

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 12 #7, December 6-7, 2024; 6 Kislev 5785; Vayeitze 5785

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

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

As Israel's primary focus turns from Hamas to the evils of Iran, Gaza, Hezbollah, and their allies, we pray that Hashem will protect us during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the cease fire with Lebanon start us on the road to peace.

We first meet Yaakov as a master of deception who withholds food from his twin brother Esav until he agrees to sell his birthright to Yaakov. Later, Yaakov pretends to be Esav to receive his brother's bracha from their father. In Lavan's home, he trades deception back and forth with his father-in-law. By the end of the parsha, however, Yaakov learns to fight his own battles. He fights Esav's angel directly (without cheating), rebukes Lavan for cheating him for twenty years, and goes on to meet Esav directly to apologize for his earlier deception and to give back the gains from taking the birthright. Yaakov's growth in personal midot (values and behavior) is more obvious than that of Avraham or Yitzhak. The Torah represents our Avot as real humans, showing their positive and negative sides. Each of the Avot grows in mitzvot over his life and becomes a role model for Jews for all time.

At both the beginning and end of the parsha, Yaakov has dreams involving ladders. Rabbi David Fohrman observes that the language helps us see connections between the Tower of Babel and Yaakov's ladders. The people of Shinar use the technology of their time to build a tower, hopefully to reach the sky and bring their values (and legacy) to heaven. Yaakov's ladders bring angels down to earth and back up to heaven. Once Yaakov rids himself of his deceptive past and becomes a straight man of God ("Yisrael"), the angels move horizontally, between Canaan and Paddan Aram, and Yaakov merits to meet the angels directly. Where the people of Shinar try unsuccessfully to take their values to heaven, the ladder shows that Yaakov becomes able to connect heaven and earth – worthy of following his father and grandfather in bringing Hashem's values to people on earth. In this way, Yisrael, Yaakov's new name, becomes the father of our people, and we become B'Nai Yisrael.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the Haftorah, from Hosea, reminds us that despite our sins, Hashem forgives us when we do teshuvah. Despite our exile at various times, and continued struggles with our enemies, God protects us. We have seen this protection for nearly eighty years since the founding of Israel – countless times when Israel defeats the combined forces of our enemies, even when the science of warfare claims that doing so is impossible. Early evidence of Hashem's protection comes from Yaakov starting with nothing but his faith and later going to Egypt with a family of seventy children and grandchildren, the beginning of B'Nai Yisrael. Recent evidence comes from many refugees from the Nazis who start with essentially nothing in the late 1940s and now have several dozen children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. The large families from the survivors of the Holocaust constitute our revenge to Hitler and his gang of murderers.

The Torah provides the origin of many of the enemies of our people. Yishmael is the father of the Arabs, our major enemies in recent years. Esav's grandson Amalek is a major enemy during Biblical times, and his descendants (Edom), the Romans and then Europeans, have been our enemies and murderers for much of the past two thousand years. Rabbi Lam reminds us that Lavan could have been a hero for the Jews, because he is the grandfather of all of Yaakov's children, all the Jews. However, instead of cherishing and supporting his grandchildren, Lavan cheats his daughters and son-in-law – and becomes the great villain of the Haggadah, one of the worst villains in our history.

We Jews are close to the smallest of all identifiable groups, yet we are the ones who persist. God tells us that the Jews will always be a tiny nation but will always be here. We must claim who we are and see that our grandchildren remain Jewish. I started learning this lesson from my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, more than fifty years ago, and I proudly teach it to my own children to transmit to their children and grandchildren.

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 Shlema for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, 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

Haftarat Parshat Vayetzei: God's Unending Love

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5785 (2024)

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftorah this week in loving memory of Staff Sergeant Zamir Burke z"l, a graduate of our Robert M. Beren Machanaim Hesder Yeshiva, who fell in battle in northern Gaza, protecting our people and our land. Our hearts ache for Zamir's family. May his memory be a blessing.

Despite variations in the choice of verses, all traditions – Ashkenazim, Sefaradim, and Teimanim – read from the closing chapters of Hoshea for the haftorah of Parshat Vayetzei. Taken together, these traditions give us the opportunity to hear the message of the prophet Hoshea, the first of the minor prophets, in addition to identifying the connection to our parsha.

What is most striking about Hoshea's prophecies is the juxtaposition of his stern rebuke of the people alongside his belief in God's unyielding love for them. The prophet witnesses and bemoans the sinfulness of the people as they demonstrate infidelity to God and injustice to their fellow men and women. *"Ephraim surrounds Me with deceit, the House of Israel with guile"*)Hoshea, 12:1(. Hoshea gives language to God's fury at such behavior: *"Like a bear robbed of her young I attack them, and rip open the casing of their hearts; I will devour them there like a lion, the beasts of the field shall mangle them"*)13:8(. Yet despite the threat of destruction, Hoshea shares with us God's insistence on continuing to love us. *"I will heal their affliction, generously will I take them back in love; for My anger has turned away from them"*)14:5(. This prophetic orientation, insisting on divine love even in the midst of divine disappointment, stands out in Hoshea's prophecies. *"Hosea came to spell out the astonishing fact of God's love for man. God is not only the Lord who demands justice; He is also a God Who is in love with His people."*)Heschel, *The Prophets*, 44(

And in the midst of these prophecies, we meet Yaakov, who also plays a central role in our parsha. In passing, Hoshea mentions Yaakov's flight to Aram, where he worked in order to be granted a wife. As the hook from the haftarah back to the parsha, it is easy to overlook the relevance of the verse within the broader scope of the prophetic message. Hoshea is rebuking the people for their trickery in business, which they deny constitutes real wrongdoing. *"A trader who uses false balances, who loves to overreach. Ephraim thinks, 'I have become rich; I have gotten power! All my gains do not amount to an offense that is real guilt"*)12:8-9(. It is here that God reminds the people of Yaakov, whose story abounds in accusations of trickery, and who is eventually fooled by Lavan into first marrying Leah before wedding Rachel. Here, the people are being reminded that Yaakov, on the heels of fleeing the brother with whom he's had an uneasy relationship, himself becomes the victim of trickery.

Yet all this fits within the broader flow of Hoshea's message – that even in the face of sinfulness, God does not forsake the people, but rather God desires our eventual return. The closing verses of the haftarah make a second appearance on Shabbat Shuva, as Hoshea pleads with us, on God's behalf, to return to God and mend our ways, assuring us that God *"will be like dew to Israel, who will blossom like a lily"*)14:6(. This is the message we need to carry with us – always, and especially in this moment.

God does not forsake us, and God's love for us NEVER expires. Even when we fall short of divine expectations, the door towards return is never shut, and the invitation is never rescinded. It may take seven years of toil or more, but there is always a way back to the all-loving God.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Vayeitzei: The Fools of the World

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2018 (5779)

And Lavan answered and said to Yaakov, "The daughters are my daughters, and the sons are my sons, and the animals are my animals, and all that you see is mine. Now, what would I do to these daughters of mine today, or to their children, whom they have borne?")Breishis 31:42(

Lavan was positioned to be one of the great people of all time. Rochel and Leah were his daughters, and our sages tell us that Bilhah and Zilpah were also his progeny. He was as much a patriarch of the Nation of Israel as Yitzchok Avinu, if not more. All twelve tribes of Israel were his grandchildren. In the end he is one of the most diabolical villains of our history. He gets dishonorable mention in the Haggadah every year as being worse than Pharaoh who wanted to destroy only the males while *"Lavan wanted to uproot everybody."* What went wrong?

The Maharal identifies this as the first and deepest root of anti-Semitism. He explains that there are five generic categories of entities in the universe; 1(Inanimate, 2(Organic-Growing 3(Animal 4(Speaking Human, 5(Israel – Servant of HASHEM. He explains that one group does not cannibalize its own species. Usually a parent wants to protect his young, and in the human world, even grandchildren are revered. However when his daughters became Israel – Servants of HASHEM – then his deep hatred eclipsed his natural paternal love. His children produced a Holy Nation in spite of him, not because of him. He can accept no credit.

In a futuristic story, the Talmud)Avoda Zara 2A-B(tells us of conversation between The Almighty and the nations of the world when the Epoch of the Moshiach will have already dawned. Here it is in an abbreviated form: In the times to come the Holy One, blessed be He, will take a scroll of the Torah in His embrace and proclaim: *"Let him who has occupied himself with this come and take his reward!"* There upon the Kingdom of Edom)Rome(will enter first before Him... The Holy One blessed be He will say to them: *"With what have you occupied yourselves?"*

They will reply: *"O' Lord of the Universe, we have established many market-places, we have erected many baths, we have accumulated much gold and silver, and all this we did only for the sake of Israel that they might have the leisure to occupy themselves with the study of Torah."* The Holy One blessed be He will say in reply: *"Fools of the world, all that you have done, you have only done to satisfy your own desires. You have established marketplaces for the purpose of prostitution, baths to indulge yourselves, and as for the silver and gold they are mine...Are there any amongst you those who have studied Torah?"* They will exit in disgrace.

After Rome has departed Persia enters...And to the question of the Holy One Blessed be He, *"What was your occupation?"* They will answer, *"We have constructed many bridges, conquered many great cities, we were engaged in many great wars, all for the sake of Israel to enable them to study Torah."* The reply to which will be, *"All that was done by you was done for your own sake! Fools of the world, bridges you made for the collection of taxes, cities you conquered to impose labor and as to waging war, I am the Lord of battles...Are there any amongst you who have studied Torah?"*

The Brisker Rav ztl. asked about the truthfulness of this dialogue. These nations are making up a last minute story just to ride on the coattails of the Jewish Nation that did devote itself to Torah study. They're telling lies and making excuses. Why then does The Almighty only refer to them as *"fools of the world?"* They should rather be called what they really are – *"liars."*

In the grand scheme of things, they are really telling the truth. They made bridges and banks that benefited the Jewish People and actually enabled them to study Torah. The reason they are more fittingly titled *"fools"* is because they only failed to have that benefit in mind. Lavan too missed a golden opportunity. Everything was his as he declared. It could have remained his, but such are the **fools of the world**.

* <https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5779-vayeitzei/>

Vayeitzei: God, Money and Ma'aser

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2013

God promises Yaakov many things when God appears to him in the dream of the ladder and the angels: the Land of Israel, future children, Divine protection, and a safe return to his ancestral home. These blessings certainly seem to be extensive and all-encompassing.

It is thus fascinating to see how, when Yaakov arises the next morning and makes a vow to God, he feels a need to translate the promise of God's protection to something more concrete and specific. *"If the Lord is with me and protects me on the path that I am going, and gives me bread to eat and garment to wear..."*)verse 20(. Yaakov is clearly anxious about his well-being, and an abstract promise of protection is not sufficient. He needs to know that he will have what to eat and what to wear. That is how he needs to see this promise playing out.

Yaakov is so anxious, in fact, that he vows God that he will do something in return if God keeps God's promise: "*Then this stone will be a house of God and all the You give me, I will give a tenth to You.*" (20:22). This vow is troubling for it seems that Yaakov is bargaining with God. If you do this for Me, here's what I will do for you. How many of us haven't, when we were younger, made those types of promises and deals with God? "*If You help me pass this test, I promise I'll be nicer to my little brother.*" But as we grow up, most of realize that this is a childish approach to our relationship with God. And yet, here is Yaakov doing exactly that. And to make matters worse, God had already promised this! Doesn't he trust God's promise?

This question intensifies if we read verse 21 in a certain way. After his condition of God giving him food and clothing, verse 21 continues: "*and if I return to my father's house in peace, then Lord shall be for me as a God.*" The question is how to translate the Hebrew vav which connects the first half of this verse with the second. Do we translate it as "*then*" or as "*and if*." To translate it as "*then*" would mean that Yaakov is stipulating that only if God fulfills all the promises, will he accept the Lord as God. Even accepting God is part of the deal!

I do not believe that such a reading is correct. The first words of God's promise are: "*I am the Lord, the God of Avraham your father and Yitzchak.*" Part of the promise is that Yaakov will continue this chain, and God will also be the God of Yaakov. Yaakov, then, is echoing these words back to God. The translation then would be: "*If You, God, do all these things for me, and if You will act as my God...*" or perhaps, even better: "*If You do all these things, then through that You will be acting as my God...*" Read this way, Yaakov is again translating an abstract promise into the specifics that are immediately relevant to him and regarding which he is most anxious.

But what about his bargaining with God. Isn't this a wrong way to act?

Perhaps he isn't bargaining. There is another way of looking at this. First, we must note that by translating the lofty yet abstract promises into something more mundane and concrete, Yaakov is not sullyng them. Quite the contrary. He is bringing God into the world, into the most specific aspects of his life. Yaakov is saying that he will see God's presence, he will see God acting as his God, in all of the successes that he will encounter during this challenging and arduous journey. What is a more religious act than seeing God's help in support in our putting bread on the table and clothes on our back?

What is the proper response to this? How does one acknowledge that God has been there for him? First through words and prayer, and then through actions. The stone will become a place to worship God, and Yaakov will give a tithe of all that he receives. **This is not a deal. It is a proper religious response to God's beneficence.** [emphasis added]

Yaakov is modeling a particular way of relating to our money and our economic success. We must see God in our earning of a living. And we demonstrate that we do by giving a tenth of it back to God. The key word here is "*back*." It is tithed to God because it comes from God. The tithing is not giving God something that God needs. It is our demonstrating to God and, more importantly, ourselves that we recognize this as coming from God.

This theme repeats itself later in the story. When after the first fourteen years of labor, Lavan asks Yaakov to give him his terms for continued employment, Yaakov underscores his own success in tending to Lavan's sheep, and then conflates that with God's role: "*You know how I have worked for you and how your flock have fared with me. For the little you had before I came has grown to much, since the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned.*" (30:29-30). My work brought success, and it was God who was helping me all along.

Similarly, Yaakov invests much effort in attempting to have the sheep give birth to striped and spotted animals according to Lavan's stipulations. And yet, he sees that his success was all due to God: "*And you know*" – he says to Rachel and Leah – "*that I have worked for your father with all my strength... And the Lord did not allow him to do me harm... God has taken away your father's flock and given it to me.*" (31:8-9). It is my effort, but it is God that has been behind it all.

Another dream with angels bookends this story. He reports to Rachel and Leah that he lifted up his eyes and saw in a dream that the sheep were mating in a way that ensured his financial success. This phrase "*lifted up his eyes*" then repeats itself, when he states that an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to lift up his eyes and see the sheep

and their mating. It was God who was behind it all.

Now, the phrase *“lift up your eyes”* occurs many times in the Torah, but it is only here that it appears in the context of a dream, and it does so twice. The use of that term here, I believe, is to tell us not what to see, but how to see. Yaakov is saying, I lifted up my eyes. I was able to see that it was God who was bringing about this success. I was able to have a dream, a dream that disconnects us from our physical reality and gives us another vision of things. A dream that allowed me to see that it was an angel, that it was God, who was making me successful.

This type of seeing is what can motivate us to give a tithe. And if we don’t yet see this way, giving a tithe can help us lift up our eyes, can help cultivate this way of seeing. Giving a tithe is different than just giving tzedakkah. Giving tzedakkah can sometimes make us feel: *“Look how religious I am. Look how generous I am. I am giving from my hard earned money to a religious cause.”* Giving a tithe sends a different message: *“I separate out a tenth of everything I earn because I know that it is not mine. I know that this money is coming from God.”* It teaches us the lesson of the verse: *“For from You is everything. And it is from what we receive from Your hand that we have given to You.”* (Divrei HaYamim I 29:13).

