

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**W**hat kind of man was Jacob? This is the question that cries out to us in episode after episode of his life. The first time we hear a description of him he is called ish tam: a simple, quiet, plain, straightforward man. But that is exactly what he seems not to be. We see him taking Esau's birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup. We see him taking Esau's blessing, in borrowed clothes, taking advantage of their father's blindness.

These are troubling episodes. We can read them midrashically. The midrash makes Jacob all-good and Esau all-bad. It rereads the biblical text to make it consistent with the highest standards of the moral life. There is much to be said for this approach.

Alternatively we could say that in these cases the end justifies the means. In the case of the birthright, Jacob might have been testing Esau to see if he really cared about it. Since he gave it away so readily, Jacob might be right in concluding that it should go to one who valued it.

In the case of the blessing, Jacob was obeying his mother, who had received a Divine oracle saying that "the older shall serve the younger." Yet the text remains disturbing. Isaac says to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." Esau says, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob [=supplanter]? He has supplanted me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" Such accusations are not levelled against any other biblical hero.

Nor does the story end there. In this week's parasha a similar deceit is practiced on him. After his wedding night, he discovers that he has married Leah, not, as he thought, his beloved Rachel. He complains to Laban. "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?" (Gen. 29:25)

Laban replies: "It is not done in our place to give the younger before the firstborn." (Gen. 29:26) It's hard not to see this as precise measure-for-measure retribution. The younger Jacob pretended to be the older Esau. Now the elder Leah has been disguised as the younger Rachel. A fundamental principle of biblical morality is at work here: As you do, so shall you be done to. Yet the web of deception continues. After Rachel has given birth to Joseph, Jacob wants to return

home. He has been with Laban long enough. Laban urges him to stay and tells him to name his price.

Jacob then embarks on an extraordinary course of action. He tells Laban he wants no wages at all. Let Laban remove every spotted or streaked lamb from the flock, and every streaked or spotted goat. Jacob will then keep, as his hire, any new born spotted or streaked animals.

It is an offer that speaks simultaneously to Laban's greed and his ignorance. He seems to be getting Jacob's labour for almost nothing. He is demanding no wages. And the chance of unspotted animals giving birth to spotted offspring seems remote.

Jacob knows better. In charge of the flocks he goes through an elaborate procedure involving peeled branches of poplar, almond and plane trees, which he places with their drinking water. The result is that they do in fact produce streaked and spotted offspring.

How this happened has intrigued not only the commentators-who mostly assume that it was a miracle, G-d's way of assuring Jacob's welfare- but also scientists. Some argue that Jacob must have had an understanding of genetics. Two unspotted sheep can produce spotted offspring. Jacob had doubtless noticed this in his many years of tending Laban's flocks.

Others have suggested that prenatal nutrition can have an epigenetic effect- that is, it can cause a certain gene to be expressed which might not have been otherwise. Had the peeled branches of poplar, almond and plane trees been added to the water the sheep drank, they might have affected the Agouti gene that determines the colour of fur in sheep and mice. (Joshua Backon, "Jacob and the spotted sheep: the role of prenatal nutrition on epigenetics of fur color," Jewish Bible Quarterly, Vol. 36, No.4, 2008)

However it happened, the result was dramatic. Jacob became rich: "In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys." (Gen. 30:43)

Inevitably, Laban and his sons felt cheated. Jacob sensed their displeasure, and-having taken counsel with his wives and being advised to leave by G-d himself-departs while Laban is away sheep-shearing. Laban eventually discovers that Jacob has left, and pursues him for seven days, catching up with him in the mountains of Gilead.

The text is fraught with accusation and counteraccusation. Laban and Jacob both feel cheated.

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They both believe that the flocks and herds are rightfully theirs. They both regard themselves as the victim of the other's deceitfulness. The end result is that Jacob finds himself forced to run away from Laban as he was earlier forced to run away from Esau, in both cases in fear of his life.

So the question returns. What kind of man was Jacob? He seems anything but an ish tam, a straightforward man. And surely this is not the way for a religious role model to behave-in such a way that first his father, then his brother, then his father-in-law, accuse him of deceit. What kind of story is the Torah telling us in the way it narrates the life of Jacob?

