

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 10 #7, December 2, 2022; 9 Kislev 5783; Vayeitzei 5783

**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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Mazel-Tov to Rabbi Aaron Lerner (Semikhah Yeshivat Chovevei Torah 2013), as he departs after a highly distinguished career as Executive Director of Hillel at UCLA. Rabbi Lerner is starting a new career as President and CEO of the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles.**

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

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In my message last week, I opened with the tendency of fiction, especially for children, to focus on good guys and bad guys. My point was that the sons of our Patriarchs, both those selected to be ancestors of B'Nai Yisrael and those not so selected, were more complex than "good" or "bad." As the Torah continues to focus on Yaakov, we see that he must overcome significant faults to grow from Yaakov (one who twists like a heel) to Yisrael (straight man of God). His story, however, remains complex throughout his life.

Vayeitzei opens and closes with Yaakov's dreams. As Vayeitzei opens, Yaakov is leaving Canaan for Haran, and he dreams of a ladder reaching the sky with angels climbing up and coming down. At the end of the parsha, as Yaakov returns to Canaan, he dreams again – this time encountering angels who are coming into and leaving Canaan. These dreams seem out of place, because chazal say that Yaakov did not sleep at all while he was with Lavan (for twenty years), because he spent all night every night taking care of Lavan's sheep. Why would a man who never sleeps have two such significant dreams?

In Yaakov's first dream, the ladder reaches from near his resting place to heaven. Rabbi David Fohrman observes many parallels in language and images between this dream and the Tower of Babel. The people of Shinar want to make a name for themselves and challenge God. Rabbi Fohrman's interpretation is that Yaakov's ladder represents God's message coming down to earth, and that Yaakov's potential is to be a conduit to bring His message to the world. In Yaakov's second dream, after Yaakov has spent twenty years improving his midot (character development), he merits meeting the angels directly. Since Yaakov returns with a large family, he can start a nation that can influence others with God's values and make the world a better place.

For twenty years living in Lavan's home and working for his father-in-law, Yaakov does graduate work in dealing with deception in a world of dishonest people. Before Yaakov leaves for Haran, he manipulates Esav's impulsive nature and bargains to take his brother's birthright in exchange for a bowl of lentil soup. He later cooperates with their mother to pose as his older brother and receive Yitzhak's bracha meant for Esav. Yaakov flees home because Esav threatens him over this deception.

Lavan agrees to permit Yaakov to marry Rachel in exchange for seven years of Yaakov's labor caring for his sheep. Lavan switches daughters, and Yaakov discovers that he has married Leah instead of Rachel. Lavan explains that "here" one does not favor the younger sibling over the older one. Yaakov understands that Lavan's trick is payment for his tricking his father and taking the bracha meant for Esav. Lavan's steady diet of deception teaches Yaakov empathy –

how it feels to be the victim of deception. Yaakov now understands lessons that we now learn from group and family therapy – how our thoughtless actions can cause long lasting pain to others.

Living with Lavan for twenty years and coping with two sisters as wives ensures that Yaakov has an unhappy time in Haran. Yaakov clearly favors Rachel over Leah – so God helps Leah by making her fertile and Rachel barren. Rachel complains to Yaakov. Rather than showing her empathy, Yaakov tells her to daven to Hashem. Favoring one wife over the other and failing to empathize with Rachel makes both his wives unhappy and guarantees that Yaakov is also unhappy in his marriages. As Yaakov's life continues, he repeats his mistake by favoring Rachel's children over those of Leah – thus continuing unhappy family relations to another generation. (For more on Yaakov's problems with Rachel, see Rabbi Ovadia's Dvar Torah below.)

By the end of Vayeitzei, Yaakov learns to face his father-in-law and angels directly and honestly. He earns the name Yisrael, honest man of God. He earns the right to become the father of B'Nai Yisrael, the Jewish nation. Even so, he has more to learn in terms of dealing with his wives and children.

At the beginning of Vayeitzei, it is easy to question whether Yaakov's midot are good enough for him to be a Patriarch of the Jewish nation. Rashi, however, apparently does share this doubt (see Rashi's famous interpretation of 28:10). \* By the time he graduates from Lavan's University of Deception and returns to Canaan, Yaakov grows substantially and earns God's sanction to become the father of our nation. Even so, no human is perfect, and Yaakov still needs to learn to treat his wives and raise his children better. Even the Avot are humans, have some failings, and have room to grow.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, always brought new insights into his Torah discussions and into our discussions as long as I knew him. We all have room to improve ourselves and grow in stature. May we bring this insight to our relationships with family and friends, and teach this message to our children and grandchildren.

\* The Torah could have stated that Yaakov left for Haran without also saying that he departed from Beer-sheva. Rashi states that the additional term indicates that the departure of a righteous person leaves a void in the city. This Rashi seems to indicate that Yaakov was already righteous when he left Canaan.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah & Alan

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**Dvar Torah: Vayeitzei: In All Honesty**  
by Rabbi Dovid Green © 2000

*"If you never lie you never have to remember anything" – Mark Twain*

*"Truth is a heavy burden, therefore it's bearers are so few" – Mishlei*

In this week's parsha we learn of the beginnings of the nation of Israel. The Talmud tells us "All beginnings are difficult." This rings true as we read of the life Yaakov avinu lead in the home of his uncle Lavan to whom he fled at the behest of his mother to protect him from his murderous brother. One of the biggest tests for Yaakov who personified truth was to live in the house of Lavan who personified trickery and deceit. Lavan was constantly changing the stipulations he had set down that would decide which portions of the flocks Yaakov tended would belong to Yaakov. Lavan lied and put in much calculated effort into doing so. The consummate example of the worst of his trickery is shown when Lavan sent the veiled Leah under the chuppah instead of Rochel for who's hand in marriage Yaakov had worked for seven years.

The Talmud (Makos 24a) tells us of the truthfulness of Rav Safra. Rav Safra owned a store. Once while he was saying "kriyas shema" a man entered the store and, not noticing that Rav Safra was davening, offered a price to purchase a certain item. Naturally Rav Safra didn't reply. Taking the silence to mean that the offer was too low, the man upped his offer not once but twice. After his prayer was done Rav Safra turned and told the surprised man that the original offer would be accepted. Though he could have easily made more money in the transaction, he answered honestly that he had in mind to accept the first offer but he hadn't replied because he had been praying.

If one is honest, one accepts reality as it is. That is the truth of existence. If one does not accept reality and lives in denial, one can easily become impatient for if the situation isn't as it should be then one wants it to change, and fast. Yaakov showed the ultimate patience with his uncle. He worked another seven years to earn the right to have married Rochel as well. Patience has its' rewards. In Vayeitzei, eleven of the twelve of the tribes of Israel are born. They are Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehudah, Yissachar, Zevulan, Dan, Naftali, Gad, Asher and Yosef. The birth of Binyamin is mentioned in Parshas Vayishlach. The staying power accomplished through the dedication to serving the Creator shown by the tribes and their progeny were built on the beginning efforts of their father Yaakov. What so we learn from this? Truth brings patience and then it brings nachas.\*

\*Enjoyment – Used most commonly to refer to the pleasure parents have from their children and also when the Creator has nachas from the creation.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5761-vayeitzei/>

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## **"This is None Other than the House of God" – Building a House that Endures**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer \* © 2010, 2022

Yaakov runs away from his brother, falls asleep, has a vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder, and God appears to him and promises to watch over him. He then wakes up and declares: "This is none other than the house of the Lord and this is the gate of heaven," on which the Rabbis comment, "Not like Avraham that called [God's place] a mountain, nor like Yitzchak that called it a field, but like Yaakov that called it a house" (Pesachim 88a). What is the significance of the place of God being a house, and what is the significance of a house in Yaakov's life?

A house, unlike a mountain or a field, has boundaries, has limits. It defines what is inside of it and what is outside of it. God is truly everywhere. But if God is in the fields and on the mountains, if God is experienced equally everywhere, then to some degree God is also nowhere. With a house, with walls, one defines a place, and God is – somehow -- more present in that place than outside that place. The boundaries allow for degrees of connection, degrees of intensity.

Boundaries, walls, also define an interior and an exterior. Within a smaller, interior space greater intimacy is possible. It is a connection that is not shared equally with all. It is only for those that are in the house, that are close, that are just with each other and not with the outside world. A house allows for warmth, a house can become a home, and as such it creates bonds of connection, bonds of intimacy.

Walls also give protection. Protection from the elements, privacy, and the ability for those inside to nurture one another and to tend to each other's needs. A house provides security and protection.

Boundaries also define limits. Not all is acceptable. There are rules in a house. But with those limits comes caring, comes direction, and comes meaning. The Beit HaMikdash was guided by a myriad of rituals and rules, but this is what gave it its sanctity, its meaning. And so it is in our own homes. As the ex-rapper Shyne, now Orthodox Jew Moses Levi, said at the end of a recent NY Time article:

*"What I do get is boundaries," he said. "Definition and form. And that is what Shabbat is. You can't just do whatever you want to do. You have to set limits for yourself."*

*"All these rules, rules, rules," he said with his hand on an open page of the Talmud. "But you know what you have if you don't have rules? You end up with a bunch of pills in your stomach. When you don't know when to say when and no one tells you no, you go off the deep."*

And, finally, a house requires work – work to build it, and work to sustain it. A mountain, a field, just are – they exist and we take them and value them for what they are. But a house we build, we put our efforts, we put ourselves into it, and we value it not just for what it is, but for what we have invested in it, we value it as a part of ourselves. Thus, Har Sinai, where we experienced the greatest presence and revelation of God, has no lasting sanctity after God's presence departed from it. The Beit haMikdash, the house that we build for God, retains its sanctity even after it was destroyed, because our investment, and our connection, transcends the structure and lives on for all future time.

This is true about creating a House of God, and it is true about creating our own homes, and our family life. Yaakov Avinu was the first of our forefathers to truly feel dispossessed and homeless. Avraham was told to leave his father's house and his homeland, but he went to the Promised Land, the land that would be his future (and present) inheritance. Yaakov ran away not only from his father's house and his homeland, but also from the Promised Land and his land of inheritance. Yaakov was also running away from his brother, and knew that his father had intended to give the blessing to his older brother. It is safe to say that Yaakov was feeling vulnerable, without a physical home, and emotionally distant from his family. Yaakov was without a home and a home life. Thus, God promises him not only that he will have the Land of Canaan and many children, but also that God will be with him and protect him. God will take care of him and provide him with the security and protection of a family when he is without one.

Yaakov, then, is the forefather who most feels the need for a home, who, lacking his own home, is most sensitive to what it means to have a home. He understands the importance of making a House of God, and not a field, not a mountain. He also understands the importance of building his own home. Although he makes mistakes as a father – showing favoritism to Yosef and Binyamin stand out in particular – Yaakov is the first of the forefathers that is described in the Torah as truly investing in his role not as a forefather, but as a father. He talks to his wives and consults with them before he makes decisions (Breishit 31:4 ff.), and he knows that he has an obligation to provide for his family – "When will I do also for my family?" (Breishit 30:30). He protects his family from imminent danger with Esav and his men, and risks his own life fighting the angel (contrast this to Avraham risking Sarah's wellbeing to protect his own life). He is involved in the lives of his children, he criticizes them when he needs to – for their actions at Shechem, for their behavior when they try to procure grain from Egypt – and he praises them when they are deserving – his highly personalized blessing at the end of his life.

Yaakov is, in all respects, a deeply devoted family man. He is a man that has spent his life trying to build a house, to ensure that his children have the walls and the structure, the discipline, the boundaries, the warmth, the caring, and the intimacy, that he himself lacked for so much of his life. He gives everything to his family, and it is thus that Yaakov's house endures. Yaakov created Beit Yaakov, the House of Jacob. He has 13 children, all of whom are part of Klal Yisrael. Twelve sons and one daughter, all of whom are respected for their individuality and whose differences and uniqueness make up the multifaceted nature of the Jewish People. They are children that know that there is a home where they are loved and cared for, that no matter how far they travel – to Mitzrayim, to Adulam – no matter what mistakes they make – that they can always come back home.

Like Yaakov, who called it a house, let us work to build a house for God that will endure, and let us work to build our own houses, to invest in them and in our relationships, so that no matter what happens, our house will always be a home, a home of love, of intimacy, of boundaries, of protection – a home where everyone is loved and valued for his and her individuality, a home to always come back to.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School.

## **Our Two Selves: Thoughts for Parashat Vayetsei**

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

The Kotzker Rebbe (1787-1859) was an important Hasidic leader known for his incisive mind and his impatience with human frailties. He was once told by his personal secretary that some of the Rebbe's silverware had been stolen. The Kotzker cried out in disbelief: "Stolen? Is it not written in the Torah 'you shall not steal?'" To him, it was unthinkable that anyone would willingly violate an ethical commandment of the Torah.

And yet, his silverware indeed had been stolen. People did — and do — sin. They may know in theory that God hates arrogance, lies, murder, wickedness, theft, trouble-making; and yet they do these things anyway. Why?

People commit abominable acts for a variety of motives. They may be seeking personal gain, or taking vengeance, or trying to assert their own personal power over others; or they may be mentally ill or psychologically damaged.

King Solomon reminds us that "stolen waters are sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." People derive a certain degree of pleasure in doing that which is forbidden. Perhaps this provides a sense of freedom and power; perhaps this lets us think that we have outsmarted the system. Since the days of Adam and Eve, humans have been confronted with temptations; and since the days of Adam and Eve, humans have succumbed to temptations.

Each human being has the capacity to be righteous and each has the capacity to be wicked. We each have the responsibility to shape the direction of our lives...for better and for worse.

In Hebrew, the usual word for sin is *het*. At its root, the word *het* means "missing the mark." The assumption is that people are aiming to behave honestly and morally, but they may veer off course. Their goal is to be upright and fine human beings; but due to errors in judgment or self-control, the goal is missed. They give in to the temptation to sin.

The Torah reports on an amazing dream of our forefather Jacob. He had fled from his brother Esau's wrath and was on his way to Laban, his future father-in-law. At nightfall, Jacob went to sleep. "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 were ascending and descending on it" (Bereishith 28:12). The usual understanding of this verse is that the angels were ascending and descending the rungs of the ladder.

**A Midrash (Bereishith Rabba 28:12) offers a different explanation. The Hebrew words *olim veyordim bo* (ascending and descending on it) can also be translated "ascending and descending on him." That is, the angels were jumping up and down on Jacob himself! The angels said to him: "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." According to this Midrash, the ideal image of Jacob was in heaven near the throne of glory of God. That ideal image represents the person Jacob could become...and should become. The angels viewed this perfected image of Jacob in heaven, but then descended to earth and found the sleeping Jacob who seemed unaware or unconcerned about his heavenly self. The angels pounced on him, as if to say, "wake up, don't you realize who you can become, who you are supposed to become?" [emphasis added]**

This Midrash relates not only to Jacob but to all human beings. In a sense, we each are two people: our heavenly ideal self; and our earthly self. The heavenly self is an ideal to which we should aspire. We are each born with unique talents, sensitivities, opportunities. If we strive to develop to our maximum potential, we can approach the heavenly ideal of ourselves. We will realize that the "stolen waters" may taste sweet in the short run; but that they are poisonous to our moral development in the long run.

The angels reminded our forefather Jacob to rise to the challenge of becoming his best self. It is a challenge that applies to each of us.

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

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/our-two-selves-thoughts-parashat-vayetsei>

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## **Thoughts on Friendship**

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

A while ago, I received a note from a friend with the following quotation: "Friendship isn't about whom you have known the longest....It's about who came and never left your side."

Among the basic ingredients of true friendship are: loyalty, trust, mutual commitment, shared ideals. Friends are very special to us because we know that they are there for us, just as we are here for them.

When we have the safe haven of a true friend and genuine friendship, we have something precious beyond words. Friends make life worthwhile because they embody the powers of goodness, trustworthiness and love.

Friendship is about those special people who are part of our lives and who have never left our side. Friendship is about people who believe in us and in whose goodness we believe. Friendship is about people who really care about us, just as we really care about them. Friendship is about loyalty and trust, commitment and sharing.

There is a category of friendship that ties us together with people we may hardly know or whom we have never even met. This kind of friend — also true and loyal — is someone with whom we share ideas, ideals and aspirations. The friendship is not based on face to face interactions, but on the interactions of our minds, our hearts and souls. It is spiritual friendship of kindred minds and souls.

We have various communities of such friends: people with whom we share a religious vision; and/or a vision for society; and/or a humanitarian cause; and/or a commitment to art, literature, science etc. Although we may not know these friends personally, we know we can count on them --just as they can count on us-- in our shared commitments to ideas and ideals in which we believe. These are people who have come into our lives and never left our sides. They are with us, as we are with them.

### **We recently marked the 15th anniversary of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, founded in October 2007.**

During these amazing years, the Institute has grown into an important force on behalf of an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Our website [jewishideas.org](http://jewishideas.org) has been attracting many thousands of visits per month; our journal, *Conversations*, is read by thousands of readers worldwide; our University Network includes hundreds of students, with programs on many American campuses. Our National Scholar's online learning link and our Zoom classes have brought Torah wisdom to a large audience, as has our youtube channel [youtube.com/jewishideasorg](http://youtube.com/jewishideasorg). Our "Sephardic Initiative" is focusing on teacher training, publications, online resources. The Institute has been here as a resource for the many people seeking guidance in Jewish law, tradition, worldview.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals began as an idea, as a framework for reshaping the thinking within the Orthodox Jewish community and beyond. It has been a strong, steady voice for diversity, creativity, dynamism. It has been a strong, steady voice against authoritarianism, obscurantism, extremism and sectarianism.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has made great strides of progress in the past fifteen years, and we hope it will continue to grow dramatically in the years ahead.

How did we get to this point? How did our Institute community manage to undertake so many projects and raise millions of dollars to fund our work?

The real answer is encapsulated in one word: friendship.

True and trusted personal friends have never left our side. They have stood with us in our successes and in our setbacks. They have rejoiced at our victories and offered consolation and encouragement at our failures.

Along with these true and trusted personal friends, we have been fortunate to have won the spiritual friendship of thousands of like-minded people throughout the world. We have a large and growing circle of friends who believe in the ideas and ideals of our Institute; who invest generously in our work; who are partners in the Institute's efforts. Through our shared religious vision, all of us are making a stand for a better, more intelligent, more diverse, more compassionate Orthodox Judaism...a better Judaism for all Jews and for society as a whole.

As we celebrate our 15th anniversary milestone, I express my deep and abiding gratitude to the friends who have stood with us faithfully. I thank personal friends for being there for us, as I hope we have been here for them. I thank our large community of spiritual friends — Institute members and supporters — who have joined us shoulder to shoulder in our important work.

I thank Board members of the Institute for their friendship, leadership and support: Isaac Ainetchi, Rabbi Hayyim Angel, Daniel Cohen, Andre Guenoun, Nugzari Jakobishvili and Stephen Neuwirth. I thank Alan Shamoon and the Apple Bank for Savings for making office space available to our Institute. I thank the supporters of our Institute's Fundraising Campaign, listed on the Scroll of Honor: <https://www.jewishideas.org/scrolllofhonor>

I thank the Institute's talented staff for their remarkable work: Rabbi Hayyim Angel, National Scholar; Andre Guenoun, Business Manager; Ronda Angel Arking, Managing Editor; Laurynn Lowe, Website Manager; and David Olivestone, Production Manager of Conversations.

I thank the Almighty Who has sustained us and enabled us to reach this milestone.

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

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its annual fund raising period.**

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/thoughts-friendship-rabbi-marc-d-angel>

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## **Vayeitzei -- Tzedaka and Maaser: Looking Through the Window** by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

Yakov was in a precarious situation. He was on a journey to find a wife in Charan, and he was penniless. He was charged with the task of perpetuating the family legacy of Avraham and Yitzchak (his brother Esav sure wasn't going to do it) and he had no resources to bank on. His strengths were prayer, faith, fortitude, and clear perspective, and he harnessed them with nobility. Standing at the site of what was destined to become the Beis Hamikdash, Yakov prayed and made a vow. He said, "If Hashem will be with me and guard me on my mission and provide me with food and clothing and return me safely to my father's house...Then all that You give me I shall tithe."

Yakov's commitment to tithe, declared at this critical juncture in the most sacred of places, has a treasured place in Halacha and Jewish observance. A Jew tithes. Barring a case where a person has a specific ruling due to mitigating circumstances, a Jew tithes as Yakov did. Ten percent of our income is designated and distributed to charitable causes.

This noble behavior may be difficult for some people. For a child who earns ten dollars, it means that he or she only get to take home nine. For a working person who earns a hundred thousand dollars, it means that he or she will distribute ten thousand dollars to poor people and other worthwhile causes. Taking ten percent from our earnings is substantial. Recognizing this, Hashem provides a promise that a person who gives appropriately will not lose out. "Tithe, and you will become wealthy." This serves both as an incentive and as an acknowledgment of the good that a person has done. "If you



provide for My interests, you can even test Me, for I will provide for you beyond expectation.” (Malachi 3:10) The poor and sacred endeavors are Hashem’s causes. If you provide for them then Hashem will provide most generously for you.

Jewish tradition declares, “More than the wealthy donor does for the poor, the poor does for the donor” and “Tzedaka saves from death.” There are causes that Hashem wants supported. He reserves special reward for those who partner with Him and see to it that those needs — of the poor and of sacred endeavors — are provided for.