There is a debate whether Yaakov established the principle of tithing, or whether Yitzchak did. Those that argue that it was Yitzchak point to the midrash that states that when Yitzchak reaped a hundred measures of grain, he gave 10 of those measures as a tithe. Now, the tithing certainly more corresponds to the halakhic tithing of grain that applies in the Land of Israel. But to limit our concept of tithing to the narrow halakhic application would be to undermine the power of this as a religious institution which shapes our entire relationship to money, regardless of what form it takes – grain, sheep, or cash. It is Yaakov’s tithing which is explicit in the Torah, not Yitzchak’s. And it is Yaakov’s tithing which teaches us how we can lift up our eyes, how we can see God in all our successes, how God can also be for us as a God.

Shabbat shalom!

From my archives.

Book Review of Dennis Prager: The Rational Bible: Numbers

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Dennis Prager, *The Rational Bible: Numbers* (Regnery Faith, 2024)

Dennis Prager is far better known as a political commentator than a Bible Scholar. Nonetheless, he is animated by his belief in the Torah and its enduring moral messages for humanity. His commentary, as the book’s title suggests, is rooted in a rationalist approach to the Bible.

Whether or not one agrees with all of his politics or individual interpretations of the verses, Prager’s commentary is strikingly relevant when he emphasizes the moral and theological revolution of the Torah and the vitality of its teachings to today’s overly secularized Western world. Rather than serving as bastions of moral teachings and American values, universities are increasingly at the vanguard of attacks against God, the Bible, family values, Israel, and the very notion of an objective morality. Prager pinpoints several of the major differences between the Torah’s morality and the dangerous shortcomings of today’s secular West.

Throughout his commentary, Prager makes his case for belief in God, providence, the divine origins of the Torah, and the eternal power of the Torah’s morality. He also offers a running commentary on the Torah, bringing insights from a variety of scholars and thinkers, as well as from his personal experiences. As in my previous reviews of his volumes on Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy, I will focus exclusively on the former, as it is here that Prager’s commentary makes its greatest contributions.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/review-dennis-prager-genesis>.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/review-dennis-prager-exodus>.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/book-review-dennis-prager-deuteronomy>.

In Numbers chapter 9, several Israelites who are ritually impure approach Moses, wondering how they can bring the Passover sacrifice if they are impure, but feeling excluded if they may not participate in this nationally vital offering. God responds that they may not offer the sacrifice on the usual date since they are impure, but God creates a makeup date one month later so they may participate.

Prager uses this passage as a springboard to discuss the balance between having standards and being compassionate. God upholds the law that ritually impure people must not bring offerings, while compassionately creating a makeup date to include these individuals. Prager laments that *“we live during a time when compassion is frequently regarded as more important than standards. For example, at this time, compassion has led some people to advocate that no students be given a failing grade. But if widely adopted, this would inevitably destroy academic standards.”* If we abandoned the highest physical standards and training for firefighters, more people would die in fires. It is compassionate to have moral standards for society, as everyone benefits.

Western society also must continue to uphold its family standard — promoting the ideal of a nuclear family consisting of a married man and woman and their children. Numerous studies have demonstrated the palpable benefit to the children and society when this standard is met on a widespread level. In the name of compassion toward singles, single-parent homes, and same-sex relationships, many today attempt to eradicate the family standard as the ideal. However, we should instead insist on this standard in the macro, while showing compassion in the micro for the many people who for different reasons do not have a nuclear family (95-97).

Prager explores the central significance of rituals in a different essay. He addresses the frequent but undefined threat of karet, excision, in the Torah for various severe sins. Regardless of God’s method for meting out punishment, Prager focuses on a tangible, human interpretation of karet: One who abandons central rituals cannot transmit our values or identity to the following generations. This is true for Jews and Judaism, and also for American identity. Large sectors of American society are poorly educated in American history and values. For many, Memorial Day is little more than a day off, instead of a day to honor the memories of the members of our armed forces who gave their lives for our country. Columbus Day has all but disappeared. Many schools no longer have their students recite the Pledge of Allegiance at the start of the school day. This widespread abandonment of these and other central American rituals leads many American children to be *“cut off”* from their American identity (98-101).

A seemingly bizarre feature of the Numbers narrative is when the Israelites long for a return to Egypt (e.g., in chapter 11). Although they were indeed fed *“for free”* while in Egypt (11:5), that came at the expense of back-breaking slavery, oppression, and the murder of their infant sons. Prager explains that in fact, most people value free things more than freedom. The Torah teaches that God wants us to be free, but liberty is a value that needs to be taught, rather than a human instinct. Prager cites a study which concludes that more Russians look back upon the Soviet Union with nostalgia, not disdain. This despite the fact that the Soviet Union deprived its citizens of all freedoms, and murdered tens of millions of them. The Torah stresses liberty as a core value. It builds the greatest society, and enables people to grow up and take responsibility for their own lives (116-117).

Miriam and Aaron envied Moses’ exalted level of prophecy (Numbers chapter 12). The rebel Korah insisted that all Israel was equally holy (Numbers chapter 16). Prager explains that healthy envy prods people to work harder to achieve higher levels. Unhealthy envy involves coveting what the other person has, or even harboring a desire to deprive the other of what you do not have yourself.

The Torah insists that all people are created equal, in God’s image. Such equality lies at the heart of the American Revolution. America’s three great values are *“Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”* All people are created equal, but cannot be regarded as equal regardless of what they do. When we view all people or cultures as equal, we fail.

In contrast, the French Revolution was thoroughly secular, and placed at its highest values “*Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.*” The demand for equality of result almost inevitably leads to confiscating money and the pursuit of power. America believed that human rights derive from God. France believed that human rights derive from the state. “*One of the first things the French regime did after the French Revolution was massacre priests and destroy churches. One of the first things America’s first president did was send a note of appreciation to a synagogue.*” Tellingly, the iconic symbol of the American Revolution is the Liberty Bell. The iconic symbol of the French Revolution is the guillotine. When France built the Statue of Liberty, they gave it to America.

“In the twentieth century...more people were murdered, tortured, and deprived of human rights in the name of equality than in the name of anything else. Communism, whose greatest goal was equality, resulted in the murder of more than a hundred million human beings and the enslavement of over a billion.”

Prager concludes that “*Human beings are not, as Korach and modern egalitarians would have it, ‘all equally holy.’ Some people do indeed achieve greater holiness than other people. Holiness is earned through holy, moral, and ethical behavior. Moses earned it. Korach did not*” (130-133, 207-213).

Through these and so many other religious-moral teachings, the Torah was a revolution in world history, and continues to bring relevant, and sorely needed, teaching to the modern world.

* National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during and since 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 during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3295>

Vayeitzei – Living in Joyous Surprise

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

Yakov arrived in Charan to marry and to build the Jewish family. Hashem revealed to him that he would father twelve sons. When Leah, one of Yakov’s four wives, had her fourth child she was overjoyed.

Leah did the math: Twelve sons divided between four wives meant that if all things were equal, she would be blessed to be the mother of three sons. She named her first sons based on various factors. The name Reuvein, her first child, comes from the word, “Reu- See,” the contrast between her firstborn, and Esav, the firstborn of her in-laws. Shimon and Levi were also named after factors in Leah’s life. But when she had her fourth son she was surprised and elated. She named him Yehuda for her feelings of gratitude.

The Talmud (Brachos 7) informs us that “*From the time of creation*” Leah was the first to praise Hashem in this way. It seems that until her time, people went with the flow and took what Hashem gave. Leah, however, introduced the

experience of joyous surprise. Leah lived with hopeful anticipation to be the mother of three sons. When she was blessed in a way that exceeded her expectations, she experienced surprise and overflowing gratitude. She named her son for that feeling based on the word "Odeh," a word which means to praise, thank, and acknowledge. To this day, all of us carry this quality of Yehuda with us, as we are known as "Yehudim- Jews."

The experience of surprise blessing was so powerful for Leah that she introduced a new level of thanks and gratitude. We wonder: Is there something we can do to enable us to access that type of joy in our relationships?

Leah's joy came from her sense of what she could reasonably hope for (three sons). When she exceeded that, she felt surprise and remarkable joy. Similarly, whenever we step out of any feelings of entitlement, we get to see the blessings of our lives with pleasant surprise. The goal is to appreciate life deeply and not take it for granted.

Each morning, we begin the day by reciting Modeh Ani. We can recite these words as a perfunctory statement, or we can recite them with a sense of joyous surprise. In fact, the Medrash (Bireishis Rabboh 14) teaches that each breath we take should be cause to praise Hashem. We can create a sense of delight as we are the recipients of Hashem's gift of life.

Sometimes we may feel that since everyone in our generation seems to have the same blessings, we can take them for granted.

I am reminded of a comment that a Rebbe once made, saying that he was very wealthy. His children looked at him befuddled by the comment. Did Father mean that he was wealthy in a physical, financial way? Rebbe explained, "Yes, *I am very wealthy. I have a home with 4 bedrooms, two floors, bathrooms, kitchen, electric lighting, heating, air conditioning, and carpet. The fact that my next-door neighbor has this or more shouldn't take away from the blessing and appreciation that I have.*"

To live in joyous surprise for the blessings in our lives is to walk the path of happiness for the blessings Hashem consistently bestows upon us. The alternative can be very sad.

I once gave a Torah talk in a JCC and invited the group to stay on afterwards for informal discussion. During the discussion time, one of the participants asked me my opinion on evolution as opposed to creation. I smiled and pointed to my yarmulka and said, "My opinion is fairly public." But I saw he was a sincerely searching Jew, so I responded with the following question.

"Imagine I was sitting at my dinner table, and my wife served me a wonderful supper (as she does) and instead of thanking her I would say, 'Remarkable, truly remarkable. I am just astounded by the kind of culinary delights that just evolve in the kitchen.' Wouldn't that be sad? Instead of being touched and appreciative, instead of saying 'Thank You!' with gusto, I would be taking it for granted in a way that everyone loses. My opinion about evolution is that it is one of the saddest, misguided, and destructive suggestions possible for any relationship. Instead of appreciating G-d's benevolence, some people would like us to believe it all evolved."

Leah introduced a precious style of thinking that can produce overflowing joy in any relationship. Instead of living a life of entitlement, instead of thoughtlessly assuming that things just happen, Leah lived a life of surprise and appreciation.

And so can we.

With heartfelt blessings 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

Vayeitzei – Talk to Yourself

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021 (5782)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Vayeitze – Loving Leah

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

We tend to classify many of the familial conflicts of Genesis under the rubric Sibling Rivalry. The term has become an idiom we feel comfortable with, a nice compact packet which describes a painful phenomenon. It conjures the image of a battle, not weapon-wielding, lethal one, but more a ritual. It is a life-long dance of medieval knights in full regalia or sumo wrestlers, circling each other, searching for weaknesses, seeking honor and glory. This elegant term, however, glosses over the real and very painful problem of parental love, which is directly responsible for the rivalry.

The struggles between siblings in Genesis are struggles for their parents' love. Like smaller trees in the rainforest, where up to ninety five percent of sunlight might be blocked by canopy trees, those siblings who feel deprived of the light and warmth of their parents' love fight to get what little they can of it, or they wither away in agony.

Cain and Abel fought over God's love. Ishmael and Yitzhak had no conflict, but Sarah was unable to love Ishmael, who was supposed to be considered her son. I believe that for that reason God intervenes and tells Abraham to send Ishmael away. He is not doing it to alienate the child but rather to save him, because He knows that Ishmael will suffer in a household where he is rejected and hated. Esau and Yaakov became pawns in their parents' struggle to decide who will be their successor, with each one of them granted more love by one of the parents. Joseph and his brothers... well, need I say more?

There is one person, however, whom we neglect to count as a sibling and a child, and rather refer to as a wife, and an adversarial one at that. Leah! The wife of Yaakov. The first wife of Yaakov. The one who was not supposed to be the wife of Yaakov. Leah, who felt hated by her husband and hoped to acquire his love by bearing him more children. Leah, who accused her sister Rachel of stealing her husband's love, though she was the one who tricked her sister out of the status of first wife. Leah, who comes out towards Yaakov when he comes home from the field and declares triumphantly that he is hers for the night, in return to the mandrakes she gave to Rachel.

Yes, we focus so much on the role and life of Leah as a disgruntled wife and a fruitful mother, that we forget that she also was a child, at one stage of her life, and that she also was vying for her parents' love. To understand the nature of the mythical battle between the sisters, one which is later referred to by Rachel with the words "*I have wrestled my sister with divine powers and have prevailed*" (30:8), we should first address the issue of the strangest wedding night in the Bible. What happened at the wedding hall in the city of Haran the night of Yaakov's and Rachel's wedding? How was Laban able to deceive his future son-in-law into marrying the wrong woman? The narrative clearly indicates a connection to the previous deception, that of Yaakov disguising as his twin brother, but whereas Yitzhak frisked, hugged, and even kissed the impostor, Yaakov had the most intimate contact with a woman who pretended to be the love of his life, a woman for whom he passionately and impatiently worked seven years. How was Yaakov not able to see that she is Leah and not Rachel?

As kids, we were given a Midrashic answer. Rachel knew that a deception is inevitable and created a code between her and Yaakov to confirm her identity. As the wedding approached and it became clear that her father is going to present Leah as the bride, she felt sorry for her sister and gave her the secret code. Not only that, she hid under the bed and spoke for Leah. Looking at this Midrash with a critical eye, we understand that besides the fact that it was probably impossible to lie under ancient beds, or beddings, and that most men would have known if the love words whispered in their ears come from under the bed, this story has no logical or textual footing. I feel that we should grow out of that interpretation, and find the solution in the parallelism between this story and that of Yaakov and Esau.

Since the deception of Yaakov by Laban is a retaliation for the deception of Yitzhak by Yaakov, it would make sense to assume that like the previous pair of siblings, Rachel and Leah were twins. Not only that, they were identical twins, beautiful identical twins. The one difference between the girls was that Leah had, in the biblical language, soft eyes. This difference could have probably been attributed to a childhood illness which left her with impaired vision and a physical damage to the eyes, which was noticeable only from a short distance. It is hard to imagine Leah's suffering growing up in the shadow of her younger twin's beauty. Not only was she not attractive, she was also compared to her perfect, unblemished replica standing next to her. Rachel was "the beautiful one" while Leah was "the one with the eyes." When people who met the sisters for the first time approached them they would be taken aback, from afar, by their beauty, but when Leah stepped forward, people recoiled, finding it hard to look her in the eye and to open a window to her soul.

If at least her parents showed her some love! But no! Leah was for them a toxic asset. They knew she had slim chances to find a good husband, and more than that, they were afraid that she will spoil Rachel's chances as well. That is why Rachel, the younger twin, was sent to the water-well with the flocks. The well was the meet-market, where matchmakers would make and break marriage deals, and the presence of an unbecoming girl such as Leah would have ruined the family's reputation. No wonder that Leah became less confident and had low self-esteem when her own parents did not care for her, and when she was rejected by society for being different. How else can we understand Leah's willingness to play along with her father's plot and to become Yaakov's first wife?

