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Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Out of the Depths (Vayetse, Covenant & Conversation 5778)

What did Jacob add to the Jewish experience? What is it that we find in him that we do not find to the same measure in Abraham and Isaac? Why is it his name – Jacob/Israel – that we carry in our identity? How was it that all his children stayed within the faith? Is there something of him in our spiritual DNA? There are many answers. I explore one here, and another next week in Vayishlach.

Jacob was the man whose deepest spiritual encounters happened when he was on a journey, alone and afraid at the dead of night, fleeing from one danger to another. In this week's parsha, we see him fleeing from Esau and about to meet Laban, a man who would cause him great grief. In next week's parsha we see him fleeing in the opposite direction, from Laban to Esau, a meeting that filled him with dread: he was "very afraid and distressed." Jacob was supremely the lonely man of faith.

Yet it is precisely at these moments of maximal fear that he had spiritual experiences that have no parallel in the lives of either Abraham or Isaac – nor even Moses. In this week's parsha he has a vision of a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, at the end of which he declares: "Surely God is in this place and I did not know it... How awesome is this place! This is nothing other than the house of God, and this, the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 28:16-17).

Next week, caught between his escape from Laban and his imminent encounter with Esau, he wrestles with a stranger – variously described as a man, an angel and God Himself – receives a new name, Israel, and says, naming the place of the encounter Peniel, "I have seen God face to face and my life was spared" (Gen. 32:31).

This was no small moment in the history of faith. We normally assume that the great spiritual encounters happen in the desert, or a wilderness, or a mountain top, in an ashram, a monastery, a retreat, a place where the soul is at rest, the body calm and the mind in a state of expectation. But that is not Jacob, nor is it the only or even the primary Jewish encounter. We know what it is to encounter God in fear and trembling. Through much – thankfully not all, but much – of Jewish history, our ancestors found God in

dark nights and dangerous places. It is no accident that Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik called his most famous essay, The Lonely Man of Faith, nor that Adin Steinsaltz called one of his books about Judaism, The Strife of the Spirit.

Sometimes it is when we feel most alone that we discover we are not alone. We can encounter God in the midst of fear or a sense of failure. I have done so at the very points when I felt most inadequate, overwhelmed, abandoned, looked down on by others, discarded and disdained. It was then that I felt the hand of God reaching out to save me the way a stranger did when I was on the point of drowning in an Italian sea on my honeymoon.[1] That is the gift of Jacob/Israel, the man who found God in the heart of darkness. Jacob was the first but not the last. Recall Moses in his moment of crisis, when he said the terrifying words, "If this is what You are going to do to me, please kill me now if I have found favour in Your sight, and let me not see my misery" (Num. 11:15). That is when God allowed Moses to see the effect of his spirit on seventy elders, one of the rare cases of a spiritual leader seeing the influence he has had on others in his lifetime.

It is when Elijah was weary to the point of asking to die that God sent him the great revelation at Mount Horeb: the whirlwind, the fire, the earthquake and the still, small voice (1 Kings 19). There was a time when Jeremiah felt so low that he said: "Cursed be the day on which I was born, led not the day on which my mother gave birth to me be blessed ... Why did I come out from the womb, to see toil, and sorrow, and to end my days in shame?" (Jer. 20:14, 18). It was after this that he had his most glorious hope-filled prophecies of the return of Israel from exile, and of God's everlasting love for His people, a nation that would live as long as the sun, the moon and the stars (Jer. 31).

Perhaps no one spoke more movingly about this condition than King David in his most agitated psalms. In psalm 69 he speaks as if he were drowning:

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. (Ps. 69:2-3)

Then there is the line as famous to Christians as to Jews: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:2). And the equally famous, "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord" (Ps. 130:1).

This is the heritage of Jacob who discovered that you can find God, not just when you are peacefully tending your sheep, or joining others in prayer at the Temple or in the synagogue, but also when you are in danger, far from home, with peril in front of you and fear behind.

These two encounters, in this week's parsha and the next, also provide us with powerful metaphors of the spiritual life. Sometimes we experience it as climbing a ladder, rung by rung. Each day, week, month or year, as we study and understand more, we come a little closer to heaven as we learn to stand above the fray, rise above our reactive emotions, and begin to sense the complexity of the human condition. That is faith as a ladder.

Then there is faith as a wrestling match, as we struggle with our doubts and hesitations, above all with the fear (it's called the "impostor syndrome") that we are not as big as people think we are or as God wants us to be.[2] Out of such experiences we, like Jacob, can emerge limping. Yet it is out of such experiences that we too can discover that we have been wrestling with an angel who forces us to a strength we did not know we had.

The great musicians have the power to take pain and turn it into beauty.[3] The spiritual experience is slightly different from the aesthetic one. What matters in spirituality is truth not beauty: existential truth as the almost-infinitesimal me meets the Infinite-Other and I find my place in the totality of things and a strength-not-my-own runs through me, lifting me to safety above the raging waters of the troubled soul.

That is the gift of Jacob, and this is his life-changing idea: that out of the depths we can reach the heights. The deepest crises of our lives can turn out to be the moments when we encounter the deepest truths and acquire our greatest strengths.

Shabbat Shalom

[1] I have told the story in the video *Understanding Prayer: Thanking and Thinking*. I

also give an account of it in my book, *Celebrating Life*.

[2] There is, of course, the opposite phenomenon, of those who think they've outgrown Judaism, that they are bigger than the faith of their fathers. Sigmund Freud seems to have suffered from this condition.

[3] For me the supreme example is the *Adagio* of Schubert's *String Quintet in C Major* op. 163, written just two months before the composer's death.

from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

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Yad Yechiel New Site <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1009 – Sheva Brachos Questions. Good Shabbos!

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Rabbi Yissochar Frand

A Respected Master of Deception

Analyzing Yaakov's Claim That He Was Lavan's "Brother"

The pesukim in this week's parsha say, "And it was, when Yaakov saw Rochel, daughter of Lavan, his mother's brother, and the flock of Lavan, his mother's brother, Yaakov came forward and rolled the stone from upon the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan, his mother's brother. Then Yaakov kissed Rochel; and he raised his voice and wept. Yaakov told Rochel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rivka's son; then she ran and told her father." [Bereshis 29:10-12].

Rashi comments on the implication of the message that "he was her father's brother" (when in fact Yaakov was Lavan's nephew, not his brother). In his first comment (at the level of simple interpretation), Rashi says that the term "brother" merely means relative, as in the expression "we are men who are brothers" [Bereshis 13:8] (which Avraham said to Lot, even though there, too, Lot was Avraham's nephew).

In his second comment (at the level of Medrashic interpretation), Rashi says that Yaakov was saying, "If he comes for deceit, I am his brother in deceit; but if he is a decent person, I am also the son of Rivka, his decent sister." In other words, apparently Yaakov was telling Rochel that he was prepared to go tit for tat, punch for punch, toe to toe against anything her father Lavan was prepared to throw at him.

This appears to be a very strange comment by Rashi. Baruch Hashem, I have the privilege of teaching young men who are in the stage in life when they are seeking appropriate marriage partners. Many times a young man who is beginning to date comes to me for advice on how to conduct himself on a first date.

The first thing I might tell such young men is not to be embarrassed to say, "I need to use the bathroom." After that, I might suggest what to do and what to discuss. I never ever tell a young man, "On the first date, do not ever say to the girl 'your father is a swindler and I can match him in deceitfulness.'"

This comment of Rashi is amazing. Yaakov is meeting Rochel for the first time. He has barely had time to say "Shalom Aleichem" and the first thing that comes out of his mouth (according to the Medrashic interpretation given by Rashi) is, "I am as big a swindler as your father is!" What is the meaning behind this inexplicable comment?

The other problem with this statement is that if we read the ongoing story, we see how Lavan actually swindled Yaakov repeatedly. Yaakov, in fact, complains later to his wives that Lavan had switched his salary ten times (according to the Medrash it was a lot more than ten times), trying to undercut his advantage each time. The whole time, Yaakov never reacted to Lavan's deception. What happened to his bravado that "I can go toe to toe with your father in deception?"

Yaakov seems to take Lavan's abuse lying down. If I were Yaakov, I would have walked away from Lavan the first time he cheated me. Yaakov stayed

in this abusive environment for twenty years, without ever pulling a fast one on his father-in-law in retribution for all of Lavan's trickery. On the contrary, he was an extremely loyal and extremely dedicated employee throughout! Yaakov acted throughout like the "Tam" he was — a naïve Yeshiva bocher who was repeatedly manipulated by his uncle/father-in-law. Yaakov's statement to Rochel that "I am your father's brother in trickery" seems to be nothing more than a bluff.

