

Weekly Parsha

VAYEITZEI Rabbi

Wein's Weekly Blog

Our father Jacob was a very strong and powerfully physical person. We read of his physical prowess in his previous encounter with the shepherds of Haran and later of his wrestling match with the angel of Esav, at the river of Yaabok. His sons, though young in years, are also very powerful and strong physically and filled with self-confidence, without fear of confronting dangerous enemies. We will see that his two sons, Shimon and Levi, destroy the city of Shechem in their rage and sense of justified revenge for the behavior against their sister Dena. And according to Jewish legend, as quoted by Ramban in his commentary, Jacob engaged in many battles against hostile tribes after entering the Land of Israel.

And yet the overall picture of our father Jacob that emerges from the narrative recorded in the Torah is one of appeasement and an avoidance of confrontation at almost all costs. He allows both Lavan and Esav to threaten him and, in effect, he chooses to buy them off with words and gifts. There is little evidence of the true strength and power of Jacob in the Torah narrative itself. It is obvious that that there is a dual nature present in the portrait that the Torah describes regarding our father Jacob. And there is a profound lesson present in that purposeful presentation that the Torah has made for us to learn and follow.

We are all aware that the narrative regarding the lives and experiences of our patriarchs and matriarchs is meant to be instructive, as are all the events in Jewish history. During first and second Temple times, when the Jewish people had national sovereignty, they engaged in many wars and battles and were well known throughout the area as a fierce foe. As a matter of fact, Josephus records that the wars of the Jews were the most fearsome in the history of the Roman Legions.

However, after the destruction of the second Temple and the rise of Christianity and later Islam, the Jews became a persecuted minority and almost powerless in terms of physical strength. The entire history of the exile is how the Jewish people lived by their wits, with low profiles and with appeasement of their enemies. Since the exile has lasted for such a long

time, this attitude and self-assessment became ingrained in the Jewish psyche. It is only when the nadir of the Jewish exile was reached through the Holocaust that the situation of Jewish self assessment and self assertion began to change.

The creation of the State of Israel is undoubtedly the catalyst for this change. The success of the Jewish State, far beyond even the wildest hopes of previous generations, has emboldened Jewish life throughout the world. It has enabled Jews to become publically Jewish and observant even while holding high office in non-Jewish societies and countries. It is the time of the children of Jacob reasserting themselves in pride and strength. May it continue to embed itself in the brains and hearts of Jews.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

How the Light Gets In

VAYETSE - Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Why Jacob? That is the question we find ourselves asking repeatedly as we read the narratives of Genesis. Jacob is not what Noah was:

righteous, perfect in his generations, one who walked with God. He did not, like Abraham, leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house in response to a Divine call. He did not, like Isaac, offer himself up as a sacrifice. Nor did he have the burning sense of justice and willingness to intervene that we see in the vignettes of Moses' early life. Yet we are defined for all time as the descendants of Jacob, the children of Israel. Hence the force of the question: Why Jacob?

The answer, it seems to me, is intimated in the beginning of this week's parsha. Jacob was in the middle of a journey from one danger to another. He had left home because Esau had vowed to kill him when Isaac died. He was about to enter the household of his uncle Laban, which would itself present other dangers. Far from home, alone, he was at a point of maximum vulnerability. The sun set. Night fell. Jacob lay down to sleep, and then saw this majestic vision:

He dreamed: – "Ve-hinei!" – He saw a ladder set upon the ground, whose top reached the heavens. – "Ve-hinei!" – On it, angels of God went up and came down. – "Ve-hinei!" – The Lord stood over him there and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you

lie I will give to you and your descendants. Your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west, the east, the north, and to the south. Through you and your descendants, all the families of the earth will be blessed. – “Ve-hinei!” – I am with you. I will protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken of to you.”

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Truly, the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!” He was afraid, and said, “How full of awe is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of the heavens.” Gen. 28:12-17

Note the fourfold ve-hinei, in English “and look,” an expression of surprise. Nothing has prepared Jacob for this encounter, a point emphasised in his own words when he says, “the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it.” The very verb used at the beginning of the passage, “He came upon a place,” in Hebrew vayifga bamakom, also means an unexpected encounter. Later, in rabbinic Hebrew, the word ha-Makom, “the Place,” came to mean “God.” Hence in a poetic way the phrase vayifga ba-makom could be read as, “Jacob happened on (had an unexpected encounter with) God.”

Add to this Jacob’s night-time wrestling match with the angel in next week’s parsha and we have an answer to our question. Jacob is the man who has his deepest spiritual experiences alone, at night, in the face of danger and far from home. He is the man who meets God when he least expects to, when his mind is on other things, when he is in a state of fear and possibly on the brink of despair. Jacob is the man who, in liminal space, in the middle of the journey, discovers that “Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!”

Jacob thus became the father of the people who had their closest encounter with God in what Moses was later to describe as “the howling wasteland of a wilderness” (Deut. 32:10). Uniquely, Jews survived a whole series of exiles, and though at first they said, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” they discovered that the Shechinah, the Divine presence, was still with them. Though they had lost everything else, they had not lost contact with God.

They could still discover that “the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!”

Abraham gave Jews the courage to challenge the idols

of the age. Isaac gave them the capacity for self-sacrifice. Moses taught them to be passionate fighters for justice. But Jacob gave them the knowledge that precisely when you feel most alone, God is still with you, giving you the courage to hope and the strength to dream.

The man who gave the most profound poetic expression to this was undoubtedly David in the book of Psalms. Time and again he calls to God from the heart of darkness, afflicted, alone, pained, afraid:

Save me, O God,
for the floodwaters are up to
my neck. Deeper and deeper I
sink into the mire;
I can’t find a foothold.

I am in deep water,
and the floods
overwhelm me. Ps
69:2-3

From the depths, O Lord,
I call for your help.
Ps. 130:1

Sometimes our deepest spiritual experiences come when we least expect them, when we are closest to despair. It is then that the masks we wear are stripped away. We are at our point of maximum vulnerability – and it is when we are most fully open to God that God is most fully open to us. “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps.34:18). “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart You, God, will not despise”(Ps. 51:17). God “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3).

Rav Nahman of Bratslav used to say; “A person needs to cry to his Father in heaven with a powerful voice from the depths of his heart. Then God will listen to his voice and turn to his cry. And it may be that from this act itself, all doubts and obstacles that are keeping him back from true service of Hashem will fall from him and be completely nullified.”[1]

We find God not only in holy or familiar places but also in the midst of a journey, alone at night. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me.” The most profound of all spiritual experiences, the base of all others, is the knowledge that we are not alone. God is holding us by the hand, sheltering us, lifting us when we fall, forgiving us when we fail, healing the wounds in our soul through the power of His love.

My late father of blessed memory was not a learned Jew. He did not have the chance to become one. He came to Britain as a child and a refugee. He had to leave school young, and besides, the possibilities of Jewish education in those days were limited. Merely surviving took up most of the family's time. But I saw him walk tall as a Jew, unafraid, even defiant at times, because when he prayed or read the Psalms he felt intensely that God was with him. That simple faith gave him immense dignity and strength of mind.

That was his heritage from Jacob, as it is ours. Though we may fall, we fall into the arms of God. Though others may lose faith in us, and though we may even lose faith in ourselves, God never loses faith in us. And though we may feel utterly alone, we are not. God is there,

beside us, within us, urging us to stand and move on, for there is a task to do that we have not yet done and that we were created to fulfil. A singer of our time wrote, "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." The broken heart lets in the light of God, and becomes the gate of heaven.[2]

[1] Likkutei Maharash 2:46

[2] Anthem by Leonard Cohen.

<https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/7261/essay-vayeitzei-no-missing-links>

No Missing Links - The Omission of a Blank Space in the Torah Captures the Story of a People

Rabbi YY Jacobson

December 5, 2019

The Blank Spaces

This essay will not dissect a portion of the Torah, nor a chapter, verse, sentence, or word. We will not even focus on a letter or a syllable in the Torah. We will explore a glaring omission in this week's portion.

Any person who has been called up to the Torah, or those who had an opportunity to gaze at a Sefer Torah (Torah scroll) will note that it does not contain the familiar kind of punctuation used in books. There are no periods, exclamation points, or question marks; no commas, colons, semi-colons, or hyphens.

