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ON VAYEITZE - 5768

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Rav Soloveitchik ZT'L Notes (Volume 3)

Lecture delivered by Rabbi Soloveitchik on Saturday night, December 16, 1978

Sedra "Vayaytze"

This evening we shall explain a few aspects of the word, "Vayaytze" (and he went out). Rashi's interpretation is that the word "Vayaytze" denotes that the departure of a "zadik" — a righteous person leaves a profound impression. When he is in a town, he is its glory, its grandeur, its beauty. "Vayaytze yaakov mibayr shova vayaylech chirona." (And Jacob departed from Ber Sheva and went to Choron.) Where does Rashi derive this conclusion about the departure? Where is his source for this statement? It was no longer the B'er Sheva which it previously was. He felt that semantically Vayaytze tells a story. It contains a message B'er Sheva became a desolate place which previously it was a beautiful city.

In Hebrew the word Vayaytze appears with many suppositions as demonstrated in various places in the Torah. In chapter 11, sentence 8 of Sedra Bo in Chumash Shemot we find: "Vayaytze mayim parah b'chori af." (And Moshe went out from Pharaoh in great anger.) We find it combined with the word "ays" when Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray for him and he answered that he could not pray here. "I will go out and spread out my hands to G-d!" There are three suppositions connected with "Vayaytze". It is combined with the words "ays", "m'ays" and "min" — all meaning "going out from". It means a physical departure — not a spiritual one. For instance, we find in Sedra Vayakal (section 35, sentence 20): when Moshe sent the people to obtain the ingredients necessary for the "chel moed", "Vayaytze kol adas bnai Yisrael milifnai Moshe." They went out to attend to important business — to return shortly with the "offering for the Mishkan." This is a departure not for ever but for a short time. They went just to get what they needed. It is a physical departure for a short time but not permanent. The same applies to what Moshe said to Pharaoh, "I'll walk out to the city gate to pray." Again it is physical, "B'tzasi ays" — not "min". "Ays" is departure from a person — Moshe's leaving Pharaoh. These are the semantics of the word. When it is combined with the word "min" (or a contraction of "min") it means something different; it means "permanent — forgotten."

Thus in "Vayaytze Yaakov mi'ber" — means "I had to move away from something dear — something I loved. A "force" has displaced me. This is

what Rashi means "Mi Be'r Sheva". He didn't want to go but was uprooted. More over, "Vayaytze min" refers to something tragic — something sad which is reminiscent of a catastrophe — his moving from B'er Sheva. How do we know he felt like that? B'er Sheva felt it and Jacob felt it. It is hard to imagine a B'er Sheva without the personage of Jacob. They were one entity; he belonged to the city. His distinction was strange and foreign to him and he felt that he could never learn to live there. His tragedy was the necessity to live minus his father's home. Why did he experience this in such tragic terms? Of course, it is understood that no one wants to leave his father and mother and the home he loves. But this was not Jacob's main reason for he was not a child. The Torah would not talk merely about sentimental terms. The Patriarchs were not in the habit of turning natural events into tragedies.

There is a posek in Tehilim which reads, "I lift up mine eyes to the mountain; from whence shall mine help come!" This "posek" of Tehilim refers to Jacob when he left B'er Sheva to go to Choron. It was a spiritual moment of tragedy for him. Interestingly, however, after he spent the night "B'mokom" (at the place), he became light-headed, happy — because he had experienced an encounter with G-d and assurance of Divine help. But it was not due merely to an encounter with G-d and not only the promise of protection and assurance. What did G-d tell him?

Abraham introduced the Covenantal Community. It was signed and sealed by G-d and it imposed an obligation not only on man but on G-d. It involved each side of the covenant. Was it unconditional or did Abraham have to meet certain conditions and obligations? Certain definite conditions were introduced as we find in Chapter 18, line 19 of Sedra "Vayera".

"For I know that he will instruct his sons and his community after him to observe the ways of G-d to do charity and righteousness in order that G-d will bring to Abraham that which He has promised concerning him."

He must transmit all his teaching to future generations. If Abraham leaves no "will", there is no obligation by G-d. It is said that every member of the Covenant must write two wills. There is the normal will which disposes of his personal wealth and belongings. But there is another will, the one of observing "Derech Hashem" (G-d's way). "He (Abraham) will entrust the spiritual treasure to his children."

According to Rambam, a "mitzvah" is not merely a commandment but "m'tzoa she' bal peh" — an utterance or a will. The word "mitzvah" is synonymous with the word "Tzavoah" (will). If it were not carved out, the covenant would have terminated.

Abraham was the first teacher, not to a few but to tens of thousands, according to Rambam. The Community consisted of "Talmidim" — students. The main thing was the "Teacher-father," not merely based on the biological factor but on the teaching aspect. Rambam calls it, "the nation which is in love with G-d." This is how he termed the Covenantal Community. We find in Tehilim often the phrase, "Shigoyun L'Dovid" as it introduces a psalm. The word "Shigoyun" means the "Madness of David." He was madly in love with G-d. Abraham's responsibility was to see that there is someone to pass it on to. This was the type of community which Abraham passed on to Isaac and which Isaac then passed on to Jacob. It was "love of G-d" and it was consummated at Sinai.

Where in Torah do we find that "Yitzchak" took over the lead? In Chapter 26, line 25 of "Toldos" it declares, "Vayiven shom mizbayach" — and he built there an altar. Once he built the altar, he was now the teacher. Now he became the successor.

We also find that Abimelech, the King of G'ror, recognized this greatness as did the previous Abimelech of Abraham Here, immediately after being told that Yitzchak built the "Mizbayach" Abimelech came to sign a treaty. "Now I see that G-d is with you. Let there be a treaty between you and me." A king does not sign a pact with an ordinary person but with a person of equal importance. In Chapter 22 of "Sedra Vayera", Abimelech made a treaty with Abraham and recognized him as a king. Also, he wouldn't have done this with an ordinary man. Thus, with both Abraham and Isaac we find them recognized as kings. Therefore, lineage succession is clean. Now

as for Jacob, where do we find the leadership turned over to him? We find it in the second "Brochos" or blessings bestowed upon him by his father Isaac before Jacob left his home. Chapter 27, line 4: "And may He bestow upon you the blessings of Abraham." Isaac never intended these blessings for Esau. He intended for Esau only "M'tal Hashamayim" — the dew of heaven — the physical riches. The second ones, "Birchas Avrohom" were for Jacob. "Travel and spread the words of G-d. Tell the people who G-d is!" That is the trusteeship of the Covenantal Community. "Love of G-d." Interestingly, here we find the name of G-d written as "Kal Shadai" In the first blessing it is written Elokim. Shadai means "limitation," not too big — not too much — limited. Jacob's role would now involve a limited group of people.

Jacob understood all this but there was something he didn't understand. If he is the leader of the community, he thought it only could be carried out in Eretz Yisroel. He knew that his father Yitzhak wanted to leave the land but G-d stopped him. "You are the leader of the Community — one entity and cannot leave."

Here suddenly Jacob's father tells him to leave the land with the "Birkos Avraham," — (Abraham's blessings). This is what he couldn't reason. We are told by Rambam that B'er Sheva was the "Ir M'Kudeshes" — the city as holy in the Patriarchs' time as Jerusalem was destined to become. It was the center of Abraham's activities. From time to time we are told that Abraham left B'er Sheva to expand his activities but invariably he returned to the city. Thus, if the city had such stature, Jacob couldn't visualize leaving B'er Sheva. In fact, he was uprooted and taken by force from B'er Sheva. "It is not your place." These were his fears for he thought that his role would be taken away from him. It was hard for him to realize that he could be a leader — a teacher in a place of Pagans. B'er Sheva indeed lost a great man! The holiness is not B'er Sheva per se. It is not holy more with his departure and is similar to Mt. Sinai. Now it means nothing per se. "The moment the shofar "Tkiah G'Dolah" was sounded at Sinai and the "Shechina" departed, there was no longer holiness. Similar is B'er Sheva. Jacob was frightened! Perhaps, not only was Kedusha (holiness) taken from B'er Sheva but maybe from him too. Maybe there is another man. This was his great fear. This is why he declares almost hysterically, "Where shall I turn my eyes, etc." "Can I build a community in Choron? It is an impossibility." Why did G-d send him to Choron? Why start from scratch? Why lose the tens of thousands who Abraham trained, who Yitzhak trained? Apparently, the community was destroyed. However, it was G-d's inscrutable will. In Choron he did start the community with a handful of children — with twelve people. Only this did G-d want! He left thousands and came back to an old blind father with a handful. Why?

I believe that G-d tried to teach Jacob this "Yehodus" — faith is recognizable and understandable even on the moon. If he didn't leave, the community would have been limited only to Eretz. "Yehodus" wanted Jacob to realize this and to start from scratch. It also shows us that we can start from scratch.

