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Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
Vayeitzei 5769

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OUR VINEYARD :: Rabbi Berel Wein

In the Torah parshiyot, portions, of these past weeks we read of a winnowing process that eventually formed the Jewish people into a nation called Israel. Our father Avraham, the most compassionate of all humans who even attempted to invoke God's mercy, so to speak, on the cities of Sodom, nevertheless sends his son Yishmael and the children that he had with his wife Keturah away from his house. Against his own private instincts and nature he heeds the call of God and Sarah and sends away Yishmael in order not to endanger the physical and spiritual well-being of Yitzchak, his miraculous and fragile blessed son.

The Lord told Avraham "Only through Yitzchak will your generations be assured." Thus Avraham performs a necessary but nevertheless painful form of parental triage. Since Yitzchak represents the eternal future of Avraham and of all Jewish values and life, Avraham invests all that he has in the development, education and well-being of Yitzchak, for without Yitzchak and his ideas and values, Yishmael and the children of Keturah will also fail to become more civilized and positive.

Yitzchak is the key to not only the success of Avraham but to the advancement of monotheism and Godly values in the world generally. The same idea pertains in the choice of our mother Rivkah in advancing the cause of Yaakov over that of his twin brother Eisav. Without Yaakov, Eisav will be an unredeemable criminal and murderer. And, Yaakov requires the blessings of Avraham and Yitzchak in order to survive. So Rivkah makes the hard decision that gives Yaakov the blessings that Eisav also desires but has not earned. The building of the Jewish nation is a product of such painful triage and wrenching decisions.

King Solomon in Shir HaShirim points out the terrible dilemma of the Jewish people throughout the ages. He states: "They (the nations of the world) have made me the guardian of their vineyards. In so doing, I have not given sufficient care to my vineyard." A great many Jews worry about the welfare of Yishmael and Eisav. This is an admirable moral trait of Jewish compassion. The problem lies in that so doing many of them lose compassion for their own family, the Jewish people and especially the State of Israel. In attempting to be engaged in fixing the world their efforts many times lead towards destructing the Jewish people. Basically put, if there are no Jews there is no Judaism and no Jewish values can exist to help fix a badly broken world.

The Lord at Sinai gave the Jewish people a special role to play in all human affairs: "You are to be to Me a special treasured people - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Our efforts have to be concentrated primarily on achieving the blessings for the descendants of Yitzchak and Yaakov. The State of Israel may have as yet not reached perfection but it is the only state that we have. At a time when we have few friends in the non-Jewish nations of the world, for well-meaning but terribly self-injurious Jews to vilify and campaign against Israel while at the same time espousing high minded 'tikun olam' slogans is a misreading of Judaism and all Jewish experience.

The great Hillel said: "If I am not for me then who will be for me" He also said that I cannot be for me alone but there has to be an alive and functioning me for that to happen. We are small in numbers but great in influence. Our main task should be to increase our numbers and be physically and spiritually secure and viable before we allow ourselves to pursue exclusively the lofty, if not even somewhat arrogant goal of fixing the world.

Legend has it that the sainted Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (Chafetz Chayim) remarked at the end of his life: "When I was young I was convinced that I would be able to change the world for the better. As I grew older I realized that that was too great a task for me. But I was convinced that I could certainly change my town - my community - for the better. Yet as I grew still older I realized that this too was beyond my abilities. So I decided that I would attempt to change my household, my family members for the

better. Sadly, I came to realize that this too was not necessarily within my powers and control, so finally I decided I would attempt to change myself for the better. If I did that then my family, my community, the entire world would also be subtly changed for the better."

Our primary task of 'tikun olam' lies in 'tikun atzmi' - in self-improvement and the strengthening of tradition and Jewish values in Jewish society. It lies in defending and strengthening the Jewish people and the State of Israel from external and internal foes. It lies in concentrating our efforts and resources in our world - in safeguarding our own vineyard - before engaging in attempting to change the world. In the standard instructions given on commercial airplane flights one is always instructed to place an oxygen mask over one's own face first before attempting to help someone else with their mask. This is a good lesson for Jews to remember.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: VAYETZEI :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The main character in this week's parsha, aside from our father Yaakov, is Lavan of Aram, who becomes the father-in-law of Yaakov and the grandfather of the twelve tribes of Israel. Lavan is portrayed as a devious, scheming and duplicitous person. He is narcissistic in the extreme, only interested in his own selfish wants, even sacrificing his daughters to fulfill his scheming goals.

In the famous statement of the rabbis, the Hagada of Pesach teaches us that Lavan was a greater and even more dangerous enemy of Jewish survival than was the Pharaoh that enslaved Israel in Egyptian bondage! Lavan is portrayed as wishing to uproot all Jewish existence for all time.

Pharaoh threatened Jewish physical existence by drowning the Jewish male infants in the Nile. But even then the Jewish people could have survived and limped along through the female line of Israel (which is often even a stronger bond than the male line.) However Lavan intended to destroy Yaakov and his descendants spiritually.

He tells Yaakov that the "sons of Yaakov are my sons and the daughters of Yaakov are my daughters and all that Yaakov possesses, physically and spiritually all belong to me." In Lavan's eyes the Jewish people and their faith and vision and goals are to be non-existent. Only Lavan is entitled to life and success. Everyone else, especially a conscience laden family such as that of Yaakov, is only entitled to become part of Lavan's world or they are to be eliminated.

The selfishness of Lavan knows no bounds. The rule of the rabbis that one is jealous of the success of all others except that one is never jealous of one's own children and students ironically finds its own exception in the case of Lavan, who remains jealous and inimical even of the success of his own children and grandchildren.

It is interesting to note that after his role as it appears in this week's parsha, Lavan disappears from the biblical scene. In attempting to destroy Yaakov and the Jewish people, Lavan in essence destroys himself and is not granted any positive mention of eternity in the Torah. Such is always the fate of the attempted destroyers of Israel.

History is littered with the bones of those who came to eradicate Jews and Judaism from the world. Some used the devious tactics of Lavan (such as Napoleon and his sham Sanhedrin which was intended to "modernize" and assimilate the Jews of Europe and the attempt of the Marxists to create a Marxist Jew who no longer would be a Jew or a believer, among other such examples) while others used the more direct methods of Pharaoh to physically enslave, terrorize and eliminate the Jewish people.

All have failed in these nefarious endeavors. Lavan's selfishness is his own undoing. Much of the hatred directed towards the Jewish people and the State of Israel is still based on jealousy and selfishness. It dooms the hater to eventual extinction and disappearance. Thus the lesson of Lavan's eventual fate, of his being erased from the eternal book, is part of the great morality play which is the narrative of this week's parsha.

Shabat shalom.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayeitzei
For the week ending 6 December 2008 / 9 Kislev 5769
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Overview

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Beer Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14-year stint in the Torah Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the Beit Hamikdash. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and earth. G-d promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive. Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachels older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

Insights

Judaism and the Art of Espresso Machine Maintenance

"...he took the stones of the place which he arranged around his head..." (28:11)

About 250 years ago, way before Starbucks reinvented coffee as the drink of the age, my parents bought me a Pavoni espresso machine for my thirtieth birthday.

I have that machine to this day. I love it. It has more chrome on it than a Chevy Impala. The Pavoni is the Harley-Davidson of coffee machines. It's built to tolerances of about plus or minus half an inch, which makes it incredibly easy to service and repair — just get the parts somewhere near each other and it'll work. Even if you're not a grease monkey you could strip the whole thing down and replace all the gaskets in an hour or two. Many times I have thought about replacing this 29 year-old tank with one of the modern microprocessor-controlled beauties in the store. Mine's rusting underneath and it leaks a bit. The rubber base is starting to perish and I've lost some of the washers, but it still makes a really good cup of coffee. (This article is being powered by two of those cups right now.) Last time I de-scaled it I thought it would have to go because the coffee started to taste bad; then I realized I used the wrong kind of vinegar to clean it out. During the couple of days that its "head was on the block" I went through something that I can only describe as withdrawal symptoms (and not from the coffee — I used instant in the meantime.)

Here was this old warhorse whose guts I knew, which I had managed to repair more than once, about to be replaced by a machine that would be impossible for me to do more than... make coffee. If — and more probably — when it broke, I would have to take it to a repair center where doubtless they would tell me it would be cheaper to buy a new one.

Repair is a dying art.

Many years ago the economic balance between labor and material tipped toward material. Once upon a time, labor was cheap and materials were expensive. Nowadays, even in places like China, labor is comparatively expensive and there are a plethora of new materials — mainly plastics — that are ludicrously cheap. Which basically means: Exit the repairman.

Apart from any nostalgia of which I may be guilty (nostalgia tends to increase in proportion to the number of years over which you have to nostalgic), repairing something gives us a sense of achievement that merely producing our credit card fails to do by miles. But I think there's a deeper reason here as well.

The world was made to be fixed.

In the Aleinu prayer that a Jew says three times a day, we pray to G-d, "to fix the world under the Kingdom of Sha-dai." We refer to G-d in many ways. For example: Ado-nai — the Tetragramaton — G-d's four-letter name, which is never pronounced as it is written; Elokim — the name that signifies precise judgment; and El — the name of mercy. In His essence of course, G-d has no 'Name'. G-d's names are the way He manifests Himself in His world, the way we perceive His interface with the creation. What, then, is the connection between the idea of 'fixing the world' and the name Sha-dai?

When G-d created the world, He did not create it as a complete and finished entity. Instead He fashioned a single point (actually a rock that sits of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem) and the rest of the Universe expanded from there. At a certain point He said "Dai!", which means "Enough?" In other words, the potential for more exists in this world, but G-d intended that the world should be left lacking, incomplete, and that Mankind would have the opportunity and the obligation to bring it to its completion. The world can be — and needs to be — fixed. Thus, in Aleinu we use the name "Sha-dai" when talking about the fixing of the world.

G-d's original plan for the world was that there should be one being who would fix the lacuna of this world and bring it to perfection. That being was called Adam, Man. Man was "born" on Friday and the entire history of the world should have been played out in the hours of Friday and finished with the commencement of Shabbat. Had Adam not transgressed the one prohibition that G-d had commanded him, G-d's purpose in creation would have been fulfilled. Adam would have fixed the world.

As we know, things didn't quite turn out like that.

By ingesting the forbidden fruit Adam internalized and actualized the latency of evil inherent in the creation when G-d said "Dai!" — "Enough!" By bringing evil into his body Adam made it impossible for the body to ascend to its elevated eternal state without having to suffer death, decay and resurrection. Nevertheless, man was created to fix the world. It's in our genes. It's part of our programming.

One of the ways this latent motivation emerges is in the ecology movement. Judaism has always recognized that Mankind has the ability to build the world or to destroy it. In fact, ecology has always been a fundamental part of Jewish thought. However, there exists a deeper side to ecology than is generally understood.

When Yaakov was fleeing his brother Esav, the Torah describes how Yaakov laid his head to rest on some stones. The stones then had what can only be described as an argument over which stone the tzaddik would lay his head on (Talmud Bavli 91b). The stones argued because they understood the tremendous elevation that the physical world experiences when it is used by a holy person in the service of G-d.

Judaism's concept of ecology is when we do a mitzvah, be it the simplest action, by kindness, by prayer, we elevate not just ourselves but the world's eco-system as well.

My desire to fix that espresso machine goes deeper than DIY, deeper than saving a buck or three. It is none other than my aspiration to fix the world, masquerading as a cup of coffee.

L'Chaim!

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
PARSHAS VAYEITZEI

Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva and went toward Charan. (28:11)

Rashi notes that it would have been much simpler to merely say that Yaakov went to Charan. Obviously, he had left Beer Sheva. He explains that Chazal derive from here that the departure of a tzaddik, righteous person, from a place leaves a void. His presence in a community constitutes its glory and its beauty. Thus, when he leaves, its glory, its beauty and its splendor depart with him. This is a well-known exposition

with great meaning. Often we do not realize a tzaddik's impact on a community until after he has left. It is only then that we acknowledge him by recognizing the void that remains. Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita offers an alternative explanation for the Torah's emphasis on the departure of Yaakov Avinu. He cites an exegesis from Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl that lends insight to this difficulty.

A well-known prayer was recited by Rabbi Nechunyah ben HaKanah upon entering the bais ha'medrash and upon departing from it. When he entered, he entreated Hashem that he not err in Torah and that no debacle result from his interpretation of the law. He prayed that his eyes be illuminated by the light of Torah and that his colleagues be pleased with him. This was a poignant and practical prayer. One wants to be assured that his interpretation of the law is correct and that he does not inappropriately differ with another student of Torah.

When he left the bais ha'medrash, he did not actually voice a prayer. Rather, he uttered his gratitude to Hashem for allowing him to have a portion in the study hall. How happy he was to be among those who devoted themselves to Torah study, rather than the temporal frivolities of this world. He emphasized the great distinction between himself and yoshei keranos, those who sit around and do nothing: "We toil and they toil; we run and they run; we run to eternal life, while they run to a well of infamy." This "prayer" of gratitude begs elucidation. As he prepares to leave the sanctity and purity of the bais ha'medrash for the immoral filth of the street, the individual should be filled with fear and trepidation. The street is a dangerous place for a Torah Jew. As one stands on the threshold of vulnerability, as he is about to step into the instability and peril that reigns in the outside world, he should supplicate Hashem for guidance, protection and reassurance that the spiritual demeanor which he attained in the bais ha'medrash not be sullied by his exposure to the street. Why did Rabbi Nechunyah instead focus on the great distinction that existed between himself and those who were "out there."

Rav Shach explained that certainly one must pray as he is about to enter the spiritual pollution of the street. Prayer alone, however, is not sufficient. The danger is too great. Rabbi Nechunyah is teaching us that the only way to overcome the harmful effects of the outside world is by acknowledging who one is, why he is in the bais ha'medrash, what its advantages are, what he has gained, and how he is better than those whose lives are devoted to satisfying their base desires. When one looks at himself with distinction, when he extols his decision to devote himself to Torah study, when he feels good about himself by recognizing his enormous achievements, he is able to grapple with the effect of the street. He must first proffer his thanks that he is fortunate enough to be among the yoshei bais ha'medrash and not the yoshei keranos.

As Yaakov Avinu prepared to leave the spiritually idyllic environment of Beer Sheva for the unknown of Charan and his uncle Lavan, he knew for certain that he would confront many challenges to his spiritual well-being. He knew that he had to pray for inspiration, guidance and help every step of the way. On the other hand, he also knew that he had to prepare himself to acknowledge: who he was, what his goals were, and how his focus on life differed vastly from the inhabitants of Charan. Only then did he have a safeguard to some degree against falling into the abyss of evil and immorality that prevailed in Charan.

She called her name, Dinah. (30:21)

Upon perusing the narrative, the average reader will walk away thinking that Rachel Imeinu is the heroine of the parsha. She had given up so much, had waited so long, and had left this world much too early to have even had the nachas, satisfaction and pleasure, of seeing her sons grow up. What about Leah Imeinu? Is she to be ignored? She did not have an easy life either. She clearly was not Yaakov Avinu's choice as a wife. Her wedding was certainly filled with fear. What would she have done if Yaakov had discovered the ruse that was taking place? She would have been humiliated beyond description. So, she was blessed with six sons - half of the Shvitei Kah, twelve tribes. There is more, however. Leah also had mesiras nefesh. She also sacrificed. The Talmud Berachos 60A comments that the name Dinah is a derivative of din, judgment. Indeed, Leah passed judgment on herself. She knew that Yaakov was to be blessed with twelve sons. She already had six, and she was pregnant again. The

two shfachos, handmaids, each had two. Thus, if Leah were to have another son, Rachel would end up having less than the shfachos. In order to spare Rachel humiliation, Leah prayed that the fetus she was carrying would be a girl. This was Leah's mesiras nefesh.