But there are two forms of punctuation in the Torah to indicate (at least in many instances[1]) the beginning of a new topic—and they are blank spaces between words, marking the end of one "Parsha," or theme, and the beginning of a new one.

[There are two types of spaces in a Torah scroll, one

is called "setuma," which means closed; the other is called "pesucha," which means open. When a topic in Torah comes to an end, and a new topic is about to begin, the words stop before the end of a line, the remainder of the line is left open. Then the new topic begins only on the next line. This is called a "pesucha," or an open-ended line. However, when a new, yet related, topic begins, the line is not left open at the end, but a space the length of nine letters is left empty between the words, and the next topic begins on the same line. This is called a "setuma," or a closed-ended line. They are indicated in every printed Chumash with a Hebrew letter "pei" (פ for pesucha) or the Hebrew letter "samach" (ס for setuma).]

Here is an image of a few pages in the Torah scroll containing both types of spaces, a "pesucha," then a "setuma."

Two Exceptions

All portions of Torah are filled with numerous such blank spaces. Take a look at any portion in your printed Chumash and you will see at every new topic a letter "pei" (פ) or a letter "samach" (ס).

There are two exceptions—this week's portion, Vayeitzei, and the portion of Miketz. Vayeitzei contains 148 verses; Miketz—146 verses, and they both lack these breaks. The entire portion is written as a run-on sentence, with no "space" to breathe.

This is strange. Vayeitzei is one of the longer portions in the Torah and it covers twenty full years in the life of Jacob, years filled with diverse encounters, experiences, and tribulations. Why is there not a single space in the entire portion?

Leaving Home

It was Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Altar, the second Rebbe of the Ger dynasty, known as the Sefas Emes, who offered a marvelous explanation.[2]

The portion begins with these words: "And Jacob left Be'er Sheva (where his parents lived in the south of the Holy Land) and traveled to Charan." Harran was a city in ancient Mesopotamia, located today in Southern Turkey, on the border of Syria and Iraq. Jacob leaves the cocoon of his parents, an environment infused with the Abrahamic vision of life, and travels to Harran, where he would live with a deceitful father-in-law, Laban, and would endure many a trial. The portion ends, two decades later, with Jacob leaving Laban and returning to the Holy Land: "And Jacob went on his way and Divine angels encountered him."

What allowed Jacob to maintain his moral and spiritual equilibrium throughout his two decades in exile? Why did the first Jewish refugee not assimilate and forfeit his spiritual identity?

The answer is hinted in the Torah by the omission of any space throughout his journey from the Holy Land and back there. From “And Jacob left Be'er Sheba,” in the opening of Vayeitzei, through “Jacob went on his way and Divine angels encountered him,” at the end of Vayeitzei, there was no chasm. Geographically, Jacob left Be'er Sheba in the Holy Land, he departed from Isaac and Rebecca and their Divine-centered world; but in his mindset, there was no gulf between the two. He knew he is on a journey, he was sent on a mission, and he will return.

Jacob never lost touch with where he came from, and thus never got lost in the vicissitudes of his exile life. "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how," Friedrich Nietzsche said. When you know who you are and the task that lay before you, the changing circumstances do not override your inner anchor. There is a uniform serenity that pervades your life.

The Secret of Longevity

This portion captures the long drama of Jewish exile. Jacob is the first Jew to leave his parents' cocoon and recreate Jewish life on foreign soil; his descendants would be forced to do so numerous times throughout their history.

What is the secret of the descendants of Jacob to be able to endure millennia of exile and yet remain firmly etched in their identity as Jews?

The Mission

The late astrophysicist, Professor Velvl Greene, who worked many years for NASA, once related the following story.

Many years ago, Dr. Greene shared, a noted scientist delivered a lecture at a Space Science Conference on the broader aspects of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Program in the USA. Among other things, the lecturer drew a parallel between the problems which will face space explorers in the future and our current conditions on earth.

Using a hypothetical manned voyage to the nearest star, Alpha Centauri, as an example, he emphasized the remarkable engineering, biological and sociological problems that would be encountered during the execution of this enterprise. Since the star is 4.3 light-years away, a spaceship traveling at 1,000 miles per second would require more than 800 years

to get there and another 800 years to get back. Any original crew we launched would not survive for even a fraction of the mission's duration. Instead, we would have to "man" the capsule with men and women who would have children who would carry on the mission. These children would themselves have children, continuing this for 1,600 years. Ultimately, after many generations, the remote progeny of the original crew would complete the mission.

This interstellar spaceship would have to be completely self-sustaining and self-supporting. But the lecturer pointed out that the engineering and technical problems are only one side of the coin. In the spaceship, the crew would have to learn to tolerate each other, generation after generation. They would have to learn, and learn quickly, that you don't blow up only part of a spaceship.

And then the speaker touched on a key topic: Would the fiftieth generation, after a thousand years, still share the aspirations of their pilgrim fathers who set out from earth so long ago? How, indeed, can you convey to a generation still unborn the basic information about where they came from, where they are going, why they are going there, how to get there, and how to get back?

One of the scientists stood up, and to my surprise and delight, declared: “If we could figure out how the Jewish people managed to survive these thousands of years, we'd have our answer!”

The scientist was on target. To a Jew, this story is no mere fantastic flight of imagination; it captures our millennia-long narrative. Almost four millennia ago, Abraham heard a call to become a blessing for all mankind. Over three thousand years ago, at Mount Sinai, we were launched with specific instructions and suitable maps. And we were told that we ought to transmit this mission to our children and grandchildren, for generations to come. The task was to bring healing and redemption to the world.

We were charged with the mission to reveal that the universe has a soul, that humanity has a soul, that each of us has a soul. That we are living in G-d's world, and our mission is to transcend our superficial shells and reveal the infinite oneness that unites us all. For more than a hundred generations we knew where we came from, where we were going, why we were traveling, who was the Project Officer, and how to get back. We had no real difficulty in transmitting this intelligence unbroken from generation to

generation—even to generations who were not physically present during “take-off” at Sinai. How? Because the Torah, our Divine logbook, contained macro and micro guidance. Notwithstanding all challenges, this logbook has met the only real criterion of the empirical scientists—it worked. Our presence demonstrated that it worked.

As long as we did not allow an interruption in the transmitting of the Torah from generation to generation, the mission and the people remained intact.

The Challenge

But somehow, not too long ago, a “space” emerged in the middle of this long and incredible journey. A generation of “astronauts” arose who decided that they could write a better logbook. They thought the original was old-fashioned, restraining, complicated, and irrelevant to the problems of modern times. They lost their “fix” on the celestial reference points.

Many of them know something is wrong, but they could not pinpoint the malfunction and get back on course. Our mission today is to teach by example how there is indeed no gorge and no gulf between Sinai and modernity. It is one continuous uninterrupted chain, and—unlike with Darwinism—there is no missing link. The glorious narrative of our people is that we never allowed for an inter-generational gap. The same Shabbos our grandmothers celebrated 3000 years ago, we still celebrate. The same tefillin my great grandfathers donned in Georgia 300 years ago, I still wrap today in New York. The same texts Jewish children in Florence and Barcelona were studying 700 years ago, my children study today.

Abraham began the story, Moses consolidated it, and we will complete it.

[1] Sometimes it is unclear to us the purpose of the break at a particular location of the text.

[2] Sefas Emes Vayeitzei 5650 (1899). In his own words: שפת אמת ויצא תר"ן: בסדר ויצא לא נמצא שום פרשה פתוחה וסתומה. וכ"ה בספרי מסורות כי לא יש סדר כזה בתורה זולת ויצא. ונראה דהרמז שלא פסק אבינו יעקב ולא הוסח דעתו מיציאתו לחו"ל עד שחזר ויפגעו בו מלאכי כו'. וז"ש וישבת עמו ימים אחדים שהיו כל הימים באחדות ודביקות בשרשו. [ויתכן ג"כ כי זה פ"ה הפסוק ויהיו בעיניו כימים אחדים באהבתו אותה כי ע"י אהבה זו הי' דבוק באחדות. וידוע כי אהבתו ברחל הוא סוד השכינה.] וזה הי' עיקר הנדר והבקשה אם יהי' אלקים עמדי בו שלא יתפרד מן הדביקות ע"י לבן הרשע ותחבולותיו כנ"ל.

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

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(Not) Together Forever

And it was when Yaakov saw Rochel [...] Then Yaakov kissed Rochel and he raised his voice and wept (29:10-11).

Yaakov Avinu, having traveled quite a distance to meet his future wife, reacts in a very unusual manner upon first seeing Rochel: He begins to cry in a very loud voice. Rashi, noting that this seems rather odd, explains that Yaakov cried because he saw through the Divine spirit that Rochel would not be buried alongside him (29:11). But why would Yaakov be preoccupied by the idea of not being buried together on the day he first meets his wife? It would seem that Yaakov Avinu had far more pressing issues to overcome in the immediate future: he was destitute, had a devious Uncle Lavan, a brother who had proclaimed his intent to kill him, etc. So why was Yaakov worrying about their separate burial locations – events far removed in the future – at this time?

Perhaps even more perplexing: Rashi, in Parshas Vayeichi (48:7), relates how Yaakov explains to his son Yosef that he should not be upset with him for not burying his mother Rochel in Beis Lechem because he buried her there at the direction of the Divine word of Hashem: “So that she should be of aid to her children when the Nebuzadran would exile them; (as they are leaving Eretz Yisroel) they would pass by her grave and Rochel would emerge from her grave and cry and seek Divine mercy for them[...].”

Thus, it was necessary for Rochel to be buried by the side of the road in order to come out and daven as her descendants passed by her grave. But if this is the reason she needed to be buried there then why did Yaakov cry – Rochel was obviously never intended to be buried next to him in Chevron anyway! Furthermore, Rashi, on the words “He shall not live” (31:32), explains that Yaakov inadvertently cursed Rochel and this is what caused her to be buried by the side of the road. But this seems to be a direct contradiction to the reason that Yaakov gave his son Yosef!

The answer to these questions lies in the fundamental understanding that the Jewish view of marriage is one of an eternal union. As explained in earlier editions of INSIGHTS, the primary method of how a woman becomes betrothed to a man is learned from the story of how Abraham acquired a burial plot for

his deceased wife Sarah. He wasn't buying one plot, he was buying plots for both of them. In fact, the Torah calls the city Kiryat Arba because of the four couples who are buried there (Rashi on 23:1). It isn't eight individuals; it's four merged couples. This is the Jewish view of what a marriage is supposed to be. Yaakov was devastated when he saw through Ruach Hakodesh that he wouldn't be buried together with his soulmate Rachel because this indicated that their union wouldn't be perfect. A defect in their union would be very painful and obviously have repercussions throughout the marriage.

We find a fascinating concept by Yaakov Avinu. Rashi, in Parshas Vayechi (49:33), quotes the Gemara (Taanis 5b) that Yaakov never really died. In fact, according to the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 92:2), Yaakov was actually standing there when Bnei Yisroel left Egypt. Even though the Torah explicitly says that he was embalmed and buried in Chevron, apparently he wasn't physically bound by his death. In all likelihood, if Yaakov and Rochel would have had a perfect merged identity, it seems very possible that Rochel could have had the same quality of not being really dead. In other words, she could have been buried in Chevron and still gone out to the side of the road to pray for her children when they needed her.

This is why Yaakov Avinu was sobbing loudly when he first met Rochel. He understood from the outset that they would not share that eternal bond. Their brief marriage, which ended upon the sudden death of Rochel, also ended their connection and the potential for an eternal relationship. This is why Yaakov was exceedingly distraught when they first met.

A Fate Worse Than Death

[...] and he [Yaakov] cried (29:10).

Rashi relates that Yaakov was saddened by the fact that he came searching for a wife empty handed in contrast to Eliezer who, when he went to find a wife for Yitzchak, came bearing many gifts. This was because Elifaz, the son of Eisav, pursued him on the orders of his father to kill Yaakov. But Elifaz, who was "raised on the lap of Yitzchak," did not want kill Yaakov. As Elifaz was conflicted, he asked Yaakov, "What should I do about my father's command?" Yaakov responded, "Take all my possessions, I will be impoverished and a poor person is considered as if he is dead." Obviously, Elifaz couldn't return to his father and

outright lie by saying that he killed Yaakov because the truth would come to light eventually. This being so, even if technically he didn't violate his father's command, how could this scheme possibly satisfy Eisav?

There is a well-known maxim in Judaism; "He who publicly shames his neighbor is as though he shed his blood" (Baba Metzia 58b). The Gemara continues, "all who descend into Gehenna eventually leave. Except for one who publicly shames his neighbor."

This is quite remarkable. The ultimate punishment for embarrassing someone is worse than the punishment received for killing him! How is this possible? Rabbeinu Yonah in his famous work explains that the pain of shame is even worse than death itself (Shaarei Teshuva 3:139).

The reason is quite obvious. When one kills someone, the pain caused, while severe, is temporal. In contrast, when one suffers a deep humiliation, the pain is replayed in their mind constantly and endured for a lifetime. This, in effect, causes a much greater emotional trauma to the victim than the pain of non-existence and therefore merits a much greater punishment.

This fact is demonstrated as Yaakov was so pained by the fact that he was penniless and had nothing to offer as a gift to his future wife that he cried. Clearly, Elifaz felt that Eisav would be satisfied with the continuous humiliation of Yaakov.

Family Matters

And Yaakov said to his brethren "gather stones" (Bereishis 31:46). Rashi (ad loc) comments, "this refers to his sons who were as brothers to him, standing by him in his troubles and wars." Rashi's explanation seems a little difficult to understand; if the Torah meant to say his sons why are they referred to as "his brothers"?

Rashi is highlighting how Yaakov interacted with his children. Often parents treat their adolescent children as employees they can order around – and that's on a good day. On a bad day, they tend to treat them as indentured servants ("take out the garbage!" or "get me a beer!" etc.). Rashi is telling us that Yaakov Avinu treated his adolescent children as one would treat siblings: in other words, as equals. This is what spurred them to stand by him during his troubles and throughout wars. It's no wonder then that Yaakov's legacy was considered complete (see Rashi 35:22) and all of his children were righteous. This also

explains Rashi's comment in Parshas Vayechi (49:24) on the words "even Yisroel" – foundation of Israel. There Rashi says that the word "even" is a contraction of the words "av" and "bonim" – "father and sons." In other words, the foundation of the Jewish people is built on the strength of the relationship between Yaakov and his children; that of a healthy relationship between a father and his sons.

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For the week ending 3 December 2022 / 9 Kislev
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***Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -
www.seasonsofthemoon.com Parshat Vayeitzei***

Most of us get to a certain platform of spirituality in life and leave it at that. We're happy to move into neutral and coast on what we've already achieved. If we decided to keep Shabbat, we carry on keeping Shabbat; if we said, "I'm going to keep kosher," we carry on keeping Kosher, or putting on tefillin or whatever it is. If we went to Yeshiva, we carry on learning — sometimes less, sometimes more. At some point we feel, "Okay, I'm not that great, but I'm not that bad either." Truth be told, to move outside our comfort zone and do something that's even a little bit more than other people is very difficult. It's difficult because people don't do more than they have to. Some of us struggle to do even that. In terms of spirituality we are a bit like herd animals. We like to stick with the crowd. And we also tend to think, "What difference does it make to the world anyway? True, I'll be a better person, but there are already so many tzadikim (righteous people) in the world, so what does the world need me for? Why do I need to be so religious? Aren't there already enough "Famous Tzadik" pictures to put up in the succa?" "And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan." Rashi explains that the Torah needed to write only that Yaakov went to Charan — what need was there to emphasize that he also left Be'er Sheva? He answers that when a tzadik leaves a place it leaves an impression. When a tzadik is in a city, his presence causes radiance and a luminous, spiritual brilliance to settle on the city, and when he leaves, the radiance is lost.

The question arises, "Was Yaakov the first tzadik to leave a city? Didn't both his father Yitzchak and his grandfather Avraham both leave places? Why does the Torah emphasize Yaakov's leaving over theirs?"

The difference is that when both Avraham and Yitzchak left places, they left no tzadik of their stature behind, whereas when Yaakov left Be'er Sheva he left his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka, two great tzadikim. One might have thought that since Yitzchak and Rivka remained, Yaakov's departure would not dim the spiritual light of the place. Therefore, it is specifically here that the Torah emphasizes the reverse — holiness never eclipses itself. The spiritual light that three holy people radiate is much greater than two. When we think that our meager efforts at being close to G-d are eclipsed by the great and the holy people of our generation, we should remember that holiness is never eclipsed, that our every holy thought or action adds immeasurably to the cosmos.

• Sources: Kli Yakar in Talelei
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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

***Vayeitzei: You can only win the lottery if
you buy a ticket 30 November 2022***

Success in life doesn't just fall into our laps. We learn this important lesson from an intriguing passage in Parshat Vayeitzei.

Yaakov came to his father in law Lavan and demanded that he be paid for his many years of service, during which he hadn't received a penny. The Torah provides for us the details of the negotiations between the two. Lavan said to Yaakov (Bereishit 30:27), "I can see what has happened; I can read the signs;

Nichasti vayevarcheinu Hashem biglalecha. – "God has blessed me because of you."

Yaakov then replied (Bereishit 30:30) by saying, "*Vayevarech Hashem otecha meragli,*" which we usually translate as, "God has blessed you on my account."

But the term 'leragli' literally means 'because of my feet!' What was Yaakov trying to convey?

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsh explains this beautifully. He explains that when Lavan said to Yaakov, "Nichasti vayivarcheinu Hashem biglalecha," what he meant was this: "What has happened Yaakov, is that God has blessed me – it's not you – you're a holy man, and that's why God has always helped you. It is God who has performed these miracles for my flocks.

It's to God that I should give thanks, not to you. You don't deserve a single penny – God has done it all.” When Yaakov then replied and said, “Vayevarech Hashem otecha leragli” – “God has blessed you because of my feet!” what he meant was, “For all these years, I've been standing in your fields. Under all weather conditions, I've given the utmost service. It has been a partnership. Of course, I've got my bitachon, my trust in God, but throughout this time, God was turning to me for my hishtadlut, for my efforts, as well. I did it with Hashem, and therefore you should be paying me.”

From Yaakov we learn that in life, you can only succeed if you try hard together with faith in Hashem. The way that the Talmud puts it is that Hashem says to us,

“Pichu li petach shel machat veniftach lachem pitcho shel ulam.” – “Open for me just the space of the eye of a needle and I will expand that to be the space of an entire hall.”

We may be the junior partners, but it is always a partnership. ‘Ein somchin al haneis’ – never rely on miracles, the Talmud tells us. We have to do our bit. So it is from Yaakov we learn that in life, you can only win the lottery if you buy a ticket. Success doesn't automatically fall into our laps. It's a partnership and together with bitachon in Hashem, we need to always try our hardest.

Shabbat shalom.

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

***Drasha Parshas Vayeitzei -
Point of Order Rabbi Mordechai
Kamenetzky***

Let me get straight to the point. After all Yaakov did! at least when he dealt with his charlatan father-in-law, Lavan. You see, Yaakov wanted to marry Rachel, Lavan's youngest daughter. He did not have the audacity to ask for her hand in marriage straightforwardly, so when he arrived at Lavan's home, and identified himself as the son of Lavan's sister, Rivka, Lavan decided to offer his nephew Yaakov work. He would not have him work for free, so he declared, “Just because you are my relative, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me – What are your wages?” (Genesis 29:15). The Torah tells us that “Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, ‘I will work for you seven years, for Rachel your daughter, who is

the youngest one.” What is fascinating is the magnanimous offer Yaakov made. He did not say, “I'd like to marry your daughter and then work. He offered seven years of devoted labor before marriage. What is even more perplexing is the seemingly superfluous language in the request. Why did he annunciate each detail about Rachel? Why ask for Rachel, your daughter, the youngest one? Why not just one of the three?

Rashi tells us that Yaakov was afraid. What reason was there for mentioning all these detailed descriptions of Rachel? Because Yaakov knew that Lavan was a deceiver he said to him, “I will serve you for Rachel. If Lavan would say he meant any other Rachel from the street, therefore he said “your daughter.” Should Lavan say, “I will change Leah's name and call her Rachel”, Yaakov said “your younger one.”

It didn't help. In spite of all this, Lavan deceived him. He surreptitiously switched Leah for Rachel, excusing himself in a mocking manner, “By us, in our place, we don't give the younger daughter before the older one!” (ibid v. 26). But we are surely left with a lesson both in Yaakov's specificity and in Lavan's response. Master storyteller Rabbi Ami Cohen tells the tale of the famous and equally pious Reb Yossel Czapnik, who in his unpretentious manner walked one day into a large yeshiva. He was unfamiliar with the workings of that particular school, and as he meandered about the great study hall, his Chassidic garb and uncombed beard attracted some stares from some of the students who were not accustomed to that sort of persona in their academy. Innocently he looked at the bookshelves crammed with countless volumes of Talmudic and Biblical exegeses, picked up a volume, sauntered over to a chair toward the back of the study hall, and began to study the book. A moment later, a tall young man towered over him peering down through the narrow gap that separated his spectacles from his ruddy face. In a very sarcastic tone he sneered, “In our Yeshiva, we do not sit in the Mashgiach's seat.”

Reb Yossel looked up for a moment, and in his pure naiveté smiled, and agreed, mumbling as he peered back down in the volume, “by us as well.” The fellow hunched over Reb Yossel and repeated his statement, this time in a louder and more ominous tone. “By us, we don't sit in the Mashgiach's seat!”

Reb Yossel shook his head and acknowledged. “In

our yeshiva too!” By this time, the exasperated, young man changed his tactic. In a sharp voice, he commanded. “I don’t know who you are, but you are sitting in the Mashgiach’s seat!”

Upon hearing those words, Reb Yossel bounded out of the seat. He turned to the fellow in authentic shock. “I was sitting in your Mashgiach’s seat?” he asked in horror. “Why didn’t you say so in the first place?” Perhaps the exchange that is portrayed in the Torah teaches us two lessons at once. A person who requests something should be clear, direct, and accurate. Yaakov clearly stated his want, “Rachel, your youngest daughter.” There should be no room for error or an opening for surreptitiousness. Like Yaakov, you can’t always win, but you have to try your best with a most clear request. In addition, if you don’t want to accept the terms, say no right from the start. Don’t deride your counterpart saying, “By us, we don’t do it this way.” Mocking the individual, while making him feel like an anomaly, is no way to explain your position. Be clear, honest, and precise. You may disagree, but you will gain a lot more respect. *Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Joel Mandel in memory of Joseph Jungreis Reb Yoel Zvi ben Reb Tuvia HaLevi ob”m — 10 Kislev*

Dedicated by the Schulman Family in memory of Milton Schulman R’ Michoel ben R’ Zvi ob”m — 11 Kislev

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blogs.timesofisrael.com Prophetic Vision (Vayetze) Ben-Tzion Spitz

As a man is, so he sees. As the eye is formed, such are its powers. - William Blake

The encounter with God is often a nebulous affair. It seems that prophetic visions are challenging for most mortals to withstand, let alone fully and deeply comprehend. The sages liken the prophetic experience as seeing someone through a clouded window. The most prominent exception is Moses, who is described as perceiving God clearly, through a “clear window” (Asplakariah Meirah is the term that’s used).

However, between the clear and the clouded visions, there are nuances as to how one achieves prophetic clarity. The Bat Ayin on Genesis 28:10 delves into some of the factors of prophetic vision based on

Jacob’s journey.

He explains that the first level of prophecy is achieved by wholehearted fulfillment of God’s commandments. This is the level of entry into the land of Israel and is similar to the level achieved by the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest when he enters the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. The most holy person entering the most holy place on the most holy day of the year. By actively and fully pursuing and fulfilling all of God’s desires one can strive for the initial level of prophecy, the Asplakariah She’eina Meriah – the unclear window into the realm of prophecy.

The next level of prophetic vision is achieved by immersion in God’s Torah. By fully accepting, embracing, and internalizing God’s word, one’s mind and heart are sanctified. The Torah has the power to enlighten and show a person the path they should undertake.

