

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Judaism is supremely a religion of love: three loves. "You shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." And "You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in a strange land." (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, and see Leviticus 19:33-34)

Not only is Judaism a religion of love. It was the first civilisation to place love at the centre of the moral life. C. S. Lewis and others pointed out that all great civilisations contain something like the golden rule: Act toward others as you would wish them to act toward you, (The Abolition of Man, New York, 1947) or in Hillel's negative formulation: Don't do to others what you would hate them to do to you. (Shabbat 31a) This is what games theorists call reciprocal altruism or Tit-for-tat. Some form of this (especially the variant devised by Martin Nowak of Harvard called "generous") has been proven by computer simulation to be the best strategy for the survival of any group. (See for example Martin Nowak and Roger Highfield, Super Cooperators: Altruism, Evolution and Mathematics (or, Why We Need Each Other to Succeed). Melbourne: Text, 2011.)

Judaism is also about justice. Albert Einstein spoke about the "almost fanatical love of justice" that made him thank his lucky stars that he was born a Jew. (The World As I See It, New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.) The only place in the Torah to explain why Abraham was chosen to be the founder of a new faith states, "For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (Gen. 18:19). So why the combination of justice and love? Why is love alone not enough?

Our parsha contains a gripping passage of only a few words that gives us the answer. Recall the background. Jacob, fleeing home, is taking refuge with his uncle Laban. He falls in love with Rachel, Laban's younger daughter. He works for seven years so that he can marry her. The wedding night comes and a deception is practised on him. When he wakes up the next morning he discovers that he has married Rachel's elder sister Leah. Livid, he confronts Laban. Laban replies that "It is not done in our place to marry the younger before the elder." He tells Jacob he can marry

Rachel as well, in return for another seven years work.

We then read, or rather hear, a series of very poignant words. To understand their impact we have to recall that in ancient times until the invention of printing there were few books. Until then most people (other than those standing at the bimah) heard the Torah in the synagogue. They did not see it in print. The phrase *keriat ha-Torah* really means, not reading the Torah but proclaiming it, making it a public declaration. (This has halakhic implications. *Keriat ha-Torah* is, according to most rishonim, a *chovat ha-tsibbur*, a communal rather than an individual obligation, unlike the reading of the Megillah on Purim.)

There is a fundamental difference between reading and hearing in the way we process information. Reading, we can see the entire text -- the sentence, the paragraph -- at one time. Hearing, we cannot. We hear only one word at a time, and we do not know in advance how a sentence or paragraph will end. Some of the most powerful literary effects in an oral culture occur when the opening words of a sentence lead us to expect one ending and instead we encounter another.

These are the words we hear: "And he [Jacob] loved also Rachel" (Gen. 29:30). This is what we expected and hoped for. Jacob now has two wives, sisters, something that will be forbidden in later Jewish law. It is a situation fraught with tension. But our first impression is that all will be well. He loves them both.

That expectation is dashed by the next word, *mi-Leah*, "more than Leah." This is not merely unexpected. It is also grammatically impossible. You cannot have a sentence that says, "X also loved Y more than Z." The "also" and the "more than" contradict one another. This is one of those rare and powerful instances in which the Torah deliberately uses fractured syntax to indicate a fractured relationship. (The classic example is the untranslatable verse in Gen. 4:8, in which Cain kills Abel. The breakdown of words expresses the breakdown of relationship which leads to the breakdown of morality and the first murder.)

Then comes the next phrase and it is shocking. "The Lord saw that Leah was hated." Was Leah hated? No. The previous sentence has just told us she was loved. What then does the Torah mean by "hated"? It means, that is how Leah felt. Yes she was loved, but less than her sister. Leah knew, and had known for seven years, that Jacob was passionately in love with her younger sister Rachel. The Torah says that he

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worked for her for seven years "but they seemed to him like a few days because he was so in love with her."

