

**Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet**  
**Parshat Vayeitzei 5766**

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**TALMUD - Rabbi Berel Wein**

In its simplest form of definition, the Talmud is the record of centuries of discussion expounding the Oral Law of Judaism as it took place in the great Torah academies of the Land of Israel and Babylonia long ago. The Mishna, which is the basis of all talmudic discussions, was completed and edited at the beginning of the third century CE by Rabi Yehuda HaNassi in Tzipori in the Galilee. The Talmud was developed in two separate works: Talmud Yerushalmi (the Talmud of the Land of Israel) and Talmud Bavli (the Talmud of Babylonia.) The Talmud Yerushalmi was completed c.350CE when the Jewish community in the Land of Israel began to suffer genocidal persecution from the newly empowered Byzantine Christians. The demise of a vibrant Jewish community in the Land of Israel forced many of the Torah scholars living there to flee to Babylonia where Christian dominance did not hold sway. The Babylonian Talmud was not completed until the middle/end of the sixth century CE and became the definitive Talmud. Even though the Babylonian Talmud describes itself as being created in “darkness (of exile)” it remains the definitive Talmud. Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi, the great eleventh century codifier of Jewish law, explained that we follow the opinions of the Babylonian Talmud over those of the Talmud Yerushalmi because the Babylonian Talmud, which was edited two centuries later than the Talmud Yerushalmi, already took into consideration the opinions of the Talmud Yerushalmi when reaching its own stated halachic opinions and conclusions. Thus the Babylonian Talmud became and remains the main source for the definitive tradition of the Oral Law from Sinai.

Throughout Jewish history, the Jewish people in all of their lands of dispersion, basically lived a talmudic way of life, differing little from the way of the lives of their ancestors in Babylonia during the period of the compilation and editing of the Talmud. It was the Talmud, naturally based upon the sanctity and integrity of the Torah, the Written Law, that bound world Jewry together in spite of the enormous distances of space and society that exile imposed upon it. The names of the great men of the Talmud – Rabi Yochanan ben Zakai, Rabi Akiva, Rabi Yehuda HaNassi, Rav, Mar Shmuel, Rabah, Abayei, Ravah, Ravina, Rav Ashi, Mar bar Rav Ashi, etc. – were all household names and familiar “guests” in Jewish homes the world over. Even though the vast majority of Jews were hardly talmudic scholars – this field was pretty much reserved for the rabbis and judges of Israel – almost all Jews were aware of the Talmud, its values, messages, decisions and stories. It was the guiding book in their lives, not only in matters of ritual and law, but also in terms of personal behavior, societal goals and vision of the Jewish future. It was almost as though a process of osmosis that Jews absorbed within themselves an appreciation and respect for the Talmud. Eventually it could be said that the book referred to in the phrase “people of the book” was the Talmud.

It is no surprise therefore that the Talmud became the target and flash point of opposition to Judaism, its values and practices as well as its practitioners. The burning of the Talmud was a regular part of Christian persecution of Jews throughout Europe from the time of Louis IX in the thirteenth century to Nazi Germany in the twentieth century. Again, all those dissident Jews who rejected the traditions of the Oral Law and sought to create “new” forms of Jewish life also attacked the Talmud bitterly and discredited its ideas and formulations. From the Karaites in the seventh century to the Yevsektzia (the Jewish section of the Bolshevik party that Stalin would later purge) in the twentieth century, the Talmud was vilified and its pages torn and destroyed by Jews who were bitterly opposed to its teachings and who recognized that no “new” form of Judaism could ever take hold as long as the Talmud was still studied, respected and loved within the Jewish world. Nevertheless, the Talmud,

like the Jewish people that it protects, has weathered all storms. It is the main text and topic of study in all yeshivot throughout the Jewish world. Competence in its study is the first requirement for all rabbis and teachers who maintain and defend the veracity of Jewish tradition from Sinai until our day. The Talmud is old but it remains fresh and vital. Its study is complex, challenging, but it is a labor of love. For understanding the Talmud is the way to understanding the Jewish soul – the Jew that is within us all – and thus is our true connection to our past and our destiny. Shabat shalom.

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**Weekly Parsha - VAYETZEI - Rabbi Berel Wein**

Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov all suffered from success-induced jealous reactions from the local populations where they lived. Avraham is recognized as the “prince of God in our midst” and yet is begrudged a grave plot to bury Sarah. Yitzchak is sent away from the kingdom of Avimelech because “you have grown too great from us.” And in this week’s parsha, Yaakov is told by Lavan that everything that Yaakov owns is really the property of Lavan. The blessings of God and the promise that He made to protect the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel save them from their neighbors, relatives and enemies. However, this very success and achievements of this small family, as per God’s promise and against all odds and opposition, raises the hatred and jealousy of their neighbors. No matter that the neighbors themselves, such as Avimelech and Lavan benefit mightily from the achievements of Yitzchak and Yaakov. The rabbis of the Talmud taught us that “hatred destroys rational thought and behavior.” So, instead of gratitude and friendship, the accomplishments of the patriarchs and matriarchs only bring forth greed, jealousy, persecution and always the threat of violence hovers in the background. All efforts to maintain a low profile and to mollify Lavan result only in increased bigotry and hatred. It is not for naught that the Pesach hagada makes Lavan a greater enemy to the survival of the Jewish people than even the Pharaoh of Egypt. But almost all of the enemies of the Jews over the centuries suffer from the same basic moral faults regarding the Jews: ingratitude, jealousy and greed. These are all revealed to us in this week’s parsha.

Someone mentioned to me that perhaps if we maintained a lower profile in the world, didn’t receive so many Nobel prize awards, and were less influential in the fields of finance and the media, anti-Semitism would decrease. “What if” is a difficult field of thought to pursue intelligently. There is no question that the world and all humankind would be by far the poorer if the Jews purposely withheld their energy, creativity and intelligence from contributing to human civilization. And there certainly is no guarantee that the world would like us any more than it does now if we were less successful and prominent. The mere fact that God blessed the patriarchs with the blessings of success and influence indicates that this is His desire for us. The Torah specifically states that all of the nations and families of the earth will benefit and be blessed through us. So in our case less would not necessarily be more. Yet we were enjoined from flouting our success in the faces of those less fortunate than us. Modesty in behavior and deportment is an important partner to success. This is also a lesson that our father Yaakov intended to teach us. We are not allowed to rein in our talents and achievements. But we are certainly bidden to rein in our egos and bluster. That is also an important Jewish trait that should be a foundation in our lives. Shabat shalom.

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

## OVERVIEW

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

## INSIGHTS

### Medicine for the Soul

"...and she said to Yaakov; Give me children, or else I die!" (30:1)

(Rashi explains that "Give me children" means "Pray for me!")

I have a friend who returned to his Jewish roots via the Himalayas. For several years he was deeply involved in Buddhism. When he subsequently discovered the depth and beauty of his own heritage he was surprised at how quickly he felt comfortable living a Jewish life: The radiance of Shabbat captivated him. The discipline of the dietary laws resonated with his regard for self-control. There was, however, one aspect of his newfound faith that continued to be problematic for him.

Prayer.

"How can prayer be meaningful if everyone has to use the same words? How can that be a personal expression of connection to G-d?" he would ask. "How can prayer be fixed at certain times? Is my heart supposed to open on demand?"

In truth, at the root of his question was a basic misunderstanding of the Hebrew word tefilla, woefully and inadequately translated into English as 'prayer'. The verb l'hitpalel - 'to pray' - is a reflexive verb. Obviously, 'reflexive' does not mean that we pray to ourselves, so why should the verb 'to pray' be reflexive?

The root of the word hitpalel is pillel, which means 'to judge.' To understand the connection between praying and judging, we must understand the deeper function of a judge. A judge takes conflicting evidence, disunion, and injects into this situation of confusion Divine Truth as revealed in the Torah. This Truth penetrates to the very heart of the opposing views, the quarrels and dissension, and creates a new unity on a higher level.

Similarly, when we pray, we inject into the maelstrom of our unquiet soul the Divine Truth which pierces through all the artifice, all the conflict and turmoil inside us. Prayer is reflexive because it brings us face to face with the great harmony at the core of our existence. In other words, tefilla is not an outflow of emotion: it is an influx of Divine energy, a prescription

for the soul formulated by the greatest physicians of the soul - Chazal - the Jewish spiritual masters.

This is not to say that there is no place in Judaism for the outpouring of the soul. Quite the reverse. There are several other words to describe this process, such as siach and techina. Tefilla, however, is the prescription for the soul, and thus, like any medicine, it has to be taken at prescribed times and with exact repeatable doses, and very often, just as with medicine, when we desire it least we need it most.

Source: Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch on Bereishet 20:7; thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

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## Penim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

### PARSHAS VAYEITZEI

**And he became frightened and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d." (28:17)**

When Yaakov Avinu first walked by (the place that would be) the Bais HaMikdash, G-d did not halt him there. Why? Rashi explains that since he did not take the initiative to pray in the place in which his ancestors before him had prayed, Heaven was not going to halt him. It was only when he traveled as far as Charan that he realized, "Is it possible that I passed by a place where my ancestors prayed, and I did not pray there?" He then set his mind to return and went as far as Beth-El, and at that point, the earth contracted for him and the Bais HaMikdash came toward him. Interestingly, it was only after Yaakov "set his mind" and began to return that he merited the miracle of kefitzas ha'derech, the earth contracted for him. Why did there have to be a miracle; he should have been halted at Har HaMoriah when he passed it by. Why did he have to "return" to it?

Horav Moshe Shapiro, Shlita, derives from here that although he was in the place most propitious for prayer, since he did not set his mind and heart on his own, Hashem was not going to assist him. It was only after he took the initiative, set his mind to return, and began the return trip, that Hashem caused a miracle. Siyata d'Shmaya, Divine assistance, is granted to us only after we have taken the first steps, after we have taken the initiative to go forward and undertake the endeavor.

We find support for this idea in Daniel 1: 8-15 when the wicked king decreed that in order to fatten up the Jewish youths, to make them appear healthy and strong, they should be fed unkosher meat and wine. The pasuk says, "Daniel set [the resolve] in his heart not to be defiled by the king's food." We find soon afterward that "G-d granted Daniel favor and mercy before the chief officer," until finally, "their appearance seemed better and they (Daniel, Chananyah, Michael, and Azaryah) were of healthier flesh than all the youths eating the king's food." At the moment that Daniel took the initiative and resolved in his heart not to be led astray, Hashem came to his assistance.

Likewise, the Rosh Yeshivah noted that bachurim in yeshivos become overwhelmed, or they are mistapek b'muat, satisfied with a little accomplishment. They do not shoot for the stars. When one sets his mind and resolves within his heart to become a great talmid chacham, Torah scholar, Hashem will grant him siyata d'Shmaya. If one does not try, he will never know if he could have achieved the goal.

**Leah's eyes were tender, while Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. (29:17)**

Rashi explains that Leah's eyes were tender from constant weeping in prayer. She feared that since she was the elder daughter, she would have to marry Esav. What an incredible sacrifice! What an exalted spiritual position she must have reached. To cry so much that her physical appearance was actually transformed was truly an unprecedented achievement. Bearing this in mind, why did Rachel merit Yaakov as her husband? She did not cry for him, her sister Leah did. Yet, Rachel eventually became the akeres ha'bayis, the foundation and principle of the home.

Harav Tuviah Lisitzin, zl, a student of the Alter of Slabodka, and founder of Yeshivas Heichal HaTalmud, gives an insightful explanation. Leah cried so that she would not fall into Eisav's grip. The mere thought of falling into this evil man's grasp brought about a torrent of tears and supplication. Rachel, on the other hand, exhibited a tremendous inner peace and joy with the knowledge that she would marry Yaakov. The inherent joy of marrying this great tzaddik, righteous man, brought about a physical change, transforming her into a remarkably beautiful woman. Her external physical appearance was a manifestation of her inner joy. Rachel's transformation came about as a result of a positive desire to marry Yaakov, who is considered part of Hashem's Merkavah, Holy Chariot. Thus, in her outward appearance, one could perceive the aura of the Shechinah. A beauty that is the result of a desire for closeness to the Shechinah will undoubtedly reflect the Shechinah in its countenance.

We now have some idea of who were the Matriarchs that gave birth to the Shivtei Kah, Twelve Tribes of Hashem. One cried so much not to fall into Eisav's grasp that her facial appearance changed and her eyes became tender. The other Matriarch exhibited such inner joy in her desire to marry Yaakov, it was manifest in extraordinary physical beauty that glowed of the Shechinah. This is the power of a Jewish woman who, with holiness and purity, seeks to be wed to a talmid chacham and build a Jewish home that is loyal to the verities of Torah.