One of the treasured perspectives which makes giving easier is to recall a time that we were downtrodden, nationally, or even individually. Yakov’s vow was made when he had “nothing.” He yearned to build a family. The stakes were high. But he had no assets. As he proceeded in his precarious journey into the unknown, we can feel his intense concern from the words of his prayer. He is concerned about his safety. He is concerned about basics like food and clothing. It is from this place of humbleness that Yakov sets into motion the Jewish standard of Tzedaka, tithing. With prayer and faith, he makes Hashem his partner. He declares that no matter how wealthy he becomes, he will always remember how he owes everything to Hashem.

There is a story told of a man who became very wealthy. Unfortunately, as he became more and more wealthy, he became more and more absorbed in himself and in his family to the exclusion of the community. One day his Rebbe came to visit. First, the Rebbe stood with him at the window and asked him what he saw. The wealthy man described what he saw: A shul, a yeshiva, and the needy in town. Then the Rebbe walked over to a huge ornate mirror and told the wealthy man to stand before it and describe what he saw. Although he was a bit perturbed as to where this was going, the man stood before the mirror and replied that he saw himself and his beautiful dining room. His Rebbe then asked him if he knew what the difference between a window and a mirror was. After all they are both made of glass, but one allows you to see others and the other causes you to see only yourself. With the wealthy man now paying close attention, the Rabbi intoned softly, “The difference between a window and a mirror is that when the silver gets in the way you only see yourself.”

Then, as only a lifelong Rebbe can do, the Rabbi took a pocketknife out and gently scraped away at the corner of the mirror, removing just a bit of the silver backing. He said, “My dear Talmid (student), “Before you became wealthy, you lived life through a window. You were sensitive and noticed the needs of others and of the community. But since you have become wealthy you have become busy and absorbed with yourself. You are seeing life through a mirror because of the silver backing. Please look daily at the scrape I have made in the mirror and remember to still see life through the window.”

Although not everyone is wealthy, when we give a tenth of what we have, there is a commonality between all of us. As the Talmud says, “Some give more, and some give less. The main thing is that our hearts are focused to serve Hashem as best we could.”

Giving any amount of Tzedaka is nice. But giving Maaser, the one tenth tithe which we learn from Yakov, takes Tzedaka to a whole new level. Maaser means that you are a percentage type partner with Hashem. Nine tenths of your earnings go to you for your needs and personal mitzvos. One tenth goes to Hashem to provide for His interests in this world beyond you and your family. It is a method of giving that ensures that no matter how much we have, we will always see the world through the window.

To give Maaser is more than just giving charity. To give Maaser is to see yourself as a custodian of Hashem’s tenth to provide for His interests. “What is a worthy cause?” is a question you will find yourself asking, not in a personal sense, but trying to see it in Hashem’s eyes as you allocate the funds He so lovingly entrusted with you.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

<http://www.teach613.org/toldos-the-pig-and-esav-a-perek-shirah-perspective/>

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**



## **Vayeitzei - Silence is Golden**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \*

When the Torah says Hashem remembers someone this is an indication that a particular merit of theirs was brought before G-d's Heavenly throne to sway a judgement in their favor. We find this term in our Parsha when Rochel conceives a child, and the commentaries discuss which merit tipped the scales in her favor. One explanation offered by the Medrash Tanchuma (Vayeitzei 6) is that it was the merit of Rochel's silence. The Medrash describes how Lavan's efforts to have Leah marry Yaakov instead of Rochel began long before the wedding day. Throughout the seven-year engagement, Yaakov would send gifts to Rochel. Lavan intercepted these gifts and secretly gave them to Leah, as though Yaakov had sent them for Leah. Rochel was aware of her father's actions, but chose to remain silent. Through this she acquired a trait of silence which she passed on to future generations, as well. The Medrash describes how descendants of Rochel, including her son Binyomin, King Saul and Queen Esther, each expressed this attribute of silence.

The Medrash asks why Rochel chose to be silent. Rabi Shimon bar Yochai explains that she understood that she if exposed Lavan's treachery, Lavan would retaliate by refusing to let her marry Yaakov under any circumstances. If she was silent, there was still a chance that she could end up marrying Yaakov once Yaakov found out on his own. She, therefore, chose to remain silent to avoid angering her father. The Medrash concludes that G-d told Rochel, "You were silent. By your life, in the merit of that silence I will remember you."

While it is often true that silence can be sign of wisdom, as it appears to be here, one would not think of silence as a sign of righteousness. We certainly would not think of silence as a noble character trait which would be the merit to tip the judgement in Heaven and determine that Rochel should bear children. Why was this silence such a powerful merit for Rochel?

The Alter of Kelm, Rav Simcha Zissel Broide, explains that the trait of silence, when used properly, is an act of great dignity and an expression of true G-dliness. We have a natural tendency to use our words as tools to clarify and correct situations in the world around us. Generally, this is a noble and proper usage of speech. However, there are times when an immediate response can be more damaging in the long run. The trait of silence is the ability to hold back and remain silent, even when you have something worth saying. Thinking before speaking, requires a patient and developed mind, and a wise and careful personality. In essence, silence under pressure is one of the greatest displays of self-control. It is the ultimate dignity.

The Alter of Kelm notes that developing this G-d-like nobility and dignity is included in the mitzvah of "v'halachta bidrachav" – "You shall walk in His ways". (Devarim 28:9) This means that we should strive to come close to G-d by emulating Him. One of G-d's attributes is that He always does things in the best way possible, and always with an eye on the goal. Therefore, this mitzvah requires us to develop this trait of silence, to be aware of when speaking would be harmful and to develop the self-control to remain silent.

This was Rochel's great merit. Rochel recognized Yaakov's righteousness and knew that by marrying him she would play a role in building the Jewish nation. When Lavan began putting Leah in her place by giving Yaakov's engagement gifts to Leah, she was watching her dreams go up in smoke. It would have been so easy to send a message to Yaakov and end her anguish. Yet, she held her tongue and considered the consequences of her actions. This was the merit which guaranteed she would bear children. This silence emulated G-d.

It is easier to recognize the significance of the great achievements that come through our actions and efforts. Recognizing the significance of silence is much more difficult. Yet, this Medrash is teaching us that the nobility and sanctity of silence can sometimes be far greater than any outward action.

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**Listen Carefully, Please!**

In the book *You Just Don't Understand*, which deals with the different conversational styles of men and women, author Deborah Tannen analyzes the case of a woman who underwent surgery and had to stay at the hospital several weeks for recovery. Her husband who saw how frustrated and lonely she was, and seeing that she constantly complained, suggested to take care of her at home. Unfortunately, the move did not bring the desired change and after a while she told her husband that she was still suffering and uncomfortable. Her husband commented that maybe they made a mistake and that she would have been better off in the hospital. In response, the woman burst into tears and claimed that he doesn't love her and that he wants her out of the house. The husband was perplexed because he thought that he was doing what is best for her. How did he become the bad guy?

Tannen explains that the woman wanted her husband to empathize with her, to say that he understands that she is undergoing a very difficult period, and that with his support and love and her resilience they will be able to overcome. The man, on the other hand, felt helpless and unable to help. When she was unhappy at the hospital, he brought her home. Now that she was unhappy at home, he was trying to find a solution to the current problem. He questioned the wisdom of his previous decision not because he didn't love her, but because he thought it might not have been the right solution.

After listening to and analyzing hundreds of conversations between men and women, Tannen was able to prove that many of these dialogs go awry because the two sides are not really having a conversation. They are not talking to each other but to their personal needs. When a woman speaks of a problem, she first seeks understanding and compassion, wanting to know that the other side commiserates with her and listens to her. When a man hears that there is a problem, he feels the obligation to offer a solution, and if he cannot do so he feels weak and threatened. That is why men don't ask for directions, because doing so will show that they cannot solve their problems on their own. All men know they sighed with relief when the GPS came around, and even more so with Waze, which gives other options in addition to a woman's voice. Men also rarely speak of their problems and when they do, they don't want the listener to empathize and say that know the feeling and had experienced the same pain or problem.

Yaakov is one man who suffered because of this communication gap. When Rachel saw that Leah, her twin and adversary, is having one child after another while she is still barren, she comes to him with an impossible request:

*"Grant me children or I will die."*

Yaakov was confused and became angry with her. He answers with what the Torah describes as rage:

*Can I replace God? He is the one who prevented you from having children.*

Rachel then offered him her maidservant as a surrogate mother, and she bears two children for Yaakov and Rachel. That seems to settle the matter, but it is not so simple. The midrash (Ber. Rabbah 71:7), probably taking its cue from the fact that Rachel named the children after the strife and pain she felt, comments that Yaakov was punished for his rash response. God told Yaakov:

*"Is this a way to answer a woman in distress? I swear, your sons are going to plead to her son for their lives!"*

The Midrash refers to Yosef's response to his brothers' plea (Gen. 50:19). After Yaakov's funeral, Yosef brothers feared his retaliation, and sent him a message, allegedly by Yaakov, asking him to forgive his brothers. Yosef cried when he heard the message, and he told his ashamed brothers:

*Fear not! Can I replace God?*

Yosef was trying to tell his brothers that God orchestrated the events that led him to be Egypt's viceroy, and that he cannot assume God's role as a judge and punish his brothers, but his words are the same words used by Yaakov to rebuke Rachel. According to the midrash, Yaakov's inappropriate response to Rachel created the sibling rivalry that tore his family apart.

The midrash and Tannen help us understand the conversation between Yaakov and Rachel. Rachel comes to speak with her husband from a place of sadness, sorrow, and jealousy. Leah, the once rejected wife, now has a seat of honor as the mother of Yaakov's growing family, while she feels estranged and alienated.

Rachel decides to become a surrogate mother through her maid, a common practice in the Ancient Near East, and a step already taken by Sarah and Abraham, but first she wants to know that he understands her, that he has compassion for her. She wants to convey her emotional turmoil to him and does it with full force:

*Grant me children or else I'll die!*

Was she contemplating suicide? No, she was simply saying that without her husband's love, outdone by Leah, and childless, she is as good as dead. What Yaakov hears, however, is:

*You are responsible for my sterility! Solve my problem!*

Since he cannot solve it, he gets angry. Not at her, but at his own inability to help his beloved wife, but when he says that God prevented her from having children, she hears something completely different. He meant to say that God is responsible for her situation and there is nothing he can do, but she heard the emphasis on the word ממך – you. She understands him to say that he has no problem since he has children from Leah. As Rashi puts it:

*I have children, God has made you, and not me, sterile.*

Yaakov should have said: "I know how you feel." She would have retaliated with: "No you don't. You have your children, and as a man you will never know what it means to be barren." He would have answered: "You are right, but I remember how my mother's eyes would fill with tears when she spoke about the twenty first years of her marriage, years of solitude, longing and despair."

All men, including Yaakov, should try to listen to what their conversational partner is saying. After showing Rachel his love and empathy, Yaakov could have asked her about her thoughts on what should be done. She might have said that she wants him to should pray for her, as the Midrash and Rashi suggest, that she wants him to spend more time with her, or as the text clearly demonstrates, tell him that she already has a solution.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Torah VeAhava )now SephardicU.com(. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD( and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

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## Truth and Oneness

By Raffi Levi \*

Is it possible that Truth is different in different settings? Or is Truth always only one thing? )Or, can both of these be true?(

The Rabbis say "elu v'elu divrei Elokim chaim" — that these and those are the words of a living God. That when it comes to Torah, there are many truths — many perspectives on a concept that can all be words of the living God, words of Truth. But how are we able to realize that there are many truths if there was only one Matan Torah, and there is only one Torah? Certainly it ought to be that one truth supersedes others. But the Rabbis suggest otherwise.

In this week's parsha we read of Yaakov leaving his home, running away, and breaking out of his natural habitat. Yaakov goes out into the wilderness and we learn that he sets up camp under the stars, resting his head on a pile of stones:

*"He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place" )Gen. 28:11(.*

The Me'or Einayim, a commentary on the Torah by Rabbi Menachem Nachum Twersky, suggests a fascinating read on this verse. He suggests that the many stones underneath the head of Yaakov represent a special quality that Yaakov had, which was his ability to break down revelation — revealed Truths from HaShem — into many comprehensible pieces. Yaakov took the paradoxical incomprehensible and divine Truths, and brought them down to our world in all their variety. It is no coincidence then, that through Yaakov there is not only one progenitor of the blessing of God, but twelve. Twelve separate tribes with different personalities and perspectives, all reaching towards the same truth.

The Me'or Einayim suggests that it is only because our world appears divided and is experienced as separate that we see different perspectives on reality. But in truth our varied perspectives, even those that completely oppose one another, are all rooted in the same source. They are all part of the living God. And whether we realize it or not, we are all connected.

What this means is that Torah has many different perspectives that are all true, and at the same time that they are different, they are all really One. When we go back to the source of Truth, we begin to realize its oneness, and the oneness in everything.

Yaakov does this too, says the Me'or Einayim. Later Yaakov takes the separate stones that he placed under his head and makes them into a pillar. The Me'or Einayim says he made it into a pillar of unity. Yaakov shows the capacity to realize the ultimate truth of oneness, a oneness that shatters in order to enter into our lower level of consciousness.

This very deep idea offers insight into everything we do. When we realize with humility that our perspective is but one small percentage of all knowledge, we walk through the world learning from others, and begin to realize the beautiful range of perspective and possibilities that exist in this life.

For this shabbat, may we all find the humility of Yaakov, and remember that our perspective is just one, and yet it is also one of the words of the Living God, Divrei Elokim Chaim.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Third-year semikha student at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2022/12/truth-and-oneness/>

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### **Shavuon Vayeitzei** By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

I fractured my wrist the first time I played rugby.

Actually that's me being generous. The truth is I fractured my wrist within the first 10 seconds of play in my first and only game of rugby.

It was at a Jewish boys camp in Chicago one summer that we all decided to give rugby a shot. I don't remember why we chose the sport that none of us American raised boys ever played. I don't remember if we even knew the rules besides destroy the person with the ball. But I do remember being excited. In a camp environment where it's always safety first, it was so cool to break out of the mold and just plan to ram each other. And get rammed I did as soon as I caught the ball from the other team's kickoff )is kickoff the right word?{(.

I flipped over in the air, landed on my arm, and about 5 minutes later was white in the face as I realized this was not a regular thing you could shake off. Thank God it was only a fracture and not a break. But still to this day, I feel a slight painless something in my right wrist whenever I rotate it. It's my little rugby reminder.

Honestly though, if I was going to cause a little rough and tumble to my body, I'm glad I did it playing rugby and not something like falling down the stairs. Now I have a story and a lifelong connection to a sport I've never watched a full game of or ever played for more than 10 seconds. And ironically, I'm much more interested in sports, athletics, tramping, and being active because I've been there done that. As long as it's not a situation where a bunch of overenergized men are trying to trample me, I have confidence in my ability to handle it. But I'm a little conflicted as to whether I'll try rugby again

Maybe Yaakov went through a similar conflict when he first ventured out into what we usually call “the real world.” He wasn’t expecting to get tricked and bullied by Lavan. Up until that point, he was just a pure, innocent, tent dweller. And now he had to venture out into a world where frauds and charlatans would be looking to cheat and take advantage of him. He was running right into the rugby scrum without any concept of what it may be. And boy did he get taken. But boy did he learn from all the chicanery that was done to him. He left Lavan with great wealth and family because he learned how to play the game. And it only took him 20 years. He suffered some fractures along the way but he got up and transformed himself into a real world, tougher than rugby, superstar.

And he was the only Patriarch that goes through a transformation story. Avraham and Isaac were great but none of them had to radically alter their personality to such an extent. Yaakov even got the new name of Yisrael to suit his newfound identity.

So maybe with that story to inspire me, I’ll play another game of rugby or at least try another 10 seconds of it. Lord knows I’m in the right country for it. And maybe I’ll get so good that I’ll also get a new name. I’m thinking “Jonah Tali Lomu” if that’s not already taken.

Shabbat Shalom!

\* Rabbi Rube recently moved from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he is Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation.

[Ed: Jonah Tali Lomu, 1975-2015, was a rugby player for New Zealand.]

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## **Rav Kook Torah VaYeitzei: Prayer Before Sleep**

After leaving his family in Beersheba, Jacob reached Beth El at nightfall. Before lying down to sleep, Jacob prayed there.

*“He entreated at the place and stayed overnight, for it suddenly became night.”* )Gen. 28:11(

The Sages taught that it was in Beth El that Jacob established the third daily prayer — Ma’ariv, the evening service. While less obligatory than the morning and afternoon prayers, Ma’ariv has its own special benefits. The Talmudic sage Abba Benjamin testified that he took great pains every day of his life to recite the evening prayer before going to sleep )Berachot 5b(. What is so special about this prayer?

### **Refining Desires and the Imagination**

When we are asleep, our cognitive and rational functions are suspended, and the body’s involuntary processes take over. Only our powers of imagination remain active, guiding our dreams as we sleep. Without the control and regulation of our intellectual faculties, a measure of impurity descends on the body during the night. We remove this impurity by washing our hands when we rise in the morning.

Holy individuals may experience sublime visions in their sleep, like Jacob, who dreamt of angels ascending and descending a Heaven-bound ladder as he slept in Beth El. However, it is only the soul that experiences these visions. The body is detached from the soul during sleep and is not influenced by the soul’s uplifting experiences.

We have two tools for spiritual growth: Torah study and prayer. Abba Benjamin’s statement on the importance of the Ma’ariv prayer helps clarify how each tool ennoble a different facet of the human soul

When we study Torah, we refine and elevate our intellectual powers. The function of prayer, on the other hand, is to uplift our faculty of *ratzon*, our will or primal desires. Through prayer and introspection, we refine our will and powers of imagination. As we articulate our inner needs and aspirations in prayer, our desires are elevated toward holier, more spiritual goals.

Our imaginative faculties are closer to our physical side than the intellect is. Thus they function even as we sleep, in our

dreams. Since it is through prayer that we can most effectively direct those faculties still active during sleep, it is logical that prayer before sleep will have the strongest impact on this aspect of life. For this reason, Abba Benjamin stressed the importance of his nighttime prayer.

)Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 19.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYETZE59.htm>

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### **Light in Dark Times (Vayetse 5774, 5781)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is the strength Jacob bequeathed to the Jewish people. What is remarkable is not merely that this one tiny people survived tragedies that would have spelled the end of any other people: the destruction of two Temples; the Babylonian and Roman conquests; the expulsions, persecutions, and pogroms of the Middle Ages; the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth-century Europe; and the Holocaust. It is truly astonishing that after each cataclysm, Judaism renewed itself, scaling new heights of achievement.

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

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

people, a nation of leaders. )This, I believe, is what the phrase “*a kingdom of Priests*” [Ex. 19:6] means(.

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

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

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

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

*It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. Theodore Roosevelt, “Citizenship in a Republic,” speech given at the Sorbonne, Paris, 23 April 1910.*

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

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

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you think greatness leads to moments of despair? Do you think moments of despair can lead to greatness?
2. How can we apply this message to our lives today?
3. With all the stories in the Torah, what is unique about the story of Jacob?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayetse/light-in-dark-times/> 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.

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## **The Reason Isaac Went Blind**



When Jacob took advantage of his father's blindness to secure the blessing intended for his elder twin brother Esau,<sup>1</sup> Esau pledged fatal revenge.<sup>2</sup> To avoid tragedy, his parents, Isaac and Rebecca, urged Jacob to traverse approximately 1,300 miles to lodge with his uncle Laban in Padan Aram in Upper Mesopotamia (today, northwestern Iraq).<sup>3</sup>

Not long into his journey, Jacob lay down to rest for the night and experienced the famous dream of the ladder with angels ascending and descending. In this dream, G d appeared to Jacob, promised His protection, and assured him that the land upon which he lay would one day belong to his descendants.

### **Compared to the Dead**

The dream began with G d introducing Himself: "I am the G d of your father Abraham and the L rd of Isaac."<sup>4</sup> Rashi notes that this wording is highly irregular:

*Although we do not find in Scripture that the Holy One, blessed is He, associates His name with that of the righteous during their lifetimes by writing "the God of so-and-so" ... nevertheless, here He associated His name with Isaac [during his lifetime] because his [Isaac's] eyes had become dim, and he was confined in his house, and was therefore akin to a dead person, with the evil inclination having ceased from him.*

So long as a person is alive, it is too early to say that they are righteous, for who knows what the future may bring? People have free will, so even if they are currently most pious, perhaps they will disgrace themselves and turn to wrongdoing. Only after the person's death, when it is clear that they ended their life righteously, can they be accorded such an honor. But in Isaac's case, says Rashi, there was no reason to fear this eventuality. As noted earlier, Isaac was blind and considered incapable of sin, so his righteousness was secured.

### **Can Blind People Not Sin?**

But is this really so? Is it plausible to declare a blind person incapable of sin? Is eyesight a prerequisite for iniquity? Surely not! It flies against common sense and contradicts our own life experience to suggest that a blind person is free of temptation. Blindness may make some sins more difficult, but it does not make sinning impossible. Blind people sin too!

### **Blinded by Smoke**

Let's turn for a moment to how Isaac became blind. Rashi offers three explanations.

The first (and presumably main) one is that Isaac was blinded by the smoke from offerings Esau's wives prepared for their idols.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the verse that talks about Isaac's blindness appears immediately after it tells us about Esau's wives.<sup>6</sup> It stands to reason that the two matters are related. The Torah<sup>7</sup> explicitly states that Isaac disapproved of Esau's choice of wife, which may well have been due to their idolatrous practices.

There is a major problem with this explanation, however. Since when does smoke cause blindness? Smoke inhalation can be devastating for one's lungs, but it is not known to have that kind of impact on eyesight. It is true that smoke irritates the eyes,<sup>8</sup> but it is not something that will cause permanent loss of vision.

Moreover, there is no reason to believe that smoke from idol worship would be any more damaging to someone's eyes than any other type of smoke. Could it really be that Isaac's blindness is related to smoke?

