

Weekly Parsha VAYETZEI 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In a few weeks, we will read in the Torah that the brothers of Joseph referred to him almost derisively as being the master of dreams. Yet we see in this week's reading that it is our father Jacob who is really the master of dreams.

Two of Yaakov's major dreams are recorded for us, and it is obvious from the story of his life that Yaakov is constantly guided and influenced by the dreams that he dreamt when he left the home of his parents and journeyed to an alien society.

Dreams are one of the most provocative and mysterious events that occur to human beings. They come to us on almost a daily or nightly basis. Early psychiatry held that dreams would be key to understanding human personality and reflect the emotional and mental stresses that exist in human life. The correct interpretation of dreams, according to this theory, help solve mental health disorders or, at the very least, help to diagnose them, so that perhaps they might be treated.

The Talmud teaches us that those dreams have the quality of being a minor type of prophecy. There is an entire chapter in the Talmud devoted to explanations and interpretations of dreams. The Torah itself teaches us that prophecy itself, except for the prophecy of Moshe, was always communicated through the medium of the subconscious and dreams.

Appreciating all of this will help us understand the story of Jacob and his survival in the house of Lavan. What is the secret of the strengths that Yaakov exhibits in being able to resist the culture of Aram and the influence of the house of Lavan? Jacob never forgets the dream of the ladder stretching from earth to heaven, of the angels, and of the message of God himself reassuring him of his protection and survival.

Dreams often become reality to the dreamer. And when they do, a great new force of self-confidence is given to the dreamer. There are dreams that we immediately forget upon awakening in the morning, and there are some dreams that remain with us, but they also usually are of limited influence, and after a length of time, they also disappear. It is only a great dream, perhaps even one that has frightening aspects to it, that remains embedded in our memory and consciousness. And it is this type of the dream that

influences our behavior and drives us forward in our lives. This dream encompasses our ambitions, our energy, our creativity, and our direction in life. It becomes the source of our hopes, and the source of our disappointments, as well as our achievements and our shortcomings.

Our father Jacob is really the great dreamer of the family, who keeps the tradition of the Jewish people. He never seeks to escape his dream, but rather, devotes his entire life and being toward its realization and actualization.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayetze (Genesis 28:10-32:3)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed” (Gen. 28:12-13).

Dreams have a unique capacity to inspire us to aim higher, to remain focused on a distant goal even when the present circumstances give us little reason for optimism. But what happens when the gap between dream and reality seems insurmountably vast? Jacob's dreams throughout this week's Torah reading of Vayetze shine a bright light on this question, and offer important insights into his evolution as a person, as well as lessons about his descendants' mission in the world and destiny as a nation.

Jacob begins his journey from his father's home into exile with the loftiest of dreams: a ladder rooted in the ground while reaching up to the heavens with angels ascending and descending upon it. This visual symbolizes his and his descendants' Divine mandate: even in exile, to unify heaven and earth so that the Divine Presence can be manifest in the world.

Unfortunately, something goes awry along the way, as Jacob's long sojourn with his father-in-law Laban has a corrupting influence on him. In order to hold his own with his devious employer, Jacob perfects the art

of deception, and in time, the bright nephew even out-Labans his clever uncle, becoming wealthy in his own right.

It must be said that Jacob has not completely forgotten the traditions of his youth, despite the distance from his parents' home: "With Laban have I dwelt, and the 613 commandments have I kept" (Rashi on Genesis 32:5) is what Jacob reports after the ordeal has passed. Although it may be true that, technically speaking, he has remained faithful to his roots, his focus of concentration has become the livestock on earth rather than the stars of the heavens.

Indeed, Laban has certainly corrupted his aspirations. Just look at his new dream after a period in Laban-land: "And I saw in a dream and behold, rams that leapt upon the sheep were speckled, spotted and striped" (ibid. 31:10). Jacob now dreams of material success devoid of any spiritual component.

It is upon coming to this spiritual nadir that he soon receives the life trajectory-changing command of the Divine messengers: "I have seen everything that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Beit El...now rise, leave this land and return to the land of your birthplace" (ibid. v. 13). In other words, leave the land of obsession with materialism. Return to the land – and to the dream – of your forefathers, who walked with God!

More than twenty years in the prime of one's life is a significant period. Jacob must have been devastated when he realized what had become of him and his dreams. He must have seen himself as an abject failure. He must have questioned whether he would ever succeed in achieving his original aspirations. He knows he must leave Laban before it is too late.

When he leaves Laban's home, with his large family in tow, he has a third dream, even more momentous than those that preceded it: "And Jacob went on his way and he was met there by angels of God...and he called the name of that place Mahanayim (Divine encampments of God's messengers)" (Genesis 32:2-3).

This dream, which concludes Parshat Vayetze, is a parallel to the one that opened the reading, with Jacob again meeting angels of God. This time, however, there is no ladder; but instead two distinct encampments, family compounds, one outside Israel and the other in Israel.

The message is dramatic: uniting heaven and earth requires more than ascending a spiritual ladder. It also requires making an impact on the world around us by

building a family dedicated to God and Torah in the Land of Israel – and not to materialism in Laban's house of exile.

The fact that Jacob somehow manages to return to Israel – despite the inertia of habit and the comforts of his home in exile – is the reason, I believe, why he is called the 'chosen among the patriarchs' (Midrash Rabbah 76:1 on Genesis). Whereas Abraham obeys the Divine command to come to the land, and Isaac never leaves the land, Jacob returns to this land despite the sibling conflict that awaited him there.

Did Jacob's return to Israel mark the end of his difficulties and challenges? Certainly not. And so it is with his descendants. Disappointments and setbacks are inevitable, in a world still divided between the holy and the profane, the religious and the secular.

But if we keep our sights focused on preserving our Jewish heritage into future generations; if we wish to live a holistic Jewish life whose civic experience is guided by the Jewish calendar, and if our national dream is to create a society able to merge heaven and earth, then the only place where this can happen is in the land of our dreams and destiny, the Land of Israel. It is the land promised by God to Israel, the earth whose sacred gravestones below and whose dedicated mountain tops above are that very ladder which connects the human with the Divine, and the Jew to his eternal dream of a united world.

Shabbat Shalom!

Time for Love, Time for Justice (Vayetse)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Judaism is supremely a religion of love: three loves.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deut. 6:5);

"You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Lev. 19:18);

And

"You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in a strange land." (Deut. 10:19)[1]

Not only is Judaism a religion of love. It was also the first civilisation to place love at the centre of the moral life. C. S. Lewis and others pointed out that all great civilisations contain something like the golden rule – Act toward others as you would wish them to act toward you,[2] or, in Hillel's negative formulation: Don't do to others what you would hate them to do to you. (Shabbat 31a) This is what Game Theorists call

reciprocal altruism or tit-for-tat. Some form of this altruism, (especially the variant devised by Martin Nowak of Harvard called “generous”) has been proven by computer simulation to be the best strategy for the survival of any group.[3]

Judaism is also about justice. Albert Einstein spoke about the “almost fanatical love of justice” that made him thank his lucky stars that he was born a Jew.[4] The only place in the Torah to explain why Abraham was chosen to be the founder of a new faith states, “For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” (Gen. 18:19) So why this combination of justice and love? Why is love alone not enough?

Our parsha contains a gripping passage of only a few words that gives us the answer. Recall the background: Jacob, fleeing home, is taking refuge with his uncle Laban. He falls in love with Rachel, Laban’s younger daughter, and works for seven years so that he can marry her. A deception is practised on him, and when he wakes up the morning after their wedding night, he discovers that he has married Rachel’s elder sister Leah. Livid, he confronts Laban. Laban replies: “It is not done in our place to marry the younger before the elder.” (Gen. 29:26) He tells Jacob he can marry Rachel as well, in return for another seven years of work.

We then read, or rather hear, a series of very poignant words. To understand their impact, we have to recall that in ancient times until the invention of printing there were few books. Until then most people (other than those standing at the bimah) heard the Torah in the synagogue. They did not see it in print. The phrase *Keriat ha-Torah* really means, not reading the Torah but proclaiming it, making it a public declaration.[5]

There is a fundamental difference between reading and hearing in the way we process information. Reading, we can see the entire text – the sentence, the paragraph – at one time. Hearing, we cannot. We hear only one word at a time, and we do not know in advance how a sentence or paragraph will end. Some of the most powerful literary effects in an oral culture occur when the opening words of a sentence lead us to expect one ending and instead we encounter another.