**She (Leah) declared, "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem"; therefore she called his name Judah. (29:35)**

The translation of the word, odeh, is to gratefully praise. Leah was especially grateful now, because as the mother of four sons she had been granted a privilege whereby she had a predominant share in building the twelve tribes which comprise Klal Yisrael. Gratitude is an inherent Jewish character trait. Indeed, the Chidushei HaRim posits that this is the reason the Jewish People are called Yehudim. We understand that we must always be grateful to the Almighty for granting us even more than we deserve.

The word todah, thanks/thank you, is the acknowledgment of gratitude and appreciation to the one who has performed a specific act. The word todah has another connotation. It is a derivative from the word modeh, to confess/concede. Todah is thus an act of admission and concession. Veritably, when one confesses to another, he is in fact conveying a message of agreement with the other party's opposing view.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, explains that the parallel between these two definitions-- todah as an expression of gratitude, or as an act of admission -- lies in the depths of man's natural instincts. By his innate nature, man seeks independence, aspiring and eager to demonstrate his ability to fend for himself without requiring the services of another individual. Thus, when one expresses his gratitude to his benefactor, he is actually acknowledging and conceding that he really does need the assistance of others. This concept which applies to every individual in his interpersonal relationships with others, manifests itself in one's attitude towards Hashem.

Ingrained in the human mind, as part of the human psyche, is the foolish notion that it is my strength and the power of my hand which has wrought this greatness. The ludicrous belief that man has his own power, without acknowledging Hashem as the Source of all power, has misled and been the ultimate downfall of many. Yehudim, by their very character should reflect and understand the futility of this belief. At every juncture one must acknowledge and give gratitude to his benefactor and to the One Who is the Source of all power. Hashem wants us to maintain this sense of appreciation and to always feel that we are in debt. In fact, He assists us in doing so, as evidenced in the following story.

I was recently at a wedding on the east coast and met someone who shared an incredible story with me. I have since spoken to, and verified the facts with, the primary source of the incident. It was 1984 and Rabbi Aaron Paperman, zl, the executive vice-president of Telshe Yeshiva, and later the director of Chinuch Atzmai, was the keynote speaker at Yeshiva Shaarei Torah's annual dinner. The Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Berel Wein,

sent one of the older bachurim, students, to meet Rabbi Paperman at the airport. The bachur who was selected, Yonasan Hirtz, is today Rabbi Yonasan Hirtz, a distinguished rav in Queens, New York.

When Rabbi Paperman arrived, Yonasan introduced himself as his chauffeur. Rabbi Paperman asked him, "Why were you sent?" Yonasan replied that his Rosh HaYeshiva had sent him. "But, why you - specifically?" Rabbi Paperman reiterated. "I have no idea," replied Yonasan, "I guess I was available, so Rabbi Wein asked me to go."

"Impossible," Rabbi Paperman countered. "There must be a reason that you were sent - and not someone else. Tell me about yourself. Perhaps I can figure out some reason why you were the one that was sent to fetch me."

Yonasan began to relate his background to Rabbi Paperman - who his parents and family members were, where he had studied in yeshiva. Suddenly, Rabbi Paperman's face broke into a large smile as he exclaimed, "I know why you were sent. It was to avail me the opportunity to finally show my appreciation and convey my gratitude to the man who is in a large part responsible for my Torah education. You are the great-grandson of Philip/Uri Shraga Gundersheimer of Baltimore. Do you know who this man was? He was a simple grocer who, despite the financial pressure of the times, refused to open his store on Shabbos. Even during the difficult years of the Depression, he observed Shabbos.

"There were three of us, three aspiring yeshivah bachurim who wanted to go to Europe to learn Torah. America had very little to offer us. Two of us were accepted in Telz and the third wanted to go to Slabodka. There was one major problem: money. Who could afford to go to Europe to learn Torah? Your great-grandfather undertook the responsibility to pay for our tuition. He covered all of our expenses. When I returned from Europe, I went to your great-grandfather's house to offer my profound gratitude. It was too late. He had passed away shortly before my return. I was devastated and during the last forty-three years it has troubled me greatly that I could not thank my benefactor. Today Hashem has finally availed me this opportunity. Thank you! Now you know why you were chosen to meet me at the airport. It was not by chance - it was by Heavenly design." As a postscript, Rabbi Hirtz related to me that the other two bachurim became gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders. In fact, one was my rebbe. Interestingly, similar episodes occurred with other members of Philip Gundersheimer's family, yehi zichro baruch.

**She (Rachel) said to Yaakov, "Give me children..." He (Yaakov) said, "Am I instead of G-d?"...She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, consort with her that she may bear upon my knees." (30:1-3)**

Chazal teach us that there was a little more to their dialogue than what we read in the pesukim. Rachel asked Yaakov why he did not pray for her as his father had prayed for his mother? Yaakov replied that his father did not yet have children, while he already had children. Consequently, he was not certain that his prayer would be successful. She then said that his grandfather, Avraham, already had fathered Yishmael, yet, he still entreated Hashem on Sarah's behalf. Yaakov then queried Rachel, "Are you prepared to do what my grandmother did? Are you willing to take a co-wife into your tent as Sarah took in Hagar?" Rachel responded in the affirmative and instructed Yaakov to take Bilhah for a wife.

When we analyze the dialogue, we wonder what Yaakov wanted from Rachel. Undoubtedly, he had already poured out his heart supplicating Hashem in her behalf.

Apparently, she was destined to be barren. She needed a special zechus, merit, to alter the course of nature and bring about a change in her physical status. Prayer had until this juncture been to no avail. Yaakov then came up with an idea. Perhaps, Rachel would be willing to sacrifice as Sarah had done. Would she be inclined to take a co-wife? He was asking this of the woman who had once given up her rightful place as his wife, only so that her sister not be humiliated. Was not that act of selflessness sufficient to merit a child? This is a compelling question. What greater act of magnanimity is there than giving up her right to marriage - out of sensitivity to her sister?

The question was asked by Horav Avraham Yoffen, zl, in a shmues, ethical discourse. What more could Yaakov have demanded of his fragile wife? The Novardoker Rosh HaYeshiva offered a penetrating insight into Yaakov's advice to his brokenhearted wife. The Patriarch saw that Rachel's chances to achieve motherhood were bleak. Prayer did not create an impact. The gates of tears seemed to be closed. Rachel was regrettably destined to be barren. There seemed to be no eitzah, strategy, left to bring about a change. But wait, there was something that could be done. Yaakov realized that he could implement the attribute of middah k'neged middah, measure for measure, by which Hashem administers the world. Chazal teach us that by the same measure that one conducts his own personal affairs and relationships, so, too, will Hashem conduct Himself with him. Therefore, Sarah, who was barren, took in Hagar as a co-wife and in this merit was blessed with her own child. Yaakov told Rachel, "We have tried everything. You have certainly gone beyond the call of duty with your prayers and outstanding chesed to your sister. I know of only one last resort which my grandmother employed. She gave her maidservant to my grandfather and, in that merit, she was blessed with a child. The Almighty responds to middah k'neged middah." The rest is history.

What a powerful lesson for us. We need parnassah, livelihood, pray for your friend to achieve parnassah. We need a shidduch, suitable match, for a child, pray for your friend. We need a refuah, cure, pray for someone else. When Hashem sees us acting on behalf of others - He will act on our behalf.

**Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's dudaim." But she (Leah) said to her, "Was your taking my husband insignificant? And now to take even my son's dudaim!" (30:14,15)**

The deep, cryptic meaning of the episode of the dudaim aside, we must endeavor to understand Leah's reaction to Rachel's request. If not for Rachel giving over the simanim, secret signals, to her sister, Leah never would have been Yaakov's wife. Lavan's ruse would not have been discovered. How could Leah speak this way to Rachel? Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl, offers a novel approach toward understanding the entire episode that took place on Leah's wedding night. He cites the Daas Zekeinim who explain that the secret signals were none other than the three halachos, laws, in which every Jewish woman should be proficient: niddah, challah and hadlokas ha'neir family purity, the laws of challah separation, and candle-lighting. Yaakov taught these laws to Rachel and the plan was that he would question her proficiency, to confirm that it was truly Rachel that he was marrying.

Rachel not only went to great lengths so her sister would not be humiliated, but also so that her dignity would be maintained. Therefore, she did not share with her the fact that she and Yaakov had predetermined signals between them. Instead, she simply taught her sister the laws that every Jewish woman should know when she marries. Rachel never revealed, nor even indicated, to Leah that there were simanim. Instead she "gave over" the simanim unpretentiously, by teaching them to her. Thus, Leah was never aware of the great sacrifice her sister had made in her behalf. She did not realize how Rachel selflessly gave her the opportunity to wed Yaakov.

We now have a new insight into the remarkable act of chesed, kindness, that Rachel performed for her sister. The most notable aspect of the chesed is that she did not divulge that it was a chesed.

**Then Yaakov became angered and took up his grievance with Lavan...and he said to Lavan, "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?" (31:36)**

Twenty years Yaakov Avinu lived in Lavan's home. Twenty years of being cheated and persecuted. Not once did Yaakov complain; not once did they argue. Yaakov accepted his lot and went along with equanimity. Now, after Yaakov is finally rid of Lavan, and after being pursued by Lavan and searched for contraband, does Yaakov at last take issue and argue. After twenty years of misery, Yaakov tells it like it is. Why did it take so long?

The Ben Avraham explains that Lavan pursued Yaakov with the claim that Yaakov was a thief for stealing his idols. Yaakov feared that because of Lavan's maligning him, a chilul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name would result. Therefore, in order to mitigate whatever rumors might ensue as a result of Lavan's spurious claims, Yaakov argued with Lavan and publicly denied being a party to any wrongdoing. He also recounted each and every time Lavan cheated him in the past twenty years, so that word would get out that Lavan was a liar and a cheat. Thus, the chilul Hashem would be ameliorated.

There is an important lesson to be derived from Yaakov's behavior. He could handle anything. We have no idea how many times Lavan cheated and denied Yaakov what was rightfully his. Yet, Yaakov kept quiet; he did not complain. He did not take issue with Lavan, nor did he argue. It was only after it touched upon kavod Shomayim, the honor of Heaven, that Yaakov took a stand. Yaakov remained at Lavan's for twenty years. Only after he heard Lavan's sons speaking among themselves, claiming that Yaakov had stolen "everything" that had belonged to their father, did he decide that it was time to move on. Why? What took so long?

True, Yaakov could handle suffering and tolerate the lies and the constant cheating. He would not, however, allow Hashem's Name to be defamed by Lavan's ilk. Once word started to spread that Yaakov was a thief, then his G-d, Hashem's Name, would accordingly be tainted. This could not be allowed to occur. The time had come for Yaakov to leave.

**Va'ani Tefillah**

**Rabbi Yishmael omer: B'shalosh esrai middos haTorah nidreshes.**

**Rabbi Yishmael says: "Through thirteen rules is the Torah elucidated."**

As mentioned before, Chazal have prefaced the morning Tefillah with selections from Chumash, Mishnah and Talmud. The Baraisa of Rabbi Yishmael is one of the Baraisos that are authoritative, a Talmudic teaching that was excluded from the Mishnah when that compendium of laws was prepared. This Baraisa has been selected because it is basically an introduction to Torah She' Baal Peh, the Oral Law. When Hashem had Moshe Rabbeinu write down the Written Law, He had already revealed it orally in full detail to the nation. He caused the Holy Torah to be composed in accordance with thirteen basic rules, which made it possible to present the Torah in its compact form so that the intention of Hashem Who gave the Torah, could be nidrash, investigated, and elucidated from the written word, by means of these rules. Known also as the Thirteen Hermeneutic Principals, there is a tradition expounded by Chazal in the Talmud that determines and governs the manner in which these rules may be applied. We have no authority to implement them in any manner that runs counter, or contradicts, the Oral Law. Thus, Rabbinical exegesis does not mean a new innovation, or new laws, but rather the means by which the Oral Law was implied in the Torah itself. Nothing is new. Furthermore, the majority of the laws were transmitted from generation to generation, by rebbe to student, and they were well-known and accepted without the need for any source in the Torah. It was only in the era of the Talmud, when Chazal decided to set forth the Scriptural derivation of a number of well-known laws, that there emerged disputes concerning the exact Scriptural interpretations. The actual laws, however, were familiar.

