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Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayietzei

"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayietzei -

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion:
The Simile of the Dust of the Earth

At the beginning of the Parsha, Hashem blesses Yaakov with the words "I am Hashem, G-d of Avraham your father and G-d of Yitzchak; the ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants. Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward..." [Bereshis 28:13-14].

The simple understanding of the blessing "Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth" is that Yaakov's descendants should be so plentiful that their numbers will be comparable to the dust of the earth. The Medrash, however, sees in these words more than just a blessing of being plentiful and bountiful. Out of all the similes that one might pick, the terminology "like the dust of the earth" is somewhat peculiar.

This is different than the blessing elsewhere that we should be "like the sand of the sea" (k'chol haYam) [Breishis 32:13]. The phrase "k'afar ha'Aretz" literally means like the dust of the ground. The dust of the ground is that which we walk on. Is it not peculiar that Jews are blessed by being told that they will be like the dust that people trample?

There are so many more picturesque similes to use (as we find elsewhere). "Like the stars in Heaven" [Bereshis 22:17] is a majestic comparison. Stars are unreachable. They are beautiful. They sparkle. "As many as the stars in Heaven" is a very inspiring and poetic blessing. But "k'afar ha'Aretz" is almost like saying "you should be like dirt." Is this a blessing?

Even the expression "k'chol haYam" — like sand of the sea -- seems more appropriate. In our minds, we do not think of the sand on the

seashore as something we trample upon. We associate sand of the sea with beautiful white sandy beaches. Even sand has quite a different connotation than "you should be like dust."

The Medrash explains the very powerful significance of this choice of words. This is more than just a blessing of multitudes. The blessing of "k'afar ha'Aretz" represents the history of the Jews. Everybody tramples over the dust of the earth, but in the end the dust of the earth always remains on top. That same dust ultimately covers those who trample it.

"From dust you are taken and to dust you will return" [Bereshis 3:19]. In the final analysis, the dust of the earth is always on top. This is the analogy and the blessing of "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth." Yaakov is told that his children will be trampled upon and spat upon, like the dust. But in the end, like the dust, they will remain on top.

Tosfos [Brochos 17a] comments on the prayer recited at the end of the Shmoneh Esrei: "My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent; and let my soul be like dust to everyone." What is the meaning of the term "let my soul be like dust to everyone?" Tosfos suggests the very idea introduced by the Medrash above: Just like dust (afar) is never destroyed and always remains, we pray that our descendants should always remain and not be destroyed.

This prayer is speaking about people who are not our friends, people who curse us and abuse us. We pray that to those who curse us, we remain silent and we pray that our soul will remain like dust vis-à-vis our enemies. What is the intention when we pray that we should be like dust? It expresses a desire to be among those "who are insulted by others but do not respond in kind, who hear themselves being shamed, but do not respond" [Shabbos 88b]. Such people are the ones who eventually come out on top. We express this aspiration with the words "may my soul be like dust to everyone." That which Hashem promised Yaakov collectively for his descendants, we request on an individual basis as well. Concerning such people it is written: "And let those who love Him be like the powerfully rising sun" [Shoftim 5:31].

Why Didn't Yaakov Stand Up For His Rights?

Yaakov's labored for Rochel for seven years, only to have his father-in-law switch daughters and give him Leah. When Yaakov complained about this outrageous deceit, Lavan proposed that Yaakov agree to work for him for an additional seven years and then he would give him Rochel.

Yaakov should have told Lavan, "I already worked for Rochel for seven years. I will agree to stay married to Leah whom I never asked for, but it is only decent that you fulfill your end of the previously agreed upon bargain and give me Rochel, with no further stipulations." Why did he so meekly agree to work seven more years for Rochel?

I saw an insight on this point by Rav Dovid Feinstein. The reason Yaakov agreed to this "new deal" was to preserve Leah's sense of self-respect. How would Leah have felt if Yaakov expressed willingness to work for seven years for Rochel, but would only take Leah "gratis" — as if she were "good for nothing"?

Yaakov's willingness to accept Lavan's terms was not because he did not know how to cut a good business deal. He knew how to negotiate and he knew that if he pressed his case, he could have gotten his way. The reason why he worked seven more years was in order to not devastate Leah. Had he stood up for his rights, he would have received "two wives for the price of one" and one of the wives would have felt that "he got her for nothing."

Concerning potato chip bags, there is no concern over hurt feelings when they are "buy one get one free." Neither potato chip bag thinks: "Am I the one he paid for, or am I the one he got for free?" However, it would have been cruel to put Leah in the position of being the "get one free" wife. Yaakov refused to do that.

Rav Dovid Feinstein emphasized that we see from here that it is worth giving up seven years of one's life so that another person not feel humiliated. It is for this reason Yaakov willingly agreed to work for seven more years.

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Rav Kook List **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion** Vayeitzei: The Rivalry between Rachel and Leah

Jacob did not have an easy life. He loved Rachel, but was tricked into marrying her sister Leah. And when he finally married Rachel, his home was plagued with jealousy between the two sisters. This strife was not limited to Jacob's household. It continued on in future generations: in the struggle between Rachel's son Joseph and Leah's sons; and in the rivalry between Saul, descended from Rachel, and David, a descendant of Leah. Why did Jacob need to endure so many obstacles when setting up his family - complications that would have such a long-term impact on future generations of the Jewish people?

The Present versus the Future We live in a divided reality. We continuously deliberate: how much should I live for the moment, and how much should I work for the future? We must constantly balance between the here-and-now and the yet-to-come. This dilemma exists on all levels of life: the individual, the family, the community, and the nation. God's original design for the world was that we should be able to taste the sweetness of the fruit even in the bark of the tree (Gen. 1:11). In other words, even during the intermediate stages, we should be able to sense and enjoy the final fruit. When the world is functioning properly, the present is revealed in all of its glory, and serves as a suitable guide to a loftier future. In such a perfect world, our current desires and wishes do not impinge upon our future aspirations. But the physical universe is flawed. The earth failed to produce trees that taste like fruit. Our lives suffer from the constant conflict of the present versus the future, the temporal versus the eternal. As individuals and as a nation, we often need to disregard the sensibilities of the present, since they will not lead us to the destined path of the future.

Rachel and Leah Jacob's marriage to two sisters, and the ongoing rivalry between them, is a metaphor for this duality in our lives. Like all things in our world, Jacob's home suffered from a lack of clarity. Jacob should have been able to establish his family on the basis of an enlightened present, blessed with integrity and goodness. He should have been able to marry and set up his home without making complicated calculations with an eye to the future. The natural purity and simple emotions of his holy soul should have sufficed. Rachel, whom Jacob immediately loved for the beautiful qualities of her soul, is a metaphor for the simple and natural love of the revealed present. Jacob felt that Rachel's external beauty was also in harmony with the hidden realm of the future. But God's counsel decreed that the future destiny of the people of Israel belonged not to Rachel, but to Leah. This future was so profoundly hidden, that its current state - in Leah - was hidden from Jacob. The concealed quality of Leah was embedded in the very foundations of the Jewish people. Because of Leah, we can raise our sights afar, skipping over the present circumstances, in order to aspire to a lofty future. Just as Jacob found himself unexpectedly wed to Leah, so too the path of the Jewish people throughout history does not always

proceed in an orderly fashion. The future often projects its way into the present, so that the present time may be elevated and sanctified.