The Bat Ayin draws all of this out from the somewhat repetitive verse “And Jacob left Beer Sheva and went to Charan.” We were just told of Jacob’s journey a few verses before that. The Bat Ayin relates the word Charan to the word Cherut, meaning freedom. Jacob travelled from his earnest and dutiful fulfillment of God’s commands to a level of fully delving into the Torah, thereby reaching a higher level of awe of God, of freedom and of even being able to see the angels, besides the prophetic vision he was granted.

May we, in our own small ways, reach for glimpses of the divine and holy by doing what’s right and learning what God says about it. *Dedication - To the memory of one of my rabbinic inspirations, Dayan Chanoch Ehrentreu z”l.*

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay.

He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Vayetzeh 5783 - The Ladder from Heaven to Earth

In last week’s parasha, we read about Jacob being forced to leave his parents’ home in order to escape the wrath of his brother Esau who was waiting for an opportunity to take revenge for Jacob taking the blessings that had been promised to Esau. In this

week's parasha, Vayetzeh, we get into the story of Jacob who wandered to Haran where his uncle Laban lived. Jacob lived in Haran for twenty years, through many trials and tribulations.

This chapter in Jacob's life began with the deceit from which Jacob suffered his entire life. After he got to Haran and met Rachel, Laban's daughter, he felt she was his soulmate and wished to marry her. Jacob made a proposal to Laban, as was customary in those days, and agreed to work for Laban for seven years after which he would be able to marry Rachel. Laban agreed to give Rachel to Jacob, but after the seven years passed, he cheated Jacob and gave him his older daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel. From here on, Jacob's life became a string of complications and tragedies. After he discovered the deceit, he demanded to marry to Rachel, the woman he loved, but Laban demanded an additional seven years of labor. With no choice, Jacob agreed and worked for Laban for another seven years.

Jacob was married to two sisters but loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. This created a rift in his family with far-reaching implications. The tension between Rachel and Leah is described in the parasha. It intensified after Leah gave birth to child after child, whereas the beloved Rachel was unable to bear children. Only after Leah had six sons did Rachel get pregnant and give birth to Joseph. After Joseph was born, Jacob decided to leave Haran and return to his parents' home in the Land of Canaan. Laban was not amenable and Jacob was forced to stay in Haran for years more. Even when he finally was able to escape with his family and possessions, Laban chased him and tried to kill him. Only divine intervention prevented the tragedy.

What kept Jacob going during these long and difficult years, when he was alone, far from his parents' home, being swindled and threatened time after time by his father-in-law? To answer that, we must go back to the start of Jacob's journey from the Land of Canaan to Haran. When he was on his way, he went to sleep for the night in a place called Beit El (the House of G-d). Chazal tell us that this was on the Temple Mount, the site where the Temple would be built years later. There, Jacob dreamed an amazing dream. He saw in his dream "a ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of God were ascending and descending upon it."

Many interpretations of this vision have been offered by commentators. According to some of them, the dream symbolizes the connection between heaven and earth; the possibility of a person living a secular and sacred life simultaneously, and the human capacity to bridge the gaps between heaven and earth.

Jacob embarked on his life journey equipped with these understandings. He knew that even when he was living in a foreign land, alone and vulnerable to deceit, there was meaning to his life and his actions. He learned that even when we feel we're at the bottom of a pit, we are not disconnected from heaven. He believed that a person can be standing on earth but his head could reach the heavens.

He also recognized that the ups and downs in his private life are not merely mishaps, but are part of a complex plan in which he plays a part. He saw angels going up and down the ladder and inferred that he too could be like that – descending and then going back up; never staying down, but always climbing back up that ladder leading to heaven.

When Jacob woke up, he cried out, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." If we listen closely to these words, we reveal two aspects of the connection between heaven and earth, between the sacred and the mundane. On the one hand, Jacob discovered that this earthly site is actually "the house of G-d." G-d resides on earth. He is not unattainable and distant. On the other hand, Jacob revealed that the place was "the gate of heaven" – the gate between earth and heaven. Jacob discovered the connection between heaven and earth from both sides, enabling him to cope with his distant exile while equipped with faith and confidence, hope and significance.

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Rav Kook Torah

Vayetzeh: The Blessing of a Scholar's Presence Rabbi Chanan Morrison

After working at Laban's ranch for 14 years, Jacob was anxious to return home, to the Land of Israel. Laban, however, was not eager to let his nephew go. "I have observed the signs," he told Jacob, "and God has blessed me for your sake" (Gen. 30:27). The Talmud (Berachot 42a) points out that Laban's good

fortune was not due only to Jacob's industriousness and hard work. "Blessing comes in the wake of a Torah scholar," the Sages taught. The very presence of a saintly scholar brings with it blessings of success and wealth.

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

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

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

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

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

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Peninim on the Torah - Parashas

Vayeitzei 2"D'J7 RY'7 J7'5D

מש הליו מוקמב עגפיו ... עבש ראבמ בקעי אציו

Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva ... He encountered the place and spent the night. (28:10,11)

Chazal (Megillah 17a) glean from the word *sham*, there, that this was the first time the Patriarch lay down to sleep. He had spent the past fourteen years "hidden" within the *yeshivah* of Shem and Eivar. I use the word "hidden" to underscore that Yaakov *Avinu* became a part of the *yeshivah* in such a manner that no one even knew he was there. He studied day and night, focused on one thing: learning Torah. The question that should be addressed is how

Chazal knew that Yaakov was in the *yeshivah*. Simply put, after calculating Yaakov's age at present and the age that he was when he left home, we have fourteen years that are not accounted for. Yet, how do we know that those fourteen years of his life were spent ensconced in the *bais hamedrash*?

Horav Avraham Yudelevitz, Shlita, recalls an incident that received much coverage in the news. Two children had disappeared from their home (or so it was thought). At the end, Hatzalah members were able to locate them – within the confines of their own home! How did they achieve this? They interviewed the parents, seeking a detailed schedule of their children's daily activities to ascertain where they might have gone. Who were their friends? What excited them? After listening to the answers, the men decided that the children had not wandered off very far, since their entire lives were centered around their home and immediate community. After some more room-to-room searching, the children were found sleeping in the linen closet in their parents' bedroom! They were sleeping peacefully without a care in the world, oblivious to all the chaos their "nap" had generated. Apparently, they had been playing, and this was a perfect place to hide. They became tired and naturally fell asleep.

A similar idea (explains *Rav Yudelevitz*) applies to our Patriarch who personified Torah study at its apex. If Yaakov is "missing," we have no question that he is to be found in the *bais hamedrash*. This is his permanent address. Everything else is distraction. Conversely, his twin brother, *Eisav ha'rasha*, after returning from a day out in the "field," is "tired." *Chazal (Bava Basra 16B)* explain that he had committed five transgressions that day. How do we know this? This is *Eisav*. When he goes out in the field and returns "tired," it can only mean one thing: his base personality and moral perversion acted themselves out, through adultery, murder and their accompanying transgressions. A person's proclivities and activities are usually an indication of his personality. Some gravitate to the *bais hamedrash*; others, sadly, do not.

Truthfully, had Yaakov *Avinu* not "hidden" himself in the Torah, he would not have survived two decades with Lavan, the arch swindler. Yaakov was cheated from day one. Yet, he neither complained nor allowed his righteous indignation to cloud or lessen the commitment he had to execute his job faithfully.

He worked for Lavan without holding back, because he had made a commitment. He viewed every swindle, every challenge, every obstacle as Heavenly-ordained. His *emunah* in Hashem was absolute and unshakeable. *Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, Shlita*, relates what is a well-known story, which grants us a window into the evil of Lavan and the equanimity of Yaakov.

The *Alshich HaKadosh* was giving a *shiur*, lecture, in the *shul* in Tzfas. His topic was the *pasuk*, *Va'tachlif es maskurti aseres monim*; "And you changed my wage ten times" (ibid. 31:41). The *Alshich* brilliantly detailed one hundred times and ways in which Lavan cheated Yaakov. The *Arizal* was seated in the *bais hamedrash* listening to the *shiur*. At one point, a smile came across the *Arizal's* face. After the *shiur*, the *Alshich* asked the *Arizal* why he had smiled. He explained that Lavan had also attended the *shiur* (obviously the *Arizal's* vision was far above our natural ability to see): "Concerning each one of the swindles that you detailed, he would shake his head in agreement. At one point, however, you mentioned something that even he did not realize. He said, 'I never thought about this.'" This is why the *Arizal* smiled.

