

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Why Jacob? That is the question we find ourselves asking repeatedly as we read the narratives of Genesis. Jacob is not what Noah was: righteous, perfect in his generations, one who walked with G-d. He did not, like Abraham, leave his land, his birthplace and his father's house in response to a Divine call. He did not, like Isaac, offer himself up as a sacrifice. Nor did he have the burning sense of justice and willingness to intervene that we see in the vignettes of Moses' early life. Yet we are defined for all time as the descendants of Jacob, the children of Israel. Hence the force of the question: Why Jacob?

The answer, it seems to me, is intimated in the beginning of this week's parsha. Jacob was in the middle of a journey from one danger to another. He had left home because Esau had vowed to kill him when Isaac died. He was about to enter the household of his uncle Laban, which would itself present other dangers. Far from home, alone, he was at a point of maximum vulnerability. The sun set. Night fell. Jacob lay down to sleep, and then saw this majestic vision: He dreamed and, look, there was a ladder set on the earth, with its top reaching heaven; and, look, angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it. And, look, the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the G-d of Abraham your father and the G-d of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread forth to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you and through your offspring. And look, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d,

and this is the gate of heaven." (Gen. 28:12-17)

Note the fourfold "and look," in Hebrew *ve-hinei*, an expression of surprise. Nothing has prepared Jacob for this encounter, a point emphasized in his own words when he says, "the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it." The very verb used at the beginning of the passage, "He came upon a place," in Hebrew *vayifga ba-makom*, also means an unexpected encounter. Later, in rabbinic Hebrew, the word *ha-Makom*, "the Place," came to mean "G-d." Hence in a poetic way the phrase *vayifga ba-makom* could be read as, "Jacob happened on, had an unexpected encounter with, G-d."

Add to this Jacob's night-time wrestling match with the angel in next week's parsha and we have an answer to our question. Jacob is the man who has his deepest spiritual experiences alone, at night, in the face of danger and far from home. He is the man who meets G-d when he least expects to, when his mind is on other things, when he is in a state of fear and possibly on the brink of despair. Jacob is the man who, in liminal space, in the middle of the journey, discovers that "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!"

Jacob thus became the father of the people who had their closest encounter with G-d in what Moses was later to describe as "the howling wasteland of a wilderness" (Deut. 32:10). Uniquely, Jews survived a whole series of exiles, and though at first they said, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" they discovered that the *Shekhinah*, the Divine presence, was still with them. Though they had lost everything else, they had not lost contact with G-d. They could still discover that "the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!"

Abraham gave Jews the courage to challenge the idols of the age. Isaac gave them the capacity for self-sacrifice. Moses taught them to be passionate fighters for justice. But Jacob gave them the knowledge that precisely when you feel most alone, G-d is still with you, giving you the courage to hope and the strength to dream.

The man who gave the most profound poetic expression to this was undoubtedly David in the book of Psalms. Time and again he calls to G-d from the heart of darkness, afflicted, alone, pained, afraid:

Save me, O G-d,
for the floodwaters are up to my neck.
Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire;



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I can't find a foothold.
I am in deep water,
and the floods overwhelm me. (Ps 69:2-3)
From the depths, O Lord,
I call for your help. (Ps. 130:1)

Sometimes our deepest spiritual experiences come when we least expect them, when we are closest to despair. It is then that the masks we wear are stripped away. We are at our point of maximum vulnerability – and it is when we are most fully open to G-d that G-d is most fully open to us. “The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps.34:18). “My sacrifice, O G-d, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, G-d, will not despise”(Ps. 51:17). G-d “heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3).

Rav Nahman of Bratslav used to say; “A person needs to cry to his Father in heaven with a powerful voice from the depths of his heart. Then G-d will listen to his voice and turn to his cry. And it may be that from this act itself, all doubts and obstacles that are keeping him back from true service of Hashem will fall from him and be completely nullified.”¹

We find G-d not only in holy or familiar places but also in the midst of a journey, alone at night. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me.” The most profound of all spiritual experiences, the base of all others, is the knowledge that we are not alone. G-d is holding us by the hand, sheltering us, lifting us when we fall, forgiving us when we fail, healing the wounds in our soul through the power of His love.

My late father of blessed memory was not a learned Jew. He did not have the chance to become one. He came to Britain as a child and a refugee. He had to leave school young, and besides, the possibilities of Jewish education in those days were limited. Merely surviving took up most of the family's time. But I saw him walk tall as a Jew, unafraid, even defiant at times, because when he prayed or read the Psalms he felt intensely that G-d was with him. That simple faith gave him immense dignity and strength of mind.

¹ Likkutei Maharash 2:46.

That was his heritage from Jacob, as it is ours. Though we may fall, we fall into the arms of G-d. Though others may lose faith in us, and though we may even lose faith in ourselves, G-d never loses faith in us. And though we may feel utterly alone, we are not. G-d is there, beside us, within us, urging us to stand and move on, for there is a task to do that we have not yet done and that we were created to fulfil. A singer of our time wrote, “There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.”

The broken heart lets in the light of G-d, and becomes the gate of heaven. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

A fascinating aspect of the strife and the strivings, the growth and the grandeur, of the familial development of the house of Abraham and Sarah is the stark contrast between the courtship relationships of Isaac and Jacob. Isaac and Rebecca were brought together by a most remarkable, resourceful and faithful shadchan (marriage broker), Eliezer, who calculated that the primary criteria for the daughter-in-law of Abraham were loving-kindness and hospitality-extended to a servant and his camels, to the "lower vessels" of that society (Gen. 24:42-44). Jacob, on the other hand, found his beloved Rachel in a romantic glimpse of love at first sight and was "smitten" until death did them part.

For this commentary I would like to analyze the second relationship; that of romantic love, as seen through a reading of the biblical text and the commentary of Rashi.

Love empowers - Jacob arrives in Haran, sees how the various shepherds are gathering with their herds of sheep and quickly learns that all the shepherds are necessary together to remove the heavy boulder atop the well so that each can water their respective flock. Then comes a seemingly innocent verse which reveals a depth of passion that can move mountains: "And it happened that when Jacob looked upon Rachel, the daughter of Laban, the brother of his mother, and the sheep of Laban, the brother of his mother, that Jacob drew near [to the well] and single-handedly removed the stone from atop the well; he then watered the sheep of Laban, the brother of his mother" (Gen. 29:10). One can picture young Jacob on the very first day of his exile taking a good look at a most attractive woman whom the shepherds have already identified for Jacob as Laban's daughter-a girl from the very family his father had adjured him to marry into. Jacob must have stolen a second glance to ascertain that the nubile maiden was also looking at him; then I can see him removing his jacket, rolling up his sleeves, perhaps shyly flexing his muscles, and, without waiting for the usual helpers, alone lifting up the stone and

chivalrously watering his uncle's sheep! Apparently love - even love at first sight - empowers the young lover to rise to unexpected heights of physical prowess, perhaps to be proven worthy of his beloved. Love can even transform time and bestow almost superhuman patience in the mind of the lover; as the Bible testifies: "And Jacob worked for Rachel's hand for seven years; but they were only as a few days in his eyes because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:20).

Love inspires: After Jacob removed the stone and watered Rachel's sheep, the Bible records: "And Jacob kissed Rachel, and he lifted up his voice and wept." What made Jacob weep? One of my students suggested many years ago that he wept because he kissed her before they were married, a transgression according to Jewish law.

Indeed, the biblical commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra maintains that the kiss was on her hand, a mere formality in that time and place rather than an erotic expression of love.

Rashi, however, cites the Midrash Genesis Raba (ad loc.) that he wept because he was empty-handed, because he had no gifts to present her with.

It must be remembered that the Hebrew word *ahava* (love) is built upon the two letter root verb *hav*, give; the true lover is heaven-bent on giving to his beloved, whom he sees as an inextricable part of himself. A true test of love is the extent to which one desires to give to, rather than take from, the other.

But love comes at a tragic price: The Midrash cited by Rashi gives yet another reason for Jacob's tears: "Jacob envisioned through the Holy Spirit [a form of prophecy] that Rachel would not enter into the grave together with him." This phrase is usually interpreted to mean that Jacob would be buried in Ma'arat Hamachpela ("The Cave of the Couples" in Hebron), whereas Rachel would be buried on the side of the road in Bethlehem on the pathway to Efrat. Their burial places would be separated.

However, I believe that the words of the Midrash have a much deeper existential and personal significance than the mere geographical distance between the two graves. After all, built into the nature of things is the usual occurrence that two individuals-who, through the years, have come to see themselves, as a single unit, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," will leave the world of the living at different times, causing agonizing loneliness in the part of the one left behind. Does not the Bible describe the marital one-ness as the highest expression of marriage? "Therefore shall a person leave his/her father and mother, cleave [become joined together with] his/her spouse, and they shall become one flesh" (one persona) (Gen. 2:24). The deeper the love, the more difficult the separation.

Nevertheless, I believe that most would agree with the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson: "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." And

hopefully to the extent that the lover and beloved truly merge as one, the most important part of the one remains indelibly tied to the other for as long as the other lives. © 2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

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 Hashem, just for the sake of thanking Him.

We have three chances a day to thank G-d through prayer, if we do it with enough meaning and concentration. We can all emulate Rachel's desire to show gratitude by studying prayer, learning about ourselves from them, and improving ourselves through them. © 2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Rashi comments regarding the opening word of this week's Torah reading that when a righteous person departs from a community, the loss is noticeable and is damaging to that community. In most instances, the community or even the righteous person's own family and friends, pay little attention to his or her presence while the person is amongst them. It is only when that person is no longer with them, does their true value and mettle become apparent. And then it is usually a case of too little, too late.

Yaakov is a low profile person in his community. It is Eisav who makes the headlines, gives the interviews and media appearances. He is the outside man while Yaakov is quiet, studious, private and not obtrusive. But communities, especially in the Jewish world, are built upon the righteousness....the quiet Yaakovs and not on the bombast of noisy Eisavs.

I have often commented that the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed totally not because of the millions of evildoers who were their inhabitants but rather because there were not ten righteous and good people who lived in their community.

Judaism values and prizes the worth of a single individual. It never deals with numbers and majorities alone. It strives to create righteous individuals by

whose mere presence alone societies are enhanced and the influence of good prevails. It is therefore sad that the value of such good people is noticed most significantly only by their departure and absence.

When Yaakov arrives at the house of Lavan, Lavan is financially impoverished. He is forced to use his daughters as his shepherds – a shameful matter in his place and time. Yaakov's presence in Lavan's home over the next decades will cause him to become rich and powerful. In a rare moment of candor, Lavan admits to Yaakov "that the Lord has blessed me because of you."

All of history indicates the blessings that have occurred to countries, empires and civilizations simply because the Jewish people resided in their midst. Nevertheless, this realization does not prevent anti-Semitism and violence against Jews from being justified and encouraged. Lavan is the perfect paradigm for this warped behavior. He knows that his success is a result of Yaakov's presence in his home and yet he pursues Yaakov and hopes to somehow destroy him.

This paradoxical type of mindset is abundantly and clearly visible in our current world. We are cursed by others not for our actions but simply because we have the temerity to exist. Good people were not allowed to live in Sodom. Jews are not to be allowed in the Land of Israel.

The influence of good is an intolerable idea in a world committed to evil and falsehood. Yet, Spain, Portugal and Poland want the Jews to come back. Europe wants to be free of Jews but somehow to retain the presence and benefits of Jews living in its midst. It is a warped and complicated world that we live in. Like Yaakov, there is little that we can do about it except to continue to soldier on. ©2015 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd Yaakov stole the heart of Lavan the Aramenian, by not telling him that he was going to flee" (B'reishis 31:20). Let's read that again. Yaakov stole Lavan's heart by not telling him ahead of time that he was going to run away. Huh? How could Yaakov have warned Lavan that he was going to run away? Wouldn't that defeat the purpose? Maybe Lavan could have expected Yaakov to tell him that he was leaving, so it's fair to say that by running away Yaakov "stole Lavan's heart." But the fact that he didn't *tell him* he would run away shouldn't be the issue, only that he ran away. Why does the Torah attribute the theft of Lavan's heart to Yaakov not telling him he would flee rather than to the very fact that he fled, or to

not telling him that he was leaving? Was Yaakov expected to give Lavan advance notice that he was going to run away, to the extent that not warning him that he was about to leave without telling him (whatever that means) was considered "stealing his heart"?

To be fair, I may have created a straw man, as I translated the word "Beis-Reish-Ches" as "running away," whereas the Targum and Rav Saadya Gaon translate it as "going." True, not telling Lavan he was leaving is the same as running away, but by translating "Borach" as "going" rather than "fleeing," the issue of expecting Yaakov to warn Lavan that he was fleeing isn't there. Nevertheless, the word the Torah usually uses for "going" somewhere (rather than "fleeing") is "Hey-Lamed-Chof," and if the Torah meant to say that Yaakov stole Lavan's heart by not telling him he was leaving, this is the word we would have expected to be used. [Stay tuned for a possible answer as to why the Torah uses "Beis-Reish-Ches" instead of "Hey-Lamed-Chof" if the intent was not "fleeing."] Most commentators do understand the word to mean "fleeing," and various explanations have been suggested.

Radak and S'fornu put a comma between the words "by not telling him" and the words "that he was running away." "Yaakov stole Lavan's heart by not telling him" that he was getting ready to leave (which had just been described in verses 17 and 18). Why didn't he tell him? "Because he was running away," so couldn't tip his hand. S'fornu explains it a bit differently, with the "not telling him" referring to Yaakov acting as if he was unaware that Lavan was now unhappy with him, so that Lavan wouldn't suspect that Yaakov might leave; Yaakov didn't let Lavan know that he knew "Lavan's face had changed" (31:2) "because he was planning to run away," and didn't want Lavan to prevent him from doing so. The question we are left with is why we need to be told the reason Yaakov didn't tell him. Isn't it obvious that Yaakov didn't give any hints that he was planning to run away because, well, he planned on running away?

Alshich has a similar approach (see also Netziv), albeit without putting a comma between the two expressions. "Yaakov stole Lavan's heart" by doing things that made him think he wanted to stay, which in turn caused "Lavan's heart [read: intuition] not to tell him (Lavan) that [Yaakov] was thinking of running away." [Ohr HaChayim adds that by asking permission the first time (30:25), Yaakov made it seem as if he wouldn't leave without asking first, leading Lavan to believe that Yaakov wasn't considering running away.] The verse isn't saying that Yaakov didn't tell Lavan he was going to run away, it was "Lavan's heart" that didn't inform Lavan that he better take precautions because Yaakov might try to flee. However, the plain meaning of the verse is that it was Yaakov who didn't tell Lavan, not Lavan's heart.

Malbim focuses on Yaakov's preparation to leave, which was purposely done in a way that wouldn't raise any suspicion that he was leaving without permission, thereby preventing anyone from telling Lavan that Yaakov was running away. "Yaakov stole Lavan's heart" by leaving in a way that led to "no one informing [Lavan] that [Yaakov] was running away." However, Lavan was in fact told that Yaakov had fled (31:22), on the very first day that word could have possibly reached him (on the third day, since there was a three day separation between where Yaakov was and where Lavan was (see 30:36). Since it doesn't seem that Yaakov's plan on leaving in a way that wouldn't cause anyone to go tell Lavan was successful, why would the Torah tell us that Yaakov "stole Lavan's heart" rather than "tried to steal his heart"?

Chasam Sofer switches the "fleeing" from Yaakov running away from Lavan to Yaakov running away from Eisav, with Yaakov having "stolen Lavan's heart" by not telling him the full story of why he left Canaan. Just as Yisro made Moshe swear that he wouldn't return to Egypt with his (Yisro's) daughter and grandchildren without first getting his permission (see Rashi on Sh'mos 2:21) because Moshe's life was in danger if he returned to Egypt (see Sh'mos 2:15), had Lavan known the whole story he would have made Yaakov swear that he wouldn't return to Canaan without permission because his life was in danger there (as Eisav wanted to kill him). By not telling Lavan why he fled, that he was running for his life, and not just leaving because of a spat with his brother, