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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Yosef feels the brothers have been unjust for rejecting his dreams immediately and they in turn are convinced that he and his dreaming constitute a veritable danger to the unity and survival of Yaakov's family. It is not only the contents of Yosef's dreams – that he will dominate the family – that disturb the brothers. It is the very fact that he is dreaming that raises their suspicions and fuels their enmity towards him.

In the struggle between Yosef and the brothers, the conflict is between the lofty and inspirational theory of Judaism and its sometime mundane practice of hope and actual reality-of what can be achieved even though it is not exactly what one dreamt of achieving. The conflict between Yosef and his brothers is never really ended. It is compromised by both sides, recognizing the validity of the position of the other and living with that reality. The Jewish people in its long and difficult history have somehow been able to combine the spirit and dreams of Yosef with the hardheaded realism of his brothers. Both traits are necessary for our survival and accomplishments, both as individuals and as a nation. Someone without dreams and ambition, who refuses to reach heavenward and conquer the stars, will never be a truly creative or original person.

But if this drive is not tempered by a realistic sense of the situation and the society that surrounds us, then all dreams are doomed to eventually disappoint. Yosef's dreams are realized only after he has been severely chastened by his brothers' enmity, slavery and imprisonment in Egypt. Even after he seemingly has them in his grasp, it is still a contest of wills. Again, Yosef's dreams are finally realized but only after he has been subjected to many hard years of unpleasant reality. The brothers, realists to the end, are shocked to see that the dreamer has emerged triumphant. The dreamers save the world from famine while the realists end up being its customers. Thus, the Torah teaches us that we need both dreamers and realists within our ranks. A nation built exclusively on dreams, without practical reality intruding, will find that reality rising to foil the realization of the dream.

A nation that ceases to dream of reaching greater heights will stagnate and not survive. So, both the brothers and Yosef are "right" in their pursuit of building a nation and of spiritual growth. We need a healthy dose of both values and views in our Jewish world today as well.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Birth of the World's Oldest Hate
Vayetse

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"Go and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to our father Jacob. Pharaoh made his decree only about the males whereas Laban sought to destroy everything."

This passage from the Haggadah on Pesach – evidently based on this week's Parsha – is extraordinarily difficult to understand.

First, it is a commentary on the phrase in Deuteronomy, *Arami oved avi*. As the overwhelming majority of commentators point out, the meaning of this phrase is "my father was a wandering Aramean" – a reference either to Jacob, who escaped to Aram [Aram meaning Syria, a reference to Haran where Laban lived], or to Abraham, who left Aram in response to God's call to travel to the land of Canaan. It does not mean "an Aramean [Laban] tried to destroy my father." Some commentators read it this way, but almost certainly they only do so because of this passage in the Haggadah.

Second, nowhere in the Parsha do we find that Laban actually tried to destroy Jacob. He deceived him, tried to exploit him, and chased after him when he fled. As he was about to catch up with Jacob, God appeared to him in a dream at night and said: "Be very careful not to say anything, good or bad, to Jacob." (Gen. 31:24). When Laban complains about the fact that Jacob was trying to escape, Jacob replies: "Twenty

years now I have worked for you in your estate – fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for some of your flocks. You changed my wages ten times!" (Gen. 31:41). All this suggests that Laban behaved outrageously to Jacob, treating him like an unpaid labourer, almost a slave, but not that he tried to "destroy" him – to kill him as Pharaoh tried to kill all male Israelite children.

Third, the Haggadah and the Seder service of which it is the text, is about how the Egyptians enslaved and practised slow genocide against the Israelites, and how God saved them from slavery and death. Why seek to diminish this whole narrative by saying that – actually - Pharaoh's decree was not that bad, Laban's was worse. This seems to make no sense, either in terms of the central theme of the Haggadah or in relation to the actual facts as recorded in the biblical text. How then are we to understand it?

Perhaps the answer is this. Laban's behaviour is the paradigm of antisemites through the ages. It was not so much what Laban did that the Haggadah is referring to, but what his behaviour gave rise to, in century after century. How so?

Laban begins by seeming like a friend. He offers Jacob refuge when he is in flight from Esau who has vowed to kill him. Yet it turns out that his behaviour is less generous than self-interested and calculating. Jacob works for him for seven years for Rachel. Then on the wedding night Laban substitutes Rachel for Leah so that to marry Rachel, Jacob must work another seven years. When Joseph is born to Rachel, Jacob tries to leave. Laban protests. Jacob works another six years, and then realises that the situation is untenable. Laban's sons are accusing him of getting rich at Laban's expense. Jacob senses that Laban himself is becoming hostile. Rachel and Leah agree, saying, "he treats us like strangers! He has sold us and spent the money!" (Gen. 31:14-15). Jacob realises that there is nothing he can do or say that will persuade Laban to let him leave. He has no choice but to escape. Laban then pursues him. Were it not for God's warning the night before he catches up with him, there is little doubt that he would have forced Jacob to return and live out the rest of his life as his unpaid labourer. As he says to Jacob the next day: "The daughters are my daughters! The sons are my sons! The flocks are my flocks! All that you see is mine!" (Gen. 31:43). It turns out that everything he had ostensibly given Jacob, in his own mind he had not given at all.

Laban treats Jacob as his property, his slave, a non-person. In his eyes Jacob has no rights, no independent existence. He has given Jacob his daughters in marriage but still claims that they and their children belong to him, not Jacob. He has given Jacob an agreement as to the animals that will be his as his wages, yet he still insists that "The flocks are my flocks."

What arouses his anger, his rage, is that Jacob maintains his dignity and independence. Faced with an impossible existence as his father-in-law's slave, Jacob always finds a way of carrying on. Yes, he has been cheated of his beloved Rachel, but he works so that he can marry her too. Yes, he has been forced to work for nothing, but he uses his superior knowledge of animal husbandry to propose a deal which will allow him to build flocks of his own that will allow him to maintain what is now a large family. Jacob refuses to be defeated. Hemmed in on all sides, he finds a way out. That is Jacob's greatness. His methods are not those he would have chosen in other circumstances. He has to outwit an extremely cunning adversary. But Jacob refuses to be defeated, crushed or demoralised. In a seemingly impossible situation Jacob retains his dignity, independence, and freedom. Jacob is no man's slave.

Laban is, in effect, the first antisemite. In age after age, Jews sought refuge from those - like Esau - who sought to kill them. The nations who gave them refuge seemed at first to be benefactors. But they demanded a price. They saw, in Jews, people who would make them rich. Wherever Jews went they brought prosperity to their hosts. Yet they refused to be mere chattels. They refused to be owned. They had their own identity and way of life; they insisted on the basic human right to be free. The host society then eventually turned against them. They claimed that Jews

were exploiting them rather than what was in fact the case, that they were exploiting the Jews. And when Jews succeeded, they accused them of theft: “The flocks are my flocks! All that you see is mine!” They forgot that Jews had contributed massively to national prosperity. The fact that Jews had salvaged some self-respect, some independence, that they too had prospered, made them not just envious but angry. That was when it became dangerous to be a Jew.