In loving memory of our husband, father and grandfather on his yahrtzeit Elchanan ben Peretz z"l Esther Kurant Mordechai & Jenny Kurant Aliza & Avrohom Wrona Naomi & Avrohom Yitzchok Weinberger Dovid & Chavi Kurant Yossi Kurant

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**"RavFrاند" List - Parshas Vayeitzei**

**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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## **h a a r e t z**

### **Portion of the Week / Between heaven and earth**

#### **By Haim Sabato**

Jacob obeys his parents and leaves a land pulsing with life. A fugitive, he flees his brother Esau who seeks to derive some measure of comfort from his death, and thus becomes the first of many Jewish exiles. Jacob appears to be penniless, armed with just a staff. All he asks of God is bread, clothing and the chance to return to his parents? safely. He is not truly impoverished when he sets out on his long journey into exile. Alone in an arid land with a rock as his pillow, he has a wonderful dream on the first night - about a ladder whose base is on earth and whose top rung touches the heavens, on which angels ascend and descend. God stands above and draws up a covenant with Jacob.

In addition to the divine covenant with the patriarchs again drawn up with Jacob, God grants him a special promise that will serve him in his exile and offer him comfort as an expatriate: "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Genesis 28:15?). Jacob is the first Jewish exile and his descendants, who will also be exiles, receive a similar promise: "When they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God" (Leviticus 26:44?).

We see only what is deep within our hearts. Jacob’s thoughts are focused on the realm of sanctity, on the divine covenant with his ancestors, on his longings for the land he has left. God stands above him and reveals holy visions. King David the poet writes in a similar vein: "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary" (Psalms 63:1-2?). As Sefat Emet (Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter?) writes about this week’s reading: "The more we long to serve God in an arid land where there is no water, the greater will be our devotion to him when he reveals himself to us."

The dream about the ladder, which rises straight up to the heavens, attests to the thoughts that are in Jacob’s mind as he flees the wrath of his brother. How lofty those thoughts are. What is the nature of this dream? It is about the world we live in. God shows Jacob what the role of mortals is in this earthly existence. They must ascend the ladder, rung by rung.

Since its base rests on earth and its top reaches the very heavens, all we need for our ascent is our determination to reach the top. However, we must use the ladder and not skip any of its rungs. In contrast, prophetic visions and divine providence descend until they reach this world. As Gersonides (Levi ben Gershon) comments on Gen. 28:10: "The forces and forms that are contained in these all descend from God rung by rung until they reach the lowest of the created forms, which then themselves ascend the ladder."

God also shows Jacob what will happen in history (Exodus Rabbah 32?): Nations rise and nations fall, but God will protect Jacob and his descendants. Our sages have also said on this subject (Genesis Rabbah 68:12?): "It is written in the Torah, 'and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it' (Gen. 28:12?). They ascend through Jacob, as we read in the Book of Isaiah: 'O Israel, in whom I will be glorified' (49:3?). God is essentially saying to Jacob, 'The image of your face is inscribed in heaven.' They (the angels?) ascend and see Jacob's face, and when they descend, they see that same face as they observe Jacob deep in slumber."

In his vision, the prophet Ezekiel sees a mortal among those bearing the divine chariot. Rashi, commenting on the Holin Tractate of the Babylonian Talmud (91b?), asks: Who is this mortal? It is Jacob, who is inscribed in heaven. The angels are dumbfounded: When they ascend heavenward, they see Jacob inscribed in the divine chariot. When they descend earthward, they see him asleep, with a rock for a pillow. They simply cannot understand this enigma. How can this same mortal, Jacob, be in this earthly existence, asleep on the ground and yet be inscribed in the divine chariot in the high heavens?

The divine chariot expresses the presence of God's glory in this world. The prophet Ezekiel discovers that God's glory and his appearance before mortals are borne not only by holy creatures but also by mortals. Mortals can aspire to a lofty existence. They can ascend the ladder, reach the uppermost rung and become one of the divine chariot's bearers and one who reveals God's glory in the world.

The very same mortal lying asleep on the ground has the power to ascend the ladder and become one of the bearers of God's glory. This is the privilege granted to Jacob, because he is the third patriarch and the "threefold cord" (Ecclesiastes 4:12?) in whom the process of establishing the family that will show God's ways to the inhabitants of the world, reaches its culmination. That is why Jacob is so excited when he awakes from the dream and why he exclaims, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16?). When he wakes up, Jacob realizes that such a dream can be seen in only one place – in the valley of prophetic visions that is the sole place on earth where mortals can have these visions – namely, at the gate of heaven. Jacob discovers that this well-known place is the place where his ancestors so fervently worshiped God, the site of Isaac's binding. With a sense of awe in his heart, Jacob utters the statement, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:17?). Jacob knows that, in order to reach the ultimate goal of worshiping God, to ascend to the uppermost rung of the ladder and to reach the heavens, he must be in the Land of Israel, in Jerusalem, the place on earth where mortals must worship and serve God.

But where does this ladder stand? In Jerusalem or Bethel (the House of God)? And where is heaven's gate? On Mount Moriah or at Luz? Our sages (Genesis Rabbah 69:7?) provide us with the solution: The foot of the ladder is in Be'er Sheva, its head is in Bethel and its middle faces Jerusalem. The height of God's worship is Bethel – the top of the ladder that reaches the heavens. The foot of divine worship is Be'er Sheva, where Abraham planted a grove (Gen. 21:33?), a place for eating, drinking and a night's sojourn, as well as a place for executing God's commandments and performing acts of compassion.

This is our world, our earthly existence, where the foot of the ladder rests. The middle of the ladder is Jerusalem, which is sheer perfection and creates peace between the physical world and the spiritual one. The

quintessence of our worship of God is that we are capable of standing in the very middle between heaven and earth, that we can ascend the ladder, that we can enable the entire world to ascend with us. Jerusalem makes peace between the ladder's base and the worship of God in this world, on the one hand, and the goal of that worship: the House of God. That is why the middle of the ladder faces Jerusalem.

Abraham, the founder of the family that will glorify God in this world, provides an example by setting out for the Promised Land and thereby obeying God's command. Isaac sets an example by residing with such great devotion in that land, as a perfect offering to God. Jacob becomes an example because he is the first Jewish exile. The preparation he receives is the wondrous dream that accompanies him on his journey. The prophetic vision he has been privileged to see is what gives him the strength to endure the lengthy exile with hope and complete trust in God, as we read this week: "And, behold, I am with thee."

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### **From: Darash Moshe**

### **A selection of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's choice comments on the Torah.**

### **Parashas Vayeitzei**

Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Hashem is in this place and I did not know!" (28:16).

For what purpose did Yaakov mention this seemingly insignificant fact? Rashi explains that Yaakov's intent was: Had I known, I would not have slept in a holy place such as this. This is very difficult to understand. The Gemara tells us (Chullin 91b) that Hashem caused the sun to set early in order to cause Yaakov to sleep in this particular spot (Chullin 91b). The Talmud further teaches that the stones Yaakov had placed surrounding his head miraculously joined, forming one large stone. As the verse narrates, it was during this sleep that Yaakov merited receiving a prophecy from Hashem, as well as a promise of protection during his numerous travels. From all of these miraculous occurrences it should have been clear to Yaakov that it was the will of Hashem that he should sleep in this spot. Why, then, would Yaakov say that had he known of Hashem's presence he would have done otherwise?

The proper way to understand Yaakov's words is as follows. Yaakov thought that one is only considered to be serving Hashem when involved in spiritual pursuits such as tefillah and Torah study. Involvement in physical matters such as eating and sleeping, however, could not be considered serving Hashem, since they are not themselves mitzvos.

By performing miracles and causing Yaakov to sleep (a purely physical activity) on the future site of the Beis Hamikdash, Hashem sought to teach Yaakov that this is not the case. Hashem gave His Torah to human beings knowing that they are creations whose physical needs must be satisfied to facilitate their continuing ability to fulfill His commandments. It is His Divine will that these physical activities should be sanctified through their use as tools assisting people in their service of Hashem. In this way, these activities can be raised to the level where they themselves become the fulfillment of Hashem's will.

It was this that Yaakov alluded to when he exclaimed "and I did not know." Yaakov exclaimed that prior to being taught this lesson, he did not know that a physical act such as sleeping could be sanctified to such a degree. Rashi (quoted above) explains that commensurate with Yaakov's prior understanding, had he known of the holiness of the site he would not have thought it proper to sleep there.

Taking note of this lesson, Yaakov said that the stone upon which he rested his head while sleeping should be a Beis Elokim. It was Yaakov's wish that the stone should serve as a reminder to the fact that a Beis Elokim is not only a place where one is involved in Torah and mitzvos. Even the seemingly mundane act of sleeping must be done with the proper intentions — so that a sleeping place, too, can reach the level of Beis Elokim.

## Rabbi Yonasan Sacks

Torahweb.org [from last year]

### Foundations of Tefilla

The Gemara (Berachos 26b) cites two different sources for our daily tefillos. According to Rebbe Yosi b'rebbe Chanina, our tefillos were instituted by the avos. Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi however maintains that our tefillos correspond to the daily korbanos.

The Gemara subsequently (27b) disputes the nature of tefillas arvis. Rabban Gamliel maintains that tefillas arvis chova, that the maariv tefilla is compulsory, whereas Rebbe Yehoshua argues that tefillas arvis reshus, that maariv is elective.

Although the Gemara never connects these two themes, Rashi (Shabbos 9b) explains that the source and extent of our obligation to daven maariv are clearly linked. If tefilla is rooted in the practice of the avos, there is no difference between shacharis, mincha, and maariv. According to Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi, however, who bases tefilla on korbanos, one can easily distinguish between shacharis and mincha, which are patterned after fixed korbanos, and maariv, which does not correspond to a particular korban, but rather to the remaining parts of the korban which would burn through the night.

The Netziv, however, observes (Sheilta 8) that this cannot be the view of Rebbe Achai Gaon. Although the Sheiltos maintains tefillas arvis reshus (maariv is elective) he nevertheless cites the source of Rebbe Yosi b'rebbe Chanina basing tefilla on the avos. Why however, should the tefilla of Yaakov avinu be any different than the tefillos of Avraham and Yitzchok?

The Netziv explains that an answer can be found in the very phrase vayifga bamakom, he encountered the place, which describes the tefilla of Yaakov avinu. The Gemara (Chulin 91b) comments "ki mata l'Charan amar, efshar avarti al makom shehispalelu avosai va'ani lo hispalalti?" – "when Yaakov reached Charan he exclaimed, how could I have passed the place where my fathers davened and not have davened there myself?"

Unlike the tefillos of Avraham and Yitzchok, when the Torah simply states that they davened, here the passuk attributes the tefilla of Yaakov avinu to a particular time and place. Apparently, the tefilla of Yaakov was not a categorical obligation, but rather a response to his unique circumstance. If so, the Netziv observes, the view of Rebbe Yehoshua who holds tefillas arvis reshus can be understood based on the tefilla of Yaakov avinu.

Tefillas arvis, which was instituted by Yaakov avinu, emphasizes the appropriateness of tefilla when one is surrounded by darkness. The Meshech Chochmo explains (Braishis 46:2) that twice, Hakadosh Baruch Hu appeared to Yaakov avinu at night, b'maros layla. Although Yaakov avinu was forced to leave Eretz Yisroel and endure the difficulties of galus, Hakadosh Baruch Hu reassures him, specifically at night, that even b'cheshkas hagalus one can experience hashroas hashechina.

May we, the descendants of Yaakov avinu, embrace the priorities of our avos, enabling the light of Torah and tefilla to permeate the darkness of galus.

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## Bar-Ilan University's Parashat Hashavua Study Center

Parashat Va-Yetze 5766/ December 10, 2005

### Rachel and Leah – Wife and Mother

#### Dr. Gabriel H. Cohn - Department of Bible

According to an ancient tradition, Rachel and Leah were twins: "Rachel and Leah turned out to be ... twins" (Seder Olam Rabbah 2). As with Jacob and Esau, so too with Laban's twins, Leah was called the elder and Rachel the younger, [1] and like Isaac's twins, so too Rachel and Leah were completely different in their character and way of life. A close look at the biblical text enables us to draw to different images of these two women: Rachel, active by nature and taking matters in hand, the other, domestic and passive. Rachel's presence is felt from the first moment

that Jacob meets her; striking in her external appearance, extremely beautiful, she moves freely among the shepherds. Jacob falls in love with Rachel at first glance (Gen. 29:18) [2] and chooses her to be his wife and companion.

Rachel, however, does not settle for the role of Jacob's mate; she wishes also to be the mother of his children, and as she continues to be barren she gives sharp expression to her desire to bear a child. When her request is not answered, she comes up with the idea to have her maidservant Bilhah brought into Jacob's household as a wife. Rachel expresses her feelings outright, and Scripture, which generally presents thoughts and feelings obliquely, notes explicitly in this case that she was jealous of her sister (Gen. 30:1).

This jealousy finds expression in the transaction with the mandrakes: Leah had received a gift of mandrakes from her son, Reuben; this was an expression of a son's love, so deeply longed for by Rachel. In exchange for the mandrakes of Leah's son, Rachel offers to let Leah sleep with Jacob that night. [3] Even the names of the sons that her maidservant Bilhah bore express Rachel's gnawing agony: "G-d has vindicated me [Heb. dananni, 'to judge']; indeed, He has heeded my plea" (Gen. 30:6); "A fateful contest I waged [Heb. naphtule ... niphtalti, connected with Naphtali] with my sister; yes, and I have prevailed" (Gen. 30:8). Joseph's birth also evokes in her a strong, almost egocentric, response: "G-d has taken away [Heb. asaph] my disgrace... May the Lord add [Heb. yoseph] another son for me" (Gen. 30:23-24). So too the name that she gives her younger son, Ben-Oni [meaning "son of my suffering", hence Benjamin], is tied to Rachel's personal feelings.

Nonetheless, even though she bore few children, Rachel's position as Jacob's confidante continues, and when he consults his wives she is named first ("Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the field" – 31:4; "Then Rachel and Leah answered him" – 31:14). When they leave Laban's house Rachel steals Laban's idols and acts in her own way to conceal the theft, and in anticipation of his encounter with Esau, Jacob puts "Rachel and Joseph last" (33:2). Indeed, she remains the beloved wife and an independent-minded woman, full of life and vitality.

In contrast, Leah is a mother figure through and through. She modestly conceals her feminine charms, so that through her veil one can only see that her eyes are "gentle" [Heb. rakkot, rendered by New JPS translation as "weak"], or beautiful. [4] She suffers constantly due to Jacob's greater love for Rachel ("Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes?" – 30:15), and hopes that Jacob will be more loving to her because of the children she has borne. She also gives most of her children names that reflect her aspiration: "Now my husband will love me"; "This time my husband will become attached to me"; "This time my husband will exalt me" (29:32, 34; 30:20).

It might seem that Leah was concerned with herself, but that is not the case; Leah's thoughts are on Jacob, and her entire aspiration is for him to be closer to her. She is not troubled about her own honor and status – a way of thinking that to some extent characterizes Rachel, as finds expression in the names she gives her children – rather, Leah's thoughts are entirely given over to Jacob. In all that happens to her she remains passive, from the moment that her father gave her to Jacob ("He took his daughter Leah and brought her to him" – 29:23) until the day of her death. Even when Leah appears to take action, for example, when she gives her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob, she does so following Rachel's initiative. [5]

Strangely, over the years the position occupied by these two female figures became reversed: Rachel came to be viewed as the mother of children, and Leah as Jacob's wife. The prophet Jeremiah writes about Rachel crying for her children on the high road to Jerusalem (31:14-16):

Thus said the Lord: A cry is heard in Ramah – wailing, bitter weeping – Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone. Thus said the Lord: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding

tears; for there is a reward for your labor – declares the Lord: They shall return from the enemy’s land, and there is hope for your future – declares the Lord: Your children shall return to their country.

Thus the woman who most of her life was Jacob’s beloved, but barren, became the symbol of the mother of the children of Israel. The word “sons” recurs in this prophecy three times, as the key word of the entire passage. Many legends as well, describe the children of Israel heading out to exile and pleading that Rachel, the mother figure, help redeem them. [6] In contrast, Leah, who in the Genesis narrative is the embodiment of the mother figure (with most of the Israelites being from her progeny), is the only one of Jacob’s wives to be buried next to her husband, as were the other matriarchs, and this was done at Jacob’s explicit request. [7] We must conclude that Leah achieved this status as Jacob’s wife—a position to which she came, ironically, by chance—through persistent devotion to her husband her entire life. [8]

[1] “Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel” (Gen. 29:16). Jacob had said explicitly to Laban that he was interested in his “younger daughter Rachel” (Gen. 29:18).

[2] The verb a-h-v, to love, occurs three times in the context of Jacob’s relationship with Rachel (29:18, 20, 30).

[3] What an irony of fate: once more Jacob finds himself in relations with Leah, contrary to what he had intended, but this time at the initiative of Rachel herself.

[4] There are several well-known legends that associate Leah’s weak eyes with her sadness (Bava Batra 123a, also see Rashi on this verse). Many commentators, however, view the vav before Rachel’s name in verse 17 as conjunctive, not disjunctive, and laud Leah for her beautiful eyes. For example, Targum Onkelos says that Leah’s eyes were beautiful, Rashbam says they were pretty, etc. Such an interpretation is far more suitable to the plain sense of the text and the nature of the biblical narrative.

[5] The only exception is when Leah goes out to meet Jacob, after having given her son’s mandrakes to Rachel, and proclaims: “You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes” (30:16); but even in this case the initiative for the deal comes from Rachel.

[6] Rachel was the mother of the Messiah, son of Joseph, and she is buried on the high road over which the Judean exiles passed on their way to Babylonia. Leah, whose progeny includes the Messiah, son of David, is buried in the patriarch’s tomb in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, south of Jerusalem.

[7] “Bury me with my fathers in the cave ... which is in the field of Machpelah ... that Abraham bought... There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah” (Gen. 49:29-31).

[8] One could say that Jacob, throughout his life, was tied to the woman who complemented his character. As a “mild man who stayed in camp” (25:27), he was particularly drawn to Rachel, who, like his mother, was a woman of action and initiative. Over the years, as Jacob became a man of struggles and battles (Israel, wrestling with G-d), he began to appreciate Leah’s unique qualities, representing the other aspect of life.

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## Haftorah - Parshas Vayeitzei

### Hoshea 12:13 - 14:10

This week’s haftorah is devoted to the Jewish nation’s severe plunge into idolatry. The Judean kingdom ultimately succumbed to the rampant practices of the Samaritan kingdom and engaged itself in foreign worship. This abhorrent conduct traced back to the days of Yeravam ben N’vat, the first Samaritan king. Shlomo Hamelech relied upon his unprecedented sound wisdom and permitted himself to marry women of alien descent and culture. He undoubtedly intended to eradicate from them every trace of their previous environment. However, he was unsuccessful in this and his idolatrous wives threatened to corrupt the entire Jewish nation. Hashem responded to this deteriorating situation and pledged to remove most of the Jewish kingdom from the royal Davidic dynasty. (see M’lochim 1 11:4-13) Hashem sent the prophet Achiya to inform Yeravam he would lead ten of the tribes and Shlomo’s son, Rechavam would lead the remaining tribes of Yehuda and Binyomin.

Yeravam began his reign with the best of intentions but he soon abused his royal authority. Instead of preventing foreign influences he ultimately

corrupted his entire kingdom beyond the any point of return. Eventually, brought matters under control and exiled most of the Jewish nation. In this week’s haftorah the prophet Hoshea turns to the remaining Judean tribes and sternly warns them not to follow their brothers’ corrupt ways.

It is worthwhile to understand the events described here that led to Yeravam’s appointment and gain true insight to human nature. Hoshea said, “When (Yeravam from) Efraim spoke frightening words he was elevated over Israel; yet he sinned in idolatry and died.” (Hoshea 13:1) This verse refers to a specific incident quoted in Sefer M’lochim wherein Yeravam took a hard stand and reprimanded Shlomo Hamelech. Dovid Hamelech previously designated the Milo area outside Yerushalayim as a communal plaza for the masses of Jewish people who visited Yerushalayim during the festivals. Shlomo Hamelech, however, opted to use this area as living quarters for his new bride, the daughter of Pharaoh. The Jewish people were infuriated by this outrageous act of authority but lacked the courage to respond to it. Yeravam took the initiative and displayed his religious zeal and publicly denounced the king for his behavior. Hashem rewarded Yeravam for his courageous act in defense of Hashem’s honor and elevated Yeravam to the highest position of authority.

The Sages add an important insight regarding this rise to power. They reflect upon the verses that describe Yeravam’s act in the following words, “And Yeravam ben N’vat ... was the servant of Shlomo and he raised his hand against the king. And for this matter... Shlomo built the Milo and closed his father Dovid’s opening.” (M’lochim 1 11:26, 27) The Sages explain that Yeravam merited the throne because of his outstanding courageous opposition to Shlomo Hamelech’s conduct. But, they painfully add that Yeravam was also severely punished because he publicly shamed the king. (see Mesicta Sanhedrin 101b) Maharsha explains here that the sages sought to understand Yeravam’s devastating end. They question that since Yeravam performed such a meritorious act, as is evidenced by his appointment over Israel, how could such control result in the horrible Jewish exile? If Hashem truly appreciated Yeravam’s devotion how could it develop so quickly into a rampant campaign of idolatry?

They answer that although Yeravam’s intentions were proper they were accompanied by arrogance. True, Shlomo Hamelech deserved reprimand but this did not include public shame and embarrassment. The Sages reveal that had Yeravam been truly sensitive to the king’s honor and authority he could have never acted in this manner. Although he acted out of religious zeal he was self absorbed in piety and ignored the king’s honor and due respect. This imperfection ultimately led Yeravam to total corruption and caused him to forfeit his portion in the world to come. (ad loc)

This arrogance and disrespect played itself out on a broader scale and eventually led the Samaritan kingdom into idolatry. The Sages explain that Yeravam feared that the Jewish pilgrimage to Yerushalayim would cause him to lose his following to Rechavam. Yeravam based this fear on an halachic precedent that required him to stand in the Temple area while Rechavam sat. He reasoned that this scene would undermine his authority and publicly display him as Rechavam’s servant. To combat this, he established alternate sites of worship throughout his kingdom and forbade his people from visiting the Temple. These drastic measures forced his kingdom to totally disassociate with the Judean kingdom and the Temple. In the absence of any tangible link with Hashem, the Samaritan kingdom developed its own form of worship and became gravely involved in idolatry.

The Sages reveal that the root of this was Yeravam’s arrogance and insensitivity towards Rechavam. After all, couldn’t a scion of Dovid Hamelech be afforded proper respect and honor without interfering with Yeravam’s reign? Why couldn’t Yeravam justify his behavior as a show of honor to Hashem’s chosen one, Dovid Hamelech? The unfortunate reality was that Yeravam could not see himself forgoing his respect for Rechavam’s sake. He conceivably reasoned that the king must display total authority and not be perceived as subservient to anyone. However,

the Sages reveal that this reasoning was truly rooted in arrogance and unwillingness to show others proper honor and respect. This character flaw created his threatening illusion and propelled him to alienate his kingdom.

We now realize that what began as a subtle insensitivity towards Shlomo Hamelech eventually developed into a full grown split in our nation. Yeravam did perform a meritorious act but showed disrespect for authority. Hashem granted Yeravam the throne but tested his ability to manage such authority. Yeravam succumbed to the temptation of power and could not forego his own honor. This persistent drive blinded him and misled him to undermine his own power and destroy his kingdom. (see Maharzu's comment to Vayikra Rabba 12:5) Regretfully, we learn the power of a character flaw and see how one person's sense of honor and respect destroyed our nation and exiled our Ten lost tribes.

This lesson is appropos to our sedra that presents our Matriarch Rochel as the paradigm of human sensitivities. Although Rochel undoubtedly knew the immeasurable spiritual value of her exclusive relationship with our Patriarch Yaakov she was not self absorbed. Her spiritual drive could not interfere with her sensitivity towards her sister, Leah. Rochel decided that her exclusive relationship with Yaakov had no merit if it caused Leah embarrassment. She, unlike Yeravam, overlooked her religious fervor and focused on her sister's pain. She therefore revealed to Leah all of Yaakov's secret signals and assisted her sister in establishing an eternal bond with her own pre-destined match. Rochel's self sacrifice and sensitivity became the hallmark of the Jewish people who constantly strive to perfect themselves in these areas.