There was "Churban rishon" — Churban sheni — destruction after destruction, and yet we picked up the threads and started from scratch. Yitzhak told him, "Lach Padana Arom" (go to Padan Arom). And Jacob had to experience this — not only Jacob but later Joseph. G-d wanted Jacob to experience "Golus" (Diaspora) — to be a stranger — to be rejected — not in a known land — to be exposed and persecuted. But why twice? First, it was father and then the son. Joseph resembled Jacob physically and also resembled Jacob's awesome experiences. Jacob had to experience it in poverty and hard work. Joseph had to experience it both ways — in poverty and as a successful man with material wealth. It was to teach us, the later generations, that we can be part of the Covenantal Community under all conditions in all places.

This is what G-d wanted for Jacob. "Go, forget all your friends and your people — go to Choron. Try to convert the young girls - your wives - your children." And from the twelve cornerstones come the nation. There will be a Mokom Kodesh, a holy place, but not B'er Sheva. There he became

happy with "B'Mokom" (the mount where he slept the night). "I realize I don't have to worry. 'B'er Sheva' is not the place of destiny. It will be in time to come in another place."

<http://www.ou.org/torah/zomet/5759/vayetze59.htm>
"LET THERE BE NO FAULT IN MY OFFSPRING"

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

Yaacov made a vow on his way from Be'er Sheva to Charan: "The Almighty will be a G-d for me" [Bereishit 28:21]. As Rashi explains, his prayer was, "Let me be worthy of His name from beginning to end, let there be no fault in my offspring." This was years before he had any children, but he already prayed that his children would continue in his path. And in the end, Yaacov achieved what his father and grandfather did not. As far as Avraham was concerned, Yitzchak was the only one who continued his way. Similarly, for Yitzchak, only Yaacov continued on the righteous path. Yaacov himself is not sure of his sons, asking, "Is there some fault among you? Is there anybody who does not stand with me in following G-d?" [Rambam, Hilchot Keriyat Shema 1:4]. The reply is: "Hear, Yisrael - that is, hear us, our father Yisrael - our G-d is one. And he replied, Blessed is the honor of His kingdom for ever." [Rambam, ibid].

This desire, to pass on the yoke of heaven to all his children, without any exception, is Yaacov's guiding principle throughout his life. At his first meeting with Yosef, after 22 years of separation, he didn't fall over him and kiss him, but he "recited the Shema" [Rashi, Breishit 46:29]. In spite of the fact that his sons had told him that Yosef had been killed by an animal, he still feared that they had a hand in his death, acting in a way more befitting Esav than Yaacov. When he saw that Yosef was indeed still alive, he cried out, "Shema Yisrael - I am happy that all my children follow the path of G-d."

But Yaacov is concerned not only with his own children but with all of mankind. That is how Rashi interprets the first verse of Keriyat Shema: "G-d, who is only ours for now and not the G-d of all the nations, will in the future be a single G-d, as is written, Then will I change the nations to speak clear language, that they will all call out in the name of G-d' [Tzefania 3:9], and it is written, 'On that day, G-d will be one and His name will be one' [Zechariya 14:9]." [Devarim 6:4]. The mitzva of "Love your G-d" is not concerned only with the Jew himself and his family, but is interpreted to mean, "Cause Him to be loved by all mankind, as was your father Avraham, as is written, 'and the souls which he made in Chevron' [Bereishit 12:5]" [Sifri, Devarim 6:8].

Rabbi A.Y. Kook wrote in "Teudat Yisrael U'Leumi'uto" as follows: "It would be a mistake to leave nationalistic feelings in their natural state, in terms of materialistic desires, related to nothing more than the needs of life. It is necessary in addition to this to attempt to understand and to explain how our nationalistic feelings are related to the lofty goal of love for all mankind. This is our ultimate goal and desire." Yaacov's great vision, from the time he escaped all alone to Aram, and from then on, was that there should be no fault not only in him and his children, but in all of mankind as well. Back To Top of Page

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The Tzadik Does Not "Flee" He "Leaves" (With Dignity and Confidence)

Last week's parsha ends with Yitzchak sending Yaakov to his Uncle Lavan to find a wife. The narrative concludes with Yitzchak blessing Yaakov and the latter leaving for Padan Aram. The pasuk [verse] then interjects that Eisav noticed that his Canaanite wives were evil in his father's eyes and therefore went and married Machalas the daughter of Yishmael, son of Avraham. [Bereshis 28:5-9]

Parshas Vayeitzei returns to the narrative of Yaakov's departure and restates the fact that "Yaakov left Be'er Sheva." [Bereshis 28:10] From a literary perspective, it would have made far more sense to not repeat Yaakov's departure from Be'er Sheva for Padan Aram, but rather to immediately begin the narration of Yaakov's dream: "He encountered the place..." beginning in pasuk 11. It would seem almost as if the Torah was "side-tracked" by the interjection of Eisav's marriage, such that it had to retrace its steps and refresh our memory of what was taking place with Yaakov.

The Be'er Yosef by Rav Yosef Salant says this "diversion" implicitly compliments Yaakov Avinu. We notice a vast difference in the lot of Yitzchak's two sons, in their ability to land the type of shidduchim [marriages] they are seeking. Yaakov needs to travel to Padan Aram. He needs to negotiate with the notorious Lavan. He gets tricked by Lavan and winds up having to work for 14 years to get two wives, only one of which he really wanted to marry. Eisav goes off and marries Machalas, one-two-three!

For those with the experience of having sons in "shidduchim," this is the equivalent of having one son who marries the first girl he ever goes out with, while the other son travels from New York to Baltimore, week in, week out, for years, without ever finding a shidduch.

What are we to say about such a dichotomy? We might say "Nu, some people have it easy and some people have it hard." But who has it easy and who has it hard? The righteous Yaakov has it hard. The wicked Eisav has it easy!

The Be'er Yosef says that this is why the Torah uses the words "Vayeitzei Yaakov" at the beginning of the parsha. The verb Vayeitzei [and he went out] teaches us that despite the fact that Yaakov could have had complaints to the Almighty and questioned the fairness of the relative difficulty he was having finding a marriage partner in fulfillment of his parents' wishes, he nevertheless did not question Him. Yaakov had no complaints.

Rav Matisyahu Solomon asks on this insight of the Be'er Yosef: where do we see that Yaakov did not have complaints to G-d regarding the difficulty he was experiencing with shidduchim? Rav Matisyahu Solomon explains that we see that Yaakov did not have complaints from the pasuk "And Yaakov left from Be'er Sheva and he went to Charan." This teaches us that he went serenely and calmly, always with a smile on his face, and without complaints.

How do we see that? A pasuk in the Haftorah mirrors the pasuk at the beginning of the Parsha: "Yaakov fled (vayivrach Yaakov) to the fields of Aram..." [Hoshea 12:13] The wording in our Parsha (vayeitzei / vayelech) implies that he went quietly, confidently, not rushed and not hurried, with the greatest serenity. "Vayivrach Yaakov Sedei Aram" means he ran for his life! Which one is correct?

In truth, he did flee for his life. Rivka saw what was happening. She knew that her son Yaakov would be in mortal danger if he remained in Canaan much longer. "So now my son, heed my voice and arise; FLEE to my brother Lavan to Haran." [Bereshis 27:43]

Really, both pasukim are true. He was running for his life, but he did not perceive it as such. He perceived that this was part of G-d's plan. G-d was taking him by the hand, so to speak, and saying "Yankele, now we need to go to the field of Aram and this is where you are going to find your marriage partner. I am leading you." Even though objectively he was fleeing, he perceived it to be a departure of dignity and purpose, which did not present cause for worry or anxiety.

There is no difference in any of our life's journeys, whether we have a Pillar of Fire at night that leads our way, as was the case in the Exodus from Egypt, or whether the journey resembles any of the other numerous sojourns that Klal Yisrael has taken in Galus all these thousands of years. It is always the same. Whether obvious or not, G-d is always leading us by the hand.

He prepares the steps of man (ha'mechin mitz'adei gaver). We are supposed to be in a certain place at a certain time and G-d sees to it that this will happen. It is Yaakov Avinu's unbelievable confidence and faith in the Almighty that allows him to take in stride, all the trials and tribulation that confronted him in finding his marriage partner.

It is with such an attitude that Yaakov was able to maintain a sense of calm and dignity represented by the word "vayeitzei" (he departed in an orderly man ner) during a situation that objectively amounted to a "vayivrach" (fleeing for his life).

I recently attended a dinner in Chicago for the Telshe Yeshiva. The Roshei Yeshiva there spoke about the history of Telshe. Rav Avraham Chaim Levine was yet a young boy when they started the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio. He remembered what Rav Elya Meir Bloch said in the early days of the Yeshiva in America.

Rav Elya Meir Bloch saw the Telshe Yeshiva in Europe burn to the ground with his own eyes, with virtually all of its students at the hands of the Nazis, yemach shemam [may their name be blotted out]. The Telshe Yeshiva in Europe and all its students were destroyed. Two of the Roshei Yeshiva, Rav Elya Meir Bloch and Rav Mottel Katz were miraculously spared.

When Rav Elya Meir came to the United States as a refugee who had lost his family, he immediately decided that he was going to start a Yeshiva. He went to Rabbi Teitz in New Jersey for consultation. They fasted so that they should merit picking the right city. They picked Cleveland, Ohio.

Some people argued with him: "How can you start a new Yeshiva? You are fresh off the boat! You are a refugee. You cannot start a new Yeshiva in a strange country in a strange land!" Rav Elya Meir responded that when the future King Dovid did not know whether King Shaul was about to kill him or not, he made up a sign with the King's son, Yonasan (recorded in the famous Haftorah of 'Machar chodesh'). "If I say this to the boy: 'Behold, the arrows are beyond you!', then go (lech), for this is a signal that Hashem has sent you away." [Shmuel I 20:22].

The pasuk does not use the term "berach" [flee], just "lech" [go]. "For this is a signal that Hashem has sent you away." This is part of your mission from the Almighty. This is part of G-d leading you by the hand and telling you This is where you are supposed to go.' This is all part of the Pillar of Light that leads you at night. It may not be readily perceived as such and things might look bleak, but in truth, it is all the same. The Tzadik proceeds confidently in the bleakest of situations, secure in his faith that the Almighty is leading him in the appropriate direction.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #570, Tuition And Maaser Money. Good Shabbos! Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Persistence and Initiative in Avodat Hashem

Parshat Vayetze begins with an account of Yaakov's departure from Beer Sheva en route to Charan. Understandably, the Torah elaborates his experience that evening in which he dreams of the ladder that bridges heaven and earth and comes to the profound realization of Hashem's omnipresence. These transformative developments inspire Yaakov to rename the city of Luz and to assume a neder obligation that reflects an intensification of his commitment to Hashem. However, some of the mefarshim (see Ohr ha-Chaim 28:10) note that it is puzzling that these events are introduced by a seemingly redundant report of his exit from Beer Sheva ("vayetze Yaakov"), as this development is already chronicled twice previously (Bereshit 28:5,7). The Torah records that Yitzchak sent him on his journey. Subsequently, we are informed that Yaakov heeded the advice of his parents and left his home. What does the Torah add by repeating Yaakov's exodus yet again, as a prelude to this transformative evening?

An examination of Yaakov's singular approach to avodat Hashem may perhaps resolve this difficulty and also shed some light on the significance of the ladder dream, as well as his personal revelation that evening.

Yaakov's spiritual personality is already reflected in the story of his birth and early childhood, especially when contrasted with the development of his twin, Esav. Esav's birth is quite a dramatic event. He emerges into the world in impressive and colorful fashion. "Vayikrau shemo Esav". He is acclaimed by all (vayikrau-plural) and given a name (Esav=asui) that conveys his remarkably advanced physical maturity. Yaakov, on the other hand, is initially perceived almost as an afterthought (ve-acharei khein yatza achiv), simply as Esav's brother, who is barely grasping Esav's heel.

The pattern persists as the twins develop. Esav impresses his father and others as an accomplished forceful person, signified by the double "ish" ("ish yodea zayid, ish sadeh"), while Yaakov is self-effacing, and self-contained, an ish tam yoshev ohalim who appears to be passive. A closer look, however, belies the public images. Esav's high point is his birth. He never develops or strives for anything beyond self-indulgence. The Torah does not refer to him by using verbs of accomplishment but simply "vayechi". [Only when he loses the bechorah, does he respond actively albeit negatively by complaining, crying, and expressing his hatred (Bereshit 27:38,41), further reinforcing his actual weakness.] His stature is unrelated to his activities. He is stagnant, spiritually impoverished and insensitive (even Yitzchak realizes that he does not invoke Hashem's name; his lack of initiative in marrying a local pagan engenders the disappointment (morat ruach) of both parents). Moreover, Esav displays absolutely no vision; his actions are motivated exclusively by the need for instant gratification. In his moment of truth, as Yaakov is honoring the memory of Avraham Avinu, Esav forfeits his destiny for a bowl of soup because he is tired, hungry, lethargic and indifferent. The midrash explains his consideration - "hinei anochi holeich la-mut ve-lamah li bechorah" - as based on the calculation that the avodah would eventually be taken from the bechor. In any case, he could not see the advantage in a bechorah that entailed halachic risks. Notwithstanding his charismatic image, Esav was essentially passive, rigid and static in his personal growth.

Yaakov represented the antithesis of his flashy but self-indulgent brother. Seemingly passive, insular and peripheral, he was actually from the very outset singularly focused (characterized by the term "tam" and the use of a single "ish"), extraordinarily persistent, and possessed of great vision and spiritual ambition. He was humble and self-contained, but intensely committed to self-growth in avodat Hashem. From his very inception, he struggled to grow and to progress, literally seizing Esav's heel. Chazal (Devarim 7:12) associate the term "ekev" with spiritual ambition and sensitivity that capitalizes on the opportunity to accomplish even the perceived "lesser mitzvot". Yaakov is the one who initiates the aveilut for Avraham. When confronted with Esav's spiritual bankruptcy, he is able to overcome his own humility to salvage the abused bechorah (vayeevez Esav et ha-bechorah). Yaakov understands that accountability and responsibility betoken value and significance. The story of the berachot further illustrates Yaakov's vision and his capacity for self-improvement and growth.

The midrash explains that initially Yaakov hesitated to leave Beer Sheva because his beloved father and role model had been forbidden to leave Eretz Yisrael. Yet, when it became clear to Yaakov that his destiny was to take a different course, he confronted this new challenge with the same spirit of initiative and the same aspiration for spiritual growth that had characterized his previous endeavors.

Perhaps for this reason, the Torah repeats Yaakov's departure from Beer Sheva to add further perspective. Previously, we read only that Yitzchak sent him off and that Yaakov responded to his parents wishes. Now the Torah records that Yaakov, the quintessential dynamic religious personality, began to embrace this new challenge on his own terms searching for the spiritual silver lining that would turn an unhappy but necessary exile into a meaningful spiritual odyssey.

According to Chazal, following the traumatic events that led to his departure, Yaakov is able to muster the discipline and dedication to return to exclusive Torah study and spiritual growth in the conducive environment of the yeshivah of Shem and Ever. The midrash deduces that he barely slept during that entire period so that he would not squander any opportunity for growth in avodat Hashem. As he prepares for the next, apparently mundane phase of his journey, Yaakov finally succumbs to physical fatigue and perhaps existential exhaustion as well. It is at this point where he dreams of the ladder in which angels are constantly in flux implementing Hashem's Will. Hashem's omnipresence and the symbol of a spiritual ladder whose ascent leads to an ever more intense avodat Hashem (ve-hineh Hashem nitzav alav) constitute an important breakthrough for the single-minded and idealistic ish tam yoshev ohalim. His affirmation of these values and concepts reinforce and significantly expand the idea that continued religious growth is possible and obligatory in all circumstances.

It is at this juncture that Yaakov formalizes his even higher spiritual aspirations. After renaming Luz and dedicating a matzevah, he articulates his ultimate vision- ve-shavti be-shalom el beit avi ve-hayah Hashem li le-elokim. The Kli Yakar (28:21) explains that with these words Yaakov aspires not only to the level of avodah mei-yirah (observance due to fear of Hashem), but to the ultimate attainment of avodah mei-ahavah (out of love of Hashem. See Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah ch. 10; Yesodei Hatorah 2:1-2). The Ohr ha-Chayim posits that with this formulation Yaakov anticipated that his singular brand of avodat Hashem would be worthy to be emulated, that like his father and grandfather it would become associated with Hashem's very name - Elokei Yaakov.

With this declaration, Yaakov was poised to successfully confront the ultimate challenge of avodat Hashem - spiritual life in Lavan's home ("Im Lavan garti ve-taryag mitzvot shamarti" - Rashi). Once again he would rise to the occasion, eventually earning the status of Yisrael that defines Jewish nationhood, as he continued to ascend the ladder of spiritual greatness. Yaakov-Yisrael continues to inspire us as Klal Yisrael confronts dynamic challenges.

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Parshas Vayetze/ Vayishlach ◊ Volume 10, Issue 9 ◊ 16 Kislev 5766 ◊ December 17, 2005

Don't Be So Sure of Yourself

Yoel Epstein

The beginning of parshas Vayishlach discusses Yaakov's encounter with his brother Eisav. Yaakov makes extensive preparations for the confrontation, because as the torah states (32:8): "vayeera yakov miode"- "Yaakov was very frightened". Later, the torah explains why Yaakov, the great tzadik, was so afraid. Yaakov feared that (32:11) "kutonte mekole hachasadim ... asher asisa es avadecha" - his merit might have been diminished by all the kindnesses that Hashem bestowed upon him, leaving him in grave danger.

Rav Yanai (Ta'anis20b) derives from this pasuk that "A person should never stand in a dangerous place or situation and say that 'a miracle will be performed for me,' because the miracle may not be performed for him. And if you find that the miracle will be performed for him it will be deducted from his merits." The gemara illustrates this lesson with a story involving the amora Rav Adda Bar Ahava: 'Rav Huna had wine in a certain dilapidated house, and he wanted to remove it. He brought Rav Adda bar Ahava there and engaged him in a torah discussion until he was able to remove the wine. After Rav Adda left, the house collapsed. Rav Adda bar Ahava realized why Rav Huna brought him into the house and was upset because he followed the teaching of Rav Yannai'

The principle taught by this gemara poses an important question in terms of our faith. If we truly believe that Hashem controls everything, and that a person's future is not determined by the course of nature, why should we take special care to avoid dangerous situations? If Hashem has decreed that a person's time is up or that he should receive an injury, the decree will be fulfilled regardless of precautions taken by that person. And if these things were not decreed, "there may be a seven year plague and no man dies prematurely (Sanhedrin 29a)".