I heard an amazing interpretation from the current Tolner Rebbe of Jerusalem, based on a Gemara [Bava Basra 89b] that discusses the prohibition of making measuring utensils in ways which could lead to deception. The Gemara elucidates; if you make it this way, the seller can cheat the buyer, if you make it this other way, the buyer can cheat the seller. After an extensive technical discussion about the matter, the Gemara states: "Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai says, concerning all of the above, 'Woe to me if I reveal the halacha, and woe to me if I don't reveal the halacha.'" The Gemara explains Rabbi Yochanan's dilemma. If he reveals the details (of what should not be done because it could lead to cheating) it will benefit the thieves (who may learn new ways to cheat); and if he does not reveal it, the thieves will think that the Rabbis are not onto their methods of deception, and will continue to try to fool them.

The Gemara then asks what the bottom line was: Did Rabbi Yochanan reveal the halacha or did he not reveal it? The Gemara concludes that he did reveal it, based on the following pasuk: "...the ways of Hashem are straight; the righteous will walk in them, and the sinner will stumble over them." [Hoshea 14:10]. This is the nature of Torah. Torah can be a potion of life, or it can be a poison of death. Torah knowledge can be used for righteous purposes, or it can be used for evil purposes. The righteous use their Torah knowledge for righteousness, and the wicked use it for evil.

The Tolner Rebbe notes that Rabbi Yochanan was hesitant to remain silent, lest the thieves think that Torah scholars are naïve and unaware of the tricks of the trade of the wicked. The Tolner Rebbe points out a universal human character trait: When I meet another person, the thing that will impress me most about him is if I think he understands my business well. If I am in real estate or some other business, yes I can have respect for the Rav, or the Rosh Yeshiva, or the Rebbe. But if I go into that person and see that he knows real estate just as well as I do, then I have tremendous extra respect and derech ertz for him.

I am greatly impressed when I see someone else who has expertise as great as my own — or perhaps even greater — in a field that I understand well. If a doctor goes into a Rav with a medical shaylah, and he sees that the Rav knows medicine as well as he does, he is very impressed with that Rav. Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai was afraid that the swindlers would have no connection whatsoever with the Rabbonim. They would have total contempt for Rabbis who spend their entire time sitting in the Beis Medrash bent over pages of the Talmud. Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai said, "I want to show the robbers that I know how to swindle as well as they do. That will impress them. Then they will respect me. We never know. Maybe the swindler will be lost, but if he has derech ertz for the wisdom of Rabbonim, maybe it will have a subtle positive impact on his children, and they will come back. Rabbi Yochanon's message was, "I want to have a connection with every type of Jew — even a thief, even a robber!" The fact that I daven a long Shmoneh Esrei, or that I know every Tosfos in Shas will not overly impress a thief. This is not "currency" with which thieves will be overawed. What is "currency" by the thieves? It is when I know the tools of their trade.

What does this teaching in Bava Basra have to do with our parsha? Rav Chaim Vital writes in the Sefer haGilgulim that Rav Yochanon ben Zakkai was a "Gilgul" (transmigrated soul) of Yaakov Avinu. With this bit of (mystical) insight, we can better understand the comment of Rashi regarding Yaakov's boast to Rochel.

Yaakov meets Rochel for the first time and tells her, "I am your father's brother in trickery." This is not to say, "I intend to swindle him." Yaakov never swindled Lavan. Yaakov was not the type to swindle. However,

Yaakov was telling Rochel, "I want you to know that your father is going to respect me. He is not going to respect me because I learned in the Yeshiva of Shem v'Ever for 14 years without sleeping one night. That does not mean anything to him. Rather, he will be impressed that I am as shrewd and insightful into the ways of thievery as he is. He will respect me, and therefore maybe I will have a chance to have a positive influence on him!" Yaakov wanted to improve Lavan. That was the hidden message behind "I am his brother." This explains why, throughout the entire parsha, when Lavan tricks Yaakov left, right, and center, Yaakov does not retaliate. "I am his brother in swindling" only means "I know the ways of swindling" — not that I intend to use them. Heaven forbid that I should actually engage in thievery.

The Rambam writes (in Igros HaRambam), "that which our Rabbis interpreted 'I am his brother in deception' only means he could demonstrate it to Lavan once or twice. However, deception becomes addictive. Once someone gets into the practice, it becomes second nature to him. It is a slippery slope. Once someone begins to descend it, it is very hard to stop. Yaakov merely stated that he knew the profession. He never intended to use it. However, Lavan could not stop himself. He was a compulsive swindler who could not act otherwise.

The Sefarim state that each of the Avos had his own attribute. Avraham's attribute was Chessed [Kindness]; Yitzchak possessed the attribute of Din [Judgment]; and Yaakov's attribute was Emes [Truth]. If we review the Torah portions of the recent weeks, we notice that Hashem tested each of the patriarchs in the area of their special attribute. They were tested in their area of spiritual expertise, and they each passed their test, thereby taking their mastery of this spiritual attribute to an even higher level.

Avraham was the master of Chessed. He had to be prepared to slaughter his son. The Gemara in Shabbos says that Hashem threatened to wipe out Klal Yisrael, and it was Yitzchak who stepped forward and made a deal with G-d and argued for compassion towards Israel. Avraham and Yaakov were silent here; Yitzchak, in an out-of-character moment, pleaded that Hashem should mitigate Din, and he was the one who became the savior of the nation.

Yaakov Avinu, whose attribute was Truth, had to "steal the blessings" of his father and struggle with Lavan in an atmosphere of falsehood for twenty years. He had to bring out the attribute of truth to a new, higher level.

"I am his brother in thievery" does not mean he intended to cheat Lavan. That would be a contradiction to his entire essence. It means, "I know the profession; your father will respect me. I can hopefully have an influence over him, because I am "in charge" when it comes to deception, not your father."

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. .. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit www.yadyechiel.org for further information. Rav Frand © 2017 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Thanksgiving and Chanukah

I -- Leah said, "'This time I will thank Hashem', therefore she called his name Yehuda" (Breishis 29:35.) The matriarchs were prophetesses, and knew that twelve tribes would be born to Yaakov, and that he would marry four wives. When Levi, the third son, was born, Leah said "I have taken my full share of

sons" (Rashi 29:34). When Yehuda, the fourth son, was born, she said "Because I took more than my share, now, this time, I must give thanks" (Rashi 29:35).

"From the day Hashem created His world, there was no person who thanked Hashem until Leah came and thanked Him, as it is said 'This time I will thank Hashem'" (Brachos 7b). The Ksav Sofer (29:35) asks: didn't the patriarchs bring korbanos to thank Hashem for the miracles that He performed for them? He answers that Leah was the first person to thank Hashem for a natural event such as multiple childbirths.

Leah realized that natural blessings are also "more than my share". Indeed, "let all souls (haneshama) praise Hashem" (Tehillim 150:6) is rendered, "for each and every breath (al kol neshima) one must praise Hashem" (Breishis Raba 14:9.) This is the appropriate conclusion of Tehillim written by Dovid, a descendant of Leah.

The impetus for Leah's recognition was the birth of a fourth son, more than her share of Yaakov's sons. Emerging from a dangerous situation, such as illness, captivity, or a hazardous journey is also an impetus to thank Hashem (Brachos 54b). Why do we conclude the bracha we recite on such occasions by saying, "shegmalani kol tuv - Who has bestowed upon me every goodness" if we are thanking Hashem for a specific occurrence? Rav Soloveitchik explained that when a particular event (a "mechayev") demands that we thank Hashem, we must include all the kindnesses He bestows upon us in our bracha. On Pesach, Beis Shamai places the paragraph describing the Exodus, "B'tzeis Yisrael mimitzrayim" in the Hallel stage of the seder (Pesachim 116b) so that the praise should focus on the main reason we thank Hashem. Beis Hillel, however, places it in Magid, the story of the event that Pesach commemorates (the "mechayev"). According to Beis Hillel, Hallel is not focused on the miracles of Pesach, but rather on all the other miracles and blessings for which we must thank Hashem. Therefore "B'tzeis Yisrael mimitzrayim" should specifically not be included in Hallel, since it would incorrectly narrow the focus of our praises.

When a baby is born with a dangerous condition and is cured, we are duty-bound to thank Hashem for His kindness, which is, "more than our share". Yet we must realize that the biggest miracle is the birth of a healthy baby, and we must praise Hashem for every breath of ours and our loved ones.

II -- An additional understanding of the uniqueness of Leah's thanksgiving (citing in Kaftor Vaferach, Brachos 7b, Mesivta edition) is based on a creative interpretation of the Maharam Shick. He renders Leah's words as a question, "(Only) now should I thank Hashem?" To ensure that she will constantly thank Him she called her son Yehuda, so that whenever she called or heard his name, she would remember to thank Hashem. The patriarchs brought offerings at the time of miracles, but they did not establish a permanent memorial for Hashem's kindnesses. Leah, by naming her son Yehuda, was the first to do so.

The American holiday of Thanksgiving is an annual event. For us, every day is one of thanksgiving, as we thank Hashem thrice daily in Modim for our very lives and souls. We acknowledge Hashem's miracles that are with us every day.

On the upcoming holiday of Chanukah we add Al Hanisim in Modim. In it we thank Hashem for a military victory against overwhelming odds, and refer to the candles that were subsequently lit in the Beis Hamikdash and the eight days of Chanukah. The Ramban (Shemos 13:16) writes, "from the great open miracles, one acknowledges the hidden miracles." All of our experiences, national and individual, are all miracles, ordained from Above. So, too, from the open miracle of the oil lasting eight days we recognize that the military victory was also a miracle to be commemorated (Maharal, Ner Mitzva and Shabbos 21b). Both Chanukah miracles, which are included in Modim, sensitize us to the daily miracles in our lives, and the miracle of life itself, for which we thank Hashem three times daily in Modim.

III -- "Men of insight (B'nei Bina) established eight days for song and joy" (Ma'oz Tzur). Bina, insight, means to understand one thing from another (Rashi Shemos 31:3). How does this apply to Chanukah?

The Bais Yosef (Orach Chaim 470) famously asked, why do we light for eight nights? After all, there was enough oil for one day and therefore the first night was not a miracle. Rav Chanoch Karelstein (Kuntres B'inyanei Y'mei Chanukah p. 26, 27) records the following answer given by the Alter of Kelm: Chazal instituted the first night to teach us that even nature is a miracle. "Hashem Who told oil to light will tell vinegar to light" (Ta'anis 25a), and vice versa. Thus, the fact that we celebrate eight days, and not seven, is a result of the understanding that nature itself is a miracle. Rav Shmuel Rozovsky explained "B'nei bina y'mei shmona" in this manner. Only this insight, i.e. deriving from open miracles that nature is a miracle, yielded the eighth day of Chanukah.

The Pri Chodosh answers the Bais Yosef's question as follows: the first day of Chanukah is not celebrated because of the miracle of the oil, but rather because of the military victory. As Maharal explains, the miracle of the oil taught us that the military victory was also miraculous, and this insight led to the entire holiday of Chanukah which celebrates the victory described in Al Hanisim. As such, all eight days are based on bina.

It is precisely this insight which led Leah to thank Hashem for a natural event and to appreciate that all of our G-d given gifts, including our very lives, are, "more than our share". By calling her son Yehuda, she guaranteed that she would always be reminded to thank Hashem for everything. Sifsei Chachomim (Brachos 7b) notes that it was R' Shimon bar Yochai who taught that Leah was the first to thank Hashem when she named Yehuda, and he was also the one taught us that we are all called Yehudim, Jews, after the original Yehuda (B'reishis Raba 98:6.) He explains that Leah thanked Hashem because all of Israel will be called Yehudim, after her son Yehuda. Alternatively one can explain that we are called Yehudim as a constant reminder to thank Hashem, just as Leah called her son Yehuda to remind herself of this obligation. As Americans celebrate Thanksgiving, and Yehudim prepare for Chanukah, let us reinforce this critical and constant obligation to thank Hashem. Indeed, for us, Chanukah is celebrated for eight days, but every day is Thanksgiving.
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VAYETZEI

Our father Yaakov now embarks on a long, tortuous journey that represents the story of his life. In recounting his story before Pharaoh, when he descended to live in Egypt, he was brutally frank in assessing his life: "My years compared to those of my ancestors have been few, and they have not been good ones."

From the onset, he swims in a sea of troubles. He is robbed by his nephew, deceived by his father-in-law in every possible facet of their relationship, always the outsider, and a permanent stranger in a strange land. His lifetime has become, in rabbinic thought and in historical reality, the template for Jewish existence in exile among the nations and countries of the world.

Yet Yaakov embarks on this perilously dangerous journey with high hopes and a secure spirit. As he has dreamed, he has been promised by the God of Israel that he would never be forsaken by Heaven. He will remember this dream and its promise throughout the tumultuous events of his lifetime.

Even in his moments of greatest despair, he will be comforted by the Heavenly commitment that guarantees his success and survival.

This belief, that Heaven would never fully abandon him, becomes the defining feature of his life and activities. In this he has set the matrix for all the succeeding generations of the Jewish people. In all of our struggles, we believe that somehow God will eventually raise us and deliver us from oppression and cruelty. And so it has been.

The fundamental difference between Yaakov and Eisav is revealed to us at the beginning of their life stories. Eisav is a man of the fields, out in the

world, hail and hearty. The private Eisav, the child who is protective of his father, who yearns for spiritual blessings and for generational continuity is overshadowed by the public Eisav who is physically powerful, aggressive and impulsive, hedonistic and given to violence and cruelty towards others. All of this is included in being a man of the fields, one who is influenced and immediately reacts to every passing wind that blows.

Yaakov is also physically powerful and is even capable of struggling successfully with angels and humans. He is financially successful against daunting odds and is, in essence, a person of the tents, of study halls and the pursuit of knowledge, and of gratitude towards God and other human beings.

His private persona overshadows his public life; his innate modesty tempers his assessments of his very accomplishments.

In this also we find the Jewish experience throughout the centuries. Though we are fully capable of being people of the fields, as Israel has taught the world over the past decades, we are still basically people of the tents struggling for decency and spirituality in a very decadent and dangerous, Eisav-driven world. Our lot in life is to succeed in this struggle.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayetzai

For the week ending 25 November 2017 / 7 Kislev 5778

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com *Insights Our Place*

"Lavan said, 'Such is not done in our place, to give the younger before the elder.'" (13:17)

It's not what you say — it's the way you say it.

In the dead of night, the poacher makes his way across the moonlit field to the pond. At this chill hour the chance of being caught by the gamekeeper is extremely slim. Silently he lowers himself down and peers into the shimmering waters of the pool. Beautiful large trout are lazily meandering this way and that. A thin smile spreads across his face. He rummages for his lures and his bait.

"Gotcha!"

A powerful flashlight blinds the poacher's eyes.

The gamekeeper stares down triumphantly at his catch.

"I see you can't read signs," says the gamekeeper.

"What signs?" says the poacher.

"The one above your head that says: No Fishing Allowed."

"Ahh!" says the poacher, "No — you're reading that the wrong way. It says: No! ... Fishing Allowed."

"Lavan said, 'Such is not done in our place, to give the younger before the elder.'"

Lavan was snidely hinting here to Yaakov, "In our place it is not done that the younger precedes the elder. Maybe where you come from you give the birthright to the younger before the elder as happened with you and your brother Esav — but not in our place."

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OU Torah

What's In a Name?

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

"Who am I?"

This is the most powerful question that a person ever asks himself. For many of us, there are no easy answers to that question. We are uncertain of our

own identities.

Social scientists believe that this question is typically asked by adolescents. After all, it is legitimate for young people to be unsure of who they are. The task of the adolescent is to begin to define his or her identity, to formulate tentative answers to the question, “Who am I?”

Often, however, individuals persist in struggling to answer the “Who am I?” question long after they have passed the stage of adolescence. The so-called “midlife crisis” can be understood as a time in life when one again asks himself the question, “Who am I?”, and a crisis arises when no clear answer to that question emerges.

An important component in the formulation of an answer to the “Who am I?” question is the answer to another question, “What’s in a name?” Each of us has a name, almost invariably given to us very early in our lives by our parents or parent figure.

I would like to suggest that our sense of personal identity is in a large part determined by the names that we have been given. Our names were chosen for us because they have a certain meaning to those who named us. When our parents gave us our name, they also gave us a message about whom they expected us to be. Whether we ourselves are conscious of that message depends upon how explicit our parents were in their choice of our name. But on some level, we know that our name was not randomly chosen, and to a greater extent than we realize, our self-concepts are shaped by our names. In this week’s Torah portion, Vayetze, no less than eleven newborns are given names. In every case, these names are given by women; by Leah and by Rachel. Each name is carefully crafted by these women and is designed, not only to reflect the emotions of the moment, but to shape and give direction to the destinies of each of these children.

Let us consider but two examples: Leah gives her third son the name Levi, which means “connected,” or “attached.” This reflects her confidence that with the birth of a third son, her husband, Jacob, will become more attached to her. But it is also a message to the baby Levi that he will grow up to be “attached” to others. In his lifetime, he is typically number two of the duo “Simon and Levi,” secondary to his brother. And his progeny become “attached” to the Almighty and to all things sacred as the tribe of priests for the rest of Jewish history.

Leah then names her fourth child Judah, which means to praise or to thank, because of the special gratitude she experiences with his birth. And Judah ultimately, in his own life and through his descendants, gives praise to the Lord in his actions and with his words.

In more recent times, it has become rare for a Jewish parent to invent a new name for his or her child. The prevalent custom is to name a child for a deceased ancestor or for some other revered personage. The child who carries the name of a grandparent surely internalizes the message that in some way his life should reflect some of the values of that grandparent. I know for whom I was named. He was my great-grandfather, my mother’s mother’s father, Tzvi Hersh Kriegel. He was an immigrant to America, hailing originally from Galicia. His portrait adorned one of the walls of my grandparents’ home, and it showed an immaculately dressed, bright-eyed but old-fashioned middle-aged man, with a luxuriant red beard. As a child, I learned much about him from his widow, my great-grandmother. I learned of his commitment not only to Jewish observance, but to all aspects of the Galitzianer culture, especially to its wry humor and nostalgic Chassidic tunes.

I visit his grave ever more frequently as time goes on. And I both consciously and unconsciously model myself after him. When I ask myself, “Who am I?”, a significant part of my answer relates back to him and to his name bequeathed to me.

I have found myself preaching over the years to those parents who would listen that they should choose the names they give their children carefully, and that rather than choose a name because they like the way it sounds or because of its popularity, they should select a name of a real person, someone who stood for something, someone your child could eventually

emulate.

In my Torah study and in my readings of Jewish history, I have noticed that during different eras, different names seem to predominate. I find it fascinating that the names Abraham, Moshe, David, and Solomon are today quite popular and have been certainly since the days of that second most famous Moses, Maimonides. Yet, in Talmudic times, those names seemed to have been quite rare. We find no major rabbis in the Mishnah or in the Gemara who carry the names of the aforementioned four biblical heroes. No Rabbi Moshe, no Rabbi Abraham, but strangely more than one Rabbi Ishmael. And of course, returning to this week’s Torah portion, Judahs and Simons aplenty.

“What is in a name?” A message to help answer the persistent and challenging question, “Who am I?” As is so often the case in rabbinic literature, one question answers the other.

There is a passage in the works of our Sages which tells of the three names each of us has. There is the name which we were given at the time of our birth, which is the name we have discussed in this column. But there is also the name that we earn by our own deeds, the part of the answer to the “Who am I?” question that we ourselves provide.

And finally, there is a name that others give us, the reputation that we deserve. It is that name to which King Solomon in his *Kohelet* refers when he remarks, “A good name is better than fragrant oil, and the day of death than the day of birth.” And it is that very name which the Mishnah in *Avot* has in mind when it concludes that of all the crowns of glory that humans can achieve, there is one that stands supreme: the *keter shem tov*, the crown of a good name.

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Vayeitzei 5778-2017

“Three Wells ”

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week’s parasha, parashat Vayeitzei, Jacob leaves Beer Sheba to escape the wrath of Esau and travels to Haran to be with his uncle, Laban. As he leaves the Holy Land, Jacob has a powerful spiritual experience in which he dreams of angels climbing up and down a ladder that leads to heaven.

Describing Jacob’s arrival in Haran, the Torah, in Genesis 29:2 states, וַיֵּרָא, וַהֲגִיה בְּאֵר בְּשָׂדֵה, וַהֲגִיה שָׁם שְׁלֹשָׁה עֲדָרֵי צֹאן רֹבְצִים עָלֶיהָ, כִּי מִן הַבְּאֵר הָהוּא יִשְׁקוּ הַעֲדָרִים, וַהֲבִיט וַיִּבְרָא אֶת הַבְּאֵר, וַהֲבִיט וַיִּבְרָא אֶת הַבְּאֵר, וַהֲבִיט וַיִּבְרָא אֶת הַבְּאֵר, He looked and behold—a well in the field! And behold! Three flocks of sheep lay there beside it, for from that well they would water the flocks, and the stone over the mouth of the well was large. Scripture explains that only when all the shepherds were assembled could they together roll the huge stone from off the mouth of the well and water the flocks.

There is much speculation regarding the purpose of the huge stone. The most plausible reasons for placing the stone on top of the well were to protect the water and to prevent people from falling into the well.

Others suggest that the huge stone was there for other, non-practical, reasons. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch asserts that the Arameans were not men of good character. Since they did not trust one another, there was fear that if the well were left open to all, some shepherds would take more than their fair share. Since it was necessary for all the shepherds to be there in order to roll the stone off, the equitable distribution of the water was ensured.

Jacob is surprised to see that the local shepherds had gathered around the well and were not out in the field grazing the sheep, and caring for the owners’ flocks properly. While in conversation with the shepherds, Rachel

arrives. So taken is Jacob with the young woman, that he singlehandedly lifts up the stone and waters her flocks.

Wells play an important role in several narratives in the Torah. There are, in fact, three similar accounts in the Torah that tell of travelers who come to a well to find a mate.

The first occurrence in the Torah is found in Genesis 24:11. Eliezer, Abraham's Damascan servant, brings his master, Abraham's camels outside of the city of Nachor, to the well of water, at evening, as the female water drawers come out. The second well story is found in our parasha, in Genesis 29:2. In the third case, found in Exodus 2:15-17, Moses has fled Egypt and comes to dwell in the land of Midian. He sits down by the **בְּאֵר**, a well. The High Priest of Midian has seven daughters who come to the well to draw water, fill the troughs and give drink to their father's flocks. As Moses watches, the local shepherds chase the women away.

Although the three stories appear to be quite similar, there are significant differences. In fact, there are basic differences concerning the wells themselves.

In the city of Nachor, where Eliezer comes, the shepherdesses apparently go out together every day toward evening, to draw water. This was necessary for their protection from the boys who would frequently harass them. The well, in this case, is located outside the city. Except for the troublesome shepherds, the story focuses only on the women. The well here seems to be a communal well that is governed by communal laws. The water is open and free for anyone to take. The fact that the well is outside the city indicates that the location is secure from enemies and bad elements, and is even safe for girls who go out to draw water.

The well, mentioned in our parasha, serves only to water flocks and is not open to communal use. It is subject to use only during those hours when the shepherds come together. The men here play a significant role, for without them, there would be no access to the water.

The well that Jacob comes to is **בְּאֵר בְּשָׂדֵה**, a well in the field. It is not near any inhabited areas, but farther away, closer to the pastures, and its use is limited only to flocks that belong to the members of the local community. The well seems to be owned or controlled by the local community whose shepherds dug it, and may not be used by anyone else. The source of the water does not appear to be an open stream, but rather a flow of underground water. The well itself needs to be protected, because of the scarcity of water. At first glance, the well in the story of Moses in Midian seems to be similar to the well where Jacob meets Rachel. However, there is a significant difference. Both the wells of Eliezer and Jacob are in Mesopotamia, a land that is blessed by powerful rivers—the Tigris and the Euphrates, and abundant rain. The land of Midian is hot and arid, with poor soil. Its Bedouin residents are always fighting for bare subsistence, and only the strong survive. They fight over every inch of land and every drop of water. Although the daughters of Jethro arrive at the well long before the male shepherds, they are soon chased away. Only the presence of Moses, who fights off the shepherds, makes it possible for them to water their sheep.

Wells, in many cultures, are a positive symbol of abundance, good fortune and comradeship. Wells are often seen as vehicles that ensure the future fate of the people of the community.

But every well is different. Depending on the environment they serve, wells elicit different reactions, often coinciding with the needs of the time and the location.