One would assume that being Yaakov Avinu's only daughter was a position of distinction, so that she would merit the "top guy" as a husband. As we all know, however, this did not materialize. Dinah was violated by Shechem, clearly not an appropriate reward for Leah's act of self-sacrifice. The question that is waiting to be asked: Why? Is this what Leah deserved after all she had endured? Clearly, she deserved a little better, a little more. Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, instructs us to read what the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer wrote concerning Dinah. The blanks in her life were filled in, and suddenly Leah's incredible reward was revealed in all of its glory. Apparently, Dinah became pregnant from Shechem and gave birth to a daughter whom she named Osnas. When the sons of Yaakov heard this, they sought to slay her, because the entire incident-- with a child to document it-- gave a bad name to Yaakov's family. In order to protect her, Yaakov fashioned a necklace with the name of Hashem engraved on it and sent her off. The Angel, Michael, brought Osnas to Egypt where she was given into the care of Potifar, whose wife was childless. They raised Osnas as their own child. She eventually married Yosef.

This is an incredible story, which demonstrates that Hashem's plan is really the only one that makes a difference. Dinah had appeared to be lost, but in the end she became Yosef's mother-in-law and grandmother of two tribes! Leah exchanged the fetus in her body for a girl and merited to have two shevatim descend from her. We must have the patience to allow Hashem's Divine plan to reveal itself. Heaven compensates us for everything which we endure. Every ounce of self-sacrifice, every tear, every krechts, groan, will be cherished, with compensation to follow. It might take some time, but it will be worth the wait.

How important it is for us to think outside of the present and focus instead on the future. Hashem's plan extends far beyond our limited ability to see. We must be patient, and we must believe. Those who live for the present see only what appears before them, thus leaving limited room for hope in their lives. They would have perceived our Matriarch Leah as a sorry specimen of life. Leah did not feel that way, because she believed. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, interpreted David Hamelech's statement in Tehillim 19:11, "The judgments of Hashem are true, altogether righteous." When does one perceive that all of Hashem's judgments are the essence of truth? When they are yachday, all together. When the events of the past are incorporated together with the events of the future, everything begins to make sense.

Rav Galinsky adds that there is much to be learned from the habits of the ant. The ant is an insect that lives for approximately six months. During its entire lifetime it subsists on one and one half kernels of wheat. Yet, it spends every waking moment diligently, with great alacrity, toiling to store away much, much more food than it will ever need. Why? As Chazal teach us, the ant says, "What will be in the future if Hashem decrees that I live more than six months? From where will I have sustenance? Therefore, I am putting away food today, just in case I will need tomorrow."

What a powerful lesson to be derived. Shlomo HaMelech tells us to learn a lesson from the ant. It would be well worth our while to take his advice.

Thus, the late-bearing ones went to Lavan and the early-bearing ones to Yaakov. (30:41)

What Yaakov Avinu did to ensure a profitable and successful breeding was very practical.. He separated the flocks, making the newborn spotted ones lead the monochrome ones, so that the latter would be influenced by the leaders and bear similar offspring. He was discriminate in applying these measures, setting up the peeled rods only when the sturdier, earlier bearing flocks were about to mate. Thus, he secured the stronger animals for himself. This is the simple p'shat, explanation, of the pasuk. In his Eim HaBanim Smeichah, Horav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, zl, cites an unknown author, whose manuscript came into his possession, that offers an alternative exposition. Rav Teichtal adds that based upon many of the other homilies he read in this manuscript, there is no doubt in his mind that the author was a great Torah scholar.

The attribute for which Yaakov is famous-- the middah which represented his avodah, service, to the Almighty-- is the middah of emes, truth. This is supported by the pasuk in Michah 7:20, Titein emes l'Yaakov, "Give truth to Yaakov." The word emes is comprised of three letters: aleph, mem, taf; the aleph being the letter of the Hebrew alphabet most distant from the tav. The mem, which is in the middle of the word, connects the aleph with the taf forming emes. It is as if the emes, entire word, connects them. This alludes to a significant lesson: regardless of the distance between the sides, emes - the truth - connects them. The power of emes is so great that it constitutes a bond between two sides/positions that are unusually distant from each other.

This is Yaakov's role in life, his raison d'être, to create a bond, to attach two sides, using emes as the bonding agent. Yaakov connects, and this is his greatest feature. Hence, we understand the pasuk, "And the keshurim, which can be translated as related to kesher, a knot; those who are unified are from Yaakov." In other words, those who resort to only the truth, they are Yaakov's people; they are unified together. The atufim, ones who wrap themselves, who seek to create separation, discord and division, they belong to Lavan. The wicked Lavan portrayed himself as being even more pious than his son-in-law, Yaakov, by not permitting the younger daughter to marry before the older one. He cared about frumkeit, piety. His misplaced piety and misguided observance were nothing more than deceit concealed in a cloak of false religiosity. It was all a sham. His ill-advised devotion caused the exile. Had he allowed Rachel to marry Yaakov immediately, she would have given birth and established all twelve tribes, precluding the Egyptian exile and all of its subsequent displacements. The necessary tikun, spiritual repair, for which Hashem was waiting, would have occurred without delay. We are today in galus, exile, as a result of Lavan's manipulating, his deceitful maneuvering, all in the name of frumkeit.

There is nothing as deplorable as manipulating circumstances, causing strife, pain, humiliation and even destruction of people's lives - all in the name of piety. This is Lavan the Arami.. His deceit was in presenting himself as a devout, well-meaning, pious individual whose only goal was to do what is "right." This might be true, but his concern was only for what was right by his spurious standards.

In an anecdotal interpretation of the pasuk in Bereishis 27:41, in which, after losing the brachos, the blessings of Yitzchak Avinu, to Yaakov, Eisav comments, "May the days of mourning for my father draw near, then I will kill my brother, Yaakov," the Pardes Yosef explains that Eisav was not simply waiting for his father's passing, so he could do away with Yaakov. No, Eisav was being very frum. He said, "Our father will die, and we will both have to say Kaddish and daven for the amud, lead the services in shul. One day, when we are both grappling over the amud, I will deliver one punch that will end Yaakov's hold on life. No one will do anything, because, after all, we will have been fighting over the amud." The same misconstrued piety. People will not complain, because, since it is all part of religious observance, everything is permissible, even the reprehensible. While this might, lamentably, occur more often than we are prepared to concede, we must acknowledge that the individuals involved, both overtly and covertly, are the heirs to the legacy of deceit and divisiveness of Lavan and Eisav.

This is my twenty years in your household. (31:41)

It is interesting to note that the Shivtei Kah, twelve tribes, the progenitors of the Jewish nation, were raised in the home of their grandfather, the deceitful Lavan. It is as if it was specifically designed to be this way. The question begs to be asked: Why? Was there no other environment more conducive to spiritual growth and fulfillment available in which Yaakov's twelve sons could have been raised? It is widely accepted that the environment in which one finds himself plays a pivotal role in his development. If one is in an environment that reeks of spiritual pollution, he will be affected. Why were the Shevatim placed in such challenging circumstances?

Horav David Povarsky, zl, explains that this was truly by design. The shevatim needed to be raised in a place that was fraught with spiritual challenges. As a requisite for the sublime positions of leadership which they would occupy, it was necessary for them to be raised amid challenge

and trained to overcome those challenges unscathed. Life is not easy; it is filled with challenges, paved with obstacles, bristling with dangerous bends and turns. It is an obstacle course in which only the hardest or the most careful survive. One either leads the way or he follows someone whom he trusts and respects. The shevatim had to triumph over the many challenges that the wicked Lavan placed before them. They succeeded, and thus, they were able to infuse this strength of character in their descendants. We stand on their shoulders. The trials which they sustained are the foundation stones upon which our glorious nation was built and continues to grow.

And he said to them, "I have noticed that your father's disposition is not toward me as in earlier days; but the G-d of my father was with me." (35:5)

Knowing fully well how difficult it would be to uproot his wives from the home in which they were raised, Yaakov Avinu attempted to convince them of their father's lack of integrity and to impress upon them the need for haste in separating themselves from this evil environment. He then added that it was Hashem's will that they leave. The commentators grapple with the Patriarch's roundabout manner of conveying the need to leave. If it was Hashem's command, why the dilly-dallying about acknowledging Lavan and his dishonesty? Why not immediately get to the point? It almost seems as if Yaakov was trying to minimize Hashem's involvement in his decision to leave.

Horav David Povarsky, zl, cites the Alter, zl, m'Kelm, who derives from here the importance of acting with pashtus, simplicity. One should not demonstrate that he is performing a holy mission or acting out of extreme piety. Modesty is equivalent to simplicity. One should not call attention to himself via his actions. People end up noticing the external actions, rather than taking note of his internal emotions and, regrettably, often the two do not coincide. Thus, the individual plays a leading role in an act of deception. Clearly, Yaakov was acting in response to Hashem, but he did not want to call attention to his elevated spiritual level and to his close relationship to the Almighty. He wanted to act as a poshute Yid, a simple, ordinary Jew.

Horav Nesanel Quinn, zl, related something that he heard from Horav Dovid Leibowitz, zl, who was a nephew of the Chafetz Chaim. As a young student in Radin, he attended the recital of Kinos, Lamentations, on Tisha B'Av in the Bais Medrash in which the Chafetz Chaim davened. The great sage would read the Kinos in quiet sorrow, accompanied by muted weeping. Indeed, to the spectator entering the Bais Medrash, the Chafetz Chaim's display of emotion was not unlike that of anyone else.

When davening was over and all of the worshippers had left for home, Rav David went to sleep in his bed in the Chafetz Chaim's attic. Shortly after he had retired, he heard the Chafetz Chaim tiptoe into his room to see if he was asleep. Once the sage confirmed that Rav David was sleeping, he went back downstairs. Suddenly, Rav David heard bitter shrieking, coupled with relentless weeping, as the Chafetz Chaim poured out his heavy heart to Hashem over the bitter exile and the destruction of the Batei Mikdash. It was then that Rav David realized that the Chafetz Chaim's "act" in shul was a cover-up for his real pent-up emotions. He did not want to call attention to himself, so he acted like everyone else - like a poshute Yid - not like the gadol ha'dor, pre-eminent leader of the generation.

Indeed, to the average spectator, the Chafetz Chaim had no airs about himself; he always presented himself as an ordinary Jew. This was not merely a demonstration of modesty or piety. This was his real demeanor. In his own eyes, the Chafetz Chaim felt like a poshute Yid. We have had gedolei Yisrael whose impact on the community at large was enormous, but in whose own eyes felt and acted like ordinary Jews. Horav Benyamin Beinish Finkel, zl, Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah, was such an individual. He was a remarkable Torah scholar who was a master at eluding detection. He would do whatever he could to conceal his greatness.

His taciturn manner extended not only to his relationships with other gedolim, prominent members of the Torah world, but even with the hamon am, common folk. Shortly after his passing, an elderly Sefardic woman knocked loudly on the family's door. "Please," she began, "you must tell me about the rabbi that passed away. Was he tall? Did he have a beard? Did he pray everyday at the Kosel vasikin, sunrise minyan?" When they

replied in the affirmative, she broke down in bitter sobbing. A short while later, after she composed herself, she explained that for years she had lived a pathetic existence. She would stand all day at the Kosel suffering from the heat and the cold rain, so that she could collect alms to sustain herself. It was a miserable way to live, but one thing kept her going: Rav Beinush's good-natured jokes and friendly interchange. True, she had heard that the Mirrer Rosh Yeshivah had passed away, but she could not imagine that it was he. His easy-going nature and friendly, unassuming manner was not indicative of a man occupying such a distinguished position. He seemed like a poshute Yid. Only after she asked one of the attendees at the Vasikin minyan about her "friend" did she become aware of who he really was.

Va'ani Tefillah

Tzaddik Hashem b'chol drachav, v'chasid b'chol maasav.

Righteous is Hashem in all His ways, and magnanimous in all His deeds.

Horav Yosef Breuer, zl, views this prayer as the tziduk ha'din, vindication of Hashem's Judgment, recited by one who, unfortunately, Hashem treats in a manner which disturbs the individual. Nonetheless, despite not making it, not succeeding in finding ratzon, favor, in the eyes of people, so that he can earn a livelihood, he accepts the Divine decree. He expresses his emunah, faith, in the Almighty, asserting that Hashem is just in all of His ways. Even if he has lost his job or does not succeed in his endeavor for making a living, he feels that since Hashem is just, that there must be a reason for what "seems" to be his misfortune.

If, by some chance, despite the fact that he does not deserve Hashem's favor, but Hashem nevertheless listens to his entreaties and does grant him some measure of parnassah, livelihood, lifnim meshuras ha'din, beyond the strictures of Divine Judgment, over and above what he deserves, it is only because the Almighty is a chasid b'chol maasav, magnanimous in all His deeds. Hashem goes beyond the strict judgment and grants him chesed, loving-kindness. This is the way in which one should recite, "Ashrei."

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

Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Parshas Vayeitzei

The Blessing Emerges From Lowliness

In Yaakov's famous dream of a ladder at the beginning of Parshas Vayeitzei, Hashem appears to him and tells him – among other things – "Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth and you shall spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward..." [Bereshis 28:14]. The Sforno wonders about the nature of this blessing. It seems to be expressed in imagery that is perhaps not especially complimentary. After all, the dust of the earth is something that people trample on! The imagery used elsewhere of "descendants as numerous as stars in the heaven" is much more noble and uplifting than "descendants that shall be as the dust of the earth."

The Sforno writes that this language in fact foreshadows Jewish history. Our history has been that just when Klal Yisrael finds themselves to be at their lowest point (represented by the dust of the earth), that is precisely when they will merit receiving the blessing "you will spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward." The two sections of the pasuk [verse] that at first seem to be incongruously combined are, in fact, dependent upon each other. It is exactly the state lowliness that precedes the state of dynamic growth and expansion. This is comparable to the common saying "night is always at its darkest immediately before dawn."

The Kli Yakar quotes a similar idea from a Medrash Shochar Tov: "Salvation only comes to Israel at a time when they have reached the ultimate in lowliness (tachlis haShiflus), as it is written 'For prostrated to the dust is our soul, stuck to the earth is our belly' [Tehillim 44:26] and immediately thereafter we find 'Arise! Assist us And redeem us for the sake of Your kindness!' [Tehillim 44:27]."

The reason for this phenomenon, the Kli Yakar writes, is that as long as the Jews are mired in the depths of lowliness, they place all their trust in G-d.

When things are going better, they make plans for human schemes and intervention to rescue themselves and do not place their hope in Hashem. However, when they see that there is no hope and no value in relying on human intervention, then they turn to Hashem as their only hope. When they sincerely call out to Him, recognizing that He is their only hope, then, in fact, salvation will dramatically follow.

This is the meaning of our pasuk in Parshas Vayeitzei as well. When it will be that your children are like the dust of the earth — meaning they have reached the lowest of points with no hope for self-preservation — and out of hopelessness, they turn to Hashem for salvation, that is precisely when salvation will come and it will be dramatic and expansive. "You will spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward."

The Almighty Rewards Every Act of Kindness

Following the enumeration of the birth of Leah's six sons the Torah states: "Afterwards, she bore a daughter and she called her name Dinah." [Bereshis 30:21] The Talmud [Brachos 40a] says that the name Dinah comes from the fact that Leah judged herself (dana Din b'atzmah). She calculated that she already had six of the twelve sons her husband Yaakov was destined to father. Since Bilhah and Zilpah each already had two sons, if the child she was now carrying would be another son, that would cause her sister Rochel to be the mother of fewer tribes than even Bilhah or Zilpah, the handmaidens. Leah therefore pronounced judgment on herself and prayed that the child she was carrying (who Chazal say was a male) be changed to a female! In fact, Chazal say that Rochel at this time was pregnant with a girl and the two fetuses were miraculously switched, such that Rochel gave birth to Yosef and Leah gave birth to Dinah.

G-d does not deny any creature their due reward . The wheels of Divine Providence may turn very slowly but they turn with great precision. What happened to Dinah? She was raped by Shechem and became pregnant with a girl. The daughter of Dinah and Shechem was Osnas. Yosef wound up in Egypt and was given Osnas as a wife. From Yosef and Osnas were born Menashe and Ephraim. Yaakov promised that he would consider Ephraim and Menashe to be like Reuben and Shimon [Bereshis 48:5]. In other words, G-d paid Leah back. She gave up one potential Tribe (by praying that her seventh pregnancy not be a male child) and in return, became the great grandmother of two more tribes in Israel, through that daughter!

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

TorahWeb Foundation

Back to Yeshiva

Yaakov is about to embark on a journey during which he will face two great challenges. As his first challenge, Yaakov must sustain himself spiritually in an environment alien to the values he absorbed in his parents' home. Somehow, a buffer must be created to protect him from being influenced by his deceitful uncle and future father-in-law, Lavan. Yaakov's second challenge, as the heir to the legacy of Avraham, is to build a family which can serve as the foundation of the Jewish nation-to-be. The future of the Jewish People depends on the actions of Yaakov in this regard. What can Yaakov do to guard himself from the negative influences around him and how can he prepare himself to found a nation? Chazal teach us that Yaakov did not go immediately to the house of Lavan when fleeing from Esav, rather he first immersed himself in learning Torah in the Yeshiva of Ever. Given that Yaakov was already sixty-three years old and had already spent his youth learning Torah in the Yeshivas of Shem and Ever, why was it necessary to return to the yeshiva now?

It was precisely the two aforementioned challenges facing Yaakov that compelled him to return to the study of Torah. Torah study is the only line of defense against spiritually hostile forces and the protection that guarantees that a person's value system remains pure. The Rambam (Hilchos Issurei Biah 22:21), after elaborating upon all the necessary safeguards against inappropriate activity, concludes that the greatest impediment to sin is whole-hearted involvement in Torah study. For

Yaakov to survive the house and society of Lavan, an extra dose of Torah study was necessary.

Yaakov was about to begin a new chapter in his life. Standing on the threshold of marriage and building a family, Yaakov is about to begin to transmit Torah to the next generation. It is this transmission from parent to child that creates the essence of the Jewish nation. Yaakov no longer studied Torah only as an individual, but also as one with a responsibility to transmit the Torah to the next generation. Yaakov returns to the Yeshiva of his youth to reapply himself to the talmud Torah that will enable him to properly build his family and nation.

Yaakov's return to Torah serves as a model for all subsequent generations. We are often faced with challenges to our spiritual goals. How do we survive when the values we hold dear are under attack? We return to our sources of Torah, our yeshivas and batei medrash, to strengthen ourselves. Our learning before and after work can be the buffer that preserves our Torah, even if we are exposed to influences antithetical to the Torah value system during the day. We look to Yaakov as a role model for how to create a family. Talmud Torah is indispensable in creating an environment in which our children can spiritually flourish. Therefore we, as parents, have the responsibility to rededicate ourselves to talmud Torah to enable us to share our legacy with our children. Just as Yaakov's fourteen years of renewed Torah study enabled him to respond to the challenges that faced him, our return to talmud Torah will enable us to rise to our own challenges.

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haaretz

Between past and future

By Benjamin Lau

Setting off on his journey to another land, to his uncle Laban, Jacob spends his first night in a lonely spot: "And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep" (Genesis 28:11). In his famous dream, Jacob sees a ladder ascending heavenward: "and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (Gen. 28:12).

Rashi explains why the angels first ascend the ladder, only afterward descending to earth: "The angels accompanying Jacob in Canaan cannot go abroad; therefore they ascended heavenward. Then the angels assigned to the area outside Canaan descended earthward to accompany him."

The Talmud informs us that angels accompany each of us every moment of the day. According to our sages, the verse in Psalms, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (91:11), teaches us that actually two guardian angels accompany us wherever we go. It was even customary in Talmudic times that when people entered a lavatory, they bade farewell to their guardian angels, asking them to wait outside (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot). However, Rabbi Joseph Caro, author of the Shulhan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law), notes that in the 14th century, Spanish rabbinical authorities forbade this ritual for all Jews, except the truly devout, "because it gives the impression of arrogance." Spanish Jewry's rational world triumphed over Babylonian Jewry's Eastern imaginative world and eliminated the custom.

We must consider Jacob's position as he leaves the comfort and warmth of the home he knew all his life. The idea of guardian angels protecting him on his journey to an unknown destination is conveyed in the verse describing the end of Jacob's dream: "And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. 28:13-15).

At this moment, Jacob feels very alone, but God's promise of protection encourages him to continue on his journey. God's blessing connects Jacob

with his parents and grandparents, and Jacob realizes he is a link in a chain and that he will return to his ancestral home. Thus, God's promise ties Jacob to his past and his future.

Journeys themselves have no content; they are merely a means of connecting our past with our future. Our sages issued two important rulings related to taking trips. First, we must utter short prayers while traveling: "Those who pray in the course of their journeying should not tarry in their prayers" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot). Prayer is our meeting point with God, a point on a vertical continuum connecting heaven and earth; however, it is also a stopping point in a horizontal process linking our starting point to our destination. We should not linger on our journey. Any delays on the horizontal axis through long detours through the world of prayer will prevent us from fulfilling our role in the universe. We must quickly traverse the distance between our past and our future.

The second ruling of the sages is that, as we journey, we must remember God: "When you set out for a journey, you must think about God. How?" By reciting tefilat haderekh [the Traveler's Prayer]" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Brachot). Journeys spell change and contain an element of danger, although they are also part of a building process. We can imprison ourselves in our own homes, even become emotionally paralyzed, because of our fear of encountering the outside world. Thus, the sages encourage us to go out into the world without fear. When they instruct us to think about God, they mean we should think carefully before we set out, so all our journeys will be meaningful.

The Talmud provides the text of the Traveler's Prayer: "May it be your will, O my Lord God, that you lead me peacefully along the way, that you guide my steps peacefully and that you rest your hands upon me peacefully. Please save me from the hands of all enemies and ambushers along the way, and bless all that I do. May I find favor in your eyes and in the eyes of all who behold me. Blessed are you, O God, who hears our prayers."

This prayer recalls Jacob's dream and is intended to dispel fears that can paralyze us and prevent us from setting out on our journey. Indeed, the Traveler's Prayer is meant to make us rejoice and to fill our heart with hope when we set off on a trip. However, the amora (Talmudic scholar) Abbaye suggested a change: "We must never separate ourselves from the rest of society. Therefore, [when reciting the Traveler's Prayer] we must say: 'May it be your will, O my Lord God, that you lead us peacefully along the way, that you guide our steps peacefully, and so on.'"

Abbaye reminds us that we are all engaged in taking a journey. At the practical level, we can connect that idea with Israel's dismal record as far as traffic accidents are concerned. Maybe if we could spend 10 seconds reciting the Traveler's Prayer, using the first person plural, we might remember more vividly that we must share the road with others. At the symbolic level, we can accept the concept that we are actually all travelers through life, and that we all have our personal luggage containing fear. We should thus pray that all travelers reach the destination of their life's journey with a sense of happiness and in peace.

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

VaYetze - The Prayers of the Avot

According to the Talmud [Berachot 26b], the Avot (forefather 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 ("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 hadin), so he founded the soul's natural prayer of the afternoon. The exacting measure of law is applied to situations where one has deviated from the normal and accepted path.

Spontaneous Evening Revelation

And what distinguishes Ma'ariv, the evening prayer?

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

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

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

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

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

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· This Week's SSC (Suitable Secular Citations): "Pay up, Mortimer... We took a perfectly useless psychopath like Valentine, and turned him into a successful executive. And during the same time, we turned an honest, hard-working man into a violently deranged, would-be killer!" – Randolph Duke, collecting his \$1 debt from Brother Mortimer, as Valentine (Eddie Murphy) listens with wide-eyed shock from the bathroom stall in TRADING PLACES

THE \$1 WAGER

What do you get when you have Eddie Murphy and Dan Aykroyd tricked into trading societal places? Aside from a continual flow of hysterical lines and classic Eddie Murphy camera-stares, you also end up with fascinating food-for-thought. In the hilarious comedy "Trading Places", the \$1 wager of Randolph and Mortimer Duke gives comedic expression to the age-old debate of nature vs. nurture (see SSC above). To settle the score regarding their opposing opinions on the issue, the Duke Brothers cleverly conspire to orchestrate a "life swap", callously switching the environments and lifestyles of Billy Ray Valentine (Murphy) and Louis Winthorpe III (Aykroyd). Ultimately, the dastardly Duke duo "succeeds" in transitioning an underprivileged con-man into an upstanding business leader while turning an honest executive into a common criminal.

With regard to their bet, which of the Duke Brothers is more in line with Jewish wisdom – Randolph (on the side of nurture) or Mortimer (on the side of nature)? To some degree, Judaism would agree with each of the brothers, asserting that nature and nurture both play a large role in determining a person's position in life. But let's up the ante on their wager: if nature and nurture forces are so powerful, must we bet against freewill – a central tenet of Judaism – and concede that there's no room for it in the equation of life's forces?

THE SHIFTING BATTLE LINE OF CHOICE

There's no need to concede, as Jewish wisdom beautifully resolves this quandary. Our sages reveal that each person possesses two competing drives: a positive drive (which lifts us towards constructive, meaningful endeavors) and a negative drive (which sucks us into seemingly "self-serving" yet counter-productive behaviors). The clash of these drives creates a dramatic tension that allows for the challenge of choice. Each of us, however, has a unique choice-point – our own inner battle line where the freewill struggles are taking place (i.e. where the competing drives are at equal strength). But our battle line continually moves, depending on 1) changing circumstances, and 2) whether our positive or negative drive has prevailed in the previous battle. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler compares this phenomenon to a physical battle, paraphrased as follows:

When two armies are at battle, fighting takes place only at the battlefield. Territory behind the lines of each army is under that army's control, so little or no resistance is needed there. If one side gains a victory at the front and pushes the enemy back, the position of the battlefield will change. At that point, fighting takes place only at the new battlefield. We now see how there is always potential for freewill in the equation: true, our Creator sets the stage for us, endowing us with "innate influences" and with frequently changing "nurture influences", all of which are beyond our control. But wherever those forces may place us – and in whichever direction our battle might move – there will always remain a battlefield location where our drives can be at equal strength.

FREEWILL AND JACOB'S LADDER ↗ (INCIDENTALLY, 2 SONG TITLES BY THE ROCK POWER TRIO "RUSH")

Another vivid metaphor is used to illustrate the shifting battle line of choice: the up-and-down movement on a ladder that spans from the earth to the heavens (as per Jacob's dream in this week's Portion). As with the shifting battle line, each time we climb to a higher rung on this ladder of moral mobility, we actually "raise the bar" of our moral maturity – leaving behind challenges that are now beneath the zone of our temptation. Conversely, each time we drop to a lower rung, we enter a zone of lower-level temptations. In doing so, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the frightening phenomenon of the slippery slope: before we know it, we might find ourselves three or four rungs down, engaged in behaviors that were previously unthinkable.

Now let's run our own quasi "trading places" experiment in the "laboratory of Jacob's ladder" (and let's get back at Randolph and Mortimer by calling

Edutainment Weekly (torah.org)

Parshas Vayeitzei

"Trading Places on the Ladder of Life"

(Insights from this week's Portion: Vayeitzei)

· This Week's RRR (Relevant Religious Reference): "Do not judge your fellow until you have arrived at his/her place" – Hillel in Ethics of the Fathers (Avos), 2:5

our Jewish “guinea pigs” Randy and Mordechai). Randy is a Jewish thief, who has grown up in a den of thieves – glorifying “survival of the fittest” and comfortably convinced that stealing represents acceptable, “way-of-the-world” behavior. Mordechai comes from a long line of rabbis and lives in a nurturing household: conducive to moral advancement and spiritual growth. For Randy, the notion of “thou shalt not steal” is so foreign that it sounds funny when he first hears it. In other words, resisting the temptation to steal is on a rung that is above his battle line of moral struggles (in fact, one of his moral struggles is whether or not to shoot someone who catches him in the act of a robbery!). For Mordechai, the temptation to steal flies way beneath his radar, many rungs down on the ladder of moral mobility.

WHO IS GREATER: THE THIEF OR THE RABBI'S SON?

Now let's say that Randy becomes further exposed to ethical ideals, gradually refining himself to where he consistently resists temptations to steal. Sure, he still gets into occasional street fights, etc. – but let's say that he manages to climb up five rungs from where he started (which now leaves him five rungs beneath Mordechai). And let's say that Mordechai refines his character as well, making strides in his commitments to Torah study, etc. Sure, he still could pray with more fervor, and he occasionally looks down on people with lesser knowledge – but let's say that he manages to climb up two rungs from where he started. Question: who is greater in the eyes of G-d? To the naked eye, Mordechai may compare favorably to Randy in every empirical measure of morality. But from a Divine perspective – at least according to one formula of calculation – look who did more with what he had! Similarly, assume an investor were to invest \$10,000 with one broker and \$110,000 with another; if the first broker returns \$60,000 and the second returns \$130,000, which one might the investor be more impressed with?

While I certainly do not presume to understand the infinite intricacies of Divine calculations, I think that we can arrive at certain conclusions with conviction: first of all, let us be clear that we should never despair about where we may be on the ladder. We all have our tailor-made battle lines, and the direction we are heading in is far more important than which rung we currently occupy. Moreover, we can now heed the words of Hillel with greater appreciation: “Do not judge your fellow until you have arrived at his/her place!” Not only is judging someone unfavorably an undesirable, elitist thing to do – but even more, it doesn't make sense from a logical perspective. Why? Because we have never truly arrived at another person's place – we have never experienced the precise combination of forces that make up another person's battle lines. While it is reasonable to evaluate and condemn inappropriate actions, it is unreasonable and illogical to judge the people behind those actions. May we all climb life's ladder in the direction of our positive purpose, and may we judge others favorably as they attempt to do the same!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos! Love, Jon & The Chevra

YatedUSA Parshas Vayeitzei 8 Kislev 5769

Halacha Discussion by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt Amplified Sound Waves

Question: Can one fulfill a mitzvah which involves hearing something recited or read, e.g., hearing Havdalah or the reading of the Megillah, by hearing the words over a telephone or from the loudspeaker of a public address system?

Discussion: The answer to this question, extensively debated by the poskim, depends on the halachic interpretation of certain technical facts. Both the telephone and the public address system “transform” sound waves in air, e.g., spoken words, into an electrical current within the instrument, and, ultimately, back into sound waves. It is debatable, though, how the halachah views these sound waves: 1) Are they an extension of the speaker's voice, merely amplified or carried to a distance that the unassisted human voice cannot reach; or are they 2) distinct from the speaker's voice, since the loudspeaker or receiver “creates” new sound waves from something — an electrical current, which is not sound?

Translated from technical into halachic terms, the question is whether the mitzvah in question can be fulfilled only with the authentic, original voice of the speaker, or also by means of sounds generated by electrical impulses derived from the original voice and occurring simultaneously with it. Some earlier authorities were of the opinion that the sound heard over the telephone or from the loudspeaker is the original speaker's voice.¹ It is permitted, therefore, in their opinion² to listen to the Megillah read over a public address system or to Havdalah over the telephone.

Other authorities³ maintained that the halachic view of amplified sounds is difficult to resolve and cannot be clearly decided. Thus in their opinion it remains questionable if mitzvos can be performed by means of a public address system or telephone. It follows, therefore, that only under extenuating circumstances — when no other possibility exists — is it permitted to fulfill a mitzvah by means of a loudspeaker or telephone.⁴ However, the majority of the authorities⁵ who have studied this issue, including Rav S.Z. Auerbach⁶ who researched it extensively with the aid of a team of technical experts,⁷ have ruled conclusively that the sound waves emitted by a loudspeaker or telephone receiver are definitely not the speaker's original, authentic voice. In addition, they rule unequivocally that one's obligation cannot be discharged by hearing an electrically generated sound even if the original speaker's voice is heard simultaneously. Accordingly, one cannot fulfill a mitzvah by listening to sound waves from a microphone or a telephone.⁸

In practice, therefore, it is clear that when another possibility exists, mechanical voice amplifiers should not be used to fulfill a mitzvah. For example, a woman who is home alone and has no one to make Havdalah for her, should rather recite Havdalah herself⁹ than listen to it being recited by someone else over the telephone. Even if she cannot or will not drink wine, grape juice, or beer, it is better for her to recite Havdalah over coffee,¹⁰ tea (with or without milk),¹¹ or milk alone¹² (and, according to some poskim,¹³ grapefruit, orange or apple juice) than to listen to Havdalah recited over the phone!¹⁴

If one finds himself in a situation where otherwise he cannot recite Havdalah or hear the Megillah at all, e.g. in a hospital, and there is no one who can come until Tuesday evening¹⁵ to make Havdalah for him, he may have to rely on the poskim who permit listening to blessings, etc., over the telephone.¹⁶ But in a situation where someone could come and recite Havdalah for him before Tuesday evening, the correct procedure is to wait until then for Havdalah to be recited.¹⁷ If he is weak, he may eat before hearing Havdalah. If he is not weak, and he anticipates that he would be able to hear Havdalah before chatzos Sunday, he should refrain from eating until then.¹⁸

Question: Is it permitted to answer Amen to a blessing heard over the telephone?

Discussion: A related issue is whether or not it is permitted to answer Amen to a blessing or Kaddish heard over a microphone, telephone, or during a live telecast transmitted by satellite. Some poskim¹⁹ permit this and do not consider the answering of Amen etc., to be l'vatalah (“for nothing”), since they remain undecided about the halachic status of amplified sound waves, as explained above. In addition, some poskim²⁰ permit it, based on the ancient precedent set in the great synagogue in Alexandria,²¹ where most people did not hear the blessings being recited because of its vast size, but were nevertheless permitted to answer Amen when signaled to do so by the waving of a flag.

Rav Auerbach, though, rejects this comparison and rules clearly that it is prohibited to answer Amen upon hearing a blessing in this manner. He agrees, however, that one who is in the vicinity of the speaker, even though he hears the speaker's voice only over a microphone, etc., is permitted to answer Amen, as was the case in Alexandria where everyone was inside the shul and part of the congregation that was davening.²²

Question: On Shabbos, is it permitted to leave an intercom on in a baby's room in order to allow parents to monitor their child's welfare?

Discussion: Contemporary poskim agree that it is forbidden — for various reasons — to speak into a microphone on Shabbos even if it was turned on before Shabbos.²³ The same halachah applies to speaking into an

intercom. It is, therefore, recommended not to leave a monitor on in a baby's room, since adults, too, will be entering the child's room and their voices will carry over the intercom system. In a situation where parents are justifiably hesitant to leave a baby alone in a room overnight, e.g., the baby is ill or is having trouble breathing, it is advisable to connect the intercom to a Shabbos clock which will turn the intercom off in the morning. If the parents must enter the room during the night to check on or take care of the baby, they should avoid speaking while they are in the vicinity of the intercom.

Footnotes

- 1 Minchas Elazar 2:72; Minchas Aharon 18 (quoted in Tzitz Eliezer 8:11).
- 2 Their argument is based partially on the fact that sound waves — even without being mechanically transmitted — are carried through the air before they are heard by the listener. The fact that the microphone amplifies those sounds and furthers their distance should not be considered Halachically problematic.
- 3 Rav T. P. Frank (Mikraei Kodesh, Purim 11 and in Minchas Yitzchak 2:113); Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:108; O.C. 4:126. [See, however, Igros Moshe, E.H. 3:33 and O.C. 4:84.] Rav Y.E. Henkin (Eidus l'Yisrael, pg. 122) also does not render a clear decision on this issue. See also Minchas Shlomo 1:9 quoting an oral conversation with the Chazon Ish.
- 4 Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:91-4 (and oral ruling quoted in Kol ha-Torah, vol. 54, pg. 18); Tzitz Eliezer 8:11. See also Shevet ha-Levi 5:84.
- 5 Da'as Torah, O.C. 689:2; Gilyonei ha-Shas, Berachos 25a; Eretz Tzvi 1:23; Kol Mevaser 2:25; Mishpatei Uziel 1:5; 1:21; Minchas Yitzchak 1:37, 3:38; She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 129:25; 193:6; Yagel Yaakov, pg. 280, quoting Rav Y.S. Elyashiv and Rav C. Kanievsky; Kinyan Torah 1:75; Yechaveh Da'as 3:54; Moadim u'Zemanim 6:105. See also Teshuvos P'eas Sadcha 1:126 who quotes a similar ruling from Rav C. Soloveitchik.
- 6 Minchas Shlomo 1:9.
- 7 Ray Auerbach and Yechaveh Da'as add that those who dissented were not familiar with the relevant technology.
- 8 Ray Auerbach makes clear that the same ruling applies to hearing-impaired individuals who cannot hear without a hearing aid. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:85 is hesitant over whether a hearing aid works exactly like a microphone.
- 9 Women are obligated to recite Havdalah and may recite it themselves. Although there is a well-established custom that women do not drink the wine from the Havdalah cup, this custom is discounted when a woman needs to fulfill her obligation of Havdalah; Mishnah Berurah 296:35; Aruch ha-Shulchan 296:5.
- 10 Instant or brewed (Rav S.Z. Auerbach, Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchah 60, note 18).
- 11 The tea or coffee should be cooled enough to drink at least 1.6 fl. oz. within three minutes.
- 12 Aruch ha-Shulchan 272:14; Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:75.
- 13 Tzitz Eliezer 8:16; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchah 60:5.
- 14 If a woman refuses to recite Havdalah on her own and there is no one available to recite it for her, her husband (or another man or woman) may repeat it for her, even if he has already fulfilled his obligation earlier; see Mishnah Berurah 296:36; Aruch ha-Shulchan 296:5; Da'as Torah 296:8; Ben Ish Chai, Vayeitzei 22. The blessing over the candle, though, should be omitted, in the opinion of some poskim.
- 15 O.C. 299:5.
- 16 Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:91-4; Tzitz Eliezer 8:11.
- 17 In this case, one should specifically not listen to Havdalah over the phone, since then it may not be repeated for him when the visitor comes.
- 18 Mishnah Berurah 296:19, 21. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, too, is quoted (Yad le-Yoledes, pg. 135) as ruling that it is better to eat before Havdalah than to listen to it over the telephone.
- 19 Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:91-4.
- 20 Yechaveh Da'as 3:54.
- 21 See Succah 51b and Tosafos, ibid.
- 22 See Halichos Shlomo 1:22-15.
- 23 See Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:55.

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Vayeitzei - Bathing on Shabbat

Rabbi Asher Meir

Bathing on Shabbat - Going to the Mikveh

Bathing in hot water on Shabbat is forbidden, lest people come to heat the bathwater. However, bathing in cold water is permissible (though it is restricted by custom - see MB 326:21). Even so, the Shulchan Arukh specifically tells us that immersing in a mikveh for purification is permissible (SA OC 326:8).

Why would we think that this kind of bathing needs special permission? The Talmud concludes that it is forbidden to immerse clothes on Shabbat to purify them, because this is a kind of repair. The Talmud then asks, why are we allowed to immerse? Immersion of people effects a kind of spiritual repair! (Beitza 18a) Indeed, immersing a convert on Shabbat is forbidden for this very reason - it is the repair of the human being! (Yevamot 46b) The answer given is that onlookers won't be sure that the person is immersing for purity. Perhaps he is only hot, or dirty. It seems that while purifying ourselves on Shabbat is permissible, it is improper to make a point of it.

This reinforces what we mentioned last week: Legally, Shabbat is a day when material repair is forbidden. But at a deeper level, Shabbat as a day which is "like the World to Come" and a day when all our work is considered completed hints that even spiritual repair is not completely in character with the Shabbat. For example, vidui (the daily confession) is not recited on Shabbat, nor is tikkun chatzot.

The main work of fixing ourselves, like that of fixing our environment, is reserved for weekdays. On Shabbat we get an inkling of what it is like to achieve perfection in both our material environment and our inner character.

Rabbi Asher Meir is the author of the book Meaning in Mitzvot, distributed by Feldheim. The book provides insights into the inner meaning of our daily practices, following the order of the 221 chapters of the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh.

Ohr Somayach :: TalmuDigest :: Kiddushin 62 - 68

For the week ending 6 December 2008 / 9 Kislev 5769

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

The Surviving Sages - Kiddushin 66a

A spiritual holocaust descended on the Jewish people and it was Jewish king who was responsible.

King Yannai was instigated by a wicked follow named Elazar ben Poira to slay the Sages who opposed his attempt to serve as kohen gadol because of a doubt regarding his legitimacy as a kohen. When the king asked what would happen to Torah study, this villain countered that the Torah would remain in its corner and would be accessible to all who wished to study.

Accepting this argument was heresy because even though the Written Law would still be accessible, the understanding of the Oral Law depended on the Sages. The tragic result was the murder of all the Sages, which left the world desolate.

One Sage, however, survived. Rabbi Shimon ben Shatach was the brother of the queen and she managed to hide him when the slaughter took place. This lone survivor succeeded in restoring Torah study to its former glory.

What the Sages Say

"A person will not pass up the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah incumbent upon him in order to do a mitzvah not incumbent upon him."

Kiddushin 64b

Ohr Somayach :: The Weekly Daf :: Kiddushin 62 - 68

For the week ending 6 December 2008 / 9 Kislev 5769

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

Pulling Strings - Kiddushin 63a

A man gives a woman the value of a pruta, the minimum required for making kiddushin, but he makes this kiddushin conditional on his interceding on her behalf with the authorities; if he subsequently fulfills his condition by speaking to the authorities regarding her indebtedness to them, the kiddushin is valid.

This ruling of the mishna does not seem to offer us any new information, asks Tosefot, and should be challenged in the same manner as is an earlier mishna (Kiddushin 60b) as to why it is necessary to repeat the simple principle that a fulfilled condition validates kiddushin. Tosefot answers that we might have otherwise assumed that the woman can claim that she was not satisfied with the way he interceded on her behalf.

Rambam (Laws of Marriage 5:19) adds a couple of words to the description of the man's fulfillment of his condition: The man spoke to the

authorities, he writes, and they gave her a break and did not press their claim.

This is understood by one of the commentaries (Korban Netanel on the Rosh) as a paraphrase of the Tosefta cited by Rosh which states that he fulfills his condition by "speaking to the authorities in the manner of interceders." The intent of the Tosefta and Rambam is to communicate that if the man who made this condition only succeeded in gaining for the woman a deferment of payment, it is considered a fulfillment; the woman cannot contest the kiddushin by claiming that she consented to it only because she expected him to achieve total cancellation of her debt. He was required only to "speak in the manner of interceders," and this he certainly did.

Beit Yosef, in his commentary on the Tur Even Haezer (38:12), understood the Rosh as citing the Tosefta as a challenge to the approach of Tosefot, and variations of these approaches appear in the Beit Chadash on Tur (*ibid.*), Tosefot Yom Tov on the mishna, and Rashash.

Patrilineal Jewishness - A Modern Myth - Kiddushin 66b

In a case where one of the parties is not marriageable according to Jewish Law, says the mishna, the child born of their union has the status of the mother; i.e., a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother - the child is considered a non-Jew.

What is the source for this rule? Rabbi Yochanan, in the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, based it on the following passages in the Torah:

"You shall not intermarry with them [the non-Jews]; you shall not give your daughter to his son in marriage nor shall you take his daughter as a wife for your son. For - he [the non-Jewish father] - shall turn away your [grand]son from Me and they will serve other gods, and Hashem's anger shall be kindled against you, and you will be quickly destroyed." (Deuteronomy 7:3-4)

Interracism is prohibited for both a Jewish boy and girl. The consequence of a grandchild being turned away from his Jewish faith is, however, mentioned only in regard to the non-Jewish father but not in regard to the non-Jewish mother. The conclusion is that the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father is considered Jewish, and the danger of his being diverted from his faith is relevant; while the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother is considered non-Jewish, and the consequence of his being diverted from the Jewish faith is irrelevant.

haaretz

Enjoying himself to the very end

By Yoel Marcus

Look at the yellowing photos of the state's founders in the old albums on the library shelf. Look at how thin they were and how simply dressed. I still remember Menachem Begin's first speech at Mughrabi Square in Tel Aviv. As a Polish gentleman, he was wearing a suit and tie, of course, but only those standing close to the podium could see how threadbare they were. In the old days, Israel's national leaders lived in tiny apartments. Yitzhak Ben-Zvi refused to move out of his wooden shack when he became president.

They all lived humbly - Levi Eshkol and Pinhas Sapir, Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir. The most critical decisions were made in Golda Meir's kitchen in her modest apartment in Ramat Aviv. Cognac medicinal, Matias herring and calves' foot jelly were served at the little Jewish restaurants where Mapai's leaders discussed the issues of the hour. The attack plans for the Sinai Campaign were sketched on a paper napkin from the cafeteria of the Prime Minister's Office at the government compound in Tel Aviv.

I remember how Moshe Dayan left me to pay the bill at a restaurant where he had invited me for a meal, and how Minister Gideon Patt explained that he was not allowed to pick up the tab unless his guest was from overseas.

Modesty (sincere or under duress) gave way to hedonism only in the next generation. Yigal Allon, commander of the Palmach, and Shimon Peres, director-general of the Defense Ministry, were the bright young things who introduced deluxe overseas travel - Peres to Paris, Allon to London and New York - where they enjoyed the good life at the state's expense. They stayed in suites at posh hotels whose names were not familiar to Israelis.

As foreign minister, Abba Eban outdid them all, tacking his private purchases onto the hotel bill. Still etched in my memory is the picture of Walter Eytan, the Israeli ambassador, tearing his hair out and sharing his woes with me: "How am I going to send a bill like this to Israel?"

After the Six-Day War, things really went into overdrive: Victorious Israel boosted the pride of Jews, who wanted to pamper our heroes. Their eagerness to indulge the generals, especially those who visited the United States to lecture or raise money, only stirred up the hedonistic urges of their guests. The rich of America fought with one another to host a general or government minister flying over on some real or make-believe official duty. These were the trips that gave birth to the link between Israeli statesmen and American tycoons.

Ehud Olmert was a guy who was fun to be with in America. Turning on the charm, he endeared himself to Jews with money and the pleasures that come with it. He drove everywhere in limousines and stayed in suites at the best hotels, all owned by his "friends." The Jews who worshipped Ariel Sharon as an Israeli hero, to the point where they were prepared to buy him a ranch, loved Olmert, too.

As a sports fan, he was flown to games on the other side of the continent in the private jet of a "good friend." With his talent for friendship, he could organize a show for his artist wife in New York and be sure that his friends would not leave a single painting on the walls.

As a young MK in 1976, Olmert and his Knesset colleague, Yossi Sarid, waged a battle against organized crime. But he became an icon in America when he was elected mayor of Jerusalem in 1993. For American Jews, you should know, being mayor of Jerusalem is more important than being prime minister. On his many trips to the United States, there wasn't a Jew who didn't fawn over him and happily provide him with any perk his heart desired. It was being courted by the wealthy, along with a soft spot for the good things in life, that eventually blurred the line in Olmert's mind between what is permissible and what is not.

During one of his election campaigns, a full-length photo of Olmert appeared on the cover of a lifestyle supplement published by Maariv. It was a portrait that revealed just how insensitive Olmert was to what should and should not be done. He stood there in the doorway of his home in Jerusalem, with a Cuban cigar in his mouth, an expensive watch around his wrist and one of the pens from his exclusive collection tucked into his shirt pocket.

When I remarked on the show-offish nature of that photo, he didn't seem to know what I was talking about. He failed to grasp that his hedonistic streak, plus the rich friends who knew how to help him and get help in return, were a lethal brew that would lead him to where he is today.

Olmert has managed to extricate himself from many situations he should never have gotten into. But this time, not only did he make fatal blunders in how he dealt with the war in Lebanon, but he is angry at Tzipi Livni for demanding that he resign. Instead of bowing to circumstances and trying to salvage his good name, he has decided to stay put in the government and devote himself to ruining both Livni and Kadima - the "let me die with the Philistines" approach. That, too, is a kind of hedonism that could be stopped by an immediate indictment.

For God's sake, Olmert, get out already. Just don't take the whole country with you.

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