Leah was not hated. She was less loved. But someone in that situation cannot but feel rejected. The Torah forces us to hear Leah's pain in the names she gives her children. Her first she calls Reuben, saying "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." The second she calls Shimon, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved." The third she called Levi, saying, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me" (Gen. 29:32-35). There is sustained anguish in these words.

We hear the same tone later when Reuben, Leah's firstborn, finds mandrakes in the field. Mandrakes were thought to have aphrodisiac properties, so he gives them to his mother hoping that this will draw his father to her. Rachel, who has been experiencing a different kind of pain, childlessness, sees the mandrakes and asks Leah for them. Leah then says: "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" (Gen. 30:15). The misery is palpable.

Note what has happened. It began with love. It has been about love throughout. Jacob loved Rachel. He loved her at first sight. There is no other love story quite like it in the Torah. Abraham and Sarah are already married by the time we first meet them. Isaac had his wife chosen for him by his father's servant. But Jacob loves. He is more emotional than the other patriarchs. That is the problem. Love unites but it also divides. It leaves the unloved, even the less-loved, feeling rejected, abandoned, forsaken, alone. That is why you cannot build a society, a community or even a family on love alone. There must be justice-as-fairness also.

If we look at the eleven times the word "love," *ahavah*, is mentioned in the book of Genesis we make an extraordinary discovery. Every time love is mentioned, it generates conflict. Isaac loved Esau but Rebekah loved Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, more than his other sons. From this came two of the most fateful sibling rivalries in Jewish history.

Even these pale into insignificance when we reflect on the first time the word love appears in the Torah, in the opening words of the trial of the binding of

Isaac: "Take now your son, your only one, the one you love..." (Gen. 22:2). Rashi, following Midrash, itself inspired by the obvious comparison between the binding of Isaac and the book of Job, says that Satan, the accusing angel, said to G-d when Abraham made a feast to celebrate the weaning of his son: "You see, he loves his child more than you." (Rashi to Genesis 22:1) That according to the Midrash was the reason for the trial, to show that Satan's accusation was untrue.

Judaism is a religion of love. It is so for profound theological reasons. In the world of myth the gods were at worst hostile, at best indifferent to humankind. In contemporary atheism the universe and life exist for no reason whatsoever. We are accidents of matter, the result of blind chance and natural selection. Judaism's approach is the most beautiful I know. We are here because G-d created us in love and forgiveness asking us to love and forgive others. Love, G-d's love, is implicit in our very being.

So many of our texts express that love: the paragraph before the Shema with its talk of "great" and "eternal love." The Shema itself with its command of love. The priestly blessings to be uttered in love. Shir ha-Shirim, The Song of Songs, the great poem of love. Shlomo Albaketz's *Lecha dodi*, "Come, my Beloved," Eliezer Azikri's *Yedid nefesh*, "Beloved of the soul." If you want to live well, love. If you seek to be close to G-d, love. If you want your home to be filled with the light of the Divine presence, love. Love is where G-d lives.

But love is not enough. You cannot build a family, let alone a society, on love alone. For that you need justice also. Love is partial, justice is impartial. Love is particular, justice is universal. Love is for this person not that, but justice is for all. Much of the moral life is generated by this tension between love and justice. It is no accident that this is the theme of many of the narratives of Genesis. Genesis is about people and their relationships while the rest of the Torah is predominantly about society.

Justice without love is harsh. Love without justice is unfair, or so it will seem to the less-loved. Yet to experience both at the same time is virtually impossible. As Niels Bohr, the Nobel prize winning physicist, put it when he discovered that his son had stolen an object from a local shop: he could look at him from the perspective of a judge (justice) and as his father (love), but not both simultaneously.