Yet, despite all of this, our Patriarch maintained his calm and never once complained. This was due to his Torah-generated *emunah* that allowed him the clarity of vision to see and accept all that occurred as ordained by Hashem.

The *Meshech Chochmah* notes the Torah's description of Yaakov and Lavan's parting of the ways: *V'Yaakov halach l'darko*; "Yaakov went on his way" (ibid.31:2). Despite having been with Lavan *ha'rasha* for over twenty years, our Patriarch's unwavering commitment to Hashem was not altered. He continued along the path upon which he had started. Lavan was a distraction, but not a game changer. Concerning Lavan, the Torah writes, *Vayashav Lavan limekomo*; "Lavan went and returned to his place" (ibid. 31:1). Lavan was unchanged by his exposure to Yaakov, even though he had lived with him for over two decades. He remained the same *rasha* he had been until this point. Some people never change. As a swindler, Lavan was his own biggest enemy.

מש וְלֵיוּ בּוֹקֵמֵב עֲגִפְיוֹ

He encountered the place and spent the night there. (28:11)

This was no ordinary place. It was *Har HaMoriah*, where Avraham *Avinu* bound Yitzchak (*Avinu*) on the *Mizbayach*, Altar, which would later serve as the site of the *Bais Hamikdash*. *Chazal* interpret the word *vayifga*, "he encountered," as "he prayed." Yaakov *Avinu's* encounter was of a spiritual nature. He encountered Hashem. Since it was evening, this is when the Patriarch initiated *Tefillas Arvis*, the Evening Prayer. *Chazal* (*Chullin* 91:13) teach that originally Yaakov had passed the place without giving it a second thought. When he reached Charan, he realized that he had passed the place where his father and grandfather had prayed – and he did not. He immediately prepared to return. Hashem made a miracle which allowed him to have *kefitzas ha'derech*, contraction of the road.

which is a reference to miraculous, instant time-travel between two locations. Why was Yaakov able to pass the first time, and what happened later to cause him to make an about-face?

The *Tchebiner Rav, zl*, explains that on the way to Charan, he was planning to stop at the *bais medrash* of Shem and Eivar. He felt that since he was about to learn Torah, it was improper to delay his objective by stopping to *daven*. He later realized, however, that *tefillah* is an essential requirement and prerequisite for Torah study; without *tefillah* the Torah study is deficient. Thus, he returned.

Torah achievement is not predicated upon acumen. It is a Divine gift given to someone who is worthy of *siyata d'Shmaya*, Heavenly assistance. One must pray, plead, supplicate for this Divine assistance. Otherwise, his learning will be an exercise in mental gymnastics – not Torah study. The *Chazon Ish* was a classic example. He writes: "Torah and *tefillah* are inexorably bound to one another, with the toil expended in studying Torah assisting in one's perceiving the light of *tefillah*; and likewise, prayer aids in one's perception of Torah." He was wont to say that he had gained enormous levels of Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, more due to his *tefillah* than due to his *hasmadah*, diligence.

Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl, related that his *Rebbe*, the *Netziv, zl*, (He was also a close student of *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*. He was of the few who did not take sides when issues involving the leadership of *Yeshivas Volozhin* came to the fore. He sought only to learn Torah. Once, he refused to give the *shiur* which he would give daily.) No one had the

temerity to ask the *Netziv* why he was not giving shiur. *Rav Isser Zalman* had a very close relationship with his *Rebbe*, so he asked. The *Netziv* replied with total equanimity, “I felt that today (during *Shacharis*), I did not have the proper *kavanah*, intention, during the blessing of *Ahavah Rabbah* (preceding *Krias Shema*). I do not have the brazenness to present my analysis of the *sugya*, topic of discussion, without first *davening* properly.” Without *tefillah*, one does not merit the *siyata d’Shmaya* to pinpoint the unvarnished truth.

יתעדי אל יכנאו הזה בוקמב ד שי וְכא רמאי ותנשמ בקעי
יקייו

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

Rashi explains that after discovering the level of holiness of the place in which he presently was, *Yaakov Avinu* was lamenting having slept. How does one dare to sleep in such a holy place? The *Brisker Rav, zl*, would become emotional when thinking about *Yaakov’s* reaction to discovering that he was in a consecrated place. The Patriarch had escaped from his brother, *Eisav*, who was bent on killing him. On the way, he was waylaid by *Elifaz*, who took away all of his money. Therefore, since he had just received a prophecy that assured him, *U’shemarticha b’chol asher teilech*; “I will guard you wherever you go,” he should be filled with overwhelming joy. Instead, he was depressed that he had slept in a holy place. In other words, it was worth it for him to have forfeited all of the Heavenly blessing spelled out in the prophecy just so he did not violate one transgression! If he manifests any taint of impropriety, then all the blessings are of no value whatsoever!

The *Rav* explained that the Torah’s laws are not arbitrary for us to decide whether to “trade” *mitzvos*, to do less here, be lenient there, all in order to benefit in the larger picture. In reality, no larger picture exists. We are charged with carrying out the will of Hashem, performing His *mitzvos* as they are individually stated. It is forbidden for us to make calculations to determine how we will benefit the most. We do not transgress for the purpose of later benefit.

The *Rav* cites the well-known *Tosefta* (*Terumos* 7), which states a *halachah* that might raise eyebrows among those who feel that the *mitzvos* of the Torah are negotiable. A group of

idolaters came to a Jewish community and demanded they give over a certain Jew (whom they would murder). If the community did not comply with their demands, they would slaughter the entire community. The *Tosefta* states the *halachic* ruling that no Jew may be given over. It is an act of *retzichah*, murder. The question is obvious: This man will die regardless – either as an individual or as a part of the community. Why jeopardize the lives of an entire Jewish community to save one man? We do not make calculations concerning the Torah’s laws. The man may not be handed over, even if this inaction will result in the deaths of others. The *Brisker Rav* would quote his father, *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, who said that the Torah is likened to fire. As such, it is prohibited to touch. To touch it, even with the intention of somehow adding to it elsewhere, carries the risk of being burned.

During World War II (as related by *Rav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*), as the Nazi war machine was overrunning Europe, it reached a point that the Nazi army would reach England within two weeks. The English government issued a call for all able-bodied men to sign up to the army, to assist the country in this challenging time. No one was absolved from the draft except for English *yeshivah* students who were studying full-time. Those *yeshivah* students that were from outside England, however, had to sign up or be deported. *Horav Moshe Schneider, zl*, refused to allow anyone – not one single *bachur*, student, to join the army. He declared, “We are prepared for *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. Even if they arrest us, we will convene the *yeshivah* in prison! The Torah is our heritage, and they are unable to sever our relationship with it. We are already drafted into Hashem’s legion and, through the power of our study, we will save the country!”

When the government inspectors saw that *Rav Schneider* was intractable, they threatened to deport him. Perhaps this way he would loosen his hold on the students. The *yeshivah* administration turned to Chief Rabbi Hertz to intercede on their behalf. *Rav Hertz* suggested that they compromise and offer two or three students in order to satisfy the government’s demands. The *Rosh Yeshivah* stood resolute – not one student would he relinquish. They were his students who came to his *yeshivah* for his guidance; thus, they were under his protection. He would protect them.

They were all going to remain together as one unit. He would not compromise *vis-à-vis* the Torah. Each and every Jew has inestimable value.

The Chief Rabbi convinced the government's inspectors to speak directly with the students, to hear what they had to say. Understandably, the students opted to stay with their revered *Rebbe*. They felt that this was their only chance of surviving the war. The Torah would protect them. The government promised to render its decision the following day. The *Rosh Yeshivah* declared the next day as a day of *taanis u'tefillah*, a day of fasting dedicated to prayer, to pierce the Heavens and have the government's decree rescinded. Hashem listened and provided a positive response. The students were declared emotionally unwell and, consequently, absolved from serving in the military. The order of deportation against the *Rosh Yeshivah* was also revoked, on grounds that he singlehandedly was maintaining a "school" for depressed, emotionally challenged young men. He was lauded for his magnanimous, selfless personality. The *yeshivah's* status was hereby changed from "school" to "hospital", catering to the needs of the emotionally disabled. Their refusal to alter their commitment one iota resulted in their survival. Torah does not brook compromise.