The gemara in Shabbos (32a) explains Rav Yanai's principle. The mishnah (31b) declares that "al shlosa averos nashim masos bishas ladoson..."-"there are three sins for which women die in child birth". The gemara asks "umy shna bishas ladasan"- why should they die for these sins specifically in childbirth? One of the answers the gemara offers is that the very fact that the woman is in danger during childbirth causes her to be called to account for her sins. Rashi explains that when the woman is healthy, she may be worthy enough to prevent the heavenly prosecutor from mentioning her sin. But when she is in a precarious state and is in need of a miracle, it is easy for the heavenly prosecutor to mention her sins as reason that she doesn't deserve for such a feat to be performed on her behalf.

This explains why Rav Ada Bar Ahava was upset that Rav Huna depended on his merit in a dangerous situation and why Yaakov Avinu, in his great humility, was worried that he was in danger when he confronted Eisav.

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No Guarantees

Moshe Shulman

In the beginning of Vayishlach we find that Yaakov was afraid of Eisav – "Va'yirah Yaakov Mi'od." Why was Yaakov afraid? Didn't Hashem guarantee Yaakov, in the beginning of Parshas Vayeitzei, that he would be protected ("U'shmarticha Bichol Asher Teileich")? Why then was Yaakov worried that he would be killed by Eisav? Surely Hashem would protect him as promised!

The Gemara in Brachos (4a) answers that Yaakov was afraid that "Shemoh Yigrom Ha'chet" maybe his sins would cause him to be punished. However, according to Rashi's explanation of the line "Im Lavan Gart," Yaakov kept all 613 mitzvos during the spiritually trying years he spent in Lavan's house. As such what sin did Yaakov have to fear?

Several Mefarshim answer that even though Yaakov didn't sin, there were still certain Mitzvos that he was not able to keep in Lavan's house, namely Kibud Av Va'Eim (honoring one's parents) and Yishuv Eretz Yisrael (settling the Land of Israel). Eisav, who had remained at home, was able to keep these mitzvos. Yaakov was afraid that these mitzvos would give Eisav an edge. Similarly, at the end of Parshas Chukas, Moshe worries that Og, who had assisted Avraham, would merit to defeat B'nai Yisrael in battle.

Still, why would Hashem break his promise to protect Yaakov? After all, the Gemara in Brachos (7a) say "Kol Dibur V'Dibur She'Yatzah MiPi Hahadosh Baruch Hu LTova, Afilu al T'nai, Lo Chazar Bo," if Hashem says that something good will happen, he won't go back on his word.

The Rambam in his Hakdamah L'peirush Mishnah explains that this Gemara only applies when Hashem makes a promise to many people. However, if Hashem tells something to only one person, as in Yaakov's case, He can renege if the circumstances have changed.

The story of Yaakov's confrontation with Eisav teaches us an important lesson about the power of Mitzvos. Mitzvos, can serve as a source of merit even for a person who is not a Tzadik. On the other hand, even a Tzadik cannot rest on his laurels— one can never do enough Mitzvos.

From: **Rabbi Goldwicht** [rgoldwicht@yutorah.org] Sent: Friday, December 09, 2005 12:54 PM Subject: Parashat VaYeitzei 5766
WEEKLY INSIGHTS BY RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT Parashat VaYeitzei

After Yaakov leaves Eretz Yisrael, his first interaction with people is with the shepherds gathering around the well in Charan. When Yaakov sees them, he comments to them, "The day is still long and it is not time to gather the flocks; water the sheep and go feed them." Rashi explains that when Yaakov saw them lying down around the well, he thought they wanted to gather the livestock and go home for the day. He said to them, "The day is still long," meaning that if you were hired for the day, you have not completed the day's work, and if the animals belong to you, "It is not the time to gather the flocks" nevertheless. The question that must be asked is why Yaakov, who was unfamiliar with the people, the culture, and the customs of Charan, was driven to say anything in the first place? The importance of this question is bolstered by the fact that sefer Bereishit is ma'aseh avot siman babanim.

When we contemplate Yaakov's life, we discover something very interesting. On his last night in Eretz Yisrael, the Torah says, "And he lay down in that place." Rashi explains that only in that place did he lie down, but during his fourteen years in the yeshiva of Shem and Eiver, he did not lie down at night. While he certainly slept, for he was human, he never

went to sleep; he simply crashed over his sefarim. His last night in Eretz Yisrael was the first time he actually lay down to sleep.

When Yaakov confronts Lavan many years later, he says, “During the day I was consumed by heat and by frost at night, and my sleep wandered from my eyes.” The gemara in Bava Metzia (33) explains that Yaakov worked day and night, much more than he needed to. In other words, Yaakov was a person who could squeeze every moment for all its worth. Yaakov could not tolerate *batala* (inactivity).

In *Avot d’Rabbi Natan* (11), it says, “A person only dies while engaged in *batala*.” Chazal say in the Midrash that work is greater than the patriarchal merit, because Yaakov says to Lavan, “Were it not for the G-d of my fathers...you would have sent me away empty-handed”—in the merit of his fathers, he received his wages—“and the L-rd saw my hard work and rebuked you last night”—in the merit of his hard work, Lavan was unable to lay a finger on Yaakov to harm him. Yaakov teaches us the importance of hard work and avoiding inactivity.

This is why the mishnah in *Avot* says, “*Hamefaneh libo l’vatalah mitchayev b’nafsho*, One who turns his heart to inactivity has brought a death sentence upon himself.” When HaKadosh Baruch Hu blesses us in Parashat Bechukotai, one of the berachot is “*ufaniti aleichem*, lit. I will direct my attention to you.” The Admor of Gur comments homiletically that “*ufaniti aleichem*” appears in Bechukotai as both a *klalah* and a *berachah*, suggesting that *zman panui* (related to the root of “*ufaniti*”), free time, can be both a blessing and a curse, depending on whether you take advantage of it or let it go to waste.

Yaakov Avinu could not stand to see the shepherds wasting their time around the well and wished to teach them the importance of work. When Yaakov goes on in the parasha to build his family and his home, he teaches us that this requires a person to go out and work. Working is not a *b’dieved* lifestyle. Quite the opposite – Shlomo haMelech says in Kohelet, “See a life with your wife whom you love.” Rashi explains that this is a craft to go hand-in-hand with your Torah learning. The same lesson is clear in Rabbeinu Bechayey’s interpretation of the passuk, “Six days shall you work (*ta’avod*, lit. serve) and complete all your work”: Six days shall you serve Hashem by completing your work, like the *Avot*.

R’ Hutner writes in *Iggeret 94* that having a career is not a double life. If it is centered around Hashem, it is a broad life. This is the path to Hashem – when a person’s work connects him to *kedushah*, he merits *hashra’* at *haShechinah*. As R’ Tarfon says, “HaKadosh Baruch Hu only infused Yisrael with his *Shechinah* once they did *melacha*.”

Through this lesson, we will merit the blessing of, “And you shall spread westward and eastward, northward and southward, and all the nations of the world will be blessed through you and your descendants.”

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VAYEITZEI 5757 & 5762

NEXT PARSHA: VAYISHLACH

I. Summary

A. Yaakov’s Dream. During Yaakov’s journey from Be’er Sheva to Chorán, he reached Mt. Moriah (where the Akeidah had taken place and where the Temple would be built) and slept there overnight. In a dreamlike

vision, he saw angels ascending and descending a ladder which stretched from the earth to the heavens. Hashem then appeared to Yaakov and promised that the land on which he was resting (Canaan) would be given to him and his descendants and that he would return home under Hashem’s protection. Upon awakening, Yaakov anointed and consecrated the stone which he had used as a pillow as an altar to Hashem, and promised that when he returned safely to his father’s home he would offer Hashem one-tenth of all of the possessions which Hashem had given him. He would return to worship and pray to Hashem at the altar he had just consecrated.

B. Yaakov at the Well. Yaakov arrived at the wells in a field in the outskirts of Chorán. He noticed that three flocks of sheep and their shepherds had gathered around the well and were sitting by idly. Yaakov asked them from where they were, and was told they were from Chorán. He asked if they knew Lovan, which they said they did. They then pointed out his daughter, Rachel, who was coming with Lovan’s sheep. Yaakov noted that the day was yet long and asked them why they weren’t giving the sheep water and taking them out to pasture. The shepherds explained that they couldn’t until other shepherds arrived to help them move a large boulder covering the well. When Rachel arrived, Yaakov singlehandedly removed the boulder and gave Lovan’s sheep water.