Two Kings and Two Messiahs The rivalry between Rachel and Leah, the conflict between the beautiful present and the visionary future, also found expression in the monarchy of Israel. The temporary reign of Saul, descended from Rachel, struggled with the eternal dynasty of David, a descendent of Leah. Even in the Messianic Era, the divide between Rachel and Leah will continue, with two messianic leaders: the precursive redeemer, the Mashiach ben Joseph (from Rachel), and the final redeemer, the Mashiach ben David (from Leah). Nonetheless, we aspire for the simpler state in which the present is enlightening and through its light the future acquires its greatness. For this reason, Rachel was always honored as Jacob's primary wife. Even Leah's descendants in Bethlehem conceded: "Like Rachel and Leah who both built the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11), honoring Rachel before Leah. (Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 44-46) Comments and inquiries may be sent to: <mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com>

From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum 5773 **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

Parshas VAYEITZEI

And (he) lay down in that place. (28:11) Rashi notes that ba'makom ha'hu, in that place, is an expression of exclusion, implying that it was only in that place that he lay down. During the fourteen years that he spent in the yeshiva of Eiver, however, he did not lay down at night, because he was occupied with the study of Torah. Previously, in Parashas Toldos, Rashi explained that when Yaakov Avinu left Be'er Sheva, he did not immediately go to Charan. He took a fourteen-year hiatus in the yeshiva of Eiver to study Torah. The Ostrovitzer, zl, wonders why Yaakov Avinu, who was sixty-three-years old when he left home and had certainly spent his entire life studying Torah in the ohel ha'Torah, the yeshiva of Shem and Eiver, felt it necessary once again to return to the yeshiva. The Ostrovitzer explains that, prior to leaving his father's home, Yaakov Avinu had learned from Shem and Eiver how a Jew living among Jews maintains himself as a ben Torah, committed, devoted, vibrant in his belief and observance. Now, he was leaving this utopian environment to deal with the "elements" - a negative spiritual environment, steeped in immorality and unethical behavior. It was an entirely new enterprise. Living among Lavan and his ilk could prove to be an overwhelming challenge for the yeshiva man who had never been exposed to such a prurient environment. In the Sefer Alufei Yehudah, the author cites the Ostrovitzer, who applies this idea to the opening pasuk in Parashas Vayeishev, "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef, at the age of seventeen years, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock" (Bereishis 37:2). Why does the Torah emphasize Yosef's age? The Ostrovitzer explains that Yaakov saw through Ruach Ha'Kodesh, Divine Inspiration that Yosef would one day leave home and be compelled to live among pagan degenerates. How was he to cope with the constant spiritual challenges he would be forced to confront? His father decided that he would transmit to him the Torah that he had studied in the Yeshiva of Eiver for fourteen years. Since the commencement of Torah study occurs at age three, we have only to do the math - three plus fourteen equals seventeen. Hence, the Torah underscores Yosef's age at the time of his forced departure from home. Horav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zl, supplements the above, explaining that Shem and Eiver were most suitable to teach Yaakov the necessities for survival in an adverse spiritual climate. Shem survived the generation of the Flood. He not only was spared physically, but he also emerged spiritually strong and unaffected by the pervasive influence of the members of that generation. Eiver was born during the dor Haflagah, generation of the Dispersal, whose members built the Tower of Bavel with the explicit purpose of rebelling against Hashem. He also emerged physically unscathed. These two Roshei Yeshiva were ideally suited to impart the lessons they had learned in coping with spiritual adversity. The Rosh Yeshiva applies this thought to explain Chazal's statement in the Talmud Megillah 16b: "The study of Torah is greater than the mitzvah of honoring one's parents." The entire fourteen years that Yaakov spent away from home, engrossed in Torah study, was not considered a blemish on his respect for his parents. For fourteen years, Yaakov did not actively honor his parents; yet, he was not punished. Why? Torah study takes precedence. We still must rationalize why Yaakov absconded on his mitzvah of Kibud av v'eim,

exchanging it for fourteen years of Torah study. The Rosh Yeshivah explains that Yaakov's fourteen years of Torah study was actually an inextricable, inseparable component of the honor he gave his parents. Clearly, Yitzchak and Rivkah had no great desire to send their son to the wicked Lavan, unless he was strong enough to survive in that challenging environment. If Yaakov could not proclaim, Im Lavan garti v'taryag mitzvos shomarti, "I lived with Lavan, but I still remained committed to the 613 mitzvos, I did not learn from his ways"; going there would pose a serious spiritual threat. In order to do this, Yaakov needed his fourteen years of preparation. Exactly what was the content of the lessons that Yaakov received in Eiver's yeshivah? The message would have to endure throughout our nation's exile, because we have yet to reach that utopian spiritual environment which encourages and empowers spiritual growth. Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, cites a yesod, principle, stated by Horav Yehoshua, zl, m'Belz, which can be applied and viewed as the primary lesson Yaakov imbibed in the yeshivah. How does a Jew live as a Torah Jew in a non-Jewish, morally depraved environment? The opening pasuk to Sefer Shemos reads: V'eilah shemos Bnei Yisrael ha'baim Mitzraymah. "And these are the names of the Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt." A similar pasuk is to be found in Parashas Vayigash (Bereishis 46:8). There, Rashi comments, "Because of the moment, ie, in terms of the present in the narrative, the Torah call them ha'baim, 'coming.' Thus, no one should wonder why it did not write asher ba'u, 'who came.'" Be'er Yitzchak explains that it is quite common to narrate stories of the past as if they are unfolding in the present. With this commentary in mind, we question why the pasuk in Sefer Shemos also uses the word ha'baim, coming, when they were already there. Their coming had occurred many years earlier. The Belzer explains that the Torah is not teaching us a history lesson concerning the Jews' arrival in Egypt; rather, the Torah teaches us what it was that had saved the Jews from total assimilation. What was it that protected them from Egypt's harsh spiritual environment? It was the fact that they viewed themselves as ha'baim, just now coming to the land. They were not Egyptians. They had a homeland for which they yearned. They had a way of life and culture that was antithetical to Egyptian culture. They aspired for their return. Now, they were just visiting. Rav Friedman supplements this idea with the Midrash which attributes Klal Yisrael's redemption from Egypt to four reasons: they did not adopt Egyptian names; they did not accept the Egyptian language; they did not speak lashon hora, slander against one another; they maintained a high moral standard as befits a Jew. These protective safeguards against assimilation were the result of the fact that they had never accepted Egypt as their home. They were just "coming" to the land. They were not residents. This, explains Rav Friedman, is the idea behind Yaakov's eschewing sleep for the fourteen years that he studied in Eiver's yeshivah. Sleep is a necessity, but sleep does not come easily to one who is tense, who is concerned about his well-being. Yaakov taught his descendants that we do not sleep while in galus, exile. Sleep equals complacency, and in exile we dare not become passive victims to the contemporary society's morally corrupt and ethically lacking culture. Yaakov spent fourteen years studying with Yosef. Yet, we find that when Yosef was in Potifar's house, he began to care about his physical appearance by curling his hair. It was soon after this that Potifar's wife attempted to seduce him. In his Divrei Yechezkel, the Shiniever Rav, zl, asks how a tzaddik such as Yosef could have acted so inappropriately. How could someone on an elevated spiritual plane care so much about his physical appearance? He explains that wherever a tzaddik finds himself, the first question that he asks is: What can I do to repair, to embellish, to elevate the spiritual plane of this place? Thus, when Yosef found himself thrust into the licentiousness of the Egyptian lifestyle, he wondered how he could change things. The first step was to change his appearance. There was no way that anyone would give him the time of day if he stood out like a Jew with a beard and payos. His goals were on target, but he forgot his father's lesson concerning the distinctiveness of a Jew. He had to distinguish himself from the environment in which he found himself. He was protected only as long as he realized that he was different, that he was only visiting; he was not a resident. Yosef almost gave in to the pressure and allure of Potifar's wife. He was saved because he saw d'mus dyukno shel aviv, an image of his father. How did this save him? Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Vorka explains that when he saw his father's image he once again realized how a Jew should appear to the world. He saw the "old fashioned" regal appearance of a Jew who took pride in his individuality and independence. He quickly understood the evil of assimilation, and he rejected it.

Leah's eyes were tender. (29:17) Rashi comments that Leah Imeinu's eyes were tender due to her incessant weeping. She thought that, as she was the older sister; it would be her lot to fall into the hands of Eisav for the purpose of marriage. This was clearly a reason to cry. Tears play a significant role in our relationship with the Almighty, especially in the area of prayer; indeed, weeping is considered a form of supplication. In one of the most moving elegies of the Selichos prayers, we ask

Hashem: Yehi ratzon, "May it be Your will, You who hear the sound of weeping, that You place our tears in Your flask permanently, and that You rescue us from all cruel decrees, for on You alone our eyes are fixed." The Almighty listens and discerns between the various tears that a person emits. He Who delves into the hearts of men knows which tears are from a pure source, to which ones He will listen and place in a special "container" for posterity. Our sages teach that with the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, the Shaarei Tefillah, Gates of Prayer, were closed. Prayer does not access the Heavenly Gates as it once did, but, Shaarei Demaos, the Gates of Tears, remain open, allowing for the result of genuine emotion, pure tears, to enter and achieve efficacy. Why are tears different than prayer? What gives tears greater capability than genuine prayer? Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, explains that tears are multi-faceted. They are a form of prayer; they are an entreaty; and they are a hirhur teshuvah, expression of thoughts of repentance. While they are all these, tears go deeper than prayer. They are an expression of greater profundity than even genuine prayer. Tears are the expression of a stormy heart, a broken heart, a prayer that became emotional, that achieved such purity that it expressed itself through pure emotion. Tears contain the key to access the Gates of Heaven, because they are the ultimate expression of the heart. There is a problem, however - even with the purest of tears. Rav Zaitchik gives this a practical application. Reuven insults Shimon. Shimon has been hurt, humiliated and brought to tears. He expresses his pain in the most common manner. Reuven has by now realized the hurt he caused, and, as a result, seeks forgiveness and repentance. He cries out to Hashem, begging forgiveness for the pain that he brought to Shimon. His tears are sincere - but, so are those of Shimon. The tears of Reuven, the offender, the baal teshuvah, ascend to Heaven and confront another set of tears - those of Shimon. Whose tears will prevail? Heaven determines whose tears will achieve greater efficacy: those of the offender who now seeks forgiveness, or those of the one whose life was made unbearable, who cries out in pain and misery? "And he (Eisav) cried out an exceedingly great and bitter cry" (Bereishis 27:34). Eisav returned from the field to discover that Yaakov had received the blessings. Can we imagine Eisav's pain as he cried out? This pain was inadvertently catalyzed by Yaakov. Chazal teach that Eisav's hurt was "compensated" years later in Persia, when Yaakov's descendant, Mordechai HaYehudi tore his clothes and wept bitterly concerning the evil decree passed against the Jews by Achashveirosh. Agag, king of Amalek groaned while in prison. This catalyzed Haman's birth. When we realize the effect the tears of even a rasha, wicked person, we begin to imagine how far-reaching are the tears of those whom we humiliate, oppress, or even whose feelings we inadvertently hurt. Tears are powerful. Rav Zaitchik quotes a Midrash that is frightening in its implications. Chazal teach that Rachel Imeinu died prior to her sister Leah, because she spoke before her, thereby indicating a hint of lack of respect. Let us take into account that Rachel gave everything up for Leah. She not only gave her the signs that Yaakov had given her, but she also hid in her room and spoke instead of Leah, so that her sister would not become embarrassed. She gave up her opportunity to marry Yaakov first, just to prevent Leah's humiliation. Yet, because she spoke before her, she preceded Leah in death! Is this not mind-boggling? Leah, however, was used to weeping. Leah's emotions were unusually raw. Therefore, in response to a minor slight to her character, her emotions were immediately revealed. The Rambam in Hilchos Avadim 1:7 writes that one must be unusually careful not to cause emotional pain to a slave, because his self-esteem is very low and his negative reaction will thus be quickly forthcoming.

Leah's eyes were tender. (29:17) Leah Imeinu had good reason for her excessive weeping. She feared that she would be relegated to marry the wicked Eisav. After all, it made sense. Rivkah had two sons; her brother Lavan had two daughters. It was only "right" that the older daughter Leah would marry the older son, Eisav. For this reason, she cried. When we think about it, especially through the spectacles of contemporary society, what really was so bad about marrying Eisav? As an ish sadeh, man of the field, he was out there making money. Eisav would not settle for a mediocre paycheck. He certainly did well for himself. The woman that would marry Eisav would have it "good." Her material needs would be taken care of. She would live a life of comfort, surrounded with luxury, never having to worry from where the next check will come. Marrying Yaakov, however, meant a life of struggle, hardship and material need. Was that what she really wanted for herself and her future children? I have painted the picture which those who are foreign to the world of Torah like to present. They view a life of materialism as the epitome of living; in contrast, they saw its counterpart, a life of Torah, which by its very nature eschews many material pursuits, as a life of settling for less, even one of misery. How wrong they are! The Matriarch Leah shows us the way. Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, observes that, despite Leah's exposure to the pervasive, evil influence of her environment, her home and especially to her brother, she still wanted to share her life with Yaakov Avinu. Not only was this her

wish; it became her obsession. She wept incessantly at the mere thought of marrying Eisav. She cried so much that her facial features, especially her eyes, were negatively altered. Due to Leah's incredible devotion to the Torah way of life, she was rewarded with becoming the progenitress of the three crowns with which Klal Yisrael is crowned: Kesser Torah, the Crown of Torah, through her son Yissachar; Kesser Kehunah, the Crown of Priesthood, through her son Levi; and Kesser Malchus, the Crown of Monarchy, through her son Yehudah. This is a significant achievement for Lavan's daughter, who grew up in an environment which renounced all of these attributes. When a person demonstrates their undying devotion to Torah; when he displays his overwhelming desire and love for Torah, he succeeds in its procurement. There is a well-known story of Reb Beinish Dennis a wealthy Russian businessman, who was privileged to be the father-in-law of two gedolei Yisrael, Torah luminaries, of the previous generation: Horav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Telshe, Lithuania; and his brother, Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Telshe, America. After the Bolshevik Revolution, which devalued the Russian currency, his money became worthless. He was now a poor man. One would have expected him to be broken-hearted. He comforted himself, saying that he still had left in his possession two precious diamonds, his two sons-in-law. These were jewels which no one could take from him. Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Baranovitz, related that he was once on a fundraising trip on behalf of his yeshiva. He journeyed to Russia to meet with this noted philanthropist, hoping to obtain a large donation on behalf of his yeshiva. It was a cold, wintry day; a heavy snow had just fallen, and the unpaved streets were slushy with snow and mud. The Rosh Yeshiva's shoes were filthy; there was no way that he could enter the palatial home of Reb Beinish with the grime on his shoes. He went to the back door which opened up to the kitchen, figuring that it would be much more appropriate to enter this way, rather than soil the fancy carpeting in the foyer. Reb Beinish's daughters came to the door, and, after greeting their distinguished guest, they immediately went to inform their father that the Rosh Yeshiva of Baranovitz was in the kitchen. Rav Elchanan refused to walk any further into the house with his soiled shoes. When Reb Beinish came to the kitchen he asked the Rosh Yeshiva why he had come through the back door. Rav Elchanan explained that his shoes were filthy, and he had no desire to soil the rugs. Reb Beinish became visibly upset and said, "Rebbe, you are impugning the education that I have given my daughters. I have taught them that Torah takes precedence over everything. Nothing is greater than Torah. You, however, are showing them that carpeting takes precedence over Torah. I do not want to cause you any trouble, but can you please exit the kitchen and enter once again through the front door? I want my daughters to see the carpet becoming soiled. Let them learn the importance of honoring a Torah giant!" While this is clearly the proper attitude to manifest toward those who study and disseminate Torah, the flipside to this must be avoided. One must exert the greatest care to see to it that the respect given to the Torah one possesses does not go to his head. It is unfortunately quite easy to develop an elitist attitude that fosters an overactive ego. This leads to his becoming unapproachable and condescending. I recently came across a story related by Rabbi Yisrael Besser in his book: *Warmed by Their Fire*. The story concerns the Pnei Menachem, the previous Gerrer Rebbe. A young girl, daughter of prominent Gerrer Chassidim, woke up one night and was frightened when she realized that she was alone in the house. Apparently, her parents had a medical emergency which had required immediate attention. They asked a neighbor to look in on their daughter until they returned. The child, however, was unaware of this. She just knew that she was all alone in the middle of the night. The panicked girl did the only thing that came to her mind. She went to her family's phonebook and looked up the Gerrer Rebbe's number and called him. The Pnei Menachem himself answered the phone. The young girl identified herself, and explained that her parents were not home and that she was scared. This great man, who was mentor and spiritual guide to thousands, spoke softly to the child, reassuring her that her parents would be home soon. He asked her about school, her friends, and he even told her a story. All of this was done to calm down a frightened child. The parents returned home shortly thereafter and were mortified upon hearing what their daughter had done. The next day, the father entered the Rebbe's study to apologize for his daughter's "insolence." The Rebbe smiled and said, Es is a gitte chinuch. "You have taught your child well. It is important for a child to know that when a problem occurs, one calls the Rebbe." Children often teach us valuable lessons.

And he (Yaakov) encountered the place and he stayed there. (28:11) And Yaakov went on his way; and Angels of G-d encountered him. (32:2) Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, explains that the word *vayifga* has the special connotation of an unexpected encounter. Thus, we understand that Yaakov Avinu experienced something unexpected when he arrived at "that" place. He saw Heavenly Angels ascending and descending a ladder. This was a significant personal experience

which conveyed a special message to the Patriarch. Likewise, at the end of the parsha, as the Patriarch was leaving the house of his wicked father-in-law, Lavan, he encountered Angels. This time, however, it was the Angels who encountered him. They were "surprised" by Yaakov as he had been surprised by them twenty years earlier. What revelation did the Angels have that surprised them so? This encounter with the Angels was an event, because Yaakov was the only one of the Avos, Patriarchs, who could claim that *mitaso sheleimah*, his marital bed was complete, all of his children were righteous and followers in their father's ways and beliefs. Even after having lived for twenty years in Lavan's home, Rachel and Leah and their children remained resolute and committed to Hashem. Neither the world nor the Angels had ever seen such upstanding, righteous individuals. The Angels were truly taken aback by this astonishing sight. Thus, Yaakov's surprise at seeing the Angels on his way to Lavan was matched by the Angels' surprise upon seeing the perfection of man as personified by Yaakov.

Va'ani Tefillah V'sein b'libeinu... lishmor, v'laasos, u'l'kayim... b'ahavah. In his *Be'er Shmuel*, Horav Shmuel Rosenberg, zl, explains this tefillah from a practical perspective. The best relationship between two people must be strong enough to weather the most harsh challenges. Like any physical edifice, whereby the foundation must be firm and strong, a relationship between two people must be concretized in such a manner that the strongest winds, the most vile *lashon hora*, slander, will not adversely affect the underpinnings of the bond that exists between them. How does one guarantee this? What is the magic glue that holds it all together? What cements a foundation so well that it will not yield to destructive forces? Love! One who loves will not have his relationship weakened. Indeed, it will become stronger! Love has the power of creating a bond whereby two become one - the foundation and the edifice are one and the same. When one has *ahavas Hashem*, true love for the Almighty - nothing can extinguish the fiery passion of this relationship - not pogroms, not holocausts, not illness and financial ruin. With the love in his heart, the Jew is able to transcend the vicissitudes of life, girding himself to overcome all of the challenges to his faith. He loves Hashem. Sponsored in memory of Rabbi Louis Engelberg z"l niftar 8 Kislev 5758 Mrs. Hannah Engelberg z'l niftar 3 Teves 5742 t.n.tz.v.h. Etzmon and Abigail Rozen and Family

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Lonely Israel

The prophet bemoans that Jerusalem lacks people who are interested and inquire after her welfare. In a general sense that is the case regarding the State of Israel and Jerusalem today. There is a lot of interest in the world today regarding the Palestinians and their cause, of ending the existence of the Jewish state, one way or another.

The presentation of the historic and justified counter-claim of the over six million Jews who live in their homeland and to Israel's right to exist is given short-shrift in the world, if not even ignored completely. The bias against Israel and the Jewish people in the media such as CNN, BBC, the New York Times and the other major media outlets is so ingrained that it has become part of their subconscious so that they are amazed and shocked and are in denial when this bias is sometimes and somehow actually brought to their attention.

There are almost never any positive articles or reporting about Israel and its people and accomplishments. Terrorists are merely militants and victims somehow always have it coming to them. Half of the European Jews have suffered overt anti-Semitism and the other half are too fearful to acknowledge that Europe does not really enjoy their presence within their sanctimoniously enlightened societies.

Bluntly put, it is pretty lonely and even nasty to be a Jew in Europe today. The international minister of South Africa weeps that she cannot sleep at night after seeing a map of Palestine. She is certainly not concerned about Israel and Jerusalem, thereby fulfilling the doleful

observation of the ancient Jewish prophet. Our welfare is not on the agenda of the world's manifold do-gooders. But this disdainful attitude, towards the welfare of the State of Israel and thus towards the Jews who live there, exists in the Jewish world as well. I have recently returned from an extended visit to Brazil and the United States. I may now be oversensitive to all of these matters – living in Jerusalem for seventeen years can make you oversensitive to many things – but I was and am deeply troubled by the fact that Israel is not really on anybody's radar screen.

Naturally there is support for Israel in times of real crisis but in everyday Jewish life it does not register. To the alienated and assimilated Jewish world, which unfortunately is large in numbers, wealth and influence, Israel is somewhat of an embarrassment. It is too Jewish, too traditional, too conservative, too provincial and parochial for their broad, universal, liberal, hedonistic, pacifist worldview.

In the Orthodox world there are many motives advanced towards explaining this apathy within American religious Jewry towards Israel. These motives range from the fact that Israel is not religious enough (though America is?) to financial and educational difficulties.

Aliyah is therefore not an option for most religious American Jews and since that is the case, there exists a feeling that one would be somehow hypocritical to inject too much Israel consciousness into one's everyday personal and communal life.

It is embarrassing to them as well to recite a prayer for Israel in their Sabbath service. Somehow it is preferable to ignore its existence - and ignoring its existence has taken on an aura of religious piety amongst many otherwise fine observant and very loyal Jews.

I think that the basic problem that underlies much of this apathetic attitude towards Israel is that according to many Israel should never have happened. That was the decree and stated opinion of many – but not all - great rabbinic leaders of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Eastern Europe. It is still anathema to many that one should now say a century later that perhaps they were mistaken.

So, one must now pretend that it never really did happen or that somehow its existence is not really central to Jewish life, present or future. In the eyes of many, Israel is not a salvation for the Jewish people in our time, saving the remnants of the Holocaust and gathering in the exiles of the Jewish world, but is rather, somehow, the cause of the Holocaust and of our current troubles. This skewed view of things, divorced from historical fact and logical reason, pervades sections of the religious world in America - and even here in Israel. That is why most children attending American Jewish day schools, yeshivot and seminaries are ignorant not only of Israel but of Hebrew, the Prophets, and Jewish history.

Rather, we have created for our coming generation a fanciful narrative of what once was and of what is supposed to now be. There is great danger in being an irrational people in a dangerous, inimical rational world. The prophets of Israel have warned us about this as well.
Shabat shalom

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Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Vayetzei

Our father Yaakov leaves his home, he who is accustomed to study, tranquility, and to “dwelling in tents,” and immediately finds himself alone and endangered in a hostile world. A rock is his pillow and he must erect barriers at night to protect himself from wild animals (both four and two footed) as he sleeps on the ground. Though he is reassured by Heaven and by his grand dream and vision it is clear to him that his future is still uncertain and fraught with dangers, peril and challenges.

When he finally arrives close to his destination he encounters the neighbors and daughters of Lavan who are unable to water their flocks because of the great rock that seals the opening to the well of water. The Torah then describes for us in great detail how Yaakov greets the people and the family of Lavan and in a selfless gesture of help and compassion to others - who he has just met - singlehandedly removes the rock from the mouth of the well.

It is interesting to note that the Torah lavishes a great deal of space and detail to this incident at the well while the Torah tells us nothing about the fourteen years of Yaakov's life that passed between his leaving home and arriving at the house of Lavan.

Rashi, quoting Midrash, tells us that Yaakov spent these fourteen years in spiritual study and personal growth at the yeshiva academy of Shem and Ever. So, if this is in fact the case, why does the Torah not tell us of this great feat of spiritual challenge and self-improvement – fourteen years of sleepless study - while it does seem to go into mystifying detail regarding the incident at the well of water? Certainly, it would seem that the years of study would have a greater impact on the life and persona of Yaakov than rolling a rock off of the mouth of a well would have had.

As we see throughout the book of Bereshith, if not indeed regarding all of the Torah generally, the Torah places utmost emphasis on the behavior that one exhibits towards other human beings. Not everyone can study for fourteen years in a yeshiva day and night. Yet everyone has the ability to care about others, to demand justice for the defenseless and to provide to the best of one's abilities help to those who so obviously need it.

Though Yaakov, like all of the great figures and founders of our people that appear here in Bereshith, is unique in spiritual stature and blessed with Divine visions and revelation, he is also essentially everyman. His actions are meant to be a template of attitude and behavior for his descendants and the people who bear his name.

The Torah, while making it clear that we can never personally be the equal of our ancestors in their exalted spiritual state and accomplishments, we can and should attempt to emulate their values and behavior. We can all help those in need to roll the rock off of their wells and thereby to nurture an environment where the Yaakov within all of us can grow and expand.

Shabat shalom

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Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Light in Dark Times

What is it that made Jacob – not Abraham or Isaac or Moses – the true father of the Jewish people? We are the “congregation of Jacob,” “the children of Israel.” Jacob/Israel is the man whose name we bear. Yet Jacob did not begin the Jewish journey; Abraham did. Jacob faced no trial like that of Isaac at the binding. He did not lead the people out of Egypt or bring them the Torah. To be sure, all his children stayed within the faith, unlike Abraham or Isaac. But that simply pushes the question back one level. Why did he succeed where Abraham and Isaac failed?

It seems that the answer lies in this week's parsha and the next. Jacob was the man whose greatest visions came to him when he was alone at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next. In this week's parsha, escaping from Esau, he stops and rests for the night with only stones to lie on and has an epiphany:

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it ... When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was

afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." (Gen. 28: 12-17)

In next week's parsha, fleeing from Laban and terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau again, he wrestles alone at night with an unnamed stranger.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome" ... So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." (Gen. 32: 29-31)

These are the decisive spiritual encounters of Jacob's life, yet they happen in liminal space (the space between that is neither starting point nor destination), at a time when Jacob was at risk in both directions, where he came from and where he was going to. Yet it was at these points of maximal vulnerability that he encountered God and found the courage to continue despite all the hazards of the journey.

That is the strength Jacob bequeathed the Jewish people. What is remarkable is not merely that this one tiny people survived tragedies that would have spelled the end of any other people: the destruction of two temples, the Babylonian and Roman conquests, the expulsions, persecutions and pogroms of the Middle Ages, the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth century Europe and the Holocaust. After each cataclysm, it renewed itself, scaling new heights of achievement.

During the Babylonian exile it deepened its engagement with the Torah. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem it produced the great literary monuments of the Oral Torah: Midrash, Mishnah and Gemara. During the Middle Ages it produced masterpieces of law and Torah commentary, poetry and philosophy. A mere three years after the Holocaust it proclaimed the state of Israel, the Jewish return to history after the darkest night of exile.

When I became Chief Rabbi I had to undergo a medical examination. The doctor put me on a treadmill, walking at a very brisk pace. "What are you testing?" I asked him. "How fast I can go, or how long?" "Neither," he replied. "What I am testing is how long it takes, when you come off the treadmill, for your pulse to return to normal." That is when I discovered that health is measured by the power of recovery. That is true for everyone, but doubly so for leaders and for the Jewish people, a nation of leaders (that, I believe, is what the phrase "a kingdom of priests" means).

Leaders suffer crises. That is a given of leadership. When Harold Macmillan, prime minister of Britain between 1957 and 1963, was asked what was the most difficult aspect of his time in office, he replied, "Events, dear boy, events." Bad things happen, and when they do, the leader must take the strain so that others can sleep easily in their beds. Leadership, especially in matters of the spirit, is deeply stressful. Four figures in Tanakh – Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah – actually pray to die rather than continue. Nor was this true only in the distant past. Abraham Lincoln suffered deep bouts of depression. So did Churchill, who called it his "black dog." Gandhi and Martin Luther King both attempted suicide in adolescence and experienced depressive illness in adult life. The same was true of many great creative artists, among them Michelangelo, Beethoven and Van Gogh.

Is it greatness that leads to moments of despair, or moments of despair that lead to greatness? Is it that those who lead internalize the stresses and tensions of their time? Or is it that those who are used to stress in their emotional lives find release in leading exceptional lives? There is no convincing answer to this in the literature thus far. But Jacob was a more emotionally volatile individual than either Abraham, who was often serene even in the face of great trials, or Isaac who was more than usually withdrawn. Jacob feared; Jacob loved; Jacob spent more of his time in exile than the other patriarchs. But Jacob endured and persisted. Of all the figures in Genesis, he is the great survivor.

The ability to survive and to recover is part of what it takes to be a leader. It is the willingness to live a life of risks that makes such

individuals different from others. So said Theodor Roosevelt in one of the greatest speeches ever made on the subject:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. (Theodor Roosevelt, Speech at the Sorbonne, April 23, 1910)

Jacob endured the rivalry of Esau, the resentment of Laban, the tension between his wives and children, the early death of his beloved Rachel and the loss, for twenty-two years, of his favourite son Joseph. He said to Pharaoh, "Few and hard have been the years of my life" (Gen. 47: 9). Yet on the way he "encountered" angels, and whether they were wrestling with him or climbing the ladder to heaven they lit the night with the aura of transcendence.

To try, to fall, to fear, and yet to keep going: that is what it takes to be a leader. That was Jacob, the man who at the lowest ebbs of his life had his greatest visions of heaven.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Vayeitzei
For the week ending 9 November 2013 / 6 Kislev 5774
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Waiting to Rust

"Then Rachel and Leah replied and said to him, 'Have we then still a share and an inheritance in our fathers house? Are we not considered as strangers? So whatever G-d has said to you, do'." (31:14-16)

There's a widespread misunderstanding about why people are religious. It runs something like this. Okay. I'm prepared to sacrifice something of my pleasure in this world so that I can get a piece of the action in the next. I don't mind refraining from the occasional BLT or McDonalds, because I believe the Big Macs are bigger on the 'other side'.

Even those of us who like to think of ourselves as religious, if questioned, may subscribe to this line of thinking.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

A person should feel that he is giving nothing up of this world because this world has nothing to give him.

Let me give you an example:

Tuesday morning. You finally get the call. You've waited for two full months. And now it's here. Your champagne-metallic luxury turbodeisel 4x4 has arrived at the car dealer. Your heartbeat leaps to 120 beats a minute. Your mouth dries up. You jump into the nearest taxi and sit there lost in the glow of expectation. You arrive at the showroom. The car dealer hands you the keys. This is the moment you've been waiting for. You slide behind the wheel. The smell of leather and "new car" is more potent than the latest Paris perfume. You turn the key and the engine purrs into life. You ease the car out of the parking lot and cruise down the main drag of the city real slow.

Riding a wild set of wheels at an easy pace.

Phew!

A couple of months later, you've already scratched the champagne metallic paint in more than a few places, and the front fender shows the battle scars of a shopping expedition to the mall.

Why can't new cars stay new? What happens to that smell of new-car? Does the factory send out a fragrance recall on it? And what happens to the feeling of new car? Why does it always turn into a gas-guzzling insurance-eating rusting heap? Nothing in this world that is solely of this world brings you real happiness. Compare this to the feeling that comes from praying, even with a little bit of concentration. Most of us, at some time or another, have had this beautiful experience. And that feeling is second only to the feeling of learning Torah that's the most exquisite experience in the world. And it's a genuine pleasure that stays with you. Not like this week's new purchase that fills you with pride and desire and then comes to collect from you a heavy debt, both physically and spiritually. "Then Rachel and Leah replied and said to him, 'Have we then still a share and an inheritance in our fathers house? Are we not considered as strangers? So whatever G-d has said to you, do'."

You could very easily misunderstand what Rachel and Leah meant by the above statement. You could very easily think that they were saying that the only reason to do what G-d said was because they had no share or inheritance in their father's house, that they were considered as strangers, but if that were not the case, then Yaakov should not do what G-d said!

What Rachel and Leah were really saying was that they understood that leaving their father's house was in no way a sacrifice for them. For they felt estranged from everything that Lavan's house represented.

Life's true pleasure is to be close to G-d. Everything else is like a pile of steel waiting to rust.

Based on Lev Eliyahu

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Vayeitzei

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz, a"

"The Thankful Jew"

He may or may not have been an anti-Semite, but he sure was an abrasive personality. He was my seat mate on an Amtrak train, returning to Baltimore from New York some years ago.

As I recall, it was at the end of a particularly long and grueling day for me. I had a series of rabbinical meetings, delivered a talk during lunch which provided me no opportunity to eat, and was involved in an unsuccessful attempt to keep the marriage of a young couple from breaking up. I was looking forward to the respite of some quiet time on the return trip to my home in Baltimore, but even that luxury was denied to me that evening.

I sat down, as I always try to do, in the window seat. This fellow entered the railroad car, and walked past me in search of a seat for himself. There were several seats that he could have chosen, but for some reason he returned to where I was sitting, glared at me, and sat down with a gesture of dissatisfaction.

I immediately sensed that I would not experience the peaceful train ride that I had anticipated. I tried burying my head in the book I was reading, but that was not sufficient insulation from my neighbor's insistence upon conversation.

"You are obviously Jewish," he began. "Your yarmulke for one thing is a dead giveaway. Plus, I see that you are reading a Hebrew book."

Of course, I admitted to being Jewish and slanted my book in his direction so that he could verify that it was indeed in Hebrew. I asked him, as I typically do in such conversations, whether he was Jewish.

I can only describe his instant response by saying that he snorted. "Look, buddy," he growled. "I've got my bunch of problems and burdens, but being Jewish is thankfully not one of them."

I was at a loss as to what to say next, but there was something about his use of the word "thankfully" that prompted me to comment to him: "But surely you have other things to be thankful for besides not being Jewish."

He seemed to be taken aback, having expected some defensive statement on my part, or perhaps some indication that I was offended. I was hoping that I succeeded at changing the topic from my Jewishness to his life and the things he had be thankful for.

It worked. That is, at least for a while. He went on to say that he didn't have much to be thankful for, although he was happily married, had several children, and held a well-paying job. He also insisted that these beneficial facets of his life were merely the result of good fortune and did not call for any expression of thanks on his part.

He then pressed on with his almost obsessive interest in my Jewishness. "You seem to be proud of the fact that you are a Jew. Why? What is it about you Jews that makes you want to wear your Jewishness on the outside? Why do you dress so differently, and why you persist in reading those old-fashioned books in that outdated language?"

I was about to launch into a major lecture but restrained myself from doing so, knowing full well that my efforts would be in vain. As I hesitated, pondering my next move, he surprised me.

"Forget those questions," he said. "Instead, give me an answer to the following question. It is one that I've asked many Jews before, but none were able to give me a satisfactory answer. My question is: What does the word 'Jew' mean? What is its origin, and what is its significance?"

Once again, the word "thankful" proved useful. I responded that the word "Jew" in English is related to the word "Jude" in German, which in turn derives from the Hebrew word "Judah," one of the ancestors of the Jewish people.

I then asked him whether or not he was familiar with the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. His face, which up until this point projected hostility, suddenly took on a different aspect. His facial muscles seemed to relax at first, and then his eyes clouded over with tears.

"Are you kidding? I was the child of a preacher whose father was a preacher before him. We read from the Bible at the dinner table and studied it regularly every single day. I grew up resenting the Bible and all that it stood for, although I remember much of it against my will. I guess one can't forget words that were ingrained in him since his childhood."

I now had my opening. And this is the connection to this week's Torah reading, Parshat Vayeitzei (Genesis 28:10-32:3). "Then you must remember the stories of Genesis. Do you recall the passage in which Leah names her children? Do you remember the name she gave to her fourth son?"

The words came out of his mouth as they would from a recording: "Genesis 30:35: And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, 'This time I will praise the Lord.' Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing."

He looked at me with a big grin, his face finally indicating a small measure of friendship. "Impressive, wouldn't you say? I remember every word. I even remember Grandpa explaining that 'Judah' sounds like the Hebrew for 'praise.'"

I responded by congratulating him for his excellent memory and further remarked that he had his old Grandpa to thank for his biblical expertise. I indicated that Leah's reaction to her fourth child's birth was usually translated in our tradition as, "This time I will thank the Lord".

"Now you have your answer. We are called Jews because of our ancestor, Judah, whose very name means to praise, or to thank. By definition, the Jew is a person who feels thankful, who expresses gratitude for all his blessings to the Almighty, who provides those blessings to other humans without whose help those blessings would never be realized."

He didn't seem convinced. "Why then," he pressed on, "is it so hard to feel thankful and ever so much more difficult to express it?"

I told them that to answer that question, I would have to give him a further lesson in the Hebrew language. I explained to him that the word *hoda'ah*, while it is the Hebrew word for thanks, it is also the Hebrew word for admission or confession. I went on to explain something to him that I had learned in the writings of Rabbi Isaac Hutner, who taught that when we are thankful to another person, we are in effect admitting that we couldn't do it alone but were dependent upon the other person for the favor.

Gratitude to God entails the recognition of one's own insufficiency and the confession that without God, we would not have achieved that which we are grateful for.

"It is difficult to be thankful," I concluded, "because it is difficult to admit to ourselves that alone we are inadequate and must always rely upon the Divine or the human to achieve whatever we wish to achieve in life. We don't like to admit that we need another, that we can't 'go at it alone.'"

At that point, the train was fast approaching Wilmington, Delaware. My companion was about to get off. He didn't say goodbye and certainly did not thank me for my words.

But he did give me a small bit of satisfaction. He said: "You're different from other Jews. You actually make sense."

I spent the rest of the train ride pondering the adequacy of my responses to this stranger and feeling thankful to the Almighty for giving me the words I needed to earn this dubious compliment.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

**Drasha Parshas Vayeitzei
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Brothers in Scorn**

Yaakov's first encounter with his future wife Rachel was significant, encompassing varied emotions, each of which merits lengthy discussion. Upon greeting her at a well, Yaakov feeds her sheep, kisses her, cries, and then identifies himself as the brother of her father. (Genesis 29:11-12)

Such classification needs explanation. Yaakov was not a brother of Rachel's father Lavan: he was a nephew, the son of Lavan's sister, Rivka.

Why, then, did Yaakov refer to himself as a brother of Lavan? The Talmud in Megilah explains that Lavan's notorious reputation preceded him. He was nicknamed Lavan HaArami, or Lavan the charlatan. He was known not only to be avaricious, but to be unscrupulous as well. Yaakov wanted to lay the ground rules with his future bride.

"If your father will act conniving then I am his brother [meaning, I will act conniving as well]. However, if he will act honorably I will respond in kind."

What needs clarification, however, is why begin a marital relationship on such a note. What precedent is Yaakov setting with such a powerful declaration?

Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1887-1933) was a leader of Polish Jewry in the years before World War II. In addition to being the chief Rabbi of Lublin, building and maintaining one of the world's largest and most beautiful yeshivos, Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin, he was also one of the first Orthodox members of the Polish parliament, the Sejm. He was a courageous leader whose vision and unwavering commitment to Torah values gained him the respect of Jews and gentiles alike. During his first weeks as the leader of the Orthodox Jewish delegation, Rabbi Shapiro was approached by a Polish parliamentary deputy, Professor Lutoslawski, a known anti-Semite whose devious legislation constantly deprived minorities of their civil and economic rights.

Standing in front of a group parliamentarians in the halls of the Sejm, the deprived deputy began. "Rabbi," he shouted, a sly smile spreading across his evil face. "I have a wonderful new way for Jews to make a living -- they can skin dead dogs." Without missing a beat Rabbi Shapiro shot back. "Impossible, their representatives would never allow it."

The Professor looked puzzled. "Whose representatives? The Jews?"

"No," smiled Rav Meir, "the dogs' deputies."

Flustered, the vicious bigot tried one more. "Well, my dear Rabbi," he continued sarcastically. "Do you know that on the entrance gate of the city of Schlesien there is an inscription, 'to Jews and dogs entrance forbidden?'"

Rabbi Meir just shrugged his shoulders. "If so, I guess we will never be able to visit that city together."

Needless to say, nary an anti-Semitic word was ever pointed in Rabbi Meir's direction again.

Yaakov knew that to initiate his destiny in the confines of a hostile environment he should proclaim the rules loud and clear. He would not allow himself to be swayed, duped, or connived by even the master of deception and ridicule, Lavan the charlatan. In forging the household that would be the basis for Jewish pride and eternity, Yaakov had to make it clear to his future bride that he too could play hardball. He sent a message of pride and awareness to his descendants. Though this Jew who sat in the tent would enter his new environment with brotherly love, if he needed to, he could just as well be a brother in scorn.

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series.

Questions or comments? Email feedback@torah.org. Project Genesis, Inc.

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/>

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites

Parshat Vayetze

By Shmuel Rabinowitz

Withstanding a negative environment

Ya'acov's behavior there can teach us about the lifestyle that affects each and every one of us.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayetze, we read about Ya'acov's lifestyle in Haran, the place he came to when he escaped from his brother Esau.

Ya'acov's behavior there can teach us about the lifestyle that affects each and every one of us.

Ya'acov was in essence "an innocent man, a dweller in tents," described as someone guided by values of honesty and justice in every aspect of his life and someone with a very high work ethic. This is what Ya'acov tells his father-in-law,

Lavan: "Already 20 years have I been with you... I was [in the field] by day when the heat consumed me, and the frost at night, and my sleep wandered from my eyes." (Genesis 31, 38 – 40) With these words, Ya'acov describes how dedicated he was to his work for Lavan. During the day and at night, in the heat and the cold, he was dedicated to herding Lavan's herds for which he was responsible and he did not allow himself to rest.

This sort of behavior would make a good impression on us even if it had happened in a place where this was the accepted norm. But alongside the Torah's description of Ya'acov's behavior, we are given a description of the other shepherds in Haran, where Lavan lived, and it is easy to discern the low level of the work ethic accepted there.

Ya'acov appears at the outskirts of Haran in the afternoon.

At the entrance to the city, he meets the shepherds relaxing with their herds around the well. A large stone blocked the opening of the well, but the shepherds did not even consider getting up to water their herd: "And he looked, and behold! A well in the field, and behold! Three flocks of sheep lying beside it, because from that well they would water the flocks, and a huge rock was upon the mouth of the well." (Genesis 29, 2) Ya'acov cannot control himself and he explains to them what the desired behavior should be, based on his own values which are so different from theirs: "And he said, "The day is yet long; it is not the time to take in the livestock. Water the sheep and go, pasture." (Genesis 29, 7) Ya'acov functioned in this environment for 20 years; in a society where afternoon idleness was normative and accepted, but he was not affected by it. This is worthy of admiration.

And still, we might think that the reason Ya'acov acted this way was due to the values he encountered at the home of his employer, Lavan. But Lavan is described in the Torah as someone very far from values of justice and honesty. Ya'acov complains to Lavan about his negative behavior at exactly this point: "This is 20 years that I have spent in your house. I served you... and you changed my wages 10 times 10 times." (Genesis 31, 41) Lavan is a legendary cheater who does not miss an opportunity to cheat Ya'acov. He does not only cheat Ya'acov financially but also in the most personal and sensitive areas. After Ya'acov worked for seven years to be able to marry Rachel, Lavan cheats him and gives him Leah instead of Rachel.

This is intolerable, almost inhuman, deceit. This was Ya'acov's environment, a society in which the values of honesty and justice do not have any standing. Deceit and bad work ethic ruled every corner, and despite all this, Ya'acov was not affected and he continued to cling to his values and behave according to them. From where did Ya'acov attain this strength of character? The answer to this question is hinted at in the beginning of the parsha.

On his way to Haran, Ya'acov put his head down on one of the rocks to sleep for the night. G-d appeared to him in his dream, and promised him: "And behold, I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go." Ya'acov wakes up from his sleep and understands that he is in a special place: And he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28, 17) Our sages explained Ya'acov's words and revealed to us that the place where G-d revealed Himself to Ya'acov in the dream was actually the Temple Mount in Jerusalem upon which the Temple was built centuries later.

Ya'acov got his tremendous spiritual strength and will power from this special site and from the strength of the Divine promise he was given there.

He was empowered to stand strong and not retreat from his positive values even when faced with an entire society which scorned those very values while seeing deceit and idleness as the preferred lifestyle. He absorbed values from this place, the understanding of where he came from and to where he was going, and the way of life which he should maintain.

Until today, thousands of years after Ya'acov's call, men and women, old and young, Jews and non-Jews come to the Western Wall, the supporting wall of the Temple Mount, and each in his own way cries out – "This is the gate of heaven!"

Just like Ya'acov Avinu, we must absorb the values of honesty and justice from this place, and the ability to cope and succeed. The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites. All rights reserved © 1995 - 2012 The Jerusalem Post.

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**Rav Kook on the Torah Portion
Vayeitzei: The Blessing of a Scholar's Presence**

After working at Laban's ranch for 14 years, Jacob was anxious to return home, to the Land of Israel. Laban, however, was not eager to let his nephew go. "I have observed the signs," he told Jacob, "and God has blessed me for your sake" (Gen. 30:27).

The Talmud (Berachot 42a) points out that Laban's good fortune was not due only to Jacob's industriousness and hard work. "Blessing comes in the wake of a Torah scholar," the Sages taught. The very presence of a saintly scholar brings with it blessings of success and wealth.

Yet, this phenomenon seems unfair. Why should a person be blessed just because he was in the proximity of a Torah scholar?

The Influence of a Tzaddik

To answer this question, we must understand the nature of a tzaddik and his profound impact on those around him. The presence of a Torah scholar will inspire even a morally corrupt individual to limit his destructive acts. As a result of this positive influence, material benefits will not be abused, and divine blessings will be utilized appropriately. Such an individual, by virtue of a refining influence, has become an appropriate recipient for God's blessings.

In addition to the case of Laban and Jacob, the Talmud notes a second example of "Blessing coming in the wake of a Torah scholar." The Torah relates that the prosperity of the Egyptian officer Potiphar was in Joseph's merit (Gen. 39:5). In some aspects, this case is more remarkable.

Unlike Laban, Potiphar was not even aware of the source of his good fortune. Nonetheless, Joseph's presence helped raise the ethical level of the Egyptian's household, making it more suitable to receive God's blessings.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 187-188)

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The Unfair Fare

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In this week's parsha, our forefather Yaakov must learn to deal with a dishonest person, without compromising his own integrity.

It had already been a really tough day. Now, on top of that, Mrs. Gartenhaus (all names in this story have been changed) was very unhappy with the cab driver she had hailed. Aside from his discourteous behavior, she sensed a certain shadiness to his personality. She just couldn't wait to get home and get out of his vehicle.

To complicate everything, on her way home Mrs. Gartenhaus realized that she had no more money in her wallet -- and she also realized that Mr. Gartenhaus would not be home from his chavrusa for a while. She really did not want to disturb his learning just because she had forgotten to bring enough money for the cab home. But what was she to do?

She wondered whether one of the neighbors might be home, and whether she could remember their phone numbers. Sure enough, Mrs. Horowitz's phone number popped into her head -- if only she were home. Mrs. G. dialed the number on her cell phone, and Baruch Hashem, Mrs. Horowitz answered! Mrs. G. quickly explained her predicament, and Mrs. Horowitz answered, "No problem. I have a 100 shekel bill in my wallet. That will be more than enough for your fare."

Mrs. G. breathed an audible sigh of relief. "The fare should actually not be more than 40 shekalim, so I don't need to borrow that much," she told Mrs. Horowitz.

"I happened to check my wallet this morning and noticed that I have only one single 100 shekel bill," Mrs. H. replied. "But feel free to borrow it. I have to go to the bank later today, anyway, to withdraw some money. I'll send my daughter Channie outside to meet your cab."

Mrs. Horowitz asked 13-year-old Channie to fetch the bill from her wallet and meet Mrs. Gartenhaus's cab. Mrs. G., who was very relieved to escape the sleazy driver's vehicle, paid little attention to the bill that

she transferred from Channie's hand to the cabby's outstretched paw.

Before receiving her change, she gratefully began to exit the cab.

"One minute," the driver shouted gruffly, brandishing a 20 shekel bill in his hand, "You owe me another 20 shekalim!"

Mrs. Gartenhaus was at a loss. She assumed that Channie had given her the 100 shekel note her mother promised, but maybe there was some mistake. In the meantime, Channie had returned home, the driver was hissing, and Mrs. G. just wanted to get home and climb into bed.

Noticing one of her neighbors on the curb, she embarrassingly called out the window, "Do you, perhaps, have 20 shekels I can borrow?" Having successfully borrowed the additional 20 shekels, she paid the cabbie, and struggled into her house. Meanwhile, she was trying to figure out what went wrong in her communication with her wonderful neighbor. Mrs. Horowitz. And, only later, did she realize that she should have taken down the cabby's license number and the name of his company.

After resting a while, she called Mrs. Horowitz to ask her if she could send one of her children over in order to repay her loan. "By the way, how much money did you send with Channie?" She inquired.

"I sent 100 shekel," came the swift reply. "Why? Was there some problem?"

Mrs. G. told Mrs. Horowitz what had happened. "I'll check with Channie, but I am pretty certain that I had only one 100 shekel bill in my wallet."

Channie confirmed that she had found only one 100 shekel bill in the wallet.

How much must Mrs. Gartenhaus pay back to Mrs. Horowitz?

Does Channie have any legal responsibilities in this case?

Mrs. Horowitz called Rav Cohen to ask how much Mrs. Gartenhaus owes her. Although it might seem like an open-and-shut case, the halacha is anything but obvious, as we will see.

Rav Cohen mullied over the case, thinking over the complicated halachic topics this event encompasses. Clearly, both women want to do what is correct. Is it clear that Mrs. Gartenhaus owes 100 shekalim?

Legally, in this case, the claimant, usually called the plaintiff, is Mrs. Horowitz. She is placing a claim that Mrs. Gartenhaus borrowed 100 shekalim that Channie delivered. Mrs. Gartenhaus' response is that she does not know how much money she borrowed. It might seem that Mrs. G. has a very weak defense: After all, Mrs. Horowitz is making a definite claim that Mrs. Gartenhaus owes her 100 shekalim, while Mrs. Gartenhaus' only response is that she did not pay attention.

Halachically, Mrs. Horowitz's position is called a bari, a person with a definite claim. Mrs. Gartenhaus' response that she is unaware how much she owes makes her a shema, a defendant stating that she is uncertain. This case is the subject of a Talmudic dispute. Here is one case where this question is discussed:

Reuven borrowed a cow from Shimon and also rented a different cow. One of the cows died in a way that would make Reuven liable if he had borrowed it, but he would not have to pay if it was rented. Unfortunately, Reuven does not remember which cow was borrowed and which was rented, but Shimon is certain that the dead cow is the one that was borrowed and that Reuven is obligated to pay. Must Reuven compensate Shimon for the dead cow?

The halacha is that bari ve'shema lav bari adif, the certain claim of the bari is insufficient on its own to win the case. This rule is true even in a case where the shema should have known for certain whether the claim against him is valid, as in the situation of the dead cow (Bava Metziah 97b). Therefore, Reuven does not have to pay for the dead cow.

Applying the principal to our case, it could be that Mrs. Horowitz would have to prove that she loaned 100 shekalim in order to require Mrs. Gartenhaus to pay the full amount. But this is true only when the claim is challenged.

Ah, but you'll tell me, Mrs. Horowitz has a witness on her side which Shimon did not have. Channie can testify that the loan was indeed 100 shekalim!

By now, the yeshiva minds among us are racing with valid reasons why Channie's testimony is insufficient to prove her mother's case. Firstly, a single witness is not enough. Secondly, Channie is related to one of the interested parties. Furthermore, Channie herself is an interested party, *nogei'ah be'eidus*, in the litigation. If she denies that she received a 100 shekel bill from her mother, she exposes herself to a lawsuit from her mother claiming that she received money as an agent for which she cannot account. Although the likelihood of Mrs. Horowitz suing her own daughter for 100 shekalim is slim, it is still sufficient reason for Channie to be considered a *nogei'ah be'eidus*, making her testimony inadmissible.

Mrs. Horowitz has not yet exhausted her legal approaches. She may still stake a claim against Mrs. Gartenhaus, based on either of the following reasons:

1. *Modeh bemiktzas*. Mrs. Gartenhaus agrees that she borrowed money, but is challenging the amount of the loan. The Gemara calls this *modeh bemiktzas*, acknowledging part of a claim. The Torah requires someone who acknowledges part of a claim, and denies part, to swear an oath he does not owe the balance (Bava Metzia 3a et al.). If he does not want to swear, he must pay the balance of the claim.
2. *Shevuas hesses*. Based on Mrs. Horowitz's definite claim that Mrs. Gartenhaus owes her 100 shekalim, Mrs. H. can insist that Mrs. G. swear an oath denying that she owes money. The Gemara calls this *shevuas hesses*, an oath to discourage defendants from denying claims that lack sufficient evidence (Shevuos 40b; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 87:1).

We will examine each of these legal arguments. In the first argument, *modeh bemiktzas*, Mrs. Horowitz is claiming 100 shekalim. Mrs. Gartenhaus acknowledges that she owes 20 shekalim, but is uncertain about the remaining 80 shekalim. Thus, to fulfill the Torah's requirement to swear an oath, Mrs. Gartenhaus would have to swear that she definitely does not owe more than 20 shekalim, something she cannot do. What is the halacha in this situation?

The Gemara discusses this exact case: Reuven claimed that Shimon owed him 100 dinarim. Shimon responds, "I know that I owe you fifty, but I do not know about the other fifty." Is Shimon obligated to swear on the remaining balance? And if so, what does he swear?

The Gemara rules that since Shimon cannot swear that he does not owe the balance, he is obligated to pay the full 100 dinarim (Bava Metzia 98a).

Thus, Mrs. Horowitz seems to have her case wrapped up. Mrs. Gartenhaus cannot swear that she definitely does not owe 80 shekalim. Consequently, she should be required to pay the full 100 shekalim. Except for one detail: Has Mrs. Gartenhaus paid back the 20 shekalim? If she already paid back 20 shekalim, the case is halachically different. Now, Mrs. Horowitz is claiming 80 shekalim and Mrs. Gartenhaus is denying the entire claim. Thus, Mrs. G. is no longer *modeh bemiktzas*, someone who acknowledges part of the claim, but *kofeir hakol*, someone denying the entire claim. Although it may seem that there is not much difference between the two scenarios, halachically someone who acknowledges part of a claim must swear an oath *min haTorah*, whereas someone who denies the entire claim does not. The rationale for this distinction is beyond the scope of this article (Bava Metzia 3a).

This is where the other type of oath, *shevuas hesses*, comes into play. Since Mrs. Horowitz claims that Mrs. Gartenhaus definitely owes her 80 shekalim, she can insist that Mrs. G. swear an oath about the claim. But one minute! Either way, there would be a technical responsibility to swear an oath. What is the difference whether Mrs. Gartenhaus is being asked to swear a oath because of *modeh bemiktzas* or as a *shevuas hesses*? Either way, there is an oath that she cannot swear!

However, there is a significant difference in halacha between the two oaths, which makes a big practical halachic difference in our case. If the oath is *min haTorah*, the fact that Mrs. G. cannot swear for certain to deny the claim works against her, as we explained above. However, if the oath is of the *hesses* variety, it is sufficient for Mrs. Gartenhaus to swear that she is unaware how much she owes (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 87:1). Thus, Mrs. Horowitz cannot insist that Mrs. Gartenhaus pay her the full sum. She must be satisfied with 20 shekalim and an oath from Mrs. Gartenhaus that she truthfully does not know how much she borrowed.

Rav Cohen reflected over the fact that *batei din* do not usually insist on oaths, but instead will suggest some form of compromise. Not that these two well-meaning ladies were about to pursue this matter in a *beis din* setting -- they are two fine ladies who want to do what is halachically correct.

The Rav asked Mrs. Horowitz to have Mrs. Gartenhaus give him a phone call.

The phone rings. Mrs. G. is on the phone. Rav Cohen asks her what happened, to see if the versions substantiate one another. They do. And it is also clear that Mrs. Gartenhaus wants to do what is correct.

"Is it true that you told Mrs. Horowitz that I don't have to pay her back?" asked Mrs. G. "I feel really guilty about that. I can't imagine that just because I didn't pay attention to how much money Channie gave me that she should be out 80 shekalim."

"Actually, I was simply pointing out that the halacha is not obvious," replied the rav. "In fact, however, someone who wants to be certain that he has done the *mitzvah* correctly (*ba latzeis yedei shamayim*) should pay back a full 100 shekalim (Bava Kamma 118a). Thus, the correct thing to do is to offer her the full amount."

Mrs. Gartenhaus paid the money in full, and as you can imagine, she never heard from the cabby again. Besides the halacha principles gleaned from her story, an added lesson is to check before handing over a bill, especially to an unscrupulous cab driver!