רכזיו

Hashem remembered Rachel. (30:22)

Rachel *Imeinu* was *mevater*, relinquished, that which she deserved in order to preserve her sister's esteem. If Yaakov *Avinu* would have discovered that Leah had been exchanged for Rachel, it would have posed an embarrassing situation for Leah. To spare her the shame, Rachel gave up what was hers. *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, adds that Rachel's actions to spare her sister from humiliation also breached the trust Yaakov had in her. The Patriarch knew that Lavan was a swindler who would find some way to break his word at the very last moment. Thus, he made a pact with Rachel, giving her special signs which only she would know. Rachel shared those *simanim* with Leah. Rachel gave up everything – her husband, her self-respect, her position in Matriarchal status – all so that her sister would not feel the pain of humiliation.

When *Horav Itzele Ponovezher, zl*, left *Yeshivas Slabodka*, the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl*, reverently called the *Alter m'Slabodka*, was challenged with finding a *Rosh*

Yeshivah to fill his shoes. He turned to *Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl*, who, although young in years, had developed a reputation as a brilliant mind whose analytic rendering of the subject matter was without peer. *Rav* Isser Zalman considered the position, then demurred because he felt it would cause his mother-in-law, the widow of *Rav* Feivel Frank, undue pain. Apparently, his brother-in-law, *Horav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, zl*, who was the oldest son-in-law, had yet to assume a rabbinical leadership position. *Rav* Moshe Mordechai was a brilliant Torah scholar who simply had not connected with the right position. He did not want to cause his mother-in-law any undue ill will. Thus, *Rav* Isser Zalman suggested to the *Alter* that he hire both himself and *Rav* Moshe Mordechai as *Roshei Yeshivah*. The *Alter* agreed, and the two brothers-in-law reigned as Slabodka's *Roshei Yeshivah*. After a few years, it became obvious to *Rav* Isser Zalman that he and *Rav* Moshe Mordechai had disparate approaches toward elucidating the *sugya*, Talmudic topic, and, since two kings do not reign as one, he offered to leave. It was exactly at that point that the opportunity to open a branch of Slabodka availed itself in the city of Shtetl. *Rav* Isser Zalman left to establish the *Shtetl Yeshivah*. His *vatranus* led to his imbuing with his Torah such *talmidim* as his future son-in-law, *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, and *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, two individuals responsible for the burgeoning of Torah both in America and *Eretz Yisrael*; two *gaonim*, who each became the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah giant of his respective generation.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, was the *chazzan*, led the services, during the *Yamim Noraim* in the *Zaharei Chamah, vasikin minyan*, in Yerushalayim. One year, the board informed him that a relative of the *shul's* largest donor was coming to the Holy Land. The donor wanted this relative to lead the services. Without the funds contributed by this donor, the *shul* would suffer. *Rav* Aryeh was upset, but he could do nothing about it. He went to speak with his *Rebbe*, the *Leshem*, *Horav Shlomo Elyashiv, zl*, who told him, "The pain you suffer in this world is greatly beneficial for the soul." When *Rav* Aryeh returned home, he found two students who had recently emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* from Slabodka. They had established a small group of *yeshivah* students who were paving the way for the *yeshivah's* branch in Chevron. Would he do them the honor of leading the services on *Yamim*

Noraim? This was the beginning of the famed *nusach*, melody, sung in Chevron for years to come, which was amalgamated with the *nusach* made famous by *Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*. One never loses out due to being *mevater*.

Horav Simchah Shlomo Levin, zl (youngest son of *Rav Aryeh*) asked why it had taken so long before *Rachel Imeinu* was

rewarded by Hashem for her act of yielding to her sister. By the time *Rachel* had her first child, *Leah* had already given birth to six of her own, which were supplemented by the two sons of *Zilpah*, her maidservant. Her unprecedented action of forgoing her right to marriage to save her sister from humiliation should have generated an earlier reward. *Rachel* had suffered enough.

Rav Levin explains that, upon occasion, one may elevate himself to the point that he places his fellow's need before his own. This, however, is not an indication of his innate personality. Only after a considerable period of time elapses – and he continues supporting his act of *vatranus* – does his/her true nature emerge and come to the fore. *Rachel Imeinu* acted in a manner that earned her accolades and served as a merit to protect the Jewish nation in later times. Her patience and forbearance added to her *vatranus* to make it shine, such that it became her hallmark.

Va'ani Tefillah

וישעמ לכב דיסחו ויכרד לכב ד' קידצ – *Tzaddik Hashem b'chol derachav v'chasisd b'chol maasav*.

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

We are introduced to two virtues: *tzaddik*, righteous; *chassid*, pious. *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl* (commentary to *Parashas Chayei Sarah*) explains that a true *tzaddik* is one who continually rises to higher levels of righteousness. He does not rest on his past laurels. He quotes *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, who derives from Hashem's questioning the *Satan* (*Iyov* 1:8) that a *tzaddik* is one who is able to withstand the scrutiny of even the *Satan*, who looks for every negative aspect of a person's demeanor.

A *chassid*, as explained by *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, is one who does not insist on receiving what is actually due to him. Instead, he acts *lifnim meshuras ha'din*, beyond the letter of the law. He diffidently defers to others, allowing his own property to be damaged or spent rather than taking from others.

When *Rav Chaim* learned in *Kollel Chazon Ish*, he administered a *gemach* (*gemillas chesed*) fund, from which the community could borrow interest free. When he was ready to “retire” from this responsibility, he transferred the reins to his son. He said, “For any loan which you know cannot be repaid (due to the indigence of the borrower), take the money from my personal fund. *Tzedakah* funds cannot be absolved.” He did not want people borrowing money which they could not repay if he could help them. Otherwise, as the *Arizal* writes, one who leaves this world owing money will have to return in order to pay back the loan. If so, the lender (in this case, *Rav Chaim*) would likewise have to return, so that he could be reimbursed. Neither option was acceptable.

In loving memory of our father and grandfather on his yahrtzeit

ט"גשת ולסכ א"י רטפנ - ל"ז ירפ נב ונחלא

Mordechai & Jenny Kurant, Aliza Wrona Naomi & Avrohom Yitzchok Weinberger Dovid & Chavi Kurant, Yossi & Chani Kurant Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

May I Eat before I Daven?

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

As the Gemara teaches, the source in this week's parsha teaches that *Yaakov* introduced the *Maariv* prayers...

Question #1: *Reuven* calls me: I have not been well, and I need to eat something shortly after awaking. On weekdays, I go to shul to daven when I wake up and I can wait to eat until after davening, but I do not have this option on Shabbos. What should I do?

Question #2: *Ahuva* asks: It is difficult for me to wait for *Kiddush* until my husband returns from shul. May I eat something before he arrives home?

Question #3: Someone told me that a woman may not eat in the morning before she davens, but I remember being taught in *Beis Yaakov* that we may eat once we

say the morning berachos. Is my memory faulty?

Answer:

The Gemara (*Berachos* 10b) states: "What do we derive from the verse, You may not eat over blood (*Vayikra* 19:26)? That you may not eat (in the morning) before you have prayed for your 'blood'...

The verse states, in reference to someone who eats and drinks prior to praying: You have thrown me behind your body (Melachim 1 14:9). Do not read your body (in Hebrew gavecha), but your arrogance (gai'echa). The Holy One said: After this person has indulged in his own pride (by eating or drinking), only then does he accept upon himself the dominion of heaven!?"

The halacha that results from this Gemara is codified by all authorities. To quote the Rambam: "It is prohibited to taste anything or to perform work from halachic daybreak until one has prayed shacharis" (Hilchos Tefillah 6:4).

Would you like tea or coffee?