Laban was the first to display this syndrome but not the last. It happened again in Egypt after the death of Joseph. It happened under the Greeks and Romans, the Christian and Muslim empires of the Middle Ages, the European nations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and after the Russian Revolution.

In her fascinating book *World on Fire*, Amy Chua argues that ethnic hatred will always be directed by the host society against any conspicuously successful minority. All three conditions must be present.

The hated group must be a minority or people will fear to attack it.

It must be successful or people will not envy it, merely feel contempt for it.

It must be conspicuous or people will not notice it.

Jews tended to fit all three. That is why they were hated. And it began with Jacob during his stay with Laban. He was a minority, outnumbered by Laban’s family. He was successful, and it was conspicuous: you could see it by looking at his flocks.

What the Sages are saying in the Haggadah now becomes clear. Pharaoh was a one-time enemy of the Jews, but Laban exists, in one form or another, in age after age. The syndrome still exists today. As Amy Chua notes, Israel in the context of the Middle East is a conspicuously successful minority. It is a small country, a minority; it is successful, conspicuously so. Somehow, in a tiny country with few natural resources, it has outshone its neighbours. The result is envy that becomes anger that becomes hate. Where did it begin? With Laban.

Put this way, we begin to see Jacob in a new light. Jacob stands for minorities and small nations everywhere. Jacob is the refusal to let large powers crush the few, the weak, the refugee. Jacob refuses to define himself as a slave, someone else’s property. He maintains his inner dignity and freedom. He contributes to other people’s prosperity, but he defeats every attempt to be exploited. Jacob is the voice that says: I too am human. I too have rights. I too am free.

If Laban is the eternal paradigm of hatred of conspicuously successful minorities, then Jacob is the eternal paradigm of the human capacity to survive the hatred of others. In this strange way Jacob becomes the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind, the living proof that hate never wins the final victory; freedom does.

The article below is from Rabbi Riskin’s book *Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family*

Parshat Vayetze: Can One Really Come Home Again?

“If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and clothing to wear, so that I shall come back to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God and I shall erect a monument.” (Genesis 28:20–21)

What does it really mean ‘to return whole, in peace, (beshalom) to one’s parents’ home? Is it really possible to ‘come home’ again? The Torah portion of Vayetze speaks volumes about parents, adult children and what it really means to come home.

Rabbi Yeshoshua Baumel, in his collection of halakhic inquiries called *Emek Halakha*, writes the following fascinating responsum. A certain individual vowed to give a hundred dollars to a local synagogue if his son came back ‘beshalom’ – usually understood to mean whole-alive, in one piece, from the war. As it turned out, the son returned very much in one piece; the only problem was that he brought along his gentile wife, whom he’d married in France, as well as their child. The father now claimed that the conditions of his vow had not been met since the forbidden marriage constituted a breach of the ‘beshalom.’ The synagogue rabbi and board of trustees disagreed, claiming that as long as the son had returned home from the front without a war wound, the

father owed the hundred dollars. Both parties agreed to abide by Rabbi Baumel’s ruling.

Rabbi Baumel ruled that the father was required to pay the money to the synagogue. He ingeniously based his ruling on a Mishna in the little known Tractate *Tvul Yom* (Chap. 4 Mishna 7), where we learn that if a person vows to give wine or oil from his cistern as an offering to the priests (teruma), but stipulates ‘let this be a heave-offering provided that it comes up whole (shalem); then we take his intention to have been that it be safe from breakage or from spilling, but not necessarily from contracting impurity.’ As Rabbi Baumel explains, apparently according to a sage of the Mishna who determines the normative halakha, the concept of ‘shalom’ only refers to physical wholeness, without a breakage of spilling; in the instance of ritual impurity, the loss is not in the physical essence of the object but is rather in its religio-spiritual quality, and this latter defect cannot be considered a lack in ‘beshalom.’ Moreover, the son’s ‘impurity’ may only be temporary, since the possibility always exists that his wife may undergo a proper conversion (*Emek Halakha*, Chap. 42).

I believe that we need not go all the way to a Mishna dealing with heave offerings in order to define the words ‘to return to one’s father’s home beshalom.’ Our biblical portion deals with the patriarch Jacob, setting out on a dangerous journey far from home, who also takes a vow saying that if God protects him and he returns to his father’s house in peace beshalom, he will then erect a monument to the Lord. The definition of ‘beshalom’ in the context of Jacob’s vow might shed more direct light on the question asked of Rabbi Baumel, and might very well suggest a different response.

It should be noted that although Jacob leaves his Uncle Laban’s home and employ at the conclusion of Chapter 32 of the book of Genesis, he wanders all over the Land of Canaan until the end of Chapter 35, when he finally decides to return to his father’s house. Why doesn’t he ‘go home’ immediately? Is the Bible telling us that Jacob himself understood that he had not yet achieved the ‘in peaceness’ of his vow, and that until Chapter 35 he was not yet ready to return? I would submit that Jacob was waiting for the peace which comes from his being accepted by his father, the peace which comes from a loving relationship between father and son. Without this sense of parental acceptance, no child can truly feel whole.

Indeed, no one in the Torah has more problematic relationships than Jacob. He has difficulty with his brother, with his father-in-law, with his wife Leah, and with his sons. But the key to all his problematic relationships lies in his problems with his father, Isaac. Unless he repairs that tragic flaw, unless he feels that his father has forgiven him for the deception which haunts him throughout his life, he knows that he will never be able to ‘return to my father’s house in peace.’

Thus, we can read the series of events that begins with Jacob’s departure from Laban at the end of Chapter 32 and his reunion with his father three chapters later as a crucial process in Jacob’s development vis-a-vis his paternal relationship. It begins with a confrontation between the brothers in which Jacob bends over backwards to appear subservient to Esau, repeatedly calling him my master; plying him with gifts, urging him to ‘take, I pray, my blessing’ – all to the end of returning the fruits of the deception to the rightful biological first-born. Then, the Bible records how Jacob attempts to start a fresh life in Shekhem, only to have to face the rape of his daughter, Dina. His sons, Shimon and Levi, deceive their father and sully his name by destroying all the male inhabitants of the city. And then in the very bloom of her life, Jacob’s beloved Rachel dies in childbirth, as a result of her having deceived her father and stolen the household gods. It certainly seems as though Jacob is being repaid in spades for his having deceived his father, Isaac!

Then we encounter the worst betrayal of all, the terrible act of Reuven having usurped, or interfered with, the sleeping arrangements of his father. Whether we understand the words literally, that Reuven actually had relations with his father’s concubine, Bilha, or whether we follow the interpretation of the Midrash, that Reuven merely moved his father’s bed from Bilha’s tent to the tent of his mother, Leah, after the death of

Rachel, it was a frontal desecration of the father-son hierarchy, a son's flagrant invasion of the personal, private life of his father.