From a practical point of view, the plan was flawless. The identical twin with the soft eyes dances the night away under a veil, and at the darkness of his private chambers, Yaakov cannot see the eyes which betray Leah's identity. But let us think of the scenario from an emotional angle. How low was Leah willing to stoop to get married? Did she imagine, for even a moment, that when Yaakov finds out that she is not Rachel he will just blurt nonchalantly "OK then, no big deal, I got me a reasonably beautiful wife instead of the one I worked seven years for"? How miserable she must have felt, always pushed to the corner, always told to hide her "ugly eyes", thinking that she will ever remain lonely. She agreed to her father's proposal not because she loved and respected him, but because she hated him with a passion and because she saw a way out of her misery. She was willing to pay the price, not realizing perhaps how heavy this price will be.

Try to visualize the scene which unfolded on the morning after the wedding: the loving husband stands at the door, carrying a tray. "Good morning honey," he calls out gently, "breakfast is ready." As she slowly turns around to face him and her sleepy eyes open, she can see the tray, in slow motion, dropping to the ground. Clay shatters, food splatters, and Yaakov remains speechless, his face frozen in an expression of shock and disbelief. He then raises his voice and shouts "seven years, seven whole years, I have worked so I could marry Rachel! I worked day and night, in sweltering heat and freezing cold, gritting my teeth and dreaming of the day I would hold her in my arms! Why Leah, why?" He storms out of the room, door slamming, and Leah is left alone, crying uncontrollably, feeling helpless and ashamed, fervently repeating her mantra "I had no choice, I had no choice!"

Ehud Manor, a sensitive and prolific Israeli poet, was probably the only one who understood Leah's pain. His song "I love you, Leah!" imagines a world where Yaakov understands and loves Leah. It opens with these words:

*I will never forget that morning
You hid your face in the pillow
Sunlight resting on the tent
My head heavy with wine*

*In your ear I whispered her name,
You took my hand in your cold hand
And one boiling tear
Rolled into my palm...*

Unfortunately, this is not what happened in that tumultuous household. Relationships always remained strained between the twin sisters, their maid-servants who became surrogate mothers, their children, and of course Yaakov. After Rachel died, Yaakov focused intensely on Yosef and deprived his other children of his fatherly love and attention.

Since then, for thousands of years, civil and religious wars, expulsions, and exiles have plagued the Jewish People. Many of them can be attributed to the painful divide between the Children of Leah and the Children of Rachel, the result of one father's inability of loving also his different daughter. What children most need and want of their parents is love, unconditional love. Not love which allows irresponsibility and carelessness but love which accepts each child as he or she is, without trying to make them a replica of the parent, fulfill a dream the parent was not able to fulfill himself, or pursue a goal the parents deem important without listening to their child. Lawyers, doctors, and businessmen want their kids to follow in their footsteps and think that art and music are lazy and frivolous pursuits, while artists and musicians want their kids to be like them and not engage in a profession which in they believe squashes creativity. We must understand that each child is special in his or her unique way and no one would be exactly like their mother or father. If parents find it difficult to love a child who has different goals and ambitions, imagine how painful it is for a child to be different socially, mentally, or physically, and to feel that his parents are embarrassed, and may even want to alienate and disassociate themselves from him. Love your child, unconditionally. Love Leah! Love the "other" child, the one who is not exactly what you expected or planned, the one who is different than you and then many others.

Remember that certain attributes, abilities, or character traits might never change, but the power of genuine love of a parent, the love which is so easy and joyful to receive but for some reason so hard for many to freely give, can make a huge difference in a child's life.

Leah would have told us the same thing, had we only asked.

Shabbat Shalom

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/aim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. **Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.**

God Protects Us with the Angels We Need

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

This Shabbat we are giving Mark Herbstein, a volunteer board member of the Goldwater Trust Board, a gracious send off. Along with other volunteers, Mark has helped the Preschool both move to Remuera and grow in a competitive environment.

It brings to mind the metaphor of Jacob's Ladder in our weekly Torah portion. As Jacob left Israel to seek his family and fortune in Charan, he dreamed of a ladder stretching to the heavens where some angels went up to heaven and some came down from heaven to join him. The commentators say the angels going up were angels of Israel and the angels coming down were the angels of Charan. This new place, Charan, required different powers and protection for Jacob, and God promised to provide him with the unique angels he would need as he set off on his journey.

Jacob's Ladder teaches us that as we change focus in our lives, and move from one place to another, whether physically or mentally, God gives us unique protection. The same angels who worked in Israel wouldn't work in Charan.

It's the same way for our volunteers. We love and appreciate those who serve and, when they decide it's time for them to pass the torch or ascend Jacob's ladder, we give them our blessings and gratitude and welcome a new batch of volunteers who come with their own perspectives and views on how best to move forward.

Thank you Mark for your wonderful service to the community. And, to future volunteers who decide it's their turn, we welcome and look forward to working with you also.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

Rav Kook Torah VaYitzei: The Prayers of the Avot

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

Abraham — Shacharit, the morning prayer.

Isaac — Minchah, the afternoon prayer.

Jacob — Ma'ariv, the evening prayer.

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

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

The Morning Stand

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

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

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

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

Flowering of the Soul in the Afternoon

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

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

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

Spontaneous Evening Revelation

And what distinguishes *Ma'ariv*, the evening prayer?

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

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

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

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

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

<https://ravkooktorah.org/VAYETZ58.htm>

Vayetze – Jacob's Ladder and the Structure of Jewish Prayer (5770)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

It is one of the great dreams of the Bible. Jacob, afraid and alone, finds himself in what the anthropologist Victor Turner called liminal space — the space between — between the home he is escaping from and the destination he has not yet reached, between the known danger of his brother Esau from whom he is in flight, and the unknown danger of Laban from whom he will eventually suffer great wrongs.

As will happen again twenty-two years later on his return — in the wrestling match with the stranger — Jacob has his most intense experiences alone, at night, isolated and vulnerable, in the middle of a journey. In this, the first of his visions:

"He had a dream in which he saw a ladder resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and angels of God were ascending and descending on it."

What does this signify? There are many interpretations given by the Sages and commentators, but the simplest is that it has to do with the encounter between the human soul and God, the encounter later generations knew as prayer.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “*Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it.*” He was afraid and said, “*How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.*”

The synagogue is the house of God. Prayer is the gate of heaven. And when we have truly prayed, the most profound result is that we too are conscious of the feeling: “*Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it.*”

Did this vision exercise any influence on the structure of Jewish prayer? I want to suggest that it did. Its influence was profound. If we examine Jewish prayer carefully, we will see that its shape precisely matches the idea of a ladder on which angels ascend and descend.

If we study the liturgy carefully we will find that it often has a symmetrical three-part structure, A-B-A, which has the following form:)a(ascent,)b(standing in the Presence,)c(descent. Here are some examples.

1. The morning service begins with)a(pesukei de-zimra, a series of Psalms, which constitute a preparation for prayer. It moves on to)b(prayer as such: the Shema, the three blessings that surround it, and the Amidah, the standing prayer. It ends with)c(a series of concluding prayers including Ashrei, itself a key element of pesukei de-zimra.

The basis of this threefold structure is a statement in the Talmud (Brachot 32b) that “*the early pious men used to wait for an hour before praying, then they would pray for an hour, and then they would wait for a further hour.*” The Talmud asks on what basis they did so. It answers by citing the verse Ashrei itself: “*Happy are those who sit in Your house.*” Clearly this is what is known as anasmachta, a supporting verse, rather than the origin of the custom itself (this passage, though, is undoubtedly the reason that Ashrei is said in the first and third sections).

2. Another example is the structure of the Amidah. This has the following three-part pattern:)a(shevach, praise, the first three paragraphs;)b(bakashah, requests, the middle paragraphs, and)c(hodayah, ‘thanks’ or ‘acknowledgements’, the last three paragraphs. On Shabbat and Yom Tov, the middle section is replaced by usually one, on Rosh Hashanah three, paragraphs relating to ‘the holiness of the day’ on the grounds that we do not make requests on days of rest.

Shevach is a preparation. It is our entry to the Divine Presence. Hodayah is a leave-taking. We thank God for the goodness with which He has favoured us. Bakashah, the central section, is standing in the presence itself. We are like supplicants standing before the King, presenting our requests. The spiritual form of the first and last actions – entry and leave-taking – are dramatised by taking three steps forward, and at the end, three steps back. This is the choreography of ascent and descent.

3. The kedushah – verses taken from the mystical visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel – is said three times in the morning service (on Shabbat, the third is transferred to the afternoon service, because the morning service is more than usually long. However, its proper place is in the morning service). The first, known as kedushat yotser, occurs in the blessings before the Shema; the third, kedushah de-sidra, is in the concluding section of the prayers, beginning Uva le-Tzion. The middle kedushah is in the reader’s repetition of the Amidah.

The kedushah makes explicit reference to angels. Its key verses are the words Isaiah and Ezekiel heard the angels saying as they surround the Throne of Glory. We speak of the angels at this point: the Serafim, Cherubim, Ofanim and holy Chayot.

There are obvious differences between the first and last, on the one hand, and the second on the other. The first and third

do not need a minyan. They can be said privately. They do not need to be said standing. The second requires a minyan and must be said standing.

Maimonides explains the difference. In the first and third, we are describing what the angels do when they praise God. In the second, we are enacting what they do. The first and third are preparation for, and reflection on, an event. The second is the event itself, as we re-live it.

There are other examples, but these will suffice.

The daily prayers, as we now have them, evolved over a long period of time. The Sages tell us that the first architects were the men of the Great Assembly in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the 5th century BCE. There was a further intensive process of composition and canonisation in the days of Rabban Gamliel at Yavneh. Shaping and reshaping continued until the first siddurim, those of Rav Amram Gaon and Rav Saadiah Gaon in the ninth and tenth centuries CE.

What we see from the above examples is that there is a basic shape – a depth grammar – of prayer. It consists of ascent – standing in the Presence – descent. The inspiration for this cannot have been any other than Jacob's vision.

Prayer is a ladder stretching from earth to heaven. On this ladder of words, thoughts and emotions, we gradually leave earth's gravitational field. We move from the world around us, perceived by the senses, to an awareness of that which lies beyond the world – the earth's Creator.

At the end of this ascent, we stand, as it were, directly in the conscious presence of God – which Maimonides defines as the essential element of kavannah, the intentional state essential to prayer.

We then slowly make our way back to earth again – to our mundane concerns, the arena of actions and interactions within which we live. But if prayer has worked, we are not the same afterward as we were before. For we have seen, as Jacob saw, that *“Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it.”*

If the first stage is the climb, and the second standing in heaven, then the third is bringing a fragment of heaven down to earth. For what Jacob realised when he woke from his vision is that God is in this place. Heaven is not somewhere else, but here – even if we are alone and afraid – if only we realised it. And we can become angels, God's agents and emissaries, if, like Jacob, we have the ability to pray and the strength to dream.

* <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayetse/jacobs-ladder-and-the-structure-of-jewish-prayer/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. Footnotes are no available for this Dvar Torah.

Where Heaven and Earth Meet

By Yossy Goldman * © Chabad 5785

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 God ascending and descending.¹

Interestingly, the Baal Haturim² comments that the Hebrew word for ladder, סַלָּם (sulam), has the same numeric value (130) as the Hebrew word סִינָי (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.

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. Hegyonot El Ami.
4. Genesis 25:27.
5. See Was Abraham Jewish?
6. Exodus 19:20.
7. Ibid., verse 3.
8. Genesis 1:1.

* Life Rabbi Eremitus, Sydenham Shul, Johannesburg, South Africa. Also President of the South African Rabbinical Association.

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

Vayeitzei: Angelic Assistance by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Angelic Assistance

Before parting ways, Jacob and Laban made a pact not to do each other harm. As Jacob arrive at the border of the Land of Israel, he was greeted by angels who accompanied him home.

Jacob continued on his way, and angels of G-d went out to greet him.)Gen. 32:2(

When Jacob had left the Land of Israel 20 years earlier, “Diaspora” angels had escorted him to Laban’s home. When he returned to the Land of Israel, angels from the Land of Israel went forth to escort him home.

Like Jacob, the Jewish people were exiled from their homeland in order to fulfill a mission: to refine the world, preparing it for the Messianic Redemption. When G-d sent us into exile, He granted us the spiritual power)angels(to succeed in this mission. In these final days of exile, we now enjoy the added assistance of angels who have gone forth from the Land of Israel in order to escort us back.

Knowing that G-d has provided us with both types of angels affords us a heightened appreciation of the significance of our Divine mission, as well as the strength of purpose to remain focused upon its completion.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Good Shabbos.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on the parshah, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z''l

The Character of Jacob

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 midrastically. 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

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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 counteraccusation. 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

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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.

[1] Joshua Backon, “Jacob and the Spotted Sheep: The Role of Prenatal Nutrition on Epigenetics of Fur Colour,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2008.

[2] Henry Louis Gates, *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, New York, Methuen, 1984, pp. 81-104.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The First Monument to Life and Eternity

“And Jacob rose up early in the morning and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a monument and poured oil on the top of it.” [Genesis 27:18] *Vayetze* opens with Jacob's journey into exile. He is leaving his Israeli parental home and setting out for his mother's familial home in Haran. His first stop, as the sun is setting, forces him to sleep outdoors in the fields outside Luz – the last site in Israel he will occupy before he begins his exile. He dreams of a ladder standing (mutzav – matzeva) on land with its top reaching heavenwards, ‘and behold, angels of God are ascending and descending on it’ [Gen. 28:12]. God is standing (nitzav) above the ladder, and promises Jacob that he will return to Israel and that this land will belong to him and his descendants eternally. Upon awakening, the patriarch declares the place to be ‘the House of God and the gate of heaven’ [Gen. 28:17]. He then builds a monument from the stones he has used as a pillow and pours oil over it.

This monument – (Hebrew, matzeva) is the first one in Jewish history. Until this point, the great biblical personalities have erected altars (mizbahot, sing. mizbeah), to God: Noah when he exited from the ark, Abraham when he first came to Israel, Isaac when he dedicated the city of Be'er Sheva, and Jacob on two significant occasions. An altar is clearly a sacred place dedicated for ritual sacrifice. But what is a monument? An understanding of the first monument in Jewish history will help us understand the biblical attitude towards life and death – and even the true significance of the land of Israel.

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

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

Jacob then spends two decades with his uncle Laban, who does his utmost to assimilate his bright and capable nephew-cum-son-in-law into a life of comfort and business in exile. Jacob resists, escaping Laban's blandishments and eventually secretly absconds with his wives, children and livestock to return to Israel. Laban pursues them, and they agree to a covenant-monument: ‘And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a monument’ [Gen. 31:44]. Here again, we have the expression of an eternal promise: Abraham's descendants will never completely assimilate – not even into the most enticing Diaspora. The text continues:

“And Jacob said to his brethren, gather stone, and they took stones and made a heap.... And Laban called it [the monument] Yegar-Sahaduta, but Jacob called it Gal-Ed.” [Gen. 31:44-47]

The wily Laban wants the monument to bear an Aramean name, a symbol of the gentile part of Jacob's ancestry while Jacob firmly insists upon the purely Hebrew inscription of Gal-Ed – the eternal, Israelite language. When they take their respective oaths at the site of the monument, the deceptive Laban still endeavors to manipulate: ‘The God of Abraham and the god of Nahor, the gods of their fathers, judge between us’ [Gen. 31:53]. Jacob refuses to give an inch; this monument must give testimony to the eternity of his commitment to Israel, the faith and the land: ‘But Jacob swore to the fear of his father Isaac’ [Gen. 31:53]. Jacob's response is a polite – but emphatic – rejection of Laban's attempt at assimilation.