These are the poignant words we hear:

“And he [Jacob] loved also Rachel.” (Gen. 29:30)

This is what we expected and hoped for. Jacob now has two wives, sisters, something that will be forbidden in later Jewish law. It is a situation fraught

with tension. But our first impression is that all will be well. He loves them both.

That expectation is dashed by the next word:

“mi-Leah”, “more than Leah.”

This is not merely unexpected. It is also grammatically impossible. You cannot have a sentence that says, “X also loved Y more than Z.” The “also” and the “more than” contradict one another. This is one of those rare and powerful instances in which the Torah deliberately uses fractured syntax to indicate a fractured relationship.[6]

Then comes the next phrase and it is shocking.

“The Lord saw that Leah was hated.” (Gen. 29:31)

Was Leah hated? No. The previous sentence has just told us she was loved. What then does the Torah mean by “hated”? It means, that is how Leah felt. Yes she was loved, but less than her sister. Leah knew, and had known for seven years, that Jacob was passionately in love with her younger sister Rachel, for whom the Torah says that he worked for seven years “but they seemed to him like a few days because he was so in love with her.” (Gen. 29:20)

Leah was not hated. She was less loved. But someone in that situation cannot help but feel rejected. The Torah forces us to hear Leah’s pain in the names she gives her children. Her first she calls Reuben, saying “It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.” The second she calls Shimon, “Because the Lord heard that I am not loved.” The third she called Levi, saying, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me.” (Gen. 29:32-35) There is sustained anguish in these words.

We hear the same tone later when Reuben, Leah’s firstborn, finds mandrakes in the field. Mandrakes were thought to have aphrodisiac properties, so he gives them to his mother hoping that this will draw his father to her. Rachel, who has been experiencing a different kind of pain, childlessness, sees the mandrakes and asks Leah for them. Leah then says: “Wasn’t it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son’s mandrakes too?” (Gen. 30:15) The misery is palpable.

Note what has happened. It began with love. It has been about love throughout. Jacob loved Rachel. He loved her at first sight. There is no other love story quite like it in the Torah. Abraham and Sarah are already married by the time we first meet them. Isaac had his wife chosen for him by his father’s servant. But Jacob loves. He is more emotional than the other patriarchs; that is the problem. Love unites but it also

divides. It leaves the unloved, even the less-loved, feeling rejected, abandoned, forsaken, alone. That is why you cannot build a society, a community or even a family on love alone. There must be justice-as-fairness also.

If we look at the fifteen times the word “love,” ahavah, is mentioned in the book of Genesis, we make an extraordinary discovery. Every time love is mentioned, it generates conflict. Isaac loved Esau but Rebecca loved Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph, Rachel’s firstborn, more than his other sons. From these came two of the most fateful sibling rivalries in Jewish history.

Yet even these pale into insignificance when we reflect on the first time the word love appears in the Torah, in the opening words of the trial of the Binding of Isaac: “Take now your son, your only one, the one you love...” (Gen. 22:2) Rashi, following Midrash (itself inspired by the obvious comparison between the Binding of Isaac and the book of Job), says that Satan, the accusing angel, said to God when Abraham made a feast to celebrate the weaning of his son: “You see, he loves his child more than You.” (Rashi to Genesis 22:1) That, according to the Midrash, was the reason for the trial, to show that Satan’s accusation was untrue.

Judaism is a religion of love. It is so for profound theological reasons. In the world of myth, the gods were at worst hostile, at best indifferent to humankind. In contemporary atheism the universe and life exist for no reason whatsoever. We are accidents of matter, the result of blind chance and natural selection. Judaism’s approach is the most beautiful I know. We are here because God created us in love and forgiveness, asking us to love and forgive others. Love, God’s love, is implicit in our very being.

So many of our texts express that love: the paragraph before the Shema with its talk of “great” and “eternal love”; the Shema itself with its command of love; the priestly blessings to be uttered in love; Shir ha-Shirim, the Song of Songs, the great poem of love; Shlomo Albaketz’s Lecha Dodi, “Come, my Beloved,” Eliezer Azikri’s Yedid Nefesh, “Beloved of the Soul.” If you want to live well, love. If you seek to be close to God, love. If you want your home to be filled with the light of the Divine Presence, love. Love is where God lives. But love is not enough. You cannot build a family, let alone a society, on love alone. For that you need justice also. Love is partial, justice is impartial. Love is particular, justice is universal. Love is for this

person not that, but justice is for all. Much of the moral life is generated by this tension between love and justice. It is no accident that this is the theme of many of the narratives of Genesis. Genesis is about people and their relationships, while the rest of the Torah is predominantly about society.

Justice without love is harsh. Love without justice is unfair, or so it will seem to the less-loved. Yet to experience both at the same time is virtually impossible. Niels Bohr, the Nobel prize winning physicist, once discovered that his son had stolen an object from a local shop. He realised that he could have two separate reactions to the situation: he could view his son from the perspective of a judge (justice) or through his perspective as a father (love), but he could not do both simultaneously.[7]

At the heart of the moral life is a conflict with no simple resolution. There is no general rule to tell us when love is the right reaction and when justice is. In the 1960s the Beatles sang “All you need is love.” Would that it were so, but it is not. Love is not enough. Let us love, but let us never forget those who feel unloved. They too are people. They too have feelings. They too are in the image of God.

Toldot 5782

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

WHAT IF....

A: FAREWELL TO OUR HOLY MOTHER SARAH
Last week’s parasha can be characterized as “the changing of the guard”. From the generation of the founders to the generation of the successors. Our father Avraham passes away at the age of 175, and our mother Sarah at 127.

The Parasha Chaya Sarah begins:

שרה חיי שני שנים ושבע שנה ועשרים שנה מאה שרה חיי ויהיו

And the life of Sarah extended for one hundred and twenty and seven years; the years of the life of Sarah Rashi explains the closing phrase: “... the years of the life of Sarah comes to equate all of her years which were “good”.

Is this an accurate assessment of Sarah’s life, that they were all good years? Didn’t Sarah suffer the indignity of being abducted twice, once by Paro then by Avimelech the Philistine? Didn’t she suffer years of barrenness, giving birth only at the age of 90? Didn’t she accompany her husband Avraham when they left their regional settings, birthplace and immediate family?

But the point of this phrase is to inform us that Sarah, the little girl born to a family of idol worshippers, with all that it implies, at 127 years old looked back over all her years and understood that every one was essential in contributing to turning the little girl called Sarei (her name before being changed by Hashem to Sarah) into the illustrious matriarch of Am Yisrael.

Today, November 1st, my wife and I are celebrating 62 years of marriage. Two kids, a boy from Brooklyn and a good Jewish girl from the West Side of Manhattan, who one day in 1962 found themselves in a little wooden shack in Moshav Nechalim, a kilometer away from the Jordanian border.

We were the victims of our simplistic, superficial, minimalistic Torah education in New York, where a little Judaism is good but not too much. What did we know about the backgrounds of the Jews we were now living with; the sufferings of the Shoah survivors, and the Jews from the Melachs (ghettos) of Arab lands. What did we know of Golani, paratroopers, basic training, annual reserve duty, Palmach, Shmitta year, etc.? Of going to the local grocer to buy a half loaf of bread because that's what most of the people on the moshav could afford.

When growing up in a Brooklyn Italian and Irish Catholic neighborhood, I knew that they and the other billion or so Christians hated me. But now suddenly, we have another billion Moslems who consider my wife and me to be the enemy. I recall our first day of aliya in my Aunt Shoshana's home in Ramat Gan. I turned on the radio to hear some pure Ivrit, but wherever I turned the dial I heard Arabic. It finally dawned upon me how surrounded we were.

From the first moment we alighted from the great eagle that flew us home I realized that I was now a part of the 3500 years of my people's history; and from now on I would be taking my position "holding up the stretcher" of my people.

In her last day in this world, our mother Sarah reviewed her former life in Ur Kasdim devoid of HaShem and kedusha to her present status as matriarch of HaShem's chosen people. She closed her eyes and after reciting "Shema Yisrael" uttered one word to HaShem – "TODA".

When my time will come, I will look back to see from where I came and where HaShem had taken our family. I too will say "Shema Yisrael" and utter one word to my Creator – "TODA"!

B: GLOBAL WARMING

The present international conference in Glasgow Scotland (COP26) has been portrayed as "the world's last best chance to address the climate crisis".

Indeed, the globe is warming at a dangerous rate with climate disasters occurring more frequently all over the globe.

The conference has been called to seek remedies to prevent the ominous global disaster which would affect every human being.

If I was invited to address this august body of world leaders, I would say the following:

In Tractate Avoda Zara 3a, the Gemara states that in the future the gentile nations will be jealous of the reward that will be given to the Jewish people. HaShem will explain that the Jews earned that reward through their fulfillment of the Torah, even under the most horrific and inhuman conditions. All the same, HaShem will give the nations an opportunity to fulfill an "easy" mitzvah through which they will be tested; the mitzva of succa.

The nations will hasten to build succot on their rooftops. HaShem will then unleash the most intense sun's rays, and the globe will become very hot. After the nations receive permission to abandon their succot (in accordance with the principle that "one who suffers from residing in a succa is exempt from the mitzva"), they will kick down their succot and flee for their lives from the heat. Am Yisrael too, will leave their succot, but with great pain over their inability to fulfill the mitzvah.

Through this allegory, our sages aptly reveal how the world will look in the future.

At the end of the Second World War, the United Nations was established on the ruins of the "League of Nations", which had been established after the First World War.

The U.N. is the aforementioned "easy mitzvah", because a succah is defined as a "temporary home", and the U.N. delegates from all over the world reside temporarily in New York rather than in their permanent homes.

HaShem's "unleashing the sun" is a metaphor for the moral dilemmas facing the members of the U.N., first and foremost from the Iranian threat to annihilate the State of Israel, as well as worldwide anti-Semitism. The U.N. has not employed any means of punishing Iran, because when all is said and done, it is only Israel whom Iran threatens. The U.N.'s delegates continue to fail the "easy mitzvah" test, and we can

begin the countdown on this evil organization's demise and the nations which comprise it.

But this is not just a metaphor. It is a prediction of what is awaiting humanity if they continue to renege on their moral responsibility, first and foremost with regard to HaShem's chosen nation.

Whatever the nations will decide at the conference will not change the dire fate that "nature" is imposing upon humanity. The only salvation for humanity is to renew its obligations and moral commitments of truth and acceptance that we are the Creator's chosen people.

C: WHAT IF....

Let's play "what if":

What if Paro would have submitted to Moshe's demands to permit the Jews three days of prayer plus one day of rest every week (Shabbat). Would the Jews still have insisted on leaving Egypt for the ominous, fierce desert or would they have rejected Moshe's plan?

What if the Meraglim (scouts) would have returned with a positive report and the Jews would have entered Eretz Yisrael in the second year of the exodus. Who would teach them all the details of the Torah, because HaShem in no way would permit Moshe to enter the land?

What if at the very harsh decision handed down by Shlomo HaMelech to cut the infant whose parentage was in question, the mother would not have urged Shlomo to give the baby to the other woman, would Shlomo have ordered severing of the baby?

Let's go a little further:

What if Medinat Yisrael would have been established 100 years earlier in 1848, and not 1948, when the greatest rabbis would have led the nation. Would there have been a Shoah?

What if Ben Gurion would not have agreed to the Chazon Ish's request to exempt all the yeshiva students from army service, where would the yeshiva world be today? But Ben Gurion did agree, so, in fact, the Torah kingdom we have today is the result of a decision taken by a man who was very far from Torah. What if one or two of the recognized Torah leaders of American Jewry at the time of the establishment of the Medina would have called out to all Jews to make aliya, how would the Medina look today

What if all the thousands of shelichim of Chabad would have concentrated their efforts on influencing the Jews in Eretz Yisrael rather than being the world's biggest kosher caterers, how would our life be today?

But since all these "what ifs" did not occur, it is obvious that HaShem who directs all human actions yet retains His invisibility, did not want them to happen.

So, we must struggle on.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

Insights Parshas Vayeitzei .. Kislev 5782

**Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav
Yochanan Zweig**

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of memory of Malka bas Yosef, Malka Levine. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

Night and Day

And Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan. He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set [...] (28:10-11).

This week's parsha opens with Yaakov Avinu traveling to Charan to find a wife, following the behest of his parents Yitzchak and Rifkah. The Torah relates how he passed by the future home of the Beis Hamikdosh on Mount Moriah (see Rashi ad loc). According to Rashi, Yaakov felt it would be inappropriate to pass up the opportunity to pray at the same place his father and grandfather had prayed. Therefore, he returned to the place and instituted the evening prayer known as ma'ariv (see Rashi 28:17 and 28:11).

Chazal teach us that the three prayer services (shacharis, mincha, and ma'ariv) were established by the three forefathers: Avraham Avinu instituted shacharis, Yitzchak Avinu instituted mincha, and Yaakov Avinu instituted ma'ariv.

Yet this seems a little odd. We know that every day begins with the onset of the prior evening. That is, Monday begins at sunset on Sunday. Thus, the first prayer that we pray each day is ma'ariv. Wouldn't it be more logical for Avraham, being the first of the forefathers, to have instituted the first prayer service of ma'ariv? Why is it that Avraham instituted shacharis, the second prayer service, instead?

People often look at prayers solely as something that we do out of an obligation towards the Almighty. In other words, Hashem created man and prayers are what we do for him. While it is true that davening has a component of devotional service, the first time the

Torah refers to the purpose of prayer it is in an entirely different context.

We find regarding the creation of the world: “These are the products of the heavens and earth when they were created on the day of Hashem’s, God’s, making of the earth and heavens. At this time there was no tree yet on earth and no herb of the field had yet sprouted for Hashem had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the soil” (2:4-5). Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem did not make it rain until man arrived and recognized what the world was lacking and he prayed for rain. At that point, everything began to grow. Hence, man’s participation is required to make this world operate as it should.

From here, we find a critical aspect of man’s responsibility in the world: as a partner to Hashem in creating a functional world. Prior to Adam’s sin, man’s contribution to the world was through his relationship to the Almighty and expressed through davening. This is how man fulfilled his responsibility to build and accomplish. Thus, we see that a very basic component of davening is an expression of what we contribute to the world as Hashem’s partner.

There are two distinct components to every twenty-four hour period: day and night. They are not merely differentiated by whether or not the sun is above or below the horizon. Rather, they have completely different functions. Daytime is the period in which mankind goes out and contributes to the functionality of the world, while nighttime is the period when man feels connected to it.

In Hebrew, the word “yom – day” is masculine and “leila – night” is feminine. Day is the time for people to do and night is the time to connect. This also explains why when a woman tries to express an issue to a man he focuses on trying to solve it (the do/give aspect) even though she really just wants him to listen (the connect aspect).

Avraham Avinu is the av of chessed – which is the attribute emblematic of giving. This is why he was the proper forefather to institute shacharis, the daytime service that defines all prayers. This is also why every regular siddur (as opposed to a Machzor, etc.) begins with shacharis and not ma’ariv.

Family Not Friends

And it was when Lavan heard the news that Yaakov, his sister’s son [had arrived], he ran toward him and he embraced and kissed him and brought him to his house [...] Lavan said to him, “But you are my flesh

and bone,” and he stayed with him a month of days (29:13-14).

In this week’s parsha we find a remarkable, if not outright shocking, distinction between when Eliezer the servant of Avraham Avinu went to visit Charan and the events that unfolded when Yaakov visited Charan.

When Eliezer arrived in Charan, charged with a mission to find a wife for Yitzchak, he was greeted by Lavan who made an extraordinary statement: “Come, O’ blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside when I have cleared the house and a place for the camels?” (24:31).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that in saying he “cleared the house” Lavan was informing Eliezer that he had cleared out all the idols from the house. Meaning, Lavan knew that any servant of Avraham would find it abhorrent and downright repugnant to accept lodging in a home filled with idols.

Yet somehow, Yaakov, the greatest of our forefathers and grandson of Avraham, had no objection to staying in Lavan’s home, which we know was replete with idols (Rachel takes some when they beat a hasty escape some twenty years later).

How is it possible that Yaakov was agreeable to staying in such a home? Perhaps even more peculiar, what was so obvious to Lavan that he knew that he had to clear out the house for Eliezer but not for Yaakov?

The difference between these stories is also relevant to our generation and the challenges that many families currently face.

A person who is shomer shabbos should feel very uncomfortable in a non-shabbos environment, such as being in a room where many people are watching television or talking on their telephones. Therefore, one should try to do whatever can be done to avoid those types of situations.

But one of the outcomes of the Bal Teshuvah movement is that these newly observant Jews are now thrust into family situations where many or even most of their nuclear families do not keep shabbos or kosher. Consequently, their homes on shabbos exude very little of a true shabbos atmosphere. What are they to do? Should they return to their parents’ house for a simcha such as a nephew’s bar mitzvah even though their shabbos atmosphere would clearly be adversely affected?

The answer is a resounding yes. When it comes to family we must avoid breaking any Torah or Rabbinic laws, but we must also do everything in our power to maintain a close family relationship, even if participation makes us uncomfortable. This is because a connection to one's family is paramount to one's wellbeing.

This is the difference between the two stories. Eliezer is merely a servant seeking a wife for his master's son; he has no familial responsibility to stay connected to Lavan and his family. On the other hand, Yaakov was arriving in his uncle's home and hoping to marry one of his cousins. His obligations to tolerate being uncomfortable far exceeded that of Eliezer. This was obvious to Lavan who knew that Yaakov was hoping to become his son-in-law. This is why he felt no obligation to remove the idols from his home.

Did You Know...

In honor of Levi's birth in this week's parsha, we thought it appropriate to mention the following amazing discovery that is unfortunately not well known. This is based on an article written by Rabbi Edward Davis of Young Israel of Hollywood, Florida. BIRKAS KOHANIM WRITTEN IN SILVER... An archeological discovery in 1979 revealed the pesukim of Birkas Kohanim (Bamidbar 6:24-26) in what appears to be the earliest biblical passage ever found in ancient artifacts. Two tiny strips of silver, each wound tightly like a miniature scroll, bearing the inscribed words, were uncovered in a tomb outside of Jerusalem and dated from the 7th century BCE – easily 400 years before the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Many of the modern biblical “scholars” have claimed that the Torah was man-made and was probably written at the time of the first exile in the 6th century BCE, when the Jews were exiled to Babylonia. What this archeological discovery proved was that the words of the Torah predate what these “scholars” have been insisting for many years. This discovery was brought to light through the use of advanced imaging systems by scientists at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which made the writing legible and proved that it was truly Birkas Kohanim as we know it.

*This also debunks the ridiculous notion that Israel is a “settler colonial state” that is occupying Palestinian territory. Archeological evidence of Jews in 7th century BCE supports Israel as the native land of the Jewish people.

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***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -
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Parshat Vayeitzei

How Long is the Coast of Britain?

“And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it.” (28:12)

Benoit B. Mandelbrot (1924-2010) was a Jewish Polish-born French-American mathematician and polymath. “What is the essence of a coastline?” he once asked. Mandelbrot asked this question in a paper that became a turning point for his thinking: “How Long is the Coast of Britain?”

Mandelbrot had come across the coastline question in an obscure posthumous article by an English scientist, Lewis F. Richardson. Wondering about coastlines and wiggly national borders, Richardson checked encyclopedias in Spain and Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands, and discovered discrepancies of twenty percent in the estimated lengths of their common frontiers. Mandelbrot argued that any coastline is, in a sense, infinitely long. In another sense, the answer depends on the length of your ruler.

“Consider one plausible method of measuring. A surveyor takes a set of dividers, opens them to a length of one yard, and walks them along the coastline. The resulting number of yards is just an approximation of the true length, because the dividers skip over twists and turns smaller than one yard — but the surveyor writes the number down anyway.

“Then he sets the dividers to a smaller length — say, one foot— and repeats the process. He arrives at a somewhat greater length, because the dividers will capture more of the detail and it will take more than three one-foot steps to cover the distance previously covered by a one-yard step. He writes this new number down, sets the dividers at four inches and starts again.

“This mental experiment, using imaginary dividers, is a way of quantifying the effect of observing an object from different distances, at different scales. An observer trying to estimate the length of England's

coastline from a satellite will make a smaller guess than an observer trying to walk its coves and beaches, who will make a smaller guess in turn than a snail negotiating every pebble.”

If we measure our ascent on the spiritual ladder of our life like a snail, we will become disillusioned very quickly, for life has many twists and turns and setbacks. But if we take the satellite view, each one of us can follow in the footsteps of our father Yaakov — the ladder that is set on the ground but whose head reaches the heavens.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Vayeitzei: After Covid, will we go back to sleep?

10 November 2021

How do we respond to extraordinary experiences? If I were to give a subtitle to Sefer Bereishit, the Book of Genesis, it would be the Book of Dreams. Not only does this book of the Torah present us with details of the dreams themselves, but more importantly we're told how the dreamer reacted.

In Parshat Vayeitzei we are given a description of Jacob's famous dream of the ladder, which spanned the distance from earth up to the heavens. How did Jacob react when he woke up? The Torah tells us (Bereishit 28:16),

“Vayikatz Yaakov mishnato vayomer,” – “Jacob woke up from his sleep and he declared,”

“Achein yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh.” – “Behold the presence of God is in this place.”

That was how he responded. He recognised the presence of God, and he continued to do so for the rest of his life; indeed we speak about it to this day.

Let's now have a look at a dream of Pharaoh King of Egypt, as described in Parshat Mikeitz (Bereishit 41:4, Bereishit 41:5). There the same term ‘vayikatz’ is used.

“Vayikatz Paroh,” – “Pharaoh woke up,”

“vayishan.” – “and he went back to sleep,”

“Vayichalom,” – “And he had another dream.”

What a remarkable dream Pharaoh had just had! In the course of time he would discover that it would provide for him and his people a secret to their survival! Yet his reaction was that he turned over and he went back to sleep.

Herein lies a very powerful message for us all. So often it's not just in dreams that we might see something remarkable. More than that, we actually have exceptionally powerful experiences in our lives. Hashem is trying to say something to us.

What will our response be? Will it be just to turn over and ignore it, or will we respond in an appropriate way?

During the past year and a half every single one of us has experienced something unprecedented; we've all had our own personal, family, communal, national and global experiences. We have been able to learn so much from the pandemic. And now that b'ezrat Hashem we are gradually moving out of it, what will our response be? Will we just go back to the way we were before? Or will we learn some lessons and guarantee that as a result of this extraordinary experience our lives will forever be changed for the better?

Let's always see to it that when it comes to those unusual and extraordinary moments of our lives, our response should be the response of Jacob, and not the response of Pharaoh.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Vayeitzei Reuven at Three Didn't Know Choshen Mishpat, but He Knew Right from Wrong

The pasuk says “Reuven went out in the days of the wheat harvest; he found mandrakes (dudaim) in the field and brought them to Leah his mother; Rochel said to Leah, ‘Please give me some of your son's dudaim.’” (Bereshis 30:14). Rashi comments on the words “in the days of the wheat harvest” that this is a testimony to the greatness of the Shevatim (Tribes). It was the harvest season for wheat, meaning that there was wheat lying around and yet they did not send forth their hands to take something that did not belong to them. Reuven only took wild growing mandrakes, a type of ownerless flower.

The Tolner Rebbe asks two interesting questions on this Rashi.

First: What kind of “praise of the Shevatim” is it to tell us that Reuven was not a thief?

Second: Regardless of how we answer this first question, why would Rashi say that this incident is praise for “the Shevatim”. All we know is that Reuven

did not steal. Why does that reflect on all his brothers, to make a general statement of praise about “all the Shevatim“?