### **Blind, Humble, and Holy**

The Rebbe offers a remarkable explanation by way of an important incident in the Talmud. Rav Yosef (son of Chiyya) was a third-century Talmudic scholar, renowned for his encyclopedic knowledge.<sup>9</sup> When Rav Yehuda (son of Yechezkel) passed away, the headship of the famed Pumbedita yeshiva in Babylon became vacant.

Due to his vast learning, Rav Yosef was the frontrunner for the position. In fact, a query was sent to the sages of Israel,

and they proposed Rav Yosef to assume the leadership. But Rav Yosef's scholarship was equaled by his humility and he declined the honor, deferring instead to another outstanding candidate, Rabba bar Nachmani. Rabba led the yeshiva with great distinction for 22 years and was then succeeded by Rav Yosef.

The Talmud concludes that, "during all the years that Rabba presided, a doctor<sup>10</sup> never had reason to visit the home of Rav Yosef."

The need for a doctor is so essential that the Talmud cautions against living in a place that does not have one.<sup>11</sup> For Rav Yosef and his entire family to not need the services of a physician for more than two decades is seen as miraculous, an indication of his unique virtue and holiness.

Rav Yosef was also famously blind. What was the cause of his blindness? There is an ancient tradition that he brought blindness upon himself, as he did not want to see things that would be damaging to his spiritual state.<sup>12</sup>

### **Isaac's Blindness**

Likewise, Isaac's blindness was not a product of the smoke )for, as noted, smoke does not damage the eyes(. Rather, Isaac was so disgusted at the idolatrous practices of Esau's wives that he willed his eyesight to depart, so that he should not have to witness such an abomination. If the price of vision was to behold such spiritually offensive acts, Isaac preferred to forego his sight.

If that is the reason for Isaac's blindness, we can now understand why it was proof that Isaac was beyond the possibility of sin. G d could associate His name with Isaac even during his lifetime, because Isaac had attained such a lofty nature that his body was a loyal agent of his soul. If Isaac was so holy that his eyes automatically stopped working because they interfered with his sacred nature, that was proof positive that he was entirely free of negative qualities.

People like Isaac and Rav Yosef were more angel than human. Such noble spirits show us that even in this life we can elevate ourselves beyond the constraints of the physical. We each have a soul that is a spark of G d, and so we are connected to infinite holiness. Contemplating the lives of people who were the personification of holiness should inspire us to release the true potential of our souls and to sanctify our lives.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, Parshat Vayetze II.

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. As related in detail in Genesis chapter 27.
2. Genesis 27:41.
3. Genesis 28:1.
4. Genesis 28:13.
5. Genesis 27:1.
6. Genesis 27:46.
7. Genesis 28:8.
8. Proverbs 10:26 has the phrase "as smoke to the eyes."
9. Talmud, end of tractate Berachot, and end of tractate Horiyyot.
10. Literally "an expert." It normally refers to one who was trained in bloodletting, a highly common treatment in ancient times.
11. Sanhedrin 17b.

12. Rabbeinu Gershom, Rabbeinu Nissim, Ramban to Talmud, Kiddushin 31a.

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[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5291100/jewish/The-Reason-Isaac-Went-Blind.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5291100/jewish/The-Reason-Isaac-Went-Blind.htm)

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**Vayeitzei: Rachel's Beauty**  
by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

**Emulating Rachel's Beauty**

*Leah's eye's were tender, while Rachel was a woman of beautiful facial features and complexion. )Gen. 29:17(*

Spiritually, Rachel's beauty indicates that she personified the perfectly-righteous individual, unblemished in the performance of both the active and the passive commandments.

True beauty is the harmonious blend of diverse colors or sounds; one color or note by itself is not an example of beauty. Similarly, we all have one particular, individual strength or proclivity that we excel at, and on which we find it easiest to focus when it comes to fulfilling our Divine mission. But only a relationship with G-d that transcends personal inclinations, mustering all our strengths and all our weaknesses, can be termed "beautiful."

G-d wants us to realize our fullest potential, marshaling all aspects of our personalities – even aspects of our personality that we might prefer to ignore or even forget about – toward promoting our own spiritual growth and that of the world at large.

– from *Daily Wisdom* #3

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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\* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

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# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 29, Issue 7

Shabbat Parashat Vayetze

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Laban the Aramean

The events narrated in this week's parsha – Jacob's flight to Laban, his stay there, and his escape, pursued by his father-in-law – gave rise to the strangest passage in the Haggadah. Commenting on Deuteronomy 26:5, the passage we expound on Seder night, it says as follows: Arami oved avi. Go and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to our father Jacob, for Pharaoh condemned only the boys to death, but Laban sought to uproot everything.

There are three problems with this text. First, it understands the words arami oved avi to mean, "[Laban] an Aramean [tried to] destroy my father." But this cannot be the plain sense of the verse because, as Ibn Ezra points out, oved is an intransitive verb. It cannot take an object. It means "lost," "wandering," "fugitive," "poor," "homeless," or "on the brink of perishing." The phrase therefore means something like, "My father was a wandering Aramean." The "father" referred to is either Jacob (Ibn Ezra, Sforno), or Abraham (Rashbam), or all the patriarchs (Shadal). As for the word Aram, this was the region from which Abraham set out to travel to Canaan, and to which Jacob fled to escape the anger of Esau. The general sense of the phrase is that the patriarchs had no land and no permanent home. They were vulnerable. They were nomads. As for Laban, he does not appear in the verse at all, except by a very forced reading.

Secondly, there is no evidence that Laban the Aramean actually harmed Jacob. To the contrary, as he was pursuing Jacob (but before he caught up with him) it is written: "God appeared to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, 'Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad'" (Gen. 31:24). Laban himself said to Jacob, "I have it in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father said to me last night, 'Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad.'" So Laban did nothing to Jacob and his family. He may have wanted to, but in the end he did not. Pharaoh, by contrast, did not merely contemplate doing evil to the Israelites; he actually did so, killing every male child and enslaving the entire population.

Third, and most fundamental: the Seder night is dedicated to retelling the story of the Exodus. We are charged to remember it, engrave it on the hearts of our children, and "the more one tells of the coming out of Egypt, the more admirable it is." Why then diminish

the miracle by saying in effect: "Egypt? That was nothing compared to Laban!"

All this is very strange indeed. Let me suggest an explanation. We have here a phrase with two quite different meanings, depending on the context in which we read it.

Originally the text of Arami oved avi had nothing to do with Pesach. It appears in the Torah as the text of the declaration to be said on bringing first-fruits to the Temple, which normally happened on Shavuot.

Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt... Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm... He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the first-fruits of the soil that You, Lord, have given me." (Deut. 26:5-10).

In the context of first-fruits, the literal translation, "My father was a wandering Aramean," makes eminent sense. The text is contrasting the past when the patriarchs were nomads, forced to wander from place to place, with the present when, thanks to God, the Israelites have a land of their own. The contrast is between homelessness and home. But that is specifically when we speak about first-fruits – the produce of the land.

At some stage, however, the passage was placed in another context, namely Pesach, the Seder and the story of the Exodus. The Mishnah specifies that it be read and expounded on Seder night.[1] Almost certainly the reason is that same (relatively rare) verb h-g-d, from which the word Haggadah is derived, occurs both in connection with telling the story of Pesach (Ex. 13:8), and making the first-fruits declaration (Deut. 26:3).

This created a significant problem. The passage does indeed deal with going down to Egypt, being persecuted there, and being brought out by God. But what is the connection between "My father was a wandering/fugitive Aramean" and the Exodus? The patriarchs and matriarchs lived a nomadic life. But that was not the reason they went down to Egypt. They did so because there was a famine in the land, and because Joseph was viceroy. It had nothing to do with wandering.

The Sages, however, understood something deep about the narratives of the patriarchs and matriarchs. They formulated the principle that ma'asei avot siman lebanim, "What happened to the fathers was a sign for the children." [2]

They saw that certain passages in Genesis could only be understood as a forerunner, a prefiguration, of later events.

The classic example occurs in Genesis 12 when, almost immediately after arriving in the land of Canaan, Abraham and Sarah were forced into exile in Egypt. Abraham's life was at risk. Sarah was taken into Pharaoh's harem. God then struck Pharaoh's household with plagues, and Pharaoh sent them away. The parallels between this and the story of the Exodus are obvious.

Something similar happened to Abraham and Sarah later on in Gerar (Gen. 20), as it did, also in Gerar, to Isaac and Rebecca (Genesis 26). But did Jacob undergo his own prefiguration of the exodus? He did, late in life, go down to Egypt with his family. But this was not in anticipation of the Exodus. It was the Exodus itself.

Earlier, in our parsha, he had gone into exile, but this was not because of famine. It was out of fear for Esau. Nor was it to a land of strangers. He was travelling to his mother's own family. Jacob seems to be the only one of the patriarchs not to live out, in advance, the experience of exile and exodus.

The Sages, however, realised otherwise. Living with Laban, he had lost his freedom. He had become, in effect, his father-in-law's slave. Eventually he had to escape, without letting Laban know he was going. He knew that, if he could, Laban would keep him in his household as a kind of prisoner.

In this respect, Jacob's experience was closer to the Exodus than that of Abraham or Isaac. No one stopped Abraham or Isaac from leaving. No one pursued them. And no one treated them badly. It was Jacob's experience in the house of Laban that was the sharpest prefiguration of the Exodus. "What happened to the fathers was a sign for the children."

But where does Laban come into the phrase, Arami oved avi, "A wandering Aramean was my father"? Answer: only Laban and Laban's father Betuel are called Arami or ha-Arami in the whole Torah. Therefore Arami means "Laban."

How do we know that he sought to do Jacob harm? Because God appeared to him at night and said "Beware of attempting anything with

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Jacob, good or bad.” God would not have warned Laban against doing anything to Jacob, had Laban not intended to do so. God does not warn us against doing something we were not about to do anyway. Besides which, the next day, Laban said to Jacob, “I have it in my power to do you harm.” That was a threat. It is clear that had God not warned him, he would indeed have done Jacob harm.

How can we read this into the verse? Because the root a-v-d, which means “lost, wandering,” might also, in the piel or hiphil grammatical tenses, mean, “to destroy.” Of course, Laban did not destroy “my father” or anyone else. But that was because of Divine intervention. Hence the phrase could be taken to mean, “[Laban] the Aramean [tried to] destroy my father.” This is how Rashi understands it.

What then are we to make of the phrase, “Pharaoh condemned only the boys to death, but Laban sought to uproot everything”? The answer is not that Laban sought to kill all the members of Jacob’s family. Quite the opposite. He said to Jacob: “The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine” (Gen. 31:43). Jacob had worked for some twenty years to earn his family and flocks. Yet Laban still claimed they were his own. Had God not intervened, he would have kept Jacob’s entire family as prisoners. That is how he “sought to uproot everything” by denying them all the chance to go free.

This interpretation of Arami oved avi is not the plain sense. But the plain sense related this passage to the bringing first-fruits. It was the genius of the Sages to give it an interpretation that connected it with Pesach and the Exodus. And though it gives a far-fetched reading of the phrase, it gives a compelling interpretation to the entire narrative of Jacob in Laban’s house. It tells us that the third of the patriarchs, whose descent to Egypt would actually begin the story of the Exodus, had himself undergone an exodus experience in his youth.[3]

Ma’asei avot siman lebanim, “the act of the fathers are a sign to their children,” tells us that what is happening now has happened before. That does not mean that danger is to be treated lightly. But it does mean that we should never despair. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their wives experienced exile and exodus as if to say to their descendants, this is not unknown territory. God was with us then; He will be with you now.

I believe that we can face the future without fear because we have been here before and because we are not alone.

[1] Mishnah Pesachim 10:4.

[2] The principle does not appear explicitly in these terms in the classic Midrashic or Talmudic literature. A similar expression appears in Bereishit Rabbah 39:8. A key text is Ramban, Commentary to Gen. 12:6, 10. It was widely adopted by subsequent commentators.

[3] On this whole subject, see David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible*, Faber, 1963.

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

We left Jacob at the end of last week’s portion as he was leaving behind Laban and Laban-land, heaven-bent on returning to the land of Abraham and to the house of Isaac. Jacob understands that his inner self has been overtaken by the deceitful and aggressive hands of Esau, that he must return to his ancestral home in order to recapture the Abrahamic birthright. But what exactly are the building blocks of this birthright?

Is it possible that Esau is now even more deserving, or at least as deserving, of it as is Jacob? What is the real content—and significance—of our Jewish birthright? The first prerequisite for the carrier of the birthright is a very strong Hebrew identity, a powerful familial connection that contributes—and defines—the link to a specific and unique heritage and ancestry. Abraham established his commitment to the Hebrew identity when he insisted on purchasing a separate grave for his wife Sarah, when he was willing to spend a small fortune in establishing a Hebrew cemetery beyond the various sites of the Hittites. He defines himself as an alien resident, sees himself as living amongst the Hittites but certainly not as being existentially a Hittite, and therefore refuses an “of right” burial for Sarah in any Hittite plot of land (Gen. 23:3-20).

Esau is described as having a strong sense of familial identity. He demonstrates strong feelings of filial respect and devotion; the Bible even records that Isaac loved Esau because he made certain to provide his father with the venison he dearly loved (Gen. 25:28). He even has strong sibling ties to his brother, despite Jacob’s underhanded deception surrounding the blessings.

In the Torah portion this week, the Bible tells us how Esau first seemed to have set up a greeting brigade of 400 potential warriors to “welcome” the return of the prodigal brother (Gen. 32:7); but once Esau actually sees his younger brother and his family, his heart apparently melts with brotherly love: “Esau ran to meet him; he hugged him, fell upon his neck and kissed him” (Gen. 33:4). Esau even wishes for the two of them to travel together and to settle down together. “Let us travel together and move on; I will go alongside you.”

It is Jacob who politely refuses: “You know that my children are weak and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle. Please go ahead of me, I shall eventually come to you in Seir” (Gen. 33:13-14).

Yes, Esau has strong familial identity. However, Abraham has two crucial characteristics that Esau lacks: continuity and destiny.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Continuity is most meaningfully expressed in marrying a suitable mate: from our modern perspective, taking a Jewish spouse (so that the children will remain Jewish), and from the biblical perspective, not marrying an immoral Canaanite. Esau takes Hittite wives (Gen. 26:34), “Judith the daughter of Beeri and Basemath the daughter of Elon.” Perhaps he comforted himself with the fact that his first wife had a Jewish name (Judith) and the second had a name which means sweet-smelling perfume.

Esau’s mentality is apparently as superficial as the name “Edom” he acquired from his red complexion as well as the red colors of the lentil soup he exchanged for his birthright and the venison he gave his father. Moreover, when he realizes how upset his parents are with his marital choice, he still doesn’t look to his mother’s family in Aram Naharayim for a mate, but rather chooses a daughter of Ishmael, the “wild ass of a man whose hand is over everything.” And he takes this wife not instead of but in addition to his Hittite wives (Gen. 28:9).

Another test for continuity is a unique daily lifestyle, the ability to delay gratification and act with discipline, especially in the sexual and gustatory realms. The biblical laws of kashrut for Jews have always been a powerful tool in keeping us a “nation set apart” which didn’t fall prey to assimilation. Esau sells his birthright for a portion of lentil soup—a thick, juicy filet mignon steak in our contemporary terms. He even expresses his desire to have the broth “poured into his mouth” as one would feed a camel (Gen. 25:30, see B.T. Shabbat, P.155 b, Rashi ad loc.).

To have one’s eyes on a historic mission, to realize the goal of having “all the families of the earth blessed by us” (Gen. 12:3) through our vision of a God of compassionate justice, morality and peace (Gen. 18:19) requires a lifestyle of commitment to an ideal and delayed gratification which is foreign to—and even impossible for—the character displayed by Esau. When Jacob tells Esau that he will meet up with him in Seir, our Midrash connects this rapprochement to the messianic period when “the saviors will go up to Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau” (Gen. 33:14, Obad. 1:21, Genesis Raba 78, 14). Jacob then continues to travel to Succoth, which implies the tabernacle and the Holy Temple, the place in Jerusalem from where our message to the world will eventually emanate (Isa. 2, Mic. 4).

But before Jacob can affirm his covenantal continuity and begin to achieve his destiny, he must first disgorge the grasping hands of Esau which have overtaken his personality and substituted the Jacob of “he shall emerge triumphant at the end” with “heel-sneak”; he must restore his “image of God” which was the

source of that “wholehearted individual who was a studious dweller in tents.”

This is the purpose of that mysteriously eerie nocturnal struggle with an anonymous assailant, a wrestling match which must precede the Esau/Jacob face-to-face confrontation. Jacob is all alone (Gen. 32:25); his struggle is an inner battle, to rid himself of the heel-sneak Esau in his soul. And he wins, both over divine forces and human powers (Gen. 32:28); he has seen God (Elohim) face-to-face, and succeeded in restoring his own divine image by exorcising Esau the heel-sneak. He now proudly stands as Israel, the righteous representative of God and the fitting recipient of the Abrahamic birthright.

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

##### **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 Reuven 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?

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

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.

## Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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 recognized 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?

## Likutei Divrei Torah

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.

### Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\*

#### Physical Beauty in Judaism or Being Aware of God

When describing Rachel for the first time in our Parsha (**Genesis 29:17**), the Torah goes out of its way to accentuate her beauty, describing it in detail with two phrases, *Yifat Toar* and *Yifat Mareh*. Rashi explains the first as the beautiful outline of her face, and the second as her features or complexion. Other commentaries disagree about the details of these descriptions. But if the Torah went out of its way to describe Rachel's beauty in such detail, it is obviously important. Is that, indeed, the correct view of physical beauty in Judaism? Isn't the “inside” of a person much more important value in Judaism (see my Shiur on Parshat Chaye Sara)? So, how does Judaism, then, evaluate physical beauty – as something positive, negative, or neutral?

In general society, physical beauty, both in men and in women, has always been admired and valued throughout the ages. In the culture of ancient Greece, it was the highest ideal. But today, perhaps more than ever before, in a mass media age, society values physical beauty in everyday life as never before. Successful models have turned into superstars, emulated by millions. The cosmetics industry is a multibillion-dollar business, as people actively try to look and remain physically attractive, at all ages and in all walks of life. It has been proved that an attractive person will almost always get a job over a less attractive person with identical skills and qualifications. Does Judaism agree with this assessment of physical beauty? Are spiritual ideals and values all that matter, or is physical attractiveness a desirable trait in Judaism? Or is physical beauty possibly a trait to be avoided completely in Judaism?

**Beautiful People, Cities and Animals -** In many different areas of life, Judaism recognizes and seems to admire physical beauty. The Talmud (Megillah 15a), in addition to Rachel in our Torah portion, describes four other famous women as exceedingly beautiful. Among them were Sara, Abraham's wife and Queen Esther, showing that Judaism recognizes physical beauty as an admirable trait, something to be desired. Judaism recognizes physical beauty not only in people but also in places. Of the ten portions of physical beauty given to the world, Jerusalem received nine of those portions (Esther Rabbah 1:16). Therefore, we can surmise that Judaism describes Jerusalem not only as a holy city, but also as a beautiful city, another aspect of the city to be admired. The Torah also commanded specific laws to insure the physical beauty of any city. It was forbidden to plant or graze in the area immediately around the city limits



(Numbers 35:2) (see Shiur on Maasei 5782) Rashi (Rashi commentary, Numbers 35:2) comments that the purpose of this law was to insure the physical beauty of each city. Therefore, this concept of preserving the physical beauty of a city is not merely a positive feature to be admired, but a Biblical commandment, a necessary component in each city's development.

Even the physical beauty of non-Jewish people is admired in Judaism. When Rabban Gamliel saw a beautiful woman at the Temple Mount who was an idol worshipper, his reaction was to comment how beautiful she was and how beautiful is God's creation. Another sage commented that one should make a blessing when seeing such beauty (**Avodah Zarah 20a**) (Imagine if a prominent Rabbi at the Kotel did something like this today!). Thus, all kinds of beauty, not only those that related to Jewish people or Jewish cities are to be admired.

From Rabban Gamliel's comment, we can begin to see the reasoning behind Judaism's admiration for physical beauty. The admiration is not necessary for the person himself or herself. Rather, that person's physical beauty is a reflection upon the Creator of that beauty, God Almighty. Just as a beautiful painting reflects positively upon the artist and a compliment about the painting also compliments the artist, so, too, admiring a physically beautiful person honors God, the Creator of that person.

In the same sense, even a physically beautiful animal is admired in Judaism. In a similar fashion to a beautiful person, the Talmud says that one should make a blessing upon seeing a physically beautiful animal (**Jerusalem Talmud, Avodah Zarah 8a**) because the animal, as well, is God's creation and its beauty reflects positively upon God. Two of the three examples of beautiful animals given by the Talmudic passage may be difficult for people from western culture to relate to at first. Normally, we do not think of exceedingly beautiful donkeys or camels. Perhaps that is because we are not from the Middle Eastern culture where we can readily tell the difference between a beautiful or ugly camel. But we can relate to the third example, the beautiful horse more easily. Most western people have seen and admired an exceedingly beautiful horse.

Ethics of the Fathers (**Avot 6:8**), shows us that not only is physical beauty in people to be admired if it happens to be noticed, but it is a goal to aspire to. It is one of the qualities that a sage should try to possess. In fact, it is the very first quality of a sage that is mentioned.

**How, Then, Can it Say that "Beauty is Worthless"?** If all these sources portray a true picture of the Jewish view of physical beauty, then how is it that the verse many traditional Jews sing each Friday night around the Shabbat table (Proverbs 31:30) declares that beauty is vain or worthless? Isn't this a contradiction to all that was previously

mentioned, and sources cited? How is this verse, then, supposed to be understood?

Perhaps an approach to help resolve this apparent contradiction can be learned from a story about Rabbi Akiva (**Avodah Zara 20a**). When Rabbi Akiva saw the beautiful wife of the wicked Turnus Rufus, one of his reactions was that he cried. The reason he cried was that he realized that such unbelievable beauty could not be preserved and would one day decay and be gone. Therefore, as great as physical beauty might be, it is always transitory and will ultimately disappear. That may explain why King Solomon wrote that beauty is worthless – it is a value that cannot endure and one day it will one day be gone. Unlike other Jewish values which are more permanent, beauty by its very nature must be fleeting. This may be one reason why the Mishna (**Avot 3:7**) says that one who stops his Torah learning, an eternal and enduring commandment, to admire a beautiful tree, it is as if he is worthy to die. The reason this admiration is so abhorred is that by stopping Torah learning, that person is declaring, through his or her action, that the transient quality of beauty of the tree, which will disappear, supersedes the permanent quality of Torah, whose effect is lasting. In a similar vein, any relationship between husband and wife that is based solely on physical beauty and physical attractiveness will ultimately fall apart because this attraction must necessarily disappear along with the beauty (**Avot 5:16**).

The relationship of Judaism to physical beauty can further be illuminated by the Mishna (**Avot 4:20**) which exhorts the Jew not to look at the jug but at the contents (do not judge a book by its cover). There are some new jugs (which would ostensibly contain new, cheaper grade wine) that really contain old wine (better quality) and some old jugs (that should have old wine) that have nothing in them at all. Therefore, there can be a person who is a new jug (not very physically beautiful) who has fine wine inside, i.e., a great personality, Torah learning and a good heart. Similarly, there can be a person who is an old jug, i.e., a beautiful person without anything inside, i.e., no content or learning as a human being. Thus, physical beauty alone is not the most important thing in life. What is inside is far more important, not only because it is more permanent, but also because it is more valuable in the hierarchy of Jewish values.

The implication of this Mishna is also clear: if a person is an old jug and also contains old wine, it is better than either of the two previously combinations discussed. Thus, if a person does possess physical beauty on the outside, and also possesses content and values on the inside, which is a superior combination to having only one of the two. So, while external beauty is less important than internal beauty, having both is the highest ideal. This idea was once demonstrated in that verse from Proverbs using a mathematical model. When it

## Likutei Divrei Torah

says that "beauty is worthless," (**Proverbs 31:30**) the word "worthless" in mathematical terms is zero. So, too, does the verse mean that beauty by itself has a value of zero. But if that same zero is placed after any number, it multiplies the value of that number by ten. So, too, if there is already inner content (a positive number), then physical beauty can enhance that person's worth and multiply the person's worth. All the previously cited examples of people in the Talmud described as beautiful already had content and meaning besides their beauty. Thus, physical beauty only enhanced the deep content of Sara and Esther and the holiness already present within them.

In a symbolic sense, the Talmud speaks about the qualities of the two sons of Noah, Shem and Yefet. Yefet (from the Hebrew word *Yafe*, meaning beauty) represents beauty in the world and was the ancestor of the Greek culture who admired beauty as the ultimate value. Shem, on the other hand, represents the spiritual side of man, and is the ancestor of Abraham and the Jewish people (Semites). In explaining Noah's blessing to his children (**Genesis 9:27**), the Talmud (**Megillah 9b**) says that the beauty of Yefet will reside in the tent (house of learning) of Shem. This implies that while physical beauty is a positive force in Judaism, it will only remain admired if it subsumed within the tent of Shem, as a subset or secondary importance to the totality of Judaism.

**Is Beauty Subjective or Objective?** - The debate has probably raged for centuries whether physical beauty can be objectively measured, or does it differ in the taste from person to person. On the one hand, certain models and actresses have universal appeal and are admired by all as beautiful women (if they were not, they would not be the top models). But, on the other hand, other stars are seen as "beautiful" by some and not attractive by others. What does Judaism believe?

There is a Mitzvah to make the bride happy by dancing before her at a wedding. But there is a Talmudic debate between Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai whether you should say that the bride is beautiful (Beit Hillel) or whether you say the bride is "as she is" (Beit Shamai) (**Ketuvot 16b**). Beit Shamai will not say the bride is beautiful, because not every bride has physical beauty (and saying it for some who are beautiful and not others will cause embarrassment). In fact, Beit Shamai asks Beit Hillel: How can you lie and say that the bride is beautiful if she is lame, for example? Isn't it a violation of the Torah commandment to keep far away from a lie? (**Exodus 23:7**) Beit Hillel answers with an analogy about a special item, such as a dress, purchased in the marketplace like a flea market (that cannot be returned). If a woman spends a lot of time and a lot of money selecting an item and then asks her husband what he thinks of the item, what should he answer? Beit Shamai admitted that he should say it is beautiful (even if he finds it atrocious),

implying that that this is the proper response, in order not to insult his wife, and because to her, the item is indeed special and beautiful. Beit Hillel said the same thing is true with any bride. To the groom, she must be beautiful, even if she is lame or unattractive.

From this discussion, we may deduce that Beit Shamai measured beauty in objective terms, and if the bride is not objectively beautiful, it would be a lie to say that she is. Beit Hillel, on the other hand, believed that beauty is indeed objective, "in the eyes of the beholder" and thus, to every groom she is indeed beautiful. Thus, saying that she is beautiful is not a lie. Shulchan Aruch (**Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'ezer 65:1**) codifies according to Beit Hillel, implying that beauty in Judaism is indeed a subjective quality.

It is interesting to note that, ironically, the most objectively beautiful things in the world are those things made by God. Man-made beauty is much more subjective than God-made beauty. So, for example, almost all people will admire a sunset or a scene in nature as objectively beautiful. The same scene depicted in a painting will cause great debate if it is indeed beautiful or not. Man-made creations that do not try to imitate nature will cause even greater diversity of opinion as to their beauty. Sculptures, drawings or other original works of art will almost never receive universal recognition of their beauty.

**First Time Beauty** - In his ruling on how traditional Jews should react to seeing physical beauty, (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 225:10) Shulchan Aruch indeed rules according to the Talmudic passages mentioned above, that a Jew should make a blessing on every type of physical beauty encountered, including trees, animals and people. He adds, however, that this blessing should only be made the first time a person sees the beautiful object. What is the reasoning behind this unusual caveat? Shulchan Aruch apparently understood human nature and human reactions. Nothing is ever again as beautiful to a person as the first time it is seen. After that, one begins to notice the flaws, and it will never be quite as remarkable. Therefore, the blessing is made when the beauty is most noticeable and most striking. Concerning the physical beauty of a human being, as well, the impact of beauty is also lessened after the first time for similar reasons. But another phenomenon also occurs. Generally, the first time a person relates to a someone beautiful, the relationship begins on a level of physical beauty alone. After that, as the effect of beauty diminishes, people begin to relate to this individual as a person, not merely as a beautiful object. One begins to see beyond the physical to what is inside the person, a phenomenon that is very natural and encouraged in Judaism for reasons discussed above.

\* 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

#### The Mandrakes and the Horoscope Rabbi Chaim Navon

What was the first fertility treatment ever in Jewish history? Well, it was probably the Mandrake plant, or *duda'im*, to use the Biblical term. The Torah describes the tense atmosphere that prevailed between Leah and Rachel because of the *duda'im* that Reuven brought from the field. As expounded upon by the exegetes, it appears that the popular belief back then was that the *duda'im* could help heal infertility, which explains why Rachel, who was barren, coveted them to such an extent.

Ultimately, it was Leah who was blessed with another son and not Rachel. The Torah teaches us a profound lesson through this story. When Leah gives birth to her fifth son following the above-mentioned events, she gives a moral explanation: "God has given me my reward for I have given my handmaid to my husband." (Bereishit 30, 18). Moral actions lead to reward – the realization of one's dreams.

The Biblical protagonists, who yearn for their wishes to be fulfilled, add another dimension to that of moral action: they turn to God in prayer and beg Him to fulfill their wishes. The portion of Vayetze opens with the Yaakov's vow-prayer. Yaakov turns to God in this fashion: "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 put on..." (ibid. 28, 20)

Similarly, when Rachel turns to Yaakov with the words – "Give me children" (ibid. 30, 1), our Sages explain that she begged Yaakov to pray to God on her behalf. Clearly, prayer was an integral part of our Patriarchs' lives.

Anselm of Canterbury, an 11th Century clergyman and philosopher, succeeded in formulating the wittiest philosophical proof for God's existence. His proof, which later became known as The Ontological Argument is of interest to philosophers to this day. Prior to his formulating his Ontological Argument, Anselm prayed to God for three whole days, crying to Him and beseeching Him to help him find proof of God's existence. The 19th Century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, ridiculed Anselm: Does a bridegroom who embraces his bride need proof of her existence? Similarly, does a person who prays to his God need proof of His existence?

Prayer is, first and foremost, an intimate encounter between Man and God. As for content, prayer is all about entreating for something. However, the core essence of prayer is the very act of turning to God, whereas the content is only secondary. In

## Likutei Divrei Torah

many instances, our Sages referred to the person engaged in prayer as one standing before God. The Rambam viewed their words as a direct psychological instruction to the one praying: "His [a person engaged in prayer] heart should be directed upwards, as if he were standing in heaven." (Laws of Prayer 5, 4)

In direct contrast to our Patriarchs – who were well familiar with the merits of prayer and its redeeming properties – the Torah makes mention of the relatives from Charan. When Lavan admits to Yaakov that his prosperity was in merit of Yaakov, his son-in-law, he phrases it thus: "I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me for thy sake" (Bereshit 30, 27). This verse gives us a peek into Lavan's strange spiritual world. He "learned by divination" means he turned to sorcery, and in so doing – discovered that God had blessed him because of Yaakov. Let's translate this into contemporary talk: I read my horoscope for this week, and discovered God will bless me financially. One can scoff at Lavan for being so primitive; however, even our own newspapers give more coverage to astrological nonsense than they do to the weekly Torah portion.

Rachel steals her father's idols (ibid. 31, 19), and our Sages explain that she did so in order to wean her father off his addiction to cheap mania. However, this action backfires and, instead, Lavan chases Yaakov, driven by his belief – "Why have you stolen my gods?" (ibid. 30) – hardly aware of the inherent paradox created by his own actions: What kind of God can be stolen?

At the end of our portion, the two branches of the family split up officially. They erect a pillar of stones between them, marking the territory belonging to each family. They talk different languages: Yaakov speaks in Hebrew; Lavan uses Aramaic. Their spiritual worlds are different as well. "The God of Avraham", to whom we pray, is juxtaposed to "the God of Nachor" (Bereishit 31, 53), representing mania and sorcery. This is the point in time when the worshippers of God finally break away from the idol worshippers and each go their separate ways.

### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

#### Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky The Divine Wells

Toldos and Vayeitzei combine to present us with three stories about the Avos and wells: Avraham digs wells, Yitzchak reclaims those wells after they had been clogged by the Plishtim, and Yaakov removes a rock from on top of a well.

Chazal already point out the many "shidduchim" realized at a well (i.e. Rivka and Yitzchak via Eliezer, Rachel and Yaakov, and Tzipora and Moshe), and the Ramban discusses the significance of the three wells that Yitzchak attempted to reopen and shows them to be symbolic of the future batei

mikdash. But what lies in the different tasks performed by each of the Avos? They share the common undertaking of making well-water accessible, yet each of them does it differently.

It is obvious that a well reflects the flow of "Elokus" [divinity] into the world - it is a seemingly infinite flow in the sense that wells seem to have an unlimited supply of water, as opposed to cisterns and reservoirs. It is, so to speak, a gateway to the infinite; not that we have full access to the infinite, but that it does become more accessible to us, and is the source of life for all and everything.

The world seems devoid of the divine presence, and it is incumbent upon man to breakthrough to it. Each of the Avos engaged in bringing that light into this world. Each - based on his particular kocho - perceived the challenge differently and added another approach to allowing that light into the world.

Avraham Avinu came into this world at the end of the two thousand years of tohu - the darkness of sin and idolatry. Hashem had simply "ceased to exist" for the majority of humanity, and Avraham needed to actually bring God into this world. The very idea of one god, who is incorporeal, creator and source of the good, was an idea that needed to be "created". Avraham "dug the well" and introduced Elokus into the world. This is the hallmark of ahavas Hashem: a constant drive to let the world feel the divine presence. [See Rambam in Sefer HaMitzvos, asech #3.]

Yitzchak Avinu is seen as the embodiment of yirah. While Avraham's middah is a proactive one, Yitzchak's nature is more given to guarding against evil. It is true that Avraham had dug a well and water flowed into the world, but this well was slowly dying from the minute it came into existence. Dirt and silt were accumulating, and jealous neighbors were waiting to stuff them up entirely. It is only the constant cleansing and removing of silt that will keep the wells from disappearing. This is the essence of yirah: a nonstop standing on guard so that evil does not choke out the good that exists already.

Yaakov's attribute, however, is deeper still. He brings into the world the understanding that the good always existed and exists, and evil does not and can not eradicate this good. What can happen is that the divine presence may be covered up, and we become oblivious to it. Yaakov himself realized it when he slept in Beis El and proclaimed that, "Indeed there is Hashem in this place, and I was but oblivious to it." Yaakov's perspective meant that one simply has to remove the covering and see that the well is as pristine as it ever was.

Klal Yisroel inherited all three of these perspectives from our Avos: the burning drive of ahava to bring the divine presence into this world, the caution of yirah to guard against evil seeping in and polluting that divine light,

and, above all, the realization that in truth the divine light is never extinguished and if one but removes the covering one sees the light as it was.

This is the basis for the ruling that, "Yisroel, afa al pi she'chiti, Yisroel hu - a Jew, even if he sins, he is still a Jew." The divine spark that Yisroel (Yaakov) fathered in us eternally remains unextinguished regardless of how many layers cover over it.

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#### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

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##### **Everything at Risk**

And Lavan said to Yaakov, "Behold this pile and behold this monument, which I have cast between me and you. This pile is a witness, and this monument is a witness, that I will not pass this pile [to go] to you and that you shall not pass this pile and this monument to [come to] me to [do] harm. May the G-d of Avraham and the god of Nachor judge between us, the god of their father." And Yaakov swore by the Fear of his father Yitzchok. (Breishis 31:51-53)

The G-d of Avraham: This is holy (referring to HASHEM)...and the god of Nachor: Profane. [I.e., it refers to pagan deities.] - the god of their father: Profane. [I.e., it refers to pagan deities.] - Rashi

And you shall call out and say before HASHEM, your G-d, "An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there, he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation. (Devarim 31:5)

An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather: [The declarer] mentions [here] the kind deeds of the Omnipresent [by stating]: "An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather." That is, Lavan, when he pursued Yaakov, sought to uproot [i.e., annihilate] all [the Jews], and since he intended to do so, the Omnipresent considered it as though he had actually done it - Rashi

How did Lavan the Aramean try to destroy Yaakov? What was his plan to destroy Yaakov? Was it to kill him? Perhaps! When he chased after Yaakov as he surreptitiously slipped out of town, maybe he had an evil plan to wipe out Yaakov and his family.

However even after that we see his sinister intent at work to the very moment of parting ways. Yaakov and Lavan set up a pile of stones and made a treaty, a sort of order of protection treaty. Lavan asks Yaakov to swear, even though he is not the threat and Yaakov does so but with a slight deviation from Lavan's language of oath. That last exchange may be the key to how Lavan planned to wipe out Yaakov.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

It was many years ago that I was driving one of my Rebbeim back from an eye doctor appointment. As we were passing a well-manicured church I commented on how lovely they were keeping their property. He interrupted my praise and took the opportunity to tell me a fascinating story that gives support to the Hallacha that there are certain places we are not to use as reference points.

He told me that when Rabbi Aaron Kotler was just getting started in Lakewood he had a small but loyal and dedicated group of learning young men. One of those students was approaching him continually with questions of faith. Reb Aaron would carefully and sensitively answer his questions but he began to suspect that the source of his questions were not a sincere search for the truth. It was like the boy who puts his finger in the dyke and another leak erupts. He was looking for a way out!

On one of his frequent trips to Williamsburg Reb Aaron took counsel with the previous Skverer Rebbe who asked him if this boy had any contact with any local churches. Reb Aaron was certain not but he followed up on the advice and he asked the boy.

The fellow was adamant that he did not have any contact with any churches. Reb Aaron quizzed him further about how and when he goes to Yeshiva and which path he takes.

The boy then realized that on the way to Yeshiva at 7 AM every day he passes by a certain church and he sets his watch to the clock in the bell tower. Reb Aaron assured him that was the source of his problem. That subtle acknowledgment gave a foothold of credibility, enough to subconsciously erode his confidence in Torah.

Lavan tried to corrupt Yaakov and veer him from the path of absolute truth by swearing in the name of the god of Nachor and other false gods but Yaakov wisely dodged the bullet and swore only in name of the G-d that Yitzchok feared. It may seem too slight and subtle to make a difference but it might have put everything at risk.

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#### **Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

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##### **Rav Doron Perz**

##### **Agents of Positive Change**

It is the person that makes the place and not the place which makes the person.

We see this regarding our forefather, Ya'akov, that the places he left were never the same, and the places he went to were transformed by his presence. We see this in the opening of the parasha when we are told that he leaves Be'er Sheva and goes to Charan. Rashi points out it is of no consequence where he was coming from in the context of the narrative, so why do we need to know that information? Because when a positive influence leaves a place, the place is never the same. Something of that

place is lacking because that person is no longer there.

This is similar to what it says when Ya'akov returns later to the Land of Israel, that "he encamped on the face of the city [of Shechem]", an unusual phrase. Rashi explains that he brought a transformation to the city.

As individuals, we need to be the type of person that wherever we find ourselves we have a positive impact. We should be those agents of positive change and make a difference in the lives of others. Jewish communities throughout the world should not only impact internally, but also externally on those around them. On the global sphere, the State of Israel, the Jewish State, should be a positive force on the world. Not just to transform the land and society, but also play such a role in making a difference to the world.

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### **Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash**

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#### **There and Back Again: The Exilic Journeys and Sojourns of Yavetzze Rav Elchanan Samet**

I: The Unity of Parashat Vayetze - Parashat Vayetze is unique in that it consists of a single Masoretic parasha, i.e., one paragraph of 148 uninterrupted consecutive verses.[1] Though Masoretic division of the parashiyot is based on sundry reasons, not all of which are always clear, [2] it sometimes indicates a literary unity. It appears that this is the case with our parasha: Parashat Vayetze is all one long story. The unity of the narrative may be seen on many planes:

Yaacov, the main character of the story, can be followed throughout it with unity of time and place. Every event in the parasha is footnoted, whether in terms of the place of presentation or the stretch of time it occupies.[3]

The plot flows continuously, each segment of it flowing from what precedes it and introducing what follows it.

The entire narrative has one topic: Yaacov's adventures in exile, from the moment he leaves until he returns.

Even though our story is prefaced already in the conclusion of Parashat Toledot with Yitzchak's command to Yaacov to go to Lavan and to marry one of his daughters, it is distinguished by a basic element: there is no mention of Eisav's name or Yitzchak's blessing in Vayetze.[4]

The story has a very clear chiasmic structure. Angels appear to Yaacov as he is about to leave the land and when he returns. There is also a linguistic chiasm:

"He encountered (vayifga) the place... he dreamt... behold, angels of God..." (28:11-12).

"He encountered (vayifgi'u) angels of God" (32:1).

"He said... 'This is none other than the house of God!'... and he called the name of the place Beit El" (28:17-19).

"Yaacov said: 'This is the camp of God!' and he called the name of the place Machanayim" (32:2).

Thus the narrative of Parashat Vayetze is separate from that which precedes it in Toledot and that which follows it in Parashat Vayishlach.

In both of those parshiyot, Eisav is Yaacov's antagonist, and they are tied to each other by the story of the taking of the blessing. In Vayetze, Lavan takes Eisav's place. In order to stress the uniqueness and independence of this story, the parasha opens with a restatement of the fact that we know already from the end of Toledot. Thus, 28:5 tells us: "Yitzchak sent Yaacov, and he went to Padan Aram, to Lavan;" 28:9, the first verse of Vayetze, notes, "Yaacov left Be'er Sheva, and he went to Charan."

What is the significance of Vayetze being one unified narrative? What is the difference if we read it as one story or as the interweaving of many shorter episodes? The distinction lies in the principle of thematic unity. The moral of a story or its aim are generally not stated explicitly, but rather they are hinted to in different ways. The plot which unites all of the scenes is a tool by which the Torah suggests the inner meaning of the narrative. Thus, we are driven by the unified structure to ask: what is the central theme of Parashat Vayetze?

II: The Axis of the Narrative - In a story the purpose of which is the description of a hero's exile and his adventures until he returns home, what would be the expected point of dramatic shift? Presumably, this point would be the decision to return home, as this is the axis of the entire narrative. The first part of the story, with its description of his departure and his sojourn in exile, builds up to this decision, while the second half, of the preparations for and execution of the return journey, is engendered by it.

This point appears to be found at 30:25-26: "When Rachel had given birth to Yoseif, Yaacov said to Lavan: Send me, and let me go to my place and to my land. Give me my wives and my children... and I will go..." These verses are at the virtual dead center of the story, as verse 26 is the 74th of Vayetze's 148 verses - but do they truly introduce the second half of the story? In fact, they do not begin Yaacov's return to Canaan, as there is no movement as a result of this declaration. This is due to the fact that the continuation of these verses presents a surprising event: Yaacov acquiesces, without any argument or opposition, to Lavan's idea that he remain by him, and he does this so that "I will do also for my house" (30:30).