At the heart of the moral life is a conflict with no simple resolution. There is no general rule to tell us when love is the right reaction and when justice is. In the 1960s the Beatles sang "All you need is love." Would that it were so, but it is not. Let us love, but let us never forget those who feel unloved. They too are people. They too have feelings. They too are in the image of G-d. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And Jacob kissed Rachel, and he lifted up his voice and he wept" (Genesis 29:11) The Bible presents two models for finding one's life partner: the Isaac-Rebekah arranged marriage model, and the romantic Jacob-Rachel model. In both instances, there must be "love" (ahava): The Bible informs us that "Isaac brought [Rebekah] into the tent of Sarah his mother, he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her..." (Genesis 24:67); and in our portion, when Laban asks Jacob what remuneration he wants for his work, the Torah records that "Jacob loved Rachel, and so he said, 'I shall work for you for seven years in exchange for marrying Rachel, your younger daughter'" (Gen. 29:18).

The major difference between these models is that with Isaac and Rebekah, the love came after the marriage, whereas with Jacob and Rachel, love preceded the marriage. In both cases, however, the Bible emphasizes that love is fundamental to relationships.

The Talmud likewise speaks of the "love" component, "It is forbidden for a man to betroth a woman unless he sees [comes to know] her, lest he find in her something unseemly and she becomes distasteful to him; for the Torah teaches, 'You must love your friend like yourself.'" (B.T. Kiddushin 41a); Maimonides rules that the woman also has the right to choose her mate. (Laws of Marriage 19:3).

It is fascinating that Rabbi Yehuda (Judah bar Ezekiel, 220-299 CE) records in the name of Rav that the law of "loving your friend like yourself" applies to husband and wife - perhaps he would maintain that this is the fullest compliance of the command.

This is reminiscent of the magnificent verse regarding the very first married couple, Adam and Eve: "...This time she is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.... Therefore, shall a man leave his father and mother, join together with his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:23, 24) The Ramban (Nahmanides) explains "one flesh" as referring to the act of sexual intercourse which unites both individuals; Rashi interprets it as referring to "the child formed by the two parents." From this perspective, "love" includes the desire to join physically with one's mate as well as to have children with him/her.

Among the seven marital blessings recited under the nuptial canopy and in Grace after Meals for seven days following the wedding, we find the best description I know of a married couple: re'im ahuvim, loving and beloved friends, drawn from Rav's verse.

If we can define love as sexual attraction towards a partner with whom we would wish to continue the Jewish narrative into future generations, "friendship" would suggest a relationship of complete and

unabashed honesty, mutual respect, and commonly held ideals and values.

If all of these criteria are present in a relationship, then I would say the two people are "in love." However, one doesn't just "fall" in love; one must actively work to see that love continues and grows.

Love requires nurturing - giving time every day to the relationship, with a sharing of ideas, emotions and events which make two individuals more and more of a united entity. Each must be encouraged to grow and develop independently, but there must be sufficient sharing to allow both people to grow together as one even as they develop themselves. Hence there must be a "will to love" and to create a stable and lasting family environment (see Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*.) To return to our portion.

We are told that when the fleeing Jacob arrived in the town where his mother's family dwelt, he found shepherds gathering together to lift the boulder from atop the well so that they could give water to their sheep. "But when Jacob saw Rachel, he singlehandedly uncovered the stone from atop the well and gave water to her sheep..." (Gen. 29:10).

The amazing power of love - love at first sight.

Immediately thereafter, the Bible notes "Jacob kissed Rachel and he lifted up his voice and wept."

Why did he weep? A student of mine once suggested that perhaps he wept because he kissed her before they were married, transgressing the prohibition of touching a woman who is not your wife. One of the commentaries suggests that since he kissed her on the hand, it was an act of one relative to another without any erotic content.

But Rashi makes two other suggestions. The first is that Jacob cried because he didn't have any gifts to give her, since Eliphaz the son of Esau had stolen all the gifts that Jacob had brought for his kinspeople.

From here, we see that one should give gifts to one's fiancée and also to one's wife throughout one's marriage.