Until this point, Jacob's life is a steady accumulation of despair. But this act of Reuven's is the worst humiliation of all. Just knowing that Reuven even contemplated such an act could have led Jacob to lash out; fathers have responded violently for much less.

We now find one of the most striking passages in the Torah – not because of what it says but because of what it does not say. The literal reading of the biblical text records that Reuven went and slept with Bilha, his father's concubine. 'And Yisrael heard about it... (vayishma Yisrael)' (Genesis 35:22). Not only does the biblical sentence end here, but what follows in the parchment scroll is a complete break in the Torah writing. It is not just a gap of white space that continues on the same line, but it is rather a gap which continues until the next line, a pe'tuha, which generally signals a complete change in subject and a new beginning. Yet the cantillation for the last word before the gap, "Yisrael", is not a sof pasuk (period), as is usually the case before such an open space between texts, but is rather an etnahta (semi-colon), indicating a pause, but not a total interruption from the previous subject. I would suggest that between the lines the Torah is telling us that Jacob heard of his son's deception, is enraged, may even be livid with anger, but holds his wrath inside, remains silent – and thinks a great deal, perhaps amidst tears.

Undoubtedly, we would expect to find the verse after the long space (of Jacob's ruminations) telling us that Jacob banishes his scoundrel son, Reuven, disinheriting him from the tribes of Israel. Much the opposite, however. The text continues by presenting us with an almost superfluous fact. 'Now the sons of Jacob were twelve' (Genesis 35:23) – including Reuven. Then come four verses listing all the names of the twelve sons, at long last followed by the verse, 'And Jacob came unto Isaac his father to Mamre, to Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron...' (Gen. 35:27).

We are given no details about this ultimate reunion between son and father, Jacob and Isaac, bringing to a close more than two decades of separation and alienation. Apparently now – and not before – Jacob is finally ready to come home. But why now? Is it not reasonable to assume that the last event which the Torah records, the cause of understandable tension between Jacob and his son, Reuven, is the most significant reason for Jacob's reconciliation with his father Isaac?

I would suggest that the blank space following Jacob's having heard of his son Reuven's indiscretion might have begun with rage, but it concluded with resolve for rapprochement. Jacob thinks that Reuven's arrogance is beyond contempt, but can a father divorce himself from his son? What do I gain from banishing my own flesh and blood? Is it Reuven's fault that he acted the way he did? Am I myself not at least partially to blame for having rejected my first-born Reuven in favor of the younger Joseph? Perhaps he was trying to tell me – albeit in a disgraceful and convoluted way – that he was my rightful heir? Or perhaps he was acting out his belief that Leah, and not a servant of Rachel, deserves to be the primary wife and mother, yielding the rightful first-born son. Such does Jacob agitate within himself. And he decides at last that if he can and must forgive his son for his deception towards him, it is logical to assume that his father, Isaac, who was also guilty of preferring one son over the other, must have forgiven him for his deception as well.

Now, finally, Jacob is ready to return to his father's home in peace... He has made peace with his father because he believes his father has made peace with him. Finally, he can make peace with himself.

When does a son return to his father beshalom? Only when the father accepts the son, and the son accepts the father, in a personal and emotional sense as well as in a physical one.

So, does the father in our responsum have to pay the money to the synagogue? Only if he is ready and able to accept his son and his new wife beshalom. And that depends on the father and on the son in all the fullness, complexity and resolution of their relationship – past, present and, only then, future.

Shabbat Shalom

RABBI YY JACBOSON Vateitze

No Missing Links

The Omission of a Blank Space in the Torah Captures the Story of a People

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

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 Sheba (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"נ: בסדר ויצא לא נמצא שום פרשה פתוחה וסתומה. וכ"כ בספרי מסורות כי לא יש סדר כזה בתורה זולת ויצא. ונראה דהרמז שלא פסק אבינו יעקב ולא הסס דעתו מיציאתו לחו"ל עד שחזר ויפגע בו מלאכי כ"ו. וז"ש וישבת עמו מימים אהדים שהיו כל הימים באהדות ודביקות בשרשו. [ייתכן ג"כ כי זה פ"י הפסוק ויהיו בעיניו כימים אהדים באהבתו אותה כי ע"י אהבה זו ה"ל דבוק באהדות. וידוע כי אהבתו ברחל הוא סוד השכינה.] וזה ה"ל עיקר הנדר והבקשה אם יה"ל אלקים עמדי ב"י שלא יתפרד מן הדביקות ע"י לבן הרשע ותחבולותיו כנ"ל.

Parshas Vayeitzei refers to how Lavan was less than honest in his financial dealings. However, here we have a situation regarding travel expenses in which the halacha was followed.

The Saga of the Expired Ticket

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

SCENE I: The Saga of the Expired Ticket, Part 1.

Two yeshiva students, "Berel Bernstein" and "Aaron Adler", make an appointment to discuss a financial matter with me. Thank G-d, there is no ill feeling between them, just a practical question regarding who is required to pay for a plane ticket. Here is the background to the story:

Berel and Aaron were taking a brief trip to visit their families. Berel purchased a round trip ticket, whereas Aaron had the return ticket from his previous trip and was planning to purchase a ticket back to yeshiva from home. All went well on the trip there; however, shortly after their arrival, Berel took ill and realized that he would be unable to return to yeshiva on the flight he had originally booked. The travel agent informed his parents that although it was impossible to transfer the ticket to a later flight, he could rewrite the ticket in someone else's name with only a small transfer fee.

Berel called Aaron, asking him if he had as yet purchased a ticket back, which indeed he had not. Aaron discussed the matter with his parents, who decided to help out the Bernsteins, since Aaron needed a ticket anyway. Berel's parents instructed the agent to change the name on the ticket while leaving the billing on their credit card. The Bernsteins agreed that they will pay the change fee whereas the Adlers will compensate them for the price of the ticket.

All was fine until the morning of the flight. Aaron wakes up sick; clearly he would not be flying today. The Adlers contact the issuing travel agent to find out what they can do with the ticket. He responds that he can transfer the ticket yet again but needs the Bernsteins' approval to change the billing on their credit card. The Adlers try many times to contact the Bernsteins to arrange the change of ticket, but are unsuccessful at reaching them. Unfortunately, the ticket goes unused and becomes worthless.

Later, both Aaron and Berel purchase new tickets for the flight back to yeshiva. In the meantime, the Adlers have not yet paid the Bernsteins for the first ticket and have the following question: Must they pay for the ticket which they were

unable to use, thus requiring them to pay for two tickets? In their opinion, all they were trying to do was to help out the Bernsteins from having the ticket go to waste, although unfortunately it did anyway. The Adlers contend that they had actually found a cheaper ticket, but chose to help out the Bernsteins even though it was more expensive. They feel it unfair to expect them to compensate the Bernsteins for attempting to do a favor that backfired, particularly since they tried to reach the Bernsteins to arrange that the ticket should not go to waste.

On their part, the Bernsteins contend that other people were interested in using Berel's ticket, and that they sold it to the Adlers for the Adlers' benefit. Furthermore, they note that they were not home the day the Adlers called because they were away at a simcha and that they did have their cell phones with them.

Are the Adlers obligated to compensate the Bernsteins for the unused ticket?

SCENE II: Who Appears Before the "Judge"?

Aaron and Berel came to me with the request that I resolve an issue germane to the payment of an airline ticket. Before hearing details of the case, I asked them who were the parties to the litigation. Were Aaron and Berel assuming responsibility to pay? Both fine, young gentlemen respond that actually the parents are assuming responsibility, but they are in dispute who should pay for the ticket. The bachurim noted that there was no ill will between the families, simply a true desire to do what is halachically correct. Both sets of parents felt that consulting a rav near their sons' yeshiva would be the easiest way to resolve the issue in an amicable and halachically proper fashion.

I pointed out to Aaron and Berel that while asking a rav to clarify the halacha is indeed an excellent way to resolve the matter, the situation here was somewhat unusual. When two parties submit litigation to a rav or a Beis Din, each party makes a kabbalas kinyan (to be explained shortly) obligating them to obey the decision of that particular rav or Beis Din. In the modern world, the two parties also typically sign an arbitration agreement that they are accepting this rav's or Beis Din's adjudication. Although halacha does not require signing an arbitration agreement, this is done nowadays in order to provide simple proof that both parties accepted the particular Beis Din's authority and to strengthen the Beis Din's power under secular law as an arbitration board. (In most locales and circumstances, a civil court will accept the decision of a Beis Din as binding arbitration.)

WHAT IS A KABBALAS KINYAN?

A kabbalas kinyan means performing an act, such as lifting a pen or handkerchief,

that demonstrates acceptance of an agreement. It is also used when appointing a rav to sell one's chometz to demonstrate the authorization of the rav as one's agent. In our instance, kabbalas kinyan demonstrates that one accepts the authority of this particular rav or Beis Din to rule on the matter at hand.

HARSHA'AH – POWER OF ATTORNEY

Berel asked me, "Can't I represent my parents in this matter?"

"Indeed, one can appoint someone to represent him in halachic litigation by creating a harsha'ah. For example, let us say that it is impractical for the suing party to appear before the Beis Din in the city where the defendant resides. He can sue by appointing someone on his behalf and authorizing this by executing a harsha'ah, the halachic equivalent of a power of attorney."

I returned to the case at hand.

"Therefore, in our case, the two of you could represent your parents by having them execute harsha'os appointing you as their respective agents."

Aaron piped up: "I don't think anyone really wants to make a full din torah out of this. I think we simply want to know what is the right thing to do according to halacha."

Technically, without execution of harsha'os, either side could later claim not to have accepted the decision of the rav or Beis Din involved, and could avoid having the litigation binding. Nevertheless, in our situation, both parties seemed honorable and simply wanted to know the halacha. Both sons said that their parents had requested that they jointly ask a shaylah and that they would follow the decision. Thus, although following the strict rules of litigation requires both harsha'os and kabbalas kinyan from both sides, I elected to handle the situation informally, calculating that this would generate the most shalom.

SCENE III: Are They Parties or Participants?

Why didn't I have the two bachurim each make a kabbalas kinyan binding themselves to my ruling?

Such a kabbalas kinyan would have no value, since the person making the kabbalas kinyan binds himself to accept the authority of the specific rav or Beis Din. However, the sons here are not parties to the litigation and therefore their kinyan would not bind either themselves or their parents, unless they had previously executed a harsha'ah.

SCENE IV: Opening Arguments

Do the Adlers owe the Bernsteins for the ticket that they did not use?

Let us review the points made by each of the parties: The Adlers claim that they were simply doing a favor for the Bernsteins. They were willing to absorb a small loss for the sake of the favor, but certainly had no intention of paying the Bernsteins for a ticket that they would never use. They also feel that since they

could not reach the Bernsteins to change the ticket, the Bernsteins were partially responsible for the ticket becoming void.

The Bernsteins are claiming that the Adlers purchased the ticket from them and that what occurred subsequently is exclusively the Adlers' predicament and responsibility. Furthermore, the Bernsteins contend that the Adlers did not really save them money because there were other people who would have purchased the ticket from them. And regarding their unavailability, they were at a simcha, which is certainly an acceptable reason to be away, and they were reachable by cell phone. It is not their fault that the Adlers did not ask them for cell phone numbers.

SCENE V: In the Judge's "Chambers"

At this point, we can consider the arguments and counter-arguments of the two parties. The Adlers' contention that the Bernsteins were unavailable does not affect the issues at stake. The Bernsteins are not obligated to be accessible at all hours of the day, and cannot be considered as having damaged the Adlers through their unavailability. Thus, whether the Bernsteins could have been reached by cell phone or not, whether they should have remembered to supply the Adlers with their cell phone number or not, and whether they were away to celebrate a simcha or not, are all not germane to the issue.

WHO OWNED THE TICKET?

Essentially, the Adlers are contending that they assumed no fiscal liability for the ticket unless they used it, and were simply attempting to help the Bernsteins. Does this perception reflect what happened?

Certainly, if the Adlers had told the Bernsteins that they were not assuming any responsibility for the ticket unless they actually used it, they would not be liable for it. However, they did not say this when they arranged for Aaron to obtain the ticket. Rather, they had agreed that the ticket be reissued in Aaron's name without any conditions.

The issue we need to resolve is, "Who owned the ticket when it became invalid?" Here we have a somewhat complicated issue, since the ticket was reissued, yet it remained billed to the Bernsteins' credit card.

Someone who purchased an item that was subsequently damaged cannot claim a refund from the seller unless the seller was guilty of deception (Bava Metzia 110a). Once the item has changed possession, any damage that occurs is the loss of its current owner and he cannot shift responsibility to the previous owner. This occurrence is called mazalo garam, his fortune caused this to happen (see, for example, Rashi to Bava Metzia 103a, s.v. azla lei). This means that each person has a mazel that will bring him certain benefits and losses during his lifetime, and one must learn to accept that this is Hashem's will. Specifically, the Gemara refers to children, life and sustenance as three areas dependent on mazel (Moed Katan 28a). [One can daven to change one's mazel (Meiri, Shabbos 156), but that is not today's topic.] Thus, if the Adlers indeed owned the ticket, the resultant loss is theirs, and they should chalk it up to Hashem's will. (Colloquially, we very accurately refer to this situation as being bashert.) Thus, what we need to determine is whether the Adlers had halachically taken possession of the ticket.

KINYAN

According to halacha, for property to change hands there must be not only the meeting of the minds of the buyer and the seller, but also the performance of an act, called a maaseh kinyan, that transfers the item into the possession of the buyer. Although both the buyer and the seller agreed to transact an item, it does not actually change possession until the maaseh kinyan transpires. Therefore, if the item is damaged after the two parties agreed to a deal, but before a maaseh kinyan transpired, the seller takes the loss, since the item was still his when it became damaged. Determining the exact moment that the act of kinyan takes place and that therefore the item changed possession can be highly significant.

[It is important to note, that although a deal may not have been finalized without a kinyan, it is usually forbidden to back out once the two parties have made an agreement. This is based on the verse in Tzefaniah (3:13) which states that a Jew always fulfills his word (see also Pesachim 91a; Bava Metzia 106b). Someone who has a question whether he is bound to an agreement must ask a shaylah to find out whether he may abandon the deal.]

What act creates the kinyan? There is a vast halachic literature devoted to defining what exactly constitutes a maaseh kinyan and under which circumstances these kinyanim work. For example, the methods of transacting real estate are quite different from how one acquires chattel or food.

How does an airline ticket change possession? Obviously, no Mishnah or Gemara discusses how one acquires an airline ticket.

Let us analyze, what does one purchase when one buys an airline ticket? In the past, tickets were a piece of paper, but today, we have e-tickets, which have no intrinsic value.

What one is purchasing is the right to a seat on a flight, and the ticket is a receipt verifying the acquisition. If this is correct, then purchasing a non-refundable ticket is buying a right to a seat on a particular flight. So we now have a halachic question: How does one acquire such rights and how does one transfer those rights to someone else?

SUTIMTA

One way of acquiring property is called *sutimta*, which means using a method of purchase that is commonly used in the marketplace. Since society accepts this as a means of transaction, *halacha* recognizes it as a *kinyan*. For example, in the diamond trade, people consummate a deal by a handshake accompanied by the good wishes of “*mazel ubracha*.” Since this is the accepted method of transacting property, the *kinyan* is binding and *halacha* recognizes the deal as complete.

Based on the above, we can reach the following conclusion. When the Bernsteins instructed their travel agent to transfer the ticket to Aaron’s name, they were asking him to change the ownership of the right to the seat on that flight from Berel to Aaron. Once the agent followed up on their instruction and reissued the ticket, the right to that seat became Aaron’s, and the Bernsteins are exempt from any fiscal responsibility. Although Aaron was unfortunately unable to utilize this right and it became void, there is no basis to make the Bernsteins pay for the ticket once it was transferred.

Therefore, the Adlers should accept that Aaron’s illness and the resultant loss of the ticket is Hashem’s will that we do not challenge. Since the loss of this money is attributed to *mazel*, had the ticket situation developed differently they would have suffered this loss in a different, perhaps more painful way, and they should not be upset at the Bernsteins for the financial loss.

Notwithstanding what I just wrote, I would suggest, but not require, that the Bernsteins offer to compensate for part of the loss. Knowing how some people react to these situations, there is a good chance that the Adlers may be upset at the Bernsteins for what happened, even though this anger is unjustified. To avoid this result, the Bernsteins would do well to offer some compensation to the Adlers for the ticket. It is very praiseworthy to spend some money and avoid bad feelings, even if such expenditure is not required according to the letter of the law.

A Jew must realize that Hashem’s Torah and His awareness and supervision of our fate is all-encompassing. Making this realization an integral part of our lives is the true benchmark of how His *kedusha* influences our lives.

Vayeitzei: The Rivalry between Rachel and Leah

Rav Kook Torah

Jacob did not have an easy life. He loved Rachel, but was tricked into marrying her sister Leah. And when he finally married Rachel, his home suffered from rivalry between the two sisters.

This strife was not limited to Jacob’s household. It continued on in future generations: in the struggle between Rachel’s son Joseph and Leah’s sons; and in the conflict between King Saul, a descendant of Rachel, and David, a descendant of Leah. Why did Jacob need to endure so many obstacles when setting up his family — complications that would have such a long-term impact on future generations of the Jewish people?

The Present versus the Future

We live in a divided reality. We continuously deliberate: how much should we live for the moment, and how much should we work for the future? We must constantly balance between the here-and-now and the yet-to-come. This dilemma exists across all levels of life: individual, familial, communal, and national.

God’s original design for the world was that the entire tree, even the bark, would taste as sweet as its fruit (Gen. 1:11). In other words, even during the intermediate stages of working toward a goal, we should be able to sense and enjoy the final fruits of our labor. When the world is functioning properly, the present is revealed in all of its glory and serves as a suitable guide toward a loftier future. In such a perfect world, our current desires and wishes do not impinge upon our future aspirations.

But the physical universe is fundamentally flawed. The earth failed to produce trees that taste like their fruit. We endure constant conflict between the present and the future, the temporal and the eternal. As individuals and as a nation, we often need to disregard the sensibilities of the present since they will not lead us toward our destined path.

Rachel and Leah

Jacob’s marriage to two sisters, and the ongoing rivalry between them, is a metaphor for this duality in our lives.

Like all things in our world, Jacob’s home suffered from a lack of clarity. Jacob should have been able to establish his family on the basis of an uplifted present, blessed with integrity and goodness. He should have been able to marry and set up his home without making calculations with an eye to the future. The natural purity and simple emotions of his holy soul should have sufficed.

Rachel, whom Jacob immediately loved for the beautiful qualities of her soul, is a metaphor for the simple and natural love we feel for the

revealed present. Jacob felt that Rachel’s external beauty was also in harmony with the unknown realm of the distant future.

But God’s counsel decreed that the future destiny of the people of Israel belonged not to Rachel, but to Leah. 1 Leah would be the principal matriarch of the Jewish people. Yet this future was so profoundly hidden, that its current state — in Leah — was hidden from Jacob.

This concealed quality of Leah is embedded in the very foundations of the Jewish people. Because of the legacy of Leah, we can raise our sights afar, skipping over the present circumstances, in order to aspire toward a lofty future. Just as Jacob found himself unexpectedly wed to Leah, so too, the path of the Jewish people throughout history does not always proceed in an orderly fashion. The future often projects its way into the present so that the present time may be elevated and sanctified.

Two Kings and Two Messiahs

The rivalry between Rachel and Leah, the conflict between the beautiful present and the visionary future, also found expression in the monarchy of Israel. The temporary reign of Saul, a descendant of Rachel, struggled with the eternal dynasty of David, a descendant of Leah. 2

Even in the Messianic Era, the divide between Rachel and Leah will continue, with two Messianic leaders: the precursive redeemer, *Mashiach ben Joseph*, a descendant of Rachel, and the final redeemer, *Mashiach ben David*, a descendant of Leah.

Nonetheless, we aspire for the simpler state in which the present is uplifting, and by means of its light, the future acquires its greatness. For this reason, Rachel was always honored as Jacob’s primary wife. Even Leah’s descendants in Bethlehem conceded: “Like Rachel and Leah who both built the house of Israel” (Ruth 4:11), honoring Rachel before Leah.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. IV, pp. 44-46)

1 Six of the twelve tribes of Israel, including those designated for spiritual and political leadership — Levi and Judah — were born to Leah.

2 Saul, who is described as “the most handsome young man in Israel, head and shoulders above the people” (I Sam. 16:2), was a natural choice for king. And yet God chose to appoint David — a simple shepherd boy whose leadership qualities even his own father failed to see — as the true king of the Jewish people. As God explained to the perplexed prophet Samuel: “Look not upon his appearance, or the height of his stature, for I have rejected him. For it is not as man sees [that which is visible] to the eyes; the Lord sees into the heart” (I Sam. 16:7).]

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Vayeitzei

Smokescreen

It just doesn’t make sense. After more than twenty years of toiling in the house of Lavan (Laban), Yaakov (Jacob) wants out. He should have been entitled to. After all, he married Lavan’s daughters in exchange for years of tending the sheep. He increased Lavan’s livestock population many fold, and he was a faithful son-in-law despite a conniving huckster of a father-in-law. Yet when Yaakov leaves Lavan’s home with his wives, children, and flocks, he sneaks out, fearing that Lavan would never let him leave. He is pursued by Lavan who chases him with a vengeance. But Yaakov is lucky. Hashem appears to Lavan in a dream and warns him not to harm Yaakov. Eventually, Lavan overtakes Yaakov and accosts him. “Why have you led my daughters away like captives of the sword? Why have you fled, secretly, without notifying me? Had you told me you wanted to leave I would have sent you off with song and music!” (Genesis 31:26-27)

Yaakov answers his father-in-law by declaring his fear. “You would have stolen your daughters from me.” Lavan then searched all of Yaakov’s belongings looking for idols missing from his collection. Yaakov was outraged. He simply did not understand what Lavan wanted. Yaakov responds to the attack by detailing the tremendous amount of selfless work, through scorching heat and freezing nights, that he toiled in order to make Lavan a wealthy man. Reviewing the care and

concern that he had for his wives and children, Yaakov declares that he is not worthy of the mean-spirited attacks made by his father-in-law, Lavan. And," Yaakov adds, "If not for the protection of Hashem, Lavan would have sent me away empty handed." (Genesis 31:38-42)

Yet Lavan is unmoved. Like a stoic, unyielding dictator, Lavan responds. "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flock is my flock and all that you see is mine." (Genesis 31:43)

What can be going on in Lavan's mind? What motivates a man to be so selfish and unreasonable?

My friend Reb Yossel Czopnik told me the following true story about Yankel, a heavy smoker who went to see a certain hypnotist who had cured a large number of people. In a method that combined hypnosis, electrodes, and a little cajoling while placing little metal balls behind the ears, patients swore that the urge to smoke had been totally eradicated from their minds.

Yankel went to the doctor and underwent the entire ritual. The balls went behind his ears, the electrodes were attached to his temples, and the doctor began to talk.

"Let me ask you, Yankel," questioned the doctor of the well wired patient, "every time you inhale a cigarette do you know what is happening? Close your eyes and imagine your lips puckered around the tail pipe of a New York City bus! Now, take a deep breath. Imagine all those noxious fumes filling your lungs! That is what the cigarettes are doing to you!"

Yankel went home that night still wanting a smoke but decided to hold off. "Maybe it takes one night," he thought.

The next morning nothing seemed to change. In fact, on his way to work, he had queasy feelings. As soon as he entered his office Yankel picked up the telephone and called the doctor.

"So," asked the doctor, "How do you feel? I'm sure you didn't have a cigarette yet! I bet you have no desire for them anymore!"

Yankel was hesitant. "Honestly, Doc. I'm not sure. One thing I can tell you, however. All morning long, on my way to work I was chasing city buses!"

Lavan just wouldn't get it. No matter how clearly Yaakov explained his case, twenty years of work, the devoted labor under scorching heat and freezing cold, Lavan just stood unmoved. "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and whatever you have is mine."

When the sickness of egocentrism overtakes the emotional stability of a human soul; one can talk, cajole, or persuade. The Almighty can even appear in a dream and do his part. It is helpless. Unless one actually takes the initiative to realize his or her shortcomings, anything that anyone may tell them is only a blast of noxious air.

Dedicated In memory of our Zayde, Herbert Hauser Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heshel ben Reb Yehuda HaCohen
by Miriam, Sorah, Tamar & Shlomo Hauser
Good Shabbos!

Who Left the Flowers at Our Door?

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Last week, my doorbell rang but when I answered it, there was nobody there. Instead, I found a vase of flowers outside the front door with a note. Flowers on a random weekday? There wasn't a birthday or anniversary to mark. Who could they be from? I opened the card:

To our beloved shadchanim – can't believe it's been 26 years! With endless appreciation, we are forever grateful, Love, Ezra and Rena.

Twenty-six years ago, Yocheved and I set up mutual friends and now, for no particular reason, out of the blue, they sent flowers to say thank you. This wasn't the first time they expressed their gratitude, it isn't that they remembered a debt they had never repaid. They had thanked us numerous times before. Yet, because their gratitude had not diminished, they felt compelled to still say thank you again.

Most people don't realize how much a simple gesture of thanks can mean to the recipient of it. In 2018, Psychological Science published a study of 300 participants who were asked to write a letter of gratitude to

someone who positively impacted them from long ago. Participants wrote to their parents, friends, coaches, or teachers. The writers were asked to predict the degree of surprise, happiness, and awkwardness the recipients would feel after receiving their gratitude. The study found that those writers expressing gratitude consistently underestimated how much people appreciate being appreciated. The recipients of the letters reported feeling less awkward and in fact much more appreciative than the letter writers predicted. Being appreciated and receiving gratitude proved to make someone's day much more than those expressing thankfulness thought it would.

In our Parsha, when Leah names her fourth son Yehudah, the Torah tells us she did so because *הפעם אודה את ה'*, it was an expression of gratitude to Hashem. The Gemara (Berachos 7b) goes so far as to say that, in fact, Leah was the first person in history to say thank you to Hashem. This doesn't seem to make sense. Adam HaRishon said, "Tov l'hodos laShem." Noach thanked Hashem, Malkitzedek expressed gratitude to the Almighty. Eliezer communicated appreciation for Divine assistance, and the pre-Leah list could go on. How could the Gemara make such a bold assertion when it seems from the Torah not to be true?

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz explains: most people say thank you in order to pay off a debt of gratitude. Someone does something nice for us and, as part of an unofficial quid pro quo, we say "thank you" to them in an effort to settle up the score. Each of the earlier people who said thank you did it once, one time, to pay a debt. Leah was the first to understand that gratitude doesn't conclude, it doesn't end. If we see gratitude as more than a debt, we never stop expressing it.

Leah named her son Yehudah, literally meaning thank you. Every time she called out his name – "Yehudah come for supper, Yehudah did you do your homework, Yehudah get ready for bed," every time she called his name, she reawakened her sense of appreciation and fulfilled her commitment to never take him for granted. Unlike the others who said thank you and paid off their debt of gratitude, Leah formulated a thanks that was felt and expressed each and every day on a consistent basis.

Rav Yeruchem explains that Leah expressed this commitment when she gave Yehudah his name. We normally read *הפעם אודה את ה'* as an explanation for why the new son was called Yehudah. Rav Yeruchem suggests that we read Leah's expression with a question mark – *הפעם אודה את ה'?* Should I only thank Hashem this one time and then move on? No way, I will continue to thank Him over and over again.

A shadchanus gift represents paying off a debt of gratitude once and done. Flowers twenty-six years later for no reason demonstrate that the appreciation never ended, or as they wrote, feeling forever grateful.

The Torah endorses, encourages, and urges us to be grateful. We are call Yehudim, says the Chiddushei HaRim, because we are a people of gratitude. We don't just pay a debt of gratitude, like Leah, we say thank you over and over, we feel endless thankfulness and boundless gratitude for the good things in our lives.

Charles Plumb, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was a jet fighter pilot in Vietnam. After 75 combat missions, his plane was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy hands. He was captured and spent six years in a Communist prison. He survived that ordeal and one day, when Plumb and his wife were sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, "You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam and you were shot down!"

Plumb did not recognize this man and was perplexed. "How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb. "I packed your parachute," the man replied, "I guess it worked!"

That night, Plumb couldn't sleep. He kept wondering what this man might have looked like in a sailor uniform. He wondered how many times he might have passed him on the ship without acknowledging him. How many times he never said hello, good morning, or how are you. Plumb was a fighter pilot, respected and revered, while this man was just an ordinary sailor. Now it grated on his conscious.

Plumb thought of the many lonely hours the sailor had spent on a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship carefully weaving the fabric together, making sure the parachute was just right and going to great lengths to make it as precise as can be, knowing that somebody's life

depended on it. Only now did Plumb have a full appreciation for what this man did. After that encounter, Plumb began travelling around the world as a motivational speaker asking people to recognize who is “packing their parachute.”

Have we thanked those who contributed to the lives we are blessed to live? Imagine if our kindergarten teacher got a note from us thanking her for nurturing us with love. Imagine if our high school principal, our childhood pediatrician, our housekeeper who cleaned our childhood room, out of the blue got a gesture of gratitude showing that we cared enough to track them down and say thank you after all of these years. Did we express enough appreciation to the person who set us up with our spouse, gave us our first job, safely delivered our children?

Research shows that expressing gratitude has mental and physical health benefits, including lower rates of depression and better sleep, improved relationships, and success at work.

Be thankful. Stay thankful. And keep demonstrating gratitude, for your own benefit and for the benefit of someone who will be thrilled to know you still appreciate their role in your life.

Parashat Vayaitzai by Rabbi Nachman Kahana

A Many Splendored Thing

The ways of HaShem are beyond our understanding. However, HaShem appeared to the prophets through human characteristics to enable us to relate in some small way to the Infinite and unimaginable. The prophets perceived the Infinite at times acting towards us with compassion, courage, anger, pride, or disappointment, but always with love.

In the evening prayer (Arvit) we say:

ברוך אתה ה' אלהי ישראל

Blessed are You HaShem who loves His nation Yisrael.

In the morning (Shacharit) we say:

ברוך אתה ה' הבורח בעמו ישראל באהבה

Blessed are You HaShem who has chosen His nation Yisrael in love.

In our Parashat Vayaitzai, Ya'akov arrived at the municipal well of Charan just when several shepherds were lingering around. When Ya'akov questioned them about their seeming indolence in the middle of the workday, they replied (Bereisheit 29:8-11):

ויאמרו לא נוכל עד אשר יאספו כל העדרים וגללו את האבן מעל פי הבאר והשקינו הצאן
“We cannot (water the sheep) until all the flocks are gathered and (then all the shepherds will) roll the stone from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.”

And the Torah relates that while he was talking with them, Rachel came with her father Lavan's sheep. When Ya'akov saw her, he approached the well and plucked the stone up as easily as one does to a bottle cork (Rashi).

How could Ya'akov, the yeshiva bocher, single handedly dislodge a stone that required the combined strength of many grown men?

I submit:

Among the many masterpieces that King Solomon authored is the classic Shir Ha'Shirim (Song of Songs). The illustrious Rabbi Akiva comments on this magnum opus of King Solomon in the Mishna (Ya'adim 3:5):

אמר ר' עקיבא כל כתובים קדש ושיר השירים קודש קדש

All scriptures are holy, but Shir Ha'Shirim is the holy of holies.

Rabbi Akiva's soul was moved by Shlomo Ha'Melech's description of the love HaShem showed for the Jewish people (8:6-7):

שימני כחותם על לבך כחותם על זרועך כי עזה כמות אהבה קשה כשאלו קנאה רשפיה
'רשפי אש שלהבתי: מים רבים לא יוכלו לכבות את האהבה ונהרות לא ישטפוה וגו

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.

It is not surprising that R. Akiva was the one who was so touched by Shlomo HaMelech's description of love; because R. Akiva knew that true love was indeed “a many splendored thing”.

The Gemara (Ketubot 63a) relates that the young and beautiful Rachel, gave up her family, wealth and youth for love of Akiva, the shepherd.

She believed that he could be a Torah giant in the generation of Torah giants, and struggled alone for 24 years so that her Akiva could learn Torah in Yerushalayim without interruption.

At the end of that period, Akiva the shepherd, who was now the world-renowned Rabbi Akiva, returned home to be reunited with his beloved wife. The Gemara relates that he arrived with 24,000 disciples. All the town's people came out to honor the great Rabbi. Rachel approached her husband and bent down to kiss his feet. When the ushers pushed her back, R. Akiva brought the crowd to silence. And standing before the throng of thousands of his students and onlookers, he raised up his beloved Rachel and declared: “My Torah and your Torah is all HER Torah”.

What Shlomo Ha'Melech was saying, which was so well understood by R. Akiva, was that the love HaShem feels toward Am Yisrael moves the Creator to perform mighty acts not within the framework of the natural world which He created. Just as the love of a man for a woman can move him (or her) to perform remarkable deeds. HaShem, in his love for Am Yisrael, changed the natural order which He Himself had created: The ten plagues, splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna and quail to support millions of people for forty years in the barren desert, the destruction of the Canaanite kingdoms and the innumerable miracles up to this very day.

When Ya'akov saw Rachel, the sudden surge of overpowering love that Ya'akov felt empowered him with the strength to roll the rock, as easily as one would pull a cork from a bottle top (Rashi).

True Love

What are the telltale signs of true love? The desire to be close to the person one loves; the need to communicate, to be understood and to understand each other; the desire to give more and more without expecting anything in return; and to see only the good and forgive that which is less than good.

After listening to many religious Jews living in the galut, I have concluded that although many learn Torah and keep mitzvot most do not love Being Jewish. Many have an acquaintance with Judaism, some even like Judaism, but most do not love being Jewish. If they were, then in no way could they remain in the galut.

To love being Jewish is to strive to be as close to HaShem as humanly possible. And to be close to HaShem means to live in the land of which the Torah states (Devarim 11:12):

ארץ אשר ה' אלהיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני ה' אלהיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה
A land the LORD your God longs for; the eyes (view) of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.

To love being Jewish means returning to the Holy Land without calculating its personal or professional expedience, just as a young couple very much in love throws expediency to the wind in order to fulfill their ambitions.

To love being Jewish means to know and to communicate with the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov in the holy language of HaShem. I would not be wrong in stating that the overwhelming majority of religious leaders in the galut cannot hold a Hebrew conversation on the level of a 10-year-old Israeli child.

To love being Jewish is to remain home and prepare for the beautiful meaningful holiday of Pesach, and not to take flight to a hotel or resort in order to escape the ghosts of chametz.

To love being Jewish is to look forward, every week, to Shabbat and regard the kitchen preparations as a personal simcha for the great merit of being part of God's chosen nation.

To love being Jewish is to be part of a daily minyan that imparts to the congregation a spiritual experience; not to seek out the fastest minyan in town in order to begin work early.

To love being Jewish is to behave in reverence and to be silent when present in a bet kneset; not to sit and talk, stopping only to partake in the “club”.

To love being Jewish is to be part of the defense of Eretz Yisrael as a soldier of Tzahal.

To love being Jewish is to notice the faults and shortcomings of the Israeli leadership and to join here in our efforts to redress the mistakes.

To love being Jewish is to learn Torah in the special environment of the land where the Torah was intended by HaShem to be kept.

If your spiritual mentor in the galut does not encourage aliya to Eretz Yisrael, it has nothing to do with the land or its people; it simply means that he is involved, even deeply involved, with Yehadut, but not in love with all that it demands.

Love is indeed a “many splendored thing”. It is a call from the depths of one’s soul to announce that it has been touched and resonates to the mind and emotions. If one does not feel love for Judaism in its entirety, then that person’s soul has not been touched.

Ya’akov’s soul was touched when he met Rachel, as was Shlomo Ha’Melech when he felt the love of HaShem for Am Yisrael, and the soul of Rabbi Akiva towards the woman who made him the scholar that he became.

Those of us who have returned to the Land of Israel in love are, together with our Israeli born brothers and sisters, continuing to forge ahead in the authentic Jewish history that was so violently and cruelly disrupted 2000 years ago.

No obstacle will impede the Jews who love HaShem, the land, and Am Yisrael from our determination to restore the former glory of Am Yisrael as HaShem’s chosen people: neither gentile enemies from without nor Jewish traitors from within.

As Shlomo Ha’Melech wrote: It (love) burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.

Love for Yehadut is indeed a many splendid thing!

A most relevant manifestation of HaShem’s love for Am Yisrael is what we are experiencing in Eretz Yisrael, as expressed in Tehillim 124:

שיר המעלות לדוד

A song of ascents of David.

If HaShem had not been with us, let Israel say;

If HaShem had not been with us when we were attacked,

Then they would have devoured us alive when their anger flared against us;

Then the flood (hate) would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us,

the raging waters would have swept us away.

Praise be HaShem who has not let us be torn by their teeth.

We have escaped like a bird from the fowler’s snare; the snare has been broken and we have escaped.

Our help is in the name of HaShem – Creator of heaven and earth

SHABBAT SHALOM & CHODESH TOV

Nachman Kahana

Parshat Vayetztei

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

PARSHA 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 Yissaschar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef.

Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Opulence and Optimism

“If Hashem ... will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear ...” (28:20)

Nothing is sadder than someone who has the wherewithal without the “all.”

Nothing is sadder than having the means without the end.

A person can have tremendous wealth and opulence, can have a live-in Sushi chef, but if he has Crohn’s disease, instead of being a blessing, his wealth and wherewithal are a constant reminder of his infirmity.

Someone can have the last word in tailoring: a suit by number one Italian tailor, Antonio Liverano, and shoes by Crockett & Jones, but if he’s in the middle of a vicious legal battle and all his days are spent going to court, then his clothes will just remind him of where he has to go today.

“If Hashem ... will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear ...”

Ostensibly, there is no other reason to have bread than to eat it and no other reason to have clothes than to wear them. So, why does the verse spell out ‘bread to eat’ and ‘clothes to wear’?

Yaakov Avinu was asking Hashem not just for the wherewithal, not just food but also for the health to enjoy it. And not just clothing but the peace of mind to dress in the morning with optimism.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Vayetztei

Noach How Do You Respond to Your Dreams?

The book of Bereshit (Genesis) could easily be given the subtitle “The Book of Dreams,” as there are many significant dreams within it. However, it is only in relation to two of these dreams that the Torah uses a particular verb: “Vayyikatz” — “he woke up from his dream.”

Clearly, the Torah is inviting us to compare and contrast these two occasions. The first is in Parshat Vayetztei, when Jacob had the extraordinary vision of the ladder. The Torah tells us, Vayyikatz Yaakov — Jacob woke up.

What was his response? He immediately declared, “Achen yesh Hashem bammakom hazzeh” — “I feel, and I know that Hashem is in this place.” Jacob then translated his dream into action by declaring, “Vehayah Hashem li Lelokim” - “The Lord will be my God for the rest of my life.” Now, let’s look at the second “Vayyikatz,” found in Parshat Miketz. King Pharaoh had a dream just as monumental as Jacob’s, a dream through which God was sending a message to him personally, and through him, to all of civilisation. It was about the seven lean cows and the seven healthy cows.

How did Pharaoh respond? The Torah says, “Vayyikatz...Vayyishan vayyachalom shenit”—“He woke up, and then he went back to sleep and had another dream.” The Torah is surely teaching us how to respond to our dreams. And it’s not just the dreams we have at night, but the messages that our experiences convey to us, the inspiration we derive from what we see and hear. So, how do we respond? Do we change our lives accordingly and become a blessing for our environment as a result? Or, like Pharaoh, do we simply turn over and ignore what we see and hear? In Psalm 126 (Shir Hama’alot), a familiar passage to many, there is a reference to dreams — a very significant one. The Psalm says, “Beshuv Hashem et-shivat Tziyyon hayinu kecholemim” — “When Hashem returned the captives of Zion, we were like dreamers.” This highlights the extent to which Hashem recognises His gift of Zion to the Jewish people — not just as a geopolitical part of the Jewish nation, but as the centre of our faith. And how have we translated that dream? Into the marvellous reality of the State of Israel.

Whether people around the world recognise it or not, Israel continues to be a blessing for all of civilisation. And right now, we have a dream. It is a dream that is ever-present in our minds, and it is accompanied by sentiments from our hearts.

Our dream is to see the numerous hostages being held in Gaza come home swiftly and safely. Our prayer, right now, is "Beshuv Hashem et-shivat Tziyyon" — "May Hashem enable the captives of Zion to come home." And what will our response be then? "Az yimmale sechok pinu uleshonenu rinnah" — "Then we will be filled with joy and happiness." Please, God, may it come soon! Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Leibish ben Shimon, Leo Koenigsberg.

Night and Day

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Family Not Friends

And it was when Lavan heard the news that Yaakov, his sister's son [had arrived], he ran toward him and he embraced and kissed him and brought him to his house [...] Lavan said to him, "But you are my flesh and bone," and he stayed with him a month of days (29:13-14).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל