

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It is one of the great visions of the Torah. Jacob, alone at night, fleeing from the wrath of Esau, lies down to rest, and sees not a nightmare of fear but an epiphany: He came to a certain place [vayifga bamakom] and stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream. He saw a ladder resting on the earth, with its top reaching heaven. G-d's angels were going up and down on it. There above it stood G-d . . .

Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "G-d is truly in this place, but 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." (28:11-17)

On the basis of this passage the sages said that "Jacob instituted the evening prayer." The inference is based on the word vayifga which can mean not only, "he came to, encountered, happened upon" but also "he prayed, entreated, pleaded" as in Jeremiah 7: 16, "Neither lift up cry nor prayer for them nor make intercession to Me [ve-al tifga bi]."

The sages also understood the word bamakom, "the place" to mean "G-d" (the "place" of the universe). Thus Jacob completed the cycle of daily prayers. Abraham instituted shacharit, the morning prayer, Isaac minchah, the afternoon prayer, and Jacob arvit, the prayer of nighttimes.

This is a striking idea. Though each of the weekday prayers is identical in wording, each bears the character of one of the patriarchs. Abraham represents morning. He is the initiator, the one who introduced a new religious consciousness to the world. With him a day begins. Isaac represents afternoon. There is nothing new about Isaac - no major transition from darkness to light or light to darkness. Many of the incidents in Isaac's life recapitulate those of his father. Famine forces him, as it did Abraham, to go to the land

Mazal Tov to Eliana Rubin on her Batmitzvah in Yerushalayim. May Hashem protect all His Children across the whole of Israel!

With all our love,
Roger, Debra & Ari Rubin

of the Philistines. He re-digs his father's wells. Isaac's is the quiet heroism of continuity. He is a link in the chain of the covenant. He joins one generation to the next. He introduces nothing new into the life of faith, but his life has its own nobility. Isaac is steadfastness, loyalty, the determination to continue. Jacob represents night. He is the man of fear and flight, the man who wrestles with G-d, with others and with himself. Jacob is one who knows the darkness of this world.

There is, however, a difficulty with the idea that Jacob introduced the evening prayer. In a famous episode in the Talmud, Rabbi Joshua takes the view that, unlike shacharit or minchah, the evening prayer is not obligatory (though, as the commentators note, it has become obligatory through the acceptance of generations of Jews). Why, if it was instituted by Jacob, was it not held to carry the same obligation as the prayers of Abraham and Isaac? Tradition offers three answers.

The first is that the view that arvit is non-obligatory according to those who hold that our daily prayers are based, not on the patriarchs but on the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple. There was a morning and afternoon offering but no evening sacrifice. The two views differ precisely on this, that for those who trace prayer to sacrifice, the evening prayer is voluntary, whereas for those who base it on the patriarchs, it is obligatory.

The second is that there is a law that those on a journey (and for three days thereafter) are exempt from prayer. In the days when journeys were hazardous - when travellers were in constant fear of attack by raiders - it was impossible to concentrate. Prayer requires concentration (kavanah). Therefore Jacob was exempt from prayer, and offered up his entreaty not as an obligation but as a voluntary act - and so it remained.

The third is that there is a tradition that, as Jacob was travelling, "the sun set suddenly" - not at its normal time. Jacob had intended to say the afternoon prayer, but found, to his surprise, that night had fallen. Arvit did not become an obligation, since Jacob had not meant to say an evening prayer at all.

There is, however, a more profound explanation. A different linguistic construction is used for each of the three occasions that the sages saw as the basis of prayer. Abraham "rose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before G-d" (19:27). Isaac "went out to meditate [lasuach] in the field towards evening" (24:63). Jacob "met, encountered,

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came across" G-d [vayifga bamakom]. These are different kinds of religious experience.

Abraham initiated the quest for G-d. He was a creative religious personality - the father of all those who set out on a journey of the spirit to an unknown destination, armed only with the trust that those who seek, find. Abraham sought G-d before G-d sought him.

Isaac's prayer is described as a sichah, literally, a conversation or dialogue. There are two parties to a dialogue - one who speaks and one who listens, and having listened, responds. Isaac represents the religious experience as conversation between the word of G-d and the word of mankind.

Jacob's prayer is very different. He does not initiate it. His thoughts are elsewhere - on Esau from whom he is escaping, and on Laban to whom he is travelling. Into this troubled mind comes a vision of G-d and the angels and a stairway connecting earth and heaven. He has done nothing to prepare for it. It is unexpected. Jacob literally "encounters" G-d as we can sometimes encounter a familiar face among a crowd of strangers. This is a meeting brought about by G-d, not man. That is why Jacob's prayer could not be made the basis of a regular obligation. None of us knows when the presence of G-d will suddenly intrude into our lives.

There is an element of the religious life that is beyond conscious control. It comes out of nowhere, when we are least expecting it. If Abraham represents our journey towards G-d, and Isaac our dialogue with G-d, Jacob signifies G-d's encounter with us - unplanned, unscheduled, unexpected; the vision, the voice, the call we can never know in advance but which leaves us transformed. As for Jacob so for us, it feels as if we are waking from a sleep and realising as if for the first time that "G-d was in this place and I did not know it." The place has not changed, but we have. Such an experience can never be made the subject of an obligation. It is not something we do. It is something that happens to us. Vayifga bamakom means that, thinking of other things, we find that we have walked into the presence of G-d.

Such experiences take place, literally or metaphorically, at night. They happen when we are alone, afraid, vulnerable, close to despair. It is then that, when we least expect it, we can find our lives flooded by the radiance of the divine. Suddenly, with a certainty that is unmistakable, we know that we are not alone,

that G-d is there and has been all along but that we were too preoccupied by our own concerns to notice Him. That is how Jacob found G-d - not by his own efforts, like Abraham; not through continuous dialogue, like Isaac; but in the midst of fear and isolation. Jacob, in flight, trips and falls - and finds he has fallen into the waiting arms of G-d. No one who has had this experience, ever forgets it. "Now I know that You were with me all the time but I was looking elsewhere."

That was Jacob's prayer. There are times when we speak and times when we are spoken to. Prayer is not always predictable, a matter of fixed times and daily obligation. It is also an openness, a vulnerability. G-d can take us by surprise, waking us from our sleep, catching us as we fall. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Then he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying 'Jacob has taken all that belonged to our father, and from that which belonged to our father, he amassed all this wealth.'" (Gen 21:1)

This week's Biblical portion of Vayetze records Jacob's flight to the Laban-land of Aram-Naharayim, where he spends 22 years with his wily and deceptive uncle. Jacob fled because his brother Esau was threatening to murder him for deceptively taking the blessings which their father, Isaac, had meant for Esau.

Underlying this fateful act of deception was a tug-of-war between the parents of these rival twins, in which Isaac favored the elder son, Esau, "a man who knows the business of trapping (both aggressive hunting and deceitful ensnaring), a man of the outdoor fields", whereas Rebecca favored the younger Jacob, "a whole-hearted, naïve man, an introspective and scholarly dweller in tents" (Gen 25:27).

The disposition of the patrimony would determine which of the two would be heir to the Abrahamic mission of spreading "ethical monotheism" throughout the world. It seems difficult to understand how Isaac could possibly have favored the aggressive Esau over the more studious Jacob. Moreover, how could Rebecca have orchestrated her son to deceive his father and her husband? An analysis of these narratives will grant us insight into the tensions within contemporary Israel between the Settler Movement and Peace Now, and the dangers of the extremist, vigilante "price tag" attacks against Palestinians.

Abraham's major discovery and legacy was ethical monotheism, the ideals of compassionate righteousness and moral justice promulgated by a G-d of love, morality and peace (Gen 18:18,19, Maimonides, Book of Commandments, Command 3). The qualities involved in fostering such moral excellence and in teaching it to others were far more suited to a "wholehearted dweller in tents" than to an aggressive

"master of entrapment, a hunter in the open fields." Winning over the errant "souls of Haran" certainly did require a more extroverted personality; nevertheless, Rebecca's choice of Jacob for the patrimony seems far more logical than Isaac's choice of Esau!

G-d's first commandment to Abraham is to "get forth" to the land of Canaan, and the major content of G-d's covenant with Abraham is the promised borders of the land of Israel, the basic and eternal inheritance of Abraham's progeny (Gen 12:1,15:16-21). Such a homeland, not indigenous to the founder of the nation requires a strong and committed nation to conquer it and protect it. Even Abraham's high ideals require protection from evil purveyors of terrorism and jihad, as Abraham demonstrated when he successfully defeated the four terrorist nations who captured innocent civilians, including Lot. (Gen 14:14-16).

Isaac, more than the other patriarchs, was inextricably bound up with the land of Israel. He alone never left the land, he alone is Biblically pictured as working the land in addition to herding sheep: "And Isaac planted seeds in that land, and in that year he reaped one hundred fold; thus the Lord blessed him" (Gen 26:12).

Even when Isaac was bestowing the blessings and wished to check if he was indeed dealing with the right son, "Isaac his father said to (Jacob), 'Come close and kiss me, my son.' And he came close and kissed him; and (Isaac) smelled the fragrance of his garments, and he blessed him. He said, 'behold, the fragrance of my son is as the fragrance of the fields which the Lord has blessed.'"

Isaac loved the land of Israel, and so he was naturally drawn to Esau, who was a man of the fields. As I explained in last week's commentary, Isaac had also felt unworthy when he compared himself to his aggressive and militant brother Yishmael.

Isaac never challenges Avimelech, the King of the Philistines, even when he reneges on his treaty with Abraham, even when he stops up the wells which Abraham had dug, even when he pushes Isaac and his household off of the land which is part of the boundaries promised to Abraham's descendants! He is even bullied into signing another treaty with Avimelech, who has the arrogance to say that he had only done good to Isaac since he sent him away in peace (without killing him)." (Gen. 26:15-33)

Isaac believes that the more aggressive and pro-active Esau, rather than the retreating and passive Jacob, must become the standard-bearer of G-d's covenant and mission. Rebecca, on the other hand, believes that the moral qualities, so lacking in the hedonistic Esau, are really cardinal. She recognizes that physical prowess and a degree of aggressiveness are also mandatory, but she also remembers how Jacob grasped onto Esau's heel in a struggle to emerge first from her womb (Rashi, 25:26). Rebecca recognizes that Jacob possesses physical strength of which Isaac is

unaware. She therefore sets out to prove as much, by dressing the moral soul of Jacob in the external garb of Esau.

Rebecca, however, seems to have overreached her goals. She did not realize that sometimes the crafty and grasping hands of Esau can totally drown out the spiritual voice of Jacob. That's what occurs to Jacob in Laban-land; he out-Labans Laban when he utilizes chicanery in an attempt to manipulate the births of spotted, speckled and striped cows.

Peace Now does not sufficiently understand that a terrorist enemy hell-bent on total domination cannot be won over by more and more concessions. But the settler community must also be exceedingly careful lest the aggressive hands of Esau choke their Jewish consciences and mute the Divine Voice within us which forbids the loss of innocent lives. Jacob eventually succeeds in learning this lesson - but only after he becomes Yisrael. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Rashi points out for us in the beginning of this week's parsha (really at the conclusion of last week's parsha) that Yaakov stopped at the study house of Shem and Ever for fourteen years on his flight from Eisav to his uncle's house in Aram. This seems to be a strange stopover at first glance.

How will the instruction that he received in the school established by Shem and Ever contribute to his survival and success at the house of Lavan, the master conniver and duplicitous character? The question is phrased in a more current if blunter fashion in the Talmud itself-of what value are the Torah students to society at large?

To meet Lavan, Yaakov apparently needs to train in different forms of legal, commercial and worldly pursuits. Studying Torah is all well and fine, but how does it prepare one for the real world? This question is heard today in thousands of Jewish households and is a most vexing one. Our world today is one of Lavan compounded.

Where does Torah study and Torah knowledge fit into our milieu, into solving our problems and difficulties, in facing down our enemies? Yet, we find that on the whole Yaakov was quite successful in the house of Lavan. He acquires his wives there and his children are born and raised there. He waxes wealthy in spite of all of Lavan's efforts to cheat him out of his just payments and wages. What courses of study did he take and master in the school of Shem and Ever that enabled him to so succeed?

I have always felt that the answer lies in understanding the place and goals of a Torah education in one's life. Most people, especially those who view it from the outside looking in, think that Torah education is

purely a matter of material covered, of knowledge of facts, of understanding complex and difficult Talmudical concepts and statements. In truth it is all that but it is much more.

A proper Torah education, a study course at the school of Shem and Ever, is meant to impart life-long values and a world view in which to fit the events of one's life in a proper and moral fashion. One has to learn how to deal effectively with Lavan but one has to be very cautious not to become Lavan in the process.

Self-defense and protection of one's own interests is part of the Torah value system. But pleasantness, sensitivity, faith in G-d's justice and promises, and a willingness to tolerate and accommodate others (even unpleasant others) are also a part of the value system of the Torah.

Yaakov enters the school of Shem and Ever to absorb the Torah value system that will allow him to survive Lavan and not to fall spiritually and become Lavan in the form of Yaakov. One of the most difficult tasks that faces Jewish society today is to remain a kingdom of priests and a holy people even when struggling with Lavan, Yishmael and Eisav for our very existence. Our schools have to teach Torah values and not be satisfied merely with knowledge, grades and test scores. © 2012 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As 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 BENJAMIN YUDIN

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The Tzalach cites a popular expression focusing on the significance of time which says, "The past is gone (aiyen) the future is not-yet here (adayin) and the present is like the blink of an eye (k'heref aiyen)".

While this is true most of the time for most people, it does not apply to the Jewish nation. Case in point: while it is understood that the past might affect the future, we have as an integral part of our mesorah (tradition), that the future affects the present and past, as I will demonstrate.

That our rich past positivity influences our future can be seen by the selfless actions of Rachel Imeinu. The Talmud (Yevamos 64A) teaches that our matriarchs were barren because Hashem desired their prayers. Deep heartfelt prayers create a stronger bond and connection between the petitioner and the Divine. Thus, when Rachel is granted a child, we are told (30:22) "G-d remembered Rachel, He hearkened to her and He opened her womb". The words "G-d

remembered" are understood by Chazal (Bava Basra 123A) to indicate that Hashem remembered her giving the secret signs shared between her and Yaakov to her sister Leah on the night she was to marry Yaakov in order to spare her sister great humiliation. This incredible act of self-sacrifice, not knowing at the time that she would marry Yaakov a week later, was not only beneficial in her having children, but we are taught in the introduction to Eicha (24) and in Kina (26) of Tisha Ba'av, that the prophet Yirmiyahu awakens the patriarchs and matriarchs to arouse Hashem's mercy to allow the Jewish nation to return to their land and relationship to Hashem. However, none of the Avos are successful until Rachel Imeinu entreats, "I allowed a tzarah (rival) to come into my house (my sister) therefore Hashem you forgive them for bringing the tzarah of idolatry into your home."

The haftarah we read annually on Rosh Hashana from Yeshiyah cites the magnanimity of Rachel (31:15) "So said Hashem: restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your accomplishment- the words of Hashem- and they shall return from the enemies' land". The "accomplishment" is understood by Rashi to be her sharing the signs with her sister. The future redemption of Klal Yisroel is anchored in her rich meritorious past.

In addition, the medrash at the beginning of Chayei Sarah (Berashis Raba 58:3) teaches that Rabbi Akiva was sitting and teaching and the people were dozing; in order to arouse them he shared the following: "Why was Queen Esther privileged to rule over 127 provinces, because her great-grandmother Sarah lived for 127 years". This was more than a pedagogic tactic. The nation at the time of Roman persecution was giving up hope and faith. In order to ignite their spirits Rabbi Akiva told them that they possess in their arsenal an invaluable commodity, perhaps bigger and greater than themselves, namely the merit of their ancestors. Thus the deposit that Sarah made through her noble life in the Divine Bank of Israel accrued dividends for her offspring for many generations to come. The past unites with the future.

The Jewish nation is unique in that the future as well effects and influences the present past. The medrash (Ibid 63 :2) on the opening verse of parshas Toldos teaches based upon Yeshiyah (29:22) that Jacob redeemed Avraham. The medrash understands this to mean that Avraham Avinu was miraculously spared the inferno of Ur Kasdim in the merit of his grandson Yaakov. (The Sfas Emes understands that since Avraham was not yet circumcised when he was thrown into the furnace, he did not yet have enough of his own merit to survive.) Moreover, the medrash in parshas Noach on the challenging verse (8:21) that follows Noach's bringing offerings after the flood states that, "Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma, and Hashem said in His heart: 'I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man, since the imagery of

man's heart is evil from his youth nor will I again continue to smite every living being, as I have done". What does it mean that He smelled-Hashem is incorporeal!? The medrash (ibid 34:9) understands this to mean that He saw the heroism and self-sacrifice of Chananya, Mishael, and Azaria being thrown by Nebuchadnezzar into the furnace. The future sterling charterer of these righteous, courageous, young men was beneficial to prior generations.

Chanukah is rapidly approaching. The second blessing we recite prior to lighting the menorah is that He performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time. The last phrase, at this time, is usually understood to pinpoint the time of the year. However, in keeping with our theme, it can also be understood to mean He performed miracles for our ancestors that they might not have been worthy of, but Hashem looked to the future (bazman ha'zeh-at this time) and in our merit, and that of subsequent generations, He performed miracles for them.

The exciting lesson derived from above is that every chaya (Israeli soldier) is accompanied by 3,000 years of Jewish history and a glorious future of Torah and mitzvos to protect him. In addition, Hashem gave the land of Israel to the Jewish nation on condition we are faithful to His laws (Tehillim 105:44-45). Our personal rededication to Torah and mitzvos is another real way we can help our soldiers. © 2012 Rabbi B. Yudin and The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**T**here were three [people] for whom the land became shortened: Eliezer the servant of Avraham and Yaakov our [fore]father and Avishai the son of Tz'ruya" (Sanhedrin 95a). The Talmud continues by explaining when this miracle happened for Yaakov: When he got to Charan he realized that he hadn't stopped to pray where his father and grandfather had prayed (Mt. Moriah in Y'rushalayim, the eventual home of the Temple). He therefore decided to go back, whereupon the distance "shortened," and he immediately reached his destination.

One would have expected all three cases of the land "shortening" to follow a similar form. When Eliezer left from Chevron to find a wife for Yitzchok in Charan, it took him one day to get there (see Rashi on B'raishis 24:42), not the usual 17 days (Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer 16). When Avishai went to the land of the P'lishtim to save Dovid from Gulias' brother (Sh'muel II 21:15-17), his trip also went much more quickly than the normal travel time. Therefore, if the three miracles were to be consistent, Yaakov's trip from Charan to Y'rushalayim would have also taken him less time than projected (which is how Ramban-and others-understand it). Rashi (B'raishis 28:17), however, explains it differently. Rather

than just the travel time being shorter, Mt. Moriah itself "jumped" and relocated to the city of Luz. Even though Charan didn't "jump" to Chevron for Eliezer, and the land of the P'lishtim didn't pick up and move to where Avishai was, Yaakov's destination was transferred to a place closer to him. [Rashi likely changed the explanation of how the trip became shorter in order to answer several inconsistencies in the Midrashim, e.g. Yaakov sleeping in the place where the Temple would eventually be built even though he was in Luz, which is not Y'rushalayim; if Mt. Moriah had relocated to Luz, both could be true.] Why G-d used this method to shorten Yaakov's trip rather than the more straightforward method He used with Eliezer and would eventually use with Avishai? Wouldn't it be more consistent for all three "shortenings" to use the same mechanism of getting the traveler there faster? Why move the mountain to Yaakov rather than Yaakov to the mountain?