C. Yaakov Marries Leah and Rachel. Yaakov informed Rachel of their familial relationship and she ran to inform her father, Lovan, of Yaakov’s arrival. Lovan welcomed Yaakov, who agreed to work as Lovan’s shepherd for seven years in order to marry Rachel, whom he had come to love. Lovan agreed, but after the seven years had elapsed, tricked Yaakov into marrying his eldest daughter Leah whom he substituted in Rachel’s place under the wedding canopy. Lovan excused his deceitful conduct on the basis that Leah was older and should be married first. Yaakov had no choice but to accept the situation. He soon afterwards also married Rachel on the condition that he would work an additional seven years for Lovan.

D. Yaakov’s Sons (a/k/a the 12 Tribes). Hashem saw that Leah was not as well liked by Yaakov as Rachel, and He consequently allowed Leah to have children while Rachel remained childless. Leah gave birth to Yaakov’s first four sons: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehudah. Rachel saw that she wasn’t having children, so she followed Yaakov’s grandmother Sarah’s example and offered her handmaiden, Bilhah, to Yaakov as a wife; Bilhah bore Yaakov’s next two sons: Dan and Naftali. Leah saw that she had stopped giving birth and gave her handmaiden, Zilpah, to Yaakov as a wife; Zilpah bore Yaakov’s next two sons: Gad and Usher. Leah herself then gave birth to two more sons, Yissocher and Zevulun. (She also gave birth to a daughter, Dinah.) Hashem then remembered Rachel’s prayers and she gave birth to a son, Yoseph. (See Attached Chart).

E. Yaakov Leaves Lavon. With Hashem’s help, Yaakov became very wealthy, arousing Lovan and sons’ jealousy and cold shoulder. As a result, Yaakov took his wives, children and flocks and left Chorán while Lovan was away and began the journey homewards. Unbeknownst to Yaakov, Rachel stole her father’s idols to prevent him from worshiping them. Three days later, Lovan was told of Yaakov’s departure and Lovan pursued him, overtaking him at the mountains of Gilad. Hashem appeared to Lovan at night in a dream and warned him not to try in any way to influence Yaakov to return to Charon. Lovan rebuked his son-in-law for having left so hurriedly, and accused him of stealing his idols. Yaakov denied Lovan’s accusation and unwittingly proclaimed that the real thief would die. Lovan began a search of Yaakov’s possessions, which proved fruitless since Rachel had carefully hidden the idols. Lovan and Yaakov then parted after completing a peace treaty. Yaakov met a group of Hashem’s angels as the journey continued. Yaakov named the place where he saw these angels “*Machanoyim*” (group).

F. The 12 Tribes. In this Parsha, the birth of the Shevatim (12 tribes) is mentioned. The birth of Binyomin (the youngest) is mentioned in next week’s Parsha. (See attached chart.)

II. DIVREI TORAH

A. Lilmod U'Lilamed (Rabbi Mordechai Katz)

1. Yaakov and Lavon: Learning Good Even From the Wicked. Yaakov made a special point of practicing honesty throughout his life, even in the corrupting environment of Lavon's home. When taking care of Lavon's sheep, he cared for each one and make sure that no harm came to any of them even though they weren't his possessions. Yaakov was a firm believer in the statement: "truth is a tree of life whose fruits you should eat all of your days." Our Rabbonim learned from and copied Yaakov's admirable traits. Rav Saffra owned a store. One day, while he was reciting the Shema a man entered his store and asked to buy a certain item. Not noticing that Rav Saffra was reciting the Shema, he offered a particular price. Rav Saffra didn't reply since he was in the middle of the Shema. The customer thought that Rav Saffra's silence meant that his first offer was too low, so he raised his offer. Again, Rav Saffra was silent, so again the man raised his offer. Finally, Rav Saffra finished his prayers and turned to the man. Though he could have easily gotten the higher price, he said "I will accept your original price, for in my mind I had decided to sell it to you at that price. The only reason I didn't respond to you what that I was praying and if I accepted more money that your original offer, I would be dishonest." (Makkos 24a). Another story is story of Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair, who lived in the South of Israel. Two poor men who had come to seek a livelihood in that area came to his house and inadvertently left a small amount of barley seeds in his house. In their absence, Rabbi Pinchas planted the seeds and reaped the harvest each year. Seven years later, the men passed by Rabbi Pinchas' home and remembered that they had left the seeds. "Please return the seeds," they asked Rabbi Pinchas, "if you still happen to have them." Instead of merely giving them the seeds, he took them to the barn and opened it up; to their surprise, he told them that the entire harvest from the past seven years had been saved and was theirs! (Bava Metzia 28b).

2. Rachael and Leah: the importance of not embarrassing someone. Lavon agreed to marry off Rachel to Yaakov in exchange for Yaakov labor, but had nothing of the such in mind. Yaakov knew that Lavon might try to trick him, so he gave Rachel some secret codes to identify her under the "chuppah" (bridal canopy). However, when Rachel learned of Lavon's plan, she revealed these codes to Leah. She felt that she couldn't let her sister, who was older, be embarrassed under the chuppah. So Rachel, who had waited seven long years to marry Yaakov, delayed her chance for happiness simply because she didn't want to see her sister embarrassed. This act of selflessness is a lesson to us all. (Megillah 13). Reb Nechunya Ben Hakanoh was asked by his disciples to what he attributed his longevity. He responded "I have never gained honor from a colleague's disgrace". (Berachos 43) A story is told of a Rabbi who delivered a sermon about "Lechem Haponim" (the breads which were offered in the Beis Hamikdosh, Holy Temple, every Shabbos) and how unfortunate we are to not be able to perform this mitzvah today. The sermon left a deep impression on a congregant, a poor man, who decided that he would use the purest and finest flour he could find to bake two challahs and leave them on the Aron HaKodesh (Ark) each Erev Shabbos. The shamos of the shul came there every Erev Shabbos, saw and smelled the delicious challahs and took them home for Shabbos. When the poor man came later and noticed the loaves missing, he assumed that Hashem had accepted them, and he was overjoyed. When the Rabbi learned was happening, he scolded the poor man for being naive enough to think that Hashem would accept his challahs. The poor man left ashamed. Soon afterwards, a message came for the Rabbi from Rabbi Yitzchak Yuria telling him to make out a will since he was destined to die within the next few days. The Rabbi rushed to Rabbi Yitzchak to find out what he had done to deserve this sudden fate. Rabbi Yitzchak responded that nothing since the days of the Holy Temple had caused Hashem such joy than the challahs baked with such sincerity by the poor man. By shaming the poor man, the Rabbi had sealed his fate. Embarrassing another is a most grievous fault; If we kill someone he dies only once, but if we embarrass him he dies many times over. (Midrash Eliyahu 42).

B. Kol Dodi on the Torah (Rabbi David Feinstein)

1. The "Ladder" of Prayer. The "gematria" (numerical value) of the Hebrew words for "ladder" and "voice" are equivalent. From this we learn an interesting symbolism -- just as the ladder in Yaakov's dream connected the earth to heaven allowing the angels to ascend and descend on it, so do our voices (i.e., our prayers) connect us to heaven.

2. Sensitivity to One's Feelings. Why did Yaakov agree to work an additional seven years in order to marry Rachel? He could have correctly claimed that the seven years he already worked were for Rachel, not Leah. Why did he ignore his rights and acquiesce to Lavon's trickery without protest? Yaakov's behavior was motivated by a strong respect for Leah's feelings; he knew that if he insisted on marrying Rachel without further payment, she would be devastated. From here, we see the lengths to which the Torah expects us to go to avoid hurting the feelings of another person.

C. Peninim on the Torah (Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum)

"Achdus" (Unity). "And he [Yaakov] took from the stones of the place and placed them at his head and laid down to sleep." Rashi cites the Talmud which states that the 12 stones began arguing with each other, each urging Yaakov to rest his head on it. Hashem therefore merged them into one large stone. The Gerar Rebbe, z'tl questions this consolidation, since Yaakov could rest his head on only one area of the stone. The Rebbe insightfully suggests that when the stones merged, they blended together with such harmony that they were no longer distinguishable from each other. Every aspect of the consolidated stone was a fusion of each of the individual stones. This is essence of "achdus" (unity); we should strive for a harmonious blending of personalities such that as a community we respond as one. Through the undermining of jealousy and other manifestations of intragroup discord, we merit the appreciation of "who is like your nation Israel, one People in the land."

D. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. Climb Higher On The Spiritual Ladder Each Day. The Chofetz Chaim cited the idea expressed by many commentators that the ladder in Yaakov's dream symbolizes the situation of every person in the world -- i.e., we either ascend or descend the spiritual ladder based upon how we deal with life's daily challenges. If we have the will power and self-control to overcome these challenges, we go up the spiritual ladder; if, however, we fail to overcome these challenges, we lower ourselves. This is our daily task -- to climb higher every day. There is no standing in one place.

2. Yaakov's descendants will be triumphant in the end. "And your descendants will be like the dust of the earth." Everyone tramples on the dust of the earth, but in the end it covers up everyone of those people. This will be the history of the Jewish people -- there will be exile after exile, persecution after persecution, but in the end we will overcome in the days of the Final Redemption (may it come soon).

3. Hard Work Is Easier When You Focus On The Benefit. Yaakov was able to endure the fourteen years of labor since he remained focused on the benefit -- Rachel's hand in marriage. We must keep focused on the benefit when we encounter hardships in our work, relationships, Torah study, etc.

