

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

**A**vraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov all suffered from success-induced jealous reactions from the local populations where they lived. Avraham is recognized as the "prince of G-d in our midst" and yet is begrudged a grave plot to bury Sarah. Yitzchak is sent away from the kingdom of Avimelech because "you have grown too great from us." And in this week's parsha, Yaakov is told by Lavan that everything that Yaakov owns is really the property of Lavan.

The blessings of G-d and the promise that He made to protect the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel save them from their neighbors, relatives and enemies. However, this very success and achievements of this small family, as per G-d's promise and against all odds and opposition, raises the hatred and jealousy of their neighbors. No matter that the neighbors themselves, such as Avimelech and Lavan benefit mightily from the achievements of Yitzchak and Yaakov.

The rabbis of the Talmud taught us that "hatred destroys rational thought and behavior." So, instead of gratitude and friendship, the accomplishments of the patriarchs and matriarchs only bring forth greed, jealousy, persecution and always the threat of violence hovers in the background. All efforts to maintain a low profile and to mollify Lavan result only in increased bigotry and hatred.

It is not for naught that the Pesach hagada makes Lavan a greater enemy to the survival of the Jewish people than even the Pharaoh of Egypt. But almost all of the enemies of the Jews over the centuries suffer from the same basic moral faults regarding the Jews: ingratitude, jealousy and greed. These are all revealed to us in this week's parsha.

Someone mentioned to me that perhaps if we maintained a lower profile in the world, didn't receive so many Nobel prize awards, and were less influential in the fields of finance and the media, anti-Semitism would decrease. "What if" is a difficult field of thought to pursue intelligently.

There is no question that the world and all humankind would be by far the poorer if the Jews purposely withheld their energy, creativity and intelligence from contributing to human civilization. And there certainly is no guarantee that the world would like

us any more than it does now if we were less successful and prominent.

The mere fact that G-d blessed the patriarchs with the blessings of success and influence indicates that this is His desire for us. The Torah specifically states that all of the nations and families of the earth will benefit and be blessed through us. So in our case less would not necessarily be more. Yet we were enjoined from flouting our success in the faces of those less fortunate than us. Modesty in behavior and deportment is an important partner to success.

This is also a lesson that our father Yaakov intended to teach us. We are not allowed to rein in our talents and achievements. But we are certainly bidden to rein in our egos and bluster. That is also an important Jewish trait that should be a foundation in our lives. © 2009 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 [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd when Yaakov saw Rachel the daughter of his mother's brother Lavan and the sheep of his mother's brother Lavan, Yaakov drew close and rolled the rock from on top of the mouth of the well, and he watered the sheep of his mother's brother Lavan" (Beraishis 29:10). It doesn't say that what motivated Yaakov to move this humongous stone was seeing his cousin Rachel with ("im") his uncle's sheep. It says that when he saw his cousin Rachel and ("ve'es") his uncle's sheep he removed the rock. Yaakov didn't uncover the well when he first heard that his cousin was coming with the sheep (29:6); it was only after he actually saw them that he was inspired to do so. What was it about seeing his uncle's sheep, separate from seeing his cousin, that prompted Yaakov to perform this superhuman feat?

Aside from trying to discover the significance of the sheep, the very notion that Yaakov took it upon himself to open the well deserves a closer look. As the shepherds had told Yaakov (29:8), they couldn't access the well until all the flocks that drank from its waters had gathered. Why couldn't they get to the water any earlier? Either the rock was too heavy, or there was an agreement in place that no one would open the well until everyone was there. Even if it was because the

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rock was too heavy to move without everyone helping, if there wasn't a reason to make everyone wait until everybody was there, after the first time the rock was removed they could have just left it off (and found a lighter cover to protect the water from contaminants or to prevent anything from falling in inadvertently). If they kept putting this heavy stone back on, they must have wanted it to be there. Why did they want to make sure that no one could access the well until everyone could? "Because they were guarding the water [so that] it wasn't available for everybody because of how little there was" (Midrash Hagadol 29:2). Or, as the Radak explains it, "because there wasn't any other water there for the sheep of the people of the city, they put a large rock on the mouth of the well so that they couldn't access it unless everyone was there, and one would water [his sheep] after the other; for if each one would water [his sheep] by himself, each one would draw as much water as he wanted and what was left in the trough would be wasted."

Beraishis Rabbah (70:19) bears this out as well, telling us that Lavan convinced the entire city to help him trick Yaakov into marrying Leah (and make Yaakov stay for another seven years to marry Rachel) by reminding them that before Yaakov came there was a severe water shortage. There was but one source of water for the entire city, and in order to make sure that no one took too much water for themselves (or wasted it), they devised a system that prevented anyone from getting water until everyone was there. Well, at least until Yaakov came, when he removed the large rock all by himself. But how could he undermine the water-conservation restrictions that had been set up? What right did this stranger have to ignore the drought regulations of the city for his cousin?

Although we don't find that Yaakov re-covered the well, thus allowing the three herds that had already gathered by the well to draw water before everyone else showed up, our sages (see Torah Shelaima 29:32) tell us that once Yaakov removed the covering its waters overflowed. [This is learned out from the fact that Moshe had to draw the water for Yisro's sheep (Shemos 2:19), while Yaakov only had to uncover the well.] Yaakov knew that the drought was already over, so the need to conserve/protect the water supply had passed. Nevertheless, if he didn't know that the drought

was over before he uncovered the well, how could he uncover it without all the flocks being present?

I would suggest that until Yaakov actually saw his uncle's sheep, he would not have uncovered the well before all the flocks had arrived. However, whether because Rachel was careful to only use the exact amount of water needed until the next day or because the other shepherds were taking advantage of a young shepherdess by not allowing her to use as much water as they themselves used, Yaakov saw that the sheep Rachel was caring for were weak, and needed water badly. He wasn't going to waste any water either, but upon seeing his mother's brother's sheep withering away and in dire need of water, he immediately rolled the huge rock off of the well and gave them to drink. In order to inform us that it was only because of the state of his uncle's sheep that Yaakov disregarded the town's self-imposed restrictions, the Torah tells us that he did so only after actually seeing the sheep. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**lthough we are given a tremendous amount of information about their lives, it is certain that not every event in the lives of our matriarchs and patriarchs is mentioned in the Torah. One wonders then, why, in this week's Torah portion, the seemingly trivial story of Yaakov (Jacob) lifting the stone after seeing Rachel is mentioned. (Genesis 29:10)

Ramban writes that the incident teaches a lesson about faith. If one believes in G-d, one will be able to do the impossible. In Ramban's words, "scripture speaks at lengths about the story to teach us 'those who trust in the Lord, their strength is renewed.' (Isaiah 40:31) For behold, Yaakov our father came from his travels tired, and he removed a stone that shepherds of three flocks could not."

This comment also gives us an insight into dealing with suffering. Contrary to popular thinking, perhaps the primary issue should not be why we suffer, for there is no real answer to this question. It is sometimes beyond human comprehension. This question also tries to understand the past, by examining an event that has already happened. We, of course, have no say over events that are behind us. Rather than ask why, perhaps we should focus on what our actions should be following the suffering. What rather than why is a practical approach, not a philosophical inquiry. It is also a question that deals with the future over which we have control and not with the past, over which we have none.

While we ask this all important question of "what shall we do in the face of suffering," we also wonder "what will G-d do as we suffer?" The comment by Ramban seems to be suggesting that, when we suffer, G-d gives us the strength to transcend, to reach

beyond and to do things we never ever thought we could do. As G-d is infinite, G-d, who has created us in His image, has given us the power to sometimes reach towards infinity, to do the impossible.

In our synagogue we run programs for "special friends" (known to many as mentally retarded—a term I do not like). I once asked a mother of one "special friend" the following: If someone would have told you 25 years ago that on the 25th birthday of your daughter you'd still be diapering her, wheeling her in a stroller, giving her milk from a bottle—would you be able to handle it?

Her response was that she couldn't imagine prevailing over such hardship. But she has prevailed and has given love all these years magnificently. No one is born with this abundant love and commitment; yet the words of Isaiah ring true—with the help of G-d we can overcome.

We constantly hear about great people in the world. I always have found this strange, because it seems to me that there may not be great people in this world, only great challenges. Faced with those challenges, ordinary people can rise to do the extraordinary. The ability of the average person to do the unusual, is the way G-d works through people.

Perhaps the well of water in the Yaakov narrative represents life itself. The water, as it often does in the Torah, represents life itself. The rock on top of the well reminds us that all too often our life energies are blocked and we feel a weight above us that is difficult to bear. No matter how impossible we thought something was, Yaakov's actions remind us that we can sometimes dig deep, roll up our sleeves, take a breath, and with the help of G-d, transform it into the possible.

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**RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

It is one of the great dreams of the Bible. Jacob, afraid and alone, finds himself in what the anthropologist Victor Turner called liminal space—the space between—between the home he is escaping from and the destination he has not yet reached, between the known danger of his brother Esau from whom he is in flight, and the unknown danger of Laban from whom he will eventually suffer great wrongs.

As will happen again twenty-two years later on his return—in the wrestling match with the stranger—Jacob has his most intense experiences alone, at night, isolated and vulnerable, in the middle of a journey. In this, the first of his visions:

"He had a dream in which he saw a ladder resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it."

What does this signify? There are many interpretations given by the sages and commentators, but the simplest is that it has to do with the encounter between the human soul and G-d, the encounter later generations knew as prayer.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely G-d is in this place, and I did not know it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d; this is the gate of heaven."

The synagogue is the house of G-d. Prayer is the gate of heaven. And when we have truly prayed, the most profound result is that we too are conscious of the feeling: "Surely G-d is in this place, and I did not know it."

Did this vision exercise any influence on the structure of Jewish prayer? I want to suggest that it did. Its influence was profound. If we examine Jewish prayer carefully, we will see that its shape precisely matches the idea of a ladder on which angels ascend and descend.

If we study the liturgy carefully we will find that it often has a symmetrical three-part structure, A-B-A, which has the following form: (a) ascent, (b) standing in the Presence, (c) descent. Here are some examples.

1. The morning service begins with (a) *pesukei de-zimra*, a series of Psalms, which constitute a preparation for prayer. It moves on to (b) prayer as such: the Shema, the three blessings that surround it, and the Amidah, the standing prayer. It ends with (c) a series of concluding prayers including *Ashrei*, itself a key element of *pesukei de-zimra*.

The basis of this threefold structure is a statement in the Talmud (Berakhot 32b) that "the early pious men used to wait for an hour before praying, then they would pray for an hour, and then they would wait for a further hour." The Talmud asks on what basis they did so. It answers by citing the verse *Ashrei* itself: "Happy are those who sit in Your house." Clearly this is what is known as an *asmachta*, a supporting verse, rather than the origin of the custom itself (this passage, though, is undoubtedly the reason that *Ashrei* is said in the first and third sections).

2. Another example is the structure of the Amidah. This has the following three-part pattern: (a) sheach, praise, the first three paragraphs; (b) *bakashah*, requests, the middle paragraphs, and (c) *hodayah*, 'thanks' or 'acknowledgements', the last three paragraphs. On Shabbat and Yom Tov, the middle section is replaced by usually one, on Rosh Hashanah three, paragraphs relating to 'the holiness of the day' on the grounds that we do not make requests on days of rest.

Sheach is a preparation. It is our entry to the divine presence. *Hodayah* is a leave-taking. We thank G-d for the goodness with which He has favoured us. *Bakashah*, the central section, is standing in the presence itself. We are like supplicants standing before

the King, presenting our requests. The spiritual form of the first and last actions—entry and leave-taking—are dramatized by taking three steps forward, and at the end, three steps back. This is the choreography of ascent and descent.

3. The kedushah-erses taken from the mystical visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel—is said three times in the morning service (on Shabbat, the third is transferred to the afternoon service, because the morning service is more than usually long. However, its proper place is in the morning service). The first, known as kedushat yotser, occurs in the blessings before the Shema; the third, kedushah de-sidra, is in the concluding section of the prayers, beginning Uva le-Tzion. The middle kedushah is in the reader's repetition of the Amidah.