Judaism regards water as a holy commodity. In fact, Torah itself is often (Isaiah 55:1) compared to water. Thus, tradition reveres water, both literally and symbolically. It is at the well where matchmaking takes place, where courts of law meet and important decisions are rendered.

In a most profound way, the well may represent the actual destiny of the People of Israel.

May you be blessed.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Vayeitzei

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Designated Eater

Yaakov was on the run, but he had nowhere to turn. Eisav, his brother, was out to kill him for stealing the blessings. His parents were old and could not harbor him. So for fourteen years he hid in the house of Study — Yeshivas Shem V'Ever.

But those years, too, passed, and now Yaakov was on his own, and about to stay in the home of his crafty uncle, Lavan, whose reputation for deceitfulness earned him the name Lavan HaArami (Lavan the charlatan).

Between a brother like Eisav and an uncle like Lavan the only one Yaakov could turn to was Hashem. And so Yaakov spends a night under the stars and dreams of a ladder ascending to heaven. There are angels going up the ladder and others going down. In the dream Hashem appears to Yaakov and assures him that, "Behold, I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go" (Genesis 28:15).

When Yaakov awakes and realizes the sanctity of his habitation, he, too, makes a commitment. "If Hashem will be with me and guard me on this way that I am going, and provide me with bread to eat and clothes to wear and return me to my father's house in peace...the stone I have set will become a house of Hashem and all that he gives me I will forever tithe" (Genesis 20-22).

Yaakov pleads with Hashem for food, shelter, and warmth. He wants no more than the basic necessities of life. In return, he pledges to build a house of the Lord and give charitably. It is a wonderful commitment, one that Jews take seriously until this very day.

But Yaakov's request for "bread to eat and clothes to wear" seems more poetic than practical. Of course, bread is made to eat and clothes are made to wear! Is there anybody who eats clothing and wears bread? Why did Yaakov not just ask for bread and clothing?

Sender Laib Aronin of Skokie, Illinois, gave me a beautiful sefer, *A Student Looks At The Siddur*. In it he quotes Shmuel Weintraub, a survivor of Bergen-Belsen and other death camps, who tells a story that I'd like to re-tell with fictitious characters.

In Auschwitz, there were two inmates on different ends of the camp. Chaim was healthy enough to eat only half of his bread ration for a few days and so he stored the stale pieces for a time in the imminent future when he knew his strength would wane.

Dovid, at the other end of the camp, had no strength to save bread. He ate all that he had every day and hoped it would be enough to survive. What he did manage to scrounge was scraps of cloth, which he sewed ever-so-stealthily to make an extra blanket in dire foreboding of the coming winter.

Months later, things got worse in Auschwitz. The nights were freezing and the rations dwindled. Dovid's blanket was of little use, for he was starving. Chaim's bread was worthless, for he was freezing. Each of the two heard about the other's needs. They also knew of their extra stashes.

Dovid and Chaim had to trade their precious commodities to keep alive. The bread was bartered to keep Dovid warm, and the blanket was bartered to keep Chaim from freezing. But it did not help. Unfortunately, Dovid starved, and Chaim froze.

Yaakov Avinu knew that the world is filled with commodities. But the greatest blessing is to use the gifts for the purpose that they are intended.

Bread was given to eat. Clothes to wear. All too often, we find that food and clothes are going for purposes not intended. Sometimes they are just wasted, and sometimes they are used to make extravagant statements.

Yaakov had a proper perspective on life and asked for everything to fit into that perspective. And when the commodities of life are put in focus, man's needs follow easily as well.

Good Shabbos

Dedicated in memory of Joseph Jungreis — Reb Yoel Zvi ben Reb Tuvia HaLevi By Joel & Marilyn Mandel
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.
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VaYeitzei: 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 Ayah vol. I, p. 109, Olat Re’iyah vol. I, p. 409) Copyright © 2006 by Chanan Morrison

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Parashas Lech Lecha תשע"ח

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

ואולם לזו שם העיר לראשונה

However, Luz was the city’s name originally. (28:19)

A man goes through life – and then he passes to the next world – the real world, the world of Truth. What is left of all the years that he spent on this world? Nothing but memories: no money; no material assets; no distinction – only memories. In order to perpetuate themselves, people build monuments, erect buildings, make tributes to their achievements. Why? So that they will be remembered. We are so fickle. Everything is for one purpose: so that the next generation will not forget us. No one wants to be forgotten, but are we prepared to lead a life that will engender positive memories, so that we will impart to our children and all future generations an enduring legacy of value? The barometer is quite simple: unless one lives a life worth remembering, he will be slowly forgotten, relegated to mausoleums of antiquity.

This is how it has been throughout time. People leave mementos. Wealthy people build cities, villas, skyscrapers with their names emblazoned on them, as if this will ensure their eternal perpetuation. Others erect monuments; some even place their picture on their headstones. There was one city, however, the town of Luz, where this was not necessary. Why? Because no one ever died in Luz. They lived on and on. Apparently, the Malach Ha’Maves, Angel of Death, had no permit to enter Luz.

Horav Sholom Yosef Elyashiv, zl, has a deeper understanding concerning the renaming of Luz to Bais Kail (Beth El). During the tenure of our Patriarch, Yaakov Avinu, the goal of the average mindset was: How does one “establish” himself in the idyllic city of Luz? Imagine living in a city in which no one dies! It would be – utopia! The quality of life in such a city must be outstanding. One would think that the real estate agents and power brokers of that era would have converged on Luz from all four points/directions in the world. Who would not want to set up shop in Luz? Real estate must have been at a premium. Who would not give up his life’s savings to be freed from the clutches of the Angel of Death?

By the way, whatever happened to Luz? There is no zeicher, remembrance, of it. It is gone; it disappeared, as if it had never existed. Does it make sense that such an extraordinary city should become extinct as if it had never existed? Rav Elyashiv explains that Yaakov changed all of that. He visited Luz and called out, “He who wants to memorialize himself, to see to it that he perpetuates himself, should be cognizant of one vital fact: Every moment that he dedicates to Torah study will remain in his behalf forever. It will be an everlasting remembrance.” Torah is Hashem’s Divine manuscript, His blueprint for life. Yaakov “changed” the name of Luz to Bais Kail. He

told the people that if they truly want everlasting life, then it can only be in the “House of G-d,” within the four cubits of halachah. To think that Luz will save a person from the Angel of Death is ludicrous. When a person’s time is up, the Malach HaMaves will find some way to “convince” the person to leave Luz. The angel might not be able to enter, but when one’s time is up, the angel will find a way to perform his “ritual.”

Nothing – absolutely nothing – can perpetuate a person’s life like his connection with Torah. Bais Kail, the House of G-d, is the place where we can aspire to achieve eternity. This is a powerful lesson to all of those who seek an avenue to perpetuate their existence on this world. Buildings, monuments, enclaves will not do it. A building devoted to Torah study is not your common piece of real estate. It is a House of G-d! It is a true tribute to one’s life, to one’s values.

Eternity does not have to be about money. Torah study is one’s Bais Kail, whether it is full time, part time, or even an hour a week. Time devoted to spiritual endeavors is everlasting. Every moment that one spends studying Torah, he accrues eternal merit. Our Tanaaim, Amoraim, Rishonim, Achronim, Poskim, Rabbanim and Roshei Yeshivah are as alive and vibrant today as when they walked the halls of the bais hamedrash. Luz is a figment of one’s imagination. One cannot escape death. True life is only in Bais Kail.

וישא את קלו ויבך

And he raised his voice and wept. (29:11)

Yaakov Avinu wept when he met Rachel Imeinu. He meets the girl that he is going to marry, the wife with whom he is destined to build Klal Yisrael, and he cries. One would expect a somewhat different reaction. Rashi offers two reasons for our Patriarch’s anomalous reaction. First, Yaakov saw b’Ruach ha’Kodesh, through Divine Inspiration, that Rachel would not be buried near him. Why was Yaakov Divinely inspired at this moment? Was there no other time for Yaakov to see b’ruach ha’kodesh that he would not be buried with Rachel? Second, Rashi offers a reason for Rachel’s loss of her rightful place in the Meoras HaMachpeilah. Rashi comments (ibid 30:15), l’fi she’zilzelah b’mishkav tzaddik, “Because she belittled the lying of the righteous one” (i.e. being with Yaakov, she traded away the opportunity, thus belittling the value of Yaakov’s companionship). Yaakov obviously was troubled over the fact that Rachel was denied burial in the Meoras HaMachpeilah. Otherwise, why would he have cried?