The Sages reveal that Hashem specifically responds to Rochel's prayers on behalf of her exiled children. When Rochel weeps over her children Hashem remembers her incredible sensitivity towards Leah and responds favorably. In her merit Hashem forgives the Jewish people for their abhorrent insensitivities towards His glory and guarantees her children's return to their land. Although their sins and ultimate exile are rooted in Yeravam's insensitivity Rochel's merit surpasses all faults. Her superhuman display of self sacrifice and sensitivity became the character of the Jewish people and in her merit Hashem promises to return her long lost children to their homeland. (see intro. to Eicha Rabba)

The Chafetz Chaim reminds us that our seemingly endless exile is rooted in these insensitivities. Hashem will not send Mashiach until we rectify these faults. Let us internalize Rochel's lesson and exercise extreme sensitivity towards the feeling of others. (intro to Shmiras Halashon) Let us not allow our religious fervor or spiritual drives to desensitize us of the needs of others. Priority one must be every Jewish person's well-deserved honor and respect. Let us remember Rochel's ruling that no mitzva act-regardless of his magnitude- has merit unless it takes everyone's feelings into consideration. After rectifying our subtle character flaws we can sincerely approach Hashem and plead with Him to end our troubles. May we merit Hashem's return to His beloved nation in the nearest future.

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel is Rosh Kollel (Dean) of Kollel Toras Chaim, Kiryat Sefer, Israel.

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## WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5766

**By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt, Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights  
A discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav  
SHE'AILOS U'TESHUVOS**

QUESTION: Are men or women required to remove their rings before washing their hands for the morning netilas yadayim (negel vasser)?

DISCUSSION: L'chatchilah, all the rules that govern netilas yadayim for a meal apply to the morning netilas yadayim as well.(1) Just as a chatzitzah (halachic obstruction) invalidates netilas yadayim for a meal, so, too, it invalidates negel vasser, l'chatchilah. Generally, a ring is considered a chatzitzah since the water cannot easily touch all parts of the finger when a ring is on the finger. Even though a loose-fitting ring does allow the water to reach all parts of the finger, the poskim maintain that it

is difficult to assess what, exactly, is considered loose and what is considered tight. All rings, therefore, should be removed before washing negel vasser.(2) But b'diavad, a chatzitzah does not invalidate the morning netilas yadayim and a woman who forgot or failed to remove her rings need not repeat the washing.(3) Moreover, if a woman has a hard time removing the ring from her finger, she may leave it on when washing netilas yadayim in the morning.

A ring is considered a chatzitzah only for men or women who sometimes, even on rare occasions, remove it from their finger. The occasional removal signifies that the person is sometimes particular about having the ring on his finger, rendering it a chatzitzah. But men or women who never take their rings off, even when kneading dough, swimming or performing manual labor, may l'chatchilah wash their hands while wearing a ring.(4)

QUESTION: If one began eating or drinking in a car, does he need to recite another berachah if he wants to continue eating or drinking once he gets to his home or office?

DISCUSSION: If he began eating or drinking while the car was in motion or stuck in traffic, he may continue eating or drinking once he gets to his destination and no additional berachah rishonah is recited. This is because eating or drinking in a moving car is not considered a keivus makom, and continuing to eat or drink in another location is not considered a shinui makom. The halachah remains the same even if he initially had no intention of continuing to eat or drink once he arrives at his destination.

If, however, he began to eat or drink in a parked vehicle with the intention of finishing his food or drink before resuming the drive, and then he changes his mind and wants to continue eating or drinking, the halachah is as follows:

As long as he remains in the car he may continue eating or drinking without reciting an additional berachah.

When he reaches his destination, he must recite a berachah acharonah, and recite a new berachah rishonah if he wants to continue eating or drinking.(5)

QUESTION: If, mistakenly, a household member or a guest washes his hands for mayim acharonim thinking that the meal is over and then realizes that another course is going to be served(6)- what should he do?

DISCUSSION: If at all possible, he should not eat any of this course before Birkas ha-Mazon. He should bench immediately, and then partake of it after benching.

If, however, he cannot decline the food being served, e.g., for the sake of shalom bayis, then he may eat whatever is being served but he must first recite a proper berachah rishonah. The ha-motzi that he made at the beginning of the meal, or any other berachah he may have recited during the meal, is no longer valid for food that will be eaten after the hands were washed for mayim acharonim.(7)

If the food that was served was not "meal type food", e.g., a fruit dessert, ice cream, chocolate, etc., then he must also recite a borei nefashos before reciting Birkas ha-Mazon. If he forgot to do so and benched, then he must recite borei nefashos after Birkas ha-Mazon.(8)

The above halachos apply also to one who did not wash mayim acharonim, but was already at the point of raising his cup of wine in preparation for Birkas ha-Mazon and then decided to continue eating.(9)

QUESTION: Is it permitted to leave a car with a non-Jewish mechanic on Friday afternoon even though the mechanic may repair the car on Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: It is clearly forbidden to expressly ask a non-Jewish mechanic to repair a car on Shabbos.(10) Moreover, even if there was no express request to repair the car on Shabbos, but the mechanic would have no time other than Shabbos to repair the car, that is considered as if he is being asked expressly to repair the car on Shabbos and it is strictly forbidden to do so. It is prohibited, therefore, to bring a car in for repair late on Friday and ask to pick it up on Saturday night immediately after Shabbos.(11)

If, however, the car was brought in with enough time to repair it before or after Shabbos, but the mechanic chooses to do the job on Shabbos, that is of no concern to us, since the work being done on Shabbos is not a result of the car owner's instructions but rather by choice of the non-Jewish mechanic, which is permitted. This is permitted even if the mechanic clearly states in advance that he will do the work on Shabbos.(12)

It is, therefore, permitted to bring a car in for repairs on Friday afternoon right before Shabbos and ask the mechanic if it can be picked up first thing Monday morning, even if this particular mechanic is always closed on Saturday nights and on Sundays and the work will surely be done on Shabbos. This is permitted because in fact there is enough time for the mechanic to repair the car after Shabbos. The fact that the car will be repaired on Shabbos is due to the decision of the mechanic, not to the instruction of the Jew.(13)

**QUESTION:** What is the proper method for applying ointment on Shabbos?

**DISCUSSION:** Several poskim are of the opinion that spreading ointment on the skin is a violation of Smoothing.(14) While other poskim are not too concerned about this issue,(15) most contemporary poskim follow the more stringent view and advise to avoid spreading ointment on the skin on Shabbos.

The recommended method when using ointment on Shabbos, therefore, is to squeeze the ointment from the tube directly onto the skin.(16) [When the ointment is in a jar, the ointment may be removed with one's finger and dabbed on the skin.] A bandage may then be placed over the ointment, even though this may result in some spreading of the ointment over the skin.(17)

If, for some reason, the above option cannot be used, several poskim permit to spread ointment on the skin provided that all of the ointment is absorbed into the skin and nothing remains on the surface.(18)

**QUESTION:** How mandatory is Chazal's advisory that a guest should not change his customary lodging place?

**DISCUSSION:** Rashi(19) explains that there are two reasons behind this advisory:

Switching lodgings discredits the guest, since he will be considered hard to please or disreputable in some way.

Switching lodgings harms the host's reputation, since it gives the impression that his lodgings were unsatisfactory.(20)

It follows, therefore, that if a guest has a bona fide reason to change his lodging place, the halachah will not restrict him from doing so. For example, if a guest customarily lodged at a certain home, but came to town for a simchah and wants to stay at the home of the ba'al simchah, that would be permitted. If a guest customarily lodged at a certain home, but upon his return visit the original host was out-of-town, indisposed, or no longer had the space for guests, the halachic advisory would not apply and the guest could stay elsewhere.(21)

**FOOTNOTES:**

1 O.C. 4:7.

2 Igros Chazon Ish 1:4.

3 See Eishel Avraham O.C. 4.

4 Based on Mishnah Berurah 161:19 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 161:6. [A woman who removes her ring only when immersing in a mikveh may still wash with a ring on her finger.]

5 Entire Discussion based on Mishnah Berurah 178:42, as explained in B'tzeil ha-Chachmah 6:73-74 and Vesain Berachah, pg. 148, quoting Harav Y.S. Elyashiv.

6 Or he thought that he must leave and then realized that he could stay longer.

7 Chayei Adam 59:8; Mishnah Berurah 179:2 and 10, and Beur Halachah s.v. ad.

8 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 174:32 and Beur Halachah 177:2 s.v. limshoch. See also Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 177:6 and 9.

9 Mishnah Berurah 179:12-13.

10 O.C. 252:2.

11 Mishnah Berurah 247:4; 252:16; 307:15.

12 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 30, note 83).

13 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:53; 4:54. Other poskim disagree and maintain that since this mechanic never works overtime or Sundays, giving the car for repair right before

Shabbos is tantamount to instructing him to do so on Shabbos; see The Sanctity of Shabbos pgs. 66-68, quoting Harav Y.S. Elyashiv.

14 Da'as Torah 328:26; Chazon Ish 52:16.

15 Mateh Levi and other poskim quoted in Tzitz Eliezer 7:30-2 and Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 33, note 58.

16 Chazon Ish 52:16. One should avoid squeezing the ointment directly onto the bandage; Shevet ha-Levi 4:33.

17 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 33, note 63 and Tikunim u'Miluim).

18 Da'as Torah 328:26; Tzitz Eliezer 7:30-2; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 33, note 58). See also Igros Moshe O.C. 2:79 and Minchas Yitzchak 7:20 who sanction this method.

19 Erchin 16b.

20 Accordingly, one should not change even from one Jewish-owned hotel to the next as it discredits the hotel where he stayed, unless he has a bona fide reason for doing so.

21 See Piskei Teshuvos 170:6 quoting Ahalecha B'amitecha.

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## Halacha Talk

by Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

### Have You Ever Redeemed a Donkey?

As a cohen I often participate in the mitzvah of Pidyon Haben, redeeming a firstborn male child, a bechor, but I have not yet participated in the redemption of a firstborn donkey, a peter chamor. This mitzvah occurs less frequently in an era when few Jews own beasts of burden, yet there are individuals who strive to fulfill every mitzvah that it is possible to observe today, and they have arranged a way to fulfill this mitzvah. I even know of someone who raised a jenny, a female donkey, just for the purpose of being able to fulfill this mitzvah. (As we will see later, this does not guarantee him the opportunity to observe the mitzvah.) Although we are not required to do this, klal Yisroel kedoshim heim, the Jewish people are holy and strive to perform extra mitzvos. But in order to ascertain that we indeed fulfill this mitzvah successfully, we need to study its halachos thoroughly.

The Torah mentions the mitzvah of redeeming a peter chamor in three different places. (1) In Parshas Bo, the pasuk says: "Every firstborn donkey you shall redeem with a 'seh,' and if you do not redeem it, you shall break its neck. Furthermore, the firstborn of your children you shall also redeem" (Shemos 13:13). (I will explain later why I have not translated the word "seh.") (2) The pasuk repeats the same commandment almost verbatim in Parshas Ki Sissa (Shemos 34:20). (3) In Parshas Korach, the Torah states: "And the firstborn of a non-kosher animal you shall redeem" (Bamidbar 18:15). Although the last verse seems to be speaking of non-kosher animals in general, Chazal teach us that it is referring exclusively to donkeys, and that there is no mitzvah to redeem a firstborn colt, camel calf, or puppy (Tosefta, Bechoros 1:2).

Why was the donkey an exception? Why is it the only non-kosher animal species whose firstborn has kedusha? The Gemara teaches that this is the donkey's reward. When we left Egypt, the Egyptians gave us many gifts (see Shemos 11:2-3; 12:35-36) and we needed to somehow transport all these gifts out of Egypt and through the desert to Eretz Yisroel. The Jews could not simply call Allied Van Lines to ship their belongings through the desert. Instead they contacted Donkey Lines who performed this service for forty years without complaint or fanfare! In reward for providing Bnei Yisroel with this crucial shipping service, the Torah endowed the donkey's firstborn with sanctity similar to that of firstborn kosher animals (Gemara Bechoros 5b). In essence, Hashem rewarded the donkey with its very own special mitzvah. Thus, this mitzvah teaches us the importance of acknowledging someone's assistance, hakaras hatov. By awarding special status to donkeys, the Torah shows us the importance! of

appreciating those that help us. If we are required to appreciate the help provided to our ancestors thousands of years ago, how much more must we exhibit hakaras hatov to our parents, teachers, and spouses for all that they do to help us in the here and now!

#### BUYING A MITZVAH OPPORTUNITY- A RISKY AFFAIR

Since very few Jews own donkeys, fulfilling this mitzvah usually means that someone purchases a pregnant donkey that is expecting its first foal, in the hope that its firstborn will be male. There is no mitzvah to redeem a firstborn jenny, so the investment in purchasing the soon-to-be-mom donkey may not produce the desired result – mom's first birth might be a female. (Someone even suggested that we perform a sonogram [ultrasound] on the pregnant jenny before we purchase her to guarantee that she is indeed carrying a male foal. However, the types of medical insurance policies that donkeys own do not usually cover the cost of the test.)

#### A RISK ANALYSIS

Are there any other risks involved in this mitzvah?

Indeed, there are some serious risks. Prior to its redemption, a firstborn donkey has kedusha similar to that of a korban. The Torah prohibits us from using it — one may not ride it, use it for portage, or even use its hair. We are even required to bury the hair that falls off him lest someone use it (Mishnah Temurah 33b, Gemara ibid. 34a). However, a garment woven from his hair is burnt, rather than buried, out of concern that it will not decompose when it is buried (see Rashi to Temurah 34a). Someone who uses this donkey violates a prohibition approximately equivalent to wearing shatnez or eating non-kosher (Rashi, Pesachim 47a s.v. ve'hein; Rivan, Makkos 21b s.v. ve'hein; cf., however, Tosafos, Makkos 21b s.v. HaChoshesh).

Until one redeems the donkey, one may not sell it, although some poskim permit selling it for the difference between the value of the donkey and a sheep (Rosh, Bechoros 1:11; Tur and Rama, Yoreh Deah 321:8). Many poskim contend that if the donkey is sold, the money received has sanctity and may not be used (Rambam, Hilchos Bikkurim 12:4; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 321:8).

Have you ever ridden a donkey? Although North Americans may answer no to this question, in Eretz Yisroel this form of entertainment, or transportation, is common. Did you stop to wonder whether the donkey might be a firstborn and that it may be prohibited to ride it?

There is no need for concern. Since most of the donkeys of the world are not firstborn, one need not suspect that any particular donkey is holy. In fact, the unlikelihood of this happening is compounded by the fact that few Jews own donkeys, and a non-Jew's firstborn donkey has no sanctity at all, as we will explain.

#### HOW MUCH OF MOM MUST WE BUY?

The Jewish investors want to know, "How much of Mommy donkey must be owned by a Jew for its male firstborn to have sanctity? Indeed Rabbonim discuss this question frequently, but usually ask it in the context of a different mitzvah, that of the bechor of a kosher species, and for virtually the opposite reason, as I will explain.

#### HOLY COW!

A firstborn male calf, kid, or lamb has kedusha (sanctity) that requires treating it as a korban. When the Beis HaMikdash stood, the owner would give this animal to a cohen of his choice who would offer it as a korban and eat its meat. Today, when unfortunately we have no Beis HaMikdash, this animal has the kedusha of a korban, but we cannot offer it as a sacrifice. Furthermore, unlike the firstborn donkey that the owner redeems, we cannot redeem the sanctity of the firstborn calf, kid, or lamb. This presents a serious problem to the many Jews who are cattle farmers and raise beef or dairy cattle. When a Jew's heifer (an adult female bovine that has not yet calved) calves for the first time, the male offspring has the sanctity of a korban. Using it in any way will be prohibited min haTorah and be a serious offense. We must wait until the animal becomes injured to the extent that it will never be serviceable as a korban, and only then can it be slaughtered and eaten. Until this point, anyone who

benefits from the firstborn animal violates a serious Torah prohibition. Furthermore, one may not attempt to damage or cause damage or blemishes to this animal in any way.

The solution to this problem is to sell a percentage of the mother or its fetus to a non-Jew before the calf is born, because if a non-Jew owns any part of the mother of the firstborn or the firstborn himself, there is no sanctity on the offspring. In this instance, we deliberately prevent the offspring from having kedushas bechor in order to avoid undesirable repercussions. The idea is to prevent the animal from acquiring kedusha that we cannot remove. Of course, by now you have realized that the cow would not be holy, just its male calf – so we should have entitled our section HOLY CALF.

Thus, in the case of the firstborn calf, kid, or lamb, we want a non-Jewish partner to own a percentage of either the mother or the child in order that the offspring not be endowed with the kedusha of a bechor. However, in the case of peter chamor, we are trying to deliberately create a holy donkey so that we can perform the mitzvah of redeeming it. Thus, we want that both the pregnant jenny and its foal be owned completely by Jews so that we can perform the mitzvah. We will see shortly, that it is important for us to be careful which Jews own the animals in order for us to perform the mitzvah.

#### PARTNERS IN A MITZVAH

Can we form a partnership of several investors to perform the mitzvah?

As long as all the partners who own both the mother jenny and its firstborn are Jewish and yisroelim, as I will explain, there is a mitzvah to redeem it.

#### BE CAREFUL WHOM YOU CHOOSE AS A BUSINESS PARTNER

As in all business partnerships, you should be careful whom you include in your peter chamor partnership. As we saw above, you want to make sure that you did not include any non-Jewish investors, because their ownership precludes observing the mitzvah. You also need to exclude any cohen or levi from your partnership, since their ownership will also preclude any mitzvah to redeem the firstborn foal, as I will explain.

As we saw above, the Torah mentions the mitzvah of pidyon haben immediately after mentioning the mitzvah of redeeming the firstborn donkey. Because of this juxtaposition, Chazal made several comparisons between these two mitzvos. For example, just as pidyon haben applies only to a male child, so too, the mitzvah of peter chamor applies only to a firstborn male donkey and not to a female. This is the reason why a firstborn jenny is exempt from the mitzvah of peter chamor.

Similarly, just as the child of a cohen or levi is exempt from pidyon haben, so too a donkey that is owned (or even partially owned) by a cohen or levi is exempt from the mitzvah of peter chamor (see Mishnah Bechoros 3b). And just as a newborn child whose mother is the daughter of a cohen or a levi is exempt from pidyon haben, so too a donkey that is owned or even partially owned by the daughter of a cohen or a levi is exempt from the mitzvah of peter chamor (Teshuvos HaRashba 1:366). This is true even if the bas cohen or bas levi is married to a yisroel (Rama, Yoreh Deah 321:19). Thus, a yisroel who owns a donkey that is pregnant for the first time can avoid performing the mitzvah of peter chamor by selling a percentage of the pregnant donkey or a percentage of her fetus to a cohen or a levi or even to a bas cohen or a bas levi. He can even avoid the mitzvah by selling a percentage to his own wife if she is a bas levi. But when we are trying to perform the mitzvah, we want ! to do just the opposite. We want to make sure that all the owners are yisroelim and not cohanim or levi'im in order to create the obligation to perform the mitzvah.

Can a bas yisroel who is married to a cohen be included in our partnership? By marrying a cohen she became eligible to eat terumah, which a yisroel may not eat. (Note that we do not eat terumah today because we are tamei. However, we hope that cohanim will soon again be able to eat terumah when we again have a Beis HaMikdash and also have a parah adumah with which to remove our tumah.) Does this increased sanctity also exempt the bas cohen from the mitzvah of peter chamor, or

may she still fulfill it? Thus, if she owns a jenny, is its firstborn male sanctified or not?

The late poskim dispute this question. The Minchas Chinuch (mitzvah 22) rules that just as a bas cohen has sanctity to eat terumah, she also exempts the donkey from the mitzvah of peter chamor. On the other hand, Rav Chaim Kanievski, in his sefer Derech Emunah, rules that although a bas yisroel married to a cohen may eat terumah, this is a right of her husband to enjoy his special cohen's gifts but it does not mean that she has special sanctity (Beur HaHalachah to Hil. Bikkurim 12:14).

Thus, in order to fulfill the mitzvah of peter chamor, we need to make sure that none of our partners are cohanim, levi'im, or women who are the daughters of either a cohen or levi. However, we could include a yisroel whose wife is the daughter of either a cohen or levi, provided we did not make his wife a partner in the acquisition. According to Rav Chaim Kanievski, we could also include the wife of a cohen (or a levi, for that matter) who is the daughter of a yisroel, but not if she is the daughter of a cohen or a levi.

#### WITH WHAT DO WE REDEEM?

As I mentioned above, the Torah commands the owner of a firstborn male donkey to redeem it by giving the cohen a seh, a word we usually translate as lamb. However, we realize that when the Torah says seh it does not mean only a lamb, but also a kid goat (Mishnah Bechoros 9a). (See mitzvas Korban Pesach, Shemos 12:5, where the Torah mentions this explicitly.) Thus one can fulfill this mitzvah by giving the cohen either a sheep or a goat. Furthermore, the seh does not need to be a lamb or kid, but can also be a mature adult; it may also be either male or female (Mishnah Bechoros 9a). In addition, using a sheep or goat to redeem the donkey is merely a less expensive way to fulfill the mitzvah, since one may redeem an expensive donkey with an inexpensive lamb or kid (Rambam, Hilchos Bikkurim 12:11). But there is an alternative way to fulfill the mitzvah — by redeeming the donkey with anything worth at least as much as the donkey (Ge! mara Bechoros 11a). However, one who redeems his peter chamor with a sheep or goat fulfills the mitzvah even if the sheep or goat is worth far less than the donkey, and this saves money. By the way, there is another similarity here between the mitzvos of pidyon haben and of peter chamor. Just as the newborn donkey can be redeemed with anything of value, so too, the father of a bechor can redeem his son with anything worth the same value as the five silver coins. He does not need to give five silver coins to the cohen, only the value equivalent of five silver shekalim of the Torah (not of the modern Israeli currency).

#### VANISHING KEDUSHA!!

Once the owner redeems the firstborn donkey, both it and the lamb used to redeem it have no kedusha at all. Concerning this, peter chamor is absolutely unique, because in every other case when we redeem an item that one may not use, the kedusha that prohibits its use transfers onto the redeeming item. Only with peter chamor does the kedusha disappear, never to return.

#### WHAT HAPPENS IF NO ONE REDEEMS THE PETER CHAMOR?

An unredeemed donkey retains kedusha its entire life! Even its carcass retains kedusha and must be buried to make sure that no one ever uses it. We may not even burn it because someone might use its ashes, which remain prohibited (Mishnah Temurah 33b-34a).

Furthermore, by not redeeming it, the owner violated the mitzvah of peter chamor.

Of course, the Torah provides another option. Although the Torah prefers that the owner redeem the peter chamor, Hashem gave the owner the option not to redeem his firstborn donkey — he can perform arifah instead, killing the firstborn donkey in a very specific way. Ideally, the Torah does not want the owner to follow this approach- he is supposed to redeem the donkey, rather than kill it (Mishnah Bechoros 13a). However, if the owner cannot afford to redeem his donkey, or does not want to for any other reason, the Torah gave him this choice. The arifah does not remove the kedusha from the peter chamor. We may not benefit from the

donkey's remains and therefore we must bury them to make sure that no one benefits from an unredeemed peter chamor. The Rishonim dispute whether performing arifah fulfills a mitzvah or is considered an aveirah (see dispute between Rambam and Raavad in Hilchos Bikkurim 12:1).

#### WHEN SHOULD THE OWNER PERFORM THE REDEMPTION?

Concerning this point, there is a major halachic difference between pidyon haben and the mitzvah of peter chamor. The father of a newborn bechor does not perform the mitzvah of pidyon haben until his son is at least thirty days old. However, the owner of the firstborn donkey should redeem him within the first 30 days of its birth and should preferably do it as soon as possible (Rambam, Hilchos Bikkurim 12:6; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 321:1).

#### PERFORMING THE MITZVAH

We successfully purchased a pregnant donkey, and it successfully delivered a male firstborn! We now have to protect the peter chamor's sanctity until we can redeem it.

We schedule the redemption ceremony. There are three main participants: the owner or owners, the cohen and the long-eared guest of honor himself. There are two stages in performing the mitzvah of peter chamor, although they can be combined into one act. For our purposes, we will call the two steps, (A) redeeming and (B) giving. In the redeeming Step A, the owner takes a lamb or kid (or an item worth as much as the donkey) and states that he is redeeming the donkey in exchange for the lamb, kid, or item. Prior to making this statement, the owner recites a bracha: "Asher kidishanu bimitzvosav vitzivanu al pidyon peter chamor" (Tosafos, Bechoros 11a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 321:6). If there are several owners, only one will recite the bracha and he will redeem the donkey on behalf of all the owners.

The owner then states that he is exchanging the lamb or other item for the kedusha of the donkey. As soon as he performs this exchange the sanctity leaves the peter chamor and one may use the donkey for any purpose whatsoever (Mishnah Bechoros 12b). If one chooses to, one can now honor someone with the first ride on this donkey! (I found no source stating that bringing the donkey to or from the redemption is considered a mitzvah similar to the honor of kvatter, the mitzvah of bringing a child to his bris. I presume that the halachic difference between the two cases is that the child must be present to perform the bris, whereas theoretically one could perform the mitzvah of redeeming a peter chamor without the donkey being present. Thus, transporting him to the redemption is not essential to the performance of the mitzvah.)

In Step B, the owner gives the lamb (or whatever item was exchanged for the donkey) to the cohen as a gift. We do not recite a bracha on this step of the mitzvah, although the reason why we do not is uncertain. The poskim discuss at length why there is no bracha on this mitzvah (Taz, Yoreh Deah 321:7). The owner has the right to decide which cohen he presents with the gift (see Rambam, Hil. Bechoros 1:15).

Although this mitzvah has two parts, redeeming the kedusha from the firstborn, and giving the gift to the cohen, both parts can be performed simultaneously by giving the lamb (or items of value) to the cohen and telling him that this is redemption for the donkey. When redeeming the donkey this way, the owner recites a bracha, because even though the cohen can theoretically refuse the gift, he cannot prevent the removal of the kedusha from the peter chamor.

As a cohen I sometimes wonder what I would do if I received a lamb for peter chamor. I could leave it tied to a bedpost in my apartment or have it graze in my backyard as a souvenir. On the other hand, I suspect I would elect to have the lamb sheched so that we could enjoy some delicious lamb chops!

Of course, that's only if the owner decides to redeem his donkey with a lamb rather than with a goat! On the other hand, goat's milk is very healthy! But then again, what if he gives me a billy goat?!

### **Treating Non-Life Threatening Illnesses on Shabbat**

The previous three issues discussed treatment of life-threatening situations on Shabbat. While treatment of life-threatening illnesses warrants violation of all prohibitions on Shabbat, non-life threatening situations do not warrant violation of Shabbat. Nevertheless, there are certain leniencies regarding a choleh (an ill person) in a non-life threatening situation. This issue will discuss what leniencies apply to a choleh and what types of illnesses define one as a choleh.

#### **The Leniencies for the Choleh**

The Gemara, Shabbat 129a, states that one may ask a non-Jew to perform any melacha in order to treat a choleh. There are four interpretations in the Rishonim regarding the nature of this leniency. First, Rashba, Teshuvot HaRashba 3:275, states that this leniency is indicative of a broader leniency to permit violation of any rabbinic law for the purpose of treating a choleh. Requesting a non-Jew to perform melacha constitutes a rabbinic prohibition which is lifted in order to treat a choleh. Similarly, a Jew may perform a task that would ordinarily constitute a rabbinic prohibition. Second, Ran, Shabbat 39b, s.v. MeHa, limits the leniency of the Gemara to that which is stated. The only prohibition that one may violate to treat a choleh is the prohibition of asking a non-Jew to perform melacha. A Jewish person may not violate any rabbinic prohibition (aside from the prohibition of asking a non-Jew to perform melacha) in order to treat a choleh. Third, Ramban, Torat Ha'Adam, Sha'ar HaMeichush, states that one may ask a non-Jew to perform a melacha in order to treat a choleh. Alternatively, a Jew may perform a task that would constitute a rabbinic violation on condition that he performs that task in an abnormal manner (shinui). Fourth, Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 2:10, implies that the leniency to ask a non-Jew to perform melacha is indicative of a leniency to violate lower-level rabbinic prohibitions in order to treat a choleh. Asking a non-Jew to perform melacha is one example of a lower-level rabbinic prohibition.

Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 328:17, quotes all four aforementioned opinions. He rules in accordance with the opinion of Ramban that one may ask a non-Jew to perform melacha or one may personally perform a task that constitutes a rabbinic violation on condition that it is performed in an abnormal manner. Rama, ad loc., does not interject on this matter, implying that he concurs with Shulchan Aruch that the normative opinion is that of Ramban. Taz, Orach Chaim 328:25, questions Rama's opinion based on another ruling. There is a rabbinic prohibition to take medicine on Shabbat out of concern that it may lead to the grinding of herbs (See, Gemara, Shabbat 53b.) However, Rama, Orach Chaim 328:37, rules that a choleh is permitted to take medicine on Shabbat. Taz asks: if in fact Rama rules in accordance with the opinion of Ramban, why does he allow one to violate a rabbinic prohibition without requiring that it be done in an abnormal manner?

Mishna Berurah 328:121, suggests that one can answer this question based on the comments of Radvaz, Teshuvot Radvaz 3:640. Radvaz notes that even Ramban agrees that one may violate lower-level rabbinic prohibitions in order to treat a choleh. The requirement to perform tasks that violate rabbinic prohibitions in an abnormal manner only applies to higher-level rabbinic prohibitions. Radvaz states that the prohibition to use medicine on Shabbat is certainly a lower-level rabbinic prohibition and a choleh may use medicine on Shabbat in a normal manner.

Mishna Berurah 328:102, alludes to another answer to this question. Chayei Adam 69:12, posits that Ramban's requirement to perform the rabbinically prohibited task in an abnormal manner only applies if it is possible to perform the task in an abnormal manner. If this is not possible, one may perform the task in the normal manner. [See addendum for a possible proof to Chayei Adam's position.] One can then suggest that Rama's leniency to allow a choleh to take medicine without requiring that it be performed in an abnormal manner is due to the inability to take medicine in an unusual manner. Since medicine is not something that can ordinarily be taken in an abnormal manner, and its use

only constitutes a rabbinic prohibition, it is permitted to take the medicine in a normal manner.

It is important to note that both of these answers can co-exist. Mishna Berurah codifies both of these answers as normative. Therefore, lower-level rabbinic prohibitions are lifted for the treatment of a choleh. Furthermore, even higher-level rabbinic prohibitions are permitted to be performed in the normal manner if they cannot be performed in an abnormal manner. R. Shlomo Z. Auerbach (cited in Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata ch. 33, note 17\*), adds that there are many Acharonim who consider performance of melacha in an abnormal manner to be a lower-level rabbinic violation. He therefore rules that if there is no non-Jew available it is permitted to perform a melacha de'oraita in an abnormal manner for a choleh.

#### **Who is Defined as a Choleh?**

Ran, op. cit., states that the leniencies that are applied to a choleh are limited to one who is bed-bound. One who has an ailment but is "walking around like a healthy individual" is not considered a choleh and no leniencies are applied to such an individual. Maggid Mishneh, Hilchot Shabbat 2:10, adds that even one who is not bed-bound, but his ailment pervades throughout his body is considered a choleh, and may be treated with all of the aforementioned leniencies. Maggid Mishneh's opinion is codified by Rama, Orach Chaim 328:17. R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Shulchan Shlomo 328:23, adds that if the illness is such that lying in bed does not alleviate the symptoms, but the symptoms are severe enough that if lying in bed would help, the ill person would certainly lie in bed, he is considered a choleh.

Even if one is not currently a choleh, there are grounds for leniency to treat someone as a choleh in order to prevent the onset of a bed-bound illness. Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 22:7 (based on the Gemara, Shabbat 140a), states that one may take medicine on Shabbat in order to prevent illness. While Rambam does not state explicitly whether this leniency applies only to preventing life threatening illnesses or whether it extends to preventing non-life threatening illnesses, Chiddushei HaRan, Shabbat 140a, s.v. Ee Lo, quotes an opinion that states explicitly that this leniency applies to non-life threatening situations. Based on the comments of Rambam and Chiddushei HaRan, R. Yehoshua Y. Neuwirth, Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 33:1, rules that it is permitted to use medicine in a situation where it is likely that one will become sick if the medicine is not taken in a timely manner. An example given by R. Neuwirth, Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata 34:16, is one who has a mild headache but is concerned that it will develop into a migraine. He may take medicine immediately upon the onset of any symptoms of migraine in order to prevent the migraine from developing.

#### **The Leniencies for a Mitzta'er**

A mitzta'er is someone who is suffering from an ailment that causes him a certain degree of discomfort, but his condition is not that severe so as to classify him as a choleh. Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 6:9, writes that one is permitted to ask a non-Jew to perform a rabbinic violation (i.e. what would constitute a rabbinic violation for a Jew to perform) in order to treat a "partial illness." Rambam, ibid, 6:10, includes in this leniency one who is mitzta'er. Rambam's position is codified by Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 307:5.

Magen Avraham 307:7, contends that the leniency for a mitzta'er is not limited to asking a non-Jew to perform a rabbinic violation. A Jew may perform a rabbinic violation in an unusual manner in order to treat a mitzta'er. [See addendum for a discussion of how Magen Avraham distinguishes between choleh and mitzta'er.] R. Avraham Borenstein, Avnei Nezer, Orach Chaim no. 118, disagrees with Magen Avraham, and maintains that there is no leniency for a Jew to violate a rabbinic prohibition in an abnormal manner for a mitzta'er.

**by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

### **Sleeping it “On”**

Sobriety is an absolute necessity both for prayer and for ruling on matters of halacha. But even if one has come under the influence of wine, says the Sage Rami bar Abba, he can return to a sober state by walking the distance of a mil (roughly a kilometer) or by sleeping a bit. A qualification of this sobering solution is provided, however, by Rabbi Nachman in the name of Rabba bar Avuha. Only when a revi'is of wine (86 grams) is imbibed will sleep have a sobering effect. If one drinks more than this, sleep will only make him more intoxicated. This gemara can help us explain a halacha mentioned in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 695:2), based on the ruling of the Sage Rava (Mesechta Megilla 7a), that on Purim one must drink wine until he can no longer distinguish between “cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai.” In contrast to the literal interpretation which suggests excessive drinking, Rema cites an opinion that it is sufficient to drink more than one is accustomed to and then go to sleep, “since when he is asleep he is unable to distinguish between cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai.” On the basis of the aforementioned gemara about the relationship between wine and sleep, it may be concluded that it is not drink-induced sleep which is the Purim state of confusion prescribed by Rema, but rather the state of intoxication induced by sleeping after drinking more than the customary measure of a revi'is. (Eruvin 64b)

### **The Three Indicators**

You can tell a man by three things, says Rabbi Ilouï. By his drinking (kosso), his pocketbook (kisso) and his temper (ka'asso). A good man, the Sage informs us, is one who can hold his liquor, deal honestly in business and control his temper (Rashi).

This basic interpretation is expanded upon by Maharsha:

All human characteristics can be divided into three categories - man's relationship with Heaven, with his fellow man and with himself. Whether one deals honestly in his affairs with others determines whether he is good or bad towards his fellow man. How he behaves when he has drunk more than a little spirits is an indication whether he is good or bad in caring for himself. How quick he is to anger is a criterion to Heaven, for our Sages have taught us that one who is prone to anger is considered as if he worships idols.

This oft-quoted Talmudic advice is borne out by so much human experience. The veneer which some people of poor character affect in their routine activities is exposed when they are challenged to hold their drink or temper, or to refrain from cutting corners in order to earn another dollar at someone else's expense. (Eruvin 65b)

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**For the week ending 10 December 2005 / 9 Kislev 5766**

**by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach**

### **The Long and Short of It**

#### **“Doesn't Abba need sleep?”**

This question was put to Rabbi Chisda by his daughter when she noticed that he was neglecting sleep in order to study Torah. “There will come the days,” he replied, “that are long and short and then we will have plenty of time to sleep.”

How can days be both long and short?

Maharsha explains that “long” is a reference to the eternity of afterlife which is described in the Torah as “the length of days” earned by those who live by the Torah. The opportunity to earn that reward, however, is available only during one's lifetime on earth. This is expressed in the Talmud's comment (Eruvin 22a) on the Torah's use of the term “today” (Devarim 7:11) in connection with the performance of the mitzvot commanded by G-d. “Today – this world – is the time for performing,” say our Sages, “and tomorrow – the World-to-Come – is the time for receiving the reward for such performance.”

The term “short” used by Rabbi Chisda in his response to his daughter is a reference to the total absence of any opportunity to perform and gain reward once life in this world comes to an end. This then is the long and short of Rabbi Chisda's perspective of life and afterlife and explains why he was loath to waste his time on sleep when eternity was at stake.

### **What the Sages Say**

“Anyone in whose home there is not the same reaction to spilled wine as to spilled water has not achieved the full measure of blessing (even if he is a wealthy man in general terms – Rashi).”

Rabbi Chanina bar Papa - Eruvin 65a

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### **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion - VaYetze**

#### **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 made use of divination and have learned that it is because of you that God has blessed me” [Genesis 30:27].

The Talmud 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 [Berachot 42a]. The very presence of a saintly scholar brings with it the 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?

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 acts of destruction. 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 the scholar's 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 [Genesis 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.