The Tolner Rebbe further points out that the Seder Olam, which describes the chronology of all the personalities of Tanach, says that Reuven was born in the year 2193 from Creation, and Yissochor (who was conceived following this incident with the mandrakes) was born three years later. So how can Yissochor be praised for an incident that occurred before he was even born? Reuven picked these flowers for his mother when he was only three years old. If so, what is the point of evaluating the righteousness of the act of taking the mandrakes? Does a three-year-old understand the concept of property rights and the fact that it is wrong to take something that belongs to someone else? Considering his age, why in fact did Reuven not take the wheat and give it to his mother?

The answer is that Reuven did not know the severity of the sin of theft, but he did know the values of his parents. It must have been such a prominent concept in his father’s house that someone else’s property is OFF LIMITS, that this three-year-old recoiled at the thought of taking something that was not his. This was not because he maturely understood Torah or Hilchos Gezeilah in the Rambam or the Choshen Mishpat section of Shulchan Aruch. He did not know any of that at this stage in his life. But from growing up in a house whose motto was “Titen Emes L’Yaakov...” (Micha 7:20), theft was such an anathema that even a three-year-old would not touch it.

A famous Gemara (Succah 56b) comments that a child’s conversation in the market place inevitably reflects things he heard from one of his parents. A child’s mode of conversation and what he says reflects what is going on in his parent’s home. The praise of the Shevatim is that even toddlers in that family, because of the education they received at home from their earliest ages, recoiled from taking things which did not belong to them. All the Shevatim were like this, because they all grew up in Yaakov Avinu’s house, an atmosphere which constantly stressed the middos of honesty and integrity.

Was It a Message from G-d or Wishful Thinking?

The Tolner Rebbe has a further thought which clarifies a peculiar insight in the parsha, based on a schmooze of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz in Parshas Vayechi.

The Almighty came to Yaakov after twenty years of service in Lavan’s house and told him, “It is time to

leave. Go back to the Land of your fathers and your birthplace.” (Bereshis 31:3). If we study the pesukim which follow, we see a strange phenomenon. Yaakov Avinu tells his wives that an Angel of G-d appeared to him the previous night and told him that they need to leave. “What do you think—should we leave or should we not leave?” They respond with their opinion that they should leave, but they justify that decision based on financial and familial interpersonal issues: “Do we yet have an inheritance portion in our father’s house? He considers us like strangers, for he sold us and he also consumed our money. For all the wealth that the L-rd has rescued from our father belongs to us and our children. Thus, all that the L-rd said to you, you should do!” (Bereshis 31:14-16)

This is a mind-boggling parsha. First of all, Yaakov seems to weigh whether or not to listen to what Hashem commanded him based on the advice of his wives, and second of all, his wives seem to make their calculation based on resentment of their father and financial calculations, mentioning Hashem’s command merely as an afterthought! How do we understand this strange conversation Yaakov has with Rochel and Leah?

We have mentioned this question in previous years. An additional question here (mentioned by the Chizkuni) is the following: When Yaakov receives the message from Hashem, he is told directly (Vayomer Hashem el Yaakov): “Return to the Land of your fathers and your birthplace and I will be with you”. However, when he relays the dream to his wives, he does not say he heard this message from Hashem; he says he heard the message from “Malach haElokim” (an Angel of the L-rd).

Which was it? Was it a direct communication from Hashem or a message from an Angel? (The Chizkuni makes note of this discrepancy and explains that the original communication was indeed from a Malach as Yaakov told his wives, But the pasuk, in mentioning the original communication, does not bother to mention that detail, since at any rate it was a Divine communication.)

In Parshas Vayechi, there is a beautiful teaching from Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. The pasuk says “But as for me—when I came from Paddan, Rochel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still about a beras of land to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem” (Bereshis 48:7) Yaakov Avinu tells his son Yosef: I want you to bury me in Eretz Yisrael... Rashi there

explains that Yaakov is offering an apology to his son: Even though I am asking you to trouble yourself to bury me in Eretz Canaan, I did not do the same for your mother. I buried her on the road because she died near Beth Lechem (and I did not schlep her to the family burial plot in Chevron). I know that you have complaints against me about this, but you should know that the reason I buried your mother there was not because I was lazy. It had nothing to do with the weather or any excuse of that nature. You should know that I buried her based on the word of G-d that she should be of aide to her descendants at that burial spot when the Jewish people will be exiled from the Land of Israel by Nevuzradan as it is written: “A voice is heard on high, Rochel weeps for her children...” (Yirmiyahu 31:14) That is why I buried her there.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks: Why does Yaakov Avinu need to go through this whole shtickle Torah with Yosef: You should know it wasn't raining, and I wasn't lazy, etc., etc.? Say to Yosef straight out: “Listen, Yosef I know you have complaints against me, but I buried her there because I was commanded to do so by the Almighty. End of discussion!

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains an important principle of life: We hear what we want to hear, we see what we want to see, we believe what we want to believe.

Yaakov Avinu had doubts. He told Yosef: Don't say that I got the message of G-d wrong. Don't say that I misinterpreted it. Don't say that G-d told me something else, but because of my negiyus (bias) – because it was too hard, because it was too far, because it was too rainy – I misinterpreted what the Ribono shel Olam said because people hear what they want to hear and believe what they want to believe. Yaakov Avinu needs to emphasize that there was no bias here. He could have easily brought Rochel to the Me'Aras haMachpelah. It would not have been difficult for him to do that. Consequently, Yaakov is emphasizing “I did not misinterpret the Almighty, because I had no personal agenda which would have caused me to do so.”

The Tolner Rebbe uses this insight of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz in Parshas VaYechi to explain this incident in Parshas VaYetzei.

Yaakov Avinu hated being in the house of Lavan. During their final confrontation, he told it to his father-in-law like it was: “I worked for you for twenty years and during that entire time you were a crook.

You cheated me day and night...” Yaakov Avinu cannot wait to get out of the house of Lavan. One night, Yaakov has a dream. An Angel comes to him in the name of the Ribono shel Olam and told him “Time to leave.”

Yaakov Avinu thought to himself, “Ah, this is what I have been waiting for!” But he woke up the next morning and wondered, “Did I really dream that? Did I really hear that? Is that actually what the Malach said? Or perhaps I want to get out of here so badly that I started hallucinating! Maybe I am misinterpreting my dream and we should really stay here?”

Because Yaakov had these doubts, he decided to consult with his wives. Even though when I had the dream, I thought Hashem was speaking to me directly, I will tell them: “Listen here, last night I think a Malach came to me and I think that he told me in the name of Hashem that it is time to leave here. What do you think? Is there any reason not to leave?” Yaakov feared that his negiyus (bias) caused him to misinterpret his dream, and was seeking reassurance from his wives that there was no reason not to leave.

Rochel and Leah assured him that there was absolutely no reason to stay. “Therefore, what you heard was not your negiyus – it was the truth. A Malach did come to you and tell you to leave, and therefore you should definitely act upon that vision!”

This is how to understand this parsha. Yaakov Avinu was so concerned about Emes (Truth), that he needed reassurance that what he heard was not just wishful thinking or a fantasized imagination of his subconscious desires. He expressed his uncertainty by emphasizing the role of the Malach (as opposed to a direct and explicit message from Hashem). His wives put his mind at rest, that he had no negiyus here, and that the message was an authentic one from Hashem, which should be acted upon.

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Vayetze: Powerful Vows

Ben-Tzion Spitz

A vow is fixed and unalterable determination to do a thing, when such a determination is related to

something noble which can only uplift the man who makes the resolve. - Mahatma Gandhi

Jacob is on the run. He is escaping his home in the land of Canaan from the murderous intent of his brother Esau. En route, he sleeps in a place that afterward will be named Bet El (House of God) where he has a dream. In the dream, he sees a ladder that reaches the heavens, with angels ascending and descending. God speaks to Jacob from the top of the ladder. God promises Jacob that He'll protect Jacob on his journey, bring him back home safely, and guarantees him the land and great progeny.

Jacob wakes from the dream, and he is in such awe of the event that he vows that God will be his God and that he'll tithe all of his gains to God.

The Chidushei HaRim on Genesis 28:20 examines the phenomena of making a vow. The Torah and Jewish Law take vows very seriously. The consensus is that vows should generally be avoided, but if made, they are legally binding and must be upheld.

