

BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON VAYEITZE - 5763

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Subject: Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - Family Focus
http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2002/parsha/rneu_vayetsei.html
RABBI YAAKOV NEUBURGER
FAMILY FOCUS

Finding herself in what seemed to her as a loveless marriage, Leah hopes to capture her husband's heart as she delivers to him the baby boys that would ultimately establish his legacy. Indeed the names of Leah's first children chronicle a relationship that, in her perception, slowly grew from hate to begrudging companionship. With her first born, Reuven, she marked that Hashem had seen (ro'oh) her suffering, "and now my husband would love me". Unfortunately with the next baby, Shimon, she speaks pessimistically as she remarks that Hashem has heard (shoma) that she is hated and perhaps, merely as consolation, granted her another son. However with the birth of Levi, Leah is now surprisingly convinced that "now Ya'akov will accompany (yilaveh) me as I have given birth for him three sons".

Why does Levi's birth nurture this renewed optimism? Explains Rashi, that blessed with prophecy Leah foresaw a family of four wives and twelve sons and she figured Ya'akov would do the math. She clearly had been privileged to bear her share and she is quite sure that Ya'akov will finally be fully accepting of her. I remember my Rebbe Harav Shimon Romm tz"l vividly portraying the comment of some Rabbis that is less generous. They suggested that with three infants, Leah's arms, already carrying Reuven and Shimon, will need Ya'akov's help and he will no doubt leave Rachel's side to accompany her.

The precise interpretation of the source of Leah's joy notwithstanding, it is clear that the arrival of Levi finally convinces Leah that she will enjoy Ya'akov's support in an unprecedented fashion. It is for this reason, opines Harav Chaim Shmuelevitz tz"l, the rosh yeshiva of the Mir in Yerushalyim till his passing in the seventies, that Levi is destined for eternal distinction. After all, we find that already in Mitzrayim, long before their noted dedication throughout the golden calf episode, that they had been set apart and freed from working. This is often noted as Moshe's ticket to the liberty he enjoyed to come and go. It seems that they were accorded the respect of clergy, a position that they would earn in the years to come. So great is the feat of bringing greater tranquility to a home, even if done inadvertently and effortlessly, that through it Levi merited a unique position in our nation. Interestingly in our parsha as well, the birth of Yosef is greeted by Rachel with a not so dissimilar reaction to that of Leah at Levi's birth. At first, Rachel, upon absorbing the news of Yosef's birth, comments "Now Hashem has ended my shame". Presumably she felt inadequate for so many years and now she can take her place among Ya'akov's fertile wives. Nevertheless, Rashi quotes a medrash explaining that Rachel was focused on the shame she had felt when she would shoulder the blame for the daily mishaps

that are a part of every home. Now finally, when the dishes dropped and the milk spilled there would Yosef by her side and she could point the finger at him!! What a strange response from a woman who finally gives birth after suffering infertility for so long in the most trying circumstances. Is it imaginable that after so many years of pining for a child that she would allow the moment for which she had dreamt fizzle into focus on the mundane. Suggests Harav Shmuelevitz that our surprise is that of those who just don't get it; of a person who does not get how hurtful the small daily barbs really are and they over time can wear down the strongest of mates. Only those who appreciate how important tranquility at home is can understand that with all that must have been going through Rachel's mind, the additional peace at home impressed her most.

Finally, the manner in which the Torah describes the Yaakov - Leah-Rachel triangle reveals an instructive insight into shalom bayis. Clearly Leah felt that she was hated as her remark in naming Shimon indicates. Hashem concurred (29,31), "And Hashem saw that Leah was hated and she opened up her womb." Yet the preceding pasuk does state that Ya'akov loved Rachel more than Leah, inferring that Leah was not number one but she was not at all hated. How do we reconcile these descriptions? Ramban quoting the Radak points out that marriage differs from other relationships. Whereas other relationships can weather orbits of varying strengths and closeness, marriage is a center or nothing matter. Either spouses are central to each other or they will feel distanced. Would Leah be a friend she certainly would have felt the love Ya'akov poured over her, but as one who aspires to be the mainstay of one's home she deservedly belongs to be the point about which all life revolves.

From: RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND [ryfrand@torah.org] To: ravfrand@torah.org "RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frاند on Parshas Vayeitzei -

Leah Was Commended For Recognizing "I Have Received More Than I Deserve"

Upon the birth of her fourth son, Yehudah, Leah said, "This time I will thank Hashem" [Bereshis 29:35]. Rashi quotes the Rabbinic explanation that she expressed special gratitude because she had now given birth to more than her share of Tribes. "Now that I have received more than my portion, it's time to express my gratitude to G-d".

What is the meaning of the statement that Leah received more than her share? Our Rabbis explain that Leah made a simple mathematical calculation. She divided twelve future tribes by 4 wives, and arrived at the result of 3 tribes per wife. Now that she had her fourth son, she offered praise to G-d. The Rabbis praise Leah for her recognition that she owed a debt of gratitude to the Almighty.

Although Leah's recognition that she owed a debt of gratitude is certainly praiseworthy, this teaching of our Rabbis doesn't seem to make sense. Who deserves more praise -- the person who receives his or her proper share and feels indebted to G-d, or the person who receives more than his or her fair share and feels indebted to G-d? Obviously, the first person is more deserving of praise.

I saw a very interesting observation from Rav Dovid Kviat (Maggid Shiur in the Mir Yeshiva, New York): The praiseworthy aspect of Leah's behavior here was that she viewed what she received as "more than her fair share".

It is the nature of human beings to view that which they receive in life as something that they had coming to them. "This is what I deserve." If my friend is earning \$30,000 a year and I am earning

half a million dollars a year, it may not be so easy to recognize my great fortune. It is easy to think "I'm smarter than him, I'm more clever than him, I earned this on my own -- it was coming to me!" The novelty of Leah's comment is that we see that a person has the ability to step back, look at a situation objectively and come to the conclusion that "I am getting more than I deserve". This is not our normal tendency. The normal tendency is to view life as either "I am getting less than I deserve" or "I am getting my fair share." The rare person, who lives their life with the attitude that "I have gotten more than I deserve," is indeed a praiseworthy person.

Convince, Cajole, And Persuade Your Family, But Do Not Impose Towards the end of the parsha, the Torah tells us that "Yaakov saw the face of Lavan, and it was not like it was yesterday and the day before" [31:2]. Yaakov saw the way in which Lavan was treating him and recognized that things were not the same. G-d appeared to Yaakov and told him that it is time to pick up his family and return to the land of his fathers [31:3].

