondering about coastlines and wiggly national borders, Richardson checked encyclopedias in Spain and Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands, and discovered discrepancies of twenty percent in the estimated lengths of their common frontiers. Mandelbrot argued that any coastline is, in a sense, infinitely long. In another sense, the answer depends on the length of your ruler.

"Consider one plausible method of measuring. A surveyor takes a set of dividers, opens them to a length of one yard, and walks them along the coastline. The resulting number of yards is just an approximation of the true length, because the dividers skip over twists and turns smaller than one yard — but the surveyor writes the number down anyway.

"Then he sets the dividers to a smaller length — say, one foot— and repeats the process. He arrives at a somewhat greater length, because the dividers will capture more of the detail and it will take more than three one-foot steps to cover the distance previously covered by a one-yard step. He writes this new number down, sets the dividers at four inches and starts again.

"This mental experiment, using imaginary dividers, is a way of quantifying the effect of observing an object from different distances, at different scales. An observer trying to estimate the length of England's coastline from a satellite will make a smaller guess than an observer trying to walk its coves and beaches, who will make a smaller guess in turn than a snail negotiating every pebble."

If we measure our ascent on the spiritual ladder of our life like a snail, we will become disillusioned very quickly, for life has many twists and turns and setbacks. But if we take the satellite view, each one of us can follow in the footsteps of our father Yaakov — the ladder that is set on the ground but whose head reaches the heavens.

Q & A

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?

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.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Almonds in the Bible

When Jacob tried to induce the animals in his care to give birth to offspring that fit a certain look, Jacob placed various tree branches that mimicked those specifications in his animals' feeding trough. Among the sorts of branches that Jacob used, the Bible reports that he took a *luz* branch (Gen. 30:37). Targum Onkelos leaves the word *luz* untranslated when rendering this passage in Aramaic. Yet, Radak and Ibn Ezra cite Rabbi Saadia Gaon (892-942) as explaining that the word *luz* in this passage means "almond," as it does in Arabic. Ibn Ezra adds that Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic all belong to one language family (what modern linguists call "Semitic languages"), so it makes sense that a word in one language might carry over into the others. However, on top of all this, there is another Hebrew word for "almond" — *shaked*. This article explores the etymologies of *luz* and *shaked*, seeking to find what, if anything, is the difference between these two terms.

The connection between *luz* and *shaked* is also seen later in the Bible when Jacob sends gifts to the viceroy of Egypt. Listed among those various edibles that Jacob sent are *shkedim* (Gen. 43:11). The Targum known as Jonathan and Targum Neofiti (to Gen. 43:11) both translate the term *shkedim* in this verse as *m'shach d'luzin* ("almond oil/butter"). Similarly, when the Bible reports that Aaron's staff sprouted *shkadim* (Num. 17:23), those Targumim translate the word into Aramaic as *luzin*.

The upshot of this discussion is that it seems that the word *luz* is actually an Aramaic word, not a Hebrew word, while *shaked* seems to be a genuine Hebrew word. According to this, the two words mean the exact same thing — just that they come from different languages. Dr. Gary Rensburg of Rutgers University adds that even though *luz* is Aramaic, not Hebrew, the Torah still uses that word when narrating the story of how Laban the Aramean tried to swindle Jacob because that story happened in Aram, the home of the Aramaic language. Using an Aramaic word in an Aramean context thus gives more authenticity to the account.

Alternatively, I was thinking that perhaps in Hebrew the term *shaked* refers to the "almond" fruit/nut itself, and refers to the "almond tree" only in a borrowed sense, while *luz* refers directly to the "almond tree." It seems that Avraham Even-Shoshan's dictionary follows this approach.

Just for the record, not everybody agrees that *luz* refers to the almond tree. An alternate version of Rabbi Saadia Gaon's commentary records him as explaining *luz* as the silverleaf poplar tree, while Menachem Ibn Saruk writes that the *luz* is related to the cedar. Finally, there are also many opinions which maintain that *luz* refers to hazel (see Rashi and Tosafot to *Bechorot* 8a, Rashi to Gen. 30:38, Judges 1:26). Targum Onkelos (to Gen. 43:11, Num. 17:23, see also Targum to Ecc. 12:5) seems to follow one of these approaches because he never translates *shaked* as *luz*, instead consistently translating the word as *segd* (which means "almond" in Syriac and Ethiopic, and seems to be derived from the Hebrew *shaked* through the interchangeability of GIMMEL and KUF).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) defines the core meaning of the two-letter root LAMMED-ZAYIN as "sideward deviation." Words that derive from this root can refer to simply moving to the side in a physical sense, or to a moralistic deviance that distances a person from the straight and narrow. In these ways, the *luz* tree beckons back to the core meaning of LAMMED-ZAYIN because it deviates from the nature of other trees in the sense that its shoots branch out from its trunk very early on. Another word derived from this root is *halaz* ("that one"). Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the antecedent of this pronoun is typically somebody

who is far away and thus has deviated/distanced himself from "here."

Midrash *Sechel Tov* offers a homiletic explanation of *halaz,* arguing that when that word is used in reference to Isaac (Gen. 24:65), Joseph (Gen. 37:19), Zecharia (Zech. 2:8), and the Holy Land (Yechezkel 36:35), it is related to the word *luz* and refers to outwardly majestic beauty like that of the *luz* tree. The aesthetic quality of the almond may also be reflected in the almond-like decorations that are to be fixed (*meshukadim*) to the Menorah (Ex. 25:33-34, 37:19-29).

Luz is also the place name of an important biblical city. It was later renamed Beth-El and was actually the site of Jacob's famous dream with the ladder (Gen. 28:19). The Bible relates that when the Tribe of Joseph besieged the Canaanite city of Luz, they waited until somebody left the impenetrable city and asked him to show the hidden entrance, which he obliged to do. It was only then that the Jewish army was able to enter the city and capture it. The Canaanite defector, who led the Jews into the city, later relocated to the Land of Hittites, where he established a new city named Luz (Judges 1:23-26).

The Midrash (*Bereishet Rabbah* 69:8) records some interesting facts about Luz, although it remains unclear whether this refers to Luz in the Holy Land or the other Luz: The population was not mixed up when Sennacherib conquered the area, it was not even destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the Angel of Death has no dominion over this city. Rabbi Abba Bar Kahane adds that one who enters this city blossoms with mitzvahs and good deeds like a *luz*. The Sages also explained that just as an almond has no "opening," so was the city of Luz completely impenetrable. Rabbi Symon adds that there was a *luz* ("almond tree") at the entrance to the city, while Rabbi Pinchas bar Chamah explains that the city was accessible only via a cave whose entrance was concealed by a *luz* tree. Interestingly, Rabbi J. D. Eisenstein (1854-1956) claimed that the city of Luz referred to in this Midrash is the Tibetan city of Lhassa, whose population reputedly has longevity and could thus be said to elude the Angel of Death.

There is also the matter of the *luz* bone, which is said to be the kernel from which one will be revived in the Resurrection of the Dead and which is only nurtured through the *Melava Malka* meal on *Motzei Shabbat* (see *Mateh Moshe* 513) — but that is for a different discussion.

Turning to the word *shaked*, this word seems to be related to the triliteral root SHIN-KUF-DALET ("watchfulness," "vigilance," "diligence," "persistency"). In fact, grammarians as early as Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1055) and Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235) intimated a connection between almonds and the core meaning of that root by explaining that the almond tree is especially zealous in making its fruits blossom faster than other trees (although *Machberet Menachem* does not seem to draw a connection between these two meanings). Similarly, botanist Dr. Joshua D. Klein of the Volcani Center explains that the term *shaked* is appropriate for almonds because of their tendency to stay on the tree and not fall off when ripe like most fleshy fruits do. This scientific fact thus serves a way of linking the verb *shoked* ("diligence") to the noun *shaked* ("almond"), because the almond is "diligent" and "persistent" by tenaciously hanging onto the tree longer than most fruits.

The connection between these two meanings derived from the SHIN-KUF-DALET root might even predate the early grammarians, as it seems to be found in a sort of prophetic pun that G-d told Jeremiah:

> "The word of G-d [came] to me saying: 'What do you see Jeremiah?' And I said, 'I see a branch of an almond (*shaked*) tree.' And G-d said to me: 'You see goodness, for I am vigilant (*shoked*) about My word, to do it.'" (Jer. 1:11-12).

Rashi explains that just as the *shaked* tree is overly "attentive" to make sure it bears fruit before all the other trees, so is G-d especially "attentive" to fulfill the words relayed to the prophet. (By the way, see Jerusalemic Talmud *Taanit* 4:5, which paraphrases the word *shaked* in this passage as *luz*.)

In Modern Hebrew, the word *shaked* has an anatomical meaning — just like *luz* does. Except that the Modern Hebrew term does not refer to the mythical *luz* bone, it refers to the less-mythical "tonsils." Even-Shoshan's dictionary calls this

neologism a "folk usage" based on the similarity between the shape of the tonsils and the shape of an almond. As an aside, the Modern Hebrew word *shkadiyah* seems to have been invented by the poet Levin Kipnis (1894-1990), who used the word in his popular song about Tu B'Shvat. The word *shkadiyah* refers specifically to the "almond tree," as opposed to *shaked* which refers to the almond nut itself.

The English word *almond* sounds like it comes from Arabic (because of the *al-* prefix), but we have already established that the Arabic word for "almond" is *luz*, just like it is in Aramaic. The etymological ancestor of *almond* seems to ultimately be the Latin *amygdala*, although it went through different variations in between. Some argue that the *al-* prefix came about through contamination from the last syllable of the Latin etymon. Others argue that the Latin *amygdala* became *almendra* in Spanish because of the Arabic influence on Spanish, in which *al-* serves as the definite article ("the"), and the word only came to English through Spanish.

It is fascinating to note that the old name for Portugal when it was a Roman province was Lusitania. The Hungarian Maskillic scholar Solomon Löwisohn (1789-1821) writes that this name is derived from the Aramaic word *luz*, because when the Phoenicians came to the Iberian peninsula they saw a plentitude of almond trees. Löwisohn adds that there are several place-names in Portugal that refer to almonds, such as Calmende ("the house of almonds") and Castelmende ("the castle of almonds"), both of which are related to the Spanish/Portuguese words *almendron* ("almond"). It should be noted that this etymology for the name Lusitania is not widely-accepted nowadays.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 7)

"The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
– they must be felt with the heart."
(Helen Keller)

The second blessing continues: "Bring us in peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us with upright pride to our Land. For You effect salvations…You have chosen us from among every nation and every language."

One of the basic prerequisites for the Messianic era is the ingathering of the Jewish People from the "four corners of the earth." The Torah declares categorically (Devarim 30:3-5), "…[G-d] will gather you in from all the peoples to which G-d has scattered you… G-d will bring you to the Land that your forefathers possessed and you shall possess it…"

When the time is right, G-d will gather together *all* the Jews from all over the world and bring them to the Land of Israel. Not only does this include all Jews who may not even be aware that they are Jewish, but it will also include all the poor, misguided Jews who seem to think that Israel is a state that is built on apartheid policies and human rights abuses. But the verse promises even more. Everyone coming to the Land of Israel will do so with pride and dignity. At that time — may it happen very, very soon — it will be apparent to all that the Land of Israel will be the only conceivable place for Jews to live.

When a respected Rabbi in Romania decided to live out the rest of his days in Israel, he was asked why he

didn't just wait for the Messiah, and only afterwards go to Israel. He answered that he preferred to be found by the Messiah immediately in Jerusalem, rather than have him look all over for him in Bucharest!

Why does the blessing add the words, "and every language" if it has already stated that we have been chosen from every nation? Each nation has its own distinctive language, even when it is ostensibly the same language as another nation. Or, as Winston Churchill, the legendary Second World War Prime Minister of Great Britain was purported to have said about England and America: "They are two nations divided by a common language." What, then, are the words "and every language" adding to our understanding of the blessing? According to some of the commentaries, the difference is quite intriguing. The word "nation" is a reference to its physical nature, whereas "language" is a reference to its spiritual character. According to this interpretation we are emphasizing the fact that it is not enough that we — the Jewish Nation — are spiritually different from everyone else, but that we must remain physically different from the other nations as well. How do those differences manifest themselves? The spiritual differences should be heard through the way that we express ourselves. By avoiding offensive and hurtful speech and by being extremely vigilant to not insult someone even inadvertently. The physical differences can be seen by dressing in a way that is identifiably Jewish.

Another possible explanation is that "language" is alluding to foreign cultures. One of the most basic dimensions of nationhood is the unique culture each nation possesses. In many respects, it is the culture of each nation that differentiates it from its neighbor. Historically, it does not take too long for those settling into a new country to adopt its cultural mores. Sometimes it takes just one generation, sometimes two or three, but at some point the new citizens become culturally indistinguishable from their fellow compatriots. This is the way of the world and it makes perfect sense that it should be like this. In order for immigrants to establish themselves in their new country, they must adapt their national values to fit those of their newfound homeland. The only possible drawback to this process is that, by doing so, their original national identity is being supplanted by that of the country they have relocated to. For a new citizen, it might be a sad moment when they finally let go of their previous national identity, but it is also thrilling to know that they have begun the process of integrating into their new place of residence. But for the Jewish People it is not a "sad moment." Rather, it is a devastating tragedy, because we are not supposed to integrate into other societies. We are commanded to retain our identity as Jews regardless of where we find ourselves.

Sometimes it can be overwhelmingly difficult to identify as a Jew — especially if it might come at the price of one's life. Rabbi Moshe Aharon Stern (1926-1998), revered spiritual mentor to thousands and the *Mashgiach* of the Kamenitz Yeshiva in Jerusalem, would tell over a true story that happened during the Bolshevik revolution. As has almost always been the case during wartime, the Jews were on the wrong side. When the Red Army swept through an area, the Jews were accused of being royalists and they were killed. On the other hand, when the White Army seized control, they accused the Jews of being Bolsheviks and murdered them indiscriminately. Once, the Bolsheviks reached a certain town and immediately rounded up all the Jews with the intention of lining them up against a wall to shoot them. There were three hundred Jews reciting the *Shema* in anticipation of their death at the hands of the Bolsheviks.

As the Bolsheviks waited for the order to fire, the town pharmacist, who was the only person in the whole area with any medical knowledge, came rushing up to the commanding officer and asked what was going on. On being told that the town's Jewish population was going to be massacred, he stepped forward and told the commanding officer that he too was Jewish, and if they were planning on murdering every single Jew, he demanded to be included with them. On hearing this, the commander was dumbfounded. In all the years that the commanding officer had known the pharmacist, he had never shown any affinity to Judaism. In fact, no one had even the slightest clue that he was Jewish. And now, all of a sudden, it transpired that the one and only person who had any medical know-how was Jewish. What a dilemma! On the one hand, he desperately wanted to kill all the Jews, but on the other hand the pharmacist was the only one who was able to treat his wounded soldiers. In the end, left with no other alternative, the pharmacist and his three hundred "brothers" were left alive.

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Rosh Hashana 23-29

Blessing the New Moon: Renewal of King David's Dynasty

Rebbi said to Rabbi Chiya, "Go to Ein Tab and sanctify the moon. And then send me the following message as a sign that you succeeded: 'David, King of Israel, is alive and well (David, melech Yisrael, chai v'kayam).' "

There is a mitzvah to say a special *bracha* at the beginning of each new month. This *bracha* is referred to in halacha and in the vernacular as *birkat ha'levana* or *kiddush levana*. It is said by the congregation outside the synagogue after they briefly look at the new moon, and is usually said immediately after the evening prayers that conclude the Shabbat. The text of the *bracha* and accompanying words of praise to Hashem are found in any *siddur* — and sometimes even on the outside front wall of the synagogue!

The commentaries explain the significance of the statement in our *gemara*, which connects the new moon and King David. Rashi, on our *daf*, cites a verse in Tehillim (89:37) that draws a comparison between the moon and the royal dynasty of King David: "[The Kingdom of David] is like the moon, which is established forever and is a witness in the sky." Rashi in Tanach explains: "The moon and the sun are witnesses to him [King David] — as long as they exist, his kingdom will exist, as it is written (Yirmiyahu 33:20), 'If you break My covenant with the day, and My covenant with the night… also My covenant with David will be broken.'"

The accepted practice nowadays to mention these words of about King David as part of *kiddush levana* is first codified by the Rema in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 426:2. The Rema writes: "Our custom is to say '*David, melech Yisrael, chai v'kayam*' (David, the King of Israel, is alive and well).' Why? Since David's kingdom is compared to the moon (in Tanach), his kingdom will therefore be renewed in the future, just as the moon is renewed nowadays monthly. When King David's dynasty is renewed, the Jewish nation will then again cleave to its 'Husband,' meaning the Holy One, Blessed be He. This connection between the Jewish People and Hashem is similar to the manner in which the moon renews itself in connection with the sun. As a result of our renewed awareness of Hashem's promise to restore the Davidic dynasty and draw us closer to Him, we celebrate at this time with dancing and other signs of joy, as we would do at a wedding." (Based on Rabbeinu Bechayei to the Torah portion of Vayeishev; see also Maharitz Chuiyus, Maharsha and Midrash Rabbah Shemot 15.)

Other expressions of our happiness at the time of *kiddush levana* — due to our special relationship with Hashem and the restoration of King David's dynasty with the arrival of the Mashiach (a descendant of King David) — are part of this monthly ceremony. For example, we say three times "*Siman tov u'mazal tov*" — "May this be a good sign and good fortune for us and the entire Jewish nation." In addition, each person in the group says to three nearby people, "*Shalom Aleichem*," thus wishing them peace, happiness and success.

Some sources write that the phrase "David, King of Israel, is alive and well" has the same *gematria* as "Rosh Chodesh." *Iyun Tefillah*, a commentary on the siddur by Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, suggests that this *gematria* equivalence was indeed Rebbi's intention when requesting those specific words as a sign of the declaration of a new month, a sign or renewal.

- *Rosh Hashana 25a*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Tefillat Haderech: A Prayer to Travel Through Life

Yaakov has just left his home, and is headed to Haran to find a wife from the house of Lavan. He will spend the next twenty years building his family, and establishing his financial independence. En route, he vows to G-d: *If G-d will be with me, and guard me on this path on which I am going, and will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and I return in peace to my father's house – then G-d will be G-d to me.*

In the context of the priestly blessing, we first mention material blessing (*yivarechecha)* and then ask that G-d protect that blessing (*v'yishmirecha*). But here, Yaakov first asks for protection (*guard me on this path)* and then for the blessing (*bread to eat and food to wear*). Since he has no more than the shirt on his back, he cannot be referring to his possessions. But there is something he did pack for his journey, in abundant supply — his spiritual and moral attainments.

Until now, Yaakov has been a *yoshev ohalim*, dwelling in the tents of study. He now sets out to seek a wife and a livelihood to support a family. He is right to fear the dangers that lurk ahead. Once Paradise was lost, and man was to eat by the sweat of his brow, earning an independent livelihood became complex. More than effort and skill are required to gain that loaf of bread. Rarely is the race for that loaf unaccompanied by pressure to attain social status. That "path to bread and clothing", having become a dizzying quest for success, is ridden with potholes. Unscrupulous business practices, dubious marketing techniques, unfair competition, and undignified treatment of employees are but a few of the stumbling blocks on this path. "This path," our Sages comment, alludes to cardinal sins such as idolatry, illicit relations, murder, and slander. It takes courage and conviction to walk this road with honesty and integrity, to continue to value hard work, even as the outcomes of clever cunning seem ever more gainful. The path is indeed steep and thorny, with luxuries and windfalls beckoning the traveler to stray from his honest and law-abiding toil.

Yaakov's prayer is a model for similarly situated travelers. First, he prays for the preservation of his character, that he not forfeit his integrity. Only then does he ask for respectable sustenance (food) and social position (clothing). His third wish is for "shalom" — peace — and "return to his father's home" — intact family ties.

Finally, Yaakov vows that he will respond to G-d's preservation and blessing by declaring, "G-d will be to me Elokim." Most who have been so blessed would surely wish to continue that relationship with the G-d of mercy (*Hashem* — spelled *Yud, heh, vav* and *heh*), but Yaakov expresses the lofty wish of the Jew, to continue the relationship also with G-d as Lawgiver (*Elokim*). He vows: *The G-d who showered upon me the bounty of His love and goodness will be to me G-d Who not only gives and bestows, but also demands that His Will be done with all that bounty.* With that vow he has directed every thought in his mind, every sentiment in his heart, and every penny in his possession to be used in accordance with the Will of G-d.

- *Source: Commentary, Bereishet 28:20-21*

Perek Shira: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE DESERT

The desert says: "The desert and the wasteland will rejoice and the plains will be gladdened. They will sprout like a flower." (Yeshayahu 35:1)

There is nothing the empty desert ought to sing about. Nevertheless, with its very desolation, it sings how the desert-like Land of Israel will transform into a joyful irrigated land by the future redemption. Accordingly, the more dead a desert appears, the more it sings of Hashem's ingathering of His nation, which for so many centuries seemed hopelessly lost in exile.

It was specifically in the desert that our people received the Torah, our eternal heritage, and it was there that we became a glorious nation. That period of nomadic desert life was an exceptional circumstance. Ordinarily, the physical world is necessary for regular human life. However, that period can serve as a symbolic lesson for all generations that whenever the physical world is empty and silent, the soft voice of the soul can be heard from within.

Thus, even the desolate patches of life are opportunities for growth in one way or another, and they are indispensable components of the universe's song. Even when going through a dismal period of life, a Jew must not lose hope. The lower a person is, the more magnificent it will be when Hashem draws him close again. The desert's song may seem unpleasant to us, but to Hashem it is as beautiful as that of the Land of Israel.

- *Sources: Radak; Shir HaShirim Rabbah (2:1); Sifsei Renanos; Mishlei Yaakov. See also Bamidbar Rabbah (23:4)*

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

A Rabbi on a Special NATO Mission

A few weeks ago, our distinguished colleague, Rabbi Dr. Guy Matalon, Director of the Mechina Program, received an invitation to lecture at the NATO Defense College (NDC) in Rome, Italy.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established in 1947, soon after WWII, as a defense pact consisting of 10 European nations, the United States and Canada. Its initial purpose was to present a unified defense against future attacks by Germany and the Soviet Union. Over the years, NATO has expanded its membership to 30 nations, including Germany and a number of former member states of the Soviet Bloc.

The NDC was established in 1951 by then General and future President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower. In its mission statement, General Eisenhower set forth a number of goals, one of which was to "prepare selected officers and officials for important NATO and NATO related multinational appointments." In preparing those officers and officials, it was deemed necessary to teach them about the major religions and their impact on world history and on contemporary political and military realities.

The invitation to Rabbi Dr. Matalon to present a dissertation on Judaism to the College came as a seemingly fortuitous combination of unrelated circumstances. For the past number of years, the Israeli diplomat, Dr. Hillel Newman, a religious Jew, had given the yearly lecture to the group.

Recently, the Israeli Foreign Office named Dr. Newman as its Counsel General in Los Angeles. He was not able to travel to Rome for the lecture this year, and he called a close friend from his yeshiva days to fill in for him. That friend, a very prominent Rav involved in *kashrut* in Israel, lives next door to Rabbi Matalon. The lecture was to be in English, and since the Rav's English was not very fluent, he suggested to Dr. Newman that his good friend and neighbor Guy Matalon would be eminently qualified for the job. Rabbi Matalon has a Ph.D. from NYU in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Thought, and is the Director of the Mechina Program at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem.

Dr. Newman contacted the College and they agreed to invite Rabbi Matalon to give the lecture and appear on a panel with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and Islam. The lecture took place during the last week of October.

A funny thing happened on the Arkia flight to Rome. Rabbi Matalon's *chevrusah* (Torah study partner) is a pilot for Arkia, and Rabbi Matalon wondered whether he might be the pilot for his Rome flight! He was not, but his *chevrusah* contacted the pilot and co-pilot for that flight to tell them about their special passenger. Rabbi Matalon was invited into the cockpit, and, to his surprise, he discovered that the co-pilot, Akiva Brown, had been a student at Ohr Somayach 23 years earlier. A small world.

The lecture was very well received by the participants. The *imam,* an Italian representing Islam, was particularly impressed. He expressed the hope that the two of them could work together promoting warmer relations and better understanding of Judaism and Jews among the Muslims of Europe and the Middle East.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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. Hashem 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 Hashem 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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