The Chidushei HaRim explains that Jacob made the vow to bind himself closer to God. He had just experienced a divine revelation. He felt enormously close to God, but he knew the feeling wouldn't last. In that moment of divine closeness, in that moment of spiritual clarity, Jacob makes a vow. The intent of the vow is to find an additional way, another mechanism to keep himself bound to God even when the effects of the momentary clarity dissipate. The Chidushei HaRim states that Jacob pioneered this approach and opened the door for his descendants, the Jewish nation, to similarly bind themselves to God through positive vows during those moments of divine proximity. Such a vow can be extremely powerful.

He further adds that the angels in Jacob's dream were dancing. They dance as a result of our good deeds. If we were to realize the tremendous impact our good deeds and divine service have in both this world and in the upper worlds, we would never cease them.

May we always resolve to do the right things, whether we vowed or not.

Dedication - To the Israeli government finally having a budget.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

The Jerusalem Post

Parshat Vayetze: Delusions that lead to evil

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

This week's Torah portion, Vayetze, brings together two people whose lifestyles were almost completely opposite of each other's – Jacob and Laban.

This week's Torah portion, Vayetze, brings together two people whose lifestyles were almost completely opposite of each other's – Jacob and Laban.

Jacob, escaping his brother's wrath, reaches Haran and meets his mother's brother, Laban, and his two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob loves Rachel and wants to marry her, but Laban obligates him to work for him for seven years first.

When the seven years are over, Jacob wants to marry Rachel, but Laban, under the cover of dark, tricks Jacob and has him marry Leah instead of Rachel.

Jacob wakes up in the morning to discover the deceit and is furious with Laban.

Laban responds by saying, "It is not done so in our place to give the younger one before the firstborn" (Genesis 29:26). He promises Jacob that he will be able to marry Rachel, but only after working for him for another seven years.

When those additional seven years ended, Laban asked his son-in-law Jacob to continue to work for him, this time for pay. But he repeatedly changed the employment agreement in a way that minimized Jacob's profits and increased his own. After another six years, Jacob wanted to leave Laban and return to Canaan, and to do so, he had to escape with his wives and children.

We might have expected Jacob to do what Laban would have done, to take – without Laban's knowledge – what he was owed or, at the very least, not to continue to be a devoted worker.

But when Laban chased and caught up with him, Jacob said: "Already 20 years have I been with you.... I have not brought home to you anything torn [by other animals]... from my hand you would demand it, what was stolen by day and what was stolen at night. 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).

For 20 years, he devotedly herded Laban's cattle, taking full responsibility for any mishaps. If an animal killed a sheep or if one was stolen, Jacob would not even report it. Rather, he would pay for it out of his own pocket. He took care of Laban's cattle in the heat of the day and the cold of the night.

On the other hand, Laban's behavior is curious. As far as he was concerned, he behaved with flawless integrity. On the other hand, we see how terribly he treated his own family. What led him to behave in such a way that even he did not pay attention to his own behavior?

The answer to this is in the continuation of the story. After Jacob complained about the way he had been mistreated through the years, Laban responded in a very strange way: "The daughters are my daughters, and the sons are my sons, and the animals are my animals, and all that you see is mine" (Genesis 31: 43).

Now it's easier for us to understand the depth of Laban's issue. His outlook is fundamentally distorted. He lives in a state of complete delusion. As far as he is concerned, his children are tools to answer his needs, his grandchildren are his private property, and Jacob's wealth – earned through hard work – belongs to him as well. With such a distorted perspective about property and people, it is no surprise that he deals with the people around him the way he does.

MANY OF us, without noticing, can develop a similar delusion. We might see the people who work for us as private property, our family members as tools for our needs. This perspective will inevitably lead to us to appropriate others' property for ourselves, not treating those around us with fairness and integrity, and not seeing anything wrong with our own behavior.

In order to avoid adopting such an outlook, we must adopt Jacob's perspective that sees everything in his life as a result of God's grace. When we see the world in this way, it will be easier for us to distinguish between our property and others', we will be able to treat our family properly, and we will be grateful for the Divine gift of being privileged to live alongside them.

Let us try to adopt Jacob's words of prayer, which we will read next week: "I have become small from all the kindnesses and from all the truth that You have rendered Your servant" (Genesis 32:10).

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah : Vayeitzei

Psalm 34: Freeing Ourselves from Bad Habits

Chanan Morrison

After recounting God's assistance to the righteous - and those struggling with impulsive behavior - the

psalmist offers guidance how to grow spiritually and free oneself from bad habits.

פֹּדֶה ה' נַפְשׁ עֲבָדָיו וְלֹא יֵאָשְׁמוּ כָּל הַחַסִּים בּוֹ.

"God redeems the life of His servants; all who trust in Him will not be condemned." (Psalms 34:23)

This advice, Rav Kook explains, relates to one's self-image. Everyone suffers from character flaws. We can easily become trapped by our weaknesses, captive to our desires.

The psalmist suggests that we gain positive change by a resolute decision: We resolve to live a life of serving God, a life dedicated to holy aspirations, a life infused with acts of kindness and generosity. We identify ourselves as an eved Hashem, as "a servant of God."¹ With this transformation of mindset, we free ourselves from the tyranny of negative desires and impulses. When we commit to live the life of Divine service, we are liberated from enslavement to our vices. "God redeems the life of His servants."

The psalmist, however, adds a caveat.

We tend to trust our natural inclinations, even though we know we are attracted to certain negative habits. If we fail to question our motives, we may stumble into the pitfall of undesirable conduct.

We should be circumspect of our impulses, guarding against destructive tendencies. We must place our faith, not in our own virtue, but in God. If we trust that God will direct our hearts, we can be assured of not stumbling.

By placing our trust in God and His Torah, we raise our lives from undisciplined habits and poor choices to the rare quality of holy splendor. Redeemed by the Divine light shining over us, our actions will be straight and true. "All who trust in Him will not be condemned."

(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol II, pp. 68-69)

¹ James Clear called this building "identity-based habits." He explained that "The key to building lasting habits is focusing on creating a new identity first. Your current behaviors are simply a reflection of your current identity... To change your behavior for good, you need to start believing new things about yourself." (Atomic Habits, Avery 2018).

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Vayeitzei

פְּרִשְׁת וַיֵּצֵא תשפ"ב

ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע... ושמרתיו בכל אשר תלך... כי לא אעזבך.

Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva... I will guard you wherever you go... for I will not forsake you. (28:10,15)

Yaakov *Avinu* was compelled to make a hasty departure from Be'er Sheva. He would have loved living in the vicinity of his parents, but that would have meant putting his life in mortal danger. After Yaakov's "appropriation" of the *brachos*, blessings, Eisav swore that he would seek ultimate revenge. This was Yaakov's cue to take an extended trip. He stopped in Beis El, and, while he was there, he was privy to an incredible dream in which Hashem assured him of His Divine protection and blessing. It should have been all good, with the Patriarch calm and looking forward to settling down and enjoying the blessings. On the contrary, we find Yaakov distressed and filled with fear. *Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl (Pri Tzaddik, Vayeitzei)*, explains that Yaakov was not so much concerned with his own life, as he was anxious that his own sins had brought him to this precarious situation. He cites the *Midrash Tanchuma* which is, at best, puzzling. The disciples asked their *Rebbe*, "What is the law concerning one who murders unintentionally?" The *Rebbe* replied, "One who kills unintentionally must flee to one of the *Arei Miklat*, Cities of Refuge, lest the *go'eil ha'dam*, blood avenger, exercises his right to take revenge and kill the murderer." At this point, the *Midrash* interjects and makes what seems to be an unrelated statement, "Yaakov fled to Charan to escape from Eisav. When Hashem saw Yaakov in great distress, He appeared to him."

A superficial reading of this *Midrash* would have one think that Yaakov *Avinu's* escape to Charan was in some way connected to the law of the *rotzeiach b'shogeg*, unintentional murderer, which could not have been further from the truth. Yaakov killed no one. If anything, it was the evil Eisav who planned to murder Yaakov – intentionally. If anyone should be required to flee, it should be Eisav. This, too, is unlikely, since anything that Eisav would do would be intentional. The dispensation of *Ir Miklat* does not apply to *meizid*, acting intentionally.

Rav Tzadok offers a powerful and illuminating exposition on original sin, its ramification, its effect on Yaakov, what we should learn from it, and how our lives should change accordingly. The origin of death lies in the sin of eating from the *Eitz Ha'daas*, Tree of

Knowledge. As a result of eating from its prohibited fruit, death became part of life. From that moment, the concept of living forever was tabled and closed. Man would have to die. The mastermind behind the sin, the creature responsible for this first insurrection, was the serpent, who through guile and prevarication was able to convince Chavah to take a bite. Out of the goodness of her heart, she shared with her husband, because, after all, that is what a good wife does.

The serpent was cunning. It knew that a little lie would go a long way. It therefore told Chavah that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge possessed unusual mystical powers, and if one were to partake of its fruit, he/she would become G-d-like and be able to create universes. The serpent was audacious enough to say that Hashem was envious and could not tolerate any other creation. Thus, by prohibiting them from eating of the Tree's fruit, He was actually preventing them from becoming His equals.

This was not only a lie – it was the first lie. Imagine the evil of the serpent. The world had just been created, and it had to inject its own brand of evil in it. Death was Hashem's response to this evil. As a result, falsehood, deceit and deception – in their various forms – are considered the forces of death. [When a person lies, a little of him dies.] *Chosamo shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu emes*; the seal of Hashem is truth. Anything less than one hundred percent truth remains a lie.

Rav Tzadok cites an incident from the *Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a)* that buttresses this idea. In a certain community the citizens adhered to the highest standards of truth. The people did not tolerate any form of falsehood. Apparently, no one in the city had ever died young, through either illness or accident. One of the *Talmudic* sages, who was known for extraordinary integrity, moved to the community when he married one of the local women. They were blessed with two sons. On one occasion, a neighbor came to visit his wife. Out of deference to her privacy, he told her that his wife was not home. (He felt that it was innocuous. She needed to rest, and he did not want to disturb her. Unfortunately, such "white" lies happen all of the time.) Immediately, his two sons died. When the citizens of the community became aware of the tragedy that had befallen the sage and his wife, and, by extension, the entire community, they realized that someone had uttered a word of untruth. The *tzaddik* was asked to leave the town. A breach in

the standards of veracity catalyzes a visit from the Angel of Death.

Titein emes l'Yaakov, “Attribute truth to Yaakov (*Michah* 7:20). The Patriarch was the personification of honesty and probity. Although they were twins, Yaakov and Eisav could not have been more different. Yaakov represented truth; Eisav was the embodiment of everything false. Every day he would play out a ruse of fooling his father to believe that he was righteous and saintly. Truth lengthens life. Falsehood and deceit bring on death. Yaakov perceived that he was in danger of suffering an untimely death. This was an indication that somehow, somewhere, he must have been negligent in the area of truthfulness. The only time that his actions “bordered” on deception was when he presented himself as Eisav in order to obtain his rightfully deserved *brachos*. He had never lied. Every word that he uttered was true. Nonetheless, the entire scenario was a beguiling charade which might be perceived as verging on falsehood. For someone of Yaakov’s spiritual stature, any form of unintended falsehood would be reckoned on the Heavenly scale as unintentional murder, which required the perpetrator to suffer the consequences.

Yaakov was not taking chances. If he was wrong, he would do what was necessary to expunge the taint on his character. When he saw that he was confronting adversity and trouble, he felt it was due to his unintentional lying. Hashem, Whose seal is truth and is the ultimate Arbitrator of truth, appeared to Yaakov in a dream and assured him that he need not worry. He would not be taken to task for his actions. He performed them under extenuating circumstances; they were appropriate and necessary. Hashem thus restored Yaakov’s self-confidence, so that the Patriarch remained the exemplar of truthfulness and probity.

Telshe Rosh Yeshiva, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, exemplified the *middah* of *emes*. Indeed, every aspect of his life was regulated by truth. *Rav Gifter* would underscore the inexorable striving one must maintain in his search for the truth, applying an incident that occurred with *Horav Shimon Shkop, zl*. *Rav Shimon* was a *maggid shiur* in *Telshe* for twenty years. Following his first *shiur*, he was walking down the street. He felt that he had rendered a good *shiur* and was now mulling it over. In the course of his walk, he met the nephew of *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*. Their conversation focused on *Rav Shimon’s shiur*.

As he was about to take leave of *Rav Shimon*, the nephew gave him a strange blessing. “May you be *zoche*, merit, never to say the ‘truth’ in your *shiurim*.” This blessing did not seem like a blessing. A *shiur* was all about explaining the passage in the *Talmud* in such a manner that all ambiguities were clarified, i.e. one presented the truthful understanding of the *Talmud*.

Seeing the look on *Rav Shimon’s* face, the nephew explained that if he ever felt that he had discovered the truth, then possibly he would stop looking for it – which must never happen. One must constantly delve, search and yearn to find the truth. He must never feel that he has found it. The standard for truth is very high. It could also (in the minds of some people) be very low. As long as one strives to reach higher and higher, he will ultimately achieve a level of uncompromising honesty based on Torah values.

Rav Gifter demanded that truth be the moral compass of every endeavor. No area of life and human endeavor exists for which truth does not serve as its barometer. *Telshe Yeshiva’s* official letterhead originally bore the name Rabbinical College of *Telshe*. He changed the letterhead to *Telshe Yeshivah*, because he felt that the term Rabbinical College unintentionally gave the message that *Telshe* is a school that produces rabbis. *Rav Gifter* felt that this was deceptive. The purpose of a *yeshivah* is to produce the next generation of Torah adherent Jews.

The *Divrei Chaim, Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl*, had two sons whose adherence to *emes* was classic: The *Shiniaver Rav, zl*, and *Gorlitzer Rav, zl*. The *Gorlitzer* once asked his brother, “We are both products of the same family and the same upbringing. Why is it that we hardly ever render the same opinion? I will explain to you the reason for this. When you see a mountain replete with *sheker*, falsehood, but buried deep within it is a miniscule element of *emes*, truth, you will do everything within your power to extricate it because of your deep abiding love for the truth. I, on the other hand, if I will see a mountain filled with truth, but I sense a tiny element of falsehood buried deep inside, will reject the entire thing. One drop of *sheker* tarnishes the entire mountain of *emes*.” They both sought the unvarnished truth. The *Shiniaver* loved *emes*, and the *Gorlitzer* despised *sheker*. Two varied approaches to one objective.

ותקנה רחל באהותה

Rachel became jealous of her sister. (30:1)

Horav Shabsi Yudelewitz, zl (grandfather and namesake of the famous *maggid*), knew that his days on this world were numbered. He was not a well man to begin with, and the physical travail which he sustained emigrating to *Eretz Yisrael* during the turn of the century, followed by the poverty and hunger he experienced in Yerushalayim, had taken its toll on him. He knew that would soon go the way of all men. He and his wife had been assured early in their marriage by a great *tzaddik*, righteous person, that “In the future, you will give birth to a son who will grow up to be a *gadol*, a *tzaddik*, and a holy man.” *Rav Shmuel Ahron, zl*, author of *Meilo Shel Shmuel*, and son-in-law of *Horav Aryeh Levin, zl*, was that child. *Rav Shabsi* was well aware that his young son was special. He did not waste a minute of his day, understanding that time is a gift from Hashem and thus sacrosanct. He was constantly learning. When everyone in his class in Yeshivah Eitz Chaim would go outside to play during recess, he remained behind learning, reciting *Tehillim*, anything that brought him closer to Hashem.