Everyone wants to know that they are appreciated. The Rambam (Maimonides) rules that every husband should give his wife a gift on every festival. Even though the author Erich Segal wrote, "Love means never having to say you're sorry," I would contend that love means always being the first to say you're sorry and giving frequent gifts.

Rashi's second interpretation is even more poignant. Jacob saw that he wouldn't be buried together with his beloved Rachel, since he would be laid to eternal rest in the "Cave of the Couples" (Ma'arat Hamachpela) and she would be buried in Bethlehem on the road to Efrat.

I interpret this to mean that Jacob saw that in the order of things, towards the end of their lives there would be an enforced separation; usually one partner predeceases the other. And the bitter price that one

pays for loving is the necessity of an ultimate existential separation. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Yaakov faced many difficult challenges in his long and tumultuous life. This week's parsha highlights one of the major challenges that any individual can face – the physical and emotional disconnect from one's family and familiar surroundings. To add to this challenge's complexity, there is the fact that he is forced to live in a very hostile environment.

His work is exploited and unappreciated, his wages and payment uncertain and constantly subject to change and readjustment, and his family life is tense and sometimes even disruptive. In light of all of this, the visionary challenge of expanding on the works of his parents and grandparents in developing a special people, that will lead humanity to connect with its Creator, seems to be almost an insurmountable one.

Yet, Yaakov, who symbolizes truth and Torah in Jewish tradition, never loses sight of his true goal of nation-building and creating unity out of the diversity of a large family and imposingly different personalities. That is what is meant by the truth of Yaakov. He is true to his own identity, refusing to remodel himself after his father-in-law or the general society of Haran.

He is true to his self-identity, his family's traditions and faith. And he remains eternally true to his goal of influencing all of humanity through his family and teachings. There can be no greater expression of truth – consistently living a moral life, and expressing that truth in daily living and so-called "ordinary" behavior.

Throughout Jewish history the major challenge faced by the Jewish people, collectively and individually, has been remaining true to itself. As a small minority forced to exist in a largely hostile world and environment, some of the Jews always attempted to blend in and adopt the majority persona. When living in Haran, then be like Lavan - that was their mantra.

Again, all of Jewish history clearly indicates that this was a faulty, if not even fatal, choice. The only thing that works for the Jewish people, collectively and individually, is being true unto one's self. We are witness today to the havoc wrought by all of the assimilationist trends and movements within the Jewish societies of various countries and cultures over the past two centuries. They were all so progressive and cutting-edge that they have practically conjured themselves into irrelevance and extinction.

There are other movements and ideologies that walk the Jewish street today that have replaced those previously failed ideas and programs. But the test of their longevity and true success remains the same as it always has been – are they true to the tradition and

vision of our father Yaakov. That is the ultimate arbiter of Yaakov's eternal vision. Everything modern soon becomes obsolete, and temporary popularity and faddishness recedes into the ridiculously absurd dustbin of failed ideas. Judaism is not opposed to change and progress. But above all, it is necessary to remain true to one's tradition. ©2014 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

Although 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 (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. © 2008 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 MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Search for Blessings

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1887-1933) was a leader of Polish Jewry in the years before World War II. In

addition to being the chief Rabbi of Lublin, building and maintaining one of the world's largest and most beautiful yeshivos, Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, he was also one of the first Orthodox members of the Polish parliament, the Sejm. He was a courageous leader whose vision and unwavering commitment to Torah values gained him the respect of Jews and gentiles alike.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yaakov knew that to initiate his destiny in the confines of a hostile environment he should proclaim the rules loud and clear. He would not allow himself to be swayed, duped, or connived by even the master of deception and ridicule, Lavan the charlatan. In forging the household that would be the basis for Jewish pride and eternity, Yaakov had to make it clear to his future bride that he too could play hardball. He sent a message of pride and awareness to his descendants. Though this Jew who sat in the tent would enter his new environment with brotherly love, if he needed to, he could just as well be a brother in scorn. © 2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And Yaakov left from B'er Sheva and he went to Charan" (B'reishis 28:10). Even though we were already told -- twice -- that Yaakov left for Charan (28:5 and 28:7), Rashi tells us that when the Torah resumes Yaakov's narrative after it was interrupted by Eisav's marriage (28:9), it resets the scene by repeating this information as an introduction.