Yaakov then called his family out into the field and began an extensive monologue with his wives explaining why it was important for them to leave. After the long list of explanations of why they should go, the wives agreed that they should leave. But the question must be asked: If G-d appeared to any one of us and told us "It is time to leave your city," "it is time to change your job," or whatever -- we would gather our families, tell them of our message from G-d, and act upon it. We would not start a whole series of explanations: "Things are not the way they used to be, times are tough, we have to think about making changes." G-d gave us an order? That settles it.

The Shaloh HaKodesh provides an interesting insight. "When a person wants something from his family -- spouse or children -- it is not proper to compel them to do it, even if he has the ability to force them." In other words, even if one has the means to dictate in absolute terms that "this is the way it is going to be," the Shaloh says this is not the way to run a household.

"Rather, a person should try to convince them of the logic of what he wants in order that they be motivated to come to the same conclusion themselves. This is far better than compelling them to do something against their will."

This means that a person can feel very strongly about a certain household decision. He may have no doubt in his mind at all. And, he can be capable of enforcing that decision. "This is the way it's going to be." The Shaloh teaches us: Do not do it that way. Convince, cajole, persuade, but do not impose.

The proof, says the Shaloh, is Yaakov's lengthy discussion with his wives. Yaakov justified the need to leave Lavan (despite the fact that this was also G-d's command) -- in order that they agree willingly with this plan of action.

If there was ever a justifiable case to compel one's family to do something, it would be right here in this situation. G-d said that it was time to leave. Did anything more need to be said? Is there any room for discussion? Why does Yaakov need to give a whole speech?

If in this situation Yaakov felt compelled to gently persuade his wives, what can we say? Is there ever a situation where we can feel as certain as Yaakov must have felt?

If it is good enough for our patriarch, Yaakov, it is good enough for us.

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Parshat Vayetze by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Shabbat Shalom:
Parshat Vayetze (Genesis 28:10-32:3) RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN
Efrat, Israel

The personalities of the Bible are depicted in all of their complexities, in the multi-colored and often frenzied emotions of love, jealousy, majestic pride and angry revenge. Let us examine in depth one of the matriarchs of our nation, Mother Leah, who suffers the pain of requited love. There is a great lesson to be learned from how she deals with the searing hurt of rejection - and the seeds sown by that rejection upon the next generation. Our story must begin in the magnificent love-at-first-sight affair between Jacob and Rachel, when the itinerant relative single-handedly removes a heavy stone from the well - which usually required the concerted effort of all the shepherds together in order to impress the approaching Rachel (Genesis 29:10). He agrees to work for her father Laban in order to procure her hand in marriage, "And Jacob worked for the sake of Rachel for seven years, and they seemed in his eyes as but several days because of his love for her" (Genesis 29:20). But alas, the deceptive Laban substituted the beautiful of stature, beautiful of appearance Rachel for less comely, weak-eyed elder sister Leah. Jacob agrees to the marriage of both sisters, obligating himself to work yet an additional seven years for Rachel. "But he loved Rachel more than Leah And when G-d saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb, whereas Rachel was barren" (Genesis 29:31). And so the stage is set, with the beloved wife Rachel and her "hated" rival Leah. In a very poignant and subtle manner, the Bible describes the silent heroism of Leah: "And Leah conceived and gave birth to a son; she called his name Reuven (Literally: See-a son), because she said, 'because G-d has seen into my affliction; perhaps now my husband will love me'" (Genesis 29:32). The usage of the ablative form, "into or through my affliction" rather than simply "my affliction" (be'onyi and not et onyi) suggests that Leah did not wear her pain on her sleeves; much the opposite, she only sobbed into her pillow at night - probably every night that she was rejected in favor of the more beautiful Rachel. This nuance is clearly perceived by Targum, who renders the phrase in his Aramaic translation, 'since my shame has been revealed before G-d' before G-d, but not before no one else! This image is reinforced by the very next verse: "And she (Leah) conceived again and bore a son. And she said, "because G-d heard that I was hated, so He gave me also this (one); and she called his name Shim-on (literally, He hears on, affliction - Genesis 29:33). The world may see a radiantly smiling mother of sons, but G-d hears her cries of hurt and rejection. The truth of her feelings are underscored by the fact that she and not her husband names her two eldest sons; it seems as though Jacob couldn't have cared less - since they were not born to his beloved Rachel!

Leah succeeding in transmitting her heroic and majestic "suffering-in-silence" pride to her first-born son Reuven. After all, Reuven - the biological first-born son of Jacob - must suffer the

indignity of knowing that he is rejected by his father in favor of the much younger Joseph, first-born to Rachel: "And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, and he made him a coat of many colors", (Genesis 37:3). Reuven is truly his mother Leah's son. When the other brothers are about to cast Joseph into a pit, Reuven represses his understandable jealousy and plays the role of the responsible, eldest brother - even though doing so went counter to his own self-interest. "And Reuven heard, and he saved him (Joseph) from their hands & Let us not smite a soul & Do not shed blood." (Genesis 37:21, 22).

Despite the truth of what we have written, there are always disastrous results when a son feels rejected especially when the rightful heir is pushed aside through no fault of his own. We have even seen in the previous generation how Jacob himself stoops down to the level of deceiving his father and pretending to be Esau - in order to feel, if only for a brief period of hours, the love and acceptance Esau felt from his father Isaac. Indeed, Jacob spends the next 22 years in Labanland acting more like Esau than Esau - always in search of his father's acceptance. In fact, towards the conclusion of the five books of Moses, the Torah enunciates three legal situations which adumbrate and reverberate with the story of Jacob and Reuven. First comes the case of the beautiful captive, a Gentile woman with whom an Israelite soldier in the thick of battle falls in love. If all the Biblical suggestions to attempt to break up the relationship fail, the Torah reluctantly permits the unlikely couple to marry (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). The Bible then describes a situation in which a man has two wives, "one who is beloved and the other who is hated." Our Scripture forbids the man from "favoring the son of the beloved wife over the son of the hated wife who is the legitimate first-born" (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). And finally the Bible describes the tragedy of a stubborn and rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21).