One way of approaching an answer is to look at a specific character- often a hare, or in African-American tradition, "Brer rabbit"-in the folktales of oppressed people. Henry Louis Gates, the American literary critic, has argued that such figures represent "the creative way the slave community responded to the oppressor's failure to address them as human beings created in the image of G-d." They have "a fragile body but a deceptively strong mind." Using their intelligence to outwit their stronger opponents, they are able to deconstruct and subvert, in small ways, the hierarchy of dominance favouring the rich and the strong. They represent the momentary freedom of the unfree, a protest against the random injustices of the world. (Henry Louis Gates, Black literature and literary theory, New York, Methuen, 1984, 81-104)

That, it seems to me, is what Jacob represents in this, the early phase of his life. He enters the world as the younger of two twins. His brother is strong, ruddy, hairy, a skilful hunter, a man of the open country. He is quiet, a scholar. Then he must confront the fact that his father loves his brother more than him. Then he finds himself at the mercy of Laban, a possessive, exploitative and deceptive figure who takes advantage of his vulnerability. Jacob is the man who-as almost all of us do at some time or other-finds that life is unfair.

What Jacob shows, by his sheer quick-wittedness, is that the strength of the strong can also be their weakness. So it is when Esau comes in exhausted from the hunt, and is willing impetuously to trade his birthright for some soup. So it is when the blind Isaac is prepared to bless the son who will bring him venison to eat. So it is when Laban hears the prospect of getting Jacob's labour for free. Every strength has its Achilles'

heel, its weakness, and this can be used by the weak to gain victory over the strong.

Jacob represents the refusal of the weak to accept the hierarchy created by the strong. His acts are a form of defiance, an insistence on the dignity of the weak (vis-a-vis Esau), the less loved (by Isaac), and the refugee (in Laban's house). In this sense he is one element of what, historically, it has been like to be a Jew.

But the Jacob we see in these chapters is not the figure whom, ultimately, we are called on to emulate. We can see why. Jacob wins his battles with Esau and Laban but only at the cost of eventually having to flee in fear of his life. Quick-wittedness is only a temporary solution.

It is only later, after his wrestling match with the angel, that he receives a new name-that is, a new identity-as Israel, "because you have struggled with G-d and with men and have overcome." As Israel he is unafraid to contend with people face-to-face. He no longer needs to outwit them by clever but ultimately futile stratagems. His children will eventually become the people whose dignity lies in the unbreakable covenant they make with G-d.

Yet we can see something of Jacob's early life in one of the most remarkable features of Jewish history. For almost two thousand years Jews were looked down on as pariahs, yet they refused to internalise that image, just as Jacob refused to accept the hierarchies of power or affection that condemned him to be a mere second-best. They, like Jacob, relied not on physical strength or material wealth but on qualities of the mind. In the end, though, Jacob must become Israel. For it is not the quick-witted victor but the hero of moral courage who stands tall in the eyes of humanity and G-d. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and [torah.org](http://torah.org)

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva, and he went to Charan" (Beraishis 28:10). Rashi tells us that the Torah says Yaakov "went out from Be'er Sheva" (rather than just stating that he went to Charan) to teach us that a righteous person leaving a city makes an impression: "For when a righteous person is in a city, he is its glory, he is its splendor and he is its beauty; when the righteous person leaves, its glory is gone, its splendor is gone and its beauty is gone." The Midrash that Rashi is based on (Beraishis Rabbah 68:6) adds that this lesson is taught specifically when Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, and not when Avraham or Yitzchok left a city, because when Yaakov left two righteous people were still in the city (Yitzchok and Rivka), yet Yaakov leaving left an impression, and the "glory, splendor and beauty" of the city were no longer the same.

It is not clear, though, that Yitzchok and Rivka were in Be'er Sheva when they told Yaakov to go to Charan to find a wife. Many (if not most) assume that they were in Chevron (which was their primary residence, see 35:27), meaning that Yaakov should have left from Chevron, not from Be'er Sheva. The Midrash immediately preceding the one quoted by Rashi also addresses why the Torah tells us that "Yaakov left from Be'er Sheva" if it had already told us that he listened to his parents (and left for Padan Aram, where Charan was), explaining that Yaakov went to Be'er Sheva to ask G-d's permission before leaving the Holy Land. Why did he go to Be'er Sheva rather than asking G-d in Chevron? Because when Yitzchok wanted to go down to Egypt (26:1-3), it was in (or near) Be'er Sheva that G-d told him not to. Therefore, Yaakov went to Be'er Sheva to ask G-d if it was okay for him to leave (or possibly to see if G-d would instruct him not to). Once he was told he could go (or not told that he couldn't), Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan. (See Ramban on 28:17, where he discusses the Midrashim about the location of the different parts of the ladder in Yaakov's dream. According to Ramban, one of the opinions in the Midrash is that Yaakov had his dream in Be'er Sheva. This dream included G-d promising that He would be with Yaakov wherever he goes (28:15), until he returns home, i.e. the permission to leave the Holy Land that Yaakov was seeking.)