4. Make An Effort To Perceive Others' Pain. As indicated by the names "Reuven" and "Shimon", Hashem both "saw" and "heard" Leah's pain -- we must perceive others' pain, whether or not they verbalize it.

E. Darash Moshe (Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, z'tl)

Do not focus on the difficulties in performing a mitzvah. After Yaakov told Rachel and Leah that Hashem had commanded them to leave Lavon's house and return to their native land, they gave Yaakov other reasons for wanting to leave with him. Weren't these reasons unnecessary, since they should have answered simply that they would comply with Hashem's will? Their reply showed that didn't desire to take any credit for fulfilling Hashem's will. This teaches that we shouldn't look at any mitzvah as a trial, something difficult to perform. If we can do mitzvot with this attitude, we will find that they become easier to perform. After all, a mitzvah never costs anything to perform. For example, refraining from work on Shabbos doesn't cost us anything, since our livelihood for the entire year is decreed in

advance on Rosh Hashonah. Furthermore, if we can inculcate this attitude in our children, it will be easier to teach them to keep the mitzvos. Those who boast about the trials and tribulations they endure to keep Shabbos or other mitzvos may instill pride and strength in their children, but they may also be doing them a great disservice. The message they may convey is that it is hard to be a Jew and that keeping Shabbos, Kashrus or other mitzvos requires great suffering and endurance. Their children may easily come to think that if they don't have the same fortitude as their parents, keeping Torah and mitzvos is beyond their power. Thus, parents must emphasize the rewards, rather than the difficulties, in keeping the Torah. This way they will instill in their children the attitude that for one who has faith, every mitzvah is easy and enjoyable to perform.

F. The Chassidic Dimension (the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, z'tl)

Giving Names. In this week's Parsha, we learn of the birth of 11 of Yaakov's 12 sons and the names given to each of them by their mothers. The reasons for the names of each of these children -- who later went on to establish the 12 Tribes of Israel -- are stated explicitly in the Torah. This is marked contrast to the names of the Patriarchs, where the Torah doesn't explicitly spell out the reasons for the names given them at birth. Why the difference? A Jewish name is not mere happenstance -- there is a direct connection between a person's Jewish name and his/her soul. It is the name that connects the soul and the body. In its revealed form, as a specific name, it also serves as a personal expression of the particular qualities and personality of the individual so named. The Alter Rebbe, z'tl explains the difference as follows: "the spiritual level of the Patriarchs is found at all times in all individuals . . . this level was bequeathed by them to their prodigy in each and every generation . . . However, the other degrees of saintliness, such as those of the individual Tribes, may not necessarily be found in all individuals." The names of the Patriarchs, who are the source and root of all Jewish souls, represent the collective quality of Judaism found within each and every Jew, while the individual names of the Tribes allude to the specific level and individual qualities of each Jew. Thus, while we all share equally in the Patriarchs' bequest, we are each blessed with our individual qualities, capabilities and life task.

G. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski).

1. **Seize the Moment.** Jacob awakened from his sleep and he said, "surely G-d is in this place. . . he took the stone that he had put in his head and made it into an altar." The Baal Shem Tov quoted the Talmudic statement that each day a heavenly voice emanates from Sinai urging us to do teshuvah (repentance). What use is this voice, he asked, if no one has ever attested to hearing it? Although it is inaudible to the human ear, it is heard by our souls. The moments of arousal to do teshuvah that we experience are due to our souls perceiving the voice from Sinai. The Divine voice arouses us. We must seize upon the opportunity or risk neglecting it.

2. **If G-d Wills It.** Jacob made a vow, saying "if G-d will be with me. . ." It is customary to say "G-d willing" or "with G-d's help" when planning to do something. It is important that these words do not become rote, but that we focus on sincerely believing that without G-d's assistance we can do nothing.

3. **Try, Try Again.** Why was Jacob so critical of the shepherds' failure to roll the stone from the mouth of the well? The S'fas Emes answers that even if they had made an unsuccessful attempt, they still had no excuse for sitting by idly. They should have tried again. While we cannot guarantee the success of our efforts, it is our obligation to keep trying.

4. **Constructive Envy.** After Leah conceived her fourth child, she said "this time I will be grateful to G-d." It is at this point that the Torah teaches us that Rachel envied her. Why wasn't Rachel envious when Rachel had her first three children? Only with the fourth child did Leah express her gratitude towards G-d. It was Leah's spiritual attainment of this great degree of thankfulness - not her fertility - which provoked Rachel and caused her to be envious. While envy is usually a destructive emotion, it can in certain circumstances stimulate us to achieve a higher degree of connection to G-d.

H. Soul of the Torah: Insights Of the Chasidic Masters of the Weekly Torah Portions (Victor Cohen).

1. **The Ladder.** The S'fas Emes noted that the meaning of the verse "a ladder was sent earthward and its top reached heavenward" is that the material aspects of our being dwells earthward but our spirituality is heavenward.

2. **The "Stone" Impeding Our Prayers.** "Roll the stone from upon the mouth of the well." The S'fas Emes commented that when it comes to prayers, it often seems as though there is a stone in our mouth. Our prayers often lack sincerity and do not seem to be a service from the heart. This is why we recite "my Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise" before the Amidah. That is, roll the stone from our mouths so that we may pray with sincerity.

I. **Windows To the Soul (Rabbi Michael Bernstein).**

True Love. From the moment Jacob first saw Rachel, he was enraptured. The Torah tells us that the seven years of servitude which Jacob endured in exchange for her hand in marriage "were in his eyes as but a few days, in his love for her." Given his intense love, how was it that these years flew by? Doesn't time pass slowly when we are anxiously awaiting something? The Torah is not speaking of frustrated earthly passions. It was Rachel's immense spiritual value that inspired Jacob's love. To Jacob, seven years of service seemed but a small consequence for the great spiritual good he would gain with Rachel as his wife. What a powerful lesson in the characteristics of true love.

J. **Reflections on the Sedra (Rabbi Zalman I. Posner).**

The Meaning of Prayer. In Jacob's famous dream, he saw "a ladder standing on earth and its top reach[ing] heaven". A common interpretation is that the ladder is prayer. That prayer should reach heaven is obvious; that prayer "stands on earth" is less clear. The Jewish conception of prayer treats it not as in and of itself, but rather as an instrument. Prayer is effective not in its effect on G-d but in its influence on us.

K. **Love Thy Neighbor (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)**

Be Careful Not To Speak Harshly Even When Angry. "And Jacob was angry, and quarreled with Lovan. And Jacob answered and said to Lovan: what is my trespass? What is my sin that you have pursued after me?" The Midrash notes Jacob's self-control. Despite his anger and Lovan's accusation, Jacob did not say anything that would antagonize Lovan or stir up animosity. He merely defended himself against the accusation and restated his own innocence. The Chofetz Chaim said that from here we learn that we should avoid becoming involved in dispute, even when we know that we are in the right.

L. **Wellsprings of Torah (Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman)**

1. **The Reward For Humility.** ". . . and behold a ladder set up on the ground and the top of it reached to heaven . . ." "If we regard ourselves as humble (i.e., "set up on the ground") then "our head will reach to heaven." That is, G-d will consider us truly great. As the Zohar notes: "he who is small is actually great." Then, too, he will deserve to have "the Lord stand beside him".

2. **The Power of Truth.** ". . . Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well . . ." The strength of Jacob was truth. Truth enables us to roll even the heaviest of boulders of deceit and concealment from the well of living waters.

M. **Growth from Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)**

In Spiritual Matters, Have The Persistence To Continually Try. "And Rachel said, with great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed, and she called his name Naftali." Rashi explains that the name Naftali comes from the word meaning being stubborn. R'Yeruchem Levovitz says that from here we learn two things about spiritual matters: (a) it is proper to be stubborn and even obstinate. Rachel saw that G-d did not want to give her children, yet she did not accept this and fought with all her strength to achieve her wishes; (b) when we try to elevate ourselves and are determined to accomplish this with all our will, we will eventually be successful. When we try to study Torah or are engaged in mitzvot, we often

find obstacles in our path. Do not allow them to stop you. Rather, use the difficulties as a que to try even harder, for if you keep on trying you will eventually be successful.

N. Torah Gems (Rabbi Ahron Yaakov Greenberg)

Perfect Harmony. "And your seed will be as the dust of the earth. . . " The Jewish people are compared to the stars, sand and dust. With stars, each one is separate from another. With sand, one can place a pile of grains of sand together, but the grains are still separate from one another. Only dust clings together and form a single block. G-d's blessing to Jacob was that his children should live, like dust, in perfect harmony and clinging to one another.

