

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd he confronted the place and spent the night there, since the sun had set..”

Why is father Jacob known as the "most chosen of the patriarchs," the most worthy of emulation from among the very paragons and path-breakers of our faith? After all, it was Abraham who was actually the one who himself discovered the G-d of justice and compassion, and it was Isaac who walked the walk of self-sacrifice and commitment unto death for the sake of heaven. So why do our Talmudic Sages single out Jacob for highest accolade?

I believe the beginning of our analysis can be found in another teaching of the Rabbis of the Talmud: "Our patriarchs initiated the daily prayers:

Abraham enacted the morning prayer, (Shaharit) Isaac the afternoon prayer, (Minhah) and Jacob the evening prayer...(Arvit)" (B.T. Berakhot 28b). I would suggest that each of these prayers, and especially the time when they are to be recited, encapsulate the essence—the seminal definition—of each of their composers.

Abraham symbolizes the dawn, the beginning of a new era, the optimism of a rising sun. After all, did not Abraham initiate an entirely novel picture of the universe with his discovery of ethical monotheism, a faith ideal which gave rise not only to Judaism but also to Christianity and Islam! And Abraham's success in winning so many adherents to his new faith as well as his financial accomplishments and military prowess make for an optimistic personality whose faith in G-d has enabled him to believe in himself and in his future.

Isaac is more the pensive, withdrawn and peacefully passive stalwart, who submits to Avimelekh's treacherous deceit in silence, who courageously accompanies his father to his binding on the altar and who is bonded to the land of Israel with a profound love and commitment. His personality is much more akin to the stillness of the twilight, poignantly reposed after the

"Sturm und Drang" of a difficult day.

Jacob is the patriarch of the night. Indeed, his many adventures, from the time he leaves his father's house in Israel to his successful encounter with an anonymous assailant (the spirit of Esau according to our Sages) some two decades later on his way back home, is Biblically portrayed as having taken place in the span of a night: Jacob's dream as he sets forth into exile comes to him as he "confronted the place and spent the night there since the sun had set" (Genesis 28:11), and after he successfully wrestles with a "man" all night until the rising of the morning star, The Bible testifies that "the sun rose for him when he passed Penuel" (Genesis 32:32). The midrash intensifies Jacob's identification with night by stressing that G-d interfered with nature and made the sun set earlier in the first instance and rise earlier in the latter instance (Rashi, 32:32). Jacob dreamed in Bet-El at sunset, and passed Penuel at sunrise.

What is the symbolism of night? Night is a black, bleak awesome and frightening period of the day; it is a time of unseen obstacles, fearful nightmares—and it is therefore identified with tragedy and exile. From this perspective, Jacob is the patriarch of night: he was hounded by Esau, deceived by Laban, bereft of a beloved wife and favored son for much of his adult life, and forced to spend many of his years—including his last ones—in exile from his homeland, Israel.

Night is also the dark and frightening aspect of one's personality; the id, or the evil instinct, is the difficult and often uncontrolled "negative side" (sitra ahara), which lurks in the heart of every individual ready to lunge forward and overtake one's being. In this respect as well Jacob had to confront the Esau within himself, the part of him which was very different from the "whole-hearted person who dwelt in tents of study," the deceiving schemer who yearned for the birthright, the blessings and patriarchal acceptance at any and all cost.

Indeed, Jacob confronted the night: the night without and the night within, the objective challenges and tragedies which are part and parcel of an unredeemed world as well as the subjective temptations and seductions which are part and parcel of an unredeemed soul—or rather of a soul-in-progress. Jacob confronted the night—and Jacob overcame the obstacles! The Almighty Himself testifies to his victory bestowing upon him a new name, Yisrael, "because you

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have fought with powers (elohim) and with individuals, and you have overcome" (Genesis 32:29).

Jacob is the one patriarch who confronts the various dreams roundabout, rises falls and rises again just as do the ascending and descending angels in his initial dream at Bet-El, but eventually succeeds in emerging triumphant and whole. It is in this spirit that he bestows the ultimate blessing upon his grandchildren: "May the Lord.. who has shepherded me until this day, may the Divine Messenger who has redeemed me from all evil, bless these youths..." (Genesis 48:9).

