

Potomac Torah Study Center
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Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Aviv and Liat Atzili, and their three children, are among the hostages from Kibbutz Nir Oz, abducted on October 7. Aviv ben Telma is the father. Hamas murdered Liat, but the remainder of the family is reportedly still alive. I do not have the other Hebrew names. Please include them in prayers for safe return of hostages.

Since the Hamas attack on Israel six weeks ago, my focus in my weekly messages has been evil in the weekly parsha and the world in which we Jews operate. The Haggadah opens by identifying a leading character from the parsha as the number one enemy of our people: Lavan, Rivka's brother, and Yaakov's father-in-law. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, considers Lavan the first anti-Semite, although I agree with Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky that Hagar deserves that honor. Either way, Lavan treats Yaakov as his property, a slave whom he can treat as he wishes and prevent from leaving with his wives, children, or wealth. Yaakov initially agrees to work for Lavan for seven years with Lavan's daughter Rachel as his only payment. After seven years, at the wedding, Lavan switches so Yaakov unknowingly marries Rachel's older sister Leah. Yaakov has to work another seven years to pay for Rachel as his second wife. Yaakov then has to work another seven years for sheep, and Lavan tries to manipulate the flocks to prevent Yaakov from gaining any sheep – only God frustrates Lavan's plans and enables Yaakov to end up wealthy. Yaakov finally has to take his wives, children, and sheep away secretly at night to escape from Lavan's home.

Lavan's manipulation is a model for anti-Semites throughout Jewish history. Egypt, Rome, Europe, Spain – many larger countries have initially embraced and welcomed Jews and later started treating them as slaves and sources of wealth to confiscate. The host countries approach us as friends but gradually accuse us of crimes that enable us to become wealthy at their expense. We all recognize the claims. Jews multiply so rapidly that they can overwhelm the local people and take over the country. They own all the banks, control the media, kill their gods, rob the poor. Similar stories return over history and "justify" discriminating against our people.

While Esav and Yaakov are not close, Esav never harms his brother. Esav seems to be ADHD. He lacks self control and seeks immediate gratification. He sells his birthright to Yaakov to satisfy an immediate feeling of hunger. He blows up in anger at Yaakov over "stealing" a bracha from their father and vows to kill his brother – but his anger subsides, and he never follows through. Esav never attacks Yaakov and even offers to defend his brother and family when they return to

Canaan. When the local area cannot support two wealthy families with extensive livestock, Esav moves east (to Se'ir, or Edom) so there will be sufficient grazing for both families.

Rabbi Haim Ovadia presents much of the later history of Esav over the centuries. One of Esav's grandsons is Amalek, the worst enemy of Jews for centuries. During the period of the Maccabees, Edom must convert to Judaism and later sides with the Romans. Herod is a Jew from the Esav/Edom line. The cruelty of Herod and the Romans has much to do with Esav's bad reputation with chazal. The later conversion of Romans to Christianity, and two thousand years of Christians hating and persecuting Jews, flow over into the evil reputation of Esav with Chazal. Rabbi Ovadia concludes that Esav is not evil but that he does not have the qualities of leadership, positive values, and a close connection to Hashem required to reinforce Jewish tradition into later generations.

Hamas follows the ugly history of anti-Semites over the past 3500 years. The Hamas goal of pushing out all Jews from the river to the sea fits the pattern of the Arabs who massacre Jews in Hebron in 1929, Nazis who try to kill all Jews in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s, and Arab groups who prevent the "Palestinians" from entering their countries and keep them in poor ghettos to pressure the world to give them the land that Hashem promised to our people. In many cases, Jews have lived in Israel for generations on land that they purchased from Arabs during the last hundred plus years.

Vayeitzei opens with Yaakov leaving Canaan for Haran (now in Iraq), dreaming of a ladder from the ground to the heavens, with angels going up and down. The parsha concludes with Yaakov returning to Canaan, dreaming again – this time interacting with angels going into and out of Canaan. The Torah repeats much of the language from the tower of Babel in describing Yaakov's ladder. While the ladder in Babel is a dead end for people who wish to create a name for themselves in heaven, Yaakov's ladder shows the potential from Yaakov and later Jews to interact with the sacred in Shemayim. The Baal ha-Turim teaches us that sulam (ladder) has the same gematria (numerical value of the Hebrew letters) as Sinai (130). The message is that Yaakov's ladder and the Revelation at Sinai both represent a connection between Jews and heaven. Both give humans the ability to aspire higher and change the world to make it a better place, sanctify the mundane, and make the physical world spiritual and holy.

As I write, Hamas and Israel have agreed to exchange the first 50 hostages for 150 Palestinian women and children, starting before Shabbat, plus a pause of four days in the war. This exchange concerns most of us, because of the potential that the freed Palestinians might become future terrorists to take lives in Israel (and elsewhere). Coping with evil in the world is always a challenge. May we move to less evil in the world over time, the hope of Avraham Avinu, and the hope of those willing to free some prisoners in exchange for some of our people who have been hostages to Hamas.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Aviv ben Telma (and family, hostages in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, 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; Rena bat Ilsa, Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat

Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel.
Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Vayeitzei: Welcome To The Middle East

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5762

Even after Yaakov specified that his seven years of work were to be for “Rachel, your daughter, the younger one,” Lavan, his too shrewd father-in-law to be, had the nerve to substitute Leah in her stead. Lavan, we know is the doctor of deception but how does he justify his actions so he can “stay in business”?

The verse records that when Yaakov protested the day after the wedding, Lavan answered him, “We don’t do that in our place to give the younger before the older.” The Malbim (19th Century Germany) tells us that Lavan intended to appease Yaakov by telling him that the only way I could give you Rachel eventually was by handing over Leah first. This way he was able to squeeze another seven years of indentured servitude from Yaakov. Perhaps we can detect another technique that may be helpful to watch out for.

A fellow came to a tailor to have a suit made for a special occasion. When the suit was ready the man came to the tailor’s shop to try it on. To his horror he discovered that one sleeve was significantly longer than the other sleeve and one pant leg was a full foot shorter than it need be. The fellow complained to the tailor. The event was that evening and he needed the suit.

The tailor advised the desperate fellow that he should pull his arm up in such a fashion that the short- sleeved arm sits right at the hand. He contorted himself as recommended. Then he suggested that he shift his weight in such a way that the cuff of the all too short pant leg comes right to the shoe.

He paid for the ill-fitted suit and went off limping down the street. Two gentlemen were walking behind him and observed how he was ambulating down the street. One man said to the other, “Look at that unfortunate fellow, how disfigured and misshapen he is!” To which his colleague replied on a positive note, “At least he has a good tailor!”

When people attempt to do business with each other, there are also many hidden assumptions that are often not necessary to speak out when the culture, language, and goals are the same. However when the language of trust is missing, there is always room for a proliferation of differences of opinion and deception even when it seems all of the invisible assumptions are overtly specified.

One of Lavan’s main tools of control was to constantly change the rules of the game. He made Yaakov wrong for assuming that one can take the younger before the older. He made a public feast and invited all the neighbors to be certain that local custom would prevail over any private agreement between the two of them. In that context Yaakov is the offender, the insensitive one for having suggested or assumed it would be otherwise.

Lavan, with all his convoluted Middle Eastern “logic,” made the victim into the perpetrator. Those observing superficially may perceive that it is Yaakov who is twisted. The truth is, though, that he has been made to seem crooked by the ever-changing rules of “the game.”

There’s an old fable about a frog that was approached by a scorpion looking for a ride across the river. The frog thought it was too risky because the scorpion might sting him and kill him. The scorpion convinced the frog that it was safe based on the logic that if the scorpion would sting him they would both die. So he agreed and off they went. Half way across the

river the scorpion stung the frog. The frog asked the scorpion why he done such a foolish thing. Now both would surely die. The scorpion answered, "This is the Middle East!"

The tragic irony is that Lavan was trying to take advantage of and sabotage his own family. In the end he alienated himself from one of the greatest spiritual opportunities ever. Rather than being credited as the father of a great nation, he goes down in the books as one of history's supreme scoundrels.

It should not surprise us to see this perverse play acted again on the ever-expanding stage of history. Sitting in a straight jacket of ill-measured ultimatums we have all been given a scorpion's welcome to the Middle East.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5762-vayeitzei/>

Le Grande Thanksgiving *

By Art Buchwald z"l *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* A leading journalist and humor writer in the generation after World War II, Art Buchwald first wrote this column in 1952 or 1953 for the Paris edition of the New York Herald Tribune, for which he was a columnist. Many newspapers reprinted this column every year until his death. Since I am preparing and posting this column on le jour de merci donnant, I am including this column for those who do not understand this very American of French holidays.

<https://www.columnists.com/2015/11/art-giving-thanks/>

What Makes a House So Special?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer * ©2023

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

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

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

Why a house?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yaakov, who was running from a home of conflict and strife, sought a new home, a relationship with God that could provide him with the anchoring, security, and connection that he so desperately needed.

Right now we can all identify with Yaakov. In Israel, over 200,000 Israelis have been uprooted and displaced and need to rebuild their houses, their homes, their communities. And every Israeli has felt that his or her protective walls have been shaken or even shattered and are desperately seeking to restore the sense of safety and security that they deserve to have in their — in our — homeland. And because of the war that Israel has had to fight to achieve this goal, over 1 million Palestinians have been internally displaced in Gaza as well. So many people in need of the comfort, anchoring, and protection of a home.

And here in the States, we are experiencing unprecedented anti-Semitism on the streets and, in particular, on college campuses. In some places, Jews are afraid to keep their mezuzot on their doors, for fear that their homes will be targeted by anti-Semites. And Jewish students are facing ongoing hostility and hatred on college campuses, feeling alienated and as foreigners where they once felt they belonged.

With this in mind, and in the spirit of Thanksgiving, we need to be so thankful for our Hillel rabbis and Hillel staff on college campuses which are providing a true home, with warmth and support, a sense of belonging and of family, for our Jewish students during this time. And grateful as well to our chayalim and chayalot and their true mesiras nefesh, and to all our rabbis and communal leaders, in the States and in Israel, who are working to rebuild and restore the home and security that we all rightly deserve.

Happy Thanksgiving and Shabbat Shalom.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2023/11/vayetsei/>

The "Fear of Isaac" -- Thoughts for Parashat Vayetsei

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

This is the only Torah portion where God is referred to as *Pahad Yitzhak*, Fear of Isaac. Jacob uses this expression twice as he negotiates his separation from Laban, his father-in-law.

Commentators have suggested various interpretations of Pahad Yitzhak, often connecting it to the Akeida where Yitzhak literally faced death at the hands of his own father. God — who commanded the Akeida — would likely have been a source of fear to Isaac.

Yet, the question remains: why did Jacob only use this term in his dealings with Laban? He generally referred to the God of Abraham and Isaac without referring to God as Pahad Yitzhak.

Jacob's relationship with Laban had deteriorated so much that Jacob and family fled Laban without even saying goodbye. When Laban learned that Jacob's entourage had left, he pursued them and confronted Jacob. Why did you leave without even allowing me to kiss my children and grandchildren? Jacob replied: *"I was afraid lest you should take your daughters from me by force"* (31:31). Jacob complained to Laban: *"These twenty years I have been in your household; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock; and you have changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side you would have sent me away empty..."* (31:41-42).

After a hostile exchange between Jacob and Laban, the two agreed to make a covenant so that neither would hurt the other in the future. Jacob confirmed the covenant in the name of the Fear of Isaac his father (31:53).

Jacob realized that Laban was a unique type of opponent. Laban was deceitful in the extreme. His word could never be trusted. Even a covenant with him was of dubious value, because Laban would not hesitate to violate it. How could Jacob be sure that Laban would leave him and his family alone in the future?

Jacob concluded: Laban will understand only one thing: fear of harsh retribution if he would renege on this treaty. Jacob invoked the Fear of Isaac, being sure to underscore the element of fear. He was making it clear to Laban that the Fear of Isaac was a mighty and fearsome God.

While Jacob's other adversaries in life posed threats to him, he at least knew what he was up against. He knew their strengths and intentions and could plan accordingly. But when it came to Laban, he was dealing with a slippery liar who thrived on deceit and deception. Unless Laban felt genuine fear, he would behave ruthlessly.

It is difficult to deal with enemies who are inveterate liars and cheaters, who claim your property as theirs, who have no compunction about committing acts of violence and terror. Such enemies need to be reminded that Pahad Yitzhak — the Fear of Isaac — is a fearsome God who will wreak vengeance on those who seek our harm.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3184>

Thoughts for Thanksgiving 2023

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Israel is at war. Anti-Jewish words and deeds have skyrocketed throughout the world. In the United States, we witness anti-Israel and anti-Semitic hatred on the streets, on college campuses, and in the media.

Yes, there are many things that concern us. The “American Dream” isn’t as peaceful and optimistic as it was last year.

But we are thankful for America. We are thankful to the Almighty for the many blessings showered upon our country.

We are thankful that the nation’s President has stood with Israel and the Jewish People at this time of crisis. We are grateful for the overwhelming support of Israel and American Jewry by the American Congress and political leaders on all levels of government. We are grateful for the many millions of Americans who stand with Israel and the Jewish People.

For Jews, as for so many others, America has been — and continues to be — a land of opportunity and freedom. The ideas and ideals of America continue to inspire and to give hope. Without ignoring or belittling the many problems facing the country, we must be grateful for its positive values, its commitment to democracy, and its strong opposition to tyrannical nations.

It is difficult to get into a celebratory mood this Thanksgiving. Our hearts are heavy with so many losses, with so much pain, with so much needless suffering.

We pray that those who hate Israel and the Jewish People will overcome their hatred...and reach out sincerely for peaceful co-existence. We pray that Israel and the Jewish People will remain strong, idealistic and humane. We pray for peace in Israel, throughout the Middle East and throughout the world. We pray that all good people everywhere will foster love, not hatred; mutual respect, not enmity; kindness, not cruelty.

Realism demands that we see things as they are. Idealism demands that we see things as they can and should be. We must never let realism block out our idealism. We dream of — and work for — better days.

There are worrying trends in American life. Yet we celebrate Thanksgiving with the faith that the American Dream has the power to maintain our country as a bastion of freedom and democracy. The American Jewish community has made — and continues to make — monumental contributions to American life in so many areas. We are grateful for the blessings of America.

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

On April 17, 1818, Mordecai Manuel Noah – one of the great American Jews of his time – delivered an address at the dedication ceremony of Shearith Israel's second synagogue building on Mill Street in lower Manhattan. He closed his talk with a prayer that we invoke this Thanksgiving:

"May we prove ever worthy of God's blessing; may He look down from His heavenly abode, and send us peace and comfort; may He instill in our minds a love of country, of friends, and of all mankind. Be just, therefore, and fear not. That God who brought us out of the land of Egypt, who walked before us like 'a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night,' will never desert His people Israel."

Happy Thanksgiving.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3185>

Chanuka and Vayeitzei: Tzedaka and Maaser

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The story of Yakov might well be described as rags to riches. As he left his parents' home he was chased by Esav's son, Elifaz, and robbed of all his assets. When he lay down to sleep that night, he slept with a rock as a pillow. He owned nothing more than the clothes he was wearing and a walking stick. But Yakov had faith and Yakov had dreams.

Yakov hoped to find a wife with whom he could build the Jewish family. He yearned that he would be a step up from even his illustrious father and grandfather. Instead of just producing one legacy-child as his parents and grandparents did, he hoped for "Mitoso Shileima," many children who would all stay true to their faith and complement each other.

He also yearned to somehow be blessed with the resources to accomplish all that he dreamed of. The proposed model of his brother Esav being the worldly one, partnering with him and supporting him, had failed. (See Malbim on Parshas Toldos.) To apply upon him the contemporary expression, "A dollar and a dream," would be an overstatement. Yakov didn't even have a "dollar."

On that fateful night, he slept in the place that would later be known as the Beis Hamikdash, and he had a prophetic dream. In it Hashem promised him success. "I will give the Land to your children. I will multiply your children. I will be with you and provide for you." Yakov received assurances regarding all that was on his mind; he awoke refreshed. He designated the place as a "Place of G-d," and he made a personal vow as well. "All that You give me I shall Maaser)tithe(to You."

From this commitment of Yakov emerges new depth in the concept of Tzedaka. The term "Tzedaka," commonly translated as "Charity," has connotations of sweetness and goodwill. It is the idea that a person who has assets looks beyond his or herself and sees those in need and contributes. This is wonderful. By using the term "Maaser," which means a tithe of one-tenth, Yakov was accepting upon himself a much more focused obligation of Tzedaka. Maaser is seen as a partnership with Hashem. Ninety percent of earnings are kept by the person and ten percent are Hashem's, to be allocated by the person to G-dly endeavors. In effect, as Yakov set out on his momentous journey to build a Jewish home and the Jewish people, he recognized and declared his partnership with Hashem. Likewise, when we accept upon ourselves to give Maaser instead of just at-will Tzedaka, we create a precious partnership with Hashem. Hashem says, "You take care of Mine, and I will take care of yours." (See Rashi to Devorim 16:11.)

When we observe the Maaser type of Tzedaka giving, there are guidelines which assist us in staying focused. Instead of simply being an act of kindness, there is a structure to the Mitzva. We ask ourselves questions like: "How much did I earn? What expenses can I deduct from earnings before calculating ten percent?" Likewise, when we allocate Hashem's ten percent, we will ask ourselves, "Is this an appropriate Maaser allocation? What is being accomplished by this giving? Is this the best way to accomplish it?" More than simply asking if it is a good deed, we ask ourselves, "Is this the appropriate way to administer Hashem's ten percent."

There is a Maaser-related tradition that we should stay focused on giving to support Torah and to support the needy. These two objectives parallel the tithes that the Torah describes to the Kohein and Levi (doing G-d's work in the Beis Hamikdash and in teaching Torah), and the tithes and allocations given to the poor. When we consider causes, we look to see how they support Hashem's interests of assisting the spiritual and physical needs of mankind. Thus, although the IRS might define charitable giving more liberally, the various Torah organizations, and the organizations that provide for the needy, will be the focus of our giving.

Jewish tradition maintains that one who observes Maaser will be blessed financially. In fact, the Talmud (Ta'anis 9) maintains that we can even "test" Hashem, expecting that the blessing will come and be noticeable. In this ongoing way, Hashem encourages people to partner with him and provide a tenth of their earnings towards His interests, to grow mankind spiritually and to provide for the needy.

Objectively speaking, as Yakov set out to build the Jewish people, he was poor as could be. He had no assets to his name. But he did have perspective. With Hashem's promises to him, and his Maaser promise of partnership with Hashem, he was poised for success. With a light heart and confidence in his step, Yakov stepped forward into destiny, a wealthy man indeed.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

* 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 and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Parshas Vayeitzei – The Inextinguishable Spark

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

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

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

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

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

making a treaty. See Bereishis 31:54.(Even a father-in-law like Lavan is a father-in-law and must be treated with the full measure of respect and dignity.

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

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

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Vayeitzei

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Note: Rabbi Hefter was unable to send me a Dvar Torah this week. As with all Israelis, Rabbi Hefter's first priority is the safety of his family and students in Israel. Please think of the Har-el Beit Midrash for donations during this time of war against our people.]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

VaYetze: Israel, Yaakov, and Esav

By R. Haim Ovadia

In the past I have written extensively about the struggle between Yaakov and Esav, which eventually led to the sibling rivalry among Yaakov's children, and by extension even to the divide between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel, or Ephraim and Yehudah, respectively.

This approach seems to contradict the traditional view of Esav as reflected in the Midrash and in Rashi's commentary, but it does not diminish the value of Yaakov's legacy and the lessons we learn from his life. In this article I would like to briefly explain how Esav became a villain in Rabbinic literature, and what are my proofs that Yaakov should not have taken the blessing through deception, but my main goal is to explain why we are called Bene Israel and how does that name relate to what Israel experiences now both as a country and as a nation.

Esav of the Torah is not a villain:

In Bereshit, Esav does nothing wrong. He commits no crime. He was ruddy)25:25(, but so was King David)I Sam. 16:12(. He was a hunter, a profession which has negative connotations but is not forbidden, as we can see in VaYikra)17:13(.

Esav may be a glutton)25:30(, but that is not a sin, and it is also possible that he asked to gulp the red-red stuff because he was at the brink of fainting and could not speak clearly.

Esav sells the right of the firstborn and belittles it, but he is just being practical. The right of the firstborn entitles him to a double portion of the inheritance, and it takes effect only after the father's death. Given the longevity of his ancestors, Esav knew that he might have to wait a hundred years for that inheritance, and because of his dangerous occupation, he felt he would die before that.

When Esav finds out that Yaakov took his blessing, he cries a great, bitter cry)27:34(, and later says that he will kill Yaakov)27:41(, but he never carries out the threat or follows Yaakov to Haran. When people are upset, they tend to make exaggerated statements, and Esav does the same. It does not make him a killer.

When Yaakov returns from Haran, Esav comes towards him with four hundred men, but does not attack him. Yaakov prepares himself for an attack, sends Esav generous gifts, and speaks to him in a subservient manner. Esav does not seem to care much about the gifts and even suggests accompanying Yaakov and protecting him. Years later, when there is not enough room for Esav in Canaan because of Yaakov, he moves to Se'ir with his family and flocks.

In conclusion, though Esav's character and profession are perhaps not ideal, he is not a criminal or a sinner, and he has never attacked his brother Yaakov.

The vilification of Esav:

If that is so, how did Esav become a villain? It was a historical process. Esav became identified with the people of Edom, or Se'ir, on the other side of the Jordan River. That nation gradually grew hostile towards Israel, and this attitude was the reason for the negative treatment of Esav by Malachi)1:3(.

During the Maccabean period the people of Edom were forced to convert to Judaism, but later sided more with the Roman invaders. The most famous, or infamous, of these collaborators was Herod the Great, who persecuted and massacred the rebellious zealots of the Galilee.

The next step was the identification of Esav with Rome, both because of Herod's association with Rome and because of the red color which featured in the Roman armor and insignia.

Thus, the animosity of the nation of Edom, Herod's cruelty, and the Roman oppression each added a layer to the negative image of Esav.

The culmination of this process was when the Roman Empire became Christian. Since that moment, Esav represented Christianity, which has been a bitter enemy of the Israeli nation for almost two thousand years.

Midrashic interpretations, written at the height of the first conflict between Christianity and Judaism from the 1st to the 3rd centuries CE, have made Esav a murderer, rapist, robber, thief and a sworn hater of Yaakov.

Rashi, writing in Europe under the darkening clouds of the imminent crusades, cast Jews and Christians in the roles of Yaakov and Esav. His goal was to inspire his readers and listeners and give them hope. Just as Yaakov defeated Esav with the power of prayer, so the oppressed Jews of Germany and France will overcome the deep hatred and the might of their "host" nations.

When we ignore the biblical character of Esav, and instead focus on his Midrashic personality, we can easily claim that taking the blessing from Esav was the right thing to do, but a careful reading of Yaakov's life following his deception of Yitzhak proves the opposite.

The consequences of taking the blessing:

When Esav finds out what Yaakov has done, he plots to kill him, and Rivka decides to save Yaakov by sending him away to Haran. She tells Yaakov “Listen to me and flee to my brother Lavan”)27:43(. This is the same formula she uses to convince him to take the blessing: “Listen to me!”)27:13(. Rivka’s certainty that her advice is correct has turned into an urgent need to whisk her son to a safe place, and she uses the same words to express both.

Yaakov deceived Yitzhak by pretending to be someone else in order to get something which was not his, and he was deceived by Leah in the same exact manner. The sibling rivalry between Rahel and Leah will extend to their children and will haunt Yaakov for years to come.

When he complains to Lavan, Lavan tells Yaakov that the younger one cannot be given before the firstborn)29:26(, reverberating the same terms the Torah uses earlier to describe Yaakov and Esav)25:23 and 27:19(.

Yaakov spent twenty years in Lavan’s house, away from his family)30:41(. His mother passed away while he was on his way to Canaan, and she probably had not seen him since the day he fled to Haran. Years later, the rivalry between Leah’s and Rachel’s children leads to the selling of Yosef. As a result, Yaakov does not see Yosef for at least twenty-two years)37:2, 41:46, and 44:6(.

Yaakov deceived his father with clothes and a slaughtered goat, and he is deceived by his sons, after they lost Yosef, with the same items)37:31-33(.

When Yaakov entered his father’s tent, Yitzhak did not recognize him)27:23(. The Hebrew root of recognize – nun, khaf, resh, becomes a key word in the saga of Yosef and his brothers)37:33, 38:25-26, 42:7-8(, starting with the chilling message of Yosef’s brothers to Yaakov: “Please recognize, is this your son’s robe or is it not?”)37:32(.

When Yaakov is told by his sons that Shimon is held captive in Egypt until they bring Binyamin to the viceroy, Yaakov responds “You have berefted me, Yosef is gone, Shimon is gone, and now you will take Binyamin as well? It all came upon me”)42:36(. Yaakov echoes two statements of his mother. The first is when she sent him to get the blessing and he refused for fear that his father would find out that he was an impostor and would curse him. Rivka responded, “your curse will be upon me”)27:13(meaning that she will carry the burden of the curse and the consequences. Yaakov now says, as if speaking to his mother, it wasn’t upon you, it all came upon me. The second is when Rivka sends Yaakov to Lavan and says, “I do not want to be bereaved of both of you in one day”)27:45(. Now Yaakov says that he is going to be bereaved not of two, but of three sons.

So Why Are We Bene Israel?

Now that we see that the biblical narrative very strongly suggests that Esav was not a wicked person and that Yaakov should not have deceived Esav and Yitzhak in order to get the blessing, we might ask why was Yaakov chosen to be the father of the nation and not Esav, and why are we called Bene Israel, after Yaakov’s second name, and not Bene Yaakov.

The answer is that though Esav’s actions are not evil and not even delinquent, they are not the actions which breed leadership and progress. Esav is an opportunist who chooses the easy way out. He does not dwell too much on the past or contemplates the future, and he lives the moment.

This is why Esav belittles the right of the firstborn. It is a right which might benefit him in the distant future, and he does care about it now.

This is why Esav, though very angry at Yaakov immediately after the blessing was taken, never chases him to Haran. Once Yaakov is gone, Esav returns to his routine.

This is why when Yaakov returns from Haran and send an amazing offering to Esav, along with a subliminal apology, Esav is not impressed. He has whatever he needs at the moment, and he does not care about Yaakov’s transgression twenty years ago.

And this is why Esav decides to move away from Yaakov and find new pastures. At an older age he became a shepherd like Yaakov, and it is easier for him to move than to fight over the land.

We might think that carelessness is a great character trait, and it is true that sometimes we should be able to let go of grudges and hard feelings, but it could also lead to apathy and indifference. That apathy later led to the refusal of the nation of Edom to provide safe passage to the newly freed Israelite slaves, and it is for that apathy that the prophet Ovadiah 1:11 rebukes the nation: "You stood idly by when foreigners looted Yaakov".

Yaakov, on the other hand, never rests. Yaakov wrestles, not only with Esav and with the world, but with himself as well.

The key verse to understand this character trait of Yaakov is Genesis 32:29.

Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven/contended/fought with beings divine and human and have prevailed/won.

All translations understand the last word, which in Hebrew is derived from the root Yakhal)Yod, Khaf, Lamed(, as winning or prevailing, which is synonymous to triumph, victory.

The one translation which takes it to the extreme is the interpretive Totah Yesarah by Chaskel Kahane, who bases his translation of this verse on the commentaries of Rashi and Sforno.

And he said: "Your name will no longer be called 'Jacob,' which carries the implication of crookedness, but the Eternal will appear to you at Bethel and change your name to 'Israel,' meaning 'superior'; for you have prevailed against angels and men and have triumphed. Your children will be called the Children of Israel, which name will carry the implication that their nation is the champion of the Almighty.

There is a different way to read the verse, however. The root Yakhal appears in the bible almost two hundred times in the significance of being able, with the exception of three or four places where it means to win. According to Avraham Even Shoshan's concordance, our verse is not among these exceptions.

This enables to read the verse as saying that Yaakov will be called Israel because he was able to struggle with the human and the divine. Yaakov does not always win, but he is always willing to wrestle, both physically and spiritually.

To be Israel is to wrestle!

This brings us to the way the State of Israel and those who see themselves as part of the Jewish People behave and are seen around the world.

The identity and trajectory of the State and the nation are defined by our willingness and ability to wrestle and struggle, to question and analyze. We make a lot of mistakes along the way, but we keep moving forward. In Israel, that struggle was felt over many decades in the attempts to establish a democratic country, based on moral values, and assure that it will not be a dictatorship or an oppressive regime. It pushed Israel to make decisions, legislate laws, and reach agreements which other countries would never have considered.

As Jews, we keep wrestling with ethical and moral dilemmas. We do it during the High Holidays, in our daily prayers, and every time we study Torah. Even those Jews who do not consider themselves observant refer to this narrative and strive to bring justice to the world.

The factions within Israel and the Jewish People could at times be worlds apart, but they are all part of the ongoing process of the evolution of Am Yisrael.

Esav or Edom, on the other hand, have fallen into a state of disrepair because of the attitude of carelessness or opportunism. As an individual, and later on as a nation, Esav did only what benefited him. There was no struggle, no

questions, no attempt to grow, and where there is no growth, there's decline.

We are Bene Israel because we struggle, and because we struggle, we will also prevail.

Shabbat Shalom

* Torah VeAhava. 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 article includes Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Vayeitzei: Ideal Shabbat for a Joint Bar and Bat Mitzvah

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

It seems a lovely coincidence that we have both a Bat Mitzvah and Bar Mitzvah to celebrate this Shabbat as our Torah portion seems tailor made for it.

Our parsha speaks of our forefather Jacob starting his life as an adult as he leaves his parents' home for Charan. There he falls in love with Rachel, Lavan's daughter, and agrees to work seven years as Lavan's shepherd for her hand.

However, Lavan switches his other daughter Leah for Rachel, forcing Jacob to work another seven years for Rachel. Lavan also switches Jacob's wage conditions 100 times in an effort to cheat him out of what he owed. But with God's help, Jacob is able to turn the tide and manipulate the situation so that he gets all the wages that he was owed and even leaves Charan a wealthy man.

Jacob was described as a "*man of tents*," a scholarly type who never entered the world of business. And yet, Jacob becomes a man and rises to the challenge.

And I know that our Bar Mitzvah boy Adam Snyders and our Bat Mitzvah girl Alexa Nathan can do the same as well. As you both make your journey into adulthood, know that there will be challenges along the way. But like our forefather Jacob, you will rise to them and become the strong and mature adults that we all can look up to. There are a lot of deceivers like Lavan in the world, and we always need more people who emulate Jacob to take them on.

You are both fortunate to have something valuable to help you on this journey. And that is loving parents and your Auckland Jewish Community that is rooting for you every step of the way. We wish you a huge Mazel Tov and a blessing that you go from strength to strength.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Vayeitzei: The Blessing of a Scholar's Presence

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.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYETZ60.htm>

Laban the Aramean (5780)

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

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 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.

FOOTNOTES:

]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.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayetse/aban-the-aramean/>

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

]1[Was Laban a bad person?

]2[Why do you think the author of the Haggadah chose this biblical passage)arami oved avi(to begin the telling of the story of the Exodus?

]3[What can we learn for our lives today from the concept of ma'asei avot siman lebanim?

Where Heaven and Earth Meet

By Yossy Goldman * © Chabad 2023

On his way to Haran, fleeing the wrath of his twin brother, Esau, Jacob stopped to rest and had his famous dream: he saw a ladder fixed to the ground, its top reaching the very heavens, with angels of G d ascending and descending.¹

Interestingly, the Baal Haturim² comments that the Hebrew word for ladder, סולם)sulam(, has the same numeric value)130(as the Hebrew word סיני)Sinai(. What is the connection between the ladder in Jacob's dream and Mount Sinai?

Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, chief rabbi of Tel Aviv for 10 years until his passing in 1946, explains³ that the part of the ladder embedded in the earth symbolizes Abraham, who represents kindness. Abraham's kindness and compassion expressed itself primarily in his hospitality — in material, earthly things like feeding, nourishing, and accommodating people. Abraham was the paragon of chesed — kindness and compassion.

The top of the ladder, which reached the heavens, epitomizes Isaac. He was that heavenly soul who was nearly sacrificed on the altar, and thus became the eternal symbol of avodah — spiritual service and faithful commitment to G d.

Jacob, we are told, represents Torah. He is described as yoshev ohel,⁴ the scholar laboring "in the tent of Torah study."

Torah unites chesed and avodah, fusing two opposites, like heaven and earth.

And so, we have sulam, Jacob's ladder, numerically equal to Sinai. The ladder, like Sinai, characterizes that which is firmly embedded in earthliness, but can reach the heavens.

Where do we see that Sinai, too, symbolizes the idea of bridging the gap between heaven and earth?

The Rebbe, in many talks over the years, addressed this concept at great length.

The process of linking heaven and earth began with the Sinai experience.

Abraham may have been the first historic Jew, but he was not the first halachic Jew.⁵ That only happened to Moses and his generation when they received the Torah at Mount Sinai.

That's when our people became mandated to keep the Torah and its commandments.

While Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the generations prior to the Exodus and the Sinai experience, may have fulfilled the Torah even before it was given, it was an optional extra at that point, based on their own prophetic insight of what the Torah would teach. G d had not yet commanded them to keep it.

Until Sinai, heaven was G d's domain, earth was humanity's domain, and "never the twain shall meet." As a result, the mitzvahs performed by the pre-Sinai generations did not have the capacity to transform the materials with which they were performed.

But after "G d descended upon Mount Sinai,"⁶ and the mortal Moses ascended the mountain,⁷ heaven and earth were no longer unbridgeable. Ever since, humans can aspire higher and can indeed change the world, sanctify the mundane, consecrate the material, and make the physical world spiritual and holy.

Thus, as the Baal Haturim writes, Sulam, the ladder, equals Sinai, the moment when heaven and earth met.

[emphasis added]

Are we doomed to live out our lives in the empty materialism of a hollow, plastic world? Is the only way to escape the crassness of the material world by fleeing to reclusive monasteries or the mountains of Tibet?

To this, the Torah says an emphatic "No!" Ever since Sinai, we have been empowered to introduce spirituality into our material circumstances. We need not escape anywhere. We must engage with our material world, deal with it head-on, and, in fact, transform it into something holy.

Here's one simple example:

Money is surely the most material thing of all. What symbol, more than the mighty dollar, characterizes materialism? But when we give our hard-earned money to the poor and other worthy causes, we have transformed the material into something meaningful, purposeful, and yes, even holy.

That's how we fulfill G d's purpose in creating the world.

"In the beginning G d created heaven and earth."⁸ The very same Creator who made the heavens also made the earth and everything in it. Heaven and earth, the spiritual and the material, are not inaccessible, unreachable opposites. They

are two sides of the very same coin. We should not reject the physical, nor should we succumb to its empty attractions. Rather we should use it in positive, meaningful ways, thereby elevating it to its potential as something created by G-d for a higher purpose.

When we do, as physical and finite as we are, we can climb the ladder of G-d and ascend the very heavens.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 28:12.
2. Rabbi Jacob ben Asher)c. 1269 - c. 1343(.
3. Heggonyot El Ami.
4. Genesis 25:27.
5. See Was Abraham Jewish?
6. Exodus 19:20.
7. Ibid., verse 3.
8. Genesis 1:1.

* Founding Director of the first Chabad in South Africa; Life Director Emeritus of the Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5706944/jewish/Where-Heaven-and-Earth-Meet.htm

Vayeitzei: Working Together

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniewsky *

Laban said to him, "If only I would find favor in your eyes! I have learned by divination that it is on your account that G-d has blessed me.")Gen. 30:27(

The Torah teaches us that the Jewish people play a special, central role in G-d's mission of making the world into His home. It is therefore natural that any facet of creation that assists the Jewish people in fulfilling their mission merits G-d's blessings.

The Midrash notes that the presence of Jewish people in a place – especially the presence of Jews who are consciously loyal to their Divine mission – brings blessing to that place. Historically, the presence of the majority of the Jewish people in a particular country has brought prosperity and success to that country.

Thus, it is not enough for the Jewish people to merely make efforts to ensure that the government of whatever country they live in protects their religious rights. It is not even enough for the Jewish people to encourage the non-Jews to fulfill their own Divine responsibilities – the seven Noahide laws. Besides all this, the non-Jewish population must be enlisted to help the Jews fulfill their Divine mission. This serves to bring blessing upon the entire country, as one.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

May G-d grant a swift, miraculous and complete victory over our enemies.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

How the Light Gets In

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

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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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"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, so that I shall come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God and I shall erect a monument." (Genesis 28:20-21)

What does it really mean 'to return whole, in peace, (beshalom) to one's parents' home? Is it really possible to 'come home' again? The Torah portion of Vayetze speaks volumes about parents, adult children and what it really means to come home.

Rabbi Yeshoshua Baumel, in his collection of halakhic inquiries called Emek Halakha, writes the following fascinating responsum. A certain individual vowed to give a hundred dollars to a local synagogue if his son came back 'beshalom' – usually understood to mean whole – alive, in one piece – from the war. As it turned out, the son returned very much in one piece; the only problem was that he brought along his gentile wife, whom he'd married in France, as well as their child. The father now claimed that the conditions of his vow had not been met since the forbidden marriage constituted a breach of the 'beshalom.' The synagogue rabbi and board of trustees disagreed, claiming that as long as the son had returned home from the front without a war wound, the father owed the hundred dollars. Both parties agreed to abide by Rabbi Baumel's ruling.

Rabbi Baumel ruled that the father was required to pay the money to the synagogue, based on a Mishna in the little-known Tractate Tvul Yom.

I believe that we need not go all the way to a Mishna dealing with heave offerings in order to define the words 'to return to one's father's home beshalom.' Our biblical portion deals with our patriarch Jacob setting out on a dangerous journey far from home, who also takes a vow that if God protects him and he returns to his father's house in peace – beshalom – he will then erect a monument to the Lord.

The definition of 'beshalom' in the context of Jacob's vow might shed more direct light on the question asked of Rabbi Baumel.

It should be noted that although Jacob leaves his Uncle Laban's home and employ at the conclusion of Chapter 32 of the book of Genesis, he wanders all over the Land of Canaan until the end of Chapter 35, when he finally decides to return to his father's house. I would submit that Jacob was waiting for the peace which comes from his being accepted by his father, the peace which comes from a loving relationship between father and son. Without this sense of parental acceptance, no child can truly feel whole. And you will remember that Jacob is haunted by his having deceived his blind father by posing as his brother Esau and thereby his having received his father's blessing under false pretenses!

Unless he feels that his father has forgiven him for the deception which haunts him throughout his life, he knows that he will never be able to 'return to my father's house in peace.'

Thus, we can read the series of events that begins with Jacob's departure from Laban at the end of Chapter 32 and his reunion with his father three chapters later as a crucial process in Jacob's development vis-a-vis his paternal relationship.

It begins with a confrontation between the brothers in which Jacob bends over backwards to appear subservient to Esau, repeatedly calling him 'my master'; plying him with gifts, urging him to 'take, I pray, my blessing' – all to the end of returning the fruits of the deception to the rightful biological first-born.

Then we encounter the worst betrayal of all, the terrible act of Reuven having usurped, or interfered with, the sleeping arrangements of his father. Whether we understand the words literally, that Reuven actually had relations with his father's concubine, Bilha, or whether we follow the interpretation of the Midrash, that Reuven merely moved his father's bed from Bilha's tent to the tent of his mother, Leah, after the death of Rachel, his action was a son's flagrant invasion of the personal, private life of his father.

We now find one of the most striking passages in the Torah – not because of what it says but because of what it does not say. The literal reading of the biblical text records that Reuven went and slept with Bilha, his father's concubine. 'And Israel heard about it...' (vayishma Yisrael) (Genesis 35:22). Not only does the biblical sentence end here, but what follows in the parchment scroll is a complete break in the Torah writing. It is not just a gap of white space that continues on the same line, but it is rather a gap which continues until the next line, an open parchment space which generally signals a wordlessness which is fraught with deep emotion.

I would suggest that between the lines, the Torah is telling us that when Jacob hears of his son's deception, he becomes enraged, even livid with anger, but that he holds his wrath

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inside, remains silent, and thinks a great deal – perhaps amidst many tears.

The text continues by presenting us with an almost superfluous fact: "Now the sons of Jacob were twelve" (Genesis 35:23) – including Reuven. Then come four verses listing all the names of the twelve sons, at long last followed by the verse, "And Jacob came unto Isaac his father to Mamre, to Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron..." (Genesis 35:27).

Apparently now – and not before – Jacob is finally ready to come home.

But why now? Is it not reasonable to assume that the last event which the Torah records, the cause of understandable rage between Jacob and his son, is what surprisingly led to Jacob's reconciliation with his father Isaac!

I would suggest that the blank space following Jacob's having heard of his son Reuven's indiscretion might have begun with rage, but it concluded with resolve for rapprochement. Jacob still thinks that Reuven's arrogance is beyond contempt, but how can a father divorce himself from his son? And even more importantly, is it Reuven's fault that he acted the way he did? Am I myself not at least partially to blame for having rejected my first-born Reuven in favor of the younger Joseph? Perhaps Reuven was trying to tell me – albeit in a disgraceful and convoluted way – that he was my rightful heir, and I had rejected him unfairly.

So does Jacob agitate within himself. And he decides at last that if he can and must forgive his son for his deception towards him, it is logical to assume that his father, Isaac, who was also guilty of preferring one son over the other – Esau over Jacob – must have forgiven him for his deception as well.

Now, finally, Jacob is ready to return to his father's home in peace. He has made peace with his father because he believes his father has made peace with him. Finally, he can make peace with himself.

When does a son return to his father beshalom? Only when the father accepts the son, and the son accepts the father – in a personal and emotional sense, as well as in a biological one.

So, does the father in our responsum have to pay the money to the synagogue? Only if he is ready and able to accept his son and his new wife beshalom. And that depends on the father and on the son in all the fullness, complexity and resolution of their relationship – past, present and, only then, future.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's
Derashot Ledorot**

"The Stone on the Well - Boulder or Pebble?"

In reading today's Sidra we are puzzled by some extraordinary incidents therein recorded. Jacob, we read, had chanced upon a group of shepherds waiting to water their sheep from a nearby well. And on it, there rested a stone, a stone big enough to cover the mouth of the opening of the well: "ve'ha'even ha'gedolah al pi ha'be'er". When Jacob notices the shepherds lingering, he tells them, "hashku ha'tsoan u'lechu re'u" - why don't you go ahead, remove the stone from the mouth of the well and water your sheep? It all seemed so terribly simple to the naive Jacob. But they answered: "va'yomru lo nuchal ad asher ye'asfu ha'adrim" - they said: we cannot, it is impossible, until all the herds gather and the other shepherds help us. Jacob was puzzled by their attitude, and he thought he might be able to do it - and, in the Bible's eloquent simplicity: "vayigash yaakov va'yeg'al ess ha'even me'al pi ha'be'er" - He went over and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well! Just like that!

We can well imagine the attitude of the shepherds when Jacob walked over to the well. "Look," they probably sneered, "look who's going to play big hero - Jacob, the Batlan, the Luftmensch!" And we can also imagine their amazement - and their embarrassment - when this same Jacob walks up to the stone and effortlessly rolls it off. The stone appeared to Jacob, say the Rabbis, "ki'mlo pi kvara ktanah", as big as a hole of a strainer. What to these mighty muscle men appeared to be a boulder, appeared to Jacob to be a mere pebble!

This narrative certainly is remarkable. The feat of strength of Jacob and the apparent weakness of the shepherds require some explanation. Why could Jacob do it? - and even more important - why couldn't the shepherds? What does all this mean, and what is it that the Bible is trying to teach us?

The "be'er", the well, was interpreted in many different ways by our Rabbis. Some said that it refers to Zion - the love for the Jewish home. Others would have it mean the feeling for Jewish ethics, when they say: "be'er - zeh Sinai". Still others say: "be'er zeh ha'mehaleches im ha'avos", that it refers to the tradition of the Jew and his sense of continuity. In essence, what our Rabbis are trying to tell us is that the "Be'er" is the well of the Jewish personality, it is the source of the forces of opportunity and accomplishment which well up in the Jewish soul and beg to be released. It is a man's talents and his innate abilities which seek expression. But we see so many people, you might say, who never amount to much despite the fact that they have a wealth of talent and ability. True - their talents are never released because there is a stone on the mouth of their well, there are difficulties - hard, cold

and rocky - which must be rolled away first. The stone represents the difficulties in the way of each and every man in his desire to set free the forces which lie in the great well of his personality and being. And it is his attitude to this stone, his approach to these difficulties, which determines whether he will be able to roll it away, like Jacob, or be forced to keep the well covered - like the shepherds.

Yes, it is the attitude which counts most. It is the idea which gives birth to the fact. The reason the shepherds could not roll the stone away was that they were convinced that they could not do it. Listen once again to the Bible's words: "va'yomru lo nuchal", they said "we cannot - it's impossible". When a man thinks that a particular task is impossible, then for him it becomes impossible.

Jacob, however, had no such difficulty. He did not think that it was impossible. He thought that it certainly was possible for a man to remove the stone from his well. He therefore went over and, without further ado, simply moved it out of the way. He thought it was possible, and so for him it became possible.

That same rule holds true for all of us. If we face the stone on our individual wells, the difficulties which keep us back from doing those constructive things which we want to do, and and we imagine that stone to be a boulder - that that is what it is, and try as we shall it cannot be budged. Our "lo nuchal" attitude makes of it an "even gdolah". Approach it, however, with the attitude that it is only "ki'mlo pi kvarah ktanah", that the stone is only a pebble, then it can be rolled away as easily as a pebble! What you think is impossible becomes impossible. Think of it as possible, and the odds are that you can do it. Here is a man who would like to get himself an education. He must continue at night-college for two more years in order to get his degree. It is his opportunity to open up the well of his hidden abilities. But there is a stone which lies on that well and threatens to choke it. He must have time for his club, he must finish his office work, he must keep up his social contacts, he must have some rest. "Lo nuchal", sorry, I can't do it - it's impossible. And so the stone becomes a boulder, and for him it is now a virtual impossibility to get a degree. The "lo nuchal" made a boulder of the stone, and he cannot surmount it.

On the other hand, take a man like the late Pres. Roosevelt. At the prime of his life he was cut down by crippling infantile paralysis. What a stone! What a rock! And yet we know, from the many biographies written of him, that his attitude was anything but that of resignation, anything but "lo nuchal" - he was going to beat it. It was for him only "ki'mlo pi kvarah ktanah" - and so the stone became not a boulder but a pebble, and he removed it, allowing all the world to benefit from the treasures stored up in the well of his personality.

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The story is told of Marshal Foch, the famous World War I commander, who reported to his headquarters the following message: "My right flank is in retreat. My left flank is encircled. My center is caving. I am ready to attack." Here was a man who could not say "lo nuchal" and so the stone became as pebbles, and he won.

And what is true for individuals is true for communities and for this community in particular. Of course there are stones on our well. This is not primarily a residential area, the interest in religion in general is waning, and so on and so forth. Look at it that way, and the stone is as formidable as a boulder, and we might as well give up before we start. Think of it, however, as a minor significance, remember that within walking distance of this synagogue there live a minimum of over four thousand adult Jews, and your stone becomes not a boulder but a pebble. As long as we don't say "LO nuchal", we can't, it can't be done, impossible, the well can be tapped to good use.

And so, getting back to Jacob, his show of strength was of the mind and not of the muscles; it was a matter of attitude, not sheer brawn. And it was this very same attitude, this "never say 'die'" attitude, which made him perform such miracles all his life. This ivory-tower scholar, the "yoshev ohalim", was able to turn shepherd for 14 long years to work for Rachel whom he loved. Thus the "ish tam", the naive student, was able to outsmart Laban in his own game of trickery and deceit. Thus he was able to envision a ladder rising into heaven. All this - because he never said "lo nuchal" - impossible.

The Vilna Gaon, according to a folk's legend, was once asked how one becomes a Vilna Gaon. And he answered, "vil nur, vest du zein a gaon". Just don't say "lo nuchal".

And Jacob's reward was ample. When he crossed "maavar yabok" with his family and then went off by himself, an angel appeared out of heaven and began to grapple with him. The angel who represented, according to Tradition, "saro shel Esav", the patron angel of Esau, wrestled with him on the bleak plains of Mesopotamia until morning. It was the battle for spiritual supremacy - who will ultimately control the destiny of the human race:

Jacob, with his religion and faith decency, or Esau, with his treachery and faithlessness and sinister intrigues? Jacob, fleeing from Laban after having been tricked into 14 years of hard labor, and fearful of an uncertain future, could easily have been the pessimist and conceded to the "sar shel Esav". But that was not for the Jacob who rolled the stone from the well and never said "lo nuchal". And so, it is the angel who conceded to Jacob, and - and this is remarkable - in the very same expression of "yachol", the Bible relates: "vayar ki lo yachol lo", the angel saw that he could not gain the best of him, Jacob would not surrender, Jacob had never learned the words "lo nuchal". How

significant and how complimentary, therefore, the encomium which G-d bestows upon Jacob when, changing his name, He says to him: “ki sarisa im elokim ve'im anashim vatuchal” - you fought with angels and with men, and you won - “vatuchal”, and you were able. There was no “lo nuchal” on your tongue, you did not regard any great and noble task as “impossible” - vatuchal!

The limits of a man's ability are much greater than most men think they are. Tremendous forces churn incessantly in the well of human nature and particularly in the Jewish soul. The stone upon that well can either block it, or the stone can be cast away. What a man does with that stone depends on what he thinks of it. He can be a peasant and, in primitive fear, imagine it a boulder and choke off his life's mission. Or he can be a Jacob and understand that the stone is only a pebble, cast it off, and eventually grapple even with angels - “vatuchal,” and win.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

In the Merit of Yaakov's Walking Stick

There is a very fascinating Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos in this week's parsha. Before Yaakov went to sleep, he “put the stones under his head.” And when he arose “he took the stone from under his head” and made it into a matzevah, upon which he poured oil to anoint it as a mizbayach. The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos ask a simple question: From where did Yaakov obtain the oil? He was in the middle of nowhere. It is not like he could go to the nearest gas station and get a quart of oil. So where did Yaakov obtain this oil?

They answer that Yaakov had a walking stick with him. He had hollowed out the walking stick and filled it with oil. Why? Yaakov had been studying in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever for the previous fourteen years. He learned there the entire night. Chazal say on the words “He slept there in that place” (Bereshis 28:11), that it was only there that Yaakov slept at night, but for the previous fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, he learned the entire night without going to sleep. They did not have electricity in the Yeshiva of Shem v'Ever, so how could Yaakov learn at night? Obviously, he must have learned by candle light, which requires oil. This, says the Daas Zekeinim, is where Yaakov obtained the oil. The ready supply that he kept in the hollow of his trusty walking stick was available whenever he needed it.

The Daas Zekeinim adds that this was the same supply of oil from which Moshe obtained the Shemen haMishcha (oil of anointing) to inaugurate the keilim of the Mishkan. And it was the same supply of oil that Elisha used, and it was this very Shemen that was in the jug of oil that the Chashmonoim found, which lasted for eight days during the story of the Chanukah miracle.

The sefer Darash Mordechai makes a beautiful observation: In Tefilas Geshem (the prayer for Rain recited on Shmini Atzeres), one of the stanzas is “Zachor ta'an maklo v'avar Yarden mayim”—Remember (Yaakov Avinu) who took his stick with him and crossed the Jordan's water. At first glance, this seems like a very strange expression. What is so significant about Yaakov's walking stick? Presumably, all desert travelers need a walking stick. Yaakov was not a youngster anymore so he had a walking stick. What is the big deal? Why do we mention Yaakov's stick in Tefilas Geshem?

In light of the comments of the Daas Zekeinim, we can appreciate the special nature of this walking stick. This stick, with its hollowed-out chamber for storing olive oil, enabled Yaakov to learn Torah, day and night, for fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem v'Ever. So we very appropriately say, “Ribono shel Olam – remember the Torah of Yaakov Avinu that he learned with self-sacrifice and dedication.” That is the “ta'an maklo v'avar Yarden mayim.”

The Relationship Between Yaakov Marrying Two Sisters and 'Mama Rochel'

One of the famous problems which all the commentaries discuss is how Yaakov Avinu could marry two sisters, which is one of the forbidden Arayos relationships. But let us ask another question. There is a strange dialog in this week's parsha that has been bothering me for many years:

The Torah states: “And Reuven went in the time of the wheat harvest, and he found dudaim (mandrakes) in the field and he brought them to Leah his mother. And Rochel said to Leah, ‘Let me have some of your son's mandrakes.’” (Bereshis 30:14). Leah's response to Rochel must be one of the most incredible statements in all of the Torah: “...Is it not enough that you took my husband, that you (now) also want to take my son's mandrakes?” (Bereshis 30:15) Finally, Rochel reacts by proposing a compromise that Yaakov would spend that night with Leah, and Rochel would take the flowers.

Leah's chutzpah in making such a statement is incredible. “You took my husband...” If I were Rochel, I would have answered back to Leah, “I beg your pardon. Have you forgotten what happened? Have you forgotten that he was supposed to marry me and I was the righteous one who saved you from humiliation by giving you the secret code that Yaakov and I set up between us? Now you have the unmitigated audacity to say ‘You took my husband!’”

There are two questions here: (1) How could Leah say such a thing? (2) Why does Rochel just seemingly accept Leah's statement and merely offer the switch of the flowers for her husband that night? Why didn't she call out her sister on the audacity of her comment? How do we understand this dialog?

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The Kesav Sofer says a very novel idea: Even though the Avos kept the entire Torah before it was given, they did not keep it in the same way as we keep it after Matan Torah. After the Torah was given, even if a person has all of the greatest excuses in the world to not keep a particular halacha, we cannot violate the Torah. If the Torah says that a king should not have too many wives or too many horses, then even Shlomo haMelech may not say “Don't worry, that does not apply to me, this is not going to affect me.” When Shlomo haMelech said that, it did affect him. A halacha is a halacha.

However, before Matan Torah, the Avos had the option to say “This halacha does not apply to me.” The Ramban, in fact, says this in his Chumash commentary in Parshas Achrei Mos. He notes that two sisters are not really an Ervah (incestuous relation). His proof is that if one of the sisters dies, her husband is allowed to marry the other sister. This is a fact that we do not find by any other Ervah. The Ramban says that the reason the Torah forbade a person from simultaneously being married to two sisters is because the Torah is trying to prevent an unmitigated disaster. Imagine the sibling rivalry that would result from two sisters marrying the same person!

The Kesav Sofer says that Yaakov understood this distinction and he knew why the Torah prohibited a man from marrying two sisters—to prevent sibling rivalry. However, Yaakov knew that Rochel was such a big Tzadekes that she would not fight with her sister. Therefore, he did not need to worry about the prohibition of marrying two sisters. Consequently, Yaakov was confident that the prohibition of marrying her sister did not apply in this case.

How did Yaakov know that Rochel was such a big Tzadekes? Maybe Rochel would ultimately come to hate Leah? The fact that Rochel was so righteous that she gave her sister the secret code convinced Yaakov that Rochel was such a big Tzadekes that there would not be sibling rivalry.

On the other hand, says the Kesav Sofer, maybe that was a momentary flash of greatness on Rochel's part. Sometimes people can rise to the occasion once in a lifetime. Perhaps over the course of time, the natural feelings of resentment and strife between the two sisters would surface.

Perhaps that is even why Rochel did not have children for all those years. What if Yaakov had been mistaken? If it would turn out that Rochel came to hate Leah, wouldn't that retroactively prove that Rochel was in fact an Ervah (i.e. – that the Torah's prohibition of marrying two sisters did apply to her) and therefore Rochel's children would have been mamzerim since she was an Ervah to Yaakov?

Rochel finally did have children after Leah made that outrageous statement that “You stole my husband.” Rochel did not say a word in reaction. At that moment, it became clear that

Rochel's righteousness at the time of Leah's marriage to Yaakov was not just a momentary thing. This was the essence of who Rochel was. Therefore, immediately after that, eight pesukim later, Rochel gave birth to her first child! Why now? Because it became clear that Rochel was such a Tzadekes that she would never hate her sister in their co-wife relationship. Rochel would therefore never be an Ervah to Yaakov, and her children with him would not be mamzerim.

The Kesav Sofer says that this also explains how Leah could make such a statement – because Rochel was so generous and non-resentful of what happened that Leah did not even think to consider the fact that Rochel did her a favor.

The Kesav Sofer's approach answers several questions: It answers how Yaakov could marry two sisters. It answers why Rochel was barren for so many years. It answers how Leah could make the statement 'Is it not enough that you took my husband?' It answers how it was that Rochel was so passive in her response to Leah's chutzpah. There is only one problem left:

Leah has six sons; the handmaidens each have two children. Why is it that Rochel only has two children like the handmaidens? This does not seem fair. Where is the reward for her kindness and Tzidkus?

I saw in a sefer that it is fair. When someone goes to Eretz Yisrael, stop number one is the Kosel Ha-Ma'aravi, but what is stop number two? It is Kever Rochel! Why? Everyone considers Rochel to be their mother! She may have only had two biological children but she became THE matriarch of Klal Yisrael. Out of all the Imahos, she is the prototypical mother of all of Klal Yisrael. When you have a problem, you cry to your mother. When you have a problem, you cry at Kever Rochel.

In spite of the fact that Hashem only gave Rochel two biological children, He saw to it that Klal Yisrael treats Rochel Imeinu like our true mother. The Ribono shel Olam does not let a good deed go unrewarded. Rochel's acts of incredible selflessness were not merely a momentary thing. This was the ongoing essence of her character. For that she became Mama Rochel.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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

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, "Vayevarach 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 vayevarcheinu 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, "Vayevarach 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.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Yaakov Avinu's Exile is Our Own Exile Rabbi Pinchas Puntarello

"And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon the place, and tarried there all night..." (Bereishit 28:10-11).

Our exile begins in this very verse, in the life of Yaakov Avinu and all that befell him, in keeping with the words of the Ramban that "the events that befall the fathers, are a sign unto their children" (Ramban on Bereshit 12:6).

Yaakov's personal exile and his longing to return to his homeland has become a symbol,

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an archetype of sorts, for the exile of the Jewish People living far away from its Land. According to one interpretation, in much the same way that Yaakov never lost the hope of returning to the land of his forefathers and his eyes were constantly raised, as it were, towards the Land, so, too, the hearts and eyes of every Jew are perpetually pointed towards the Land of Israel.

God's words to Yaakov – "I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou go, and will bring thee back into this land" (Bereshit 28:15) evoke apprehension, but are also infused with hope and anticipation, making it clear that there will ultimately be a return home. This symbolic illustration of anticipation intertwined with certainty has always characterized Jews in the Diaspora, irrespective of their religious affiliation, their knowledge of the history of Zionism or their involvement in Israeli politics.

We are constantly witness to this anticipation coupled with certainty in our daily lives. It is clearly manifest in our daily prayers in which we say three times a day: "And may our eyes see Your return to Zion with mercy". Similarly, we end the Seder night with the words "Next year in Jerusalem". Clearly, the eyes of the Jewish People are always facing Zion, hoping for return, while the hearts know in certainty that one day there will be a return to the Promised Land.

The Talmud in the tractate of Chulin (91:2) explains the verses with which we opened, and offers a detailed and rather unique description of the turn of events in our portion.

Yaakov leaves for Charan and "lights upon" a specific spot where he sleeps and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder. We know for a fact that this place was inside the Land of Israel. If so, how is it possible that he had already arrived in Charan, as the verse seems to suggest?

In order to resolve this difficulty, the Gemara teaches us that Yaakov had indeed arrived in Charan, but then returned to Eretz Yisrael. In fact, his journey back to the Land was a miraculous one, and Yaakov was able to travel the long distance in a very short time. According to this interpretation, Yaakov turns back [after having reached Charan] because he realized that he had passed through the place where his fathers, Avraham and Yitzhak, had prayed. Hence, he decides to go back and, quite miraculously, "lights upon" the very spot – Har HaMoriya – where the Beit HaMikdash would later be built. Why does Yaakov return to the Land he had just left just for the sake of praying?

Yaakov had crossed the border, transitioning from the Land of Israel into an existence of Exile, where he would have to grapple with a different level of spirituality than the one with which he was familiar. It is in Exile, away from the Land, that he would have to confront

a society in which appearances and materialistic wealth were held in higher regard than all else, as explained by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler of blessed memory, author of the book *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*.

Yaakov was not yet ready to deal with such a serious spiritual hazard. He realized that the level of spirituality he was used to was very far removed from the one prevailing outside of his homeland, and it is this realization that led him to go back and pray, without a moment's delay. His return to the very same spot where his father and grandfather before him had prayed expresses the fact that Yaakov girds himself with strength and finds a new dimension of vitality which will help him find his own self in his new reality.

But the real lesson lies in the tremendous effort made by Yaakov throughout his journey in his attempt to maintain a certain level of spirituality. Until that moment he had never been compelled to leave the protective tents of his family and confront the dangers of the outside world.

The only physical and spiritual danger he had ever faced was the hatred of his brother Esav following the episode of the blessings. At this point in his life, however, when he leaves the Land of Israel for a place where the culture was so utterly different, Yaakov feels obliged to go back and pray in the place considered to be most sacred by his fathers before him, for the sake of his descendants after him.

A possible encounter with Esav did not deter him from turning back, all in the purpose of setting foot in the very spot where his grandfather Avraham was willing to sacrifice his son, Yaakov's own father, Yitzhak.

In this exact spot, Yaakov's descendants would later stand and pray, forming an eternal bond with the Almighty. This was all made possible in merit of Yaakov's decision to go back one more time before leaving for a long exile. This act of going back to the Land before exiting, ultimately means putting Torah and Jewish identity at the core of our existence, viewing these as fundamental values, key components of our personal lives, our family circle and our existence as a nation.

About 30,000 Jews live in Spain today, 15,000 of whom live in Madrid. Many Jews immigrated to Spain from Argentina starting in the 1970s, and recently many Jews from Venezuela joined due to the crisis in that country. The community in Madrid currently has about six synagogues, as well as a conservative community, a daily Jewish school, a mikveh, a kosher restaurant, including one for Torah study, a shop selling kosher products, a central rabbinate and everything necessary for a Jewish life.

In 1965, the Jewish community of Madrid founded the Ibn Gavirol School to serve as a pillar of Jewish education for the Jews of

Madrid. The initiative started off with one kindergarten, the product of great dedication and perseverance on the part of a group of committed parents, who wished to build a strong educational network which would incorporate the values and traditions of Judaism, and reinforce the everlasting bond with the Hebrew language, the Jewish culture, and the Land of Israel. Our mission is to teach each and every child how to live and breathe Jewish heritage with pride, while being a responsible and open-minded citizen of the world.

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Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Mirror Image

The opening first two pesukim of Parshas Vayeitzei present a difficulty. Initially we are taught that Yaakov arrives at Charan, but next we are told that he "chanced upon the place" as the sun set, and Chazal (Chulin 91b) teach that "the place" was the future site of the Beis HaMikdash, which is far from Charan. The Gemara resolves the difficulty by teaching us that when Yaakov came to Charan he was troubled and said to himself, could it be that I passed the place that my grandfather and father prayed without doing so myself? Immediately he turned around to go back to pray, and the rest is history! Our sages teach that he was afforded kefitzas haderech, that he arrived speedily and miraculously at the holy place, and received the incredible dream - a prophesy of the eternal survival of the Jewish people and multiple personal blessings. Chazal explain that all of this was due to his initiative to return and pray. The Zohar teaches that "is-orrarussa d-le-eila - Divine assistance" emanates from "is-orrarussa d-lesata", i.e. the innovations/ workings/ doings of man. As great as Yaakov was, he received all of the above only when he initiated his resolve.

I believe we are taught this concept at the very beginning of the Torah. Immediately after the account of creation, we are taught (Bereishis 2:5) that the vegetation and trees had not yet sprouted, since Hashem did not yet cause it to rain, and man was not there to work the land. Rashi teaches that until there was man who would understand the need for rain, pray for rain, and appreciate the rain, it did not rain. Built into the nature of this world is the need for man to have a relationship with Hashem. This relationship is expressed through is-orrarussa d-lesata, man-s praying, and is-orrarussa d-le-eila - Hashem-s responding.

The first communication that Hashem had with Avraham was Lech Lecha - go to the place that He would show him. The Zohar teaches that it was not until Avraham took the initiative and started the journey with his father Terach, as taught at the very end of parshas Noach, that he warranted and received the Divine call of Lech Lecha.

The Medrash (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:2:2) teaches on the verse (Shemos 11:4) "Moshe

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said, so said Hashem 'at midnight I shall go out in the midst of Egypt-' that we should note that this comes after the performance of the korban Pesach, which was a great act of courage and obedience on behalf of the Jewish people to Hashem. The Medrash continues in the name of Rav Yaso that Hashem says, "you open for Me an opening the size of a needle and I will open for you an opening that can accommodate the passage of wagons." Once again, it-s man-s initiative that releases Divine assistance.

Every morning we preface pesukai d-zimrah with, "A psalm, a song for the inauguration of the Temple by Dovid" (Tehillim 30). Stop and ask yourself, did Dovid build the first Beis HaMikdash? Hashem told him (Divrei Hayomim I, 17:4) "It is not you who will build a house for Me", and yet it is called the house of Dovid!? Dovid was troubled that he was living in a house of cedar while the aron of the bris of Hashem dwelled under curtains in a temporary manner. Because he initiated and readied the materials for his son Shlomo, providing the is-orrarussa d-lesata, Hashem responded with is-orrarussa d-le-eila bringing His holy Shechina into our midst.

Indeed, the Ramban in his commentary (Bamidbar 16:24) notes that the nation of Israel deserved punishment for the delay in the building of the Beis HaMikdash, and the fact that the aron was wandering from place to place as a stranger in the land and yet the tribes did not come forward and demand the Beis HaMikdash, as required in the passuk, "You shall seek out His presence and come there" (Devarim 12:5). Without is-orrarussa d-lesata there is no is-orrarussa d-le-eila.

This natural law is incorporated into many mitzvos and indeed is one of the reasons for mitzvos. The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 16a) teaches in the name of Rebbe Akiva, that Hashem said, "bring Me an omer of barley so that I can bless the grain in your fields; bring two loaves on Shavuot, in order for Him to bless the fruits of the land; pour water on the altar on Sukkos in order to receive the blessed rains of winter." The small acts of man precipitate the abundant heavenly blessings.

The Torah (Devarim 22:4) teaches the mitzvah of helping the owner of an animal pick up his fallen animal, and legislates "you shall stand them up with him". The mishna (Bava Metziah 32a) teaches that if the owner says to the one doing this mitzvah, "I'll sit and watch as you do it, since it-s your mitzvah", then there is no obligation on the responder to help, as the Torah says "emo - with him", i.e. the owner has to participate. The Chofetz Chaim comments (on the above cited passuk) that similarly, if one wishes to grow in their spirituality and come closer to Hashem, they must take the first step; it has to be emo - with Him. You can-t leave it all to Him. We pray every morning in the second beracha preceding the Shema, "and instill in our hearts to understand and comprehend, to listen, learn

and teach, observe, perform and fulfill all the words of the teaching of Your Torah." However, if man does not open the Gemara and study, it is a false and wasted prayer. The Chofetz Chaim continues and compares it to one who asks someone for a loan and is told to come to the lender's home at a specific time to receive the loan, but does not come. We have to initiate the study of Torah and the is-orrarussa d-le-eila will come.

Chanukah is in the air. The Tur (Orach Chaim 670) cites the Bach who explains that the reason the Jewish nation lost control of the Beis HaMikdash was that we did not regard, respect, and appreciate the Beis HaMikdash sufficiently. If we don't value something, we lose it. It was therefore our diligence and energy in searching for the pure, undefiled oil, despite the fact that perhaps we could have used the impure oil, i.e. our initiative - is-orrarussa d-lesata that enabled the miracle to occur.

Finally, the Gaon of Vilna (in Kol Hator) writes that while certainly there is a Divine plan of history, our initiatives and actions are not merely a reflection of our personal commitment and beliefs, but actually help precipitate and actualize the Divine redemption. When Jewish families go on aliyah it is not only a fulfillment of the biblical mitzvah (according to the Ramban and others) of yishuv Eretz Yisroel, but it is also our is-orrarussa d-lesata to bring about His is-orrarussa d-le-eila of kibutz goliyos - the ingathering of the exiles.

May we be privileged, each in our own way, to naturally participate and precipitate the exciting Divine plan that He has for ourselves and Klal Yisroel.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

That Fallen Tree

And Yaakov left Beer-Sheva, and he went to Charan. (Brieshis 28:10) And Yaakov left: Scripture had only to write: "And Yaakov went to Charan." Why did it mention his departure? But this tells [us] that the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression, for while the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendor, he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty has departed, its splendor has departed, its majesty has departed... Rashi

There seems to be an obvious oddity in this explanation of Rashi. Why is the departure of the Tzadik emphasized? Why not highlight and showcase the time that he was actually there? Let us try on a few approaches.

My visceral response to this question sends me way back to the old song by Joni Mitchell from so many years ago. Whatever she was singing about is one thing, and it may not be scripture but there may be a kernel of the eternal in her words. "You don't know what you've got till

it's gone. They paved paradise and put up a parking lot." There she said it.

Sometimes we only realize the value of someone or something when it is no longer. How often is that the case, with loved ones, health, youth, and many other transient aspects of life!? So, when the Tzadik leaves, the impression is felt. The citizens of that locale wake up to the realization of who they had in their midst.

The Talmud tells us about a fascinating conundrum, a spiritual law of life. If someone runs after honor then honor will run away from him, and if someone runs away from honor then honor will pursue him. Of course, there is the famous story of the person who came to his Rabbi with a question about the efficacy of this principle. He said, "Rabbi, all my life I am running from honor but honor never runs after me." The Rabbi answered, "The problem is that you are busy looking over your shoulder to see if it's running after you!" There is a requirement for authenticity in this arena. The Brisker Rav observed that in either case, it would seem that a person cannot get honor.

If he is chasing honor, it is running away and if he is running away from honor and it is chasing him, he keeps running away. He said that the answer is, the difference is after he passes from the world. If he was chasing it then it runs away leaving without a trace, without a memory. If he was fleeing from honor then after his life, when he cannot run away any more, then it will catch up with him.

How many great people have become even greater since their departure from this world!? King Solomon writes, "Pri Tzadik Eitz Chaim" – the fruit of the Tzadik is a tree of life. Some great people leave behind Seforim/Holy writings, and others leave a legacy of children, a living Torah dynasty of scholars and leaders, while others leave behind Yeshivas and Torah institutions that last in perpetuity. In a few rare cases there are those who leave behind all three.

In some very rare cases there are Tzadikim that leave behind none of the above but their greatness only grows after they are no more. One of the most visited places here in Monsey is the Kever of the Ribnitzer Rebbe. He had no children. He wrote no Seforim. He struggled to cobble together a Minyan. He built no institutions in his lifetime, but he served HASHEM and helped Jewish People with self-sacrifice and devotion beyond description. Yet now, decades later his grave has become the address for people seeking Yeshuos. The numbers and stories of results only grow. I pass by every day and I slow down, and I must, because there is so much traffic there.

Shraga Silverstein wrote in a book of original Musar aphorism entitled, "A Candle by Day" a phrase that caught my attention many years ago and I think it has direct application to this question of the Tzadik making an impression

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at the time of his departure from a place. He wrote, "It is easy to make your presence felt, but it is hard to make your absence felt!" Some can make noise and headlines like a huge storm and there's a sense of relief when he has passed but rare is the individual who humbly does his job and only when he's gone, people begin to realize the scope of the shade provided by and the true scale of that fallen tree.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

The Person Makes The Place

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.

When Ya'akov returns later to the Land of Israel something similar is stated, that "he encamped on the face of the city [of Shechem]", an unusual phrase. Rashi explains there that this means that he brought a transformation to the city – he brought 'chein' to the city, instituted social and business interactions, changing the city forever.

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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RABBI SHALOM ROSNER

Rav Kehilla, Nofei HaShemesh; Senior Ra"m, Kerem B'Yavneh

What was Taught in Yeshivat Shem V'Ever?

Rashi - Vayiskav Bamakom Hahu - Lashon Miut Bioso Mako Shachav Aval 14 Shanim Sheshimesh Bibeis Ever Lo Shachov Balaila Shehaya Osek Batorah.

And he lay down in that place: [The word hahu is a restrictive expression, meaning that [only] in that place did he lie down, but during the fourteen years that he served in the house of Eber, he did not lie down at night, because he was engaged in Torah study. Based on the language used in the Torah, Rashi derives that Yaakov rested at this location, but for fourteen years he did not rest, rather during that period he engaged in the study of Torah in the Yeshiva of Shem V'Ever.

THIRTY-SIX YEARS AWAY FROM HOME

We are told that Yaakov resided at the house of Lavan for twenty-two years, and during those years was unable to fulfill the mitzvah of kibbud Av V'em, therefore he was "punished" midah k'neged midah and Yosef was in mitzrayim unable to communicate with Yaakov for twenty-two years. If we add the fourteen years during which Yaakov studied at the Yeshiva of Shem V'Ever, then he was unable to fulfill the mitzvah of Kibbud v V'em for 36 years. Why are the fourteen years in Yeshiva not counted towards the time he did not fulfill kibbud Av V'em?

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky in Emet L'Yaakov raises this question. Rav Yaakov even offers an example to strengthen the question. Imagine that a father asks his son to pick up some groceries. On his way to the store, the child stops off at the bet midrash to learn for a week. Is that proper behavior? His father requested groceries and the child delayed the chore for a week? Yaakov was tasked with finding a wife in Haran, why would he be justified in pushing that off for fourteen years?

SHEM V'EVER - SURVIVAL IN HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

Perhaps we need to understand the nature of what was taught in the Yeshiva of Shem V'Ever. In the house of Avraham and Yitzhak, there was a closed and protected environment. When Sara suspects that Yishmael may have an adverse influence on her son, she demands that Yishmael be removed. Shem,

on the other hand, was the son of Noach. He witnessed the wickedness of his surroundings. Ever lived during the Dor Haflaga, when Migdal Bavel was built. Similarly, he grew up in a generation that did not value human life and that did not believe in God. Yet, both Shem V'Ever were able to remain steadfast Ovdei Hashem and moral and ethical beings.

What Shem V'Ever were able to teach Yaakov, was how to survive in the house of Lavan. It was a necessary pit stop before he was to arrive at Lavan's house. It is in accordance with his parent's instructions as it enabled Yaakov to retain his tradition during those twenty-two years. It is like a father asking his son to purchase a Lulav and Etrog on his behalf and on the way to the store, the child stops in the Bet Midrash to learn how to select a kosher Lulav and Etrog. It is part of the mission.

YAAKOV TEACHES YOSEF WHAT HE LEARNED FROM SHEM V'EVER

A reference to the Bet Midrash of Shem V'Ever appears elsewhere in Sefer Bereshit as well. In Parshat Veyeshev, when we are told that Yaakov favored Yosef, Rashi interprets it to mean that Yaakov taught Yosef what he learned from Shem V'Ever. Why does Rashi specifically cite what Yaakov learned from Shem V'Ever and not from Avraham and Yitzhak? Apparently, Yaakov subconsciously felt that Yosef would be in exile and needed to understand how to survive in a hostile environment. That was Torat Shem V'Ever.

Today, with so many outside influences, like Shem V'Ever, we need to strengthen our commitment to Torah and mitzvot. Chanuka is around the corner. The Greeks sought to discredit the Torah and force us to assimilate. May we be able to continue to educate our children and ourselves in the path of Shem V'Ever. Like Yaakov and Yosef, we need to ensure that the Torah, as our instruction manual, is our moral and ethical compass, irrespective of our surroundings.

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/1080920>

Thoughts for Vayitzei/War in Israel: Holding on to Truth

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

November 20 2023

Vayetze: Holding on to Truth Moshe Taragin Ya'akov spends twenty years in the house of lies and deceit. From the outset, he faced constant scheming and chicanery. Though slated to marry Rochel, he woke up the next morning married to a different woman. Confronting his father-in-law about this fraud, he receives a lame answer surrounding local customs of not marrying off younger sisters before their older siblings. Of course, no one ever mentioned the universal norm about being honest, and not lying to your future family. I guess Lavan forgot that one. The longer Ya'akov remains in Lavan's snare the more exploitation and dishonesty he encounters, as his salary is repeatedly and unilaterally reduced. At one point, Ya'akov generously agrees to relinquish all rights to healthy sheep, while committing himself to herding only sickly and damaged animals. Of course, this plan doesn't "work", as Ya'akov, with Hashem's help, continues to prosper. Unable to handle Ya'akov's financial success, Lavan disseminates false rumors about Ya'akov's unethical business practices. Though Ya'akov and his family ultimately flee this house of horrors, they are hunted down by Lavan, and, astonishingly, are accused of treason. Having been victimized for over twenty years by unremitting manipulation and cheating, Ya'akov is now accused of those very same crimes. Pulling on everyone's heartstrings, Lavan wails that he wasn't even given opportunity to wish goodbye to his daughters. Ironically, by doing his utmost to avoid confrontation and conflict, Ya'akov has committed a humanitarian crime. Thousands of years later, Ya'akov's children find themselves in a similar predicament. A coalition of Israel bashers including antisemites, ignorant stooges, shockingly gullible students, and stubborn but blind denialists, have all teamed up to accuse our people of fictitious crimes, all the while tacitly supporting rape, torture, burning human beings, and taking babies and octogenarians as hostage. The more things change the more they stay the same. You would think that, especially in this instance, moral truth is straightforward. It was pretty clear-cut on Sept 11, and Oct 7th should not be any different. Just in the past decade the entire

Defending Integrity At some point, Ya'akov had enough. After twenty years of lies and counterfeit claims, he finally defends himself and his record. He calmly accounts for his twenty years of faithful service, through freezing cold nights and scorching hot summer days. You would imagine that Lavan, when confronted with his own corruption and duplicity, would finally acknowledge Ya'akov's virtue. The facts speak for themselves. However, hate and contempt leave little room for facts and, for those consumed with rage and violence, nothing is obvious. Unable to communicate with one another, the best Ya'akov and Lavan can muster is to agree to disagree. Reluctantly, they sign a treaty of non-aggression and agree to part ways. Exasperated, Ya'akov walks away, failing to convince anyone, but confident in his own moral integrity. Like our grandfather, we too, are unlikely to convince much of this world of our morality in waging a just war. There is too much noise, hate, and ignorance for the truth to shine. Yet, despite the futility of these efforts, we must continue to try, for the sake of the few who may listen. But, even if no one listens, we must still affirm morality and truth for ourselves, so that we can maintain our own moral compass even though so many around us have lost theirs. When truth slowly dies, we must hold on to it even more tightly. The battle for truth This war has many layers. Obviously, this is a continuation of the war of Independence as we continue our struggle to return and resettle our ancient homeland. The world isn't yet ready to grant us this small parcel of land awarded to us by Hashem. One day they will, but it may take a while. The second layer to this war is the battle between good and evil. A struggle is being waged between an axis of bloodthirsty barbarians who care little about life and human dignity and civilized societies who cherish life and condemn unnecessary violence. This is a clash of civilizations and we, as always, are at the forefront. Good will always prevail over evil, provided that courageous people stand up and make a difference. Hashem give us courage and give us strength. As the war unfolds, a third layer is becoming apparent. We are waging a battle to preserve the concept of truth. The world around us has gone mad, losing its ability to identify truth. Facts are recklessly tossed around, and preposterous claims are weaponized to attack and discredit our people.

Post-Modernism The popular movement known as post modernism asserts that all truth is subjective, and context dependent, and therefore there is no objective right and wrong. This has generated the concept of moral relativism and the belief that we must always study a diversity of opinions while appreciating multiple competing narratives. Under the terms of moral relativism, there are no absolute moral positions, and any set of moral codes is merely a cultural convention. The absence of objective standards is eroding moral clarity and leading to the moral free-for-all we are all suffering through. It is a disgrace to share a planet with human beings, presumably equipped with brains and hearts, can actually celebrate incinerating other human beings. These people are the hideous monsters of post modernism.

Tower of Babel and the Mabel Tragically, when we abandon absolute moral truths, we also lose dialogue. If we can't agree on universal moral values, our conversation degenerates into shouting matches in which we lodge opposing cultural narratives at each other. Social media exacerbates the racket by providing mock communication, but no real dialogue. Social media platforms merely goad opinionated people into hollering their opinions, as they spar with one another in the cybersphere. The tower of Babel has returned and this time, though we share language we do not possess a common baseline of values. If we can't speak with one another, we can't live side-by-side. Moral relativism also diminishes moral accountability. Absolute moral values provide us with a conscience through which we inspect our behavior. Once

The writer is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has smicha and a BA in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a masters degree in English literature from the City University of New York.avan and his culture aren't everything they seem to be. Evidently,we should resist the seductive offersto join him. Evidently, there is more for us to discover back home in history. Lavan's plan is deviously simple. It almost worked then, and it almost worked now. Ultimately though, Lavan reveals his true face, and it is ugly.

Tidbits • Parashas Toldos in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz z"l
Reminders: The final opportunity for Kiddush Levanah in the USA is Monday, November 27th at 6:18 PM EST. Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Kamma 22 • Yerushalmi: Shevi'is 48 • Mishnah Yomis: Yevamos 9:2-3 • Oraysa: Next week is Yoma 34a-36a. Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbs to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!
Next on the Calendar: Chanukah begins on Thursday evening, December 7th. Shabbos Chanukah is Parashas Vayeishev, December 9th.
Summary of Parsha: VAYEITZEI: Yaakov departs Be'er Sheva • The vision of the ladder and angels • Yaakov arrives at Charan and meets Rachel at the well • Lavan agrees to allow Rachel to marry Yaakov in exchange for seven years of labor • On the wedding night, Lavan switches Leah for Rachel • Yaakov reproaches Lavan • After seven days pass, Yaakov marries Rachel in exchange for a commitment of an additional seven years of work • Leah bears Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehudah • Rachel begs Yaakov for children • Rachel gives Yaakov her maid Bilhah, she bears Dan and Naftali • Leah gives her maid Zilpah to Yaakov; she bears Gad and Asher • Rachel exchanges with Leah her opportunity to be with Yaakov for Reuven's 'duda'im • Leah bears Yisachar, Zevulun, and Dinah • Hashem 'remembers' Rachel and accepts her prayers; she bears Yosef • Lavan attempts to swindle Yaakov, but Hashem makes Yaakov wealthy • Hashem commands Yaakov to return to the land of his fathers • Rachel and Leah agree to leave • Before they leave, Rachel steals Lavan's idols • Lavan pursues them, Hashem warns him not to speak with Yaakov • Lavan rebukes Yaakov • Yaakov curses whoever stole Lavan's gods • Yaakov and Lavan make a treaty at Gal'ed • Yaakov encounters a camp of angels upon his return to Eretz Canaan.
Haftarah: The Navi Hoshea reprimands the nation for their misdeeds, admonishing them that their illustrious ancestry will not protect them from punishment. Yet at the same time, Hashem's love for them always leaves a door open to return to him. Ashkenazim read from Hoshea (12:13-14:10). [Some add Yoel 2:26-27].

הַבָּנוֹת בָּנֹתַי וְהַבָּנִים בְּנֵי הַצֶּאֱנָה צֵאֲנִי וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־רָאִיתָ רְאֵה “The daughters are my daughters, the sons are my sons, the flock is my flock and everything that you see is mine” (Bereishis 31:43)
The Chofetz Chaim once traveled to Warsaw seeking to obtain a passport, as he wished to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael. The elderly Chofetz Chaim found the bureaucratic office unreasonable in their demands. At that point, in his

eighties, he lacked a birth certificate or the ability to gather two witnesses who recalled his birth, which practically speaking would require locating two ninety year olds who originated from his home town of Zittel! The Chofetz Chaim quoted the conversation between Yaakov and Lavan, Yaakov tells Lavan that he has not sinned or taken anything, and a complete search already verified this. Lavan responds that “everything you possess is mine, including your children.” As Lavan already searched and found nothing, how can he say everything belongs to him?

The Chofetz Chaim explained that in order to work things out between two parties, each party must recognize the existence of the other side. Lavan’s mindset, however, was that Yaakov had no rights or any existence worth reckoning with whatsoever. Thus everything was up for the taking. So, too, expressed the Chofetz Chaim that despite his predicament there was no mercy forthcoming from the bureaucrats for an elderly man, as his status as a Jew gave him no rights to be recognized.

The Chofetz Chaim further compared this to the plight of Polish Jewry who were facing various decrees against religion. If the Polish Government recognized the Jews as a people worthy of human rights and compassion, they would be in a position to advocate for some relief from these edicts. However, the government isn’t acknowledging their basic existence, making the predicament untenable. The Chofetz Chaim concluded that many people approached him for advice on the matter, yet he felt that the advice was clearly spelled out in the Gemara. “Rav Eliezer says ‘what should a person do to avoid the birth pangs of Mashiach? He should involve himself in Torah and Chesed’”. The Chofetz Chaim expressed that even if all the sages from previous generations would gather together, no better solution would be found than this!

Halachos of Chanukah: Menorah: Who lights? Both men and women are obligated in this mitzvah. There is a mitzvah of chinuch to train a minor son in this mitzvah. While only the head of household is obligated, the Ashkenazic minhag is to (be zealous and) have all male household members light independently. A woman fulfills her obligation via her husband or with the in-home lighting of an adult male household member, even if she is away from home. Ideally, a husband should wait for his wife to return home before lighting, even if he will miss the preferred z’men. If a husband is away for the night, he may technically fulfill his obligation with his wife’s lighting back at home (if he is in a similar time zone). However it is best that he light in his location on his own and have in mind not to be yotze through his household. The wife, in turn, should light at home, having in mind as well not to be yotze with her husband’s lighting.

Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at klalgovoah.org Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gparency.com | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830 Copyright © 2022 Klal Govoah, All rights reserved.

<https://www.rabbiwein.com/blog/post-2539.html>

Rabbi Berel Wein's Weekly Blog

TOLDOT

The troubling question that has persisted throughout the ages of biblical commentary on this week’s parsha is: What is Yitzchak thinking in regard to giving the blessings and heritage of Avraham to Eisav? Basically the comments and explanations fall into two categories. One of them is that Yitzchak is fooled by Eisav and is really unaware of his true nature and wanton behavior.

Rashi, quoting Midrash, interprets that Eisav “haunted” his father with his pious speech and cunning conversation. Yitzchak is fooled by Eisav and believes that Eisav, the man of the world and the physically powerful figure is better suited to carry on Avraham’s vision than is Yaakov, the more studious and apparently more simple of the brothers.

The other opinion, more popular among the later commentators to the Torah, is that Yitzchak is aware of the shortcomings of behavior and attitude of his elder son. His desire to give the blessings to Eisav is due to his wish to redeem and save his son, and to enable Eisav to turn his life around and

become a worthy heir to the traditions of his father and grandfather. He thinks that by somehow giving the blessings to Eisav, Yaakov will not really suffer any disadvantage in his life’s work, while Eisav will find his way back to holiness through the blessings that he has now received.

These two divergent attitudes towards the wayward child in Jewish families is one that is enacted daily in Jewish family life. Later Yitzchaks either willfully allow themselves to be deluded regarding the behavior and lifestyle of children or they are aware of the problem and attempt to solve it with a giving nature and a plethora of blessings.

Rivkah, Eisav’s mother, is not fooled by her son’s apparently soothing words nor does she believe that granting him blessings will somehow accomplish any major shift in his chosen lifestyle. To a great measure she adopts a policy of triage, saving Yaakov and blessing him while thus abandoning Eisav to his own chosen wanton ways.

The Torah does not record for us the “what if” scenario – what if Eisav had received the blessings would he then have been different in behavior and attitude, belief and mission. However, from the words of the later prophets of Israel, especially those of Ovadiah, it appears to be clear that God somehow concurred with Rivkah’s policy and holds Eisav to be redeemable only in the very long run of history and human events.

The verdict seems to be that one must be clear eyed and realistic about the painful waywardness and misbehavior of enemies of Yaakov, be they from within or without our immediate family and milieu. There are many painful choices that need to be made within one’s lifetime and especially in family relations.

There are few pat answers to varying and difficult situations. Perhaps that is why the Torah itself does not delve too deeply into the motives of Yitzchak and Rivkah but is content merely to reflect the different emotional relationships each had with their two very different sons. The Torah emphasizes the role that human emotions play in our lives and does not consign all matters to rational thought and decision-making.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

fw from Hamelaket@gmail.com

HARAV MATISYAHU SALOMON ON A TIME OF WAR IN ERETZ YISROEL

Several years ago, HaRav Matisyahu Salomon, Shlita, had given Shiurim with practical advice to Bnei Torah in a time of war in Eretz Yisroel, published as a Hebrew Kuntrus Ki SaVo'u Milchama B'Artzechem.

We present below a short summary of his points:

1. The first time we were attacked as a people was when Paroh and the Mitzriyim chased us, and it is from there that we must learn. The pasuk records that the first reaction of Bnei Yisroel is VaYitzaku Bnei Yisroel Ehl Hashem. The Torah is teaching us that the first thing we are to do in time of danger is to daven to Hashem to save us. We have to understand that Paroh chased us not because of his own mastermind but because VaYechazek Hashem Es Lev Paroh...VaYirdof Acharei Bnei Yisroel. Enemies are sent by Hashem. Indeed, the Pasuk continues U'Pharoh Hikriv....Chazal teach that Paroh's drawing closer to attack was a more powerful source of Teshuva for Bnei Yisroel than a hundred fasts--for they turned to heaven and cried out in Prayer and Teshuva.

2. But what did Bnei Yisroel have to do Teshuva for? After initially crying out in Mitzrayim, and experiencing their salvation during the 10 Makkos that the Mitzriyim suffered, Bnei Yisroel stopped davening, as they were already confident in their position. They had forgotten that the Avos established davening, our daily tefillos of Shacharis, Mincha and Maariv, and that when the Avos davened--even when not in an Eis Tzara--it was with an absolute sense of Ein Ohd Milevado and with the absolute awareness that we are always in need of Chesed and Rachamim Min HaShomayim. It is for this reason that Rashi brings here--when Bnei Yisroel cried out to Hashem at the sea--Tofsu Umanus Avosam, that by crying out Bnei Yisroel followed the path of the Avos. Incredibly, HaRav Matisyahu teaches that the Teshuva

Bnei Yisroel had to do was actually in Tefillah! HaRav Matisyahu continues that this means that one must have the proper appreciation for Tefillah at all times, even when not in trouble--by such matters as starting on time, not talking during davening, not rushing away, focusing and trying hard to concentrate so that one has Kavannah , and recognizing that one is standing before Hashem Who is the Only Capable One. Every individual needs to make a Cheshbon HaNefesh if there is an aspect of Tefillah to which he is not giving the proper regard. Our Teshuva has to be to have charata (remorse) on any zilzul in Tefillah, and to be mekabel to daven as a son before his father, and a servant before his master--with the appropriate fear and respect, with supplication just as a person in need who stands at the door, from the depths of our hearts and feeling, with the knowledge that all of our success is in Hashem's Hands--just as our Avos did! Hashem in turn responds because He is a Kel Chanun V'Rachum Erech Apayim V'Rav Chesed V'nicham Ahl Ha'Ra'ah (Avos 2:13, Devorim 4:7).

3. HaRav Matisyahu then brings the powerful words of the Chofetz Chaim in his Sefer Machane Yisroel (Chapter 10), addressed to the needs of Jewish soldiers in the Russian army. The Sefer is known for its straightforward and sincere direction to soldiers. The Chofetz Chaim teaches them two essential points to follow when davening. First, davening should be from deep in the heart and not by lip service, if possible with tears. This will indicate true sincerity and feeling in davening. Second, one should have Kavana that his Tefillos travel to Eretz Yisroel and from there to Yerushalayim and then to the Kodosh HaKodoshim (see Melachim Aleph, 8:44-49, and 9:3, regarding Shlomo HaMelech's request about davening towards Eretz Yisrael and the Beis HaMikdash, and Hashem's acceptance of his Tefillah). Picture your Tefillah 's route! If one follows these two rules, the Chofetz Chaim assures the soldiers that their Tefillos will not be returned empty handed. HaRav Matisyahu teaches that the Chofetz Chaim's guidance is especially directed to the soldiers and to all instances of sakana.

We have the direction--we have the guidance--it is up to us to follow it through--to success for all of K'lal Yisroel!

from: Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> to: targumim@torah.org date: Nov 23, 2023, 8:48 AM subject: Ksav Sofer - Sleep-Learning

Ksav Sofer
By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein
 Parshas Vayeitzei

Sleep-Learning

Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Hashem is present in this place, and I did not know." [1]

The word for "from his sleep" is mishnaso. A midrash [2] curiously suggests that it should be read as mimishnaso -- from his learning. How are these related, and what is the midrash trying to tell us?

A Mishnah [3] teaches that all our actions should be for the sake of Heaven. Rambam [4] explains the implications: A person, he says, should eat and sleep and engage in commerce -- all with one intention: that he should have the strength to learn and deeply comprehend Torah, and perform his avodah. One who does so cannot be considered idle even when asleep. Rather, he is seen as performing a mitzvah and learning Torah, since his rest is a necessary preparation for his Torah study!

Yaakov was no slouch, and no late-riser. Chazal tell us that he eschewed regular sleep all the years that he spent in Shem's beis medrash. This was the first night in many years that he allowed himself some conventional sleep. And it is clear that his intention in getting this rest was pure. Were it not, he would not have been graced with his prophetic vision that evening. Clearly, his sleep was regarded positively in heaven, as fulfilling a mitzvah.

This is what the midrash means in substituting mimishnaso for mishnaso.

Yaakov's sleep had become an integral part of his learning.

This explains as well the gemara's [5] understanding of the angels ascending and descending the ladder that Yaakov saw in his vision. The gemara explains that the angels ascended to the heavenly throne, where they saw

Yaakov's image engraved upon it. When they subsequently descended, they found him asleep. They were livid to find a Yaakov with such potential wasting his time sleeping, basking in self-indulgence, and accomplishing nothing of value during that time. They wished to harm him. He was saved only by Hashem's standing over him and protecting Yaakov from their designs.

The angels could not read Yaakov's mind. They saw an inactive, inert Yaakov, apparently failing in his mission. Hashem, however, knew Yaakov's intentions. He understood that Yaakov slept for the sole purpose of renewing himself, so that he could better attend to his avodas Hashem the next day.

This saved him from the wrath of the angels.

Indeed, the ladder itself spoke of earthly events rising to the level of cosmic significance. The ladder was planted firmly on the ground, but reached the heavens. It spoke of pedestrian actions attaining significance in shomayim, if they were accompanied by mitzvah intentions.

Yaakov's ladder shows us that we can turn every second of life, 24/7, into avodas Hashem.

1. Bereishis 28:16; 2. Bereishis Rabbah 69:5; 3. Avos 2:12; 4. Hilchos Deos 3:2; 5. Chulin 91b

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Nov 22, 2023, 3:54 PM subject: Rav Frand - Giving Thanks to Hashem for His Past Kindness Is Not Sufficient

Rav Frand By **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

Parshas Vayeitzei

Giving Thanks to Hashem for His Past Kindness Is Not Sufficient

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1270 -- "It's Just Too Hard": Is That an Excuse Not to Fulfill a Mitzvah? Good Shabbos!

After Leah had her fourth son (Yehudah), she said "...This time I will thank (o'deh) Hashem, therefore she called his name Yehudah. And she stopped having children." (Bereshis 29:35) The Perush haTur ha'Aruch al haTorah (not to be confused the shorter commentary by the same author known as the Baal HaTurim) says an amazing thing: Leah recognized that she received her fair allotment of shvatim (tribes) and asked for nothing more, therefore she stopped giving birth. If a person does not ask for more, they will not get more.

I would have thought, on the contrary, someone receives, and then thanks, that should not be greedy by always asking for more. And yet, the Tur says that when a person thanks and does not include asking for more, then he does not deserve more.

The truth is that we see the same idea from the language used by the Rambam (Hilchos Brochos 10:26). The Rambam beautifully writes: "The general principle is that a person should always cry out for the future, asking for mercy, and giving thanks for the past." The Rambam is saying that when you express gratitude to Hashem, you not only need to give thanks for what you have already received, but you should simultaneously pray intensely for what will be coming your way in the future.

We see several examples of this in our siddur: In "Modim d'Rabanan" we say... "We gratefully thank You... who have given us life and sustained us. So may You continue to give us life and sustain us..." In the middle of Hallel, we say... "Please Hashem, save us! Please Hashem bring us success!" What is the essence of Hallel? Thanksgiving! Why are we inserting a request for salvation and future success in the middle? We include in our thanksgiving a request for the future.

Likewise, when we recite the "Hadran" that we say when concluding a tractate of Talmud, we first say "Modim anachnu lach..." (We express gratitude before You...) and then we say "...k'shem she'azartani l'sayem Maseches X, ken te'azreinee..." (May it be Your will... that just as You have helped me complete Tractate X, so may You help me to begin and complete other tractates and books...)

We see a principle: When we thank Hashem, it is not sufficient to merely thank Him for what we have received, but we must ask for the future as well. What is the reason for this? At first glance, it seems counterintuitive. Our first thought might be that we should be thankful for what we received and not be greedy by asking for more.

I saw an interesting explanation in the sefer Abir Yakov. Let's say a person wins \$25,000,000 in a lottery. What is his reaction? "Wow! I am set for life! No more job. No more boss. No more anything. I have my 25 million bucks. I can do whatever I want!" A Jew must know that he is never "set for life." Every single day and every single moment our lives are dependent on the Almighty with whom our souls are deposited. Every single minute of life is a gift. There is no such thing in Judaism as "I have arrived. I am set for life." Therefore, when a person gives thanks for the past, he needs to bear in mind "Thank you Hashem for giving me this, but I recognize and am aware that I am not set, and unless You continuously shower me with Your Blessings, I could be gone in a minute!"

As we have said many times, the Hebrew word "Ho'da'ah" has two meanings. It means to thank and it means to admit. When we thank we also admit, confessing that we are totally dependent on the ongoing assistance and support of "Yotzreinu, Yotzer Bereshis" (our Molder, the Molder of the Universe). That is what we learn from Leah, and that is what the Tur ha'Aruch says.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org
This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> date: Nov 23, 2023, 7:05 PM subject: Gratitude & Thanksgiving During Insane Times - New Essay by Rabbi YY

Gratitude & Thanksgiving During Insane Times

How Rachel Taught Her Child—and the World—the Secret to Happiness

These are challenging times for our people, and for all good people. For Jews, one of most powerful resources for millennia has been thanksgiving and gratitude. In our transition, we express gratitude hundreds of times a day, at every step of the road. Before I eat an apple, after I come out of the bathroom, when I open my eyes in the morning, and when I am about to retire. How do we cultivate this life-changing gift during times of visceral pain and distress?

What's the Shame?

It is a perplexing response in this week's Torah portion, Vayeitzei. Rachel, who has been childless for many years, gives birth. In the words of the Torah:

"And she conceived and bore a son, and she said, "God has taken away my shame."

What type of shame was she referring to? What shame is there in infertility, which is not her fault? Sarah and Rebecca were also barren, but we never hear that they were ashamed. In the world of Torah, there is no room for shame for a condition you never caused. Pain, anguish, or jealousy are sentiments we can appreciate, but why shame?

Rashi presents the astounding and disturbing answer in the Midrash: The Aggadah (Midrash Rabbah 73:5) explains it: As long as a woman has no child, she has no one to blame for her faults. As soon as she has a child, she blames him. "Who broke this dish? Your child!" "Who ate these figs? Your child!"

Rachel was previously ashamed because she had nobody to blame for any errors, oversights, or flaws. The food was burnt? Rachel must be a lousy

cook. The keys to the car are lost? Rachel is irresponsible. Rachel is in a bad mood? She is impulsive and irrational. A plate breaks? She is a shlimazal. The couch is dirty? She is a lazy couch potato. The home is unkempt? Rachel just can't get it together.

Ah, but now, with the birth of Joseph, the shame is gone. The food burnt because the baby ran a fever, and she had to rush him to the doctor. The keys to the car lost? The baby got a hold of them and cast them in the dustbin. The plate broke? The baby dropped it. The couch is dirty? The baby decided to have his ice cream on the couch. The house is a mess? Of course, the baby is at fault.

So, if I am understanding this correctly, that is why Rachel who was childless for 7 years wanted a baby—not for the incredible experience of creating a life, not for the infinite joy of having a child, not for the happiness that comes with the singular mother-child relationship—all of this was not the motivating factor. Why did Rachel want a child? So that she has somebody to blame for getting the turkey and cranberry sauce all over the floor?!

Absurd or what? Our mother Rachel, barren and infertile, was yearning for a child—to the point of her telling Jacob: "If I don't have children I am dead"—So that she blame all her mistakes on her child?

What is more, this seems so dishonest. If Rachel did not really make errors like breaking dishes and eating up figs, she would have not been ashamed to begin with. If she did, and she was constantly getting embarrassed, what exactly was her comfort now? That when she breaks a china plate she will lie and say that her child did it?

What is even more disturbing is that she names her baby "Yosef," which means removed, to celebrate the fact that now her shame has been "removed" (asaf). You are giving your child whom you waited for so many years a name which represents your newfound ability now to blame him for your mistakes?!

How can we make sense of this perplexing Midrash?

Of course, we need to dig deeper to uncover the gems contained here. In essence, Rachel was teaching us one of the primary secrets to live a life of gratitude.

Rachel's Magic

In all our lives there is a gap between what we have, and what we want. No one gets everything. And even when we are given blessings, the "package" comes with "fine print" you may have not realized in the beginning. Human nature is to focus on that which we are missing, while forgetting that which we have. We take our blessings for granted and we obsess about the missing pieces.

Rachel knew about the human proclivity to focus on the negative instead of the positive, and that even after you experienced an extraordinary gift, after a while you take it for granted and begin kvetching about the imperfections. To counterbalance this human recipe for misery, she exclaimed, "G-d has removed my shame," to remind herself of the idea that she must attribute the things going wrong to her child. When your child breaks the dish or eats the figs, remember that the only reason you have this problem is because you were blessed with a child. When your child breaks something or eats up the fresh food you made for the guests, attribute the problem to your child, to the miracle and blessing of having a child.

You can say: Oy, my child MADE A MESS. Or you can say: Thank G-d, MY CHILD made a mess. Same words, but with a different emphasis.

It is the Jewish custom that when a glass breaks, we shout: Mazal Tov!

When the groom breaks the glass under the chuppah, we exclaim Mazal Tov!

Why don't we say: Oy, 10 dollars down the drain? This is Rachel's gift:

When the plate breaks, be grateful. It means you have a home; you own dishes. When your husband breaks something, say: Mazal Tov! Thank goodness, I married a human being, not an angel.

To live means to become aware of the miracle of the breath I am emitting at this moment. Every breath is a Divine gift. I am alive, wow. I am grateful. I do not own life; I did not create life; I am privileged to be a channel for life,

for the infinite source of life, at this moment—wow. And I have a child sitting near me—wow, I can now be a channel for love and light. Yes, life presents us with painful moments, and we can feel overwhelmed, scared, and sad. And at that very moment, I can talk to my mind and say: And now, I want to go into space of gratitude—of knowing that G-d creates me at this moment so I can be a channel for His infinite love, light, peace, and compassion, and to radiate that to all around me.

The Hunch of a Mother

With the hunch of a mother, Rachel decided to immortalize this message in the name of her child, Yosef, meaning “G-d removed my shame.” This became the secret of Joseph’s success.

Joseph endured enormous pain and suffering. His brothers despised him, they sold him into slavery, he was accused of promiscuity, and thrown into a dungeon for twelve years. And yet throughout his entire life, Joseph never lost his joy, grace, passion for life, love for people, ambition to succeed, and his ability to forgive. Joseph comes across as one of the most integrated, wholesome, cheerful, loveable persons in the entire Tanach. With a life story like his, we would expect him to be bitter, cynical, resentful, angry, stone-like, and harsh. “A rock feels no pain and an island never cries,” yet Joseph weeps more than everyone in the Hebrew Bible.

How did he do this? This, perhaps, was his mother’s gift. Though she died when he was nine years of age, she infused him with perspective on how to live: Every challenge can only exist because it has a blessing as its backdrop. I feel pain? But that means I am alive, and I have feelings. It also means that there is something new I must discover about myself and the world. I am hurt, but that means that I am sensitive, and I can be here for people. I have a disagreement with my spouse? That means that I am blessed to have a soul partner who cares for me, and that we have an opportunity to create a deeper relationship. My children challenge me? That means I have children whom I love, and I am given an opportunity to dig deeper and find the light beyond the darkness.

The Backdrop of Pain

When your husband comes home late from work, instead of thinking: He is so irresponsible and unreliable, you can choose to say: Thank G-d I have a husband, who loves me and cares for me, and he has a job he loves, and works hard. (Sure, speak to him about coming home on time, but choose what you will focus on).

When your mother or father call you for help, instead of saying to yourself: Oy, my entire life must revolve around her needs, say instead: Thank G-d I have parents.

When you come into the office and you experience overload, with 90 emails to respond to, six different options for future growth, tell yourself: Thank G-d I have a job, I have six different options, I have so much to do, I am busy and productive, and I am driven.

When your wife rebukes you for your mistakes, instead of thinking, why do I need someone who criticized me? Say to yourself: I am so grateful to I have a wife who cares about me so deeply.

When your kids or grandkids make a “balagan” in your home and turn the place upside down, don’t zoom in exclusively on the mess; rather focus on the fact that you have children and grandchildren who are filled with good spirit.

When your car breaks down and you must get it towed, instead of cursing your lot, say to yourself: I own a car. That puts me in the one percent bracket superior to most humans on this planet.

An Appetite

Chassidim tell a story about the holy Reb Zusha of Anipoli. When he was a child, he often went hungry. But he was always thankful. Once, when he was really hungry, someone overheard him talking to G-d. This is what he said: G-d, I want to thank you so much for giving me an appetite!

Even the hunger he experienced as something that can exist only in the context of a blessing. G-d gave me an appetite.

Gratitude Even As I Don’t Get It

I do not comprehend the reason and purpose of so much of what is going on in our world; it is much larger than our brains. The pain we are all feeling is visceral and profound; it is the pain of peoplehood, of being part of a singular organism challenged to its core. How can I show up best in such a situation? How can I remain anchored in hope, faith, and courage? How can I, and each of us, become a beacon of light, love, and strength?

Rachel teaches us, by choosing to live in a space of gratitude, because that allows us to remain anchored in the source of all life, love, and strength, not get washed away by the tides of anger, frustration, and madness. My heart swells with gratitude to the majestic people of Israel, to my people, my brothers and sisters who are so holy and good; toward the loved ones in my life who are Divine gifts; to my inner soul which has so much light and love. And, finally, gratitude for the privilege of being a conduit for Hashem’s truth, strength, and clarity.

from: **Rabbi Efrem Goldberg** <reg@brsonline.org> date: Nov 22, 2023, 8:55 PM subject: Davening For Soldiers. . . |

DAVENING FOR SOLDIERS DOESN’T CONFLICT WITH FAITH IN HASHEM

BY RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG

For the last month and a half, nobody I know has slept through the night.

Certainly, those in Israel, especially those married to soldiers, and those who are parents or siblings of soldiers are perpetually restless, on edge, anxious, and concerned. But in truth, all of us, the Jewish people around the world, can’t rest comfortably, we can’t settle into a deep sleep while our people are at war, while our family members, direct and extended, are on the front lines, risking their lives, fighting an evil enemy, laying it all on the line to protect the Jewish people and the Jewish homeland. We are comforted by the knowledge that our soldiers’ faith, resolve, tenacity, determination, moral clarity, and sense of mission are unparalleled, but it is only natural to remain concerned and worried nonetheless.

These ordinary soldiers and reservists are in fact extraordinary and special people. They are motivated and inspired not by simple patriotism and nationalism, but by a deep sense of conviction that we are a people of an illustrious history and a distinct destiny. The IDF’s soldiers are well-trained, well-armed, and well informed. They are skilled professionals with a military superiority, but the images, videos and reports from the front lines tell of soldiers who know that the secret to their victory is not in their weapons or intelligence. In fact, it is not in their hands, but it is in their hearts, their souls, and pouring out of their mouths. The clips of IDF bombings and operations are powerful, but they pale in comparison to the power of the clips of soldiers putting on Tefillin, asking for tzitzis, praying, singing, dancing, and proclaiming al tirah Yisrael, don’t be afraid Israel, ein lanu al mi l’hishaein elah al Avinu She’bashamayim, we have nobody to lean on other than our Father in Heaven, anachnu ma’aminim b’nei ma’aminim, we are believers the children of believers.

Our soldiers know and feel that the wind at their backs, the spiritual iron dome over their heads, are the heartfelt prayers on their behalf being uttered nonstop by all of us, their brothers and sisters around the world who love them, cherish them, admire them, and feel boundless gratitude to them.

To deny the potency, power, and effectiveness of Torah and Tefilla as an indispensable part of any military victory is to deny a basic foundation of our faith. Ultimately, every area of our lives, certainly our national safety and well-being is dictated from Above and is in the hands of Hashem. There must be no doubt that our davening, our learning, our merits have meaning, they matter, they make a difference. Just as we know it is not the doctor nor the surgeon who heals, but it is Hashem. It is not the lawyer who makes the winning argument or the earthly judge who decides, but true justice is served by the Heavenly Judge. It is not the businessperson or entrepreneur who closes the deal, but it is the Senior Partner of every endeavor, Hashem. And it is not the soldier who wins the war, but the true General, the Master of all Legions, the Ribono Shel Olam. Living with Emunah and Bitachon, tenets of our faith, means recognizing and living this axiomatic truth, recognizing that

we live in a matrix of illusion, while the reality of everything comes from Hashem.

Of course, simultaneously, it is also true that we don't passively wait to be healed, we don't sit on the couch waiting for money to fall from the sky, we search out the best doctor and we take initiative to earn an income.

Excessive effort with no faith in Hashem is heresy, but claiming to rely on faith without making any legitimate effort is not genuine faith.

Chazal say harbei sheluchim l'Makom, Hashem has many agents and messengers. We must always remember that He is guiding their hand and outcome. But, while Hashem gives the talent and strength, the shliach, the agent still puts in the effort and energy to use it and is deserving of our most basic hakaras ha'tov, our gratitude and appreciation. During a loved one's surgery we daven and pour out our heart to Hashem. And when it is a success we thank Him, but we have never been concerned that showing appropriate appreciation to the doctor is a contradiction to knowing that Hashem is the one who guided his hand. Just the opposite, failing to recognize the doctor's critical role is its own denial of Hashem's hand. We daven that the lawyer find the right words and that the judge come to a favorable conclusion. But we have never felt finding the best representation or preparing diligently for a case somehow contradicts the reality and truth that Hashem is the real Judge whose opinion and conclusion is the one that truly matters. In every area of our lives, we seek to strike the balance between hishtadlus, our initiative and effort, with bitachon, trust and faith. We see them not as a contradiction or source of confusion, but two complementary, critical elements of a Jew's life.

During this urgent time, with Am Yisroel at war, it is no different. The brave soldiers of the IDF represent our people's initiative, they are the shlichei Hashem fighting this milchemes mitzvah to defend the Jewish people. Remarkably, overwhelmingly, they practice their initiative powered by profound emunah and bitachon, both theirs and ours.

This combination, the relationship of initiative and faith, has always been evident in our attitude to war. Commenting on the words, וְלִזְבוּלֹן אָמַר שְׂמֵחַ וְזָבֻלֹן בְּצִאתָם וְיִשָּׁשָׁר בְּאֵהָלָיו: עֲמִים הָרַקְלָאוּ שָׁם יִזְבְּחוּ וְזָבֻלֹן אָמַר, "And of Zebulun he said: rejoice, O Zevulun, on your journeys, And Yissachar, in your tents, they invite their kin to the mountain, where they offer sacrifices of success," the Chassam Sofer (Toras Moshe) comments: It can be explained that we find that Shmuel and Shaul, when they went out to war, before going out, they would offer a sacrifice for protection... And when it says, 'Rejoice, Zevulun, in your going out to war, for Yissachar in your tents,' it means Zevulun's success at war will come in the merit of Yissachar's learning in the tents."

Soldiers who fight absent Am Yisroel davening and learning cannot be successful. But it is also true that Am Yisroel learning and davening without soldiers fighting and protecting them cannot survive. Yaakov Avinu prepared in three ways to defeat Esav, including diplomacy, preparing militarily, and davening. Dovid HaMelech, the very author of the Tehillim we passionately recite, also led an army with generals and soldiers, as did the Jewish Kings we find throughout Tanach.

The Chiddushei HaRim of Ger, Rav Yitzchak Meir Alter, points out that we are called Yehudim after Yehudah specifically because we as a nation are to be characterized by an ever-present sense of gratitude, by an appreciation first and foremost of Hashem, but also of His loyal agents and emissaries who carry out His will. There must be enough room in our hearts and on our lips to express gratitude to all. We must be grateful to those making spiritual contributions, to those storming the Heavens, and certainly to those making extreme sacrifices, our incredible soldiers who take the ultimate risks and an army who are moseir nefesh for our people.

Loving soldiers, davening for them, showing appreciating to them has always been the Torah way, it is the example our gedolim have set, and it is the responsibility we bear at this time, something that should be obvious and intuitive. In 2005, Rav Simcha HaKohen Kook and the Bostoner Rebbe of Yerushalayim made an urgent call to have every active soldier partnered in solidarity with someone davening for their safety. They launched the "Elef

Lamatch, Elef Lamatch" campaign based on a Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah) that says for every thousand Jewish soldiers that went to fight, one thousand who remained behind matched with them and davened and learned on their behalf.

In the introduction to the third volume of Tzitz Eliezer, Rav Waldenberg writes:

A shudder runs through my entire body when I think about that terrible period of the birth of the state... We the residents of Jerusalem in particular were cut off without any connection with the other cities and surrounded by enemies in the soul, who are passionate and busy as we were driven out to swallow us... There wasn't a neighborhood that wasn't hit and there wasn't a street where victims didn't fall... Glory and praise to our heroic soldiers who sacrificed their lives to fight like lions for the conquest of our holy land from foreigners and for the establishment of our state with the face of a lion, their face like deer on the mountains to hurry and with God's help were the messengers of the Supreme Providence to carry out This historic mission, God will remember those who fell in the fulfillment of their holy mission and will enshrine in memory the glory and eternity of those who are alive with us today.

Rav Shach, during a visit with soldiers to his home, expressed gratitude to them, emphasizing "that you are esteemed, important people and you provide excellent protection of the Land of Israel." He thanked them for their actions and acknowledged their contribution, stating that he stands before them in great appreciation.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz (1912-1979), the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir once said: "The Gemara (Bava Basra 10b) says about those that gave their lives defending Lod, no creature can stand in their place. It is because they sacrificed their lives for Israel. I say the same about those who sacrifice themselves for our salvation. The entire world cannot stand in their place. The obligation upon us to pray for them is boundless because, as our Sages said, 'One who opens for his friend, his soul is obligated to him.' All the more so for one who sacrifices his life for us. The obligation upon us is boundless." Rav Yitzchak Brand described that during the Six Day War, he witnessed Rav Chaim Shmulevitz stand before each soldier he saw in appreciation for their mesirus nefesh to save the Jewish people. And Rav Yisroel Lau relates how no less a Gadol Hador than Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l, when asked about traveling to daven at Kivrei Tzadikim, would respond, "In order to pray at the graves of tzadikim, one doesn't have to travel up to the Galil. Whenever I feel the need to pray at the graves of tzadikim, I go to Mount Herzl, [the national cemetery for fallen IDF soldiers in Jerusalem], to the graves of the soldiers... who fell 'Al Kiddush Hashem' for the sanctification of G-d."

In 1980, at the 6th Knessiah Gedolah of Agudas Yisroel, a special Kayl Maleh was recited for Chayalei Tzahal, the soldiers of the IDF who gave their lives al Kiddush Hashem. It was said in the presence of Rav Shach, The Gerrer Rebbe, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky, Rav Ruderman, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, the Slonimer Rebbe, the Modzitzer Rebbe, and the Biala Rebbe who all stood and honored the fallen soldiers.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein related that once when he returned to America and was visiting with his father-in-law, Rav Soloveitchik, he posed a series of questions from students who were serving in the IDF. One student worked in the tanks division and his job was cleaning out and maintaining the tanks. Often his uniform got covered in oil and grime and he wanted to know if he needed to change before davening Mincha, something that would be terribly inconvenient and difficult. The Rav looked at Rav Lichtenstein and wondered out loud, "Why would he need to change? He is wearing bigdei kodesh (holy clothing)."

Rav Yitzchak Yosef, the current Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, said, "One must express gratitude that we are here in Eretz Yisroel, that we can sit and fulfill mitzvos, each as they want. If we didn't have security forces, if we didn't have soldiers could we sit in quiet and study Torah, could we educate our children?! What was here before eighty years, there was nothing,

Hashem helps through them, they are shlichim of Hashem and in their merit do we sit and fulfill mitzvos and study Torah. We must be grateful.”

During the Yom Kippur War, a soldier approached the holy rebbe, the Bais Yisroel of Ger z”l and shared that the soldiers are extremely cold during the night in the north. The Bais Yisroel wished him well and gave him a bracha that he should return whole. That Sukkos, the young Gerrer student appointed to help the Rebbe heard the Bais Yisroel knocking on the door to his own home, unable to get in. The “hoiz buchir” unlocked the door and the rebbe apologized to him and explained, “The key is metal and my hands are extremely cold. I tried lifting it but I just couldn’t.” The Sukkos weather was actually rather pleasant so the young man asked why the Rebbe’s hand was cold. The Rebbe explained, ever since the soldier told me it’s cold in the north and the soldiers are freezing, I have been feeling so cold.

When the First Lebanon War broke out, Rabbi Yisroel Zev Gustman declared that it was a milchemes mitzvah and later announced that since Jews were fighting on the front, every yeshiva student must sleep at night like soldiers, meaning a few hours and with shoes as if they were on the front lines, and not to waste even a minute.

Klal Yisroel has children literally putting their lives on the line every day to protect all of us. Their service involves sleepless nights, stormy weather, parents who don’t hear from their children for days, wives who have no idea if their husband will ever make it home, children who yearn for their fathers and live in constant fear, loss of life, severe injuries, and the strong risk of all of it. This is what faces our soldiers and their families daily and it is frightening.

If we want those whose service to the Klal right now is through learning Torah to understand the urgency of the moment and how essential their role is to Klal Yisrael’s protection, now is the time for yeshivas to consider a call for no more off shabbosim until the war is over. Maybe those who can should eliminate bein hasdorim, breaks during the day, and all should limit their breaks for coffee. Of course the yeshiva students are diligent and are no doubt having proper intentions in learning as a merit for the safety and security of the IDF and the people of Israel. But what are they doing, what are we doing, to really feel עמו אנכי בצרה, we feel the pain of our brothers?

Our soldiers and their families are being moseir nefesh for our cause, are we doing our part to leave our comfort zone, push ourselves, maximize our time and efforts to make our contribution? Our soldiers are living in unimaginably limited ways, are we minimally adopting limitations on our lives to at least be nosei b’ol, feel the plight and pain and discomfort of our brothers and sisters?

I was talking to a friend from our community this week and he mentioned in passing that he hasn’t had chocolate since the war started. Each time he has a craving and is tempted to indulge, he reminds himself of the conditions the soldiers are living in and decides he can forgo a pleasure as a small way of feeling their pain.

What adjustments are we making to our lives and routines to reflect that for so many of our people, nothing is normal? Will we really indulge in an elaborate vacation during Yeshiva Week this year while a war rages for our people, or will we mute our vacation and recreation as a way of demonstrating a connection with those who haven’t had a moment off since this began? Do our simchas reflect our condition or do they carry on as if no existential threat faces our people? Can we complain about petty discomforts or inconveniences while members of our family are sleeping on the floor, outdoors under trees, fighting not only our enemies, but the elements like bitter cold and rain?

Passing up on a piece of chocolate or forgoing an elaborate vacation or business as usual simcha may not directly eliminate Hamas, but it does connect us to our people, helps us resonate with their conditions, and powers us to pour it into heartfelt tefillos, and that makes all the difference in the world. Nothing gets a parent’s attention or response more than children caring about one another and feeling each other’s pain.

The lives of our precious soldiers and of all our brothers and sisters in Israel has been interrupted and severely disrupted. Those contributing from within

the walls of the Beis Medrash, and all of us wherever we are with whatever we have to offer, must push ourselves to the limit as well. We cannot carry on in ordinary ways during these extraordinary times.

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Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Zt”l

The Character of Yaakov

What kind of man was Jacob? This is the question that cries out to us in episode after episode of his life. The first time we hear a description of him he is called ish tam: a simple, quiet, plain, straightforward man. But that is exactly what he seems not to be. We see him taking Esau’s birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup. We see him taking Esau’s blessing, in borrowed clothes, taking advantage of their father’s blindness.

These are troubling episodes. We can read them midrashically. The Midrash makes Jacob all-good and Esau all-bad. It rereads the biblical text to make it consistent with the highest standards of the moral life. There is much to be said for this approach.

Alternatively we could say that in these cases the end justifies the means. In the case of the birthright, Jacob might have been testing Esau to see if he really cared about it. Since he gave it away so readily, Jacob might be right in concluding that it should go to one who valued it. In the case of the blessing, Jacob was obeying his mother, who had received a Divine oracle saying that “the older shall serve the younger.”

Yet the text remains disturbing. Isaac says to Esau, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.” Esau says, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob [supplanter]? He has supplanted me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Such accusations are not levelled against any other biblical hero.

Nor does the story end there. In this week’s parsha a similar deceit is practiced on him. After his wedding night, he discovers that he has married Leah, not, as he thought, his beloved Rachel. He complains to Laban:

“What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?”

Gen. 29:25 Laban replies: “It is not done in our place to give the younger before the firstborn.”

Gen. 29:26 It’s hard not to see this as precise measure-for-measure retribution. The younger Jacob pretended to be the older Esau. Now the elder Leah has been disguised as the younger Rachel. A fundamental principle of biblical morality is at work here: As you do, so shall be done to you.

Yet the web of deception continues. After Rachel has given birth to Joseph, Jacob wants to return home. He has been with Laban long enough. Laban urges him to stay and tells him to name his price. Jacob then embarks on an extraordinary course of action. He tells Laban he wants no wages at all. Let Laban remove every spotted or streaked lamb from the flock, and every streaked or spotted goat. Jacob will then keep, as his hire, any new born spotted or streaked animals.

It is an offer that speaks simultaneously to Laban’s greed and his ignorance. He seems to be getting Jacob’s labour for almost nothing. He is demanding no wages. And the chance of unspotted animals giving birth to spotted offspring seems remote.

Jacob knows better. In charge of the flocks, he goes through an elaborate procedure involving peeled branches of poplar, almond, and plane trees, which he places with their drinking water. The result is that they do in fact produce streaked and spotted offspring.

How this happened has intrigued not only the commentators (who mostly assume that it was a miracle, God’s way of assuring Jacob’s welfare) but also scientists. Some argue that Jacob must have had an understanding of genetics. Two unspotted sheep can produce spotted offspring. Jacob had doubtless noticed this in his many years of tending Laban’s flocks. Others have suggested that prenatal nutrition can have an epigenetic effect – that is, it can cause a certain gene to be expressed which might not have been otherwise. Had the peeled branches of poplar, almond, and plane trees been

added to the water the sheep drank, they might have affected the Agouti gene that determines the colour of fur in sheep and mice.[1]

However it happened, the result was dramatic. Jacob became rich: In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.

Gen. 30:43 Inevitably, Laban and his sons felt cheated. Jacob sensed their displeasure, and – having taken counsel with his wives and being advised to leave by God Himself – departs while Laban is away sheep-shearing. Laban eventually discovers that Jacob has left, and pursues him for seven days, catching up with him in the mountains of Gilead.

The text is fraught with accusation and counter-accusation. Laban and Jacob both feel cheated. They both believe that the flocks and herds are rightfully theirs. They both regard themselves as the victim of the other's deceitfulness. The end result is that Jacob finds himself forced to run away from Laban as he was earlier forced to run away from Esau, in both cases in fear of his life. So the question returns. What kind of man was Jacob? He seems anything but an ish tam, a straightforward man. And surely this is not the way for a religious role model to behave – in such a way that first his father, then his brother, then his father-in-law, accuse him of deceit. What kind of story is the Torah telling us in the way it narrates the life of Jacob?

One way of approaching an answer is to look at a specific character – often a hare, or in African-American tradition, “Brer Rabbit” – in the folktales of oppressed people. Henry Louis Gates, the American literary critic, has argued that such figures represent “the creative way the slave community responded to the oppressor's failure to address them as human beings created in the image of God.” They have “a fragile body but a deceptively strong mind.” Using their intelligence to outwit their stronger opponents, they are able to deconstruct and subvert, in small ways, the hierarchy of dominance favouring the rich and the strong. They represent the momentary freedom of the unfree, a protest against the random injustices of the world.[2]

That, it seems to me, is what Jacob represents in this, the early phase of his life. He enters the world as the younger of two twins. His brother is strong, ruddy, hairy, a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, whereas Jacob is quiet, a scholar. Then he must confront the fact that his father loves his brother more than him. Then he finds himself at the mercy of Laban, a possessive, exploitative, and deceptive figure who takes advantage of his vulnerability. Jacob is the man who – as almost all of us do at some time or other – finds that life is unfair.

What Jacob shows, by his sheer quick-wittedness, is that the strength of the strong can also be their weakness. So it is when Esau comes in exhausted from the hunt, famished, that he is willing to impulsively trade his birthright for some soup. So it is when the blind Isaac is prepared to bless the son who will bring him venison to eat. So it is when Laban hears the prospect of getting Jacob's labour for free. Every strength has its Achilles' heel, its weakness, and this can be used by the weak to gain victory over the strong. Jacob represents the refusal of the weak to accept the hierarchy created by the strong. His acts are a form of defiance, an insistence on the dignity of the weak (vis-a-vis Esau), the less loved (by Isaac), and the refugee (in Laban's house). In this sense he is one element of what, historically, it has been like to be a Jew.

But the Jacob we see in these chapters is not the figure whom, ultimately, we are called on to emulate. We can see why. Jacob wins his battles with Esau and Laban but at the cost of eventually having to flee in fear of his life. Quick-wittedness is merely a temporary solution.

It is only later, after his wrestling match with the angel, that he receives a new name – that is, a new identity – as Israel, “because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” As Israel he is unafraid to contend with people face-to-face. He no longer needs to outwit them by clever but ultimately futile stratagems. His children will eventually become the people whose dignity lies in the unbreakable covenant they make with God.

Yet we can see something of Jacob's early life in one of the most remarkable features of Jewish history. For almost two thousand years Jews were looked

down on as pariahs, yet they refused to internalise that image, just as Jacob refused to accept the hierarchies of power or affection that condemned him to be a mere second-best. Jews throughout history, like Jacob, have relied not on physical strength or material wealth but on qualities of the mind.

In the end, though, Jacob must become Israel. For it is not the quick-witted victor but the hero of moral courage who stands tall in the eyes of humanity and God.

from: TorahWeb torahweb@torahweb.org ate: Nov 23, 2023, 7:05 PM
subject: Rabbi Mayer Twersky: Rallying for Israel - The Halachic Perspective

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

Rallying for Israel - The Halachic Perspective[1]

Hashem runs the world.[2]

The Torah guarantees that whenever we repent and cry out wholeheartedly, He answers our prayers.[3]

These realities and fundamentals of faith notwithstanding, it is a sacred, categorical obligation that (in addition to prayer) we also vigorously defend ourselves by natural means. Specifically, we are obligated to defend ourselves militarily and diplomatically.

This episode (of Ya'akov's encounter with Esau) . . . teaches us that he (the patriarch Ya'akov) did not (passively) rely on his righteousness; instead, he exerted himself to the maximum in pursuing all avenues of rescue. What transpired between Ya'akov and Esau foretells what will happen throughout history between us and the descendants of Esau; in its detailed account of Ya'akov's actions the Torah provides a blueprint for future generations. We ought to emulate our righteous forebearer and prepare ourselves for prayer, diplomacy (literally, sending gifts), and war, to escape and be rescued. Our Sages have already recognized this eternal lesson, as I shall subsequently mention. (Ramban, introduction to Bereishis, 32:4)[4]

Everyone recognizes that the support of the United States in Israel's defensive, existential war against Hamas is crucial. America provides vital armaments and billions of dollars of financial aid; additionally, it serves as a bulwark against international pressure. Everyone also knows that it is imperative to demonstrate widespread support amongst the electorate for such support. Tuesday's rally did just that.

We are not more deserving or righteous than Ya'akov; we too must exert ourselves to the maximum in pursuing avenues of rescue. Indubitably, Tuesday's rally comprised one aspect of that effort.

Without unstinting American support, there is a very real danger that, ר"ל, the IDF will be constrained in a way that presently endangers our soldiers and, in the future, endangers the civilian population in the State of Israel. Rallying to sustain and expand such support was thus unquestionably also a fulfillment of (Vayikra 19:16), "לא תעמד על דם רעך" ("Do not stand idly while your friend's blood is spilled").

At the rally religious and not yet religious Jews stood side by side. Jews who believe and those who do not yet believe stood shoulder to shoulder. The existential threat in 1967 similarly galvanized Jews from across the spectrum. (In fact, in 1967 all Yeshiva students participated in the rally.) Wonderful! If only all Jews already appreciated the gift of Torah and were believers and religious. Tragically, that is not yet the case. In the interim it is wonderful that myriads of Jews, to a degree, embraced their identity and shared destiny and overwhelmingly came to support the Jewish people, their people.

Of course, we can never act or speak in a way that legitimizes or validates inauthentic forms of Yahadus (Judaism), which is why in some other contexts inter-denominational activities are proscribed. Attending the political rally, however, simply expressed unwavering support for our brethren in the State of Israel in their battle for survival and security; it clearly did not affirm or validate anyone else's beliefs.

Attending the rally condemned Hamas' savage butchering, massacre, and mutilation of Jews (and some non-Jews) and called for their (Hamas')

eradication; it obviously did not endorse any aspect of the program, the choice of speakers, their respective beliefs or lifestyles.

The prophetic verse (Zechariah 4:6), "לא בחיל ולא בכח כי אִם־בְּרוּחִי אֶמֶר יְהוָה" ("neither with army troops nor with strength rather with My spirit, said Hashem Tzevakos"), narrowly refers to the building of the second Temple. Even as a figure of speech it is irrelevant and inapplicable in the present context wherein our מסורה (tradition) demands that we exert ourselves to the maximum in pursuing all avenues of rescue.

May Hashem answer our prayer יכרתו עמך מהרה יכרתו (May all evil instantaneously perish and all Your nation's enemies be speedily excised) and may there be no need for any further rallies.

[1] An edited transcript of remarks delivered to students in Yeshiva University on November 16, 2023. A slightly expanded Hebrew version, קראו עצרה, is also available.

[2] "אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו הוא בורא ומנהיג לכל הברואים והוא "לבדו עשה ועושה ויעשה לכל המעשים"

כי מי גוי גדול אשר לו אלהים קרבים אליו כיהוה אלהינו בכל קראנו אליו" (דברים ד:ז). " אבל צבור כל זמן שעושים תשובה וצועקים בלב שלם הם נענים שנאמר כה' אלהינו בכל (קראנו אליו) (רמב"ם הל' תשובה ב:ו)

נכתבה הפרשה הזאת . . . ללמדנו עוד שהוא לא בטח בצדקתו והשתדל בהצלה בכל יכלתו. ויש בה עוד רמז לדורות כי כל אשר אירע לאבינו עם עשו אחיו יארע לנו תמיד עם בני עשו, וראוי לנו לאחז בדרכו של צדיק שנזמין עצמנו לשלשת הדברים שהזמין הוא את עצמו, לתפלה ולדורון ולהצלה בדרך מלחמה, לברוח ולהנצל, וכבר ראו רבותינו הרמז הזה מן הפרשה הזאת כאשר אזכיר

See also ibid. 33:15:

Our sages discerned (in Ya'akov's response) (normative) counsel. They related that R. Yanai, before traveling to intercede with the (Roman) government, would study this section (of the Torah) . . . because our Sages had a tradition that this section teaches the *modus vivendi* in exile. When R. Yanai would travel to the royal court in Rome, he would (first) study this section to follow the counsel of the sagacious elder, because all generations look to him to follow his example.

ורבותינו ראו עוד בזה עצה, אמרו (ב"ר עז טו) רבי ינאי כד היה סליק למלכותא היה מסתכל בהדא פרשתא וכו'. מפני שהיתה קבלה בידם שזו פרשת גלות. כשהיה בא ברומה בחצר מלכי אדום על עסקי הצבור היה מסתכל בפרשה זו ללכת אחרי עצת הזקן החכם, כי ממנו יראו הדורות וכן יעשו

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<https://dusiznies.blogspot.com/2023/11/must-listen-rabbi-wein-on-dc-rally-frum.html>

Rabbi Berel Wein

Talmid: So a lot of the guys are talking about ... attending the rally , that said, I think (that people shouldn't go to the rally) because of the agenda of the people involved (in the rally) Rabbi Wein:there were rallies for Soviet Jewry and ... the only reason that the Soviet Jews got out was because there were rallies... The agenda is that Jewish people in America are being persecuted.. .. The gemaarah says that when it is a milchemes mitzva even a Chassan at his Chuppah has to go, everybody goesyou know if we don't win this there won't be any "sedarim" Talmid: Despite the fact there was a Reform Rabbi getting up (speaking) or Rabbi Wein: That battle is not with reform anymore, that battle is not with reform anymore, that battle is over ...your fighting the 18th century all over again.... it is obvious that reform is gone! hat difference does it make? American Jewry is gone and now "omdm aleinu" you won't be able to walk the streets in Chicago and New York... Talmid:I think they said that there were about 300,000 but I suppose it obviously could have been a lot more than that Rabbi Wein: It should have been more. A Mazel it was 300,000. ..You have 5 million Jews in America and you only had 300,000? That shows how weak we are! Part of it is that they are convinced that the goyim don't mean them, and they will manage to ride it out., that is very shortsighted. The lack of perspective of the past and of the future and all those guys weren't alive at the Holocaust, I was and they don't remember what it looked like in 1946 after the war when a Jew in America couldn't raise his head They don't remember What Eretz Yisrael did for us!

Talmid: If you don't learn history you are bound to repeat it? Rabbi Wein You don't have to repeat it, You just don't have a perspective of what is going on You do things that are counter productive to you and that's how we got into this mess today because Israel didn't they knew there is no hope, they knew Oslo was wrong, but they like to kick the can down then road until you can't anymore ... The middas hadin was pogeiah. ... We are always worried that we have to "recognize them " we don't have to recognize them anymore its been 200 year gone already... Reb Yisrael Salanter said when reform started, he said that the Chasam Sofer put them all in Chierim he said that if it was up to me I would have put a Bais Medrash in every reform temple. You are not allowed to talk to them.... so if you are not allowed to talk to then what do you expect from them? The only one who had anything to do with them was the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Talmid: In what way? Rabbi Wein: Chabad will go into a reform temple. If ..would go into a reform temple they would also have an influence. This war in Israel has made more Jews.... traditional.. I cannot measure tzidkis but the country became traditional ...there is Shabbos and Yom Tov and Kosher... 80% of Americans are eating Neiveilis and treifis and here everything is kosher and here is where its no good (sarcastically) because it's not MY kosher?..I don't get it I just don't get it

My rabbaim were not like that. I remember my rebbe Rav Mendel Kaplan z"l who certainly was no Zionist so when Ben Gurion came to Chicago in the Stevens Hotel selling Israel Bonds [in 1951], he went down there to see it and the next day in the shiur he said "you know what I saw? I saw the Bnei Avraham give money " So I come from a different cheder. I cant relate to it. Rabbi wein: ...Everything can happen that is what this war taught us, that everything can happen, they can burn your baby in front of your eyes, everything that is written in Parshas Nitzavim Happened We learn Chumash but we don't believe in it we don't think that the chumash actually meant it "veyisam meshugah me'mareh amecha" we don't believe it.

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

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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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT VAYETZE

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

SOMETHING TO LOSE SLEEP OVER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YAAKOV HAS A DREAM

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

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

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

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

DIVINE IDENTIFICATION & 'BECHIRA' CONFIRMATION

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

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

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

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

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

DIVINE RE-ASSURANCE

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

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

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

YAAKOV'S REACTION [and REALIZATION]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YAAKOV'S NEDER

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

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

A PREDICTION - or A RESOLUTION!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY YAAKOV IS DIFFERENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY CONDITIONAL?

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

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

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

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

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

IF OR WHEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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

RELATED TOPICS

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

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

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

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

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

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The classical commentators tackle this question in their commentaries.

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

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

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

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

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

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B. BET-EL / A SPIRITUAL INTERSECTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

C. BET-EL & BET ELOKIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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