Although all poskim prohibit eating and drinking before morning davening, we find early authorities who permit drinking water before davening, since this is not considered an act of conceit (Rosh, quoting the Avi Ha'ezri; the Beis Yosef cites authorities who disagree, but rules like the Avi Ha'ezri). Most later authorities permit drinking tea or coffee, contending that this, also, is considered like drinking water, but the poskim dispute whether one may add sugar to the beverage. The Mishnah Berurah and others prohibit this, whereas the Aruch Hashulchan and other later authorities permit it. They are disputing whether adding sugar to the beverage promotes it to a forbidden beverage, or whether it is still considered water that one may imbibe before davening.

Hunger

The Rambam rules that someone who is hungry or thirsty should eat or drink before he davens, so that he can daven properly (Hilchos Tefillah 5:2).

Similarly, some authorities contend that, for medical reasons, anything may be eaten or drunk before davening. They explain that the Gemara prohibited only eating or drinking that demonstrate conceit, whereas whatever is done for medical reasons is, by definition, not considered arrogant (Beis Yosef, quoting Mahari Abohav). The Shulchan Aruch accepts this as normative halacha (Orach Chayim 89:3).

I will be hungry!

What is the halacha if someone is, as yet, not hungry, but he knows that he will be so hungry by the end of davening that it will distract him from davening properly. Is he permitted to eat before davening? This question impacts directly on Reuven's question.

The answer to this question appears to lie in the

following Talmudic discussion (Berachos 28b):

"Rav Avya was weak and, as a result, did not attend Rav Yosef's lecture that took place before musaf. The next day, when Rav Avya arrived in the Yeshiva, Abayei saw Rav Avya and was concerned that Rav Yosef may have taken offense at Rav Avya's absence. Therefore, Abayei asked Rav Avya why he had failed to attend the previous day's lecture. After which the following conversation transpired:

Abayei: Why did the master (addressing Rav Avya) not attend the lecture?

Rav Avya: I was not feeling well and was unable to attend.

Abayei: Why did you not eat something first and then come?

Rav Avya: Does the master (now referring to Abayei) not hold like Rav Huna who prohibits eating before davening musaf?

Abayei: You should have davened musaf privately, eaten something and then come to shul.

We see, from Abayei's retort, that someone who is weak should daven first and then eat, even if this means that he davens without a minyan. Based on this passage, several noted authorities rule that someone who will not be able to wait until after davening, and cannot find an early minyan with which to daven, should daven privately (beyechidus), eat and then attend shul in order to hear the Torah reading and fulfill the mitzvos of answering Kaddish and Kedusha (Ba'er Heiteiv 89:11; Biur Halacha 289; Da'as Torah 289 quoting Zechor Le'avraham; Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:28 at end of teshuvah). Thus, it seems that we can positively answer Reuven's question: If he cannot wait until davening is over to eat, he should daven beyechidus, make Kiddush and eat something, and then come to shul to answer Borchu, Kedusha, Kaddish and hear keriyas hatorah.

May a woman eat before Kiddush?

Once someone becomes obligated to recite Kiddush, he cannot eat or drink anything before reciting Kiddush. Let us now discuss Ahuva's question: It is difficult for me to wait for Kiddush until my husband returns from shul. May I eat something before he arrives home?

Of course, Ahuva could recite Kiddush herself. To fulfill the mitzvah of Kiddush, she needs to eat something that fulfills the requirement of Kiddush bimkom seudah, a topic we will discuss a different time. However, Ahuva does not want to recite

Kiddush, or does not want to eat something to accompany the Kiddush. Is there a halachic solution to permit her to eat or drink before Kiddush?

There are some authorities who suggest approaches to permit Ahuva to eat or drink before Kiddush. Here is one approach:

Although most authorities obligate a woman to recite the daytime Kiddush and prohibit her from eating before she recites Kiddush (Tosafos Shabbos 286:4, 289:3; Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 289:1; Mishnah Berurah 289:6), this is not a universally held position. One early authority (Maharam Halavah, Pesachim 106, quoting Rashba) contends that women are absolved of the requirement to recite daytime Kiddush. The reason is that the daytime Kiddush is not an extension of the mitzvah of evening Kiddush, but is to demonstrate that the meal is in honor of Shabbos, and this requirement does not devolve upon women.

Although this approach is not halachically accepted, some authorities allow a woman to rely on this opinion, under extenuating circumstances, to eat before reciting morning Kiddush (Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak 4:28:3).

When does a married woman become obligated to make Kiddush? Rav Moshe Feinstein presents a different reason to permit a married woman to eat before Kiddush. He contends that since a married woman is required to eat the Shabbos meal with her husband, she does not become responsible to make Kiddush until it is time for the two of them to eat the Shabbos meal together, meaning after davening (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 4:101\2). In Rav Moshe's opinion, she is not yet obligated to make Kiddush, since the time for her meal has not yet arrived.

The Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah (Chapter 52, note 46), in the name of Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach, disagrees with this opinion. Firstly, Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach is unconvinced that she is halachically required to eat her meal with her husband. Furthermore, even assuming that she is, he disagrees that this permits her to eat before Kiddush.

If we do not follow the lenient approaches mentioned, when does a woman become obligated to recite Kiddush and is therefore no longer permitted to drink tea, coffee, and water? The Acharonim debate this issue, but explaining their positions requires explaining a different topic:

What must a woman pray?

All authorities require a woman to daven daily, but there is a dispute whether she is required to recite the full shemoneh esrei (I will call this the "Ramban's opinion"), or whether she fulfills her requirement by reciting a simple prayer, such as the morning beracha that closes with the words *Gomel chasadim tovim le'amo Yisrael* (I will refer to this as the "Magen Avraham's opinion").

When may she eat?

According to the Ramban's opinion that a woman is required to recite the full shemoneh esrei, she may not eat in the morning without first davening (see the previous discussion), whereas, according to the Magen Avraham's opinion that she fulfills her requirement once she has recited a simple prayer or morning berachos, she may eat once she has recited these tefillos.

Some authorities rule that a woman becomes obligated to hear Kiddush as soon as she recites berachos, since she has now fulfilled her requirement to daven, and she may therefore begin eating her meals. According to this opinion, now that she has recited morning berachos, she may not eat or drink without first making Kiddush (Tosafos Shabbos 286:4, 289:3). This approach contends that, before she recites morning berachos, she may drink water, tea or coffee, but after she recites morning berachos she may not drink even these beverages without first reciting Kiddush.

There is another view, that contends that a woman can follow the same approach that men follow, and may drink water, tea or coffee, even after she recited berachos before she has davened (Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 289:4 as understood by Halichos Beisah page 204).

At this point we can address the third question I raised above: "Someone told me that a woman may not eat in the morning before she davens, but I remember being taught in Beis Yaakov that we may eat, once we say the morning berachos. Is my memory faulty?" Many authorities contend that, although a woman should daven shemoneh esrei every morning, she may rely on the opinion of the Magen Avraham in regard to eating. Therefore, she may eat after reciting morning berachos. In many institutions, this approach was preferred, since it accomplishes that the tefillah that the girls recite is a much better prayer, and they learn how to daven

properly. However, this does not necessarily tell us what she should do on Shabbos morning, and I refer you back to the earlier discussion about this issue.

Conclusion

Rav Hirsch, in his commentary to the story of Kayin and Hevel in Parshas Bereishis (4:3), makes the following observation: “Two people can bring identical offerings and recite the same prayers and yet appear unequal in the eyes of G-d. This is made clear in connection with the offerings of these brothers. Scripture does not say: ‘G-d turned to the offering by Hevel, but to the offering by Kayin He did not turn.’ Rather, it says: ‘G-d turned to Hevel and his offering, but to Kayin and his offering He did not turn.’ The difference lay in the personalities of the offerers, not in their offerings. Kayin was unacceptable, hence, his offering was unacceptable. Hevel, on the other hand, was pleasing, hence, his offering was pleasing.”

The same is true regarding prayer: the Shemoneh Esrei itself, the Elokai netzor leshoni addition, and the personal supplications that different people recite may appear identical in words, but they are recited with individual emotion, devotion and commitment. Tefillah should be with total devotion in order to improve ourselves, to enable us to fulfill our role in Hashem’s world.

Liului Nishmas Sara Masha Bas R' Yaakov Eliezer AH, Beila bas Leib AH and Ana Malka bas Yisroel AH.