These three incidents especially as they are juxtaposed together, are ominously reminiscent of Jacob and Reuven. Jacob, through no fault of his own, is duped by a scheming father-in-law into an inappropriate marriage with a woman he doesn't love much as the Gentile captive woman is an inappropriate life's partner for the Israelite, and in civilian life the early infatuation often turns to hate. Father Jacob therefore is saddled with two wives, one whom he loves and one whom he hates, and he does favor the son of the beloved wife - Joseph - over the son of the hated wife who is his rightful first-born, Reuven. And Reuven does commit a stubborn and rebellious act - perhaps the inescapable result of a mismatch which leads to a rejected first-born. "And Reuven went and slept with Bilhah, the secondary wife of his father. And Isaac heard; and the sons of Jacob were twelve" (Genesis 35:22). The precise transgression of Reuven is unclear. According to the Rabbinic commentary, after the death of Rachel, he moves his father's couch from Bilhah's tent to Leah's tent. Whatever the deed, it was a forbidden violation of his father's personal life. Jacob apparently understands that he shares in Reuven's guilt; he did not treat this first-born son properly, and is now hearing ' through his sin ' his cry to be his father's continuing heir, or at least his desire to remove disgrace from his mother. Israel hears about the incidence, decides to remain silent (there is an open space in the parchment of every Torah Scroll at this juncture in the text), and thereby retains the unity of the family. So does the sacred Torah reveal between its lines the complexity of husband-wife, father-son relationship.

Shabbat Shalom.
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From: Eretz Hemdah [eretzhem@netvision.net.il] Subject: Parshat Vayeitzei 11 Kislev 5763 Hemdat Yamim Parshat Vayeitzei 11 Kislev 5763 This edition of Hemdat Yamim is dedicated to the memory of R' Meir ben Yechezkel Shraga Brachfeld o.b.m.

DIFFERENT ANGELS, DIFFERENT DREAMS
RABBI MACY GORDON

"And behold a ladder was standing on Earth with its top reaching into the Heavens, and behold the angels of the Lord going up and coming down thereon" (Bereishit 28:12). The image of Ya'akov's dream has been portrayed in many works of art and as a well-known Biblical story to children beginning to study Torah. Not all are aware that our parasha tells of second dream that Ya'akov had a full twenty years later, which was very different from the first. Ya'akov's first dream takes place on the first night after he fled the wrath of his brother Eisav. His fear strengthened his faith in G-d. The influence of his parental home enveloped him. His thinking and his very existence was G-d-centered. Twenty years later, twenty years of chutz la'aretz in the milieu of Lavan and his sons, twenty years away from Yitzchak and Rivka, Ya'akov was now a husband to four wives, a father to eleven children. He had concerns for his material future, for supporting his family. He finally forced the issue of proper compensation and severance from his father-in-law. He had a dream in which he saw flocks of sheep, enough to secure his economic future, and ways to manipulate transfer of an appropriate proportion for himself. G-d appears to him and says, "I see what Lavan has done to you. It's time to go back to your father's house." Twenty years earlier Ya'akov dreamed of angels. Now he dreams of sheep. Twenty years earlier he too stood on the ground, but his head was in the Heavens. Now, his concerns are more material, down-to-earth realities. This is what Lavan had "done to him." When you live a long time in a society with certain values, you are bound to be influenced by your surroundings. The great Ya'akov, Patriarch of Israel, was no exception. Our sages noted the wording of Ya'akov's first dream: "the angels were going up and going down." One would have expected that angels, whose abode is in Heaven would come down before going up. Our sages grasped the metaphor of angels to suggest that Ya'akov was always guided by G-d's angels. While in Eretz Yisrael, he had angels guiding his needs there. As he was to leave Israel and venture into chutz la'aretz, he needed a different kind of angel as his guide. The "Eretz Yisrael" angels went up, and the angels for "chutz la'aretz" came down.

As Ya'akov learned (and haven't we all) you need a different kind of guarding angel in Israel than in the Diaspora. The challenges are so different. Even the dreams are very different. Ya'akov, who left Israel for Aram, could not help but be influenced by his environment in the Diaspora. All of us who have come from the Diaspora, whether from Ethiopia or Russia, the Far East or Anglo-Saxon countries, were guided to face the challenges there, and we came here. But the challenges that we meet here in Israel are of a different kind and require "special" guarding angels to help us meet them. So many young Israeli's have tragically picked up and adopted the values that we thought we left behind. Prayerfully, we hope that we will adopt the values that are spiritually unique to Eretz Yisrael, retaining the best of both of our worlds. Harav Shaul Israeli zt"l Founder and President Deans: Harav Yosef Carmel Harav Moshe Ehrenreich ERETZ HEMDAH 5 Ha-Mem Gimmel St. P.O.B 36236 Jerusalem 91360 Tel/Fax: 972-2-

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From: Menachem Leibtag [tsc@bezeqint.net] Sent: November 14, 2002
Subject: [Par-reg]Parshat Va'yetze - shiur

RABBI MENACHEM LEIBTAG

Dedicated by Jeff Hausdorff in memory of Tuvi Levi ben David Meir, A"H
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [http://www.tanach.org] In Memory of
Rabbi Abraham Leibtag Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag
PARSHAT VAYETZE

Is it acceptable for one to doubt a divine promise? If G-d makes a promise, certainly we'd expect Him to keep it! Why then does Yaakov Avinu vow to worship G-d only IF (and when) G-d fulfills His promise to return him to the Promised Land? [See 28:20-22.] Furthermore, why should Yaakov make a "neder" (vow) at all? After all, neither Avraham nor Yitzchak ever made any sort of conditional vow after receiving their divine promises! Why is Yaakov different? In this week's shiur, as we study G-d's "hitgalut" (revelation) to Yaakov at Bet-El, we attempt to explain why.

PART I - YAAKOV'S NEDER

INTRODUCTION G-d appeared to Avraham & Yitzchak several times in Sefer Breishit. In our shiurim, we have shown how a distinct aspect (or stage) of the 'bechira' process unfolds with each 'hitgalut'. Now, at the beginning of Parshat Vayetze, we find G-d's FIRST 'hitgalut' to Yaakov (see 28:10-17). Even though G-d's promise in this 'hitgalut' echoes His earlier promises to Avraham and Yitzchak, Yaakov's reaction differs drastically from that of his predecessors - he makes a 'neder'. To understand why, we must first consider Yaakov's predicament BEFORE G-d appears to him at Bet-El.

SOMETHING TO LOSE SLEEP OVER Recall from last week's shiur that the Avot themselves were not quite sure exactly WHEN or HOW the process of BECHIRA would finally end. In Parshat Toldot it became clear that the process would continue for at least one more generation: either Yaakov OR Esav would be chosen, but not both. Therefore, after the incident of the brachot, Yitzchak blesses Yaakov with "birkat Avraham" (see 28:3-4) - that G-d should elect him as the 'chosen' son. Despite his father's blessing, Yaakov has ample reason to doubt whether or not he is indeed 'chosen'. First of all, only the day before, his father had planned to give the primary blessing to his older brother Esav. Secondly, Yaakov's parents had just sent him AWAY from Eretz Canaan - to flee from Esav and look for a wife (see 27:43-28:2). Now if Yaakov is truly the chosen son, then it should be forbidden for him to leave Eretz Canaan, just as his father Yitzchak was prohibited to leave. [Recall that during the famine, G-d did not allow Yitzchak to go down to Egypt (see 26:1-3). Likewise, when Yitzchak was getting married, Eliezer traveled to Padan Aram to bring Rivka back - Yitzchak himself was not allowed to go.]

Finally, when Yitzchak's brothers were rejected from the 'bechira' process, they were sent away to the EAST (see 25:6). Now, Yaakov himself is being sent away to the EAST (see 29:1), while Esav remains in Eretz Canaan! [Although his father had blessed him and his mother had promised that she would later send for him (see 27:45), Yaakov could have understood this as a 'nice way' to bid him farewell.]

Even aside from these causes of concern, Yaakov still had reason to question his future. It is not within Yitzchak's power to determine the 'chosen' son. He only blesses Yaakov that GOD should choose him over his brother: "...and Kel Shakai should bless you and GRANT you the blessing of Avraham..." (28:3-4) It is up to G-d alone to make that final decision.

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

YAAKOV HAS A DREAM We can now better understand both the nature of G-d's opening 'hitgalut' to Yaakov at Bet-El and Yaakov's immediate reaction. As Yaakov prepares to leave Eretz Canaan, G-d must FIRST confirm Yaakov's 'bechira' and inform him that he is indeed the chosen son: "I am the Lord, the G-d of Avraham and Yitzchak. The LAND [aretz] upon which you are lying I have given to YOU and YOUR OFFSPRING [zera]... and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (28:13-14).

Note the use of the key words - 'zera' (offspring) and 'aretz' (the Land). These are typical of G-d's earlier blessings of 'bechira' to Avraham and

Yitzchak (see 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8 & 26:3), and thus confirm Yaakov's 'bechira'. [The significance of additional key phrases (from earlier blessings) in this hitgalut, such as 'afar ha-aretz', are discussed in Part II of this week's shiur.]

While the first two psukim of this 'hitgalut' sound very familiar, the third and final pasuk introduces an entirely new element: "And behold, I will be with you, and I will protect you wherever you go and bring you back to this Land..." (28:15).

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

YAAKOV'S REACTION Yaakov's immediate reaction to this 'hitgalut' is his realization of the unique, sacred quality of this site (see 28:16). He thus declares that: "This [site] is none other than a BET ELOKIM [a house of G-d], and this is the gate of heaven" (see 28:17). [The deeper meaning of this realization is also discussed in Part II.]

It is specifically because of this realization that Yaakov, upon awakening from his vision of G-d's promise, makes a promise [a 'neder']. If this site is indeed a 'gate of heaven', then upon his return he is determined to make it a Bet Elokim! In fact, every action that Yaakov takes at this point relates to his sudden awareness of the unique, spiritual quality of the spot where he slept. Immediately upon awakening, he sets a 'marker' to remind him later of the precise location of this site: "Yaakov woke up early in the morning and took the stone that was under his head and set it up as a "matzeiva" (monument); he then poured oil on it" (28:18-19). [At the end of his vow, Yaakov promises that this stone will become the cornerstone of a Bet Elokim. He therefore pours oil onto it as a type of dedication ceremony (similar to 'chanukat ha-Mishkan' in Bamidbar 7:1).]

Yaakov then makes a 'neder', promising (upon his return) to establish a Bet Elokim at this very site (see 28:22). However, before making this promise, Yaakov first establishes some 'conditions' that must be met for his neder to take effect ["IF G-d will be with me..."(see 28:20)]. Why does Yaakov make his promise conditional?

A CONDITION OR A PROMISE? First let's take a closer look at the psukim describing his 'neder', in order to determine more precisely what is his promise and what are his conditions. Before continuing, review 28:20-22 and take note of how the 'neder' divides into two parts: 1) a CONDITION - IF... ; followed by: 2) a PROMISE (i.e. the vow) - THEN...

It is unclear, however, where the IF clause ends and the THEN clause begins. Let's take a look: "And Yaakov then made a vow saying: 1) IF G-d remains with me, 2) and He protects me on this journey on which I embark, 3) and gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear. 4) And I return safely to my father's house, 5) and [or then?] Hashem will be my G-d. 6) And [or then?] this stone, which I have set up as a monument, will be a BET ELOKIM 7) and from all that You give me I will set aside one-tenth" (28:20-22).

The first four clauses are clearly part of the CONDITION, as they reflect precisely what G-d had just promised Yaakov in his dream several psukim earlier. [Compare with 28:15; see also Rashi.] Similarly, the last two clauses clearly describe what Yaakov vows to do once the conditions are met. They describe Yaakov's promise to establish a Bet Elokim at this site upon his return from Charan and offer a tithe of his possessions. However, the middle clause (5) - "and Hashem will be my G-d" - can go either way. Although it can refer to either a condition or promise, each option poses considerable difficulty. On the one hand, it doesn't appear to be a condition for two basic reasons: a) It does not reflect G-d's promise in 28:15 as do the other clauses. b) If this is indeed a condition, then it does not add anything to what Yaakov had already stated in his first clause - "If G-d will be with me".

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

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

Rashbam solves the second problem [(b)] by explaining this clause simply as a summary (or generalization) of the first three clauses. On the other hand, Ramban, Radak, and Seforno all explain this clause as the

VOW. They all solve the problem raised above (that Yaakov appears to accept G-d only on condition) by explaining that Yaakov vows to INTENSIFY his relationship with G-d should (or actually WHEN) G-d fulfill His promise. Surely, Hashem will always remain Yaakov's G-d no matter what may happen. But Yaakov promises that if (or when) he returns 'home' he will dedicate his entire life to G-d's service. [I recommend that you see these "parshanim" inside. ly"H there will a separate shiur on this topic. Btw, Ramban adds an additional peirush, which he categorizes as 'sod', that explains the clause as neither a condition nor a vow; it is a STATEMENT OF FACT. Yaakov simply states that only when he returns home to Eretz Canaan will it (de facto) become possible 'for Hashem to become his G-d', since one cannot develop the fullest relationship with G-d outside of the Land of Israel. (I've toned down Ramban's statement in translation - see it inside (28:21) for a bit of a shocker.)]

Based on all these explanations, Yaakov's intention now becomes clear. Yaakov's 'neder' in no way reflects any DOUBT on his part that G-d will fulfill His promise. It rather reflects his readiness to fulfill the divine purpose of his newly-confirmed 'bechira'. Instead of merely thanking G-d for this promise, Yaakov initiates a reciprocal relationship! Recognizing that he is indeed the 'chosen son', Yaakov volunteers to establish a House for G-d - a site where the divine purpose for his 'bechira' can be realized.

In Part II, we explain what aspect of Yaakov's dream led him specifically to this conclusion.

PART II - HA-MAKOM, BET EL, & THE BET HA-MIKDASH

INTRODUCTION In our introduction to Part I, we explained that G-d's opening 'hitgalut' to Yaakov featured both the primary theme of 'zera va-aretz' as well as additional elements from previous promises to Avraham Avinu. Let's take a careful look at the second pasuk of this hitgalut: "And your offspring shall be like the AFAR HA-ARETZ, you shall spread out to the WEST, EAST, NORTH, and SOUTH ('yama ve-kedma, tzafona, ve-negba), and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (28:14).

The first two phrases - "afar ha-aretz" and "east west north & south" - had been mentioned only ONCE before, when G-d affirmed Avraham's BECHIRA at BET-EL (after Lot's relocation in Sdom): "And G-d said to Avram, after Lot had parted from him, Raise your eyes and look out... to the NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, & WEST, for I give you all the LAND which you see... I will make your offspring like the AFAR HA-ARETZ..." (13:14-16). [Note by reading 13:1-13 carefully] that this affirmation also took place at Bet El!]

Now recall from our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha that Bet-El is the focal point of Avraham's 'aliya' from both Mesopotamia and Egypt. Twice we find at Bet El that Avraham builds a mizbeiach and "calls out in G-d's name" (12:8, 13:4). This - we explained - symbolizes the ultimate mission of G-d's special nation - to make G-d's name known to all mankind (see Ramban 12:8). Therefore, the repetition of these two key phrases in G-d's first 'hitgalut' to Yaakov emphasizes not only his 'bechira', but also its PURPOSE. [Hence, it is not by chance then when Yaakov wakes up he immediately realizes that he has slept in BET-EL (see 28:17).]

Similarly, the third phrase in this pasuk - "and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" ["ve-nivrech becha kol mishpechot ha-adama"] - is also a virtual citation from earlier blessings. In fact, this promise appears in the OPENING 'hitgalut' to both Avraham (12:3) AND Yitzchak (26:4), and now in the inaugural 'hitgalut' to Yaakov! [G-d repeats this expression when He consults with Avraham before destroying Sdom (18:18), as well as in the context of G-d's oath to Avraham after the Akeda (22:18).]

The reason why G-d would reiterate this point to each of the Avot is clear. The goal of "ve-nivrech becha kol mishpechot ha-adama" reflects the ultimate PURPOSE of G-d's special nation: through Am Yisrael, all the nations of the world will be blessed. Through the leadership and guidance of Am Yisrael, every nation will have the opportunity to develop a proper relationship with G-d. Thus, the second pasuk in this 'hitgalut' reminds Yaakov of BOTH the mission and purpose of his BECHIRA. We may thus summarize G-d's initial 'hitgalut' to Yaakov as follows: the first pasuk confirms Yaakov's BECHIRA (28:13); the second pasuk emphasizes his mission and purpose (28:14); while in the third pasuk G-d assures Yaakov that He will accompany him in exile and ultimately bring him back to Eretz Canaan (28:15).

YAAKOV'S REALIZATION With this background, we can better understand Yaakov's vow to build a Bet Elokim at this site upon his return.

Recall that when Yaakov wakes up, he is suddenly struck by the unique,

sacred quality of the spot where he spent the night: "And Yaakov woke up from his sleep and proclaimed: How awesome is this place (ha-Makom)! This is none other than the house of G-d [BET ELOKIM] and the gate to Heaven [SHA'AR HA-SHAMAYIM]" (28:16).

Obviously, the vision of angels ascending and descending the ladder (see 28:11-12) leads Yaakov to conclude that this site is "sha'ar ha-shamayim" - the gateway to heaven. However, what about this site gives Yaakov the impression of being a 'Bet Elokim'? The simplest answer would be to connect the two halves of Yaakov's statement. Namely, the very fact that this site is a 'gateway to heaven' renders it an appropriate place for a 'House of G-d'. However, Yaakov refers to the site first as 'Bet Elokim' and only afterward "sha'ar ha-shamayim". Furthermore, a careful reading of the pasuk shows that these two qualities stand on their own: "This is none other than Bet Elokim, and this is sha'ar ha-shamayim." The fact that Yaakov divides his comment into two distinct sections suggests that he has reached two unrelated conclusions.

BET-EL & BET ELOKIM Based on our earlier comparison between this 'hitgalut' to Yaakov (28:14) and G-d's earlier 'hitgalut' to Avraham at BET EL (13:14-16), we may offer a deeper interpretation. As explained above, the two common phrases, 'afar ha-aretz' and 'yama ve-kedma...', suggest to Yaakov that he currently stands on the same site where Avraham Avinu built a MIZBEIACH and 'called out in G-d's Name'. Yaakov thus concludes that this site is a BET ELOKIM. Meaning, it has been designated for the very purpose of a 'Bet Elokim' - to offer korbanot and proclaim G-d's Name. Hence the name Bet-El ('House of G-d'). [See the Ramban's commentary to Breishit 12:8 where he explains the significance of "calling out in the Name of G-d" at Bet El. Review also Devarim 12:5-12, and note the expression used numerous times in Sefer Dvarim to describe the Mikdash - "ha-MAKOM asher yivchar HASHEM Ieshakein SHMO sham".]

But if it is true, that the 'hitgalut' to Yaakov brought to mind Avraham's experience in Bet-El two generations earlier, Yaakov should have followed his grandfather's lead. As Avraham did years earlier at the exact same spot where Yaakov now stands, Yaakov should have built a mizbeiach and 'called out in G-d's Name.' Why does he set up a "matzeiva" and make a 'neder' instead? To answer this question, we must again consider Yaakov's current, life-threatening situation. He is literally 'on the run', fleeing from his brother Esav to Padan Aram. At this point in time, he is in no condition (or position) to 'call out in G-d's Name'. No one is around to listen, and Esav may be on his trail! Unlike Avraham, whom the local population considered as "the prince of G-d in our midst" (see 23:6), Yaakov - at least at this point - has yet to earn such a reputation in Canaan.

Yaakov thus realizes that he is in no position to build a mizbeiach as Avraham had done. Nonetheless, he hopes that one day he will indeed return and fulfill that very same goal. Therefore, he marks this spot by erecting a "matzeiva" and anointing it with oil (28:18), thereby designating it as the cornerstone for his future Bet-Elokim. He then promises that when he indeed returns, he will establish a Bet-Elokim at this site - in order that he can build a mizbeiach there and call out in G-d's Name. Hence, Yaakov's 'neder' reflects not only his understanding of the PURPOSE of his 'bechira', but also his hope to one day fulfill that destiny. As we explained in previous shiurim, Avraham was chosen for a purpose, to establish a nation that will bring G-d's message to all mankind. A 'House of G-d' - the Bet Ha-Mikdash - serves as the primary vehicle to fulfill that purpose. Therefore, Yaakov vows that should G-d fulfill His promise of the BECHIRA by returning him to the Promised Land, he will fulfill the purpose of that BECHIRA by establishing a 'Bet Elokim'.

BET-EL / A SPIRITUAL INTERSECTION In this week's Parsha we find the first biblical reference to the concept of 'Bet Elokim', a House of G-d. Though mentioned only once throughout Sefer Breishit, this concept constitutes one of the most fundamental religious principles in Chumash, as it presupposes the possibility of man's visiting the house as a means to improve his relationship with G-d. Yaakov's description of this site as both 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' and 'Bet Elokim' can help us understand the nature and purpose of the Bet ha-Mikdash and how it represents the potential heights of our relationship with G-d. The 'sha'ar ha-shamayim' aspect of the Mikdash, symbolized by the angels ascending and descending from Heaven, suggests the possibility of a 'vertical' relationship, a conceptual connecting point between Heaven and Earth. Despite G-d's transcendence, a connection, and thus a relationship, can be attained. In contrast, the 'Bet Elokim' aspect, a HOUSE on earth where Man can encounter G-d, implies the potential for a 'lateral' relationship. In this sense, the Mikdash serves as both a center for congregation as well as

the means of dissemination. From this site, G-d's word and the recognition of His authority can be spread to all mankind. [See Yeshayahu 2:1-5! This centrality may be reflected by the unique phrase at Bet El - "yama ve-keydema, tzafona, ve-negba," which might symbolize this dissemination of G-d's word to all four corners of the earth.]

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

shabbat shalom menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note the emphasis and repetition of the word 'ha-Makom' in this Parsha - 28:11,16,17,19. Note the use of the term also in Parshat Lech Lecha, 13:14, at the Akeida - 22:4, and in Sefer Dvarim 12:5,11,14,18. 1. Try to explain the significance of this word specifically in the context of these parshiot. 2. Use this to explain Chazal's identification of this spot as the site of the Akeida on Har Ha-Moriah, and eventually the site of the Bet HaMikdash in Yerushalayim. 3. Read Ramban on 28:17 (including Rashi whom he quotes). Relate this Ramban and his machloket with Rashi to the above shiur.

B. Read Rashi on Breishit 2:7, and note the two explanations he cites from the Midrash on that pasuk - "vayitzer Hashem Elokim et ha-adam afar min ha-adama": a) 'afar' from Har Ha-Moriah b) 'afar' from the four corners of the earth. How do these two opinions relate to our analysis in this week's shiur?

C. See if you can connect the last section of this shiur to two other well-known Midrashim: 1. Opposite "Yerushalayim shel mata" exists a "Yerushalayim shel ma'ala" (Ta'anit 5a). [Relate this to the concept of "sha'ar ha-shamayim."] 2. Yerushalayim is known in the Midrash Tanchuma as "taburo (navel) shel olam" - the umbilicus of the world. [Relate this to the concept of Bet Elokim and the 'four directions'.]

D. Several related questions to think about which relate to next week's Parsha, as well: 1. Does Yaakov actually fulfill his 'neder' when he returns? 2. Is this "neder" fulfilled by Am Yisrael? If so, when? 3. Relate Yaakov's "galut" and his "neder" to the principle of "maase avot siman l'banim" and Jewish history

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From: Michael Gros [mgros9@yahoo.com] Sent: November 13, 2002 To: ethicist@besr.org Subject: Jewish Ethicist #84

THE JEWISH ETHICIST #84

BY RABBI DR. ASHER MEIR, ameir@mail.jct.ac.il

Discriminating Against Discrimination When does toleration conflict with standing up for equal rights?

Note to readers: The following question was sent to a columnist in a major American newspaper. His reply generated much controversy, and a number of readers requested that I respond to the same issue. -AM

Q. The courteous and competent real-estate agent I'd just hired to rent my house shocked and offended me when, after we signed our contract, he refused to shake my hand, saying that as an Orthodox Jew he did not touch women. As a feminist, I oppose sex discrimination of all sorts.

However, I also support freedom of religious expression. How do I balance these conflicting values? Should I tear up our contract? J.L., New York

A. There are indeed profound paradoxes in the seemingly straightforward ideals of toleration and freedom. These ideals raise perplexing questions: Should I be tolerant even of intolerance? Should I support freedom even for tyranny?

The key to resolving paradoxes like these is to go beyond superficial slogans and reflexive statements and examine the deeper meaning of our ideals.

A commitment to tolerance means an acknowledgment that no single person can encompass the totality of truth. Reality is so vast, so complex, that a myriad of distinct individual viewpoints are necessary in order to enable us to begin to comprehend it. The Talmud prescribes a special blessing on seeing 600,000 people at once, blessing G-d Who comprehends the "wisdom of secrets." The Talmud's explanation for this blessing is that "Just as each person's face is different, so are each person's beliefs different." Only when we have thousands upon thousands of people together do we begin together to approach an understanding of

the world's inner being. This variation among human beings is not only acceptable -- it elicits a unique blessing.

Yet this doesn't mean that all beliefs are valid! The Sages of the Talmud certainly acknowledge that some beliefs are completely false and dangerous. They identified a few fundamental ideas as being so contrary to the very foundation of Jewish belief that they stated that those who hold them endanger their place in the World to Come.

When probing the limits of toleration, we must ask ourselves: Is this opposing view an additional, alternative piece of the puzzle of existence? Is it one more facet of the "wisdom of secrets?" Or does this view attack the foundation of existence?

This unique approach allows us to remain passionate in our own beliefs, while remaining tolerant of many differing points of view because we recognize some essential insight or lesson they convey.

Applying this criterion to your own dilemma, we must ask ourselves: Is the custom of many Orthodox Jews not to shake hands with members of the opposite sex one piece of the picture of ideal human relations, or a contradiction to it? It seems clear to me that this practice is indeed one aspect of the ideal, even an essential aspect.

Building healthy and respectful relations between men and women requires a delicate balance: there is a desire to develop normal friendly interaction, yet there is also a need to avoid the overtones of exploitation and objectification which have an unfortunate tendency to develop when expressions of intimacy creep in.

In order to make progress towards this balance, there must be an uncompromising insistence that everyday social and commercial interaction should have no degrading physical overtones. One way of expressing this insistence is to refrain from any physical contact with members of the opposite sex in an ordinary social context, as practiced by Orthodox Jewish men and women. In this way, expressions of intimacy between men and women are limited to non-exploitative relationships of total commitment.

It is true that feminists are strongly opposed to any practice that seems to impose a subservient position on women. But their viewpoint shouldn't constitute any obstacle to this common Orthodox custom, since the custom applies in a completely parallel way to men and women alike.

When I was in college, I took a course in feminism from a distinguished scholar, Professor Barbara Solomon. One point that my section leader in this fascinating course strongly emphasized was that there can be degrading as well as uplifting equality between the sexes. Her example was that the goal of equal treatment of the sexes in media representation was meant to end the portrayal of women as sex objects. To her dismay, the result seemed to be the opposite: the treatment of men and women equally as sex objects. I am convinced that fully equal treatment of men and women with regard to physical contact would have the same effect: more rather than less objectification.

You should not view your agent's religious expression as an affront to your humanistic ideals. Rather, this particular custom is an affirmation, albeit a partial one, of these ideals. Avoiding casual physical contact with members of the opposite sex is one way of demonstrating resistance to relationships that objectify men and women.

Answering your more practical question, it is clear that tearing up your contract would be completely unethical. Even if you can't convince yourself that your agent's action deserves respect and toleration, taking offense at someone is certainly not grounds for reneging on a signed agreement.

SOURCES: Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 58a, Sanhedrin 90a. Meiri commentary on Avoda Zara 20a.

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New on our website... A business ethics dvar torah on this week's Torah portion: Parshat Vayeitzei- The Challenge of Wealth, by Dr. Meir Tamari <http://www.besr.org/dvartorah/vayeitzei.html>

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The DUBNO MAGGID on Parshat Vayeitzei

Hagaon RAV YAAKOV WOLF KRANZ zt"l on Parshat Vayeitzei (from Mishlei Yaakov on the Torah -- The Dubno Maggid, zt"l [1740-1804])

became renowned in the Eastern European Jewish world for his brilliant use of parables in explaining the Torah and reaching his audience through his sermons. He enjoyed a close relationship with the great Vilna Gaon, zt"l, who held him in high esteem.)

"What About Yaakov's Parnassa?"

There is a slight inconsistency between G-d's promise to Yaakov in his dream and Yaakov's vow to G-d the morning after. G-d says: I will be with you

I will watch over you wherever you go

I will return you to this Land

I will not leave you until I do what I said I would

Yaakov afterwards takes a vow, saying

If G-d will be with me

If He will watch over me on this path that I am taking

If He gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear

If I return in peace to the house of my father . . .

1. & 2. correspond in the dream and in the vow; and 3. in the dream corresponds to 4. in the vow. However, Yaakov, when he vows, adds a prayer for bread and clothing – for parnasa. This concern does not seem to have been addressed in the dream, even though the rest of his worries were. The Midrash apparently addresses the problem, but it is not clear how. The Midrash says, "The Rabbis say, 'He responds to everything except for sustenance (parnasa).' Rav Issi says, 'He also responded to parnasa when He said, "For I will not leave you."'

Both opinions in the Midrash raise questions. According to the Rabbis, why did G-d not address this concern? According to Rav Issi, how do the words, "For I will not leave you," address parnasa?

The Dubno Maggid answers with a parable:

A father once sent his son off on a journey to a distant land. Along with the provisions, the father also added a bundle of money to pay for his son's expenses. As they were planning the trip they found out that foreign soldiers were frequenting the roads they needed to use, making travel extremely dangerous. The father decided he did not want to leave his son alone under such dangerous circumstances and decided to join him on the trip. When they were on the wagon the son said to the father, "Where is the bundle of money you prepared me for expenses on the journey?" The father replied, "Am I not accompanying you? If you need anything you can just ask me and I will take care of it."

The same is true for Yaakov Avinu. Once G-d promised him that He will not leave him (4.), there is no need to directly relate to Yaakov's material needs. Wherever he is, Yaakov eats of his Father's food. Rav Issi and the Rabbis do not really argue. The Rabbis point out that the issue of parnasa is not directly related to, and Rav Issi explains that when G-d says He will accompany Yaakov, He is implicitly telling him that all of his material needs are also taken care of. G-d says to Yaakov, "I am always with you; whenever you call I will answer."

[prepared by Eliezer Kwass]

From: SHLOMO KATZ [skatz@torah.org] Subject: HaMaayan / The Torah Spring - Parashat Vayaitzai
Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz
Vayaitzai: Can You Pass the Test?

In this parashah, all but one of Yaakov's twelve sons are born. The Torah's account of their birth begins (29:31), "Hashem saw that Leah was unloved, so He opened her womb; but Rachel remained barren." Why does the Torah mention that Rachel remained barren? The main point of the verse, after all, is that Leah became pregnant!

R' Nosson Wachtfogel z"l (Mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshiva) explains in the name of R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the Alter of Kelm): Apparently the Torah is criticizing Rachel for not doing more to make Leah feel comfortable in Yaakov's home. Therefore, the Torah notes the contrast - Leah's womb was opened but Rachel's was not.

The Gemara records that Yaakov had expected Lavan to try to trick him out of Rachel's hand, and Yaakov therefore provided Rachel with a secret password before their scheduled marriage. However, Rachel, seeing that Leah would be shamed, had shared the password with her sister. If so, asks R' Wachtfogel, what more was expected of Rachel? How could she be punished for not making Leah feel more at home?

The answer is that G-d puts man to many tests, and the fact that man has passed the great test does not absolve him of his duty to pass the lesser tests. Rachel passed her great test; she gave her husband to her sister. Now she was expected to pass the lesser test of making her sister feel at home.

R' Wachtfogel continues: In the 1920's and 30's, there were a small number of dedicated young men who left the comfort of the United States to study in the great yeshivot of Eastern Europe. They passed their great test, one that required unusual devotion to Torah study over all other ends.

And yet, R' Wachtfogel recalled, even these American students were not immune from wasting time. Imagine that! After making the greatest imaginable sacrifice, they failed the small test. We, too, must fight to succeed in every challenge, large or small. (Noam Ha'mussar)

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From: ohr [ohr@ohr.edu] Sent: Monday, November 11, 2002 2:19 AM To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Vayeitze * TORAH WEEKLY * from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
Highlights of the weekly Torah portion Parshat Vayeitze For the week ending 16 November 2002 / 11 Kislev 5763 unsubscribe details at end of email Sponsored by the Kof-K Kosher Supervision www.kof-k.org | info@kof-k.org

Close Encounters "He encountered the place..." (28:11)

Here I am sitting in Jerusalem writing these words on a small black box. It's amazing! And you there in LA. Yes YOU! There you are sitting there on the other side of the globe, watching minute electrons dancing around on a screen in front of your eyes and you can UNDERSTAND what I'm writing! It's amazing! More. If this was a .wav file you could hear me! If this was an .mpeg file you could watch and listen to me! (Poor you!) It's AMAZING! It's so amazing that we don't even notice it anymore. But think for a moment about the millions of man hours and hard work and the ingenuity of thousands of minds that went into providing this amazing device. How many miles of cable, ISDN lines, satellites, satellite launch vehicles, deep-sea cable-layers, microchips, hundreds of thousands of tons of plastic and metal all making it possible for me to talk to you.

Are you still listening?

Now think about this. A Jew gets up in the morning, puts on tallit and tefillin, opens up his siddur and starts to pray... and his voice is heard on the other side of the Universe. Who installed the spiritual narrow-cast that accomplishes such an incredible feat? Who was able to construct a system which elevates every prayer in every generation through all the worlds above this one until they find their home under G-d's throne of Glory? Who engineered such an incredible communications system that even the Internet pales in comparison?

Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The Avot Patriarchs. The spiritual fathers of the Jewish People established those incredible spiritual conduits to Heaven. However, each of the Avot established something unique in his prayer.

The Talmud (Berachot 26b) tells us that Avraham established Shacharit, the morning prayer. The morning is the time of Chesed, kindness. As it says in Tehillim, "to relate in the morning Your Kindness." The midah (defining characteristic) of Avraham is Chesed, as it says "Chesed L'Avraham." Yitzchak established Mincha, the afternoon prayer. The afternoon is the time when the world starts to descend into the darkness of night. It is a time of Din, of Judgment. The midah of Yitzchak is Din.

That Yaakov established the evening prayer, Ma'ariv, we learn from this week's Torah portion: "He encountered the place..." The spiritual masters teach us that the Hebrew word which is translated here as "encountered" implies the supreme encounter with the Divine - prayer. Yaakov prayed at night. Another understanding of the word "encounter" means that Yaakov wanted to move from that place but he "encountered" the Wall of the World. The whole world became like a giant stone wall in front of him. During the history of the Jewish People's long night of exile, it seems sometimes like the whole world is like a stone wall in front of us, a stone wall that will not let us pass. For these times, Yaakov established a prayer for his children and their children and their children until the long night of exile finally ends.

That prayer is the prayer of the night.

The prayer that lifts us above the tragedies of pogrom and holocaust, the prayer of exile. The prayer of hope.

Ma'ariv.

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From: RABBI BEREL WEIN [rbwein@torah.org] Sent: November 13, 2002
To: rabbiwein@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Wein - Vayeitzei Weekly Parsha
Vayetze by Rabbi Berel Wein
Nov 15 2002

After twenty years in the house of Lavan, Yakov prepares to leave for home. But he is afraid to do so openly, for Lavan will certainly object. Yakov has been too valuable an asset in Lavan's house and commercial enterprises to be abandoned easily. And there is the fact that Yakov's wives are Lavan's daughters and Yakov's children are Lavan's grandchildren. The fact that Lavan has mistreated his children and grandchildren during Yakov's stay in his home does not alter the fact that he views them as being his children and grandchildren. He will tell Yakov that "the sons are my sons and the daughters are my daughters!" Yakov also knows that Lavan resents that Yakov, in spite of all the machinations and dishonesty of Lavan towards him, has become wealthy and powerful. Lavan is jealous of Yakov's success and will do all in his power to prevent Yakov from going home to the Land of Israel to enjoy the fruits of his labor and marriages. Therefore, Yakov feels compelled to leave Lavan unannounced, in the dead of the night, almost as a fugitive. Yakov wishes desperately to avoid a painful and unnecessary confrontation with Lavan. But it is not to be. Lavan pursues Yakov, overtakes him, berates him and threatens him, but finally Yakov manages to enter into a covenant with Lavan that allows him to escape from Aram and continue on his journey back to the Land of Israel.

"The actions and incidents of the lives of the Fathers are the precursors of the history of their children." This story of Yakov and Lavan has been played out so many times in Jewish history as to be repetitive, though never boring. The Jewish people in their long journey in many different exiles have always suffered discrimination, bigotry, oppression, and the constant threat of violent action against it. Yet, somehow, the Jewish people always were able to grow and many times even prosper in such a hostile environment. And the Jewish contribution to the development and prosperity of the general societies in which they lived was always major and continuing.

The blessing given to our father, Avraham, that "through you shall all the families of the earth be blessed" was fulfilled with beneficence, if not even vengeance, throughout the long Jewish exile. There is no nation or society that has "hosted" the Jewish people that has not benefited enormously from the Jewish presence in its midst. Nevertheless, the Jews were always seen as being foreign, untrustworthy, exploitative, and dangerous. The Nazi slogan in Germany summed up the matter succinctly, albeit brutally: "The Jews are our misfortune!" And in our century, the attitude of the leaders of the Soviet Union towards its Jewish population was also one of pathological disdain and suspicion. Yet, the Jews were castigated for leaving (and in many instances prevented from leaving) their "homeland," and for longing for Zion and Jerusalem. The countries of our exile always claimed that our children belonged to them and that everything that we possessed was in reality somehow taken from them.

The sad events of this bloodiest of centuries testify to Lavan's true intentions and the difficulties of living in Lavan's home and the difficulties of leaving Lavan's home. But somehow Yakov did leave Lavan and he did finally return home. There would be many difficult and sad stops on that way home, but Yakov nevertheless persevered and came home. And that pretty much is the story of this century of Jewish life. The great centers of the Jewish exile, except for North America, have all practically closed down. The Sefardic world of the Mediterranean and Near East countries, the heartland of Ashkenazic Jewry in Eastern and Central Europe, all are almost "judenrein" today. Most of the Jews (and many non-Jews as well) have left Russia and settled in Israel. The Diaspora is slowly closing down. Yakov is going home, no matter what. Lavan may not be happy with Yakov's decision, or that Yakov has a home to go to, but Yakov owes Lavan little. Therefore, Lavan's objections are no longer too relevant to Yakov's plans. The children of Yakov live his odyssey in their lives. So may we be able to follow in his footsteps in the future.

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