The kedushah makes explicit reference to angels. Its key erses are the words Isaiah and Ezekiel heard the angels saying as they surround the Throne of Glory. We speak of the angels at this point: the Serafim, Cherubim, Ofanim and holy Chayot.

There are obvious differences between the first and last, on the one hand, and the second on the other. The first and third do not need a minyan. They can be said privately. They do not need to be said standing. The second requires a minyan and must be said standing.

Maimonides explains the difference. In the first and third, we are describing what the angels do when they praise G-d. In the second, we are enacting what they do. The first and third are preparation for, and reflection on, an event. The second is the event itself, as we re-live it. There are other examples, but these will suffice.

The daily prayers, as we now have them, evolved over a long period of time. The sages tell us that the first architects were the men of the Great Assembly in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the 5th century BCE. There was a further intensive process of composition and canonization in the days of Rabban Gamliel at Yavneh. Shaping and reshaping continued until the first siddurim, those of Rav Amram Gaon and Rav Saadiah Gaon in the ninth and tenth centuries CE.

What we see from the above examples is that there is a basic shape—a depth grammar—of prayer. It consists of ascent—standing in the Presence—descent. The inspiration for this cannot have been any other than Jacob's vision.

Prayer is a ladder stretching from earth to heaven. On this ladder of words, thoughts and emotions, we gradually leave earth's gravitational field. We move from the world around us, perceived by the senses, to an awareness of that which lies beyond the world—the earth's Creator. At the end of this ascent, we stand, as it were, directly in the conscious presence of G-d—which Maimonides defines as the essential element of kaannah, the intentional state essential to prayer.

We then slowly make our way back to earth again—to our mundane concerns, the arena of actions

and interactions within which we lie. But if prayer has worked, we are not the same afterward as we were before. For we have seen, as Jacob saw, that "Surely G-d is in this place, and I did not know it."

If the first stage is the climb, and the second standing in heaven, then the third is bringing a fragment of heaven down to earth. For what Jacob realized when he woke from his vision is that G-d is in this place. Heaven is not somewhere else, but here—even if we are alone and afraid—if only we realized it. And we can become angels, G-d's agents and emissaries, if, like Jacob, we have the ability to pray and the strength to dream. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“Jacob then took himself fresh rods of poplar and hazel and chestnut. He peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white (ha'lavan) of the rods” (Genesis 30:37)

Jacob is one of the most complex figures in the Bible. He himself is a righteous man, but he is forced to navigate his way through the cunning behavior of a cast of less savory characters. Jacob must learn how to survive in a world of tricksters and charlatans; to fight against his enemies for what he knows to be right and, where necessary, to adopt their methods in order to effectively defeat them. But is it really possible to do this without tarnishing one's own core? Can one play according to the rules of wrongdoers, even to achieve honorable goals, without being affected morally?

Jacob's first test comes when his father Isaac is about to bestow the blessing of the firstborn upon Jacob's evil twin brother Esau. Jacob's mother Rebecca recognizes that Esau is totally unsuitable for the role, and perhaps she even knows that he had already sold his birthright to Jacob. She instructs Jacob to dress in his brother's clothes and pose as Esau, to ensure that Isaac's blessing is ultimately bestowed upon the son she knows to be worthy.

It is strange - and perhaps a little uncomfortable - to see our righteous ancestors engaging in such devious practices. Rebecca, however, was confident that her strategy was essential for the destiny of Israel. She observed that even Abraham, the paradigm of lovingkindness, had been forced to fight battles in order to conquer the four terrorist nations who threatened the stable tranquility of the Fertile Crescent, and she had the foresight to understand that Abraham's descendants would require similar political acumen and military might to vanquish their enemies and realize the dream of universal peace and harmony. She recognized that the Jewish mission of spreading peace, compassionate righteousness and justice throughout the world could only be achieved through mental agility and the physical strength to combat evil, and she realized that the present circumstances demanded of her kind-hearted,

righteous son Jacob to don the uniform of Esau, that playing by his crooked rules would be the only way to achieve a fair result.