Rav Shabsi wanted to share a life lesson with his young son – one that would accompany him throughout his life’s journey. He used the medium of a *d’var Torah* to convey his message. He quoted the *pasuk*, “Rachel became jealous of her sister” (30:1). Immediately, *Shmuel Ahron* started the rest of the *pasuk*, “She said to Yaakov, ‘Give me children for if not, I am (as good) as dead.’” His father complimented him for remembering the *pasuk*. “When did Rachel *Imeinu* become jealous?” *Reb Shabsi* asked his son. “When Yehudah was born,” was his immediate response. *Rav Shabsi* then began by enumerating Leah *Imeinu*’s first sons: “Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and, although Rachel had not yet given birth, she did not indicate that she was in any way envious of her sister’s good fortune. What was it about Yehudah’s birth that provoked Rachel’s jealousy to manifest itself, to the point that she told Yaakov *Avinu*, ‘Give me children, for if not, I am (as good as) dead?’ What was different about Yehudah’s birth that engendered such a negative reaction?” *Shmuel Ahron* sat patiently, waiting for his father’s explanation. He sensed that his father had something important to say. “Listen carefully to what I will tell you,” his father began. “When Reuven was born, the Patriarchal home naturally became filled with joy. This was the beginning of the *Shivtei Kah*. It was truly a special moment. Leah declared, ‘Hashem has seen

my troubles’ (Ibid. 29:3,2). When her second child, Shimon, was born, Leah declared, ‘Hashem has heard... and He also gave me this son’ (Ibid. 29:33). Rachel was still without child, but we have no indication that she was anything but happy for her sister. She felt no jealousy. This emotion continued through Leah’s third child, Levi, after which Rachel joined together with Leah in her hopes for a better future filled with joy. Still, she manifested no jealousy.

“It was when Yehudah was born that things changed – not because of Leah giving birth to another child, but because of how Leah expressed herself at his birth. *Atah odeh Hashem*; ‘This time let me praise /thank Hashem.’ The Torah then adds, ‘Therefore, she named the child Yehudah’ (ibid 29:35). This was the only time that we find Rachel showing any resentment concerning her sister’s good fortune. Was it the fourth child that finally made her upset? No! She was jealous that her sister had given birth to a child who would serve as a vehicle for praising Hashem, a tool to serve the Almighty. When Rachel realized that this child (because he was a medium for *hakoras hatov*, gratitude) would elevate Leah spiritually, she cried out in pain, because she, too, wanted to be spiritually elevated.”

Rav Shabsi placed his hand on young *Shmuel Ahron*’s head and said, “My son, I do not expect you to understand the depth of what I am saying to you. However, I sense that you grasp the basic idea. Prior to your birth, we were promised that you would become a true servant of Hashem. I am certain that you have the acumen to become a great scholar, but so did Eisav. We know what happened to him. You must make sure that as you grow older, that you direct all of your strengths, talents and skills toward one goal: spiritual growth, so that you serve Hashem on the loftiest level of your ability.” Indeed, *Rav Shmuel Ahron*’s life was a symphony of service to Hashem.

יֵצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שֶׁבַע

Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva. (28:10)

Rashi comments that as long as Yaakov *Avinu* lived in Beer Sheva, he constituted its *hod*, glory, *ziv*, splendor, and *hadar*, beauty. Once he left the community, these qualities left with him – a phenomenon that occurs whenever a *tzaddik*, righteous man, of repute leaves a circle of people. His influence, which consists of these three qualities, departs with him. We must add that every individual *tzaddik* has his own unique form of these qualities.

Thus, even though Yitzchak Avinu and Rivkah Imeinu remained, their form of these qualities left a different impact on those around them. Theirs was a community blessed with three *tzaddikim*. When one left, his particular brand left with him.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains the difference between these three qualities and the interplay between them. The *tzaddik* is required to possess all three to be truly effective in influencing those around him. *Hod*, glory, refers to such radiance that can be transmitted from one person to another – specifically from *rebbe* to *talmid*, student. When Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to transfer his leadership of *Klal Yisrael* to Yehoshua, he was told, *V'nasata mei'hodecha alav*; “And you shall give of your glory upon him” (*Bamidbar 27:20*). *Ziv*, splendor, refers to a quality that emanates from within a person and shines forth. The shine of the sun is *ziv ha'shemesh*. Last, *hadar*, beauty, is reference to intrinsic, inherent beauty in an object similar to the beauty of an *esrog*. It is indisputably beautiful.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains why all three of these qualities should be inherent in a *tzaddik* if he is to inspire those in his immediate – and far-reaching – proximity effectively. *Hod* bespeaks the *tzaddik's* ability to interpret and explain the *halachah* and *aggada*, ethical renderings of the *Talmud* and *Midrash*, in such a manner that they continue to impact the *rebbe's/tzaddik's* lessons even when he is no longer present. Thus, in a sense, *hod* is different from *ziv*, which constrains the student from veering off the *derech*, path of Torah life, only as long as the *rebbe* is available to “shine” for him. In the *rebbe's* absence, however, the student must fend for himself, being open to the blandishments of society and his personal evil inclination, without the support of the *rebbe's* “splendor.” This is when glory becomes an important factor, by transforming the student into a *koach*, power, unto himself, founded through the inspiration and support of his *rebbe's* glory. We observe this in Yehoshua, whose face shone by itself, albeit like the light of the moon, as compared with his *Rebbe*, Moshe, whose countenance shone like the light of the sun.

Ziv, splendor, demands that the *tzaddik's* greatness must radiate outwards in such a manner that all who see him want to be like him, to emulate his ways. This phenomenon will occur even without any outreach effort on his part. Simply due to his extraordinary splendor, people will be moved to be in some way like

him. While *hod* requires effort on the part of the *tzaddik* to reach out and leave a lasting impression, *ziv* is a splendor of such distinction that it requires nothing other than a sense of being on the part of the *tzaddik*.

Last is *hadar*, beauty, which demands that the *tzaddik* maintain a presence and demeanor of such flawless rectitude that he is considered beautiful, in the sense that he is without blemish. He must reflect perfection in all his ways, such that he practices what he preaches. When people look at him, he is like a beautiful *esrog*. People choose the very best and finest available *esrog*. If there is a shortage of *esrogim*, and the only one that is available is not nearly as *hadar* as last year's *esrogim*, it is still considered beautiful. We judge beauty commensurate with its availability. In other words, we are well aware that in past years, we have been able to obtain *esrogim* of finer, more aesthetic quality and beauty, but this year this is what we have. It is then rendered to be beautiful. If, however, one sees no flaws in what is a second-rate *esrog*, then it is not beautiful. In this instance, beauty is not in the eyes of the beholder, but rather, in its true image – which in this case does not truly live up to accepted standard. Likewise, we do not expect Torah giants of our generation to be on the same level as the ones who lived a century earlier. To refuse to confront the reality of a descent in the generations, however, is to accept a flaw as beautiful and to undermine true greatness. In other words: the giant of our generation is our Moshe, but unquestionably, unfathomable spiritual distance exists between the two “Moshes.”

Va'ani Tefillah

**וּנְפֹשִׁי כְעָפָר לְכֹל תְּהִיָּה – *V'nafshi ke'afar la'kol tiheyeh*.
And let my soul be like dust to everyone.**

While we may not all crave attention, we do expect the people whom we benefit to manifest some measure of gratitude. In other words, no one wants to be taken for granted. The *Chasam Sofer* (commentary to *Chullin 88*) writes that the *tefillah*, *V'nafshi ke'afar la'kol tiheyeh*, teaches otherwise. We pray that we merit to be like dust/dirt, which is the source for providing nourishment to all; yet, everyone steps on it. Therefore, appreciation /gratitude from those whom we benefit should not be the barometer by which we measure the quality of our lives. We should still continue helping others, reaching out to those who have material/physical/emotional/spiritual needs – even if we will not receive honorable mention. This attitude should reign, even if the very same people

whom we have benefitted reject, hurt, abuse us. We must remember that it is not about them – it is about us.

The *Sfas Emes* interprets the unchanging properties of dirt/dust as a simile suggesting how we, as Hashem's people, should react to the world society and culture in which we live. We see and hear events and occurrences that would otherwise negatively affect us. As Jews who believe in Hashem, our relationship with Him and our adherence to Torah and *mitzvos* does not change one iota. Whatever is placed in the ground eventually changes/decomposes. Dirt is immutable. It does not change; neither do we – regardless of what happens around us.

In loving memory of our father and grandfather on his yahrtzeit

אלחנן בן פריץ ז"ל נפטר י"א כסלו תשנ"ט

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לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה

ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

אנא מלכה בת ישראל