The Brisker Rav asks why G-d shortened Yaakov's trip from Charan to Mt. Moriah, but not his initial trip to Charan from B'er Sheva (or from wherever Shem and Eiver's "Yeshiva" was, since he was learning there before departing for Charan, see Rashi on 28:9; see also the third paragraph of <http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-vayaytzay-5771>). He answers that Yaakov's trip to Charan was an actual mitzvah, as his parents had told him to go there (to find a wife and to escape from Eisav), while his trip to Mt. Moriah was only preparation for a mitzvah (praying to G-d), not a mitzvah in and of itself. [See Rinas Yitzchok II for a discussion of why the trip itself was a mitzvah, rather than the mitzvah being to just get there. In short, since Rivkah had told Yaakov to flee from Eisav, every step further away from him fulfilled her wishes.] A miraculous shortening of the trip, the Brisker Rav says, is not possible if the trip itself fulfills a mitzvah, as that would mean losing the mitzvah each additional step accomplishes. Getting to Mt. Moriah, on the other hand, could be shortened, as the trip itself wasn't a mitzvah. He adds that this is why G-d didn't shorten Avraham's trip from Charan to Canaan (G-d's commandment was to "go there," not "when you go there, do the following;" see Rinas Yitzchok I for a further discussion), and why, when Yaakov gets up to return to Charan, it says, "and he lifted his legs and he went" (29:1), as he was resuming the fulfillment of his parents' commandment and would have to go without any "shortening of the trip."

We see two things from this Brisker Rav: (a) G-d will not shorten a trip if it takes away someone's actual mitzvah; and (b) even the second trip Yaakov took to Charan (as he had been there, came back to pray, and then went back) was considered fulfilling the mitzvah of listening to his parents. However, since Mt. Moriah had moved closer to Charan, that second trip (to Charan) was shorter than it normally was. Had Mt. Moriah stayed where it was and Yaakov's travel time

from Charan to the mountain been shortened, then the trip from Mt. Moriah back to Charan would have taken as many steps as it usually does-as long as G-d didn't shorten that trip too, which He wouldn't have done, since it was a mitzvah. But now that Mt. Moriah had "jumped" closer to Yaakov, didn't G-d's miracle shorten Yaakov's 2nd mitzvah-trip? [It is certainly possible that the Brisker Rav is working within Ramban's approach, not Rashi's; our discussion is regarding Rashi's approach, which should still work within the Brisker Rav's parameters.]

Although if Mt. Moriah "jumped" back to where it belonged while Yaakov was sleeping it would allow his journey from Mt. Moriah to Charan to be the normal distance, Yaakov is still in Beis El/Luz when he wakes up (28:19), so nothing had changed overnight. If anything, the fact that G-d didn't move Mt. Moriah back to Y'rushalayim until after Yaakov resumed his trip to Charan indicates that either there was no mitzvah involved, or that G-d would shorten a trip that is a mitzvah (unless the mountain couldn't "jump" while Yaakov was there, even while he was sleeping).

There are two differences between Yaakov's initial trip to Charan and his trip to Charan after his "ladder dream." First of all, had G-d shortened the first trip, it would mean directly impacting the fulfillment of Yaakov's mitzvah to go to Charan. Bringing Mt. Moriah to Yaakov, on the other hand, was done in order to shorten his non-mitzvah trip. The fact that it also shortened his second mitzvah trip was an indirect consequence of G-d shortening his non-mitzvah trip, it wasn't the reason G-d shortened the distance between Mt. Moriah and Charan. Secondly, the trip from B'er Sheva to Charan ended up being much longer than it had to be. Had Yaakov stopped at Mt. Moriah on his way to Charan-rather than doubling back to Mt. Moriah after reaching Charan, then returning to Charan-the length of his "mitzvah trip" would have been no longer (and likely shorter) than his trip was even after G-d had miraculously shortened it for him. In the end, by moving Mt. Moriah towards Charan, G-d not only shortened Yaakov's non-mitzvah trip, but He (indirectly) caused his total mileage traveled to be closer to what he would have traveled had he gone straight to Mt. Moriah. Whereas shortening Yaakov's first trip would have diminished Yaakov's total mitzvah mileage no matter what, shortening the second trip only diminished the added mileage caused by Yaakov not stopping at Mt. Moriah in the first place.

Had G-d left Mt. Moriah where it was and shortened Yaakov's travel time in a manner consistent with the other "shortenings," his trip from Y'rushalayim to Charan would have had to be the full distance. After all, his parents had told him to go there, and G-d would not miraculously shorten the distance if by doing so Yaakov would lose out on fulfilling a mitzvah. However, if Mt. Moriah is moved to Luz, then Yaakov is much closer to Charan. [See Maharsha on Chullin 91b, who

says that the "Bais El" that was Luz mentioned here is on the border of the Land of Israel, and is not the one near the city of Ai. The Maharal-in Gur Aryeh- says that G-d could not have moved Mt. Moriah outside the Land of Israel, so this would have been the closest it could get to Charan.] Now, when Yaakov has to return to Charan on his own, his trip is automatically much shorter, without any miracles being done to specifically shorten his trip! Instead of walking all the way from Y'rushalyim to Charan, he just has to cross the border into Syria (where Charan is). True, G-d indirectly caused this second mitzvah-trip to be shorter, but the "shortening" wasn't done in order to shorten that trip. Once Yaakov indirectly caused the need for a second mitzvah trip, G-d indirectly caused it to be shorter than it would have been by shorting his non-mitzvah trip, without taking away any of the mitzvah-steps that were initially necessary. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

All For the One

“**H**e took from the stones of the place which he had set around his head, and lay down in that place.”

Rashi: "The stones began arguing among themselves. One said, 'The tzadik should rest his head on me,' and another said, 'Upon me [he should rest].' Immediately, HKBH turned them into one stone, as it is stated, 'He took the stone that he had placed under his head.'" (Bereishis 28:18)

Do stones argue? Many people object to this maamar Chazal because of this question. If they would stop and think about what it was that they disputed, they might also understand how there could be a dispute between inanimate rocks.

"They will sanctify the Holy One of Yaakov." (Yeshaya 29:23) This is one of many examples linking Yaakov with kedushah. Bottom line: Yaakov represents the embodiment of holiness. The Torah describes Yaakov's years of involvement with earthly things. Despite all that effort, he remained aloof and above all of that, never mirroring himself in the world of things. He transcended all of the physical in which he toiled; by transcending it, by resisting its spell, by remaining independent of it and its restrictions he effectively became master of it, just as Hashem is Master of the upper worlds. Yaakov could use all of it, without become enslaved to it.

Our world is a place of many things and many distinctions. We do not observe any oneness; that is all hidden. Everything we deal with seems to be composed of smaller elements; those too can be further subdivided. This is a world of the many-of the multiplication of things, and of their divisions. We detect oneness only in Hashem, in Whom all things are sourced and all things united. It is also only in Hashem that we detect real kedushah, real transcendence.

If Yaakov is linked to kedushah, then he shares these characteristics with Him. Yaakov is a limited refraction of the kedushah and unity of Hashem, as applied to our world of boundaries and limitations. It is for this reason that we are called Bnei Yisrael, rather than Bnei Avrohom or Bnei Yitzchok. As the paragon of kedushah, Yaakov can unite all his children in all generations, just as he united his twelve sons, turning them into a single, common cause. It is to Yaakov that the sons univocally recite the Shma, the proclamation of G-d's Oneness, at the same time telling him, "Just as to you there is only One in your heart, so it is to us." (Pesachim 56A. As the third of the avos, Yaakov is well suited to the role. The number two signifies polarity and difference. With the number three comes the possibility of an intermediate point that pulls in and pulls together the extremes, creating unity where there was previously difference.) To this day, the glue that binds us together as a people is the kedushah of Yaakov.

This, then, is the meaning of the dispute. No one stone could lay greater claim to Yaakov, because he attracted everything in his orbit. All things that related to him, gravitated towards him. There was no room for multiplicity in his personal universe. In the end, because the different stones were all attracted equally to him, they all had to come together and form a single stone. (In particular, it was Yaakov's need to rest his head-the seat of the sechel-on a stone that caused the tension between the stones, and the subsequent resolution. The intellect is the active agent in creating unity. The stones were drawn specifically to it.)

We are not sure whether the stones fused permanently or not. Possibly, their change was fixed and was not reversed. (This should not surprise anyone.) It is also possible that the stones came together during Yaakov's prophetic dream, when he was catapulted to an even higher spiritual level than usual. It is possible that they reverted to their former state when Yaakov reverted to his. It does not really matter how long the stones merged together.

No longer need we object to Chazal attributing understanding to inanimate stones. The stones did not, in fact, contend with each other, each one vying for closeness with the tzadik as a matter of choice. Choice takes understanding, and stones do not possess it. Chazal do not depict a debate between the stones so much as their performing according to their essence. There were many stones; in Yaakov's presence, there was no room for the many, only for unity. Their condition of plurality gave way to oneness, as surely as non-intelligent plants manifest their behavior without having to think about what they are doing. They act according to their nature. Here, it was in the nature of things that the many gave way to the one.

You might object that the behavior of plants is built into the scheme of natural law, while stones never come together. This observation is true, but unnecessarily narrow. Under ordinary conditions,

obeying what we call natural law, stones do not merge. Yaakov, however, transcended the ordinary laws of nature, especially during an episode of prophecy. Not limited by ordinary law, an alternate, higher form of law applied to him. And in that system, all plurality melted away before him. Stones became one.

All this was a consequence of Yaakov's transcendent kedushah. Whatever joined up with him became organically part of him, not just externally related. And it became part of simplicity and unity, which reflected the Unity Above. (Based on Gur Aryeh, Bereishis 28:11 and Chidushei Aggados, Chulin 91B) © 2012 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In this week's Parsha, Vayetzei, 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 G-d.

And then there's us... We have three chances a day to thank G-d for all that we have 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. © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In our parashah, Yaakov Avinu visits the city of Luz. "Luz" also is the name of a human bone which, say our Sages, never decays and from which man's body will be rebuilt at the time of techiyat ha'meitim. This bone takes all its nourishment from the melaveh malkah meal eaten on Motzai Shabbat. Thus, it derived no benefit when Adam ate from the Etz Ha'da'at-since that was not Motzai Shabbat-and it remained unblemished by that sin. As a result, it is not subject to the same mortality as the rest of the human body (see Mishnah Berurah 300:2 & Siddur R' Yaakov Emden).

By sitting down for one additional meal when Shabbat departs, we demonstrate that we are not sending Shabbat away like an unwanted guest; rather, we are accompanying ("melaveh") the queen ("malkah")

respectfully as she leaves. On a deeper level, R' Menachem Man shlita (Yeshivat Ohr Etzion) explains in the name of R' Tzaddok Hakohen Rabinowitz z"l (1823-1900; chassidic rebbe in Lublin, Poland): When Leah gave birth to her third son, she named him "Levi", which shares a root with the word "melaveh." She said (in our parashah--29:30), "This time my husband yilaveh / will become attached to me." Likewise, says R' Tzaddok, by accompanying the Shabbat on her way, we attach the Shabbat to the week ahead.

But where is Shabbat going? R' Tzaddok explains: Shabbat is the point of holiness which is inherent in every week. Hopefully, that point of holiness goes with us as we enter the work week ahead.

R' Man adds in the name of R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935;

Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael): The luz is not only a physical part of the body; there is a spiritual "luz" also. That is the point of pure emunah / faith deep within a person that is never extinguished. It is the essence of every Jew; it is not the many unique interests and influences that shape each person, but that kernel deep within him, which is what enables him to share in both personal and national rebirth. (Le'toamehah Chaim p.228)

"It is in my power to do you all harm, but the G-d of your father addressed me last night, saying, 'Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad.'" (31:29)

We say in the Pesach Haggadah, "Pharaoh decreed only against the males, while Lavan wanted to uproot everything." Where in the Torah do we find that Lavan had such plans?

R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania) answers: There is no hint of this in the Torah. Rather, it is an oral tradition passed down by the Sages. Even Yaakov Avinu was not aware of the extent to which Lavan conspired against him.

He continues: What befell the forefathers foreshadows what will befall their descendants. We, too, are not aware of the extent to which our enemies conspire against us. Even so, just as G-d saved Yaakov, He saves us as well. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim) © 2012 S. Katz and torah.org



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