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - 5766]

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Vayetse

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 G-d 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 G-d, the encounter later generations knew as prayer.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely G-d 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 G-d; this is the gate of heaven." The synagogue is the house of G-d. 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 G-d 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 (Berakhot 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 an *asmachta*, 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 G-d 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 dramatized 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 G-d. 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 canonization in the days of Rabban Gamliel at Yavneh. Shaping and reshaping continued until the first siddurim, those of Rav Amram Gaon and Rav Saadia 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 G-d - 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 G-d 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 realized when he woke from his vision is that G-d is in this place. Heaven is

not somewhere else, but here - even if we are alone and afraid - if only we realized it. And we can become angels, G-d's agents and emissaries, if, like Jacob, we have the ability to pray and the strength to dream.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to peninim show details 2:48 pm (8 hours ago)

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM

PARSHAS VAYEITZE And (Hashem) will give me bread to eat, and clothes to wear. (28:20) One would think that it is self-evident - bread is for eating; and clothes are for wearing. Why else would Yaakov Avinu ask for bread and clothing? Horav Aharon Hildesheimer, zl, compares this to a baker who has a store filled with bread, but he is too sick to eat. Likewise, one can be a haberdasher with a large stock of suits. Yet, he cannot enjoy his wares due to his illness. Yaakov asked Hashem to grant him food and clothing, together with the ability to enjoy them. To receive Hashem's gifts without the ability to enjoy them is as bad as-- or possibly worse than-- not having them at all.

We might add to this idea. Let us consider those whom Hashem blesses with His favor, but use it unwisely or for the wrong purpose. We do not wish to accept that Hashem grants us our wish for a specific reason. He expects us to use the great house we have built for a noble purpose. We are to use the wealth we enjoy for others - not just to satisfy our needs and wants. Indeed, everything we possess serves a purpose. While it might be difficult for some of us to accept, that purpose extends beyond ourselves. Therefore, the next time we admire what-and how much-we have, we should question if we have put it to good use. Included in our Heavenly gift is the ability to use it and to do so appropriately.

Yaakov said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" ... He said, "Look, the day is still long; it is not yet time to bring the livestock in." (29:4, 7)

The Ponovezher Rav, Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl, was well-known for his intense love of all Jews. When he addressed a group of Jews, he would begin by saying, Bridelach, "My dear brothers." This constituted much more than a term of endearment. It was an expression of his essence. He focuses on a simple question that surprisingly eludes so many of us. When Yaakov came to Charan and met the shepherds sitting around, he began by rebuking them for their attitude. One wonders how he did this. Imagine someone arriving in a strange community, knowing no one. Yet, he has no problem rebuking the people for their lack of conscientiousness concerning their jobs. First, how does one do this? Second, why did they accept his reproach? If someone who does not know us walks into shul and rebukes us about the way we daven, we will probably either ignore him or tell him, "Thank you, but mind your own business." Here we see neither. Yaakov rebukes - and they listen. Why?

The Rav explains that the answer is to be found in Yaakov's opening word to them. Yaakov said, Achai, "My brothers." When a person begins his rebuke with, "My brothers," he manifests an element of sincerity that transcends any feelings of animus that the other person might have as a result of the rebuke that he is expressing. The first step in reproaching an individual is to demonstrate to him that this is the result of concern and love: "I do not want to put you down, but I do want to help you." Thus, when one begins by saying, Bridelach, "My brothers," it is difficult to scorn his admonishment. Indeed, there is a strong possibility that the individual will accept the rebuke.

This was the Ponovezher Rav's credo in dealing with people from all walks of life, from all phases of the religious spectrum. Everyone was his brother. His overriding love for all Jews was his hallmark. Dayan Moshe Swift, zl, a talmid, student, of the Ponovezher Rav writes that his rebbe exemplified Shlomo HaMelech's concept of cholas ahavah, sickness of love. He was literally sick all of his life with the love for his fellow Jew.

In a heated debate with the Rav, who was known to embrace every Jew, Dayan Swift said to him, "You come and go, but we must struggle here (in the United States) with these men and disentangle ourselves from the entanglements in which these men involve us." His rebbe looked back at him with angelic eyes and responded, "A Yiddishe neshamah. These people are sick." Dayan Swift retorted, "Rebbe, you love too much. You love like Yitzchak Avinu, whose eyes were so dim that he could not see wrong - even that of Eisav."

In a tribute to his illustrious rebbe, Dayan Swift renders the following interpretation of a well-known Midrash. When Chazal portray the passing of Moshe Rabbeinu, they speak of the Almighty eulogizing his death with the words of David HaMelech, Mi yakum li im mereim, "Who will rise up for Me against these evildoers?" (Tehillim 94:16) There are two ways to translate this pasuk. The world needs two types of rabbis: The first will rise up against the evildoers; identify their sins; condemn them, when necessary; and reproach their shameful behavior. There is a second approach, one that may not be for everyone, but is no less important. This rabbi is an advocate for the evildoer, pleading to others: forgive him. He may be ignorant. He does not know any better. The Ponovezher Rav was the latter. He sought and found good in each Jew. He was an advocate for every Jew, regardless of his past and regardless of his current status.

Indeed, the future played a most significant role in the life of the Ponovezher. He did not care what the individual was or what he had done. It was always his potential, what he could do, that he considered. When the Ponovezher Rav established the yeshivah in Bnei Brak, he also opened an orphanage which he called Battei Avos, which means Homes of Fathers. Clearly, Battei Avos is not a typical name for an orphanage. Beis Yesomim, House of Orphans, is the standard name for such an institution. The Rav, undeterred, explained why he did this. He wanted both the children and the teachers to focus on their mission, the bright future that was in store for them. They should not dwell on their unfortunate past. "These little boys will one day be fathers in Klal Yisrael," the Rav said. "They will be a part of our future. It is called Battei Avos, Homes of Fathers, in order to emphasize their positive future."

She (Rachel) conceived and bore a son; and said, "G-d has taken away my disgrace." (30:22)

The Midrash explains this form of praise in the following manner: A woman who has no child does not have anyone to blame when something breaks. When someone asks her, "Who broke this?" she would not blame it on her child. Once she had a child, Rachel had someone upon whom to lay the blame. It seems a bit strange to say that Rachel was offering praise to Hashem because she had someone to blame when something had been broken in the house. Is this the purpose of children?

Horav Asher Kalman Baron, zl, explains that the Torah here is teaching a compelling lesson concerning the degree of hakoras hatov, appreciation, one must manifest. In expressing her gratitude for being blessed with a son, Rachel Imeinu examined every area in which she benefited from this child. She overlooked nothing - even the fact that now she had someone to blame when something broke in the house. There was nothing too great or too miniscule when it involved hakoras hatov. She was obligated to offer gratitude.

Indeed, this is the meaning of hakoras hatov, recognizing the good. One must introspect and search deeply for every aspect of the favor which he has received, so that he can offer proper gratitude. The character trait of hakoras hatov is basic to perceiving Hashem. When one appreciates what people do for him, he realizes that he owes even more to Hashem, Who is the Source of all good. This prompts him to serve Him with greater fervor and enthusiasm.

While gratitude is a trait that we commonly acknowledge, we demand it more often than we actually express it. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, the venerable Rosh Yeshivah of Torah Vodaath, was an individual who exemplified the above dvar Torah. He did not merely appreciate; he searched for ways to compensate others and for reasons to offer his

gratitude. Nothing - no favor, regardless of how miniscule - ever went unrequited. He lived hakoras hatov, and he assumed that everybody else did, too. He explained that the reason Yitzchak Avinu was so beholden to Eisav, to the point that he was about to grant him the berachos, blessings, was not that he was fooled by Eisav's righteous facade. Since Eisav attended to his father's needs in an exemplary manner, treating him like a king, Yitzchak felt a sense of hakoras hatov to him. This profound feeling of gratitude engendered a special love for his errant son to the extent that he wanted to confer the blessings on him.

In the new volume about Rav Pam by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, the author quotes Horav Elya Svei, Shlita, who commented, "If anyone performed a kindness for him or for one of his children or grandchildren - especially if this was in the spiritual realm - the rosh yeshivah felt there was no way he could fully repay it. He would do everything that he possibly could for that person."

When Rav Pam attended a convention, he made a point to thank the cooks for their work. He did not call for them, but rather, he went to the kitchen to pay his respects to them personally.

When the Rosh Yeshivah was approached in the early 1970's to become Rosh Yeshivah of a prominent kollel in Eretz Yisrael, he demurred, despite the elevation in status, both spiritually and financially. When he was questioned about this, he responded, "How can I leave Torah Vodaath? I owe so much to the Yeshivah! I learned here, and the Yeshivah gave me a position when I needed one."

The Rosh Yeshivah was in great pain on an almost constant basis during the last five years of his life. He neither complained nor lamented his situation. At a seudas hodaah, meal of thanksgiving for a relative who had survived a serious car accident, Rav Pam gathered his strength together to address the assemblage: "A seudas hodaah is a time for all participants to reflect on the gratitude which they owe Hashem Yisborach. I myself know how much appreciation I owe Hashem for all that He does for me. We should be ashamed of our complaining over small problems when we have so much for which to be grateful." This was coming from an individual who was suffering from constant, debilitating pain!

Towards the end of his life, when walking to the Yeshivah minyan was too difficult, a small select group of people would provide a minyan for Shabbos in Rav Pam's home. After Mussaf, Rav Pam would publicly thank the baal korei, Torah reader, the baalei tefillah, and all the attendees for taking part in the minyan. This was despite the fact that everyone who had come felt privileged just to be there and to have the opportunity to observe him in close proximity. He did not just preach gratitude; he lived it with every fiber of his being.