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, suggests that Yaakov’s weeping is connected to the previous weeping of his brother, the wicked Eisav. Hashem overlooks nothing. When Yaakov received the blessings which had originally been designated for Eisav, Eisav returned from the field to discover that Yaakov had preceded him in receiving the blessings. As a result, he emitted a tzaakah gedolah umarah, a loud, bitter cry” (ibid 27:34). Hashem “repaid” Eisav when Mordechai ha’Yehudi, upon hearing of Achashveirosh’s evil decree to murder all of the Jews in Shushan, also emitted a mournful cry. When Eisav came demanding the blessings, he had conveniently forgotten his earlier disdain of the blessings.

The Torah is meticulous in its demands of a tzaddik, righteous person, k’chut ha’saarah, like a hair breadth. As a result of Yaakov’s “purchase” of the bechorah, birthright of the firstborn, from Eisav, Leah, who had previously been destined to marry Eisav, was transferred to Yaakov. Thus, the original place in the Meoras HaMachpeilah that had been set aside for Rachel was transferred to Leah. Yaakov caused pain to Eisav, a pain which spurred Eisav to weep. As a result, Yaakov had to experience “pay back.” It was now his turn to weep. Since he was the bechor, firstborn, by purchase, Rachel could no longer be buried next to him. Thus, he wept.

Rashi offers a second reason for Yaakov crying: “He came empty handed.” Apparently, when Yitzchak came for Rivkah, he came carrying jewelry and other material gifts. Yaakov, on the other hand, had nothing. This caused him pain, which he expressed by weeping. Let us analyze this. Where did Lavan get the utter chutzpah to exchange Leah for Rachel? Knowing Lavan’s character, it could have been only because Yaakov was

defenseless, since he was poor. No one challenges or pulls one over on a powerfully rich man. If Yaakov would have arrived laden with jewelry, Lavan would have bent over backward to give him Rachel. His chutzpah was the direct result of Yaakov’s indigence.

This is why Yaakov cried. He realized that, as a result of his poverty level, he was no longer a “player.” Lavan could do to him whatever he wanted. As a result, he lost Rachel. Therefore, he wept.

On the other hand, we know that Yaakov lost his money to Elifaz, Eisav’s son/agent, who was sent to kill Yaakov. The Patriarch convinced Elifaz that poor is as good as dead, so he told Elifaz, “Take my money!” Had Eisav not sent Elifaz, Yaakov would have arrived with an abundant sum of money. Rachel would have surely been given to Yaakov – to live happily ever after. Leah would have ended up as Eisav’s wife, probably turning him around and saving him. Ultimately, whom did Eisav harm the most? Himself!

This is the story of life. We make plans, thinking that we do what we want. We forget that there is “Some One” in charge, that there is a Divine Plan. Who loses out in the end? We do.

In his “Illuminations of the Maggid,” Rabbi Paysach Krohn cites a quote (which I believe he heard from Rebbetzin Chavi Wagshal of Manchester, England): “Any fool can count the seeds in one apple, but only the Highest Power can count the apples in one seed.” Only Hashem knows the potential that lies in each and every seed. He knows what it can produce and the many offshoots that can be derived from it. As Rabbi Krohn observes, a seed can be anything. Any action that we perform can generate awesome, far-reaching ramifications that can go on earning incredible spiritual reward for us. One can only imagine the effect that a “good morning” with a smile has on someone who is unsure of himself. Curing a person from depression often means making him feel good about himself, preserving and encouraging his self-esteem. It could be listening to someone. One kind word, one good deed, one smile is all that is necessary. In some instances, it could be a game-changer in a person’s life.

As the seed germinates, we are unaware of its growth. In fact, we are often not even cognizant of the planting of the seed. It is only much later, when we introspect, that we realize, “Hey! I planted that seed!” Things happen whose meaning eludes us, but Hashem has a plan. He is preserving the seed that someone else has planted. He is nurturing it and allowing it room to grow. We do; we act; but, at the end of the day, we are all spectators. Hashem controls the world. We can only hope to plant the seeds.

As spectators, we are most often relegated to seeing and analyzing the big picture in retrospect. When “things” happen, whether they are “bad things happening to good people” or just occurrences and events which, to our small minds, are inexplicable, we wonder, we question, we accept, but we might have to wait a lifetime to be able to see how everything fits into its proper place. In his “Living Emunah,” Rabbi David Ashear cites a powerful explanation rendered by Horav Shlomo Kluger, zl, to the well-known Chazal which depicts Rabbi Akiva’s martyrdom at the hands of the Romans.

After such cruel torture, which the mind can hardly imagine, Rabbi Akiva’s soul finally ascended to its rightful place in Heaven. The Angels had great difficulty understanding the “reward” that this preeminent sage had received for his extreme dedication to Torah. Hashem’s response was straightforward: If the Angels will not remain silent, Hashem would return the world to its pre-Creation state – complete nothingness. Why could Hashem not have simply countered, “You do not understand My ways.” Why was it necessary to threaten to destroy the world?

Rav Shlomo Kluger answers by drawing a powerful analogy to a king who commissioned a master tailor to make a magnificent robe for him. The king provided the tailor with sufficient gold and silver from which to make the threads to be used for this exquisite garment. It took some time, but the tailor devoted himself to his work, and, in the end, he provided an outstanding piece of work. The king was bowled over by the beauty of the robe. The king’s officers, however, were quite upset and jealous that the king

was gushing over the tailor at their expense. Jealousy always leads to no good, and this instance was no different. The officers spread a rumor that the tailor had pocketed some of the gold and silver. The king believed his officers, despite the tailor's strong protests that he would never lie. The king's response was what the officers figured would end the entire problem, "Prove it!"

The tailor replied, "My king, there is only one way in which I can prove my innocence: by taking apart every thread of the robe and weighing it, in order to show his highness that I used everything that I received to make the robe. Otherwise, I have no way of proving my innocence." The king understood that this was impossible. He believed the tailor.

This was Hashem's answer to the Angels. If they would want to understand the "reward" received by Rabbi Akiva, Hashem would have to unravel the entire world to show how every single event that ever occurred fits into place as part of His Divine Plan. Every event, from the beginning of time until the end, is interconnected. It is beyond the scope of our limited abilities to understand this – unless each and every event is placed before us and scrutinized. Hashem, however, has it all before Him at all times; thus, He is able to see the entire garment all at once.

One last story demonstrates how little we see and how much less we are aware of everything that comprises any single event. A rabbi and his wife lived in a small town in France that, alas, had no functioning mikvah. The nearest mikvah was a few hours away by car. They decided to do something about it. Their fundraising efforts received no success. It was not a project that interested the small Jewish population. Not being people to give up easily, they decided to fund the project from their own savings, which meant subsisting on bread and water to save sufficient funds, so that they could transform one room in their modest home into a mikvah. It took six years of saving and living frugally, but they did it. Can one imagine the pain and devastation that enveloped them when their two-year old son crawled into the room, fell into the mikvah and tragically drowned? All of the sacrifice, everything that they had given up - for what? To lose their only child? They were inconsolable.

One night the soul of their little boy appeared to the rabbi in a dream and informed him that the anguish the father was suffering over the tragic death of the son was causing his soul pain. "You do not understand my background. I had lived 900 years ago as one of the early Baalei Tosfos, early commentators to the Talmud. I was murdered during a pogrom against the Jews of France. I did not undergo purification in a mikvah, thus, my soul was unable to reach the highest level it could attain. For all these years, my soul waited for the purest mikvah. Your mikvah, which was built on the foundation of pure sacrifice, was the perfect place. I was able to come back as your young son, and, after drowning, I was buried according to the strictest standards of halachah. To demonstrate the veracity of my words, within the coming year, you and mommy will be blessed with a little girl, all because of mommy's strict adherence to the mitzvah of challah!"

The next morning, the rabbi's wife woke up and told her husband that she had dreamt about challah. "Can you imagine?" she asked. "Yes," her husband said, and he told her the "rest of the story." And now – we too know the rest of the story. We experience so many occurrences that we do not understand, but, rest assured, Heaven has an explanation for everything.