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

In the next sequence, tragedy befalls Jacob's family when the beloved Rachel dies while giving birth to Benjamin. ‘And Rachel died,

and she was buried on the road to Efrat which is Bethlehem. And Jacob erected a monument on her grave; it is the monument of the grave of Rachel until this day'. **

Many of our commentaries question why Jacob didn't continue the relatively short distance – perhaps twenty miles – to bury his beloved wife in the Ma'arat HaMakhpela in Hebron, the ancestral burial place.

The Midrashic response, cited by Rashi, is that when the Jews would be carted off to their first exile in Babylon, they would pass by the monument at Rachel's tomb and pray that the matriarch's spirit intercede on their behalf before the Almighty. God hears her prayers, and promises Jewish return:

"...Rachel weeps for her children, thus does God say: 'Stop your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears. There is a reward for your deeds...a hope for your future: the children shall come back to their border.' [Jer. 31:15-16]

Rachel's grave is a truly fitting place for a monument, a link between heaven and earth. It represents the eternity of the Jewish spirit and our eternal relationship to the land of Israel.

Max Nordau became the world leader of Zionism after the death of Theodore Herzl. He was a Viennese physician who was not an observant Jew and had no previous connection to the Zionist movement. What made him a committed believer in Jewish return? He writes in his memoirs that a Hassidic family whose young daughter had been stricken with a mysterious disease came to him for a diagnosis. He diagnosed the malady and prescribed the cure. The grateful family returned, promising – despite their poverty – to pay whatever they owed him because he had saved their daughter's life. He smiled and suggested that she kiss him on the cheek as a fitting payment. The young girl, who had just reached the age of twelve, blushed as she explained that she could not kiss a grown man. He then suggested that she tell him the Torah lesson she had learned that morning as substitute payment. She cited the midrash I have just written about Rachel's grave site. Max Nordau writes in his diary that if, after close to two thousand years of exile, Jewish children still learn about and believe in a Jewish return to Israel, then the Jews will certainly return. At that moment, Max Nordau became a committed Zionist.

* In Hebrew, Messiah literally means 'the one anointed with oil.'

** Incidentally, this explains the origin of ceremoniously erecting a monument over the graves of our loved ones; obviously it reflects the desire to link the world of the present to the world of eternity.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Giving Thanks to Hashem for His Past Kindness Is Not Sufficient

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, and 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'azreine..." (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.

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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.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

We should be positive and never despair. That's the message emerging from Parshat Vayeitzei.

Yaakov has his famous dream of the ladder, and, in the midst of this prophecy, Hashem declares to him 'Ha'aretz asher attah shochev aleihya lecha ettenennah ulezar'echa' – 'this land upon which you are sleeping is given to you and to your future descendants, the Jewish people'.

'Vehayah zar'acha ka'afar ha'aretz' – 'and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth'.

'Ufaratzta' – 'and they shall be spread out'.

'Yammah vakedemah vetzafonah vanegbah – 'to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south'.

Seforim comments on the fact that these directions are neither clockwise nor anti clockwise, indicating the unpredictable haphazard life of the Jewish nation. Just when we think things are marvellous, in an instant, suddenly our lives can, God-forbid, be overturned.

And sometimes when things are terrible, in an instant, things can become marvellous.

This is further amplified by the Kli Yakar, who says that the directions are from the west to the

east, to the north to the south, indicating from one extreme to the other.

Showing, we should indeed, never despair.

Just when life for the Jewish people is intolerable, that's when Hashem can bring our Yeshua, he can bring our salvation.

Taking us, just as the swing of a pendulum, from one extreme to the other, to bring about salvation, and redemption.

At this very moment when there is a tragic war in Israel, our prayer indeed is that Hashem will bless the Jewish people, and he will transform our darkness into light, and may this happen speedily and instantly.

And let's not forget the continuation of the same prophecy for Hashem concludes by saying, 'venivrachu vecha kol-mishpechot ha'adamah uvezar'echa'.

And may all families on earth be blessed through you and your descendants.

Whether people realise it or not, whether they're willing to acknowledge it or not, the Jewish people is an extraordinary blessing for our entire civilisation. And that is why Hashem will guarantee that Am Yisrael Chai, the Jewish people will live on forever.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Turning Tefillah into Torah

On his way to the house of Lavan, after a fourteen-year interlude in the Yeshiva of Ever, Yaakov stopped at Har Hamorah to pray. He subsequently fell asleep and dreamt about a ladder that extended from the earth to the heavens with angels ascending and descending upon it. This vision was followed by a direct and intimate interaction with Hashem. Upon awakening Yaakov exclaimed, "Indeed, Hashem is in this place, and I did not know. How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of Hashem and the gate of heaven" (Breishis 28:16 - 17). The Medrash comments that Yaakov made this observation not only after being aroused from his "sleep" - "mi'shi'nas" but also after emerging from his time "learning" - "mi'mishnas" in the Yeshiva of Ever. What did Yaakov discover about the accessibility of Hashem that was previously unknown to him during his days in Yeshiva?

The Meor Vashemesh explains that Yaakov was not only astonished by the profound holiness of the location where he slept but also by the experience of davening itself. Heretofore, Yaakov had primarily encountered Hashem through the medium of talmud Torah. From his youth he was known for his commitment to learning Torah, as "one who

dwells in tents," an emphasis that he perpetuated during his time in the Yeshiva of Ever where he studied with an uninterrupted focus. However, when Yaakov's prayers precipitated and unlocked sublime insights and revelations, he realized that it is possible to establish an intense connection to Hashem not only by learning Torah but also through davening. His eureka moment reflected a new veneration for the makom Hamikdash as well as a novel appreciation for the role and poignancy of prayer in religious life.

Both tefillah and talmud Torah are opportunities to dialogue with Hashem. When learning Torah, Hashem speaks to man and when praying man converses with God. Initially, Yaakov preferred to internalize the will of Hashem by studying Torah rather than by indulging in a personal monologue of prayer. But after his tefillos triggered a bilateral engagement with Hashem, Yaakov came to the recognition that his own challenges and turmoil were not arbitrary or mundane but indeed a message from heaven. Through the circumstances of his life, Hashem was communicating and directing him towards the fulfillment of his unique mission. The ladder of his dreams accompanied by its itinerant angels demonstrated the dialectic of prayer. Externally, the impetus for tefillah may come from below, but indeed the very struggle itself is an indication from above, guiding man in a manner that is similar to talmud Torah.

Tehillim embodies these two dimensions. On the one hand Tehillim is a book of prayers. Chazal integrated the chapters of Tehillim as the backbone of the siddur. Each morning the supplications of the day are introduced by the praises of Tehillim, and during times of distress we return to its pages for comfort and relief. At the same time, Tehillim is part of Tanach and studying its verses is an act of talmud Torah. Confusion regarding the precise identity of Tehillim has led to some halachic ambiguities as well. At night, when studying Tanach is discouraged (Ba'er Heitev 238:2), should reciting Tehillim also be curtailed? During aveilus, when learning Torah is prohibited (Shulchan Aruch YD 384) is saying Tehillim proscribed? The answer likely depends on how Tehillim is being utilized, as a vehicle and voice for prayer or as a text of Torah. Nonetheless, the versatility of Tehillim and its inclusion within Tanach underscores that both tefillah and talmud Torah are meant to convey divine instruction.

The Medrash states that Dovid Hamelech beseeched Hashem to equate the recitation of Tehillim with the learning of Maseches Negaim and Ohalos. The Baal Hatanya (Maamarei Admur Hazakein, Shorts, Zemirots of Shabbos) explains that Tehillim represents the private tefillos of Dovid Hamelech that were articulated in response to his own

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struggles and through which he discerned tailored direction from Hashem. However, Dovid Hamelech asked that Tehillim be considered part of Torah, thus making his prayers universally and eternally available to all of Klal Yisrael. As a precedent, he pointed to the tractates of Negaim and Ohalos which deal with highly specialized areas of halacha that are practiced primarily by kohanim, but are nonetheless studied by all Jews. Similarly, Dovid Hamelech aspired that his prayers become a template for all generations to connect with Hashem and receive Divine inspiration.

During this difficult time, as our hearts and minds are focused on the war in Eretz Yisrael and the welfare of the soldiers courageously defending the security of the Jewish people, it is appropriate to immerse ourselves in the world of tefillah and invest in the recitation of Tehillim. In doing so, we express not only an unyielding trust in the power and efficacy of prayer but also an acknowledgement that the circumstances of our lives are a Divine call to duty. Hashem is constantly communicating to us and specifically through the challenges that bring us daven. Jews throughout the world have been affected by the current situation and that signal from Hashem obliges us all to respond and contribute to the war effort in whatever way possible. In this spirit, may we be successful as individuals and collectively as a nation in our mission to prevail over our enemy and restore security to our borders.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah-by Rabbi Label Lam

The Reality of Realities

And Yaakov left Beer Sheva, and he went to Charan. (Breishis 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

This is a very beautiful testimony to Yaakov whose departure was felt in Beer Sheva. Rabbi Shraga Silverstein wrote a book of personal aphorisms, "It's easy to make your presence felt but it's hard to make your absence felt." So true and certainly applicable to Yaakov Avinu.

I heard such a smart question last year accompanied by a beautiful and wise answer. Why is that same description not mentioned before about either of the two previous Avos – Fathers? They traveled to and from a number of places but the impact of their leaving a place is never explicitly or implicitly worthy of mention. Why not?

Avraham and Yitzchok were people who, in the course of their life, achieved much wealth and fame. They were men of influence and renown. They lived large on the stage of history at various times in their adult life. Of course, their arrivals and departures were felt. It's almost too obvious to be worthy of mention.

Yaakov however, was characterized as a simple man who dwelled in tents. He was a student of Torah and he lived a quiet, humble, and unassuming life. During his days and years in Beer Sheva he might as well have been an invisible man. Who could have and would have known about his scholarship and righteousness. Everything he did was not evident to the eye of society. He was practically hidden in plain sight. His world was an inner world. How could he be recognized as the glory and splendor of the city while he was still there? It was not apparent at all.

However, after his departure the true stature of who it was that they had in their midst became discernable. Then it became clear and palpable. The sun suddenly set on Beer Sheva. Such a shame to wake up after the fact and to be aware when it's already too late. So, what was Yaakov doing for Beer Sheva while living a private life and pursuing Torah scholarship? What was that splendor and glory? How would we know to appreciate today even if it was staring us in the face?

When I heard this beautiful idea, it occurred to me that this is perhaps the reason that Yaakov was shown and we are treated to for all time a vision of the ladder stretching from earth to heaven. Reb Chaim Velozhin explains the ladder in *Nefesh HaChaim* as a continuum of human potential. This is the paradigm of a human being spanning and bridging large and disparate continents. The angels that are depicted traveling up and down are the results of what the man is doing down here in the world of action.

His every thought, speech, and deed generate ripples and waves up to the heavenly realm and then their echo reverberates and rains back down on to the earth their profound influence. This is the awesome power of who we really are. That's the good news and the bad news. The good news is that every thought we think and each word we utter and any move we make is shaking the higher and lower worlds. The bad news is that every thought we think and each word we utter and any move we make is shaking the higher and lower worlds.

Now we can understand that Avraham and Yitzchok sent out horizontal waves as well, influencing the world in ways that could be seen and measured. They were also shaking up the world in a vertical direction but that

became known to us and the world through Yaakov. That a man can sit alone, remaining undetected, and with his holy thoughts, and utterances, and private deeds be lighting up a city and the world could not have been understood or appreciated until Yaakov left and the ladder revealed the reality of realities.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez: Never Run From, Run Towards

Many Jews left South Africa over the years, for various reasons. One community leader said: "All those who were unhappy in South Africa are unhappy in their new countries. The people who were happy in South Africa are happy in their new country." If you run away from somewhere, you take your unhappiness with you. We should never run away from, we should run towards something else.

Initially Ya'akov was running away – but if the salient sentiment is running away, then you often spend your life running away from your problems. But then we are told that Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan. Rashi famously comments on the seeming superfluous words that Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva – why do we need to know where he left from? He says that because after he left, the place was never the same again. And then we are told that he went to Charan – because when we leave a place, it is not about where we are leaving, but to where we are going.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Israel Belongs Nowhere - An Arab Taunt and Its Ancient History

The Yalkut tells us that the stones that Jacob used as a pillow during his lonely flight from Esau were the very ones upon which his father Isaac was offered up at the Akedah.

How history repeats itself! We today rest on pillows of stone. I did not sleep well this past week or two. What Jew did not experience difficulty in sleeping during this time? We had a hard, cold feeling, under and in our heads – and in our hearts and in our stomachs. Make no mistake about it. Even as Jacob felt the stones and reminded himself of the near-death of Isaac, we feel today the specter of the Holocaust, the Akedah of the 20th century. It is a reality that lies just beneath the surface of all contemporary Jewish experience. So, like Jacob, we have the dread sensation of *כִּי בָּאַתְּ שָׁמָּה*, the sun is setting. Darkness is spreading and danger is abroad in the world.

How shall we respond to these worries? First, let us define the areas of concern. I find three such amongst others: self-doubt, fear of the future, and loneliness.

In these critical moments, Jews both in Israel and in the Diaspora do entertain doubts about the justice and worthwhileness of our cause. Of course, I am not speaking about the New

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Left and Trotzkyite Jews. I unequivocally and unambiguously condemn such Jewish self-haters who are open-minded to Arabs, close-minded to Jews; who can understand sympathetically every nationalism--except that of their own people. I do not refer to Communist Jews who slavishly follow Moscow's party line. They are an instance of psycho-pathology, the most pathetic example of political masochism in our times.

Rather, I refer to those Jews who are fully committed to the Jewish cause, who make their lives in Israel and put their lives on the line--and yet, ask themselves whether we have acted properly all along, whether it is possible to reconcile our claims with Palestinian claims. Of course, every sane person recognizes that there can be no compromise with the PLO. You cannot reconcile the claims of life and death and end up with a condition that is neither one nor the other. But there is some incipient doubt as to whether our claim to all of Palestine is justified theoretically. And there is some nagging self doubt.

Such doubts occurred to Father Jacob. When we met him on that memorable night, he had his famous dream. And Abarbanel, who is the most psychologically oriented of all commentators, reminds us that dreams occur to people because of something that is stirring inside them. What was so disturbing Jacob that caused him to dream? Self-doubt, answers Abarbanel. The dream was a projection of his internal struggles and the divine prophetic response to them. Maybe, thought Jacob, I was wrong in taking away the blessings from Esau. True, he kept them only by deceit. True, had he gotten the blessings--by which is meant the right of his posterity to the land of Israel--it would have been a tragic miscarriage of the divine intent. But maybe I had no right to take it away from him. *אָלַי לֹא יִשְׁרַב עַצְמֵי אֱלֹקִים*. Maybe it was not right in the eyes of God. And maybe it was simply not worthwhile! Here I am, away from my parents, all alone, cold and hungry and frightened. Was it worth it?

סָלֵם מָזֵב אֶרֶץ וּרְאֵשׁ: And so the divine answer came in a dream, in the form of a vision the ladder placed on earth (which according to the Midrash, held within itself, in concentrated form, all the land of Israel) and its top reaching into the heavens. God was saying to Jacob: Despite all your self-doubt, despite all your questioning of the morality of your conduct, you are connected to God. Still your doubts, remove your hesitation, your questions are resolved. In life, one must often make tragic choices--between a greater morality and a lesser morality, between a greater evil and a lesser evil. You chose in this manner--and you were right, painful and tormenting though your deeds were.