But Rebecca's exercise in realpolitik contained an inherent danger, which could easily have resulted in the very antithesis of her goal. For while the Jewish people need military prowess to defend itself and fight injustice, mastering the tools of Esau carries with it great risk. When Jews adopt aggressive or devious tactics, they might easily become contaminated by the very same qualities that they seek to destroy. Without enormous care, dressing up in the clothes of Esau can obscure our own identity and drown out the righteous voice of Jacob.

As Jacob flees his parent's home and dreams of a ladder reaching up to the heavens with the Almighty at the summit and angels ascending and descending, we see that he is still on the right path. Jacob's celestial vision and his prayer to return to his parents' home are clear indications that despite everything, he remains the "wholehearted man, a dweller of tents" (Genesis 25:27) that he was, committed to the vision of his ancestors.

But this is just the beginning of his journey. Jacob's next test comes at the hands of his scheming uncle. Jacob prepares to marry Laban's younger daughter Rachel; Laban tricks the unsuspecting Jacob by switching the young bride for her older sister Leah. When Jacob confronts his uncle with this injustice and demands Rachel's hand in marriage, he finds himself forced into 14 years of uncompensated labor in order to pay off the double dowry.

Living with Laban is dangerous. Jacob is exposed constantly to deceit and dishonesty; he must fight hard to withstand the temptation to adopt his uncle's lifestyle. He puts up with the situation for many years, establishing a home and raising his family there. But when Joseph is born, Jacob realizes that the time has come to leave.

Well aware of the fact that his prosperity is due in large measure to Jacob's faithful service, Laban is devastated at the thought of his leaving and willing to do whatever it takes to keep him by his side. Jacob agrees to stay in exchange for fair treatment and his share of the profits. He offers Laban a reasonable deal: all future-born ringed, speckled and spotted lambs will belong to him, while the normally-colored animals will remain his uncle's. Laban accepts the deal gladly and takes the additional step of removing from Jacob's care all goats and sheep of unusual color - those who might be likely to produce offspring with rings, speckles and spots.

Once again, Jacob is forced to confront evil and fight for what is rightfully his. He peels branches of wood, revealing white stripes from beneath the surface. He places these striped and streaked wands near the water troughs where the sheep and goats usually mate, ensuring that the offspring of the animals that cohabit there are striped and streaked like the wands. In effect,

Jacob grows into a successful and wealthy man by revealing the "lavan" (Hebrew for 'white,' but also the name of Laban) that lies underneath the bark of the branches.

I believe that we can look upon this entire episode as a metaphor for Jacob himself. After spending so many years in the company of Esau and Laban, Jacob has studied their ways. He no longer needs his mother's help when faced with deception; he has learned the rules of the game directly from the masters. This provides us with a powerful lesson in the dangers of living with evil. Our rabbis taught that we are influenced by the company we keep (Rambam, Laws of Personality Development 6: 1). When we stare at the rings, speckles and spots - so to speak - those characteristics are transferred into our bodies and souls. In the words of the Biblical text, "He [Jacob] peeled white streaks [in the rods, or in his exterior character], exposing the white [the traits of Laban, which had now become the deepest layer of his personality]" (Genesis 30:37).

By the end of this week's Biblical portion, Jacob - the wholehearted man who once dreamed of the heavens, the angels and the Almighty - stands in danger of losing his greatness and his righteousness. When he dreams a second time, his vision is no longer of the heavenly court, but rather of goats. Now G-d tells him, "I have seen everything that Laban has done to you... Leave this place at once and return to your native land." (Genesis 31:12) Jacob was able to emerge victorious from his encounters with Esau with his integrity intact, still dreaming of angels. But after 22 years of contact with the wily Laban, the hazards of exposure are too great. His vision and purity are in danger of becoming stained.

Ultimately, Jacob emerges triumphant. Despite his years with Laban, his spirituality is nonetheless unscathed (See Rashi on Genesis 32:5: "I have sojourned with Laban."). But the battle is harsh and the lesson to us is clear: like our forefather Jacob, we must be strong and sharp when dealing with our enemies, but we must never allow ourselves to deviate from our mission of spreading integrity, justice, compassion and peace throughout the world. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## The Bad News Goods

**A** person can only take so much. After fourteen years of chicanery and abuse starting from Lavan's switching of Rachel and Leah to all types of shenanigans regarding his fare share of the flock, Yaakov calls it quits. But one gets to know his boss and thus, the ramifications of an abrupt departure.

Yaakov knew that he could not just leave Lavan as if he were a retiring employee. He was not expecting

a gold watch. There was no good-bye party; rather he had to stealthily slip into the night and escape.

Lavan did not take kindly to that means of departure and he decided to chase his son in law. The Torah tells us: Lavan was told on the third day that Yaakov had fled. He took his brothers [kinsmen] with him, and pursued him a distance of seven days. He overtook him in Mount Gilad. G-d appeared to Lavan the Arami, in a dream that night, and said to him, "Guard yourself, that you do not speak to Yaakov either good and evil." (Genesis 31:22-24)

Simple question: I understand that the Almighty warned Lavan lest he threaten Yaakov and thus he told he not to speak evil. But why can't Lavan speak good? Why didn't Hashem say "Guard yourself, that you only speak to Yaakov good."?

My friend David Kelly sent me this story, with the premise, "I am sure you can use it one day." He was right. (I mean not to offend lawyers but I quote the story the way it was sent...)

One afternoon a lawyer was riding in his limousine when he saw two men along the roadside eating grass.

Disturbed, he ordered his driver to stop and he got out to investigate. He asked one man, "Why are you eating grass?"

"We don't have any money for food," the poor man replied. "We have to eat grass."

"Well, then, you can come with me to my house and I'll feed you," the lawyer said.

"But sir, I have a wife and two children with me. They are over there, under that tree."

"Bring them along," the lawyer replied. Turning to the other poor man he stated, "You come with us, also."

The second man, in a pitiful voice, then said, "But sir, I also have a wife and six children with me!"

"Bring them all, as well," the lawyer answered. They all entered the car, which was no easy task, even for a car as large as the limousine was.

Once underway, one of the poor fellows turned to the lawyer and said, "Sir, you are too kind. Thank you for taking all of us with you."

The lawyer replied, "Glad to do it. You'll really love my place. You see, the grass is almost a foot high."

After fourteen years of tricks and dishonest finagling Lavan was given only one choice. Don't have any dealings with Yaakov. There is no good or bad. No dealings. The past years have taught us that even the good that the crooked speak is only good for themselves.

No matter how appealing an offer may sound if the source is crooked, then it is not a good deal. If one who wheedles tells you that he has greener grass on the other side, be wary. It is his greed that is most probably grassier on the other side! © 2009 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

## RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

### Haftorah

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

Yeravam began his reign with the best of intentions but he soon abused his royal authority. Instead of preventing foreign influences he ultimately corrupted his entire kingdom beyond the any point of return. Eventually, brought matters under control and exiled most of the Jewish nation. In this week's haftorah the prophet Hoshea turns to the remaining Judean tribes and sternly warns them not to follow their brothers' corrupt ways.

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

The Sages add an important insight regarding this rise to power. They reflect upon the verses that describe Yeravam's act in the following words, "And Yeravam ben N'vat... was the servant of Shlomo and he raised his hand against the king. And for this matter... Shlomo built the Milo and closed his father Dovid's

opening."(M'lochim 1 11:26, 27) The Sages explain that Yeravam merited the throne because of his outstanding courageous opposition to Shlomo Hamelech's conduct. But, they painfully add that Yeravam was also severely punished because he publicly shamed the king.(see Mesicta Sanhedrin 101b) Maharsha explains here that the sages sought to understand Yeravam's devastating end. They question that since Yeravam performed such a meritorious act, as is evidenced by his appointment over Israel, how could such control result in the horrible Jewish exile? If Hashem truly appreciated Yeravam's devotion how could it develop so quickly into a rampant campaign of idolatry?

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

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

The Sages reveal that the root of this was Yeravam's arrogance and insensitivity towards Rechavam. After all, couldn't a scion of Dovid Hamelech be afforded proper respect and honor without interfering with Yeravam's reign? Why couldn't Yeravam justify his behavior as a show of honor to Hashem's chosen one, Dovid Hamelech? The unfortunate reality was that Yeravam could not see himself forgoing his respect for Rechavam's sake. He conceivably reasoned that the king must display total authority and not be perceived as subservient to anyone. However, the Sages reveal that this reasoning was truly rooted in arrogance and unwillingness to show others proper honor and respect. This character flaw created his threatening illusion and propelled him to alienate his kingdom.

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

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

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

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

return to His beloved nation in the nearest future.  
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**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Vayetzei, we can learn an incredible lesson. The Torah relates how when Leah had her fourth son, Rachel became envious. The obvious question is why wasn't Rachel jealous when Leah has her first three sons. As Living Each Week explains, Leah named her first three sons based on her emotions; that 1) now her husband will love her, and 2) now she won't be disliked, and 3) now my husband will have to help me. But it is the fourth one that got to Rachel. When Leah named her son "Because now I can be grateful to G-d", that's when Rachel became envious. Rachel realized that she couldn't achieve the same level of gratitude to G-d that Leah could. How incredible a virtue! To want to have a reason to thank Hashem, just for the sake of thanking Him.

And then there's us... We have three chances a day to thank G-d through prayer, but do we? And if/when we do daven (pray), is it with enough meaning/concentration? Are we as grateful as we should be even when we DO have a reason? We can all emulate Rachel's desire to show gratitude by studying prayers, learning about ourselves from them, and improving ourselves THROUGH them. © 2009 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

**MACHON ZOMET**

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Bar-on Dasberg; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

There were two wells, one in Charan and the other in Midyan. The atmosphere in Charan was calm, the flocks frolicked, a young girl was able to go by herself to draw water. As opposed to this, the atmosphere in Midyan was tense, the girls had to arrive early in order to get their share of the water, and the shepherds tried to chase them away. Perhaps the difference stems from the different climates: In Charan, a land saturated with water, there was enough for everybody and there was no need to feel pressure. In Midyan, the desert land, it was necessary to fight for every drop.

A stranger arrives in each of the two lands, bringing with him a new outlook. Yaacov arrives in Charan, the land of great abundance, from the desert of Be'er Sheva, and he teaches the local shepherds that in spite of the abundance it is important to be diligent in their labors. Moshe arrives in the arid land of Midyan from the area of the abundance of the Nile, and he teaches the people there that even when there is poverty one must act in a righteous way.

Evidently it was not only Yaacov who thought he was marrying one woman and then discovered another one with him in the morning. In fact, in a

symbolic way, one might say that this is a very common experience. A man marries the young maiden that he has chosen, and then "Behold, in the morning, she is Leah!" [Bereishit 29:25]. The morning after the wedding he finds someone else next to him. This is a natural occurrence: he married a single girl, but as soon as they are married he finds that she is different. She married a young man who courted her, and then she finds herself with a man who is no longer worried about meeting new women. It often happens that both the man and the woman change during periods of pregnancy or raising children.

What is the solution to this dilemma? "And he worked for her for another seven years" [29:30]. Now a new task lies before them, to develop their association into that of a married couple, and to fall in love with each other once more.

When Yaacov and Lavan separated, they swore to each other that "this mound and this monument will bear testimony that I will not cross over the mound to you and that you will not cross over this mound and this monument for an evil purpose" [Bereishit 31:52]. Who broke the promise? The answer seems to be that both of them did: there were times when Yisrael crossed the border in order to fight Aram, and at other times the opposite happened.

It is interesting to note that the punishment for breaking this vow is immediate: In all the wars described in the Tanach (except for one), when Aram broke the promise and crossed the border they were defeated, and when Yisrael broke the promise they lost. This might explain why the Almighty performed miracles for Achav and Yehoram, who were evil kings of Yisrael, in order to make sure that they would conquer Aram in the Shomron (aside from the well known explanation that the people of Yisrael were completely united at the time).

The one exception to this rule is the war between King David and Aram, where David won. But in this case David did not cross the border in order to fight Aram but rather to fight Hadadezer, King of Tzova, and Aram joined a war that was not their own.



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