אחרי ילידה בת ותקרא את שמה דינה

Afterward, she bore a daughter and she called her name, Dinah. (30:21)

Everyone wants to get ahead, to rise to the summit of the spiritual ladder. What are we willing to sacrifice in order to achieve spiritual distinction? Are we willing to expend time and effort, give up financial security all for the purpose of spiritual achievement? The answer obviously should be a resounding, "Yes." Nothing should stand in the way of spiritual ascendancy. It cannot, however, be achieved on the "back" of someone else: a friend or even someone who is not a friend. Achieving closeness with Hashem cannot and should not be achieved at the expense of another Jew's feelings or sensitivities, regardless of the veracity and legitimacy – or lack

thereof – of those emotions.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, makes this observation based on the ethical behavior of our Patriarch, Yaakov Avinu, and our Matriarchs, Rachel Imeinu and Leah Imeinu. Leah gave birth to six shevatim, tribes, sons, while Rachel gave birth to Yosef and Benyamin. Bilhah and Zilpah each gave birth to two sons. It was, however, not supposed to have been this way. Leah had a seventh child, a daughter, Dinah. The root of the name is derived from din, judgment. Rashi explains that Leah chose this name by design. Apparently, our Matriarchs were aware that there would be a total of twelve shevatim. Thus, when Leah became pregnant with a seventh child, she became concerned, lest she have seven sons, and her sister, Rachel, would have only one. This would mean that Rachel would have fewer sons than even Bilhah and Zilpah, who originally had maidservant status. Leah made a judgment and prayed that Hashem change the gender of her fetus from male to female – resulting in a little girl, whom she named Dinah, after her "judgment."

כי אתה ידעת את עבדתי אשר עבדתיך

For you are aware of my service that I labored for you. 30:26)

Imagine in today's day and age, a man working for fourteen years – day and night – exposed to the elements – not for money to provide his family – but for the right to have a family! Yaakov Avinu slaved for fourteen years – not to provide for his family – but just so that he could marry Lavan's two daughters, who came to the table without any dowry. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, observes that those fourteen years serve as the bedrock, the foundation, upon which the national existence and family life of the House of Yaakov are rooted. These fourteen years did not constitute an act of chivalry or romance. They provided the shining gateway to that precious treasure of human achievement: the Jewish family. No more important unit in Jewish life exists than the Jewish family. That is where success begins, and, sadly, where a person's misfortune is rooted. A strong, happy, loving family breeds success. An unhappy family, marked by depression and strife, sets the stage for misfortune.

These fourteen years that Yaakov devoted to working are the highest tribute that a man can make to his wife. Yaakov taught us how a Jewish husband regards his wife by how he slaved fourteen years for a suitable partner in marriage. Yaakov's actions defy the inane prattle concerning Orthodoxy's degradation of the Jewish woman in marriage. Where else – what other religion – where, but in Orthodox Judaism, is the woman so venerated? At the end of fourteen years, Yaakov was back where he started – only now he had familial responsibilities. His cares had multiplied. Fourteen years earlier, when he was alone and penniless, he had made a commitment to Hashem. Now, fourteen years later, he was still penniless, but he had amassed the greatest Jewish treasure which money cannot buy: a family.

The Mashgiach considers this exemplary behavior to be a demonstration of true l'shem Shomayim, acting purely for Hashem's sake. L'shem Shomayim means that a person does not retain a vestige of personal interest for himself. Everything that he does is purely for the sake of glorifying Hashem. He applies the analogy of a community darshan, or maggid, who preaches weekly, neither for pay, nor for accolade, but simply to glorify Hashem. What would happen if another darshan, speaker, came to town and offered his services? Would the present darshan desist and embrace him with open arms – even if it meant having another voice in town? If the first darshan cried, "Foul," and refused to allow another speaker (truthfully this applies to another "entity": shul, minyan, school, business, etc.) It would indicate that his l'shem Shomayim was nothing more than a sham. He was acting purely for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. It is very much like the humble man whose humility seems to come into question when someone does not give him proper respect.

Our Imahos acted purely l'shem Shomayim. Certainly, they each desperately wanted to be the progenitress of as many shevatim as possible. Rachel sacrificed to procure the dudaim, fragrant flowers, from Leah, in the hope that, as a result, she would be blessed with child. Leah was willing to

sell the dudaim, so that Yaakov would be with her that night. Nonetheless, they were each willing to give up their greatest yearning (to have another son), if it meant not hurting the other. Leah was expecting a boy, but, if it were to cause an infringement on her sister's feelings, she did not want it. She would rather have a daughter than a son that would result in her sister's hurt feelings. Furthermore, Rachel had waited patiently for seven years to marry Yaakov, and, in a split second decision, she gave it all up just so that her sister, Leah, would not be hurt.

We all seek spiritual growth. We all want to glorify Hashem through mitzvah performance. We all want to perform good deeds, carry out charitable acts to help those in need and less fortunate. If our aspirations and goals, however, might impinge on those of someone else, who, as a result, will be hurt, then our bein Adam la'Makom, relationship with Hashem (vis-à-vis our spiritual activities), is at the expense of our bein adam la'chaveiro, relationships with man. Hashem does not want such activities from us, and neither should we.

ברך עלינו ד' אלקינו את השנה הזאת

Bareich Aleinu... es ha'shanah ha'zos. Bless on our behalf... this year.

We pray to Hashem for sustenance. This is an indication that we realize that sustenance comes from Hashem. We receive His sustenance through the various media that He employs on our behalf. We, of course, think that how we earn a living is our choice, when, in fact, it is totally from Hashem Who guides and directs us. The choices we make coincide with what Hashem wants us to do. In other words, when we do not achieve success at one position, it means that we should move on to another. Quite possibly, Hashem does not want us to earn our livelihood this way.

Hashem has the wherewithal to provide for everyone, and, in fact, He does. What we fail to understand is that Hashem provides for those who study His Torah. One should never make the foolish mistake of thinking that, by studying Torah, he is wasting time that could be spent earning a living. On the contrary, it is only through his spiritual endeavor that he merits material sustenance.

In his commentary to the Siddur, the Kol Bo observes that the prayer for sustenance begins with a bais and ends with a mem. The Torah Sheh'b'Ksav, Written Law, begins with a bais, while the Torah Sheh'Baal Peh, Oral Law, begins with a mem. A person who studies the Written Law that begins with bais and studies the Oral Law that begins with mem will merit Hashem's sustenance. The pursuit of Torah learning will not impede our ability to generate a livelihood. On the contrary, Hashem provides for those who learn Torah.

Sponsored in loving memory of RABBI SAMUEL STONE

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Kidney Donations: A Halachic Analysis of a Shocking New Ruling – by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

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By Rabbi Yair Hoffman for the Five Towns Jewish Times

One of the top Poskim in the Satmar world has issued a controversial ruling. Rav Chaim Yoseph Dovid Weiss, the Satmar Dayan in Antwerp and author of the Responsa series Vayaan Dovid, has ruled that donating a kidney is now a full-fledged halachic obligation.

This author believes that while it is very laudatory to donate kidneys, the Dayan is overstating the case and it is not an obligation.

OVERVIEW

The issue of kidney transplants has undergone a transformation in the halachic literature since the inception of kidney transplants. The first kidney

transplant took place on June 17th, 1950. Ruth Tucker, the 44 year old recipient lived an extra five years. The next transplant took place in 1952 in Paris and then in 1954 in Boston.

Initially, the Tzitz Eliezer (Vol. VIII #15) and Dayan Weiss (Minchas Yitzchok Vol. VI #103) both forbade kidney transplant on account of the perception of danger to both the donor and the recipient. So did, Rav Ovadiah Yoseph originally, although he later changed (Dinei Yisroel p.25). The problem, of course, was with the recipient's immune system. It would immediately and or chronically reject the transplanted kidney. Although medications could suppress the immune system, there was great risk of both infection and cancers such as skin cancer and lymphoma. Eventually, however, as the safety of the procedure developed and became clear, the overwhelming number of Poskim permitted kidney transplants. The consensus of opinion until recently was that, while it is certainly meritorious to donate – there is no full-fledged obligation to do so.

TWO NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Of late, two new development in kidney transplants have developed. The first was a protocol developed by Cedar's Sinai in Los Angeles that reduced the need for blood type compatibility and tissue compatibility. It was approved by the FDA in 2004.

The second development can be called "transplant chains" where one person in Oregon can donate a kidney to another person in Oklahoma, which triggers a third person to donate to the first person's spouse back in Oregon. This new system was made possible through the confluence of kidney matching computer algorithms, cooperation between transplant centers, and advances in kidney shipping techniques. The couple whose refuah shleimah this article is dedicated toward are both part of such a transplant chain. Understandably, these two new developments will cause live kidney donations to skyrocket.