Jacob-Israel never sought a charmed life of consistent righteousness in which he would be carried from pinnacle to pinnacle of success by a constantly uplifting and beneficent G-d. His was rather a life of confrontation, conflict and struggle. He is the chosen of the patriarchs because it is ultimately his prayer—and his triumph—which must serve as the model for us all:

"Dear G-d, I do not ask that You make my life easy; I only ask that You help me to be strong—and to overcome." © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**A**s Ya'akov (Jacob) flees Esav (Esau) he arrives near his uncle Laban's home. There he sees his cousin Rachel. The Torah tells us, "And Ya'akov kissed Rachel and cried." (Genesis 29:11) Why the tears?

To be sure, Ya'akov was lonely. Running from Esau he was forced to leave home. It is therefore conceivable that his tears were tears of joy that he had once again connected with family. Sensing that he would gain comfort and solace in Rachel, he cries. Tears of happiness stream down his face.

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, sees it differently. According to this reading, Ya'akov's tears were ones of

sadness for his prophetic abilities made him realize that he would not be buried with his beloved Rachel.

Rachel was buried in Bethlehem. According to the Midrash, she was buried there so that when the Jews would pass by after the destruction of the Temple they would pray at Rachel's grave. There, Rachel would intervene on behalf of her people. It seems then that Ya'akov's tears may be echoes of the tears to be shed by am Yisrael when they would be exiled. Similar tears are shed today, as Jews are being denied the right to pray at Rachel's grave.

Another thought comes to mind. It is possible that Ya'akov's love for Rachel was already so deep that he became anxious. Sometimes one's love for another is so profound that fear builds up that the love would eventually be lost. Built into love is the reality that every love relationship must terminate, for death comes to all of us. The greater the love, the greater the pain when it terminates. Hence Jacob cries. His love for Rachel is so great that he is overcome for he knows it will end and the pain was unbearable.

Here may lie a reason why we break the glass under the chupah. We do so of course to remember the Temple destroyed. But we also do so to remind bride and groom that nothing lasts forever. In the end even the greatest of marriages are fragile and will end.

Strange as it may seem, death has echoes in the wedding ceremony. In fact, juxtaposed to the Talmudic discussion of the seven blessings recited beneath the chupah are the blessings recited at a burial (Ketubot 8a, 8b). Additionally, following the marriage is a week of seven nights of family and communal gathering called Sheva Brakhot. Following death is also a week of communal and family gathering called Shiva. The relationship is not bizarre. Both of these times are ones of reflection and transition. They teach us that nothing continues forever. At the moments of greatest joy and deepest sorrow we are taught the lesson that we must live every moment of our lives in love, as life is fleeting and like a dream, flies away.

And so, this may be why Jacob cries. He is aware of the reality that we must use our time on this earth to hold on tight and to truly treasure those whom we love. © 2004 *Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA*

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### **Taking a Closer Look**

**W**hat goes around comes around. In last week's Parsha, Ya'akov pretended he was Eisav in order to get the blessings that their father had intended to give the elder brother; in this week's Parsha, Ya'akov ends up married to Leah when she pretends that she is Rachel, the intended bride. Even though Ya'akov's deception is designed to compensate for the years of deception perpetrated by Eisav (leading Yitzchok to bless him rather than Ya'akov), one cannot

help but take notice of the poetic justice. Nevertheless, the marriage of Leah to Ya'akov raises some interesting questions.

For one thing, since Ya'akov spelled it out to Lavan very clearly that he was working specifically for Rachel (see Rashi on Beraishis 29:18), how could Lavan have thought that he could get away with (and in fact get away with) switching Rachel with Leah at the last minute? Wouldn't any fiancée protest to no end if the wrong bride was brought to him?

Additionally, how could it have been a valid marriage ceremony? If Ya'akov thought he was marrying Rachel, but the "chupah" (unbeknownst to him) was really with Leah, then it shouldn't have worked. True, he would not be married to Rachel, but he shouldn't have been considered married to Leah either! He could have gone back to Lavan and said to him that the deal was seven years of work for Rachel, not Leah. But even if he didn't want to insult Leah, he would have had to "redo" his marriage with her. Instead, it seems that Ya'akov has no choice but to be married to Leah; that it was in fact valid. All he could do was take Rachel as his second wife. (So much so, that when Rachel asks Leah for the flowers that Reuvein had picked, Leah says (30:15) "is it not enough that you took my husband- now you [also] want the flowers [given to me by] my son?" We would have thought that it was Leah who took Rachel's husband, not that Rachel was guilty of taking Leah's. This response implies that Leah's marriage was completely on the up-and-up, for if not, she couldn't consider Rachel the "second" spouse. How was the "marriage" to Leah legally binding, if Ya'akov thought he was really marrying Rachel?

The wedding itself was not a private ceremony, but was attended by everybody in Lavan's town (29:22). How did the invitations read? Were they being invited to the wedding of Ya'akov to Rachel, or of Ya'akov to Leah? If the former, how could Lavan have claimed that no one in the town would ever consider marrying off a younger daughter first (29:26)? If the latter, how could Ya'akov not realize that Lavan was going to trick him by giving him Leah instead?

Finally, Lavan's excuse itself is very strange, as even if it were true that no one marries off a younger daughter before an older one, this should have been said from the outset. How could Ya'akov just accept this without refuting it? It might have been a valid excuse for postponing the wedding until the older daughter gets married, but how could it explain giving Ya'akov the wrong bride?

There is a mind-blowing (or at least eyebrow-raising) Midrash (Zuta, Shir Hashirim 1:13) that provides a context within which, with the help of other Midrashim and commentaries, we can find a possible approach to answer the above questions (and some additional ones). This Midrash is also referenced in Ishei Hatanach.

"Just as [G-d's] Name rested on Ya'akov, it was originally supposed to rest on Eisav as well." The Midrash then goes on to describe what would have happened had Eisav actually fulfilled his potential, and the Nation of Israel descended from both brothers: "Eisav would have had kings descend from him, and Ya'akov would have had Priests come from him. The first blessings (the ones that Ya'akov "took" from Eisav) were meant for Eisav, and the latter ones (given before Ya'akov fled, 28:3-4) for Ya'akov. Leah and Zilpah were meant [to be married to] Eisav and Rachel and Bilhah were meant for Ya'akov. [But] all of these presents were taken from [Eisav]: he sold the birthright to Ya'akov, [and] he removed the yoke of heaven from upon him. The Name was [therefore] taken [from Eisav] and rested on Ya'akov twofold; sometimes [G-d is referred to as] the G-d of Ya'akov and sometimes [as] the G-d of Israel. The birthright was taken from [Eisav] and given to Ya'akov, who merited the kingship and the priesthood. Leah and Zilpah were taken from him and Ya'akov merited [marrying all] four of them. [He merited having all these presents] because he followed in the ways of his fathers."

So the original plan was that the Nation of Israel, the 12 Tribes, would come from both Ya'akov and Eisav. However, because of Eisav wickedness (and through Ya'akov's purchasing the birthright and taking both blessings), all 12 came from Ya'akov alone. This explains why Leah was so concerned that she would have to marry Eisav (see Rashi on 29:17) but ended up marrying Ya'akov.

Rav Aaron Kotler z"l (Mishnas Rebbe Aaron, Parshas Toldos) explains that Yitzchok wanted to give the (first) blessing specifically to Eisav because it was a blessing for material success, and he wanted Eisav to support Ya'akov so that Ya'akov could concentrate solely on his spiritual growth- without having to worry about, or deal with, supporting himself; a sort of Yissocher/Zevulun relationship. Whether Yitzchok intended for Eisav to do this despite his flaws (as Rav Aaron suggests, so that Eisav would have some connection to spirituality), or because he didn't realize that Eisav had such flaws (see Pesikta d'Rav Kahane 32) or at least their extent, when Ya'akov took the blessing instead, he became responsible for his own material needs.

Upon arriving at Lavan's house, Ya'akov told him the circumstances of his having to come there (29:13), including the taking of the blessing. Lavan understood that both of his daughters would now have to marry Ya'akov, and Ya'akov realized that Lavan might therefore trick him by giving him Leah first. Not instead of, but before- as he would have to eventually marry both; the only question was which one he would marry him first. Ya'akov loved Rachel more, and (we can assume) wanted to build what he thought would be the more spiritually minded wing of his family first. This can explain why even though Ya'akov knew he would

have 12 sons (see Rashi on 29:21, and Midrash Lekach Tov- which points out that the numerical value of Ya'akov's request to "bring" me my wife is 12), there is an extra "vav" in the word "and I shall go" [to her] to symbolize the 6 Tribes he expected to come from this relationship (Midrash Saichel Tov); Ya'akov was fully aware even before marrying (who he thought to be) Rachel that he would have another spouse who would give birth to the other 6 Tribes.

We are told (29:22) that first Lavan gathered everyone in his town and then made a party. We would have expected that the party would have been the cause of the gathering, so it should have been mentioned first. Beraishis Rabbah (70:19) explains that Lavan gathered everyone precisely because he knew that he couldn't pull off the switch without their help. He explained to them that before Ya'akov's arrival there was a water shortage (which is why they had to all gather at the same well), but in his merit there was now water aplenty. He convinced them that since Ya'akov loved Rachel more, he would stay 7 more years for her if he was given Leah instead. They agreed, but Lavan tricked them into paying for the wedding, so when they sang and danced at the wedding they tried to hint to Ya'akov that he should be aware that it's really Leah behind the veil, and not Rachel.

So Ya'akov knows that because all 12 Tribes will have to come from him, including those that would come through Leah, he will eventually have to marry the older sister as well. He knows that Lavan might trick him, which is why he gave Rachel a "code" to can verify it's really her (see Rashi on 29:25). Still, he suspects there might be a switch anyway- especially after the townspeople seem to be singing something that sounds like "It's Leah! It's Leah!" The Riva quotes Rabbeinu Elyakim as saying that in order to make sure that his relations (and, I would add, his firstborn- see Rashi on 49:3) came within the framework of a valid marriage, Ya'akov had in mind that the marriage which he is about to enact should be legal whether it's Rachel (as he hoped) or Leah (as he feared).

We can now better understand Lavan's excuse that it would have been inappropriate to marry off the younger daughter before the older one. "You were going to marry both anyway, and, in essence (based on the custom there), the way to marry Rachel was to first marry Leah." This can also possibly explain why Ya'akov favored Yosef when it came to the Torah he learned with his sons (see Rashi on 37:3), as he thought that the spiritual wing of the family would come through Rachel.

If the Nation of Israel was originally supposed to come from both Eisav and Ya'akov, and all 12 Tribes coming through Ya'akov alone meant that he also had to marry the mothers of Israel that were supposed to marry Eisav (as the Midrash on Shir Hashirim indicates), we can more easily understand the circumstances through which Ya'akov was forced to

marry Leah; and why her marriage, which was at least as primary as Rachel's, led to the birth of the future Kings and Priests of Israel. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**T**here is perhaps no parsha in the Torah with which the Jewish world today can identify so fully as with this week's parsha of Vayetze. Yaakov is dealing with two great and dangerous adversaries, both of whom are close to him personally and understand and appreciate his greatness. Nevertheless, both Eisav and Lavan are out to destroy Yaakov - to eliminate him and all that he stands for from the world. Eisav states his aim openly and without embarrassment. "After my father's death I will murder Yaakov." Yaakov will have to deal with this threat to his existence and he successfully does so through a variety of tactics and measures. The open anti-Semites in our world state brazenly that they want to make the world judenrein. The fanatics of Islam and the haters who populate the neo-Nazi parties in the Western world make no secret of their intentions regarding our future. But they will not succeed. We will not allow them to succeed and the Lord of Israel has stated many times that He will never forsake or desert us completely. Eisav can cripple Yaakov, as he has done many times over our history, but he cannot vanquish and destroy Yaakov. The Jewish people are too strong and resilient to allow for such an occurrence. We will fight this overt anti-Jewish hatred with all of our heart and soul and might. And we shall triumph.

More insidious and, according to the rabbis of the Pesach Hagada, more dangerous and lethal is the hatred that Lavan holds for us. His complaints stem from academia and professors, artists and intellectuals. He is convinced that if there will be no Yaakov, then everyone else in the world can live happily ever after. He has nothing but praise for Yaakov - "The Lord has blessed me because of you." He acknowledges Yaakov's contributions to civilization and humanity, his talents and Nobel prizes. But that does not sway Lavan emotionally. Behind the veneer of his intellectuality and liberal humanism, Lavan is a killer, a murderer of his own family, simply because he detests Yaakov and all that he stands for. Lavan has diplomatic solutions for Yaakov's problems with Eisav. Lavan wants a single-state solution to the Israeli-Arab war; he wants the anachronistic Jew and his baffling religion to disappear; he really wants what is best for us but we are too stupid to accept his suggestions. Lavan is thriving today - in the UN, the European Union, academia and unfortunately even amongst some of Yaakov's descendants. But Lavan also is to be vanquished and left in the ash heap of history. After four thousand years of history, not much has really changed. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at

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### **MACHON ZOMET**

## **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

*by Rabbi Amnon Bazak*

**O**ur forefather Yaacov dreamed of "a ladder standing on the ground, with its top reaching the heaven" [Bereishit 28:12]. The word for top is "rosh," literally a head. This is not the first time that such a description appears in Bereishit—the people who build the Tower of Babel want to establish "a city and a tower with its top in heaven" [11:4]. The two stories have a number of points that correspond to each other, but usually with conflicting elements.

One example is that in the Land of Shinar there were no stones, and they were replaced by bricks: "And they used the bricks as stones" [11:3]. This was the opposite of Beit El, which had a large number of stones. "He took from among the stones of the place, and put them at his head" [28:11]. In the affair of the Tower of Babel, the contact between the Almighty and humanity is one-sided. "And G-d descended to see the city and the tower which the men had built" [11:5]. On the other hand, in the ladder that Yaacov sees, the movement is in both directions. "The angels of G-d rose up and descended on it" [28:12]. The builders of the tower journeyed from east to west: "And, when they traveled from the east, they found a valley in the Land of Shinar" [11:2]. Yaacov went from west to east: "And Yaacov lifted his feet and went to the land of the east" [29:1]. In addition, the Tower of Babel was never completed, as opposed to the ladder, which served as a contact point between heaven and earth. What is the significance of all of these contrasts?

The main message of the affair of the Tower of Babel is that man's task is to be dispersed all over the world. Building the tower is a symbol of the desire to remain in one place. It is built to avoid the possibility that "we will be dispersed all over the earth" [11:4]. In response, the Almighty acts in the opposite way. "And He dispersed them from there all over the face of the earth, and they stopped building the city. For that reason, the city is named Babel, since at that place G-d confused the languages of the entire earth, and from there He dispersed them all over the face of the earth." [11:8-9]. The ladder that Yaacov sees symbolizes a concept which is the opposite of that of the tower. The lesson of the ladder is that a person should want to leave his place, and that movement is part of every life. Even the angels do not stay in one place. When Yaacov starts his wandering, he receives a blessing that is the opposite of the original desire of the people of the Tower. "And your offspring will be as the dust of the earth, and you will be dispersed, west, east, north, and south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed by you." [28:14]. Yaacov learned from this that leaving

home and spreading out in all directions is part of the role that man must fulfill in the world.

Starting from that time, the ascending and descending angels continue to accompany Yaacov for the rest of his life. He will meet them again in Lavan's house (31:11) and when he returns home, at Machanayim (32:2-3), and he is destined to struggle with an angel and receive his blessing (32:25-32). Much later, when Yaacov gives his blessing to Ephraim and Menasheh, Yaacov asks "the angel who redeems me from all evil" [48:16] to bless the boys, so that they will continue on the path of the angels—up and down, and dispersed in all directions: "Let them multiply within the land" [ibid].

### **Judaism of the Wall**

*by Rabbi Boaz Ganut, Head of the Torah Mitzion Kollel, St. Louis*

Yaacov went on his way in order to flee from his brother Esav, and the Torah described his arrival in Beit El with the word "vayifga"—meaning to meet or possibly to cause harm. Many attempts have been made to explain how this word is relevant to the story of Yaacov. One example is the Midrash: "He wanted to pass by, and the entire world became—as it were—a wall in front of him" [Bereishit Rabba 68:10].

The Midrash emphasizes three factors with respect to Yaacov: (1) The phrase "vayifga" is interpreted as if Yaacov crashed into something. The usual reaction to the sentence "I was hit by a car" is not to ask what prayer was recited by the car... Instead you would ask such a person if he was hurt, if the car was damaged, etc. But the Midrash implies that the phrase indeed refers to a crash. (2) Yaacov is stopped by a wall. While he was running, he did not see that a wall was in his way until he crashed into it. This brought him to a stop and forced him to stay at the site overnight. (3) The Midrash describes the construction of the wall: "the entire world became—as it were—a wall." This is not a local barrier, it is an example of a much broader phenomenon. The entire world gathered together in order to prevent Yaacov from continuing on his way.

I would like to look at this Midrash from the point of view of current events. According to our tradition, the place where Yaacov stopped was the site of the Temple. The only remnant we have left of the Temple is the Western Wall. This became important when the Temple was destroyed and Bnei Yisrael were sent to exile. There is a Judaism of the Temple and there is a Judaism of the Wall. The Judaism of the Wall is deeply involved in remnants, memorials, and memories of the past. The Judaism of the Temple is involved in life, creativity, and shaping the future.

This week's Torah portion tells us about Yaacov-Yisrael, our forefather, who was forced to leave his home and go into exile. Clearly, he must have been troubled by what might happen to him in the future, particularly what might happen to his spiritual world. On

his way, his path was blocked. Perhaps what blocked his way was the fact that he was about to go into exile. He did not notice that there was a wall in the way, and he therefore struck the wall and was forced to stay nearby. In the end, he began to understand that life in exile would constrain him to the level of Judaism of the Wall.

The last point that we noted above in relation to the Midrash emphasizes an aspect that is very relevant in modern times. "The entire world became—as it were—a wall." The entire world gathered together to prevent Yaacov from expanding his Judaism beyond the limits of the wall. The world is happy with Judaism that concentrates on remnants, memories, and preservation of the past. We, on the other hand, have been called to the challenge of building a life of creativity and development. We have been called upon to construct a Judaism of the Temple.

**DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

## What's Bothering Rashi?

**T**his week's parsha tells of Jacob's twenty years with his father-in-law, Laban. Years that were both stressful, because of Laban's deceitfulness, and blessed because Jacob's children were born during this period. When Jacob leaves Laban to return to Eretz Yisroel, he and Laban make a pact of peace, build an altar and eat together to seal the agreement over a festive meal.

We find the following verses, which speak of "brothers," but in each case Rashi interprets this word differently.

"And he (Laban) took his brothers with him and he pursued after him a seven day's journey and he caught up with him on Mount Gilad." (Genesis 31:23)

"His brothers"—RASHI: "His relatives."

Again the word "brothers" in Genesis 31:46

"And Jacob said to his brothers: 'Gather stones.' So they took stones and made a mound and they ate there on the mound."

To his brothers—RASHI: These are his sons. For they were as brothers (to Jacob) who were ready to help in times of distress or war.

And again the word "brothers" in Genesis: 46:54 "And Jacob slaughtered on the mountain and called to his brothers to eat bread and they slept on the mountain that night."

To his brothers—RASHI: His friends, those who were with Laban. What would you ask here?

Two questions: Three times the word "brothers" appears in this section and each time Rashi has a different comment. Why must he comment at all? If he does, why does he change the meaning each time?

When Jacob calls to his brothers (Verses 46&54) we wonder: Jacob had only one brother, Esau, and he is not involved in this story at all. So who then, implicitly asks Rashi, are these "brothers"? When

Laban took his brothers (verse 23), we also ask: Who are these brothers? The Torah nowhere says that Laban or his sister Rebecca had any other brothers. Again the question:

Who are Laban's brothers?

The Second Question: Can you see why Rashi gives different interpretations to each of the three references to the word "brothers"? Hint: See the context of each verse.

An Answer: Each case is different. In verse 23 when Laban pursued Jacob, "brothers" means relatives. It is most reasonable that in his fight with Jacob he would take only those whom he could be sure were loyal to him. The word "brothers" means relatives as we see when Abraham refers to his nephew Lot as his brother. (See Genesis 13:8.)

In verse 46 Jacob is enlisting people to help him build a mound. He couldn't ask Laban or his people for they were his antagonists at this point. So the only others ones around were Jacob's sons. They are considered brothers because they support him, not just as a child, but as a brother, with equal strength and zeal.

Verse 54 is an ambiguous verse. "Brothers" are mentioned, but neither Jacob nor Laban is mentioned. When Jacob was making a feast and invited "his brothers," it doesn't say whose brothers. Rashi tells us that "brothers" here refers to Laban's friends, not Jacob's sons, because Jacob did not have to "invite" his own sons (who were referred to as "brothers" in verse 46); Jacob would have his children attend the meal, he need not "invite" them. Or it would have been self-evident that Jacob's sons would participate (on Jacob's side) since it was a pact between Jacob's family and Laban. So these "brothers" must have been Laban's friends (remember Laban had no blood brothers.). Evidence that this refers to Laban and his people (and not Jacob's) can be seen from the following verse. It says: "And Laban arose early in the morning..."

Rashi's sensitivity to contextual meaning leads him to clarify for us (who may not be as sensitive) the different meanings of similar words in the Torah. © 2004 aish.org & Dr. A. Bonchek

**RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF**

## Sfas Emes

**T**he parsha begins: "Vayeitzei Ya'akov miBe'er Sheva, vayeileich Charana." (ArtScroll: "Jacob departed from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.") ArtScroll is presenting the pshat—the simple/plain/surface reading—of this posuk. I urge you to take a good look at this pshat reading. Why? Because once you have seen the Sfas Emes's non-pshat interpretation of this posuk, you will likely never again understand this posuk exclusively in a pshat mode (or, for that matter, in a drash mode—i.e., a la Rashi) the same way.

The Sfas Emes starts by telling us that in its deeper meaning, Ya'akov Avinu's departure was voluntary ("beratzon"). But how could that be? Why would Ya'akov leave the kedusha (sanctity) of Eretz Yisroel for the profanity of a land outside Eretz Yisroel? The Sfas Emes answers this question by explaining that "bevadai" (certainly) Ya'akov undertook this drastic action on our behalf. How so? To prepare us and to counsel us for our departure from Eretz Yisroel. That is, to show us how to grow spiritually even in galus. Further, Ya'akov Avinu went to his destination in order to extend the greatness of HaShem's Presence even to a place where His Presence was hidden. Indeed, it was hidden to such a degree that to an uninformed observer, HaShem was invisible.

The posuk tells us that the starting place from which Ya'akov Avinu embarked on his perilous journey was Be'eir Sheva. The Sfas Emes tells us that in some ways, Be'eir Sheva and Shabbos resemble each other.. How does he see the similarity? One remez (hint) is the name: "Be'eir SHeVa." Moreover, not only are Shabbos and Sheva spelled (almost) the same way, but the two words also share one meaning: seven.

More important than the allusions that these words convey is the similarity in function. Thus, the word "be'eir" means a "well,;" that is, a source from which one can draw water. Water is a classic metaphor for ruchniyus (spirituality). So, too, can Shabbos provide us with the ruchniyus we need to live our lives as ovdei HaShem besimcha ("those who serve HaShem with joy") even during the weekdays. Concluding on this point, the Sfas Emes re-emphasizes that, before leaving on his journey into golus, Ya'akov Avinu had attached himself closely to the world's penimiyus (inner reality); i.e., to the vibrancy emanating from HaShem.

Continuing, the Sfas Emes refers us to the first paragraph of Medrash Rabba on Parshas Vayeitzei. The Medrash, in turn, quotes a posuk which applies to someone in Ya'akov Avinu's situation, namely, embarking on a dangerous journey. The posuk quoted is from Mishlei (3:23): "Ahz teileich labetach darkecha..." (ArtScroll: "Then will you walk on your way securely..."). The Sfas Emes notes that the letters of "ahz," the posuk's first word, have a numerical value—i.e., a gematria—of eight.

To understand what is special about the number eight, we need a brief digression. We can view a cube as a prototype of things—i.e., of objects—in the world of Nature. Further, note that a cube has six sides—and with its internal point—seven points. Accordingly, we view the number seven as an allusion to the world of nature (teva). And since the number eight is higher than the number seven, we take the number eight as a symbol of things that are above nature ("lema'ala min hateva"). Hence, the number eight indicates special kedusha (holiness).

Good We now know that the number eight—and hence, the numerical value of the word "ahz"—

signifies special kedusha. But what does the "kedusha" actually mean? Apparently, the Sfas Emes assumes that know the answer to that question; for he does not pause to explain the concept of holiness. But some of us may need help to understand what this often-used word (and key concept) mean. Fortunately, help is at hand, from the peirush of the Malbim in Parshas Kedoshim. The Malbin explains that kedusha means: "lema'ala min hateva"—behavior that transcends nature. Thus, it is "natural" to speak "lashon hara", or to take what is not ours, or to engage in illicit relationships. To refrain from such behavior requires that we conduct ourselves in a manner higher than nature. Thus, the posuk in Mishlei—"ahz teileich labetach darkecha"—is telling us that to handle the world's spiritual dangers, we need to live in a way that bespeaks "ahz"—i.e. lema'ala min hateva.

Thus, the Sfas Emes has taught us how to read the first pasuk of this parsha as a manual for living in golus. He has told us that if we cling to our awareness that HaShem's Presence pervades all reality, we can attain a state of kedusha in ma'asim gashmiyim (worldly activities). How does a person cling to that vision? He/she starts by immersing himself in kedusha. Thus, we saw that Ya'akov Avinu's point of departure was Be'eir Sheva. And now we are aware of the connotations of both words, both of "Be'eir" and of "Sheva". Finally, the Sfas Emes emphasizes, that to survive in golus, a person must be prepared to subordinate his/her will to the will of HaShem. Not always easily done...

A take-home lesson? The Sfas Emes has already given it, loud and clear: Before going to Charan, a person must start from Be'eir Sheva. That is, before entering dangerous territory—and all of life involves dangerous territory—a person would be well-advised to immerse himself in kedusha. For the Sfas Emes's poverty-stricken chassidim, kollel was not an option. Hence, the Sfas Emes's focus on Shabbos. For us, the mussar haskeil points to a spell in kollel in one's youth (and when one is older—i.e., before he embarks on a different kind of journey), with plenty of kevi'as itim laTorah (a fixed learning schedule) in between. © 2004 Rabbi N.C. Leff

#### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

### **Brothers in Scorn**

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1887-1933) was a leader of Polish Jewry in the years before World War II. In addition to being the chief Rabbi of Lublin, building and maintaining one of the world's largest and most beautiful yeshivos, Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, he was also one of the first Orthodox members of the Polish parliament, the Sejm. He was a courageous leader whose vision and unwavering commitment to Torah values gained him the respect of Jews and gentiles alike.

During his first weeks as the leader of the Orthodox Jewish delegation, Rabbi Shapiro was approached by a Polish parliamentary deputy, Professor Lutoslawski, a known anti-Semite whose devious legislation constantly deprived minorities of their civil and economic rights.

Standing in front of a group parliamentarians in the halls of the Sejm, the depraved deputy began. "Rabbi," he shouted, a sly smile spreading across his evil face. "I have a wonderful new way for Jews to make a living—they can skin dead dogs."

Without missing a beat Rabbi Shapiro shot back. "Impossible, their representatives would never allow it."

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

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

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

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

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

Yaakov knew that to initiate his destiny in the confines of a hostile environment he should proclaim the rules loud and clear. He would not allow himself to be swayed, duped, or connived by even the master of deception and ridicule, Lavan the charlatan. In forging the household that would be the basis for Jewish pride and eternity, Yaakov had to make it clear to his future bride that he too could play hardball. He sent a message of pride and awareness to his descendants.

Though this Jew who sat in the tent would enter his new environment with brotherly love, if he needed to, he could just as well be a brother in scorn. © 2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & www.torah.org

### RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

## Rav Frand

Upon the birth of her fourth son, Yehudah, Leah said, "This time I will thank Hashem" [Bereshit 29:35]. Rashi quotes the Rabbinic explanation that she expressed special gratitude because she had now given birth to more than her share of Tribes. "Now that I have received more than my portion, it's time to express my gratitude to G-d".

What is the meaning of the statement that Leah received more than her share? Our Rabbis explain that Leah made a simple mathematical calculation. She divided twelve future tribes by 4 wives, and arrived at the result of 3 tribes per wife. Now that she had her fourth son, she offered praise to G-d. The Rabbis praise Leah for her recognition that she owed a debt of gratitude to the Almighty.

Although Leah's recognition that she owed a debt of gratitude is certainly praiseworthy, this teaching of our Rabbis doesn't seem to make sense. Who deserves more praise—the person who receives his or her proper share and feels indebted to G-d, or the person who receives more than his or her fair share and feels indebted to G-d? Obviously, the first person is more deserving of praise.

I saw a very interesting observation from Rav Dovid Kviat (Maggid Shiur in the Mir Yeshiva, New York): The praiseworthy aspect of Leah's behavior here was that she viewed what she received as "more than her fair share".

It is the nature of human beings to view that which they receive in life as something that they had coming to them. "This is what I deserve." If my friend is earning \$30,000 a year and I am earning half a million dollars a year, it may not be so easy to recognize my great fortune. It is easy to think "I'm smarter than him, I'm more clever than him, I earned this on my own—it was coming to me!"

The novelty of Leah's comment is that we see that a person has the ability to step back, look at a situation objectively and come to the conclusion that "I am getting more than I deserve". This is not our normal tendency. The normal tendency is to view life as either "I am getting less than I deserve" or "I am getting my fair share."

The rare person, who lives their life with the attitude that "I have gotten more than I deserve," is indeed a praiseworthy person. © 2004 Rabbi Y. Frand & www.torah.org