However, Rashi had also told us (28:9) that Yaakov spent 14 years in "The House of Eiver," referring to Eiver's Yeshiva, before going to Charan, which complicates the statement that "Yaakov left from B'er Sheva" before he "went to Charan," as he really left for Charan from Eiver's Yeshiva. Although Sefer HaYashar has Yaakov going to Eiver's Yeshiva immediately after receiving Yitzchok's blessing, and being told by his parents to go to Charan only after he returned home from Yeshiva 14 years later, most assume that Yaakov spent the 14 years in Yeshiva after his parents had told him to go to Charan. If so, Yaakov didn't really leave for Charan from B'er Sheva, but from Eiver's Yeshiva. But where was Eiver's Yeshiva?

The Maharsha (M'gila 17a), based on this issue, says that Eiver's Yeshiva must have been located in B'er Sheva itself, so Yaakov really did leave from B'er Sheva. (He suggests that Shem's Yeshiva and Yitzchok's Yeshiva were also in B'er Sheva.) This is backed up by Midrash HaGadol using the 14 years Yaakov spent learning in Eiver's Yeshiva to explain why the Torah tells us again about Yaakov leaving; if his "leaving" specifically refers to leaving Yeshiva after solidifying his learning, and he left from B'er Sheva, the Yeshiva he was studying at must have been in B'er Sheva.

However, if Yaakov was trying to hide from Eisav so that he couldn't kill him (see 27:41-45), it doesn't seem to make sense for him to do so right under his nose -- in B'er Sheva. Nor would Yeshiva -- where Yaakov always hung out (see Rashi on B'reishis 25:27) be a good hiding spot, especially if it was located right around the corner! Even though it's unclear whether Yitzchok was still living in B'er Sheva at the time -- it was his last known residence (26:23-33), but his primary residence was in Chevron (35:27; see <http://tinyurl.com/k33pdt9>) -- if the Yeshiva was right there in B'er Sheva, wouldn't that be the first place Eisav would look?

Midrash Agadah (28:20) tells us that Eisav sent his oldest son, Elifaz, to chase Yaakov down and kill him, but because Elifaz had studied Torah under his grandfather, Yitzchok, and/or under his uncle, Yaakov, he refused to go through with it. Upon asking Yaakov how he could obey his father's command without committing murder, Yaakov gave Elifaz all of his possessions, since a pauper is considered as if he's dead (thereby allowing Elifaz to technically fulfill the orders his father gave him). If Elifaz was able to convince Eisav that Yaakov was "dead," Eisav wouldn't be looking for him anymore, so Yaakov could "hide" in Eiver's Yeshiva in B'er Sheva. A similar Midrash, quoted by Torah Sh'leima (28:97), says the Yeshiva was right next to where Elifaz caught up with Yaakov, so Yaakov was able to go into the Yeshiva right after their encounter. Based on this, it could be suggested that Yaakov only decided to stay in B'er Sheva after

being confident that Eisav wouldn't try to find him anymore.

Moshav Z'kainim (29:1) and Turay Even (M'gila 16b) say that Eiver's Yeshiva was outside the Promised Land, as Eiver's "hometown" was "on the other side of the river," in the "Land of the Eastern Peoples." Rather than learning in Eiver's Yeshiva before leaving for Charan (Charan was also "on the other side of the river" in "the Land of the Eastern Peoples"), after crossing the (Jordan) river, Yaakov went to the Yeshiva, spent 14 years there, and then stayed in the general area by going to Charan. However, the Midrashim that mention Yaakov's "shortened trip" (e.g. Targum Yonasan on 28:10, Sanhedrin 95a/b, Tanchuma 3/8, B'reishis Rabbah 68:8, Pirkay D'Rebbi Eliezer 35) have this trip starting at home (or nearby) and ending in Charan; if Eiver's Yeshiva was past Charan and Yaakov went there first, the Yeshiva would have been the end point of his "shortened" trip, not Charan. [Seder Olam (2) says explicitly that Yaakov hid in Eiver's Yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel.] Therefore, although it is likely that Shem and Eiver originally set up a Yeshiva (or several Yeshivas) in their hometown (see B'reishis Rabbah 52:11), by the time Yaakov learned there, they had moved to Canaan and opened up shop there. As a matter of fact, Yitzchok learned at Shem's Yeshiva (B'reishis Rabbah 16:11 and Targum Yonasan on 22:19), and he never left the Holy Land! [Rivka consulted with Shem at his "house of study" when she was pregnant (Rashi on B'reishis 25:22), and Yaakov frequented the "tent of Shem and the tent of Eiver" (Rashi on 25:27), something that would have been quite inconvenient if they were (still) "on the other side of the river."]

It is possible that even after moving to Eretz Yisroel, the Yeshiva in "the Land of the Eastern Peoples" stayed open, and Yaakov's original intent was to go there to study before going to Charan. After his encounter with Elifaz, Yaakov changed his mind and stayed in the "local" Yeshiva instead, so that he could study under Eiver (Shem had passed away over a decade earlier).

Growing up, I always assumed that Shem's Yeshiva was in Yerushalayim, since he was Malki Tzedek, the "king of Shaleim" (see Rashi on B'reishis 14:18), aka Yerushalayim (see B'reishis Rabbah 56:10). However, it is possible that only Shem had his Yeshiva there, while Eiver (who was Shem's great-grandson) had his own Yeshiva in B'er Sheva. [That they had separate Yeshivas seems evident from the fact that Rashi (25:27) refers to them as separate tents (based on the verse using the plural "tents").] Rivka may have gone to Shem's Yeshiva to ask about her difficult pregnancy because it was closer to Chevron (if that's where they were living at the time) than Eiver's Yeshiva, while Yaakov learned in Shem's Yeshiva when the family was living in Chevron and in Eiver's

Yeshiva when they were in B'er Sheva. It would make sense if after Avraham set up his "kiruv program" in B'er Sheva (see Rashi on 21:33), Eiver, or both Shem and Eiver, moved their Yeshivas from Yerushalayim to B'er Sheva in order to be more readily available to those who, with Avraham's help, had just begun to discover G-d. Either way, if Eiver's Yeshiva was, as the Maharsha suggests, in B'er Sheva, then even though Yaakov left for Charan after spending 14 years studying at Eiver's Yeshiva, it was B'er Sheva that he left from.

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JON ERLBAUM

Edutainment Weekly

This Week's RRR (Relevant Religious Reference): "Do not judge your fellow until you have arrived at his/her place" -- Hillel in Ethics of the Fathers (Avos), 2:5

This Week's SSC (Suitable Secular Citations): "Pay up, Mortimer... We took a perfectly useless psychopath like Valentine, and turned him into a successful executive. And during the same time, we turned an honest, hard-working man into a violently deranged, would-be killer!" -- Randolph Duke, collecting his \$1 debt from Brother Mortimer, as Valentine (Eddie Murphy) listens with wide-eyed shock from the bathroom stall in TRADING PLACES

What do you get when two classic characters, played by the likes of Eddie Murphy and Dan Aykroyd, are tricked into trading societal places? Aside from a continual flow of hysterical lines and vintage Eddie Murphy camera-stares, you also end up with fascinating food-for-thought. In the hilarious comedy "Trading Places", the \$1 wager of Randolph and Mortimer Duke gives comedic expression to the age-old debate of nature vs. nurture (see SSC above). To settle the score, the Duke Brothers conspire to orchestrate a "life swap", switching the environments and lifestyles of Billy Ray Valentine (Murphy) and Louis Winthorpe III (Aykroyd). Ultimately, the dastardly Duke duo "succeeds" in turning an underprivileged con-man into an upstanding business leader, while converting an honest executive into a common criminal.

With regard to their bet, which of the Duke Brothers is more in line with Jewish wisdom -- Randolph (on the side of nurture) or Mortimer (on the side of nature)? To some degree, Judaism would agree with each of the brothers, asserting that nature and nurture both play a large role in determining a person's position in life. But let's up the ante on their wager: if nature and nurture forces are so powerful, must we bet against FREEWILL -- a central tenet of Judaism -- and concede that there's no room for freewill to operate in a world with such dominant forces?

There's no need to concede, as Jewish wisdom beautifully resolves this quandary. Our sages reveal that each person possesses two competing drives: 1) a

positive drive, which lifts us towards constructive, meaningful endeavors; and 2) a negative drive, which sucks us into seemingly "self-serving" yet ultimately self-destructive behaviors. The clash of these drives creates a dramatic tension that allows for the challenge of choice. Each of us, however, has a unique choice-point -- our own inner battle line where the freewill struggles are taking place (i.e. where the competing drives are at equal strength). So there is always potential for freewill in the equation: true, our Creator sets the stage for us, endowing us with certain NATURES and emplacing us in certain circumstances of NURTURE, all of which are beyond our control. But wherever those forces may place us -- and in whichever direction our combat zone might move due to prior victories and defeats (see next section) -- there will always remain a battle line where our drives will clash with equal power.

Another metaphor is used to illustrate the shifting battle line of choice: the up-and-down movement on a ladder that spans from the earth to the heavens (as per Jacob's dream in this week's Portion). As with the shifting battle line, each time we climb to a higher rung on this ladder of moral mobility, we actually "raise the bar" of our moral maturity -- leaving behind challenges that are now beneath the zone of our temptation. Conversely, each time we drop to a lower rung, we enter a zone of lower-level temptations. In doing so, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the frightening phenomenon of the slippery slope: before we know it, we might find ourselves three or four rungs down, engaged in behaviors that were previously unthinkable.

Now let's run our own TRADING PLACES "experiment" in the "laboratory of Jacob's ladder" (getting back at Randolph and Mortimer by calling our Jewish guinea pigs Randy and Mordechai). Randy is a Jewish thief, who has grown up in a den of thieves -- glorifying "survival of the fittest" and comfortably convinced that stealing represents acceptable, way-of-the-world behavior. Mordechai comes from a long line of rabbis and lives in a nurturing household, conducive to spiritual advancement. For Randy, the notion of "thou shalt not steal" is so foreign that it sounds funny when he first hears it. Therefore, resisting the temptation to steal is on a rung that is ABOVE his battle line of moral struggles (in fact, one of his moral struggles is whether to shoot someone who witnesses his theft!). For Mordechai, the temptation to steal flies way BENEATH his radar, many rungs down on the ladder of moral mobility.

Let's say Randy becomes further exposed to ethical ideals, gradually refining himself to where he consistently resists temptations to steal. Sure, he still gets into occasional street fights, etc. -- but let's say he manages to climb up six rungs from where he started (which still leaves him five rungs beneath Mordechai).

And let's say Mordechai also refines his character, making strides in his commitments to Torah study, etc. Sure, he still could pray with more fervor, and he occasionally looks down on people with lesser knowledge -- but let's say he manages to climb up two rungs from where he started. Question: who is greater in the eyes of G-d? To the NAKED EYE, Mordechai may compare favorably to Randy in every EMPIRICAL measure of morality. But from a Divine perspective -- at least according to one formula of calculation -- look who did more with what he had! Similarly, assume an investor were to invest \$10,000 with one broker and \$110,000 with another; if the first broker returns \$70,000 and the second returns \$130,000, which one might the investor be more impressed with?

While I certainly don't presume to understand the infinite intricacies of Divine calculations, I think we can arrive at certain conclusions with conviction: first, let us be clear that we should never despair about where we are on the ladder. We all have our tailor-made battle lines, and our current rung is far less important than our current direction. Moreover, we can now heed the words of Hillel with greater appreciation: "Do not judge your fellow until you have arrived at his/her place!" Not only is judging someone unfavorably an undesirable, elitist thing to do -- but even more, it doesn't make sense from a logical perspective. Why? Because we have never truly arrived at another person's place -- we have never experienced the precise combination of forces that make up another person's battle lines. While it is reasonable to condemn inappropriate actions (and to penalize the perpetrators when necessary), it is illogical to judge the inherent value of the people behind those actions. May we all climb life's ladder in the direction of our positive purpose, and may we judge others favorably as they attempt to do the same! {Adapted from Rabbi Dessler's famous compendium of essays known (in English) as *Strive for Truth*} ©2014 J. Erlbaum & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Almighty told Jacob in a dream: "And your descendants will be like the dust of the earth." (Genesis 28:16). What kind of blessing is this? Everyone tramples upon the dust of the earth!

The Almighty was foretelling to Jacob the many trials and travails that the Jewish people would face throughout history -- the exiles, the persecutions, the confiscations, the pressures to deny our heritage. However, the Almighty was also telling Jacob an important point of consolation -- in the end, in the final days of redemption, in the time of the Moshiach (Messiah), the Jewish people will overcome their tormentors and prove victorious, just as at the end of his life, the tormentor is buried and covered by the dust of the earth. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi*

Zelig Pliskin

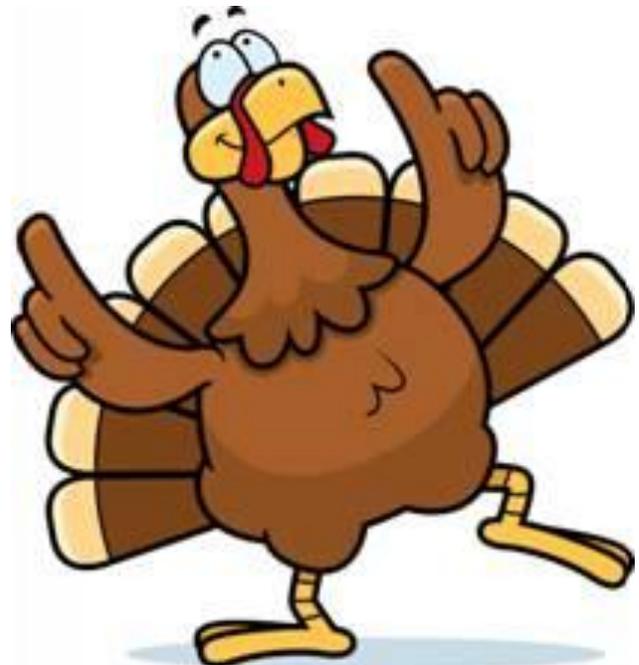


Laban searched all of Jacob's possessions, but did not find his missing idols. The Torah tells us: "And Jacob was angry and quarreled with Laban. And Jacob answered and said to Laban, 'What is my trespass? What is my sin that you have pursued after me?'" (Genesis 31:36)

What lesson for life can we learn from how Jacob responded to Laban?

The Midrash makes note of Jacob's self-control despite his anger. Laban accused Jacob of stealing his idols. After Laban had inspected all of Jacob's possessions and did not find anything, Jacob felt that Laban had fabricated the entire accusation (Sforno). However, despite his anger, Jacob did not say anything that would antagonize Laban or stir up animosity and rancor. He merely defended himself against the accusation and restated his own innocence.

The Chofetz Chaim taught that from here we learn that a person should avoid becoming involved in a dispute, even when he knows that he is right. *Based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2014 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*



HODU laShem ki tov!