GENERAL OBLIGATION OF RESCUE

All this brings us back to the general obligation of rescue. The Pasuk in Vayikra (19:16) states, "lo saamod al dam rayacha – do not stand idly by your brother's blood." Rav Yoseph Karo, in his Bais Yoseph commentary (CM 426) on the Tur quotes the Talmud Yerushalmi (Trumos 8:4) that requires us to endanger our lives to save others. Shockingly, as the SMA points out, Rav Karo does not cite this view in his actual Shulchan Aruch. The SMA explains that Rav Karo changed his mind and did not cite the Yerushalmi because the three major Rishonic codifiers (Rif, Rambam, and Rosh) do not cite the Yerushalmi.

Rav Eliezer Yehudah Waldenburg (Tzitz Eliezer Vol. IX #45) explains that the Bavli seems to have rejected the Yerushalmi (See also Pischei Teshuvah 426:2). Many Achronim (see for example Maharam Shick YD #155) seem to learn that the Gemorah in Bava Metziah (62a) regarding the debate between Ben Petura and Rabbi Akiva about two people in the desert where one has enough water only for one of the them to survive shows that the Bavli argues with the Yerushalmi. Rabbi Akiva states that v'chai bahem teaches us that one's own life has precedence over the others. The Maharam Shick explains that Ben Petura's opinion is that of the rejected Yerushalmi. The Mishnah Brurah (329:19), the font of normative halachic practice, rules that, although meritorious, one is not required to risk one's own life to save that of another.

THE RADBAZ

The idea is generally predicated upon the responsa of the Radbaz (# 627) regarding a tragic case. A finance minister in a foreign country fled to Egypt because he was falsely accused of financial impropriety by others. The king was about to close in on him, when he fled. The king issued a proclamation that he will only cut off the finance minister's hand if he turns himself in, but he will kill the ministers brother if he does not show up. The Radbaz ruled that, although meritorious, the minister was not obligated to return.

Most Achronim and Poskim of the past generation accepted the ruling of the Radbaz (See Shach YD 157:3; Pischei Teshuvah 157:3, Igros Moshe YD Vol. II 174; Tzitz Eliezer Vol. IX #45).

THE NEWER POSKIM

Of late, however, a few Poskim have issued rulings that it is, in fact, an obligation to donate a kidney. It is not that they disagree with the Radbaz, but it is that they believe that the situation is no longer congruous to that of the Radbaz.

These Poskim raise a number of questions concerning the contemporary kidney transplant.

- 1] In light of the advances in Living Donor Kidney Transplantation (LDKT) is a person obligated to enter into a possible danger in order to save the life of a friend? Is a kidney donation considered dangerous at all?
- 2] Is one obligated to endure pain and suffering in order to save another?
- 3] Is there an obligation to speed up the kidney donation process?
- 4] What if it is unclear whether the operation will succeed?
- 5] Upon whom is it the greatest Mitzvah to donate?
- 6] Is there an obligation to donate when the organ is available from another or if there will be a possibility of an organ available at additional expense?
- 7] Can one harvest a kidney from a child who is unable to consent to the procedure?

Rav Chaim Yoseph Dovid Weiss, the Satmar Dayan in Antwerp and author of the Responsa series Vayaan Dovid writes (Vol. IV p. 196) that there is no danger involved in the operation and that it is a full-fledged halachic obligation. The same ruling was issued in a British based Torah journal entitled Kol HaTorah (#59 p. 175) in an article by Rabbi Eliezer Sternbuch of New York. As far as the issue of whether there is an obligation to perform it as soon as possible, Rabbi Weiss cites the Shulchan Aruch (YD 252:3) that when time is of the essence there is certainly such an obligation.

Regarding the issue of who should do it, Rabbi Weiss quotes the Shulchan Aruch (YD 251) regarding Hilchos Tzedaka that the obligation lies first and foremost among family members. He also cites the Gemorah in Bava Metziah (71a) that the obligation to perform chessed to another is incumbent upon the family members first.

When it is possible to receive the kidney in another manner albeit through expenses and the sick person has the resources to do so, Rav Weiss writes that there is no obligation incumbent upon the family member. It is crucial to note that this author had once researched the availability of kidneys and came upon a remarkable discovery. It seems that there are different ratings of kidneys- an A level kidney could last twenty years or more, while a B level kidney, generally from an older person or from someone who had compromised health can last five or ten years. In the state of Nevada there are B level kidneys readily available for transplant and there is generally very little waiting involved. The cost of transplantation there is often initially refused by insurance companies.

THE ORIGINAL POSKIM ARE STILL CORRECT

This author would like to respectfully suggest that, at the current state of affairs in medicine, the position of the Poskim who rule that it is meritorious but not obligatory is still the correct halachic conclusion.

There are two issues when discussing the concept of danger or non-danger to the kidney donor. There is the issue of the danger or non-danger involved in the operation itself and that of the repercussions or non-repercussions to the donor afterward.

Let's discuss the first issue. There are certainly many medical centers in the United States that certainly have 100.00 percent success rates, where there are zero deaths associated donating a kidney. However, although the fatality rate has been decreased to almost zero in other hospitals – is it so clear that this is considered “no danger?” The British based organization Giveakidney.org reports that in England the fatality rate is 1 in 3000. In the United States it has been estimated to be 1 in 5000 (Matas AJ, Bartlett ST, Leichtman AB, et al. Morbidity and mortality after living donor kidney donation, 1999–2001: a survey of the United States transplant centres. *Am J Transplant* 2003;3:830–834).

THE SDEI CHEMED

What percentage of risk is considered negligible in halacha? The term “Karov l'vadai – close to certain” is one that is employed by the author of

the Sdei Chemed. The Sdei Chemed (Samech Klal 11 “v'Sham” and Klal 92 letter 6) seems to indicate that the criterion for “Karov l'vadai” is 1 in 10,000. here the danger is 1 in 5000, and according to another study 1 in 3300.

As far as the second issue is concerned, in an article entitled “Is Living Kidney Donation Really Safe” printed in the May 2007 edition of “Transplant Proceedings” (39(4):822-3), authors Azar SA, Nakhjavani MR, Tarzamni MK, Faragi A, Bahloli A, Badroghli N, reported that serious complications occurred 5.8% of the time. In 6.9% of the cases they studied, the patients serum creatinine was ≥ 1.4 mg/dL. Microalbuminuria was found in 10.4%; hematuria in 13.9%; pyuria in 8.1%; and renal stone in 6.9%. Varicocele was found in 24.1% of male patients (23.3% of patients who had left nephrectomised). Persistent pain was reported by 44.1%. Antidepressants were prescribed to 9.3% of donors because of severe depression. Other studies, however, showed less problems (Lam N, Huang A, Feldman LS, et al. Acute dialysis risk in living kidney donors. *Nephrol Dial Transplant* 2012;27:3291–3295.).

Another aspect of the second issue is the shockingly high rate of obesity and diabetes in this country. Some thirty to 40 percent of diabetics develop kidney problems. Indeed, even if a diabetic has low blood pressure many doctors recommend that he or she should still take high blood pressure meds to protect future kidney function.

Although these issues are certainly minimal, it would seem to this author that if these numbers are accurate, they would change the status of this type of obligation from obligatory to voluntary – at least according to one reading of the Sdei Chemed.

It is theoretically possible that LDKT will have advanced so far that this halacha may change, but at this point these complications still exist.

OTHER HALACHIC ISSUES

There are also a few parenthetic issues as well. One of the Ten Commandments is “Lo sachmod” – not to Covet. This is defined as being desirous of a friend's item and repeatedly requesting of him to sell it to you. The first time one asks – there is no prohibition. As an example, one may ask a neighbor one time to sell you his '67 Mustang. Asking a second time is a violation of this prohibition.

Is there a prohibition of Lo Sachmod in asking someone else who has a second, extra kidney two times to donate? Generally speaking there is a Torah requirement to spend all of one's money in order to avoid violating a negative commandment in the Torah. Does this idea mean that the prohibition of Lo Sachmod still exists regarding a kidney? Dayan Yaakov Yisroel Fisher zt"l in his Even Yisroel (Vol. VIII #105) rules that since the issue of Pikuach Nefesh applies here, the prohibition may be violated. The person may be more successful, however, in seeking other options, such as the Nevada one mentioned earlier.

May the Holy One grant the sick a refuah shleimah and continue blessing the work of those who both donate kidneys and save life in the field of medicine. May the donors be granted continued health, long life and nachas from all they do.

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