[adapted from Ein Aya vol. II, pp. 187-8]

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago 5764]

<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Vayetse

WE SOMETIMES FORGET THAT THE PHRASE KERIAT HA-TORAH DOES NOT SIMPLY MEAN “READING THE TORAH.” In biblical Hebrew the verb *likro* means not “to read” but “to call.” The phrase *mikra’ei kodesh*, “festivals,” literally means “holy convocations,” days on which the people were called or summoned together. Every seven years – in the command known as *hakhel* – the king was commanded to “read aloud [*tikra*] this Torah before them in their hearing [*be-aznehem*.” In the historic gathering of those who had returned from Babylon, Ezra “read [the Torah] aloud [*vayikra*] from daybreak till noon, in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand, and all the people listened attentively [literally, the ears of all the people were directed] to the book of the Torah.”

Keriat ha-Torah therefore means, not reading but proclaiming the Torah, reading it aloud. The one who reads it has the written word in front of him, but for the rest of the gathering it is an experience not of the eye but of the ear. The divine word is something heard rather than seen. Only with the spread of manuscripts, and then (in the fifteenth century) the invention of printing, did reading become a visual rather than auditory experience. To this day the primary experience of keriat ha-Torah involves listening to the reader declaim the words from the Torah scroll, rather than following them in a printed text. We miss some of the most subtle effects of Torah if we think of it as the word seen rather than the word heard.

There are many differences between sound and sight, and one has to do with time. We can see, but not hear, a sentence at a single glance. Listening, more than seeing, is a process extended through time. Halfway through a sentence, we can guess what will come next, but we cannot be sure until we have actually heard the words. That is why, for example, jokes are more powerful when heard rather than read. Crucial to a joke is the element of surprise. If we can guess the punchline, the joke is simply not that good. Listening, we are kept in suspense. Reading, we can go directly to the last sentence.

To give one biblical example: when Joseph is in prison, Pharaoh’s butler and baker both have dreams. The butler tells Joseph what he saw, and Joseph gives it a favourable interpretation. “Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position.” Emboldened by the good news, the baker too tells Joseph his dream. Joseph’s interpretation begins with the same words, “Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head,” but he then adds, “from the rest of you [*me’alekha*]; he will hang you on a tree.” This is humour at its blackest. The reason for its presence in the Joseph story does not concern us here, but the point is this: the Torah is written to be read aloud, and several of its literary devices depend on this fact, one above all, namely the power of the next word to confound our expectations, based on what we have heard thus far. Sometimes the result is humorous, at others the opposite, but in both cases the result is to make us sit up and pay attention. One of the most striking examples occurs in this week’s sedra.

Jacob, in flight from Esau’s anger, has travelled to the house of Laban. Arriving, he meets Laban’s younger daughter Rachel and falls in love with her. Laban proposes a deal: work for me for seven years and I will give her to you in marriage. Jacob does so, but on the wedding night Laban substitutes Leah for Rachel. The next morning, when Jacob discovers the deception, he protests, “Why did you deceive me?” Laban pointedly replies, “It is not the done thing in our place to give the younger

before the elder” (a reference, intended or otherwise, to Jacob’s deception of Isaac, a case of the younger taking the blessing of the elder, Esau). Laban agrees, however, that in return for a further seven years’ labour, Jacob may marry Rachel. He will not have to wait until the seven years are complete, but he must, however, wait for seven days until Leah’s wedding celebration is complete (an early example of a custom we still keep: the week of *sheva berakhot*). The seven days pass. Jacob marries Rachel. We then read the following:

He also [*gam*] married Rachel, and he also [*gam*] loved Rachel . . . (29:30)

The implication at this point is clear. The repeated word *gam*, “also,” leads us to believe that the two sisters are equal in Jacob’s eyes. The story of the deception has – or so we must suppose on the basis of what we have so far heard – a happy ending after all. Jacob has married both. He loves them both. The sibling rivalry that is so pronounced a theme of Bereishith (Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau) seems to be reaching a positive resolution. It is possible to love two siblings equally. The next word sends our expectation crashing to the ground:

...more than Leah (29:30)

This is an ungrammatical construction. The words “also” and “more than” do not belong together in the same sentence. Either one loves X and also Y, or one loves X more than Y, but not both. The effect – like a sudden discord in the middle of a Mozart symphony – is strident and shocking. Jacob does not love the two sisters equally. He may love them both, but his passion is for Rachel. The next verse contains an even sharper discord:

God saw that Leah was hated [*senuah*]. . .

This is a phrase that cannot be understood literally. The previous verse has just said that Leah was not hated but loved. The commentators and translators wrestled with this difficulty. Ramban (on his second interpretation) and Radak read the word *senuah* not as “hated” but as “[relatively] unloved.” Yet though the text is semantically strange, is it psychologically lucid. Leah knew that Jacob’s heart was elsewhere. She may have been loved but she felt the lesser love as a rejection. The words “God saw” mean that God felt her sense of humiliation. Laban’s deception had human consequences, and they were tragic. Leah weeps inwardly for the husband she acquired as a result of her father’s wiles, whose love is for someone else.

Only now, perhaps, do we understand the significance of the Torah’s first mention of Leah:

Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. The eyes of Leah were weak (*rakot*), but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.

The word *rakot* could mean many things: beautiful (Targum, Rashbam), weak (Ibn Ezra), or sensitive (Netziv suggests that Leah was unable to go out with the flocks because the bright sunlight hurt her eyes). The ambiguity is deliberate. Only rarely and sparingly does the Torah give us physical descriptions of its characters, and always for a reason that will eventually be disclosed (so, for example, we hear in 2 Samuel 14 about Absalom’s hair; four chapters later we discover why: it became caught in a tree, which led to his death).

The meaning of the phrase “Leah’s eyes were *rakot*,” is (as Rashi, Radak and various midrashic traditions explain) “Leah was easily moved to tears.” She was emotionally vulnerable. She had none of the resilience that might have carried her through her husband’s attachment to her younger sister. She was thin-skinned, sensitive, attuned to nuance, easily hurt. She knew she was Jacob’s lesser love, and it caused her pain.

The subtlety with which all this is conveyed is remarkable. The Torah has sketched Leah’s portrait in a few deft strokes, each of which we will only hear if we are listening carefully. Nor has this been done for the sake of description. Rather, it has set the scene for the drama that is about to unfold – and once again we find it done with the utmost brevity and delicacy. In fact, unless we are paying the closest attention we will not notice it at all.

What follows next is, on the face of it, a simple account of the birth of four children. Beneath the surface, however, these verses are as eloquent as any in the entire Torah:

God saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb. Rachel remained barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, saying: "God has seen (ra'ah) my troubles. Now my husband will love me." She became pregnant again and had a son. "God has heard (shama) that I was unloved," she said, "and has given me also this son." She named the child Shimon. She became pregnant again and had a son. "Now my husband will become attached (lavah) to me," she said, "because I have given him three sons." Therefore he named the child Levi. She became pregnant again and had a son. She said, "This time let me praise (odeh) God," and she named the child Judah (Yehudah). She then stopped having children.

Read superficially, these verses are no more than a genealogy, a list of births, of the kind of which there are many in Bereishith. As soon as our ear is attuned to Leah's plight, however, we listen more carefully, and what we hear is heart-breaking.

Leah is pleading for attention. Each of the names of her first three children is a cry to her husband Jacob – to see, to listen, to be attached, to notice her, to love. Significantly, it is she, not Jacob, who names three of the children (The exception is Levi. The commentators who emphasise the plain sense of the text, Rashbam and Radak, assume that the "he" who names Levi is Jacob. Rashi, whose commentary goes deeper, says, on the basis of midrashic tradition, that it was an angel. Rashi has understood that a key fact about the four births is the absence of Jacob).

Sadly, the lack of relationship between Jacob and Leah at the birth of her children is carried through in the years to come. Jacob's relationship with Reuben, Shimon and Levi breaks down completely (with Reuben after the episode of Bilhah's couch, with Shimon and Levi after the incident with Shechem). On his death-bed he curses them instead of blessing them. Yet it is from Levi that Israel's spiritual leaders will eventually come (Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and eventually the cohanim and levi'im), and from Judah will come its kings (David and his descendants).

It is not only Leah's cry that Jacob does not hear. He fails equally to respond to Rachel's distress when she sees her sister having children while she has none:

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I will die." Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of G-d? It is He who has kept you from having children."

The sages noticed a parallel between Jacob's words here, and Joseph's at the end of Bereishith when the brothers fear that, now that their father is dead, Joseph will take revenge. Joseph comforts them, saying, "Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" Joseph uses the same words his father had said before he was born, but to opposite effect: to bring comfort. Using this contrast to maximal effect, the sages said about Jacob's reply to Rachel:

Said the Holy One, blessed be He [to Jacob]: "Is that the way to answer a woman in distress? By your life, your children will one day stand before her son [Joseph, who will answer them, Am I in the place of G-d?]."

What is going on in this intense and sometimes tragic drama between Leah and Jacob? Jacob is unlike the other patriarchs. If the word that comes to mind in relation to Abraham is chessed, kindness, and to Isaac pachad, fear, the idea that characterises Jacob is struggle.

Already in the womb he struggles with his brother. He competes with him for the birthright and the blessing. The defining scene in his life is his wrestling match at night with an unnamed adversary. Both his names – Jacob, "he who grasps by the heel," and Israel, "he who struggles with G-d and man and prevails" – convey a sense of conflict.

While Abraham and Isaac represent modes of being, Jacob stands for becoming. The gifts he has, he has fought for. None has come naturally. Jacob is the supreme figure of persistence. He is the man who said to the

angel, "I will not let you go until you bless me." More than Abraham and Isaac, Jacob is the person who wrestles with life and refuses to let go.

The Torah describes him as an ish tam, sometimes translated as "a simple man" but better understood (according to R. Samson Raphael Hirsch) as "a single-minded man." The prophet Micah associated him with truth – "You give truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham." 15 Jacob's life embodies the fact that truth must be fought for with single-minded determination. It rarely comes without a struggle and the pain of experience. What is the truth at stake in Jacob's life?

There are many, but one is a truth about love. One of the most striking facts about the Jacob narrative is the frequency with which the word "love" appears. It figures once in the story of Abraham (Ber. 22: 2) 16, twice in the life of Isaac (24: 6717, 25: 2818, though there are also three references to Isaac's love of a particular kind of food: 27:4, 9, 14) 19, but seven times in the case of Jacob (29: 18, 20, 30, 3220; 37: 3, 421; 44: 2022). Jacob loves more than any other figure in Bereishith.

But through painful experience, Jacob must learn a truth about love. There are times when love not only unites but also divides. It did so in his childhood, when Isaac loved Esau and Rebekah loved Jacob. It did so again when he married two sisters. It did so a third time when he loved Rachel's child Joseph more than his other sons. What Jacob learned – and what we learn, reading his story – is that love is not enough. We must also heed those who feel unloved. Without that, there will be conflict and tragedy. That requires a specific capacity – the ability to listen, in Jacob's case, to the unspoken tears of Leah and her feeling of rejection, made explicit in the names she gave her sons.

I began by pointing out that the Torah was a text intended to be read aloud and listened to. It is the single greatest expression of faith in a G-d we cannot see, but only hear. Judaism is supremely a religion of the ear, unlike all other ancient civilizations, which were cultures of the eye. This is more than a metaphysical fact. It is a moral one as well. In Judaism the highest spiritual gift is the ability to listen – not only to the voice of G-d, but also to the cry of other people, the sigh of the poor, the weak, the lonely, the neglected and, yes, sometimes the un- or less-loved. That is one of the meanings of the great command Shema Yisrael, "Listen, O Israel." Jacob's other name, we recall, was Israel.

Jacob wrestles with this throughout his life. It is not that he has a moral failing. To the contrary, he is the most tenacious of all the patriarchs – and the only one all of whose children become part of the covenant. It is rather that every virtue has a corresponding danger. Those who are courageous are often unaware of the fears of ordinary people. Those of penetrating intellect are often dismissive of lesser minds. Those who, like Jacob, have an unusual capacity to love must fight against the danger of failing to honour the feelings of those they do not love with equal passion. The antidote is the ability to listen. That is what Jacob learns in the course of his life – and why he, above all, is the role model for the Jewish people – the nation commanded to listen.

How beautiful it is that this message – one of the deepest and most subtle in the Torah – is conveyed in a series of passages whose meaning does not lie on the surface of the text, but discloses itself only to those who listen to what is going on beneath the words: the unspoken cry, the implicit appeal, the unheard tears, the unarticulated pain. Those who wish to learn to listen to G-d must learn to listen to other people – to the kol demamah dakah, "the still, small voice" of those who need our love.