Thus, the axis of our narrative is not in Yaacov's declaration of his intent to leave - a declaration which is not realized for another six years, and then in a vastly different manner - but rather in the dialogue that follows: Lavan's request in verses 27-28 and Yaacov's positive reply in 29-30. It is this shift that splits our narrative into two units.

Why is this shift so surprising? In the previous parasha, Yaacov lived in his father's house as an adult bachelor at the same time that his twin brother was marrying local women and starting a family. Why did Yaacov wait? It appears that while he was aware that the local women were not appropriate candidates for marriage, he felt that, like his father Yitzchak, he did not have the right to leave the land for the purpose of marriage. Yaacov did not see why this rule applied by Avraham to Yitzchak (23:5-8) should

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

be subject to change, and so he decided that "to sit and do nothing is better." [5]

Yaacov agrees to leave only under the combined pressure of his father and mother. Yaacov consents, but only after his mother goes to great lengths emphasizing the danger from Eisav and minimizing the time which Yaacov will have to spend in exile: "Now, my son, listen to me, and rise; flee for yourself to Lavan my brother, to Charan. You will dwell there a few days until your brother's anger subsides... Then I will send and take you from there" (27:43-45).

At the beginning of Vayetze, God himself joins in the campaign. God's revelation to Yaacov at Beit El (his first prophetic vision) and what follows contain not only an insistence that Yaacov leave with faith and hope, but also a promise of his quick return: "The ground on which you sleep, I will give it to you and your seed... I am with you, and I will watch you wherever you go, and I will return you to this land, for I will not abandon you until I have done what I have told you" (28:13,15). Yaacov responds to this revelation and takes a vow that when God fulfills His word "and I will return in peace to my father's house, then this stone which I have placed as a monument will be God's house..." (v. 21-22).

Now, with a feeling of lightness, Yaacov sets off for Charan to satisfy his obligation to establish a family, on the condition of returning speedily to his destined land, to his parents' house, and to the fulfillment of his vow at Beit El.

When he reaches Lavan, Yaacov at first stays in his house for a month without a defined aim (29:14), and afterwards he begins his seven years of indentured servitude for Rachel. Nevertheless, we are still within Rivka's conception of "and you will dwell there A FEW DAYS," as verse 20 notes: "and they were in his eyes like A FEW DAYS, in his love for her." As it turns out (v. 25), "it was in the morning, and behold, she was Leah!" A week later, Yaacov is able to celebrate his marriage to his beloved, Rachel, but he is forced to undertake seven more years of hard labor in order to earn her hand. Within those seven years, twelve children are born to Yaacov. His purpose of journeying to Charan has been fulfilled, above and beyond all expectations, and his stay has also gone above and beyond the plan. With the end of Yaacov's fourteen years of servitude to his father-in-law, we expect Yaacov to leave. His return journey has been delayed more than long enough, and it is time to return to his land, his vow, and his parents.

Indeed, with the end of the first half of the narrative, we hear from Yaacov the long-awaited words: "Send me, and I will go to my place and to my land." We anticipate that the continuation of the narrative - second part - will be Yaacov's return journey at the head of a large family.

Yet at the beginning of this second part we encounter the surprising fact that Yaacov is still willing to stay with Lavan, for the sake of "doing for his house." This "doing" is the accumulation of wealth via sheep, as we see from the rest of this scene. How much time, we must wonder, did Yaacov intend to spend in Charan? A year? Two? How much time is necessary to "do for his house," and what will indicate that Yaacov has amassed sufficient wealth? The reasons which

compelled Yaacov to remain in exile no longer apply. From here on, the parasha describes Yaacov in exile under very different circumstances.[6]

III: Unable or Unwilling to Leave? - At this point, we must ask: what is the general relationship between these two halves of the narrative? How are they similar? How are they different?

Despite the fact that this is a story of leaving the land and returning to it, neither a geographical crux nor the dimension of movement define the distinction between the two parts. This is particularly striking if we compare the beginning and the end: Yaacov does not return in Vayetze to his point of origin; he leaves the heart of Eretz Yisra'el proper, on the western bank of the Yardein, and returns only to the eastern side, not to return to his father until the end of Parashat Vayishlach, and to Beit El only a few verses earlier.

Can we then employ a chronological reason for splitting the narrative? This idea does not pan out either, as fourteen years pass in the first part, while the second part details the events of six years, less than half of the other's total.

Apparently, the halves relate to each other in terms of a very different dimension of the narrative: the evaluation of Yaacov's actions. The first section describes a mandatory and reluctant sojourn, which is justified throughout; the second part, on the other hand, describes a superfluous and unaccountable delay. The two halves are thus diametrically opposed.

Indeed, marriage was Yaacov's goal in his journey to Charan, and Providence saw to it that it turned out that Yaacov married not one wife, but "two who are really four,"[7] and thus was created the tribal unit that would be the foundation of an embryonic nation. To this end, Yaacov had to work for fourteen years. However, the further economic delay has no justification: the accumulation of wealth does not justify a delay in returning to his birthplace, fulfilling his vow, and honoring his father and mother. It is particularly damning that Yaacov does not set any limit for these activities, and only external matters and a divine command following them cut his extra stay to six years.

What does this second delay yield? First, let us note what does not happen: no additional son is born to Yaacov during these six years. It is as if Yaacov's four wives stop giving birth simultaneously. There is a hint here that the lone reason for Yaacov's staying in Charan - building a family - has been fulfilled, and more time will not add to this.

Indeed, Yaacov acquires a great deal of wealth in those years, but it becomes clear that this was "wealth guarded to the detriment of its owner" (Kohélet 5:12). This prosperity arouses the jealousy of Lavan's sons and of Lavan himself, and in the end it causes Yaacov to run away from his father-in-law's house like a thief. [8] This wealth is what entangles Yaacov in Lavan's pursuit and, ultimately, in a bitter confrontation. There are serious and disturbing consequences of this action: when they flee, Rachel steals her father's sacred images, his "terafim" (31:19). This brings Yaacov to

unwittingly curse his beloved wife (31:32). He takes a morally questionable position in the denouement with Lavan, denying absolutely the accusation of theft; to the eyes of the reader, this gives Lavan the upper hand, as we know that his suspicions are essentially correct. The same wealth requires Yaacov to appease Eisav's envy in Parashat Vayishlach.

These unnecessary entanglements of the second half do not add a bit to the building of Yaacov's house. If Yaacov had, at the end of the first half, realized the original goal of his journey, Lavan might have truly executed the intention that he falsely claimed after the chase (31:27): "Why... did you not tell me? I would have sent you with joy and song, with drum and harp!" This leave-taking would have concluded honorably the fourteen years in his father-in-law's house, and Yaacov would have returned to his land, poor and penniless, but with a clear conscience. In the land of Canaan, Yaacov would have begun to build up his bank account, and then it would have been permanent wealth. That which compelled Yaacov to leave exile was the impression that "the ground was burning beneath his feet." The picture is a familiar one from Jewish history: "He heard the words of the sons of Lavan, saying, 'Yaacov took everything which was our father's; and from that which was our father's, he made all of this honor.' Yaacov saw Lavan's face, and behold, he was not with him as previously" (31:1-2). Yaacov feels the exilic kick in the shins.

Immediately afterwards, God appears to him and reminds him of the reasons which should have motivated him to return already: "God said to Yaacov: Return to the land of your fathers and to your birthplace, and I will be with you" (31:3). "I am the God of Beit El that you set up a monument there, that you vowed to Me there a vow. Now, rise, leave this land, and go back to the land of your birthplace" (30:13).[9]

Concerning God's words to Yaacov in the first verse, the Sages interpret it as follows in Bereishit Rabba (74): The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: "Return to the land of your fathers" - Your father waits for you. "And to your birthplace" - Your mother waits for you. "And I will be with you" - I Myself wait for you. Rav Ami said in the name of Reish Lakish: The property of the Diaspora carries no blessing, but when you return to the land of your fathers - then I will be with you.

It appears that the basis for this aggadic interpretation is the distinction between God's promise in Beit El, "Behold, I am with you, and I will guard you WHEREVER YOU GO" (28:15), and his assurance here, that "IN THE LAND OF YOUR FATHERS" (and nowhere else) "I will be with you." The first answer of the midrash is that at the time that God says these last words to Yaacov, there was no good reason for his dwelling in exile. God's promise in Beit El was to be with him wherever he might be forced to wander, but at this point He, along with Yitzchak and Rivka, are waiting for Yaacov to fulfill his promise - both his vow and his potential. Rav Ami responds to this that the intent of God in his last words to Yaacov is that "[He] will be with [him]" is limited only as regards guarding Yaacov's wealth; there was never a promise to

## Likutei Divrei Torah

protect the riches he might accumulate in exile, because no blessing rests on them, and it was not to accumulate them that Yaacov left. Only when he will return to his fathers' land will God "be with [him]" to guard his possessions as well.

IV: The Mark of Exile - In both of these halves, there is a description of Yaacov's adventures in two states: travelling and during his extended stay in Lavan's house.

Let us first examine the parallelism between the two segments that describe Yaacov's stay in the house of Lavan. Yaacov's actions are described in both as regards the terms of service he agrees to with Lavan. The general order of both descriptions is strikingly similar, each being composed of six elements:

- 1) Lavan's amenable opening,
- 2) Yaacov's conditions,
- 3) Lavan's consent,
- 4) chicanery in the application of the agreement,
- 5) the results for Yaacov of the agreement, and
- 6) the decision to return to the land.

Most striking is the similarity between the halves in elements (1) (in 29:15 and 30:28) and (3) (in 29:19 and 30:35). Elements (2) and (5), Yaacov's conditions and results, which consist of "I will work for you seven years for Rachel..." and the birth of twelve children in the first half (29:18; 29:31-30:24), paralleled by "I will pthorough all of your stoday, remove from there... and this will be my wage," and "And he had many sheep, maidservants, slaves, camels, and donkeys," also share a common point. In both, Yaacov appropriates that which Lavan has but does not deserve: his daughters and his marked flocks; as a result, Yaacov is blessed with a multitude of offspring, the first time human, and the second time sheep.

The other two elements are reversed between the two halves of the story. In (4), this is as regards the issue of who tricks whom: in the first half, Lavan deceives Yaacov by exchanging Rachel for Leah; in the second, Yaacov outsmarts Lavan by encouraging the sheep to give birth to marked offspring. Yaacov's questionable conduct in the second half of the story will be revealed as a direct reaction to and protection from Lavan's own fraud (31:7, 12, 41); however, at this stage the reader does not know this, and Yaacov's actions seem unjustified. This reinforces the idea that Yaacov's extended stay has affected him. The victim of deceit now becomes its perpetrator.

This is even more striking in element (6). In the first half, Yaacov reaches the conclusion that he must return home because his goal in coming to Charan has been achieved. This is his autonomous decision. In the second half, however Yaacov is compelled by Lavan's conduct and by divine command.

It thus turns out that the Yaacov's second period in Lavan's house, though it bears similarities to the first, is distinct in two aspects: Yaacov's involvement in questionable activities and the reasons for his decisions to leave. Both of these developments are negative.

Now let us turn to the descriptions of Yaacov's journeys, found at the extremes of our narrative. Normally, we would expect the departure to exile to be depressing, while the return journey should be a happy one. For Yaacov, however, the reverse

is true, even though he set out alone and returns with a huge household. The element stressed at Yaacov's return is not his family, but the abundance of material possessions that he brings back with him; 32:18 mentions "accumulation" and "acquisition" three times each. When Yaacov leaves Canaan, at the beginning of the parasha, the term "going" appears three times, but never "fleeing" (even though it does appear at the end of Toledot). Yet, Yaacov's return journey is described four times as "flight."

Certain motives appear in both segments, almost always in opposite contexts. For example, the angelic dream is sublime in 28:12, but in 31:10-11, it is set amid sheep in heat. Similarly, the stones and the monument of Beit El are a symbol of the bond between God and Yaacov, while those in Gal Eid (31:45-46) mark the covenant between Lavan and Yaacov. Additionally, on the way to Charan, at the well, Yaacov finds his soul-mate, in an encounter full of innocent love. After that encounter, Lavan runs to greet Yaacov. On the way back, Lavan chases Yaacov, and because of the confrontation, Yaacov curses his beloved unwittingly and loses her forever.

With these reversals between the two halves, the narrative expresses its disapproval of Yaacov's delay in Charan. Every relationship of Yaacov is damaged by it, and nevertheless, even at that time, Yaacov has God's protection, whether in Lavan's house or in flight. "For He will command His angels for you, to guard you on all your paths" (Tehillim 91:11).

Notes:

1] As is true of Parashat Miketz. Note that the Tosafists and others refer to our parasha as "closed," and many different explanations are given. It is clear that they saw Vayetze as attached to the end of Parashat Toledot without any true break, as Parashat Vayechi is attached to Parashat Vayigash (which prompts the Sages and Rashi to ask there: "Why is this parasha closed?"). However, between Toledot and Vayetze is a "closed" break, i.e., a space of a word, with the latter beginning on the same line as the former ends; no variation is found among manuscripts or midrashic sources. See Hagahot Maimoniyot, Laws of Sefer Torah 8:3. Minchat Shai suggests that Vayetze is referred to as "closed" because it runs uninterrupted, but Chizkunni seems to see that as a separate idea.

2] A more general reason, which does not explain specific parshiot, is given in Torat Kohanim (1): "What purpose did the interruptions serve? To give Moshe a break in order to contemplate between each parasha and between each topic."

3] "He dwelt with him a month of days" (29:14); "Yaacov worked for Rachel seven years" (ibid. 20); "He worked... another seven years" (ibid. 30); "These twenty years in your house - I worked fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your sheep" (31:41).

4] There is a hint in 29:13: "And he told Lavan all of these things," to which Rashi comments, "that he came only because of his brother's compulsion;" Radak and Seforno explain similarly.

5] To borrow a famous Talmudic phrase; see Eiruvin 100a, among others.

6] Indeed, Rav Ovadya Seforno in his commentary to Yaacov's words in verse 25 (s.v. Shalecheini), rejects the notion that Yaacov was destitute; if he did not have provisions for a journey a) he never would have endangered his family; b) Lavan, a notable of

his city, would not have let him; c) Lavan would not have asked Yaacov to stay for Lavan's sake (30:27).

7] To borrow another Talmudic phrase; see Shevu'ot 2a, among many.

8] "Ganav" in Hebrew; the root g-n-v appears seven times in the scene.

9] The claim becomes so damning that we must find a defense for our patriarch. Psychologically, perhaps he tarried so long for fear of Eisav; Yaacov may have wanted to delay the inevitable confrontation. On the other hand, one may argue that the delay is rational, as in the meantime Yaacov will amass wealth that will help in the confrontation with Eisav as a "tribute" to appease his brother (even though the reverse is also feasible: a penniless Yaacov might arouse pity rather than envy). Also in the meanwhile, Yaacov's first sons will approach fighting age (See Rashi 32:9, s.v. Ve-haya). These are only hypotheses. Yaacov may have believed them, but the fact that the Torah ignores them indicates that they are insufficient. *[Translated and edited by Yoseif Bloch]*

## Weekly Parsha

VAYEITZEI Rabbi Wein's

## Weekly Blog

Our father Jacob was a very strong and powerfully physical person. We read of his physical prowess in his previous encounter with the shepherds of Haran and later of his wrestling match with the angel of Esav, at the river of Yaabok. His sons, though young in years, are also very powerful and strong physically and filled with self-confidence, without fear of confronting dangerous enemies. We will see that his two sons, Shimon and Levi, destroy the city of Shechem in their rage and sense of justified revenge for the behavior against their sister Dena. And according to Jewish legend, as quoted by Ramban in his commentary, Jacob engaged in many battles against hostile tribes after entering the Land of Israel.

And yet the overall picture of our father Jacob that emerges from the narrative recorded in the Torah is one of appeasement and an avoidance of confrontation at almost all costs. He allows both Lavan and Esav to threaten him and, in effect, he chooses to buy them off with words and gifts. There is little evidence of the true strength and power of Jacob in the Torah narrative itself. It is obvious that that there is a dual nature present in the portrait that the Torah describes regarding our father Jacob. And there is a profound lesson present in that purposeful presentation that the Torah has made for us to learn and follow.

We are all aware that the narrative regarding the lives and experiences of our patriarchs and matriarchs is meant to be instructive, as are all the events in Jewish history. During first and second Temple times, when the Jewish people had national sovereignty, they engaged in many wars and battles and were well known throughout the area as a fierce foe. As a matter of fact, Josephus records that the wars of the Jews were the most fearsome in the history of the Roman Legions.

However, after the destruction of the second Temple and the rise of Christianity and later Islam, the Jews became a persecuted minority and almost powerless in terms of physical strength. The entire history of the exile is how the Jewish people lived by their wits, with low profiles and with appeasement of their enemies. Since the exile has lasted for such a long time, this attitude and self-assessment became ingrained in the Jewish psyche. It is only when the nadir of the Jewish exile was reached through the Holocaust that the situation of Jewish self assessment and self assertion began to change.

The creation of the State of Israel is undoubtedly the catalyst for this change. The success of the Jewish State, far beyond even the wildest hopes of previous generations, has emboldened Jewish life throughout the world. It has enabled Jews to become publically Jewish and observant even while holding high office in non-Jewish societies and countries. It is the time of the children of Jacob reasserting themselves in pride and strength. May it continue to embed itself in the brains and hearts of Jews.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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## How the Light Gets In

VAYETSE - Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Why Jacob? That is the question we find ourselves asking repeatedly as we read the narratives of Genesis. Jacob is not what Noah was:

righteous, perfect in his generations, one who walked with God. He did not, like Abraham, leave his land, his birthplace and his

father's house in response to a Divine call. He did not, like Isaac, offer himself up as a sacrifice. Nor did he have the burning sense of justice and willingness to intervene that we see in the vignettes of Moses' early life. Yet we are defined for all time as the descendants of Jacob, the children of Israel. Hence the force of the question: Why Jacob?

The answer, it seems to me, is intimated in the beginning of this week's parsha. Jacob was in the middle of a journey from one danger to another. He had left home because Esau had vowed to kill him when Isaac died. He was about to enter the household of his uncle Laban, which would itself present other dangers. Far from home, alone, he was at a point of maximum vulnerability. The sun set. Night fell. Jacob lay down to sleep, and then saw this majestic vision:

He dreamed: – "Ve-hinei!" – He saw a ladder set upon the ground, whose top reached the heavens. – "Ve-hinei!" – On it, angels of God went up and came down. – "Ve-hinei!" – The Lord stood over him there and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west, the east, the north, and to the south. Through you and your descendants, all the families of the earth will be blessed. – "Ve-hinei!" – I am with you. I will protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken of to you."

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Truly, the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!" He was afraid, and said, "How full of awe is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of the heavens." Gen. 28:12-17

Note the fourfold ve-hinei, in English "and look," an expression of surprise. Nothing has prepared Jacob for this encounter, a point emphasised in his own words when he says, "the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it." The very verb used at the beginning of the passage, "He came upon a place," in Hebrew vayifga ba-makom, also means an unexpected encounter. Later, in rabbinic Hebrew, the word ha-Makom, "the Place," came to mean "God." Hence in a poetic way the phrase vayifga ba-makom could be read as, "Jacob happened on (had an unexpected encounter with) God."

Add to this Jacob's night-time wrestling match with the angel in next week's parsha and we have an answer to our question. Jacob is the man who has his deepest spiritual experiences alone, at night, in the face of danger and far from home. He is the man who meets God when he least expects to, when his mind is on other things, when he is in a state of fear and possibly on the brink of despair. Jacob is the man who, in liminal space, in the middle of the journey, discovers that "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"

Jacob thus became the father of the people who had their closest encounter with God in what Moses was later to describe as "the howling wasteland of a wilderness" (Deut. 32:10). Uniquely, Jews survived a whole series of exiles, and though at first they said, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" they discovered that the Shechinah, the Divine presence, was still with them. Though they had lost everything else, they had not lost contact with God.

They could still discover that "the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"

Abraham gave Jews the courage to challenge the idols of the age. Isaac gave them the capacity for self-sacrifice. Moses taught them to be passionate fighters for justice. But Jacob gave them the knowledge that precisely when you feel most alone, God is still with you, giving you the courage to hope and the strength to dream.

The man who gave the most profound poetic expression to this was



undoubtedly David in the book of Psalms. Time and again he calls to God from the heart of darkness, afflicted, alone, pained, afraid:  
 Save me, O God,  
 for the floodwaters are up to my neck.  
 Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire;  
 I can't find a foothold.  
 I am in deep water,  
 and the floods overwhelm me. Ps 69:2-3  
 From the depths, O Lord,  
 I call for your help.  
 Ps. 130:1

Sometimes our deepest spiritual experiences come when we least expect them, when we are closest to despair. It is then that the masks we wear are stripped away. We are at our point of maximum vulnerability – and it is when we are most fully open to God that God is most fully open to us. “The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps.34:18). “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart You, God, will not despise”(Ps. 51:17). God “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3).

Rav Nahman of Bratslav used to say; “A person needs to cry to his Father in heaven with a powerful voice from the depths of his heart. Then God will listen to his voice and turn to his cry. And it may be that from this act itself, all doubts and obstacles that are keeping him back from true service of Hashem will fall from him and be completely nullified.”[1]

We find God not only in holy or familiar places but also in the midst of a journey, alone at night. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me.” The most profound of all spiritual experiences, the base of all others, is the knowledge that we are not alone. God is holding us by the hand, sheltering us, lifting us when we fall, forgiving us when we fail, healing the wounds in our soul through the power of His love.

My late father of blessed memory was not a learned Jew. He did not have the chance to become one. He came to Britain as a child and a refugee. He had to leave school young, and besides, the possibilities of Jewish education in those days were limited. Merely surviving took up most of the family's time. But I saw him walk tall as a Jew, unafraid, even defiant at times, because when he prayed or read the Psalms he felt intensely that God was with him. That simple faith gave him immense dignity and strength of mind.

That was his heritage from Jacob, as it is ours. Though we may fall, we fall into the arms of God. Though others may lose faith in us, and though we may even lose faith in ourselves, God never loses faith in us. And though we may feel utterly alone, we are not. God is there,

beside us, within us, urging us to stand and move on, for there is a task to do that we have not yet done and that we were created to fulfil. A singer of our time wrote, “There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.” The broken heart lets in the light of God, and becomes the gate of heaven.[2]

[1] Likkutei Maharan 2:46

[2] Anthem by Leonard Cohen.

<https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/7261/essay-vayeitzei-no-missing-links>

**No Missing Links - The Omission of a Blank Space in the Torah Captures the Story of a People**  
**Rabbi YY Jackson**  
 December 5, 2019

## The Blank Spaces

This essay will not dissect a portion of the Torah, nor a chapter, verse, sentence, or word. We will not even focus on a letter or a syllable in the Torah. We will explore a glaring omission in this week's portion.

Any person who has been called up to the Torah, or those who had an opportunity to gaze at a Sefer Torah (Torah scroll) will note that it does not contain the familiar kind of punctuation used in books. There are no periods, exclamation points, or question marks; no commas, colons, semi-colons, or hyphens.

But there are two forms of punctuation in the Torah to indicate (at least in many instances[1]) the beginning of a new topic—and they are blank spaces between words, marking the end of one “Parsha,” or theme, and the beginning of a new one.

[There are two types of spaces in a Torah scroll, one is called “setuma,” which means closed; the other is called “pesucha,” which means open. When a topic in Torah comes to an end, and a new topic is about to begin, the words stop before the end of a line, the remainder of the line is left open. Then the new topic begins only on the next line. This is called a “pesucha,” or an open-ended line. However, when a new, yet related, topic begins, the line is not left open at the end, but a space the length of nine letters is left empty between the words, and the next topic begins on the same line. This is called a “setuma,” or a closed-ended line. They are indicated in every printed Chumash with a Hebrew letter “pei” (פ for pesucha) or the Hebrew letter “samach” (ס for setuma).]

Here is an image of a few pages in the Torah scroll containing both types of spaces, a “pesucha,” then a “setuma.”

### Two Exceptions

All portions of Torah are filled with numerous such blank spaces. Take a look at any portion in your printed Chumash and you will see at every new topic a letter “pei” (פ) or a letter “samach” (ס).

There are two exceptions—this week's portion, Vayeitzei, and the portion of Miketz. Vayeitzei contains 148 verses; Miketz—146 verses, and they both lack these breaks. The entire portion is written as a run-on sentence, with no “space” to breathe.

This is strange. Vayeitzei is one of the longer portions in the Torah and it covers twenty full years in the life of Jacob, years filled with diverse encounters, experiences, and tribulations. Why is there not a single space in the entire portion?

### Leaving Home

It was Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Altar, the second Rebbe of the Ger dynasty, known as the Sefas Emes, who offered a marvelous explanation.[2]

The portion begins with these words: “And Jacob left Be'er Sheba (where his parents lived in the south of the Holy Land) and traveled to Charan.” Harran was a city in ancient Mesopotamia, located today in Southern Turkey, on the border of Syria and Iraq. Jacob leaves the cocoon of his parents, an environment infused with the Abrahamic vision of life, and travels to Harran, where he would live with a deceitful father-in-law, Laban, and would endure many a trial. The portion ends, two decades later, with Jacob leaving Laban and returning to the Holy Land: “And Jacob went on his way and Divine angels encountered him.”

What allowed Jacob to maintain his moral and spiritual equilibrium throughout his two decades in exile? Why did the first Jewish refugee not assimilate and forfeit his spiritual identity?

The answer is hinted in the Torah by the omission of any space throughout his journey from the Holy Land and back there. From “And Jacob left Be'er Sheba,” in the opening of Vayeitzei, through “Jacob went on his way and Divine angels encountered him,” at the end of Vayeitzei, there was no chasm. Geographically, Jacob left

Be'er Sheva in the Holy Land, he departed from Isaac and Rebecca and their Divine-centered world; but in his mindset, there was no gulf between the two. He knew he is on a journey, he was sent on a mission, and he will return.

Jacob never lost touch with where he came from, and thus never got lost in the vicissitudes of his exile life. "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how," Friedrich Nietzsche said. When you know who you are and the task that lay before you, the changing circumstances do not override your inner anchor. There is a uniform serenity that pervades your life.

#### The Secret of Longevity

This portion captures the long drama of Jewish exile. Jacob is the first Jew to leave his parents' cocoon and recreate Jewish life on foreign soil; his descendants would be forced to do so numerous times throughout their history.

What is the secret of the descendants of Jacob to be able to endure millennia of exile and yet remain firmly etched in their identity as Jews?

#### The Mission

The late astrophysicist, Professor Velvl Greene, who worked many years for NASA, once related the following story.

Many years ago, Dr. Greene shared, a noted scientist delivered a lecture at a Space Science Conference on the broader aspects of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Program in the USA. Among other things, the lecturer drew a parallel between the problems which will face space explorers in the future and our current conditions on earth.

Using a hypothetical manned voyage to the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, as an example, he emphasized the remarkable engineering, biological and sociological problems that would be encountered during the execution of this enterprise. Since the star is 4.3 light-years away, a spaceship traveling at 1,000 miles per second would require more than 800 years to get there and another 800 years to get back. Any original crew we launched would not survive for even a fraction of the mission's duration. Instead, we would have to "man" the capsule with men and women who would have children who would carry on the mission. These children would themselves have children, continuing this for 1,600 years. Ultimately, after many generations, the remote progeny of the original crew would complete the mission.

This interstellar spaceship would have to be completely self-sustaining and self-supporting. But the lecturer pointed out that the engineering and technical problems are only one side of the coin. In the spaceship, the crew would have to learn to tolerate each other, generation after generation. They would have to learn, and learn quickly, that you don't blow up only part of a spaceship.

And then the speaker touched on a key topic: Would the fiftieth generation, after a thousand years, still share the aspirations of their pilgrim fathers who set out from earth so long ago? How, indeed, can you convey to a generation still unborn the basic information about where they came from, where they are going, why they are going there, how to get there, and how to get back?

One of the scientists stood up, and to my surprise and delight, declared: "If we could figure out how the Jewish people managed to survive these thousands of years, we'd have our answer!"

The scientist was on target. To a Jew, this story is no mere fantastic flight of imagination; it captures our millennia-long narrative. Almost four millennia ago, Abraham heard a call to become a blessing for all mankind. Over three thousand years ago, at Mount Sinai, we were launched with specific instructions and suitable maps. And we were told that we ought to transmit this mission to our children and grandchildren, for generations to come. The task

was to bring healing and redemption to the world.

We were charged with the mission to reveal that the universe has a soul, that humanity has a soul, that each of us has a soul. That we are living in G-d's world, and our mission is to transcend our superficial shells and reveal the infinite oneness that unites us all.

For more than a hundred generations we knew where we came from, where we were going, why we were traveling, who was the Project Officer, and how to get back. We had no real difficulty in transmitting this intelligence unbroken from generation to generation—even to generations who were not physically present during "take-off" at Sinai. How? Because the Torah, our Divine logbook, contained macro and micro guidance. Notwithstanding all challenges, this logbook has met the only real criterion of the empirical scientists—it worked. Our presence demonstrated that it worked.

As long as we did not allow an interruption in the transmitting of the Torah from generation to generation, the mission and the people remained intact.

#### The Challenge

But somehow, not too long ago, a "space" emerged in the middle of this long and incredible journey. A generation of "astronauts" arose who decided that they could write a better logbook. They thought the original was old-fashioned, restraining, complicated, and irrelevant to the problems of modern times. They lost their "fix" on the celestial reference points.

Many of them know something is wrong, but they could not pinpoint the malfunction and get back on course. Our mission today is to teach by example how there is indeed no gorge and no gulf between Sinai and modernity. It is one continuous uninterrupted chain, and—unlike with Darwinism—there is no missing link. The glorious narrative of our people is that we never allowed for an inter-generational gap. The same Shabbos our grandmothers celebrated 3000 years ago, we still celebrate. The same tefillin my great grandfathers donned in Georgia 300 years ago, I still wrap today in New York. The same texts Jewish children in Florence and Barcelona were studying 700 years ago, my children study today. Abraham began the story, Moses consolidated it, and we will complete it.

[1] Sometimes it is unclear to us the purpose of the break at a particular location of the text.

[2] Sefas Emes Vayeitzei 5650 (1899). In his own words: שפת אמת ויצא תר"נ: בסדר ויצא לא נמצא שום פרשה פתוחה וסתומה. וכ"ה בספרי מסורות כי לא יש סדר כזה בתורה וזולת ויצא. ונראה דהרמז שלא פסק אבינו יעקב ולא הוסח דעתו מיציאתו לחו"ל עד שחזר ויפגעו בו מלאכי כו'. וז"ש וישבת עמו ימים אחדים שהיו כל הימים באחדות ודביקות בשרשו. [ויתכן ג"כ כי זה פ"ה הפסוק ויהיו בעינינו כימים אחדים באהבתו אותה כי ע"י אהבה זו ה"י דבוק באחדות. וידוע כי אהבתו ברחל הוא סוד השכינה.] וזה ה"ל עיקר הגדר והבקשה אם יהי' אלקים עמדי בוי' שלא יתפרד מן הדביקות ע"י לבן הרשע ותחבולותיו כנ"ל.

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#### Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is sponsored in memory of Malka bas Yosef – Malka Levine.

#### (Not) Together Forever

And it was when Yaakov saw Rochel [...] Then Yaakov kissed Rochel and he raised his voice and wept (29:10-11).

Yaakov Avinu, having traveled quite a distance to meet his future wife, reacts in a very unusual manner upon first seeing Rochel: He begins to cry in a very loud voice. Rashi, noting that this seems rather odd, explains that Yaakov cried because he saw through the Divine spirit that Rochel would not be buried alongside him (29:11). But why would Yaakov be preoccupied by the idea of not being buried together on the day he first meets his wife? It would seem

that Yaakov Avinu had far more pressing issues to overcome in the immediate future: he was destitute, had a devious Uncle Lavan, a brother who had proclaimed his intent to kill him, etc. So why was Yaakov worrying about their separate burial locations – events far removed in the future – at this time?

Perhaps even more perplexing: Rashi, in Parshas Vayechi (48:7), relates how Yaakov explains to his son Yosef that he should not be upset with him for not burying his mother Rochel in Beis Lechem because he buried her there at the direction of the Divine word of Hashem: “So that she should be of aid to her children when the Nebuzadran would exile them; (as they are leaving Eretz Yisroel) they would pass by her grave and Rochel would emerge from her grave and cry and seek Divine mercy for them[...].”

Thus, it was necessary for Rochel to be buried by the side of the road in order to come out and daven as her descendants passed by her grave. But if this is the reason she needed to be buried there then why did Yaakov cry – Rochel was obviously never intended to be buried next to him in Chevron anyway! Furthermore, Rashi, on the words “He shall not live” (31:32), explains that Yaakov inadvertently cursed Rochel and this is what caused her to be buried by the side of the road. But this seems to be a direct contradiction to the reason that Yaakov gave his son Yosef!

The answer to these questions lies in the fundamental understanding that the Jewish view of marriage is one of an eternal union. As explained in earlier editions of INSIGHTS, the primary method of how a woman becomes betrothed to a man is learned from the story of how Abraham acquired a burial plot for his deceased wife Sarah. He wasn’t buying one plot, he was buying plots for both of them. In fact, the Torah calls the city Kiryat Arba because of the four couples who are buried there (Rashi on 23:1). It isn’t eight individuals; it’s four merged couples. This is the Jewish view of what a marriage is supposed to be.

Yaakov was devastated when he saw through Ruach Hakodesh that he wouldn’t be buried together with his soulmate Rachel because this indicated that their union wouldn’t be perfect. A defect in their union would be very painful and obviously have repercussions throughout the marriage.

We find a fascinating concept by Yaakov Avinu. Rashi, in Parshas Vayechi (49:33), quotes the Gemara (Taanis 5b) that Yaakov never really died. In fact, according to the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 92:2), Yaakov was actually standing there when Bnei Yisroel left Egypt. Even though the Torah explicitly says that he was embalmed and buried in Chevron, apparently he wasn’t physically bound by his death. In all likelihood, if Yaakov and Rochel would have had a perfect merged identity, it seems very possible that Rochel could have had the same quality of not being really dead. In other words, she could have been buried in Chevron and still gone out to the side of the road to pray for her children when they needed her.

This is why Yaakov Avinu was sobbing loudly when he first met Rochel. He understood from the outset that they would not share that eternal bond. Their brief marriage, which ended upon the sudden death of Rochel, also ended their connection and the potential for an eternal relationship. This is why Yaakov was exceedingly distraught when they first met.

#### ***A Fate Worse Than Death***

[...] and he [Yaakov] cried (29:10).

Rashi relates that Yaakov was saddened by the fact that he came searching for a wife empty handed in contrast to Eliezer who, when he went to find a wife for Yitzchak, came bearing many gifts. This was because Elifaz, the son of Eisav, pursued him on the orders of his father to kill Yaakov. But Elifaz, who was “raised on the lap of Yitzchak,” did not want kill Yaakov. As Elifaz was conflicted, he

asked Yaakov, “What should I do about my father’s command?” Yaakov responded, “Take all my possessions, I will be impoverished

and a poor person is considered as if he is dead.” Obviously, Elifaz couldn’t return to his father and outright lie by saying that he killed Yaakov because the truth would come to light eventually. This being so, even if technically he didn’t violate his father’s command, how could this scheme possibly satisfy Eisav?

There is a well-known maxim in Judaism; “He who publicly shames his neighbor is as though he shed his blood” (Baba Metzia 58b). The Gemara continues, “all who descend into Gehenna eventually leave. Except for one who publicly shames his neighbor.”

This is quite remarkable. The ultimate punishment for embarrassing someone is worse than the punishment received for killing him! How is this possible? Rabbeinu Yonah in his famous work explains that the pain of shame is even worse than death itself (Shaarei Teshuva 3:139).

The reason is quite obvious. When one kills someone, the pain caused, while severe, is temporal. In contrast, when one suffers a deep humiliation, the pain is replayed in their mind constantly and endured for a lifetime. This, in effect, causes a much greater emotional trauma to the victim than the pain of non-existence and therefore merits a much greater punishment.

This fact is demonstrated as Yaakov was so pained by the fact that he was penniless and had nothing to offer as a gift to his future wife that he cried. Clearly, Elifaz felt that Eisav would be satisfied with the continuous humiliation of Yaakov.

#### ***Family Matters***

And Yaakov said to his brethren “gather stones” (Bereishis 31:46).

Rashi (ad loc) comments, “this refers to his sons who were as brothers to him, standing by him in his troubles and wars.” Rashi’s explanation seems a little difficult to understand; if the Torah meant to say his sons why are they referred to as “his brothers”?

Rashi is highlighting how Yaakov interacted with his children. Often parents treat their adolescent children as employees they can order around – and that’s on a good day. On a bad day, they tend to treat them as indentured servants (“take out the garbage!” or “get me a beer!” etc.). Rashi is telling us that Yaakov Avinu treated his adolescent children as one would treat siblings: in other words, as equals. This is what spurred them to stand by him during his troubles and throughout wars. It’s no wonder then that Yaakov’s legacy was considered complete (see Rashi 35:22) and all of his children were righteous. This also explains Rashi’s comment in Parshas Vayechi (49:24) on the words “even Yisroel” – foundation of Israel. There Rashi says that the word “even” is a contraction of the words “av” and “bonim” – “father and sons.” In other words, the foundation of the Jewish people is built on the strength of the relationship between Yaakov and his children; that of a healthy relationship between a father and his sons.

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***Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights***

***For the week ending 3 December 2022 / 9 Kislev 5783***

***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -***

***[www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com) Parshat Vayeitzei***

Most of us get to a certain platform of spirituality in life and leave it at that. We’re happy to move into neutral and coast on what we’ve already achieved. If we decided to keep Shabbat, we carry on keeping Shabbat; if we said, “I’m going to keep kosher,” we carry on keeping Kosher, or putting on tefillin or whatever it is. If we went to Yeshiva, we carry on learning — sometimes less, sometimes more. At some point we feel, “Okay, I’m not that great, but I’m not that bad either.” Truth be told, to move outside our

comfort zone and do something that's even a little bit more than other people is very difficult. It's difficult because people don't do more than they have to. Some of us struggle to do even that. In terms of spirituality we are a bit like herd animals. We like to stick with the crowd. And we also tend to think, "What difference does it make to the world anyway?"

True, I'll be a better person, but there are already so many tzadikim (righteous people) in the world, so what does the world need me for? Why do I need to be so religious? Aren't there already enough "Famous Tzadik" pictures to put up in the succa?" "And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan." Rashi explains that the Torah needed to write only that Yaakov went to Charan — what need was there to emphasize that he also left Be'er Sheva? He answers that when a tzadik leaves a place it leaves an impression. When a tzadik is in a city, his presence causes radiance and a luminous, spiritual brilliance to settle on the city, and when he leaves, the radiance is lost.

The question arises, "Was Yaakov the first tzadik to leave a city? Didn't both his father Yitzchak and his grandfather Avraham both leave places? Why does the Torah emphasize Yaakov's leaving over theirs?" The difference is that when both Avraham and Yitzchak left places, they left no tzadik of their stature behind, whereas when Yaakov left Be'er Sheva he left his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka, two great tzadikim. One might have thought that since Yitzchak and Rivka remained, Yaakov's departure would not dim the spiritual light of the place. Therefore, it is specifically here that the Torah emphasizes the reverse — holiness never eclipses itself. The spiritual light that three holy people radiate is much greater than two. When we think that our meager efforts at being close to G-d are eclipsed by the great and the holy people of our generation, we should remember that holiness is never eclipsed, that our every holy thought or action adds immeasurably to the cosmos.

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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

***Vayeitzei: You can only win the lottery if you buy a ticket 30 November 2022***

Success in life doesn't just fall into our laps. We learn this important lesson from an intriguing passage in Parshat Vayeitzei.

Yaakov came to his father in law Lavan and demanded that he be paid for his many years of service, during which he hadn't received a penny. The Torah provides for us the details of the negotiations between the two. Lavan said to Yaakov (Bereishit 30:27), "I can see what has happened; I can read the signs;

*Nichasti vayevarcheinu Hashem biglalecha.*" – "God has blessed me because of you."

Yaakov then replied (Bereishit 30:30) by saying,

*"Vayevarech Hashem otecha meragli,"* which we usually translate as, "God has blessed you on my account."

But the term 'leragli' literally means 'because of my feet!' What was Yaakov trying to convey?

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsh explains this beautifully. He explains that when Lavan said to Yaakov, "Nichasti vayivarcheinu Hashem biglalecha," what he meant was this: "What has happened Yaakov, is that God has blessed me – it's not you – you're a holy man, and that's why God has always helped you. It is God who has performed these miracles for my flocks. It's to God that I should give thanks, not to you. You don't deserve a single penny – God has done it all."

When Yaakov then replied and said, "Vayevarech Hashem otecha

leragli" – "God has blessed you because of my feet!" what he meant was, "For all these years, I've been standing in your fields. Under all weather conditions, I've given the utmost service. It has been a partnership. Of course, I've got my bitachon, my trust in God, but throughout this time, God was turning to me for my hishtadlut, for my efforts, as well. I did it with Hashem, and therefore you should be paying me."

From Yaakov we learn that in life, you can only succeed if you try hard together with faith in Hashem. The way that the Talmud puts it is that Hashem says to us,

"Pitchu li petach shel machat veniftach lachem pitcho shel ulam." – "Open for me just the space of the eye of a needle and I will expand that to be the space of an entire hall."

We may be the junior partners, but it is always a partnership. 'Ein somchin al haneis' – never rely on miracles, the Talmud tells us. We have to do our bit. So it is from Yaakov we learn that in life, you can only win the lottery if you buy a ticket. Success doesn't automatically fall into our laps. It's a partnership and together with bitachon in Hashem, we need to always try our hardest.

*Shabbat shalom.*

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

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### ***Drasha Parshas Vayeitzei - Point of Order Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky***

Let me get straight to the point. After all Yaakov did! at least when he dealt with his charlatan father-in-law, Lavan. You see, Yaakov wanted to marry Rachel, Lavan's youngest daughter. He did not have the audacity to ask for her hand in marriage straightforwardly, so when he arrived at Lavan's home, and identified himself as the son of Lavan's sister, Rivka, Lavan decided to offer his nephew Yaakov work. He would not have him work for free, so he declared, "Just because you are my relative, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me – What are your wages?" (Genesis 29:15). The Torah tells us that "Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, 'I will work for you seven years, for Rachel your daughter, who is the youngest one.'" What is fascinating is the magnanimous offer Yaakov made. He did not say, "I'd like to marry your daughter and then work. He offered seven years of devoted labor before marriage. What is even more perplexing is the seemingly superfluous language in the request. Why did he announce each detail about Rachel? Why ask for Rachel, your daughter, the youngest one? Why not just one of the three?

Rashi tells us that Yaakov was afraid. What reason was there for mentioning all these detailed descriptions of Rachel? Because Yaakov knew that Lavan was a deceiver he said to him, "I will serve you for Rachel. If Lavan would say he meant any other Rachel from the street, therefore he said "your daughter." Should Lavan say, "I will change Leah's name and call her Rachel", Yaakov said "your younger one."

It didn't help. In spite of all this, Lavan deceived him. He surreptitiously switched Leah for Rachel, excusing himself in a mocking manner, "By us, in our place, we don't give the younger daughter before the older one!" (ibid v. 26). But we are surely left with a lesson both in Yaakov's specificity and in Lavan's response. Master storyteller Rabbi Ami Cohen tells the tale of the famous and equally pious Reb Yossel Czapnik, who in his unpretentious manner walked one day into a large yeshiva. He was unfamiliar with the workings of that particular school, and as he meandered about the great study hall, his Chassidic garb and uncombed beard attracted some stares from some of the students who were not accustomed to that sort of persona in their academy. Innocently he looked at the



bookshelves crammed with countless volumes of Talmudic and Biblical exegeses, picked up a volume, sauntered over to a chair toward the back of the study hall, and began to study the book. A moment later, a tall young man towered over him peering down through the narrow gap that separated his spectacles from his ruddy face. In a very sarcastic tone he sneered, "In our Yeshiva, we do not sit in the Mashgiach's seat."

Reb Yossel looked up for a moment, and in his pure naiveté smiled, and agreed, mumbling as he peered back down in the volume, "by us as well." The fellow hunched over Reb Yossel and repeated his statement, this time in a louder and more ominous tone. "By us, we don't sit in the Mashgiach's seat!"

Reb Yossel shook his head and acknowledged. "In our yeshiva too!" By this time, the exasperated, young man changed his tactic. In a sharp voice, he commanded. "I don't know who you are, but you are sitting in the Mashgiach's seat!"

Upon hearing those words, Reb Yossel bounded out of the seat. He turned to the fellow in authentic shock. "I was sitting in your Mashgiach's seat?" he asked in horror. "Why didn't you say so in the first place?" Perhaps the exchange that is portrayed in the Torah teaches us two lessons at once. A person who requests something should be clear, direct, and accurate. Yaakov clearly stated his want, "Rachel, your youngest daughter." There should be no room for error or an opening for surreptitiousness. Like Yaakov, you can't always win, but you have to try your best with a most clear request. In addition, if you don't want to accept the terms, say no right from the start. Don't deride your counterpart saying, "By us, we don't do it this way." Mocking the individual, while making him feel like an anomaly, is no way to explain your position. Be clear, honest, and precise. You may disagree, but you will gain a lot more respect. *Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Joel Mandel in memory of Joseph Jungreis Reb Yoel Zvi ben Reb Tuvia HaLevi ob"m — 10 Kislev*  
*Dedicated by the Schulman Family in memory of Milton Schulman R' Michael ben R' Zvi ob"m — 11 Kislev*  
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### **Prophetic Vision (Vayetze) Ben-Tzion Spitz**

*As a man is, so he sees. As the eye is formed, such are its powers. - William Blake*

The encounter with God is often a nebulous affair. It seems that prophetic visions are challenging for most mortals to withstand, let alone fully and deeply comprehend. The sages liken the prophetic experience as seeing someone through a clouded window. The most prominent exception is Moses, who is described as perceiving God clearly, through a "clear window" (Asplakariah Meirah is the term that's used).

However, between the clear and the clouded visions, there are nuances as to how one achieves prophetic clarity. The Bat Ayin on Genesis 28:10 delves into some of the factors of prophetic vision based on Jacob's journey.

He explains that the first level of prophecy is achieved by wholehearted fulfillment of God's commandments. This is the level of entry into the land of Israel and is similar to the level achieved by the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest when he enters the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. The most holy person entering the most holy place on the most holy day of the year. By actively and

fully pursuing and fulfilling all of God's desires one can strive for the initial level of prophecy, the Asplakariah She'eina Meriah – the unclear window into the realm of prophecy.

The next level of prophetic vision is achieved by immersion in God's Torah. By fully accepting, embracing, and internalizing God's word, one's mind and heart are sanctified. The Torah has the power to enlighten and show a person the path they should undertake.

The Bat Ayin draws all of this out from the somewhat repetitive verse "And Jacob left Beer Sheva and went to Charan." We were just told of Jacob's journey a few verses before that. The Bat Ayin relates the word Charan to the word Cherut, meaning freedom. Jacob travelled from his earnest and dutiful fulfillment of God's commands to a level of fully delving into the Torah, thereby reaching a higher level of awe of God, of freedom and of even being able to see the angels, besides the prophetic vision he was granted.

May we, in our own small ways, reach for glimpses of the divine and holy by doing what's right and learning what God says about it. *Dedication - To the memory of one of my rabbinic inspirations, Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu z"l.*

*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.*

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### **Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

Parashat Vayetze 5783 - The Ladder from Heaven to Earth

In last week's parasha, we read about Jacob being forced to leave his parents' home in order to escape the wrath of his brother Esau who was waiting for an opportunity to take revenge for Jacob taking the blessings that had been promised to Esau. In this week's parasha, Vayetze, we get into the story of Jacob who wandered to Haran where his uncle Laban lived. Jacob lived in Haran for twenty years, through many trials and tribulations.

This chapter in Jacob's life began with the deceit from which Jacob suffered his entire life. After he got to Haran and met Rachel, Laban's daughter, he felt she was his soulmate and wished to marry her. Jacob made a proposal to Laban, as was customary in those days, and agreed to work for Laban for seven years after which he would be able to marry Rachel. Laban agreed to give Rachel to Jacob, but after the seven years passed, he cheated Jacob and gave him his older daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel. From here on, Jacob's life became a string of complications and tragedies. After he discovered the deceit, he demanded to marry to Rachel, the woman he loved, but Laban demanded an additional seven years of labor. With no choice, Jacob agreed and worked for Laban for another seven years.

Jacob was married to two sisters but loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. This created a rift in his family with far-reaching implications. The tension between Rachel and Leah is described in the parasha. It intensified after Leah gave birth to child after child, whereas the beloved Rachel was unable to bear children. Only after Leah had six sons did Rachel get pregnant and give birth to Joseph. After Joseph was born, Jacob decided to leave Haran and return to his parents' home in the Land of Canaan. Laban was not amenable and Jacob was forced to stay in Haran for years more. Even when he finally was able to escape with his family and possessions, Laban chased him and tried to kill him. Only divine intervention prevented the tragedy.

What kept Jacob going during these long and difficult years, when he was alone, far from his parents' home, being swindled

and threatened time after time by his father-in-law? To answer that, we must go back to the start of Jacob's journey from the Land of Canaan to Haran. When he was on his way, he went to sleep for the night in a place called Beit El (the House of G-d). Chazal tell us that this was on the Temple Mount, the site where the Temple would be built years later. There, Jacob dreamed an amazing dream. He saw in his dream "a ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of God were ascending and descending upon it."

Many interpretations of this vision have been offered by commentators. According to some of them, the dream symbolizes the connection between heaven and earth; the possibility of a person living a secular and sacred life simultaneously, and the human capacity to bridge the gaps between heaven and earth.

Jacob embarked on his life journey equipped with these understandings. He knew that even when he was living in a foreign land, alone and vulnerable to deceit, there was meaning to his life and his actions. He learned that even when we feel we're at the bottom of a pit, we are not disconnected from heaven. He believed that a person can be standing on earth but his head could reach the heavens.

He also recognized that the ups and downs in his private life are not merely mishaps, but are part of a complex plan in which he plays a part. He saw angels going up and down the ladder and inferred that he too could be like that – descending and then going back up; never staying down, but always climbing back up that ladder leading to heaven.

When Jacob woke up, he cried out, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." If we listen closely to these words, we reveal two aspects of the connection between heaven and earth, between the sacred and the mundane. On the one hand, Jacob discovered that this earthly site is actually "the house of G-d." G-d resides on earth. He is not unattainable and distant. On the other hand, Jacob revealed that the place was "the gate of heaven" – the gate between earth and heaven. Jacob discovered the connection between heaven and earth from both sides, enabling him to cope with his distant exile while equipped with faith and confidence, hope and significance. *The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

#### **Rav Kook Torah**

#### **Vayeitzei: The Blessing of a Scholar's Presence Rabbi Chanan Morrison**

After working at Laban's ranch for 14 years, Jacob was anxious to return home, to the Land of Israel. Laban, however, was not eager to let his nephew go. "I have observed the signs," he told Jacob, "and God has blessed me for your sake" (Gen. 30:27). The Talmud (Berachot 42a) points out that Laban's good fortune was not due only to Jacob's industriousness and hard work. "Blessing comes in the wake of a Torah scholar," the Sages taught. The very presence of a saintly scholar brings with it blessings of success and wealth.

Yet, this phenomenon seems unfair. Why should a person be blessed just because he was in the proximity of a Torah scholar? The Influence of a Tzaddik To answer this question, we must understand the nature of a tzaddik and his profound impact on those around him. The presence of a Torah scholar will inspire even a morally corrupt individual to limit his destructive acts. As a result of this positive influence, material benefits will not be abused, and divine blessings will be utilized appropriately. Such an individual, by virtue of a refining influence, has become an appropriate recipient for God's blessings.

In addition to the case of Laban and Jacob, the Talmud notes a

second example of "Blessing coming in the wake of a Torah scholar." The Torah relates that the prosperity of the Egyptian officer Potiphar was in Joseph's merit (Gen. 39:5). In some aspects, this case is more remarkable.

Unlike Laban, Potiphar was not even aware of the source of his good fortune. Nonetheless, Joseph's presence helped raise the ethical level of the Egyptian's household, making it more suitable to receive God's blessings.

*(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 187-188.*

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#### **Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayeitzei 2''D'J7 RY'7 J7'5D**

**מש וליי מוקמב עגפיו ... עבש ראבנא בקעי אציו**

**Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva ... He encountered the place and spent the night. (28:10,11)**

Chazal (Megillah 17a) glean from the word *sham*, there, that this was the first time the Patriarch lay down to sleep. He had spent the past fourteen years "hidden" within the *yeshivah* of Shem and Eivar. I use the word "hidden" to underscore that Yaakov *Avinu* became a part of the *yeshivah* in such a manner that no one even knew he was there. He studied day and night, focused on one thing: learning Torah. The question that should be addressed is how Chazal knew that Yaakov was in the *yeshivah*. Simply put, after calculating Yaakov's age at present and the age that he was when he left home, we have fourteen years that are not accounted for. Yet, how do we know that those fourteen years of his life were spent ensconced in the *bais hamedrash*?

Horav Avraham Yudelevitz, *Shlita*, recalls an incident that received much coverage in the news. Two children had disappeared from their home (or so it was thought). At the end, Hatzalah members were able to locate them – within the confines of their own home! How did they achieve this? They interviewed the parents, seeking a detailed schedule of their children's daily activities to ascertain where they might have gone. Who were their friends? What excited them? After listening to the answers, the men decided that the children had not wandered off very far, since their entire lives were centered around their home and immediate community. After some more room-to-room searching, the children were found sleeping in the linen closet in their parents' bedroom! They were sleeping peacefully without a care in the world, oblivious to all the chaos their "nap" had generated. Apparently, they had been playing, and this was a perfect place to hide. They became tired and naturally fell asleep.

A similar idea (explains Rav Yudelevitz) applies to our Patriarch who personified Torah study at its apex. If Yaakov is "missing," we have no question that he is to be found in the *bais hamedrash*. This is his permanent address. Everything else is distraction. Conversely, his twin brother, *Eisav ha'rasha*, after returning from a day out in the "field," is "tired." Chazal (Bava Basra 16B) explain that he had committed five transgressions that day. How do we know this? This is Eisav. When he goes out in the field and returns "tired," it can only mean one thing: his base personality and moral perversion acted themselves out, through adultery, murder and their accompanying transgressions. A person's proclivities and activities are usually an indication of his personality. Some gravitate to the *bais hamedrash*; others, sadly, do not.

Truthfully, had Yaakov *Avinu* not "hidden" himself in the Torah, he would not have survived two decades with Lavan, the arch swindler. Yaakov was cheated from day one. Yet, he neither complained nor allowed his righteous indignation to cloud or lessen

the commitment he had to execute his job faithfully. He worked for Lavan without holding back, because he had made a commitment. He viewed every swindle, every challenge, every obstacle as Heavenly-ordained. His *emunah* in Hashem was absolute and unshakeable. *Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, Shlita*, relates what is a well-known story, which grants us a window into the evil of Lavan and the equanimity of Yaakov.

The *Alshich HaKadosh* was giving a *shiur*, lecture, in the *shul* in Tzfas. His topic was the *pasuk*, *Va'tachalif es maskurti aseres monim*; "And you changed my wage ten times" (ibid. 31:41). The *Alshich* brilliantly detailed one hundred times and ways in which Lavan cheated Yaakov. The *Arizal* was seated in the *bais hamedrash* listening to the *shiur*. At one point, a smile came across the *Arizal's* face. After the *shiur*, the *Alshich* asked the *Arizal* why he had smiled. He explained that Lavan had also attended the *shiur* (obviously the *Arizal's* vision was far above our natural ability to see): "Concerning each one of the swindles that you detailed, he would shake his head in agreement. At one point, however, you mentioned something that even he did not realize. He said, 'I never thought about this.'" This is why the *Arizal* smiled.

Yet, despite all of this, our Patriarch maintained his calm and never once complained. This was due to his Torah-generated *emunah* that allowed him the clarity of vision to see and accept all that occurred as ordained by Hashem.

The *Meshech Chochmah* notes the Torah's description of Yaakov and Lavan's parting of the ways: *V'Yaakov halach l'darko*; "Yaakov went on his way" (ibid. 31:2). Despite having been with Lavan *ha'rasha* for over twenty years, our Patriarch's unwavering commitment to Hashem was not altered. He continued along the path upon which he had started. Lavan was a distraction, but not a game changer. Concerning Lavan, the Torah writes, *Vayashav Lavan limekomo*; "Lavan went and returned to his place" (ibid. 31:1). Lavan was unchanged by his exposure to Yaakov, even though he had lived with him for over two decades. He remained the same *rasha* he had been until this point. Some people never change. As a swindler, Lavan was his own biggest enemy.

**בש ולינו מוקמב עגפיו**

**He encountered the place and spent the night there. (28:11)**

This was no ordinary place. It was *Har HaMoriah*, where Avraham *Avinu* bound Yitzchak (*Avinu*) on the *Mizbayach*, Altar, which would later serve as the site of the *Bais Hamikdash*. *Chazal* interpret the word *vayifga*, "he encountered," as "he prayed." Yaakov *Avinu's* encounter was of a spiritual nature. He encountered Hashem. Since it was evening, this is when the Patriarch initiated *Tefillas Arvis*, the Evening Prayer. *Chazal* (*Chullin* 91:13) teach that originally Yaakov had passed the place without giving it a second thought. When he reached Charan, he realized that he had passed the place where his father and grandfather had prayed – and he did not. He immediately prepared to return. Hashem made a miracle which allowed him to have *kefitzas ha'derech*, contraction of the road.

which is a reference to miraculous, instant time-travel between two locations. Why was Yaakov able to pass the first time, and what happened later to cause him to make an about-face?

The *Tchebiner Rav*, *zl*, explains that on the way to Charan, he was planning to stop at the *bais medrash* of Shem and Eivar. He felt that since he was about to learn Torah, it was improper to delay his objective by stopping to *daven*. He later realized, however, that *tefillah* is an essential requirement and prerequisite for Torah study; without *tefillah* the Torah study is deficient. Thus, he returned.

Torah achievement is not predicated upon acumen. It is a Divine gift given to someone who is worthy of *siyata d'Shmaya*,

Heavenly assistance. One must pray, plead, supplicate for this Divine assistance. Otherwise, his learning will be an exercise in mental gymnastics – not Torah study. The *Chazon Ish* was a classic example. He writes: "Torah and *tefillah* are inexorably bound to one another, with the toil expended in studying Torah assisting in one's perceiving the light of *tefillah*; and likewise, prayer aids in one's perception of Torah." He was wont to say that he had gained enormous levels of Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, more due to his *tefillah* than due to his *hasmadah*, diligence.

*Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl*, related that his *Rebbe*, the *Netziv, zl*, (He was also a close student of *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*. He was of the few who did not take sides when issues involving the leadership of *Yeshivas Volozhin* came to the fore. He sought only to learn Torah. Once, he refused to give the *shiur* which he would give daily.) No one had the temerity to ask the *Netziv* why he was not giving *shiur*. *Rav Isser Zalman* had a very close relationship with his *Rebbe*, so he asked. The *Netziv* replied with total equanimity, "I felt that today (during *Shacharis*), I did not have the proper *kavanah*, intention, during the blessing of *Ahavah Rabbah* (preceding *Krias Shema*). I do not have the brazenness to present my analysis of the *sugya*, topic of discussion, without first *davening* properly." Without *tefillah*, one does not merit the *siyata d'Shmaya* to pinpoint the unvarnished truth.

**יתעדי אל יכנאו הזה מוקמב ד' שי וכא רמאיו ותנשמ בקעי עקיו**

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

*Rashi* explains that after discovering the level of holiness of the place in which he presently was, Yaakov *Avinu* was lamenting having slept. How does one dare to sleep in such a holy place? The *Brisker Rav, zl*, would become emotional when thinking about Yaakov's reaction to discovering that he was in a consecrated place. The Patriarch had escaped from his brother, Eisav, who was bent on killing him. On the way, he was waylaid by Elifaz, who took away all of his money. Therefore, since he had just received a prophecy that assured him, *U'shemarticha b'chol asher teilech*; "I will guard you wherever you go," he should be filled with overwhelming joy. Instead, he was depressed that he had slept in a holy place. In other words, it was worth it for him to have forfeited all of the Heavenly blessing spelled out in the prophecy just so he did not violate one transgression! If he manifests any taint of impropriety, then all the blessings are of no value whatsoever!

The *Rav* explained that the Torah's laws are not arbitrary for us to decide whether to "trade" *mitzvos*, to do less here, be lenient there, all in order to benefit in the larger picture. In reality, no larger picture exists. We are charged with carrying out the will of Hashem, performing His *mitzvos* as they are individually stated. It is forbidden for us to make calculations to determine how we will benefit the most. We do not transgress for the purpose of later benefit.

The *Rav* cites the well-known *Tosefta* (*Terumos* 7), which states a *halachah* that might raise eyebrows among those who feel that the *mitzvos* of the Torah are negotiable. A group of idolaters came to a Jewish community and demanded they give over a certain Jew (whom they would murder). If the community did not comply with their demands, they would slaughter the entire community. The *Tosefta* states the *halachic* ruling that no Jew may be given over. It is an act of *retzichah*, murder. The question is obvious: This man will die regardless – either as an individual or as a part of the community. Why jeopardize the lives of an entire Jewish community to save one man? We do not make calculations concerning the Torah's laws. The man may not be handed over, even if this inaction will result in the deaths of



others. The *Brisker Rav* would quote his father, *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, who said that the Torah is likened to fire. As such, it is prohibited to touch. To touch it, even with the intention of somehow adding to it elsewhere, carries the risk of being burned.

During World War II (as related by *Rav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*), as the Nazi war machine was overrunning Europe, it reached a point that the Nazi army would reach England within two weeks. The English government issued a call for all able-bodied men to sign up to the army, to assist the country in this challenging time. No one was absolved from the draft except for English *yeshivah* students who were studying full-time. Those *yeshivah* students that were from outside England, however, had to sign up or be deported. *Horav Moshe Schneider, zl*, refused to allow anyone – not one single *bachur*, student, to join the army. He declared, “We are prepared for *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. Even if they arrest us, we will convene the *yeshivah* in prison! The Torah is our heritage, and they are unable to sever our relationship with it. We are already drafted into Hashem’s legion and, through the power of our study, we will save the country!”

When the government inspectors saw that *Rav Schneider* was intractable, they threatened to deport him. Perhaps this way he would loosen his hold on the students. The *yeshivah* administration turned to Chief Rabbi Hertz to intercede on their behalf. *Rav Hertz* suggested that they compromise and offer two or three students in order to satisfy the government’s demands. The *Rosh Yeshivah* stood resolute – not one student would he relinquish. They were his students who came to his *yeshivah* for his guidance; thus, they were under his protection. He would protect them. They were all going to remain together as one unit. He would not compromise *vis-à-vis* the Torah. Each and every Jew has inestimable value.

The Chief Rabbi convinced the government’s inspectors to speak directly with the students, to hear what they had to say. Understandably, the students opted to stay with their revered *Rebbe*. They felt that this was their only chance of surviving the war. The Torah would protect them. The government promised to render its decision the following day. The *Rosh Yeshivah* declared the next day as a day of *taanis u'tefillah*, a day of fasting dedicated to prayer, to pierce the Heavens and have the government’s decree rescinded. Hashem listened and provided a positive response. The students were declared emotionally unwell and, consequently, absolved from serving in the military. The order of deportation against the *Rosh Yeshivah* was also revoked, on grounds that he singlehandedly was maintaining a “school” for depressed, emotionally challenged young men. He was lauded for his magnanimous, selfless personality. The *yeshivah’s* status was hereby changed from “school” to “hospital”, catering to the needs of the emotionally disabled. Their refusal to alter their commitment one iota resulted in their survival. Torah does not brook compromise.

רָחֵל

### Hashem remembered Rachel. (30:22)

Rachel *Imeinu* was *mevater*, relinquished, that which she deserved in order to preserve her sister’s esteem. If Yaakov *Avinu* would have discovered that Leah had been exchanged for Rachel, it would have posed an embarrassing situation for Leah. To spare her the shame, Rachel gave up what was hers. *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, adds that Rachel’s actions to spare her sister from humiliation also breached the trust Yaakov had in her. The Patriarch knew that Lavan was a swindler who would find some way to break his word at the very last moment. Thus, he made a pact with Rachel, giving her special signs which only she would know. Rachel shared those *simanim* with Leah. Rachel gave up everything – her husband, her self-respect, her position in Matriarchal status – all so that her

sister would not feel the pain of humiliation.

When *Horav Itzele Ponovezher, zl*, left *Yeshivas Slabodka*, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl*, reverently called the *Alter m'Slabodka*, was challenged with finding a *Rosh Yeshivah* to fill his shoes. He turned to *Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl*, who, although young in years, had developed a reputation as a brilliant mind whose analytic rendering of the subject matter was without peer. *Rav Isser Zalman* considered the position, then demurred because he felt it would cause his mother-in-law, the widow of *Rav Feivel Frank*, undue pain. Apparently, his brother-in-law, *Horav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, zl*, who was the oldest son-in-law, had yet to assume a rabbinical leadership position. *Rav Moshe Mordechai* was a brilliant Torah scholar who simply had not connected with the right position. He did not want to cause his mother-in-law any undue ill will. Thus, *Rav Isser Zalman* suggested to the *Alter* that he hire both himself and *Rav Moshe Mordechai* as *Roshei Yeshivah*. The *Alter* agreed, and the two brothers-in-law reigned as *Slabodka’s Roshei Yeshivah*. After a few years, it became obvious to *Rav Isser Zalman* that he and *Rav Moshe Mordechai* had disparate approaches toward elucidating the *sugya*, Talmudic topic, and, since two kings do not reign as one, he offered to leave. It was exactly at that point that the opportunity to open a branch of *Slabodka* availed itself in the city of *Slutzk*. *Rav Isser Zalman* left to establish the *Slutzker Yeshivah*. His *vatranus* led to his imbuing with his Torah such *talmidim* as his future son-in-law, *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, and *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, two individuals responsible for the burgeoning of Torah both in America and *Eretz Yisrael*; two *gaonim*, who each became the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah giant of his respective generation.

*Horav Aryeh Levin, zl*, was the *chazzan*, led the services, during the *Yamim Noraim* in the *Zaharei Chamah, vasikin minyan*, in *Yerushalayim*. One year, the board informed him that a relative of the *shul’s* largest donor was coming to the Holy Land. The donor wanted this relative to lead the services. Without the funds contributed by this donor, the *shul* would suffer. *Rav Aryeh* was upset, but he could do nothing about it. He went to speak with his *Rebbe*, the *Leshem*, *Horav Shlomo Elyashiv, zl*, who told him, “The pain you suffer in this world is greatly beneficial for the soul.” When *Rav Aryeh* returned home, he found two students who had recently emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* from *Slabodka*. They had established a small group of *yeshivah* students who were paving the way for the *yeshivah’s* branch in *Chevron*. Would he do them the honor of leading the services on *Yamim Noraim*? This was the beginning of the famed *nusach*, melody, sung in *Chevron* for years to come, which was amalgamated with the *nusach* made famous by *Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*. One never loses out due to being *mevater*.

*Horav Simchah Shlomo Levin, zl* (youngest son of *Rav Aryeh*) asked why it had taken so long before Rachel *Imeinu* was rewarded by Hashem for her act of yielding to her sister.

By the time Rachel had her first child, Leah had already given birth to six of her own, which were supplemented by the two sons of *Zilpah*, her maidservant. Her unprecedented action of forgoing her right to marriage to save her sister from humiliation should have generated an earlier reward. Rachel had suffered enough.

*Rav Levin* explains that, upon occasion, one may elevate himself to the point that he places his fellow’s need before his own. This, however, is not an indication of his innate personality. Only after a considerable period of time elapses – and he continues supporting his act of *vatranus* – does his/her true nature emerge and come to the fore. Rachel *Imeinu* acted in a manner that earned her accolades and served as a merit to protect the Jewish nation in later

times. Her patience and forbearance added to her *vatranus* to make it shine, such that it became her hallmark.

#### ***Va'ani Tefillah***

***Tzaddik Hashem b'chol derachav v'chassid b'chol maasav.***

**Righteous is Hashem in all His ways, and magnanimous in all His deeds.**

We are introduced to two virtues: *tzaddik*, righteous; *chassid*, pious. *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl* (commentary to *Parashas Chayei Sarah*) explains that a true *tzaddik* is one who continually rises to higher levels of righteousness. He does not rest on his past laurels. He quotes *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, who derives from Hashem's questioning the *Satan* (*Iyov* 1:8) that a *tzaddik* is one who is able to withstand the scrutiny of even the *Satan*, who looks for every negative aspect of a person's demeanor.

A *chassid*, as explained by *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, is one who does not insist on receiving what is actually due to him. Instead, he acts *lifnim meshuras ha'din*, beyond the letter of the law. He diffidently defers to others, allowing his own property to be damaged or spent rather than taking from others.

When *Rav Chaim* learned in *Kollel Chazon Ish*, he administered a *gemach* (*gemillas chesed*) fund, from which the community could borrow interest free. When he was ready to "retire" from this responsibility, he transferred the reins to his son. He said, "For any loan which you know cannot be repaid (due to the indigence of the borrower), take the money from my personal fund. *Tzedakah* funds cannot be absolved." He did not want people borrowing money which they could not repay if he could help them. Otherwise, as the *Arizal* writes, one who leaves this world owing money will have to return in order to pay back the loan. If so, the lender (in this case, *Rav Chaim*) would likewise have to return, so that he could be reimbursed. Neither option was acceptable.

*In loving memory of our father and grandfather on his yahrtzeit*

ט"ז נש"ת ולסכ"א רמפ"ג - ל"ז קרפ"ג נחלא

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#### **May I Eat before I Daven?**

##### **Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

As the Gemara teaches, the source in this week's parsha teaches that Yaakov introduced the Maariv prayers...

Question #1: Reuven calls me: I have not been well, and I need to eat something shortly after awaking. On weekdays, I go to shul to daven when I wake up and I can wait to eat until after davening, but I do not have this option on Shabbos. What should I do?

Question #2: Ahuva asks: It is difficult for me to wait for Kiddush until my husband returns from shul. May I eat something before he arrives home?

Question #3: Someone told me that a woman may not eat in the morning before she davens, but I remember being taught in Beis Yaakov that we may eat once we say the morning berachos. Is my memory faulty?

Answer:

The Gemara (*Berachos* 10b) states: "What do we derive from the verse, You may not eat over blood (*Vayikra* 19:26)? That you may not eat (in the morning) before you have prayed for your 'blood'... The verse states, in reference to someone who eats and drinks prior to praying: You have thrown me behind your body (*Melachim* 14:9). Do not read your body (in Hebrew *gavecha*), but your

arrogance (*gai'echa*). The Holy One said: After this person has indulged in his own pride (by eating or drinking), only then does he accept upon himself the dominion of heaven!?"

The halacha that results from this Gemara is codified by all authorities. To quote the Rambam: "It is prohibited to taste anything or to perform work from halachic daybreak until one has prayed *shacharis*" (*Hilchos Tefillah* 6:4).

Would you like tea or coffee?

Although all poskim prohibit eating and drinking before morning davening, we find early authorities who permit drinking water before davening, since this is not considered an act of conceit (*Rosh*, quoting the *Avi Ha'ezri*; the *Beis Yosef* cites authorities who disagree, but rules like the *Avi Ha'ezri*). Most later authorities permit drinking tea or coffee, contending that this, also, is considered like drinking water, but the poskim dispute whether one may add sugar to the beverage. The Mishnah *Berurah* and others prohibit this, whereas the *Aruch Hashulchan* and other later authorities permit it. They are disputing whether adding sugar to the beverage promotes it to a forbidden beverage, or whether it is still considered water that one may imbibe before davening.

Hunger

The Rambam rules that someone who is hungry or thirsty should eat or drink before he davens, so that he can daven properly (*Hilchos Tefillah* 5:2).

Similarly, some authorities contend that, for medical reasons, anything may be eaten or drunk before davening. They explain that the Gemara prohibited only eating or drinking that demonstrate conceit, whereas whatever is done for medical reasons is, by definition, not considered arrogant (*Beis Yosef*, quoting *Mahari Abohav*). The *Shulchan Aruch* accepts this as normative halacha (*Orach Chayim* 89:3).

I will be hungry!

What is the halacha if someone is, as yet, not hungry, but he knows that he will be so hungry by the end of davening that it will distract him from davening properly. Is he permitted to eat before davening? This question impacts directly on Reuven's question.

The answer to this question appears to lie in the following Talmudic discussion (*Berachos* 28b):

"*Rav Avya* was weak and, as a result, did not attend *Rav Yosef's* lecture that took place before *musaf*. The next day, when *Rav Avya* arrived in the Yeshiva, *Abayei* saw *Rav Avya* and was concerned that *Rav Yosef* may have taken offense at *Rav Avya's* absence. Therefore, *Abayei* asked *Rav Avya* why he had failed to attend the previous day's lecture. After which the following conversation transpired:

*Abayei*: Why did the master (addressing *Rav Avya*) not attend the lecture?

*Rav Avya*: I was not feeling well and was unable to attend.

*Abayei*: Why did you not eat something first and then come?

*Rav Avya*: Does the master (now referring to *Abayei*) not hold like *Rav Huna* who prohibits eating before davening *musaf*?

*Abayei*: You should have davened *musaf* privately, eaten something and then come to shul.

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We see, from *Abayei's* retort, that someone who is weak should daven first and then eat, even if this means that he davens without a minyan. Based on this passage, several noted authorities rule that someone who will not be able to wait until after davening, and cannot find an early minyan with which to daven, should daven privately (*beyechidus*), eat and then attend shul in order to hear the Torah reading and fulfill the mitzvos of answering Kaddish and *Kedusha* (*Ba'er Heiteiv* 89:11; *Biur Halacha* 289; *Da'as Torah* 289

quoting Zechor Le'avraham; Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:28 at end of teshuvah). Thus, it seems that we can positively answer Reuven's question: If he cannot wait until davening is over to eat, he should daven be'yeichidus, make Kiddush and eat something, and then come to shul to answer Borchu, Kedusha, Kaddish and hear keriyas hatorah.

May a woman eat before Kiddush?

Once someone becomes obligated to recite Kiddush, he cannot eat or drink anything before reciting Kiddush. Let us now discuss Ahuva's question: It is difficult for me to wait for Kiddush until my husband returns from shul. May I eat something before he arrives home?

Of course, Ahuva could recite Kiddush herself. To fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush, she needs to eat something that fulfills the requirement of Kiddush bimkom seudah, a topic we will discuss a different time. However, Ahuva does not want to recite Kiddush, or does not want to eat something to accompany the Kiddush. Is there a halachic solution to permit her to eat or drink before Kiddush?

There are some authorities who suggest approaches to permit Ahuva to eat or drink before Kiddush. Here is one approach:

Although most authorities obligate a woman to recite the daytime Kiddush and prohibit her from eating before she recites Kiddush (Tosafos Shabbos 286:4, 289:3; Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 289:1; Mishnah Berurah 289:6), this is not a universally held position. One early authority (Maharam Halavah, Pesachim 106, quoting Rashba) contends that women are absolved of the requirement to recite daytime Kiddush. The reason is that the daytime Kiddush is not an extension of the mitzvah of evening Kiddush, but is to demonstrate that the meal is in honor of Shabbos, and this requirement does not devolve upon women.

Although this approach is not halachically accepted, some authorities allow a woman to rely on this opinion, under extenuating circumstances, to eat before reciting morning Kiddush (Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak 4:28:3).

When does a married woman become obligated to make Kiddush? Rav Moshe Feinstein presents a different reason to permit a married woman to eat before Kiddush. He contends that since a married woman is required to eat the Shabbos meal with her husband, she does not become responsible to make Kiddush until it is time for the two of them to eat the Shabbos meal together, meaning after davening (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 4:101\2). In Rav Moshe's opinion, she is not yet obligated to make Kiddush, since the time for her meal has not yet arrived.

The Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah (Chapter 52, note 46), in the name of Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach, disagrees with this opinion. Firstly, Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach is unconvinced that she is halachically required to eat her meal with her husband. Furthermore, even assuming that she is, he disagrees that this permits her to eat before Kiddush.

If we do not follow the lenient approaches mentioned, when does a woman become obligated to recite Kiddush and is therefore no longer permitted to drink tea, coffee, and water? The Acharonim debate this issue, but explaining their positions requires explaining a different topic:

What must a woman pray?

All authorities require a woman to daven daily, but there is a dispute whether she is required to recite the full shemoneh esrei (I will call this the "Ramban's opinion"), or whether she fulfills her requirement by reciting a simple prayer, such as the morning beracha that closes with the words Gomel chasadim tovim le'amo Yisrael (I will refer to this as the "Magen Avraham's opinion").

When may she eat?

According to the Ramban's opinion that a woman is required to recite the full shemoneh esrei, she may not eat in the morning without first davening (see the previous discussion), whereas, according to the Magen Avraham's opinion that she fulfills her requirement once she has recited a simple prayer or morning berachos, she may eat once she has recited these tefillos.

Some authorities rule that a woman becomes obligated to hear Kiddush as soon as she recites berachos, since she has now fulfilled her requirement to daven, and she may therefore begin eating her meals. According to this opinion, now that she has recited morning berachos, she may not eat or drink without first making Kiddush (Tosafos Shabbos 286:4, 289:3). This approach contends that, before she recites morning berachos, she may drink water, tea or coffee, but after she recites morning berachos she may not drink even these beverages without first reciting Kiddush.

There is another view, that contends that a woman can follow the same approach that men follow, and may drink water, tea or coffee, even after she recited berachos before she has davened (Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 289:4 as understood by Halichos Beisah page 204).

At this point we can address the third question I raised above: "Someone told me that a woman may not eat in the morning before she davens, but I remember being taught in Beis Yaakov that we may eat, once we say the morning berachos. Is my memory faulty?" Many authorities contend that, although a woman should daven shemoneh esrei every morning, she may rely on the opinion of the Magen Avraham in regard to eating. Therefore, she may eat after reciting morning berachos. In many institutions, this approach was preferred, since it accomplishes that the tefillah that the girls recite is a much better prayer, and they learn how to daven properly. However, this does not necessarily tell us what she should do on Shabbos morning, and I refer you back to the earlier discussion about this issue.

Conclusion

Rav Hirsch, in his commentary to the story of Kayin and Hevel in Parshas Bereishis (4:3), makes the following observation: "Two people can bring identical offerings and recite the same prayers and yet appear unequal in the eyes of G-d. This is made clear in connection with the offerings of these brothers. Scripture does not say: 'G-d turned to the offering by Hevel, but to the offering by Kayin He did not turn.' Rather, it says: 'G-d turned to Hevel and his offering, but to Kayin and his offering He did not turn.' The difference lay in the personalities of the offerers, not in their offerings. Kayin was unacceptable, hence, his offering was unacceptable. Hevel, on the other hand, was pleasing, hence, his offering was pleasing."

The same is true regarding prayer: the Shemoneh Esrei itself, the Elokai netzor leshoni addition, and the personal supplications that different people recite may appear identical in words, but they are recited with individual emotion, devotion and commitment. Tefillah should be with total devotion in order to improve ourselves, to enable us to fulfill our role in Hashem's world.

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Liului Nishmas Sara Masha Bas R' Yaakov Eliezer AH, Beila bas Leib AH and Ana Malka bas Yisroel AH.

# **Parshat Vayitzei: Measure for Measure**

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

## **INTRODUCTION AND QUESTIONS:**

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

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

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

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

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

## **QUESTIONS:**

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

## **PARASHAT VAYETZE:**

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

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

## **JUST LIKE GRANDDAD:**

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

## **TO AVRAHAM:**

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

## **TO YA'AKOV:**

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

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

## **TO AVRAHAM:**

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

## **TO YA'AKOV:**

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

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

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

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

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

BERESHIT 29:22-27 --

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

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

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

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

Being on the receiving end of a deception of this proportion is a learning experience for Ya'akov. Not only has justice been served in a retributive sense, but Ya'akov, in his bitterness at what has been done to him, also begins to appreciate the bitterness of Eisav's cry upon discovering that his blessings have been taken. As the sunrise stuns him with the revelation that the woman with whom he has shared intimacy is 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'uven [= "see, a son!"], because she said, "For Hashem has seen my suffering, for now my husband will love me." She conceived again and bore a son. She said, "For Hashem heard ["shama"] that I am despised, and gave me also this one", and she called his name Shimon ["listen"]. She conceived again and bore a son. She said, "Now -- this time -- my husband will be drawn ["laveh"] to me, because I have borne to him three sons!", so she called his name Levi ["drawn to me"]. She conceived again and bore a son. She said, "This time, I will praise ["odeh"] Hashem," so she called his name Yehuda ["praise God"], and she bore no more.

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

Name    Meaning

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RE'UVEIN ---> "Look! A son!"  
SHIMON ---> "Listen!"  
LEIVI ---> "Come to me!"  
YEHUDA ---> "Praised be Hashem" (Le'ah has given up).

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

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

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

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

BERESHIT 30:1-2 --

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

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

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

### **FERTILITY DRUGS?**

Rahel and Le'ah clash once again over the duda'im, the mandrakes, which Le'ah's son Re'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 Canaan. Once he has become rich, he calls a conference with his wives and tells them his plans and these reasons. Normally, biblical men do not consult their wives on decisions, but since Ya'akov is planning to sneak away, he needs everyone's agreement and cooperation. Ya'akov reveals here that Lavan has been trying to cheat him for the last six years as he builds up his own flock, and that Hashem has stood behind him and foiled Lavan's schemes. But the Torah also communicates clearly that sneaking away is the wrong way to end this relationship:

BERESHIT 31:20-23 --

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



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

### **CONFRONTATION AND TRANSFORMATION:**

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

BERESHIT 31:26-30 --

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

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

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

BERESHIT 31:36-42 --

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

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

The secret tragedy which makes us cringe as we hear Ya'akov pronounce a death sentence is that Rachel has indeed stolen Lavan's gods. But the situation provides Ya'akov with an opportunity for growth. Finally, instead of running from the

challenge or attempting to avoid it with cleverness, Ya'akov takes Lavan on directly and indignantly. This is the first visible step in Ya'akov's growth to "Yisrael," a process which will become much more explicit and reach completion in Parashat VaYishlah. He ran away to avoid Lavan, and even this confrontation itself was initiated by Lavan, not Ya'akov, but now that it is before him, he addresses it as the "ish yode'a tsayid," the hunting man, who channels his aggression into constructive paths, actively pursues his goals, and confronts his enemies and challenges. Ya'akov is aggressive and direct, no longer cunning, subtle and clever. And Lavan, surprised, blusters, boasts, but backs down:

BERESHIT 31:43-32:1 --

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

# **Parshas Vayeitzei: Yaakov's Vow**

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

## **I. THE DREAM AND THE RESPONSE**

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

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

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

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

## **II. ANALYZING THE TEXT: FIVE QUESTIONS**

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

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

a) If the condition (God watching over Ya'akov) is a mirror of God's promise to him in the dream, why is Ya'akov phrasing it conditionally - "if God will be with me..." - isn't he fully confident that God will fulfill His promise?

b) On the other hand, if Ya'akov's condition is somehow different than God's promise - why is Ya'akov "setting the terms" for God? Isn't that inappropriate?

c) In any case, the condition seems unnecessary - if God doesn't help Ya'akov return to the Land, he won't be in a position to fulfill his vow. Ya'akov could have made an unconditional vow - and then, if God saw him safely back to the Land, he would fulfill it. If not, he would either be "stuck" outside of the Land, or dead; in either case absolved of his vow.

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

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

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

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

b) If it is the beginning of the vow/commitment, what does it mean? What is Ya'akov committing to do in this phrase?

### **PROBLEM #3: MA'ASER**

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

tenth to You"seems incongruous. What is the import of this commitment?

There is one external difficulty:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **IV. REEVALUATING THE VOW**

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

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

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

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

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

- 1) Ya'akov's condition is not merely a mirror of God's promise - it takes the promise one step further. If God's protection leads to Ya'akov's public recognition as a recipient of God's blessing, then he will demonstrate the propriety of that selection by tithing.
- 2) The "condition" ends before the last phrase. The only commitment is found in the final phrase - to tithe.
- 3) The commitment to tithe is not so incongruous - since it is the only commitment made here. In addition, its significance is understood against the backdrop of Avraham's tithing to MalkiZedeck.
- 4) Ya'akov was never "called" on this vow because he never vowed to go back to Beit El (read Beresheet 31:13 and 35:1 carefully) - rather, to tithe.
- 5) Beit-El becoming a place of worship was not the commitment - it was the final condition which would commit Ya'akov to follow Avraham's model and to give a tenth of everything with which God blessed him.

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**PARSHAT VAYETZE**

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

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

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

**INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

**SOMETHING TO LOSE SLEEP OVER**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**YAAKOV HAS A DREAM**

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

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

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

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

**DIVINE IDENTIFICATION & 'BECHIRA' CONFIRMATION**

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

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

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

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

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

**DIVINE RE-ASSURANCE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### YAAKOV'S NEDER

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

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### A PREDICTION - or A RESOLUTION!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### WHY YAAKOV IS DIFFERENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## WHY CONDITIONAL?

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

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

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

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

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

## IF OR WHEN

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

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

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

As indeed these 'conditions' are simply a repeat of God's 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 may simply be stating that: **WHEN** God fulfills His promises (in 28:15), then I will be in the position to build this Bet Elokim (and thus help 'make a Name for God').

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

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

=====

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

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

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