Then Rachel and Leah replied and said to him, "Have we then still a share and an inheritance in our father's house?" (31:14)

The Midrash makes a frightening statement which presents a powerful lesson. Chazal say that since Rachel spoke before Leah, she was punished by preceding her in death. This is mind-boggling! Horav Yoel Kleinerman, zl, writes that anybody who reads this should shudder that we are talking about Rachel Imeinu, who was willing to forgo marriage to Yaakov Avinu, the man for whom she had so patiently waited, in order not to embarrass her older sister. When Rachel saw that her sister would be humiliated, she proceeded to give her the simanim, predetermined signs, which she had arranged with Yaakov. She even stayed in the room and talked, so that Leah would not be forced to reveal her true identity. Rachel knew that if Leah were to marry Yaakov, she might be compelled to marry Eisav. Certainly, Leah "owed" her to some extent.

After the marriage, we find that the Torah refers first to Rachel, then to Leah because, to quote Rashi, "Rachel was the ikar ha'bayis, principle woman of the household." (Bereishis 31:4) She was the sole reason that Yaakov was willing to enter into a matrimonial relationship with the wicked Lavan. This fact is undisputed - even by Leah's sons. We find later that Boaz and his Beis Din, court, who were descendants of Yehudah, Leah's

fourth son, refer to Rachel before Leah, "Like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Yisrael." (Rus, 4:11)

Ultimately, Rachel had every reason to think that she was "permitted" to speak before her sister. Yet, the Torah not only disagrees with this rationale, but explains that Hashem punished her with premature death! Why?

This teaches us that, despite all that Rachel had done, it did not absolve her of the honor due to her older sister. She was not permitted to speak before her sister. Her wonderful achievements on behalf of Leah notwithstanding, she had her own obligation to achieve perfection, and this would not occur if she were to speak before her older sister.

How far are we from even understanding the extreme level of perfection demanded of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs. We do not understand the lives that they led. We speak about them as if they were ordinary people. They were not! They demanded much of themselves, because they provided the foundation upon which the entire Klal Yisrael was to be built. The statements made by secular and non-observant writers about our Avos, Patriarchs, and Imahos, Matriarchs, are totally off the mark. They view our illustrious ancestors through the spectrum of their personal vision. It is like taking a toy telescope to analyze the surface of the moon. It is impossible to perceive the nuances accurately utilizing this medium.

Then Lavan went and returned to his place... Yaakov went on his way, and the angels of G-d encountered him.

The Meshech Chochmah takes note of the words, "and (Lavan) returned to his place." All of those years with the righteous Yaakov had no influence on him. As soon as Yaakov left, Lavan said his "good by," and that signified the end of their relationship. Yaakov Avinu went his way, and he met up with the Malachei Elokim, Heavenly angels. The righteous strive to go higher and higher, to reach closer to Hashem, while the evil continue on their downward spiral of iniquity. Nonetheless, the question still remains: How can someone be in the proximity of an individual of Yaakov Avinu's caliber and remain unmoved, uninspired and uninfluenced?

I think the answer lay in Lavan's name, a name that characterizes the type of evil that he represents. Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, notes that we refer to various reshaim, wicked people, through different appellations. For example, Chazal refer to Eisav as ha'rasha, the wicked. Lot is called a baal taavah, one who is obsessed with lust. He was certainly evil, but his primary description is as a baal taavah. Chazal call Lavan, ha'Arami. Chazal give him this name because Rimah es anshei mekom, "He cheated the people of his community." Lavan was a swindler; hence, Chazal refer to him as Lavan ha'ramai, which is a play on the word Arami.

Rav Schwadron asks an insightful question: If Lavan is a ramai because he deceived others, why is he called arami? He should be referred to as Lavan ha'Ramai. This teaches us that while a swindler cheats others; his greatest victim is none other than himself. It is true that Lavan cheated others. He was a charlatan that bilked and gouged people, but the one whom he succeeded in deceiving the most was himself.

This is the story of ramai. He is a new strain of evil. In fact, he sees no evil and speaks no evil. He is able to rationalize every nefarious deed that he commits. He can even transform a heinous transgression into a mitzvah! Thus, Lavan could be with Yaakov for years and not learn anything from him. Why? Because, in his own eyes, he was perfect. He believed that he had nothing to learn. He probably thought he could teach Yaakov a few things. The Mesillas Yeshtarim writes that the yetzer hora, evil inclination, brings a person to commit two errors. First, he causes the individual to lose the ability to discern between good and bad. The individual no longer recognizes evil for what it is. Second, the yetzer hora infuses within him a feeling that he is actually performing a mitzvah, rather than an aveirah, sin.

Lavan was such a swindler that he no longer realized that he had been deceiving. He had mastered the art of deception, so that he completely fooled himself into believing that what he was doing was proper, even meritorious. This is why he had taanos, complaints, against Yaakov. The chief scoundrel, who had written the book on deception, suspected his righteous son-in-law of cheating him! Lavan was so taken in by his own

swindling that he no longer trusted anyone but himself. That constituted his first and biggest mistake.

Va'ani Tefillah Mizmor L'sodah - A Song of Thanksgiving

The Shalah HaKadosh, zl, writes that we recite Mizmor L'Sodah daily because each of us experiences a miracle on a daily basis. We simply do not realize this. Thus, Chazal arranged it to be part of our daily prayers. We express a similar thought in the Modim prayer of Shemoneh Esrai, when we say: Al nisecha sheb'chol yom imanu, "And for Your miracles which are with us every day." The Kaf HaChaim adds that this prayer has been placed at the commencement of the Pesukei D'Zimra in order that a person remember that he is a constant beneficiary of Hashem's favor. This acknowledgement motivates him to daven properly - word by word - with joy, enthusiasm and feeling.

Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl, cites the Shulchan Aruch, which states that we should recite this prayer with a tune. Chazal teach us that all shiros, songs of praise, will become null in the period following the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu - except for Mizmor L'Sodah. Thanksgiving will never cease. Rav Shlomo Zalman wonders why we do not fulfill this halachah. This is especially true in those congregations in which singing during davening is commonplace. Why not include the prayer of thanksgiving?

This tefillah is not recited on Shabbos due to its allusion to the Korban Todah. Mizmor L'Sodah contains forty words coinciding with the forty challos/breads that accompanied the Korban Todah. We did not offer the Korban Todah on Shabbos. Likewise, we do not recite this prayer.

In loving memory of our husband, father and grandfather on his yahrtzeit Elchanan ben Perach z"l niftar 11 Kislev 5759 Esther Kurant Mordechai & Jenny Kurant Aliza & Avrohom Wrona Naomi & Avrohom Yitzchok Weinberger Dovid & Chavi Kurant Yossi Kurant

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of material covered, of knowledge of facts, of understanding complex and difficult Talmudical concepts and statements. In truth it is all that but it is much more.

A proper Torah education, a study course at the school of Shem and Ever, is meant to impart life-long values and a world view in which to fit the events of one's life in a proper and moral fashion. One has to learn how to deal effectively with Lavan but one has to be very cautious not to become Lavan in the process.

Self-defense and protection of one's own interests is part of the Torah value system. But pleasantness, sensitivity, faith in God's justice and promises, and a willingness to tolerate and accommodate others (even unpleasant others) are also a part of the value system of the Torah.

Yaakov enters the school of Shem and Ever to absorb the Torah value system that will allow him to survive Lavan and not to fall spiritually and become Lavan in the form of Yaakov. One of the most difficult tasks that faces Jewish society today is to remain a kingdom of priests and a holy people even when struggling with Lavan, Yishmael and Eisav for our very existence. Our schools have to teach Torah values and not be satisfied merely with knowledge, grades and test scores.

Shabat shalom.

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Parshas Vayeitzei 5768

Rashi points out for us in the beginning of this week's parsha (really at the conclusion of last week's parsha) that Yaakov stopped at the study house of Shem and Ever for fourteen years on his flight from Eisav to his uncle's house in Aram. This seems to be a strange stopover at first glance.

How will the instruction that he received in the school established by Shem and Ever contribute to his survival and success at the house of Lavan, the master conniver and duplicitous character? The question is phrased in a more current if blunter fashion in the Talmud itself – of what value are the Torah students to society at large?

To meet Lavan, Yaakov apparently needs to train in different forms of legal, commercial and worldly pursuits. Studying Torah is all well and fine, but how does it prepare one for the real world? This question is heard today in thousands of Jewish households and is a most vexing one. Our world today is one of Lavan compounded.

Where does Torah study and Torah knowledge fit into our milieu, into solving our problems and difficulties, in facing down our enemies? Yet, we find that on the whole Yaakov was quite successful in the house of Lavan. He acquires his wives there and his children are born and raised there. He waxes wealthy in spite of all of Lavan's efforts to cheat him out of his just payments and wages. What courses of study did he take and master in the school of Shem and Ever that enabled him to so succeed?

I have always felt that the answer lies in understanding the place and goals of a Torah education in one's life. Most people, especially those who view it from the outside looking in, think that Torah education is purely a matter