I find it hard to understand the thought of a moral justification for the Palestinian claims--especially when such claims are pressed by the likes of the PLO, who are nothing more than common gangsters. Nevertheless, Jews are

morally sensitive, and if they are not, they ought to be. Therefore, even in upbuilding Eretz Israel, we know that its function must be to bring blessing to all humankind. No matter how much the majority of humanity seems arrayed against us, we shall never forfeit our function and our role of enhancing life for all men on earth. For so did God tell Jacob in that vision: *וּבְנָרְכֶיךָ בָּךְ כָּל מִשְׁפָחָתְךָ הָאָדָמָה וּבָרָעָךְ*, "and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your children."

The second area of concern is the simple apprehension of the future. We experience fear of the unknown. You will notice this if you visited Israel recently, if you talked to Israelis by phone or by mail or read their literature. We seem to be locked in an inexorable drive towards war. There is depression in Israel and in the Diaspora as well. We do not know how oil will affect our future. So we are caught in fear and in gloom and in anxiety.

We are, indeed, in the position which Jacob anticipated for us: pursued, hated, frightened.

And so, in response, Jacob dreams his dream. According to Ramban, the dream consists primarily of angels to teach Jacob one most important principle: that all that is happening to him is *מן השמים*, the providential acts of Heaven. Nothing is mere happenstance. He must not feel that God has abandoned him, that he is at the mercy of purely mundane forces. The eye of God never closes. The angels are there.

I would add: the ways of God are mysterious and complex. The help He sends to His children does not come in straight lines, and in unimpeded spurts. There is advance and retreat, progress and pullback, triumph and defeat. The angels are *שְׁלֵמִים יוֹרְדִים בָּו*, they ascend and descend. First they are *שְׁלֵמִים*, they go up--leaving us here, on earth, with a feeling of being forsaken, abandoned, almost in despair. But eventually *עוֹדָדִים בָּו*, they descend, and allow us to feel the direction of God's hand in history, the consolation of His presence.

So when we have these fears, when we worry about the future, when we are told by the so-called realists to think the unthinkable thoughts about the bleak future of the State of Israel, *הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָתָה שׁוֹכֵב עָלָיה לְךָ אַתָּנָה*: we hear from across the centuries the comforting voice of God "The land on which you lie, I have given to you."

Eretz Israel will remain ours, We shall prevail!

If we succumb to despair, we are only satisfying our enemies and carrying out their plan. Let there be no *אַיִשָּׁה*, no despair. Let there be no divisiveness, no fighting of Jew against Jew. Let there be only hard work--and hope!

Finally, there is the element of loneliness. In every instance in recent weeks, in every international form, we have been outnumbered and outvoted and isolated. We have been silenced and excoriated at the UN.

We are even unsure of the United States--and we certainly ought not take for granted a country whose highest military officer this past week delivered himself of a kind of anti-Semitic tirade which is appropriate for a small-town hick. Our leading soldier seems to be the kind of man who has obtained his philosophy of American society from the scrawlings on walls, and whose level of sophistication does not rise beyond that of the country-club locker-room.

Only a small handful of countries ever votes with us. Many others think that they are virtuous and heroic and pure if they abstain while the Arabs and communists and Third World gang up on us in the diplomatic equivalent of a gang rape.

The nadir was reached yesterday or the day before. It took place after the vote in UNESCO--the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization--which decided that Israel was the only country in the world which had to remain alone, and did not have the right to join with any region or bloc of nations. After this vote, the Lebanese delegate said the following: "Israel is a state which belongs nowhere, because it comes from nowhere."

We belong nowhere because we come from nowhere...

I confess, I was not completely shocked at this obscene taunt, at this cruel gloating. Outraged, yes; but not shocked.

I recognize it. Smell it carefully and you will detect the whiff of an ancient malodorous theory. We belong nowhere--it is the old Christian canard condemning the Jewish people to eternal homelessness as the "Wandering Jew." We have here--remarkably, in the words of a Lebanese Arab who represents a country evenly divided between Christian and Moslem-- the ultimate synthesis of discredited and evil Christian theology with malicious and manipulative Arab politics.

The old anti-Semitism has been resurrected in the half of the UN. And the world fidgets, but does not raise its voice at this international replay of a Kitty Genovese murder.

So, "Israel is a state which belongs nowhere because it comes from nowhere!" How shall we answer that when our non-Jewish ask us whether there is anything to it? What should we say to those pathetically ignorant Jews who may be taken in by a statement of that sort?

Permit to suggest the following answers.

Israel comes from the concentration camps of Western Europe--which bloc it was not permitted to join by UNESCO.

Israel comes from the crematoria of Eastern Europe where the chimneys belched forth the smokey remains of six million men, women, and children--and the government of which today, all Communists, leeringly persecute the pitiful remainders of that unprecedented massacre.

Israel comes from the horrendous ghettos, where we did not have almost limitless real

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estate, and endless oil, only to fight for another piece of real estate--but where all we wanted was one place we can call our own, our home.

Israelis come from the mullahs and slums of Arab countries, where they experienced firsthand the blessings of what the Arabs mean by, "a democratic, secular state--a fraternity of Christian, Jew, and Moslem." They learned quite intimately what it means to live in a democratic state--such as Yemen or Syria; or a secular state--like Libya or Saudi Arabia...

Israel comes from the people which created a Talmud, the most marvelous compendium of law and morality and justice and civilized life, while the Arab state still had no name, and were nothing more than pagan savages riding through the desert with knives in their teeth and blood dripping from their fingers.

Modern Israel comes from that nation of prophets who blessed the world with the vision of a united humanity--a vision distorted and profaned, made pornographic and obscene, by that organization which today condemns Israel to be the only country not permitted to participate in that same unity of nations.

Israel comes from and is a people who taught the world pity and compassion, civilization and art and music, morality and law and justice--yes, and Education and Science and Culture--when the so called Third World is still populated by the likes of Amin and gives thunderous ovations to an Arafat.

Israel is descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who taught the world what it needs to deserve survival. And, if, indeed, Israel does not belong to this world, maybe the world just does not deserve to go on.

But we do belong. We belong not to Western Europe and not to the Communist bloc, not the Arabs and not the Afro-Asians. We do belong--to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He is One God--"Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God the Lord is One"--and we are one people--"who is like unto Thy people, one people upon the earth." We are one nation not permitted to join any bloc of peoples. And He is One God who is above all pantheons, and does not belong to any bloc of pagan idols.

And therefore, to us as to our Father Jacob before us, comes the word of God as we feel rejected by the society of nations: *וְהִנֵּה אָנֹכִי עִמֶּךָ*, "Behold I shall be with thee."

and I will watch over thee in all ways that thou goest, for I will", *כִּי וְשָׁמְרָתִיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תָּלַךְ* *אַלְאָלְאַצְבָּךְ* not forsake thee."

That is where we come from. That is whom we belong to.

The Wandering Jew has come home. Twenty six years ago. That is where he belongs. And he shall not be driven out.

Ever. [November 23, 1974]

Home Weekly Parsha VAYESEH

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Yosef feels the brothers have been unjust for rejecting his dreams immediately and they in turn are convinced that he and his dreaming constitute a veritable danger to the unity and survival of Yaakov's family. It is not only the contents of Yosef's dreams – that he will dominate the family – that disturb the brothers. It is the very fact that he is dreaming that raises their suspicions and fuels their enmity towards him.

In the struggle between Yosef and the brothers, the conflict is between the lofty and inspirational theory of Judaism and its sometime mundane practice of hope and actual reality-of what can be achieved even though it is not exactly what one dreamt of achieving. The conflict between Yosef and his brothers is never really ended. It is compromised by both sides, recognizing the validity of the position of the other and living with that reality. The Jewish people in its long and difficult history have somehow been able to combine the spirit and dreams of Yosef with the hardheaded realism of his brothers. Both traits are necessary for our survival and accomplishments, both as individuals and as a nation. Someone without dreams and ambition, who refuses to reach heavenward and conquer the stars, will never be a truly creative or original person.

But if this drive is not tempered by a realistic sense of the situation and the society that surrounds us, then all dreams are doomed to eventually disappoint. Yosef's dreams are realized only after he has been severely chastened by his brothers' enmity, slavery and imprisonment in Egypt. Even after he seemingly has them in his grasp, it is still a contest of wills. Again, Yosef's dreams are finally realized but only after he has been subjected to many hard years of unpleasant reality. The brothers, realists to the end, are shocked to see that the dreamer has emerged triumphant. The dreamers save the world from famine while the realists end up being its customers. Thus, the Torah teaches us that we need both dreamers and realists within our ranks. A nation built exclusively on dreams, without practical reality intruding, will find that reality rising to foil the realization of the dream.

A nation that ceases to dream of reaching greater heights will stagnate and not survive. So, both the brothers and Yosef are "right" in their pursuit of building a nation and of spiritual growth. We need a healthy dose of both values and views in our Jewish world today as well.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Birth of the World's Oldest Hate

Vayetze

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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

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

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

Second, nowhere in the Parsha do we find that Laban actually tried to destroy Jacob. He deceived him, tried to exploit him, and chased after him when he fled. As he was about to catch up with Jacob, God appeared to him in a dream at night and said: 'Be very careful not to say anything, good or bad, to Jacob.' (Gen. 31:24). When Laban complains about the fact that Jacob was trying to escape, Jacob replies: "Twenty

years now I have worked for you in your estate – fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for some of your flocks. You changed my wages ten times!" (Gen. 31:41). All this suggests that Laban behaved outrageously to Jacob, treating him like an unpaid labourer, almost a slave, but not that he tried to "destroy" him – to kill him as Pharaoh tried to kill all male Israelite children.

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

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

Laban begins by seeming like a friend. He offers Jacob refuge when he is in flight from Esau who has vowed to kill him. Yet it turns out that his behaviour is less generous than self-interested and calculating. Jacob works for him for seven years for Rachel. Then on the wedding night Laban substitutes Rachel for Leah so that to marry Rachel, Jacob must work another seven years. When Joseph is born to Rachel, Jacob tries to leave. Laban protests. Jacob works another six years, and then realises that the situation is untenable. Laban's sons are accusing him of getting rich at Laban's expense. Jacob senses that Laban himself is becoming hostile. Rachel and Leah agree, saying, "he treats us like strangers! He has sold us and spent the money!" (Gen. 31:14-15). Jacob realises that there is nothing he can do or say that will persuade Laban to let him leave. He has no choice but to escape. Laban then pursues him. Were it not for God's warning the night before he catches up with him, there is little doubt that he would have forced Jacob to return and live out the rest of his life as his unpaid labourer. As he says to Jacob the next day: "The daughters are my daughters! The sons are my sons! The flocks are my flocks! All that you see is mine!" (Gen. 31:43). It turns out that everything he had ostensibly given Jacob, in his own mind he had not given at all.

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

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

Laban is, in effect, the first antisemite. In age after age, Jews sought refuge from those - like Esau - who sought to kill them. The nations who gave them refuge seemed at first to be benefactors. But they demanded a price. They saw, in Jews, people who would make them rich. Wherever Jews went they brought prosperity to their hosts. Yet they refused to be mere chattels. They refused to be owned. They had their own identity and way of life; they insisted on the basic human right to be free. The host society then eventually turned against them. They claimed that Jews

were exploiting them rather than what was in fact the case, that they were exploiting the Jews. And when Jews succeeded, they accused them of theft: "The flocks are my flocks! All that you see is mine!" They forgot that Jews had contributed massively to national prosperity. The fact that Jews had salvaged some self-respect, some independence, that they too had prospered, made them not just envious but angry. That was when it became dangerous to be a Jew.

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

In her fascinating book *World on Fire*, Amy Chua argues that ethnic hatred will always be directed by the host society against any conspicuously successful minority. All three conditions must be present. The hated group must be a minority or people will fear to attack it. It must be successful or people will not envy it, merely feel contempt for it.

It must be conspicuous or people will not notice it.

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

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

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

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

The article below is from Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family

Parshat Vayetze: Can One Really Come Home Again?

"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. He ingeniously based his ruling on a Mishna in the little known Tractate *Tzul Yom* (Chap. 4 Mishna 7), where we learn that if a person vows to give wine or oil from his cistern as an offering to the priests (*teruma*), but stipulates 'let this be a heave-offering provided that it comes up whole (shalem); then we take his intention to have been that it be safe from breakage or from spilling, but not necessarily from contracting impurity.' As Rabbi Baumel explains, apparently according to a sage of the Mishna who determines the normative halakha, the concept of 'shalom' only refers to physical wholeness, without a breakage of spilling; in the instance of ritual impurity, the loss is not in the physical essence of the object but is rather in its religio-spiritual quality, and this latter defect cannot be considered a lack in 'beshalom.' Moreover, the son's 'impurity' may only be temporary, since the possibility always exists that his wife may undergo a proper conversion (*Emek Halakha*, Chap. 42).

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 the patriarch Jacob, setting out on a dangerous journey far from home, who also takes a vow saying 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, and might very well suggest a different response.

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. Why doesn't he 'go home' immediately? Is the Bible telling us that Jacob himself understood that he had not yet achieved the 'in peaceness' of his vow, and that until Chapter 35 he was not yet ready to return? 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.

Indeed, no one in the Torah has more problematic relationships than Jacob. He has difficulty with his brother, with his father-in-law, with his wife Leah, and with his sons. But the key to all his problematic relationships lies in his problems with his father, Isaac. Unless he repairs that tragic flaw, 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, the Bible records how Jacob attempts to start a fresh life in Shekhem, only to have to face the rape of his daughter, Dina. His sons, Shimon and Levi, deceive their father and sully his name by destroying all the male inhabitants of the city. And then in the very bloom of her life, Jacob's beloved Rachel dies in childbirth, as a result of her having deceived her father and stolen the household gods. It certainly seems as though Jacob is being repaid in spades for his having deceived his father, Isaac!

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, it was a frontal desecration of the father-son hierarchy, a son's flagrant invasion of the personal, private life of his father.

Until this point, Jacob's life is a steady accumulation of despair. But this act of Reuven's is the worst humiliation of all. Just knowing that Reuven even contemplated such an act could have led Jacob to lash out; fathers have responded violently for much less.

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 Yisrael 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, a pe'tuha, which generally signals a complete change in subject and a new beginning. Yet the cantillation for the last word before the gap, "Yisrael", is not a sof pasuk (period), as is usually the case before such an open space between texts, but is rather an etnahta (semi-colon), indicating a pause, but not a total interruption from the previous subject. I would suggest that between the lines the Torah is telling us that Jacob heard of his son's deception, is enraged, may even be livid with anger, but holds his wrath inside, remains silent – and thinks a great deal, perhaps amidst tears.

Undoubtedly, we would expect to find the verse after the long space (of Jacob's ruminations) telling us that Jacob banishes his scoundrel son, Reuven, disinheriting him from the tribes of Israel. Much the opposite, however. 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...' (Gen. 35:27).

We are given no details about this ultimate reunion between son and father, Jacob and Isaac, bringing to a close more than two decades of separation and alienation. 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 tension between Jacob and his son, Reuven, is the most significant reason for 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 thinks that Reuven's arrogance is beyond contempt, but can a father divorce himself from his son? What do I gain from banishing my own flesh and blood? 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 he was trying to tell me – albeit in a disgraceful and convoluted way – that he was my rightful heir? Or perhaps he was acting out his belief that Leah, and not a servant of Rachel, deserves to be the primary wife and mother, yielding the rightful first-born son. Such 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, 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 physical 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.