Chazal tell us that Yaakov spent 14 years studying in the "Yeshiva of Ever" before going to Charan (see Rashi on 28:9). According to Sefer Hayashar, these 14 years occurred after Yaakov received the blessings but before his parents told him to go to Charan. Most, however, understand these 14 years to have taken place after Yaakov was told to go. According to Maharsha (Megila 17a) this Yeshiva was located in Be'er Sheva. [Others say it was located elsewhere. Shem being Malki Tzedek and living in Yerushalayim indicates that his Yeshiva was there; see also Turay Even on Megila 16b, who says it was outside the Holy Land, where Shem was from, in the "east".] It is possible that spending time in Be'er Sheva in Ever's Yeshiva is what the Midrash refers to when it says that Yaakov went to Be'er Sheva to get permission to leave, as being immersed in his studies could easily lead to "giluy Shechina," whereby G-d would communicate His wishes to Yaakov.

If Yaakov left Chevron to go to Yeshiva in Be'er Sheva before going to Charan, or if he went to Be'er Sheva to get G-d's permission to leave before going to Charan, it would seem that the Torah had to tell us where Yaakov left from so that we would know that it wasn't from Chevron, even though that's where his parents were (and where Yitzchok gave him the blessings). Even if his parents were in Be'er Sheva (the most recent location given for their residence, see 26:33), since we might have thought (as some do) that his parents were living in Chevron, the Torah could be

telling us that they were still in Be'er Sheva (and not in Chevron), and that it was from there that Yaakov started his journey to Charan.

Nevertheless, the need to tell us where Yaakov left from doesn't preclude learning that the righteous are the "glory, splendor and beauty" of a city. Although most commentators understand this Midrash to be arguing with the previous Midrash, which says that Yaakov went to Be'er Sheva in order to get G-d's permission, this would seem to be based on the lesson also being that a city's "glory, splendor and beauty" is affected even when there are other righteous people still in the city. If Yitzchok and Rivka were in the city Yaakov left from, they must have also been in Be'er Sheva, whereas the previous Midrash implied that they were in Chevron. Rashi doesn't include this aspect of the lesson, perhaps in order to avoid the implication that we can't learn the larger lesson of the righteous being a city's "glory, splendor and beauty" if Yitzchok and Rivka were in Chevron and Yaakov left from Be'er Sheva. [It should be noted that the version of the Midrash quoted by Midrash Hagadol doesn't refer to the "glory, splendor and beauty" of a city, but a country. Even if Yitzchok and Rivka were in Chevron, they were all in the same country, with Yaakov's "departing" the country affecting it even though other righteous people were still there. If how a country is affected is under discussion rather than how a city is affected (both are likely true), the other options to learn this lesson would be when Avraham left Charan, when he went down to Egypt, or when he returned from Egypt (but not from Yitzchok, since he never left the country), or when Rivka left Charan. We would learn that a country is affected when one righteous person leaves even if other righteous people remain, as Yaakov's leaving Canaan made an impact even though Yitzchok and Rivka remained there.]

Maharal is among the commentators who point out that the lesson Rashi teaches us is not affected by where Yaakov left from; it is learned from the way his leaving is described. The Torah could have said "and Yaakov went from Be'er Sheva to Charan." Instead, the same information is relayed using two clauses; first we are told that Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, then we are told that he went to Charan. The question Rashi poses is not why we are told where Yaakov left from, but why we are told that he left (rather than just saying that he went). The Midrash also only discusses the Torah's use of the word "and he went," not why it included where he left from. Where Yaakov was when he started his journey is significant, whether because it means he didn't leave straight from Chevron or because it means that Yitzchok and Rivka hadn't yet moved to Chevron. Nevertheless, the lesson about the "glory, splendor and beauty" of a city (and/or country) being impacted by the departure of a righteous person is learned from Yaakov "leaving," not from where he left. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

**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 ©2010 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he story of our father Yaakov, as portrayed in this week's parsha, is certainly the harbinger of all of the Jewish story in the long centuries of our exile and dispersion. Yaakov arrives penniless and persecuted—a survivor from the ravages of the enmity and sword of Eisav. He is subjected to further humiliation and discrimination in the house of his erstwhile father-in-law and employer Lavan who exploits his talents and labor to the fullest.

In spite of this unfair treatment, Yaakov prospers and builds a family and future for himself. Yaakov's success in the face of overwhelmingly negative circumstances only enrages Lavan and his sons and Yaakov is eventually forced to flee and return to the Land of Israel. Here, he will again encounter enmity and great challenges to the survival of his family and himself.

Through all of this tumult and danger Yaakov perseveres and succeeds in building a family that will develop into an eternal and holy nation. And this is pretty much the story of the Jewish people over its over three millennia of existence. No other people or group of immigrants has ever done so much for its host nation as have the Jews. Yet, in the main, their efforts and achievements have been unrewarded if not even resented. This phenomenon of ingratitude is Lavan's inheritance bequeathed in full measure to the non-Jewish world generally. The Jew may be elevated, exploited, rewarded or persecuted but rarely if ever is he truly appreciated. The world has a mental block against truly appreciating the role of the Jew in the progress of civilization. And in our current world, that mental block has been extended to focus mainly on the Jewish state of Israel.

The secret of Yaakov's ability to overcome Lavan, and to succeed in preserving the heritage of Avaraham and Yitzchak, lies in his constant recollection of the great dream that he dreamt at the beginning of his sojourn in exile. God's presence in the house of Yaakov was a palpable one. He always felt God's presence over him and thus his vision of the long game that he was to play triumphed over the near sighted short game that Lavan always played. Yaakov, who is aware and confident in God's promise that "I will be with you," realizes that reversals and even tragedies are still only temporary events in the march of Jewish history.

It is the constant recollection of his great vision and dream that fuels Yaakov's strength and sense of purpose. Lavan's vision from Heaven is merely a

warning not to further harm Yaakov. But he lacks grander visions- no ladders that can ascend heavenward and no sense of eternity. In this respect Lavan and Eisav resemble each other acutely. They are all about "now"-the additional pot of lentils and labor that can be squeezed out of the weak and defenseless with no thought about the ultimate future and the consequences of their behavior. Yaakov states that "tomorrow I will come into my reward"-Jews are concerned about their ultimate tomorrow and not just their today. He who is concerned about tomorrow is also successful today. © 2010 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 DANIEL TRAVIS

## Integrity

“**S**himon and Levi are a pair; instruments of violence are their wares.” (Bereshith 49:5)

Yaakov criticized Shimon and Levi's violent behavior; he also condemned them for having copied Esav's behavior. (Rashi on Bereshith 49:5) If we look objectively at our own behavior, we will see that much of it is mimicry of the behavior of others, and is not really our own at all. The Torah encourages a person to find his own individual path, and does not view imitation of the behavior of others in a favorable light. (Commentary of Reb Yerucham [from Mir Yeshivah]) In Parshath Bereshith, the Torah says, "Kayin brought some of his crops as an offering to the Almighty. Hevel also offered some of the firstborn of the flock, from the fattest ones...When they happened to be in the field, Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him." (Bereshith 4:3-8) If mitzvot have the power to protect one from danger, why didn't Hevel's fine offering to God protect him from Kayin's jealousy? Since he had merely copied the idea from Kayin, Hevel's offering was not powerful enough of a mitzvah to protect him from death. (Maharal, Derashah, Shabbath Shuvah)

When we hear inspiring stories about great Torah personalities, it is very commendable for us to think about their ideas and behavior, and to try to incorporate their strengths into our own lives. However, since we don't necessarily have the same strengths, rather than trying to imitate their behavior, it is preferable that we take from them whatever we can use to enhance our own individual avodah (spiritual work).

Lot, for instance, risked his life to fulfill the mitzvah of hosting guests, but he was saved from the destruction of Sodom for an altogether different reason. When Avraham said that Sarah was his sister, Lot did not reveal to the Egyptians that Sarah was Avraham's wife when they traveled to Egypt. (Bereshith Rabbah 51:8) Lot earned great merit when he kept Avraham's

secret, for he did so of his own accord, whereas the idea of hosting guests had been ingrained in him while he lived in Avraham's house; performing that mitzvah was not a product of his own initiative. Thus, although he had risked his life for the mitzvah, it was not considered as great a deed as was his keeping silent in Egypt. (Netziv)

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach used to daven at the Kotel in the Old City of Jerusalem every motza'ei Shabbath. He attended a minyan that was led by a particular tzaddik. When the tzaddik passed away, Reb Shlomo Zalman stopped attending that minyan. Asked why he discontinued his motza'ei Shabbath custom, he responded that the tzaddik who had organized the minyan had a special style of prayer that had been very moving. When he passed away, the person who took over the minyan tried to imitate his style. Since his imitation was merely superficial, Reb Shlomo Zalman felt that his prayers constituted sheker. He so despised any hint of sheker that he could no longer bring himself to attend that minyan. (Pe'er HaDor) © 2010 Rabbi D. Travis & Project Genesis, Inc.

### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

## Haftorah

**T**his 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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#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

**O**n his way to Choron, Yaacov establishes the cornerstone of the House of Yisrael. "He took from the stones of the place and put them near his head" [Bereishit 28:11]. But then it is written, "And he took the stone" [28:18], in the singular. "Rabbi Yehuda said, this teaches us that all the stones in the area gathered in one place, and each one demanded that the righteous man put his head on it. We have been taught, they were all combined into one stone." [Chulin 91].

The simplistic approach is that unity and peace will appear when everybody thinks and acts identically. But this is not true—a variety of outlooks enriches the nation, on condition that everybody is striving for the same goal. "Any fast day which does not include the sinners of Bnei Yisrael is not a proper fast day. As we see, the 'chelbona,' which has a bad smell, is listed as one of the ingredients of the holy incense." [Keritut 10b]. Even the chelbona has a role to play which cannot be fulfilled by anything else.

Our sages expressed this idea by comparing Bnei Yisrael to a grapevine. The clusters of grapes are the Torah scholars and the leaves are the simple folks... The following was sent from Eretz Yisrael: The clusters should pray for the leaves, because without the leaves the clusters would not be able to exist (because the leaves protect the fruits from the sun and the wind). (Chulin 92a). There are different strengths and

characteristics within the nation of Yisrael, and everything is combined into a single organism. The Torah scholars who stand at the top of the pyramid must never disparage the leaves—the scientists, the farmers, the soldiers, and so on. Without these other people, the scholars would not be able to exist.

"The seven lamps should be lit towards the face of the Menorah" [Bamidbar 8:2]. The Sforno explains that the three lamps on the right are symbols of those who are involved in eternal matters and the three lamps on the left are symbols of those involved in temporary life. When all the different people turn towards a single goal, it can be said that all seven lamps are lit up. "As is written, 'If not for the leaves, the grapes would not exist' [Chulin 92a] -- everybody should try to satisfy the will of G-d in such a way that His intentions will be fulfilled by all of the people as a group."

When Yaacov blesses the tribes, he talks to each one in a way that is unique and that is fitting for their character. The Torah concludes, "And he blessed them, each man with their appropriate blessings" [Bereishit 49:28]. Rashi notes that the verse is problematic, it should have read "each man with his appropriate blessing"—in the singular. The answer is that when everybody is linked together by a common goal, every person absorbs characteristics from the others, and thus all the traits can be found in all the men.

A problem arises when every stone insists that it should be the place where the righteous man rests his head, and when every tribe thinks that it is the main one and refuses to acknowledge the value and the need for any of the others. "Rabbi Yehuda said, he took twelve stones. This is what he said: The Almighty decreed that there will be twelve tribes. Avraham did not establish them, Yitzchak did not establish them. As for me—if these combine with each other I will know that I will be the founder of twelve tribes. Since they joined together with each other, Yaacov knew that he would establish the twelve tribes." [Devarim Rabba 68].

"It is a bad omen for a political party to think that it is the only source of all wisdom and honesty and that everything else is vanity and a spirit of evil." [Rav Kook, Igrot Harei'ah, volume 1, page 17].

#### RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

## Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Jacob took fresh rods of poplar laying bare the white of the rods" (Genesis 30:37). This week's biblical portion includes a fascinating incident in which our father Jacob outwits his scheming uncle Laban, using poplar rods to influence the color of the flocks and to recover his lost wages. The story is puzzling to us since it doesn't seem to correspond with modern scientific thought. I would like to offer an interpretation which will explain the story as a metaphor for what transpired within Jacob from the moment he

received his father's blessings until the end of his sojourn with his uncle.

Jacob leaves his ancestral home in Israel to escape from his brother Esau and find a wife. He travels to his mother's family in Aram Naharayim (Syria), where he becomes the victim of several deceptions perpetrated by his uncle Laban. First, he is tricked into marrying Leah instead of his beloved Rachel. Then, he finds himself forced to work for 14 years as an unpaid laborer in order to pay off the double dowry. Somehow, Jacob manages to adapt to this difficult life: "So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:20). Jacob looks after the flocks, continuing to draw his subsistence wage, while Laban becomes increasingly wealthy. As time goes on, Jacob settles into this routine, raising a family and working for his uncle. But Jacob's willingness to live in exile under these conditions comes to an abrupt end when his beloved wife Rachel gives birth to her firstborn son, Joseph. Jacob believes that this most-favored son must be brought up in the Promised Land, and in a healthier moral environment. He realizes that the time has come for him to bring his family home (Gen. 30:25).

Jacob's imminent departure threatens his uncle's growing prosperity, so after years of abusing his nephew, Laban is willing to strike any deal that will keep Jacob at his side. Jacob offers a fair pact; he will continue to work as a shepherd, and in return will receive any spotted or speckled lambs and goats that are born. Laban agrees to the deal, but immediately embarks on his next act of deceit; hiding all the spotted and speckled livestock to prevent them from breeding offspring for his nephew. So Jacob is forced to find a way to recuperate the hard-earned wages coming to him. He waits until the mating season, and then he prepares fresh rods of poplar, hazel and chestnut, peeling white streaks in them to lay bare the inner white (lavan) of the rods. Once this is done, he places the rods near the water troughs, so that when the sturdiest flocks come to drink, they face the striped poplar rods, cohabit, and produce young that are striped and speckled. In this way, Jacob recovers the wages that had been denied him and becomes the wealthy owner of prolific livestock (Gen. 30:43).

The reader will immediately be puzzled by the method employed by Jacob. In our times, we have a very different understanding of the way genes are transmitted, so what is the point of this Biblical tale? I would suggest that Jacob's success was not the result of a scientific ruse, but a Divine miracle; God wanted him to leave the foreign land where he had been persecuted, but the Almighty did not want him to depart as an impoverished laborer, cheated of his earnings. Rather, God determined that Jacob would leave "with great wealth" (Gen. 15:13,14).

The story of the poplar rods actually has a deep and significant moral message. The poplar rods are

symbols of Jacob's internal moral and ethical journey. Jacob began his life as "a wholehearted man, a dweller in tents." As his father lay dying, Jacob's mother persuaded him to dress in Esau's garb in order to obtain the birthright, which was rightfully his. This clothing was only external garb - a momentary veneer which enabled him to pose as the wily Esau. But after 22 years of exposure to Laban's deceit, Jacob stood in danger of actually becoming like Laban and Esau. This is the danger of any masquerade and now, as "Jacob peeled white stripes [in the poplar rods - in effect, he peeled away his own outer skin], laying bare the white ['halavan' - the inner Laban] of the shoots [at his own core]" (Gen. 30:37).

Jacob recognized that he was absorbing the inner qualities of Laban and Esau. To become fully worthy of his birthright and bring up his children in the way he wished, he knew that he had to leave his uncle's home, exorcising this evil from within himself. © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**T**his week's Parsha, Vayetzei, relates the beginning of the relationship between Yakov and Rachel. When they first meet (29:11), Yakov cries, Rashi explaining that it's because he didn't have jewelry to give her (among other reasons). Why did he cry over that? Maybe he could have been upset, but sad enough that he cried? Then, after Yakov offers to work for Lavan for seven years in exchange for Rachel (although the custom was for the father to pay the son-in-law). Why would he do that? Also, the Passuk says that those seven years were like a few days to him (29:20). If he wanted to marry Rachel, wouldn't waiting have felt like much longer than seven years?

Rabbi Zweig answers these questions beautifully. He explains that the foundation for any relationship, and especially marriage, is respect, making them feel good about themselves. But how does one accomplish this? By buying the person items? Giving someone something they need only diminishes their self-respect (however minimally) because they are now indebted to you. No, the only items you can give a woman that totally for her benefit is jewelry. Yakov cried because he didn't have the jewelry to give her, and wanted to convey that to Rachel so badly that he was willing, and indeed insisted, on working for seven years to "earn" Rachel's hand in marriage. Each day of those seven years made Rachel feel so wanted and honored that he was willing to do that for her, that the years felt like days. With this kind of respect and attitude, it's no wonder that he was the most successful of our forefathers, and hopefully a role model for us dealing with our spouses, parents and even children with the respect they deserve. © 2010 *Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.*