Shabbat Shalom

RABBI YY JACBOSON Vateitze

No Missing Links

The Omission of a Blank Space in the Torah Captures the Story of a People

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson
The Blank Spaces

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

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

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

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

Two Exceptions

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

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

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

Leaving Home

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

The portion begins with these words: "And Jacob left Be'er Sheba (where his parents lived in the south of the Holy Land) and traveled to Charan." Harran was a city in ancient Mesopotamia, located today in Southern Turkey, on the border of Syria and Iraq. Jacob leaves the cocoon of his parents, an environment infused with the Abrahamic vision of life, and travels to Harran, where he would live with a deceitful father-in-law, Laban, and would endure many a trial. The portion ends, two decades later, with Jacob leaving Laban and returning to the Holy Land: "And Jacob went on his way and Divine angels encountered him." What allowed Jacob to maintain his moral and spiritual equilibrium throughout his two decades in exile? Why did the first Jewish refugee not assimilate and forfeit his spiritual identity?

The answer is hinted in the Torah by the omission of any space throughout his journey from the Holy Land and back there. From "And Jacob left Be'er Sheba," in the opening of Vayeitzei, through "Jacob went on his way and Divine angels encountered him," at the end of Vayeitzei, there was no chasm. Geographically, Jacob left Be'er Sheba in the Holy Land, he departed from Isaac and Rebecca and their Divine-centered world; but in his mindset, there was no gulf between the two. He knew he is on a journey, he was sent on a mission, and he will return.

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

The Secret of Longevity

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

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

The Mission

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more than a hundred generations we knew where we came from, where we were going, why we were traveling, who was the Project Officer, and how to get back. We had no real difficulty in transmitting this intelligence unbroken from generation to generation—even to generations who were not physically present during "take-off" at Sinai. How? Because the Torah, our Divine logbook, contained macro and

micro guidance. Notwithstanding all challenges, this logbook has met the only real criterion of the empirical scientists—it worked. Our presence demonstrated that it worked.

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

The Challenge

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

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

Abraham began the story, Moses consolidated it, and we will complete it.

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

[2] Sefas Emes Vayeitzei 5650 (1899). In his own words:
שפת אמת ויצא תר"נ: בסדר ויצא לא נמצא שם פרשה פתוחה וסתומה. וכ"ה בספר מסורת כי לא יש סדר כה בתורה זולת ויצא. ונראה דהרמו שלא פסק אבינו יעקב ולא הוסיף מיציאתו לחו"ל עד שחזר ויפגע בו מלעכדי כו. ו"ש ושבת עמו מים אחדים שהיו כל הימים באחדות ודיקיות בשארו. [ויתכן ג"כ כי זה פ"י הפסוק והוא בינו לבין כ"מ אחדים באחבותו אותה כע"י אהבה זו ה"י דבוק באחדות. וודע כי אהבתו ברחל הוא סוד השכינה]. וזה ה"י עיקר הנדר והבקשה אם יה"י אלקם עמדי ב' שלא תיפרד מן הדבקות ע"י" לבן הרשע ותחלותו ככ"ל

Parshas Vayeitzei refers to how Lavan was less than honest in his financial dealings. However, here we have a situation regarding travel expenses in which the halacha was followed.

The Saga of the Expired Ticket

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

SCENE I: The Saga of the Expired Ticket, Part 1.

Two yeshiva students, "Berel Bernstein" and "Aaron Adler", make an appointment to discuss a financial matter with me. Thank G-d, there is no ill feeling between them, just a practical question regarding who is required to pay for a plane ticket. Here is the background to the story:

Berel and Aaron were taking a brief trip to visit their families. Berel purchased a round trip ticket, whereas Aaron had the return ticket from his previous trip and was planning to purchase a ticket back to yeshiva from home. All went well on the trip there; however, shortly after their arrival, Berel took ill and realized that he would be unable to return to yeshiva on the flight he had originally booked. The travel agent informed his parents that although it was impossible to transfer the ticket to a later flight, he could rewrite the ticket in someone else's name with only a small transfer fee.

Berel called Aaron, asking him if he had as yet purchased a ticket back, which indeed he had not. Aaron discussed the matter with his parents, who decided to help out the Bernsteins, since Aaron needed a ticket anyway. Berel's parents instructed the agent to change the name on the ticket while leaving the billing on their credit card. The Bernsteins agreed that they will pay the change fee whereas the Adlers will compensate them for the price of the ticket.

All was fine until the morning of the flight. Aaron wakes up sick; clearly he would not be flying today. The Adlers contact the issuing travel agent to find out what they can do with the ticket. He responds that he can transfer the ticket yet again but needs the Bernsteins' approval to change the billing on their credit card. The Adlers try many times to contact the Bernsteins to arrange the change of ticket, but are unsuccessful at reaching them. Unfortunately, the ticket goes unused and becomes worthless.

Later, both Aaron and Berel purchase new tickets for the flight back to yeshiva. In the meantime, the Adlers have not yet paid the Bernsteins for the first ticket and have the following question: Must they pay for the ticket which they were

unable to use, thus requiring them to pay for two tickets? In their opinion, all they were trying to do was to help out the Bernsteins from having the ticket go to waste, although unfortunately it did anyway. The Adlers contend that they had actually found a cheaper ticket, but chose to help out the Bernsteins even though it was more expensive. They feel it unfair to expect them to compensate the Bernsteins for attempting to do a favor that backfired, particularly since they tried to reach the Bernsteins to arrange that the ticket should not go to waste.

On their part, the Bernsteins contend that other people were interested in using Berel's ticket, and that they sold it to the Adlers for the Adlers' benefit. Furthermore, they note that they were not home the day the Adlers called because they were away at a simcha and that they did have their cell phones with them.

Are the Adlers obligated to compensate the Bernsteins for the unused ticket?

SCENE II: Who Appears Before the "Judge"?

Aaron and Berel came to me with the request that I resolve an issue germane to the payment of an airline ticket. Before hearing details of the case, I asked them who were the parties to the litigation. Were Aaron and Berel assuming responsibility to pay? Both fine, young gentlemen respond that actually the parents are assuming responsibility, but they are in dispute who should pay for the ticket. The bachelors noted that there was no ill will between the families, simply a true desire to do what is halachically correct. Both sets of parents felt that consulting a rav near their sons' yeshiva would be the easiest way to resolve the issue in an amicable and halachically proper fashion.

I pointed out to Aaron and Berel that while asking a rav to clarify the halacha is indeed an excellent way to resolve the matter, the situation here was somewhat unusual. When two parties submit litigation to a rav or a Beis Din, each party makes a kabbalas kinyan (to be explained shortly) obligating them to obey the decision of that particular rav or Beis Din. In the modern world, the two parties also typically sign an arbitration agreement that they are accepting this rav's or Beis Din's adjudication. Although halacha does not require signing an arbitration agreement, this is done nowadays in order to provide simple proof that both parties accepted the particular Beis Din's authority and to strengthen the Beis Din's power under secular law as an arbitration board. (In most locales and circumstances, a civil court will accept the decision of a Beis Din as binding arbitration.)

WHAT IS A KABBALAS KINYAN?

A kabbalas kinyan means performing an act, such as lifting a pen or handkerchief,

that demonstrates acceptance of an agreement. It is also used when appointing a rav to sell one's chometz to demonstrate the authorization of the rav as one's agent. In our instance, kabbalas kinyan demonstrates that one accepts the authority of this particular rav or Beis Din to rule on the matter at hand.

HARSHA'AH – POWER OF ATTORNEY

Berel asked me, "Can't I represent my parents in this matter?"

"Indeed, one can appoint someone to represent him in halachic litigation by creating a harsha'ah. For example, let us say that it is impractical for the suing party to appear before the Beis Din in the city where the defendant resides. He can sue by appointing someone on his behalf and authorizing this by executing a harsha'ah, the halachic equivalent of a power of attorney."

I returned to the case at hand.

"Therefore, in our case, the two of you could represent your parents by having them execute harsha'os appointing you as their respective agents."

Aaron piped up: "I don't think anyone really wants to make a full din torah out of this. I think we simply want to know what is the right thing to do according to halacha."

Technically, without execution of harsha'os, either side could later claim not to have accepted the decision of the rav or Beis Din involved, and could avoid having the litigation binding. Nevertheless, in our situation, both parties seemed honorable and simply wanted to know the halacha. Both sons said that their parents had requested that they jointly ask a shaylah and that they would follow the decision. Thus, although following the strict rules of litigation requires both harsha'os and kabbalas kinyan from both sides, I elected to handle the situation informally, calculating that this would generate the most shalom.

SCENE III: Are They Parties or Participants?

Why didn't I have the two bachelors each make a kabbalas kinyan binding themselves to my ruling?

Such a kabbalas kinyan would have no value, since the person making the kabbalas kinyan binds himself to accept the authority of the specific rav or Beis Din. However, the sons here are not parties to the litigation and therefore their kinyan would not bind either themselves or their parents, unless they had previously executed a harsha'ah.

SCENE IV: Opening Arguments

Do the Adlers owe the Bernsteins for the ticket that they did not use?

Let us review the points made by each of the parties: The Adlers claim that they were simply doing a favor for the Bernsteins. They were willing to absorb a small loss for the sake of the favor, but certainly had no intention of paying the Bernsteins for a ticket that they would never use. They also feel that since they

could not reach the Bernsteins to change the ticket, the Bernsteins were partially responsible for the ticket becoming void.

The Bernsteins are claiming that the Adlers purchased the ticket from them and that what occurred subsequently is exclusively the Adlers' predicament and responsibility. Furthermore, the Bernsteins contend that the Adlers did not really save them money because there were other people who would have purchased the ticket from them. And regarding their unavailability, they were at a simcha, which is certainly an acceptable reason to be away, and they were reachable by cell phone. It is not their fault that the Adlers did not ask them for cell phone numbers.

SCENE V: In the Judge's "Chambers"

At this point, we can consider the arguments and counter-arguments of the two parties. The Adlers' contention that the Bernsteins were unavailable does not affect the issues at stake. The Bernsteins are not obligated to be accessible at all hours of the day, and cannot be considered as having damaged the Adlers through their unavailability. Thus, whether the Bernsteins could have been reached by cell phone or not, whether they should have remembered to supply the Adlers with their cell phone number or not, and whether they were away to celebrate a simcha or not, are all not germane to the issue.

WHO OWNED THE TICKET?

Essentially, the Adlers are contending that they assumed no fiscal liability for the ticket unless they used it, and were simply attempting to help the Bernsteins. Does this perception reflect what happened?

Certainly, if the Adlers had told the Bernsteins that they were not assuming any responsibility for the ticket unless they actually used it, they would not be liable for it. However, they did not say this when they arranged for Aaron to obtain the ticket. Rather, they had agreed that the ticket be reissued in Aaron's name without any conditions.

The issue we need to resolve is, "Who owned the ticket when it became invalid?" Here we have a somewhat complicated issue, since the ticket was reissued, yet it remained billed to the Bernsteins' credit card.

Someone who purchased an item that was subsequently damaged cannot claim a refund from the seller unless the seller was guilty of deception (Bava Metzia 110a). Once the item has changed possession, any damage that occurs is the loss of its current owner and he cannot shift responsibility to the previous owner. This occurrence is called mazalo garam, his fortune caused this to happen (see, for example, Rashi to Bava Metzia 103a, s.v. azla lei). This means that each person has a mazel that will bring him certain benefits and losses during his lifetime, and one must learn to accept that this is Hashem's will. Specifically, the Gemara refers to children, life and sustenance as three areas dependent on mazel (Moed Katan 28a). [One can daven to change one's mazel (Meiri, Shabbos 156), but that is not today's topic.] Thus, if the Adlers indeed owned the ticket, the resultant loss is theirs, and they should chalk it up to Hashem's will. (Colloquially, we very accurately refer to this situation as being bashert.) Thus, what we need to determine is whether the Adlers had halachically taken possession of the ticket.

KINYAN

According to halacha, for property to change hands there must be not only the meeting of the minds of the buyer and the seller, but also the performance of an act, called a maaseh kinyan, that transfers the item into the possession of the buyer. Although both the buyer and the seller agreed to transact an item, it does not actually change possession until the maaseh kinyan transpires. Therefore, if the item is damaged after the two parties agreed to a deal, but before a maaseh kinyan transpired, the seller takes the loss, since the item was still his when it became damaged. Determining the exact moment that the act of kinyan takes place and that therefore the item changed possession can be highly significant. [It is important to note, that although a deal may not have been finalized without a kinyan, it is usually forbidden to back out once the two parties have made an agreement. This is based on the verse in Tzefaniah (3:13) which states that a Jew always fulfills his word (see also Pesachim 91a; Bava Metzia 106b). Someone who has a question whether he is bound to an agreement must ask a shaylah to find out whether he may abandon the deal.]

What act creates the kinyan? There is a vast halachic literature devoted to defining what exactly constitutes a maaseh kinyan and under which circumstances these kinyanim work. For example, the methods of transacting real estate are quite different from how one acquires chattel or food.

How does an airline ticket change possession? Obviously, no Mishnah or Gemara discusses how one acquires an airline ticket.

Let us analyze, what does one purchase when one buys an airline ticket? In the past, tickets were a piece of paper, but today, we have e-tickets, which have no intrinsic value.

What one is purchasing is the right to a seat on a flight, and the ticket is a receipt verifying the acquisition. If this is correct, then purchasing a non-refundable ticket is buying a right to a seat on a particular flight. So we now have a halachic question: How does one acquire such rights and how does one transfer those rights to someone else?

SUTIMTA

One way of acquiring property is called *sutimta*, which means using a method of purchase that is commonly used in the marketplace. Since society accepts this as a means of transaction, halacha recognizes it as a *kinyan*. For example, in the diamond trade, people consummate a deal by a handshake accompanied by the good wishes of “*mazel ubracha*.” Since this is the accepted method of transacting property, the *kinyan* is binding and halacha recognizes the deal as complete.

Based on the above, we can reach the following conclusion. When the Bernsteins instructed their travel agent to transfer the ticket to Aaron’s name, they were asking him to change the ownership of the right to the seat on that flight from Berel to Aaron. Once the agent followed up on their instruction and reissued the ticket, the right to that seat became Aaron’s, and the Bernsteins are exempt from any fiscal responsibility. Although Aaron was unfortunately unable to utilize this right and it became void, there is no basis to make the Bernsteins pay for the ticket once it was transferred.

Therefore, the Adlers should accept that Aaron’s illness and the resultant loss of the ticket is Hashem’s will that we do not challenge. Since the loss of this money is attributed to *mazel*, had the ticket situation developed differently they would have suffered this loss in a different, perhaps more painful way, and they should not be upset at the Bernsteins for the financial loss.

Notwithstanding what I just wrote, I would suggest, but not require, that the Bernsteins offer to compensate for part of the loss. Knowing how some people react to these situations, there is a good chance that the Adlers may be upset at the Bernsteins for what happened, even though this anger is unjustified. To avoid this result, the Bernsteins would do well to offer some compensation to the Adlers for the ticket. It is very praiseworthy to spend some money and avoid bad feelings, even if such expenditure is not required according to the letter of the law.

A Jew must realize that Hashem’s Torah and His awareness and supervision of our fate is all-encompassing. Making this realization an integral part of our lives is the true benchmark of how His *kedusha* influences our lives.

Vayeitzei: The Rivalry between Rachel and Leah

Rav Kook Torah

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

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

The Present versus the Future

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

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

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

Rachel and Leah

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

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

Rachel, whom Jacob immediately loved for the beautiful qualities of her soul, is a metaphor for the simple and natural love we feel for the

revealed present. Jacob felt that Rachel’s external beauty was also in harmony with the unknown realm of the distant future.

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

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

Two Kings and Two Messiahs

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

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

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

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

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

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

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayeitzei

Smokescreen

It just doesn’t make sense. After more than twenty years of toiling in the house of Lavan (Laban), Yaakov (Jacob) wants out. He should have been entitled to. After all, he married Lavan’s daughters in exchange for years of tending the sheep, He increased Lavan’s livestock population many fold, and he was a faithful son-in-law despite a conniving huckster of a father-in-law. Yet when Yaakov leaves Lavan’s home with his wives, children, and flocks, he sneaks out, fearing that Lavan would never let him leave. He is pursued by Lavan who chases him with a vengeance. But Yaakov is lucky. Hashem appears to Lavan in a dream and warns him not to harm Yaakov. Eventually, Lavan overtakes Yaakov and accosts him. “Why have you led my daughters away like captives of the sword? Why have you fled, secretly, without notifying me? Had you told me you wanted to leave I would have sent you off with song and music!” (Genesis 31:26-27)

Yaakov answers his father-in-law by declaring his fear. “You would have stolen your daughters from me.” Lavan then searched all of Yaakov’s belongings looking for idols missing from his collection. Yaakov was outraged. He simply did not understand what Lavan wanted. Yaakov responds to the attack by detailing the tremendous amount of selfless work, through scorching heat and freezing nights, that he toiled in order to make Lavan a wealthy man. Reviewing the care and

concern that he had for his wives and children, Yaakov declares that he is not worthy of the mean-spirited attacks made by his father-in-law, Lavan. And,” Yaakov adds, “If not for the protection of Hashem, Lavan would have sent me away empty handed.” (Genesis 31:38-42)

Yet Lavan is unmoved. Like a stoic, unyielding dictator, Lavan responds. “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flock is my flock and all that you see is mine.” (Genesis 31:43)

What can be going on in Lavan’s mind? What motivates a man to be so selfish and unreasonable?

My friend Reb Yossel Czopnik told me the following true story about Yankel, a heavy smoker who went to see a certain hypnotist who had cured a large number of people. In a method that combined hypnosis, electrodes, and a little cajoling while placing little metal balls behind the ears, patients swore that the urge to smoke had been totally eradicated from their minds.

Yankel went to the doctor and underwent the entire ritual. The balls went behind his ears, the electrodes were attached to his temples, and the doctor began to talk.

“Let me ask you, Yankel,” questioned the doctor of the well wired patient, “every time you inhale a cigarette do you know what is happening? Close your eyes and imagine your lips puckered around the tail pipe of a New York City bus! Now, take a deep breath. Imagine all those noxious fumes filling your lungs! That is what the cigarettes are doing to you!”

Yankel went home that night still wanting a smoke but decided to hold off. “Maybe it takes one night,” he thought.

The next morning nothing seemed to change. In fact, on his way to work, he had queasy feelings. As soon as he entered his office Yankel picked up the telephone and called the doctor.

“So,” asked the doctor, “How do you feel? I’m sure you didn’t have a cigarette yet! I bet you have no desire for them anymore!”

Yankel was hesitant. “Honestly, Doc. I’m not sure. One thing I can tell you, however. All morning long, on my way to work I was chasing city buses!”

Lavan just wouldn’t get it. No matter how clearly Yaakov explained his case, twenty years of work, the devoted labor under scorching heat and freezing cold, Lavan just stood unmoved. “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and whatever you have is mine.”

When the sickness of egocentrism overtakes the emotional stability of a human soul; one can talk, cajole, or persuade. The Almighty can even appear in a dream and do his part. It is helpless. Unless one actually takes the initiative to realize his or her shortcomings, anything that anyone may tell them is only a blast of noxious air.

Dedicated In memory of our Zayde, Herbert Hauser Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heshel ben Reb Yehuda HaCohen
by Miriam, Sorah, Tamar & Shlomo Hauser

Good Shabbos!

Who Left the Flowers at Our Door?

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Last week, my doorbell rang but when I answered it, there was nobody there. Instead, I found a vase of flowers outside the front door with a note. Flowers on a random weekday? There wasn’t a birthday or anniversary to mark. Who could they be from? I opened the card:

To our beloved shadchanim – can’t believe it’s been 26 years! With endless appreciation, we are forever grateful, Love, Ezra and Rena.

Twenty-six years ago, Yocheved and I set up mutual friends and now, for no particular reason, out of the blue, they sent flowers to say thank you. This wasn’t the first time they expressed their gratitude, it isn’t that they remembered a debt they had never repaid. They had thanked us numerous times before. Yet, because their gratitude had not diminished, they felt compelled to still say thank you again.

Most people don’t realize how much a simple gesture of thanks can mean to the recipient of it. In 2018, Psychological Science published a study of 300 participants who were asked to write a letter of gratitude to

someone who positively impacted them from long ago. Participants wrote to their parents, friends, coaches, or teachers. The writers were asked to predict the degree of surprise, happiness, and awkwardness the recipients would feel after receiving their gratitude. The study found that those writers expressing gratitude consistently underestimated how much people appreciate being appreciated. The recipients of the letters reported feeling less awkward and in fact much more appreciative than the letter writers predicted. Being appreciated and receiving gratitude proved to make someone’s day much more than those expressing thankfulness thought it would.

In our Parsha, when Leah names her fourth son Yehudah, the Torah tells us she did so because הַפָּעָם אָזֶה אַתָּה הִ, it was an expression of gratitude to Hashem. The Gemara (Berachos 7b) goes so far as to say that, in fact, Leah was the first person in history to say thank you to Hashem. This doesn’t seem to make sense. Adam HaRishon said, “Tov l’hodos laShem.” Noach thanked Hashem, Malkitzedek expressed gratitude to the Almighty. Eliezer communicated appreciation for Divine assistance, and the pre-Leah list could go on. How could the Gemara make such a bold assertion when it seems from the Torah not to be true?

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz explains: most people say thank you in order to pay off a debt of gratitude. Someone does something nice for us and, as part of an unofficial quid pro quo, we say “thank you” to them in an effort to settle up the score. Each of the earlier people who said thank you did it once, one time, to pay a debt. Leah was the first to understand that gratitude doesn’t conclude, it doesn’t end. If we see gratitude as more than a debt, we never stop expressing it.

Leah named her son Yehudah, literally meaning thank you. Every time she called out his name – “Yehudah come for supper, Yehudah did you do your homework, Yehudah get ready for bed,” every time she called his name, she reawakened her sense of appreciation and fulfilled her commitment to never take him for granted. Unlike the others who said thank you and paid off their debt of gratitude, Leah formulated a thanks that was felt and expressed each and every day on a consistent basis.

Rav Yeruchem explains that Leah expressed this commitment when she gave Yehudah his name. We normally read הַפָּעָם אָזֶה אַתָּה הִ as an explanation for why the new son was called Yehudah. Rav Yeruchem suggests that we read Leah’s expression with a question mark – הַפָּעָם אָזֶה אַתָּה הִ? Should I only thank Hashem this one time and then move on? No way, I will continue to thank Him over and over again.

A shadchanus gift represents paying off a debt of gratitude once and done. Flowers twenty-six years later for no reason demonstrate that the appreciation never ended, or as they wrote, feeling forever grateful.

The Torah endorses, encourages, and urges us to be grateful. We are call Yehudim, says the Chiddushei HaRim, because we are a people of gratitude. We don’t just pay a debt of gratitude, like Leah, we say thank you over and over, we feel endless thankfulness and boundless gratitude for the good things in our lives.

Charles Plumb, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a jet fighter pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent six years in a Communist prison. He survived that ordeal and one day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, “You’re Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam and you were shot down!”

Plumb did not recognize this man and was perplexed. “How in the world did you know that?” asked Plumb. “I packed your parachute,” the man replied, “I guess it worked!”

That night, Plumb couldn’t sleep. He kept wondering what this man might have looked like in a sailor uniform. He wondered how many times he might have passed him on the ship without acknowledging him. How many times he never said hello, good morning, or how are you. Plumb was a fighter pilot, respected and revered, while this man was just an ordinary sailor. Now it grated on his conscious.

Plumb thought of the many lonely hours the sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship carefully weaving the fabric together, making sure the parachute was just right and going to great lengths to make it as precise as can be, knowing that somebody’s life

depended on it. Only now did Plumb have a full appreciation for what this man did. After that encounter, Plumb began travelling around the world as a motivational speaker asking people to recognize who is “packing their parachute.”

Have we thanked those who contributed to the lives we are blessed to live? Imagine if our kindergarten teacher got a note from us thanking her for nurturing us with love. Imagine if our high school principal, our childhood pediatrician, our housekeeper who cleaned our childhood room, out of the blue got a gesture of gratitude showing that we cared enough to track them down and say thank you after all of these years. Did we express enough appreciation to the person who set us up with our spouse, gave us our first job, safely delivered our children?

Research shows that expressing gratitude has mental and physical health benefits, including lower rates of depression and better sleep, improved relationships, and success at work.

Be thankful. Stay thankful. And keep demonstrating gratitude, for your own benefit and for the benefit of someone who will be thrilled to know you still appreciate their role in your life.

Parashat Vayaitzai by Rabbi Nachman Kahana

A Many Splendored Thing

The ways of HaShem are beyond our understanding. However, HaShem appeared to the prophets through human characteristics to enable us to relate in some small way to the Infinite and unimaginable. The prophets perceived the Infinite at times acting towards us with compassion, courage, anger, pride, or disappointment, but always with love.

In the evening prayer (Arvit) we say:

ברוך אתה ה' אָוֹהֶב עַמּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל

Blessed are You HaShem who loves His nation Yisrael.

In the morning (Shacharit) we say:

ברוך אתה ה' הבורך בעמו יִשְׂרָאֵל באהבה

Blessed are You HaShem who has chosen His nation Yisrael in love.

In our Parashat Vayaitzai, Ya'akov arrived at the municipal well of Charan just when several shepherds were lingering around. When Ya'akov questioned them about their seeming indolence in the middle of the workday, they replied (Bereisheit 29:8-11):

יֹאמְרוּ לֹא נִכְלֶל עַד אֲשֶׁר יִאֲסֹפוּ לְלַכְדֵּן הַעֲדרִים וְגַלְלוּ אֶת הַאֲנָן מִלְּפָנֵי הַבָּאֵר וְהַשְׁׁלִינוּ הַצָּאן
“We cannot (water the sheep) until all the flocks are gathered and (then all the shepherds will) roll the stone from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.”

And the Torah relates that while he was talking with them, Rachel came with her father Lavan's sheep. When Ya'akov saw her, he approached the well and plucked the stone up as easily as one does to a bottle cork (Rashi).

How could Ya'akov, the yeshiva bocher, single handedly dislodge a stone that required the combined strength of many grown men?

I submit:

Among the many masterpieces that King Solomon authored is the classic Shir Ha'Shirim (Song of Songs). The illustrious Rabbi Akiva comments on this magnum opus of King Solomon in the Mishna (Ya'adim 3:5):

אמֵר ר' עֲקִיבָא כָּל כְּתוּבִים קָדָשׁ וּשְׁוֹרֵת הַשִּׁירִים קָדָשׁ קָדָשׁ

All scriptures are holy, but Shir Ha'Shirim is the holy of holies.

Rabbi Akiva's soul was moved by Shlomo Ha'Melech's description of the love HaShem showed for the Jewish people (8:6-7):

שִׁימְנִי כְּחֹותָם עַל לְבֵךְ כְּחֹותָם עַל דְּרוֹעֵךְ כִּי עַזָּה כְּמוֹת אַהֲבָה קְשָׁה כְּשָׁלֵיל כְּנָאָה רְשָׁפֵה
שְׁמַשִּׁי אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַבְתָּהּ מִימָּרְכָּם לֹא יָנוּלָה לְבָבוֹת אֶת אַהֲבָה וְנוֹרָה לֹא שְׁטַפֵּה וְנוֹ.

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.

It is not surprising that R. Akiva was the one who was so touched by Shlomo HaMelech's description of love; because R. Akiva knew that true love was indeed “a many splendored thing”.

The Gemara (Ketubot 63a) relates that the young and beautiful Rachel, gave up her family, wealth and youth for love of Akiva, the shepherd.

She believed that he could be a Torah giant in the generation of Torah giants, and struggled alone for 24 years so that her Akiva could learn Torah in Yerushalayim without interruption.

At the end of that period, Akiva the shepherd, who was now the world-renowned Rabbi Akiva, returned home to be reunited with his beloved wife. The Gemara relates that he arrived with 24,000 disciples. All the town's people came out to honor the great Rabbi. Rachel approached her husband and bent down to kiss his feet. When the ushers pushed her back, R. Akiva brought the crowd to silence. And standing before the throng of thousands of his students and onlookers, he raised up his beloved Rachel and declared: “My Torah and your Torah is all HER Torah”.

What Shlomo Ha'Melech was saying, which was so well understood by R. Akiva, was that the love HaShem feels toward Am Yisrael moves the Creator to perform mighty acts not within the framework of the natural world which He created. Just as the love of a man for a woman can move him (or her) to perform remarkable deeds. HaShem, in his love for Am Yisrael, changed the natural order which He Himself had created: The ten plagues, splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna and quail to support millions of people for forty years in the barren desert, the destruction of the Canaanite kingdoms and the innumerable miracles up to this very day.

When Ya'akov saw Rachel, the sudden surge of overpowering love that Ya'akov felt empowered him with the strength to roll the rock, as easily as one would pull a cork from a bottle top (Rashi).

True Love

What are the telltale signs of true love? The desire to be close to the person one loves; the need to communicate, to be understood and to understand each other; the desire to give more and more without expecting anything in return; and to see only the good and forgive that which is less than good.

After listening to many religious Jews living in the galut, I have concluded that although many learn Torah and keep mitzvot most do not love Being Jewish. Many have an acquaintance with Judaism, some even like Judaism, but most do not love being Jewish. If they were, then in no way could they remain in the galut.

To love being Jewish is to strive to be as close to HaShem as humanly possible. And to be close to HaShem means to live in the land of which the Torah states (Devarim 11:12):

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֲ-לֹהֵיךְ דָּרַשׁ אַתָּה תָּמִיד עַנִּי ה' אֲ-לֹהֵיךְ בְּמִרְשַׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרֵת שָׁנָה

A land the LORD your God longs for; the eyes (view) of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.

To love being Jewish means returning to the Holy Land without calculating its personal or professional expedience, just as a young couple very much in love throws expediency to the wind in order to fulfill their ambitions.

To love being Jewish means to know and to communicate with the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov in the holy language of HaShem. I would not be wrong in stating that the overwhelming majority of religious leaders in the galut cannot hold a Hebrew conversation on the level of a 10-year-old Israeli child.

To love being Jewish is to remain home and prepare for the beautiful meaningful holiday of Pesach, and not to take flight to a hotel or resort in order to escape the ghosts of chametz.

To love being Jewish is to look forward, every week, to Shabbat and regard the kitchen preparations as a personal simcha for the great merit of being part of God's chosen nation.

To love being Jewish is to be part of a daily minyan that imparts to the congregation a spiritual experience; not to seek out the fastest minyan in town in order to begin work early.

To love being Jewish is to behave in reverence and to be silent when present in a bet knesset; not to sit and talk, stopping only to partake in the “club”.

To love being Jewish is to be part of the defense of Eretz Yisrael as a soldier of Tzahal.

To love being Jewish is to notice the faults and shortcomings of the Israeli leadership and to join here in our efforts to redress the mistakes.

To love being Jewish is to learn Torah in the special environment of the land where the Torah was intended by HaShem to be kept. If your spiritual mentor in the galut does not encourage aliya to Eretz Yisrael, it has nothing to do with the land or its people; it simply means that he is involved, even deeply involved, with Yehadut, but not in love with all that it demands.

Love is indeed a “many splendored thing”. It is a call from the depths of one’s soul to announce that it has been touched and resonates to the mind and emotions. If one does not feel love for Judaism in its entirety, then that person’s soul has not been touched.

Ya’akov’s soul was touched when he met Rachel, as was Shlomo Ha’Melech when he felt the love of HaShem for Am Yisrael, and the soul of Rabbi Akiva towards the woman who made him the scholar that he became.

Those of us who have returned to the Land of Israel in love are, together with our Israeli born brothers and sisters, continuing to forge ahead in the authentic Jewish history that was so violently and cruelly disrupted 2000 years ago.

No obstacle will impede the Jews who love HaShem, the land, and Am Yisrael from our determination to restore the former glory of Am Yisrael as HaShem’s chosen people: neither gentile enemies from without nor Jewish traitors from within.

As Shlomo Ha’Melech wrote: It (love) burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.

Love for Yehadut is indeed a many splendid thing!

A most relevant manifestation of HaShem’s love for Am Yisrael is what we are experiencing in Eretz Yisrael, as expressed in Tehillim 124:

שֶׁר הַמְּעֻלּוֹת לְדוֹד

A song of ascents of David.

If HaShem had not been with us, let Israel say;

If HaShem had not been with us when we were attacked,

Then they would have devoured us alive when their anger flared against us;

Then the flood (hate) would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us,

the raging waters would have swept us away.

Praise be HaShem who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

We have escaped like a bird from the fowler’s snare; the snare has been broken and we have escaped.

Our help is in the name of HaShem – Creator of heaven and earth

SHABBAT SHALOM & CHODESH TOV

Nachman Kahana

Parshat Vayetzei

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel’s older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissaschar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef.

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

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Opulence and Optimism

“If Hashem … will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear …” (28:20) Nothing is sadder than someone who has the wherewithal without the “all.”

Nothing is sadder than having the means without the end.

A person can have tremendous wealth and opulence, can have a live-in Sushi chef, but if he has Crohn’s disease, instead of being a blessing, his wealth and wherewithal are a constant reminder of his infirmity.

Someone can have the last word in tailoring: a suit by number one Italian tailor, Antonio Liverano, and shoes by Crockett & Jones, but if he’s in the middle of a vicious legal battle and all his days are spent going to court, then his clothes will just remind him of where he has to go today.

“If Hashem … will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear …”

Ostensibly, there is no other reason to have bread than to eat it and no other reason to have clothes than to wear them. So, why does the verse spell out ‘bread to eat’ and ‘clothes to wear’?

Yaakov Avinu was asking Hashem not just for the wherewithal, not just food but also for the health to enjoy it. And not just clothing but the peace of mind to dress in the morning with optimism.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Vayetzei

Noach How Do You Respond to Your Dreams?

The book of Bereshit (Genesis) could easily be given the subtitle “The Book of Dreams,” as there are many significant dreams within it. However, it is only in relation to two of these dreams that the Torah uses a particular verb: “Vayyikatz” — “he woke up from his dream.”

Clearly, the Torah is inviting us to compare and contrast these two occasions. The first is in Parshat Vayetzei, when Jacob had the extraordinary vision of the ladder. The Torah tells us, Vayyikatz Yaakov — Jacob woke up.

What was his response? He immediately declared, “Achen yesh Hashem bammakom hazzeh” — “I feel, and I know that Hashem is in this place.”

Jacob then translated his dream into action by declaring, “Vehayah Hashem li Lelokim” - “The Lord will be my God for the rest of my life.” Now, let’s look at the second “Vayyikatz,” found in Parshat Miketz. King Pharaoh had a dream just as monumental as Jacob’s, a dream through which God was sending a message to him personally, and through him, to all of civilisation. It was about the seven lean cows and the seven healthy cows.

How did Pharaoh respond? The Torah says, “Vayyikatz...Vayyishan vayyachalom shenit” — “He woke up, and then he went back to sleep and had another dream.” The Torah is surely teaching us how to respond to our dreams. And it’s not just the dreams we have at night, but the messages that our experiences convey to us, the inspiration we derive from what we see and hear. So, how do we respond? Do we change our lives accordingly and become a blessing for our environment as a result? Or, like Pharaoh, do we simply turn over and ignore what we see and hear? In Psalm 126 (Shir Hama’ilot), a familiar passage to many, there is a reference to dreams — a very significant one. The Psalm says, “Beshuv Hashem et-shivat Tziyyon hayinu kecholelim” — “When Hashem returned the captives of Zion, we were like dreamers.” This highlights the extent to which Hashem recognises His gift of Zion to the Jewish people — not just as a geopolitical part of the Jewish nation, but as the centre of our faith. And how have we translated that dream? Into the marvellous reality of the State of Israel.

Whether people around the world recognise it or not, Israel continues to be a blessing for all of civilisation. And right now, we have a dream. It is a dream that is ever-present in our minds, and it is accompanied by sentiments from our hearts.

Our dream is to see the numerous hostages being held in Gaza come home swiftly and safely. Our prayer, right now, is "Beshuv Hashem et-shivat Tziyyon" — "May Hashem enable the captives of Zion to come home." And what will our response be then? "Az yimmale sechok pinu uleshonenu rinnah" — "Then we will be filled with joy and happiness." Please, God, may it come soon! Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Leibish ben Shimon, Leo Koenigsberg.

Night and Day

And Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan. He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set [...] (28:10-11).

This week's parsha opens with Yaakov Avinu traveling to Charan to find a wife, following the behest of his parents Yitzchak and Rifkah. The Torah relates how he passed by the future home of the Beis Hamikdosh on Mount Moriah (see Rashi ad loc). According to Rashi, Yaakov felt it would be inappropriate to pass up the opportunity to pray at the same place his father and grandfather had prayed. Therefore, he returned to the place and instituted the evening prayer known as ma'ariv (see Rashi 28:17 and 28:11).

Chazal teach us that the three prayer services (shacharis, mincha, and ma'ariv) were established by the three forefathers: Avraham Avinu instituted shacharis, Yitzchak Avinu instituted mincha, and Yaakov Avinu instituted ma'ariv.

Yet this seems a little odd. We know that every day begins with the onset of the prior evening. That is, Monday begins at sunset on Sunday. Thus, the first prayer that we pray each day is ma'ariv. Wouldn't it be more logical for Avraham, being the first of the forefathers, to have instituted the first prayer service of ma'ariv? Why is it that Avraham instituted shacharis, the second prayer service, instead?

People often look at prayers solely as something that we do out of an obligation towards the Almighty. In other words, Hashem created man and prayers are what we do for him. While it is true that davening has a component of devotional service, the first time the Torah refers to the purpose of prayer it is in an entirely different context.

We find regarding the creation of the world: "These are the products of the heavens and earth when they were created on the day of Hashem's, God's, making of the earth and heavens. At this time there was no tree yet on earth and no herb of the field had yet sprouted for Hashem had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil" (2:4-5). Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem did not make it rain until man arrived and recognized what the world was lacking and he prayed for rain. At that point, everything began to grow. Hence, man's participation is required to make this world operate as it should.

From here, we find a critical aspect of man's responsibility in the world: as a partner to Hashem in creating a functional world. Prior to Adam's sin, man's contribution to the world was through his relationship to the Almighty and expressed through davening. This is how man fulfilled his responsibility to build and accomplish. Thus, we see that a very basic component of davening is an expression of what we contribute to the world as Hashem's partner.

There are two distinct components to every twenty-four hour period: day and night. They are not merely differentiated by whether or not the sun is above or below the horizon. Rather, they have completely different functions. Daytime is the period in which mankind goes out and contributes to the functionality of the world, while nighttime is the period when man feels connected to it.

In Hebrew, the word "yom – day" is masculine and "leila – night" is feminine. Day is the time for people to do and night is the time to connect. This also explains why when a woman tries to express an issue to a man he focuses on trying to solve it (the do/give aspect) even though she really just wants him to listen (the connect aspect).

Avraham Avinu is the av of chessed – which is the attribute emblematic of giving. This is why he was the proper forefather to institute shacharis, the daytime service that defines all prayers. This is also why every regular siddur (as opposed to a Machzor, etc.) begins with shacharis and not ma'ariv.

Family Not Friends

And it was when Lavan heard the news that Yaakov, his sister's son [had arrived], he ran toward him and he embraced and kissed him and brought him to his house [...] Lavan said to him, "But you are my flesh and bone," and he stayed with him a month of days (29:13-14).

In this week's parsha we find a remarkable, if not outright shocking, distinction between when Eliezer the servant of Avraham Avinu went to visit Charan and the events that unfolded when Yaakov visited Charan. When Eliezer arrived in Charan, charged with a mission to find a wife for Yitzchak, he was greeted by Lavan who made an extraordinary statement: "Come, O' blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside when I have cleared the house and a place for the camels?" (24:31).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that in saying he "cleared the house" Lavan was informing Eliezer that he had cleared out all the idols from the house. Meaning, Lavan knew that any servant of Avraham would find it abhorrent and downright repugnant to accept lodging in a home filled with idols.

Yet somehow, Yaakov, the greatest of our forefathers and grandson of Avraham, had no objection to staying in Lavan's home, which we know was replete with idols (Rachel takes some when they beat a hasty escape some twenty years later).

How is it possible that Yaakov was agreeable to staying in such a home? Perhaps even more peculiar, what was so obvious to Lavan that he knew that he had to clear out the house for Eliezer but not for Yaakov?

The difference between these stories is also relevant to our generation and the challenges that many families currently face.

A person who is shomer shabbos should feel very uncomfortable in a non-shabbos environment, such as being in a room where many people are watching television or talking on their telephones. Therefore, one should try to do whatever can be done to avoid those types of situations. But one of the outcomes of the Bal Teshuvah movement is that these newly observant Jews are now thrust into family situations where many or even most of their nuclear families do not keep shabbos or kosher. Consequently, their homes on shabbos exude very little of a true shabbos atmosphere. What are they to do? Should they return to their parents' house for a simcha such as a nephew's bar mitzvah even though their shabbos atmosphere would clearly be adversely affected?

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

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

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' עקיבא אליעזר ע"ה
בילא בת (אריה) ליב ע"ה

אנא מלכה בת ישראל

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 & 'BECHIRAH' CONFIRMATION

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

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

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

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

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

DIVINE RE-ASSURANCE

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

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

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

YAAKOV'S REACTION [and REALIZATION]

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

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

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

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

"And Yaakov rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, and set it up for a pillar [matzeyva], and poured oil upon the top of it.

Then he called the name of that place Bet-el [even though the original name of this city was Luz]." (28:18-19)

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

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

YAAKOV'S NEDER

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

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

A PREDICTION - or A RESOLUTION!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY YAAKOV IS DIFFERENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

"For Avraham will surely become a great nation [goy gadol] - compare 12:2) - **and through him all nations will be blessed**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY CONDITIONAL?

Now that we have explained both what Yaakov does, and why he does it, we are left with one last question - If Yaakov is so inspired to build this House for God, why does he 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 Vayishlach is all about! And iy'h, that will be the topic of next week's shiur! Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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

RELATED TOPICS

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

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

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

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

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

"And Yaakov then made a vow saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The classical commentators tackle this question in their commentaries.

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

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

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

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

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

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B. BET-EL / A SPIRITUAL INTERSECTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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C. BET-EL & BET ELOKIM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parshas Vayeitzei: Yaakov's Vow

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. THE DREAM AND THE RESPONSE

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

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

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

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

II. ANALYZING THE TEXT: FIVE QUESTIONS

PROBLEM #1: "NEDER AL T'NAI"

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

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

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

PROBLEM #2: HOW MUCH IS "VOW"?

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

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

PROBLEM #3: MA'ASER

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

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

There is one external difficulty:

PROBLEM #4: WHEN IS THE VOW FULFILLED?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The one explicit instance of tithing found before Ya'akov was that of Avraham (Bereshit 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. Bereshit 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 titheing at that point, the righteous person shows that his special relationship with God is justified - and is accessible to others. Ya'akov knew that when he would be recognized by leaders as having a special relationship with God - that would be the point at which he would tithe.

IV. REEVALUATING THE VOW

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

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

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

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

We can now answer all of our questions:

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

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Parshat Vayeitzei: Measure for Measure

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

INTRODUCTION AND QUESTIONS:

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

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

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

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

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

QUESTIONS:

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

PARASHAT VAYETZE:

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

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

JUST LIKE GRANDDAD:

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

TO AVRAHAM:

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

TO YA'AKOV:

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

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

TO AVRAHAM:

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

TO YA'AKOV:

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

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

LAVAN -- MESSENGER OF HASHEM?

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

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

BERESHIT 29:22-27 --

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

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

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

YA'AKOV GROWS:

Being on the receiving end of a deception of this proportion is a learning experience for Ya'akov. Not only has justice been served in a retributive sense, but Ya'akov, in his bitterness at what has been done to him, also begins to appreciate the bitterness of Eisav's cry upon discovering that his blessings have been taken. As the sunrise stuns him with the revelation that the woman with whom he has shared intimacy is Le'ah and not the beloved Rahel, he begins to understand the "harada gedola ad me'od," the great trembling fear, which gripped Yitzhak when he realized he had been duped and blessed the wrong son. One of the reasons Ya'akov has been delivered by divine plan into Lavan's custody is so that he can appreciate what it means to be the victim of a swindle. And one of the reasons Ya'akov is silent, that he accepts Lavan's terms, is because he realizes that Lavan has been the vehicle to deliver his punishment and teach him a lesson.

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

SIBLING RIVALRY -- LEAH:

BERESHIT 30:30-31--

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

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

BERESHIT 30:32-35 --

Le'ah conceived and bore a son. She called him Re'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 Leivi ["drawn to me"]. She conceived again and bore a son. She said, "This time, I will praise ["odeh"] Hashem," so she called his named Yehuda ["praise God"], and she bore no more.

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

Name Meaning

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

SHIMON ---> "Listen!"

LEIVI ---> "Come to me!"

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

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

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

SIBLING RIVALRY -- RAHEL:

Rachel 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 --

Rachel 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 Rachel 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.

Rachel 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?

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

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

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

A FASCINATING SIDE POINT:

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

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

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

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

STEALTHY THEFT:

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

BERESHIT 31:20-23 --

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

As far as the Torah is concerned, Ya'akov's pattern of theft continues with this flight. He stole the birthright from Eisav, stole the blessings from Yitzhak and Eisav, stole away from Be'er Sheva to avoid Eisav, and now he steals away again. The word "bore'ah" (bet, reish, het) is given special prominence here in order to remind us of an earlier "bore'ah" -- when he fled from 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 Rahel has indeed stolen Lavan's gods. But the situation provides Ya'akov with an opportunity for growth. Finally, instead of running from the

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

BERESHIT 31:43-32:1 --

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom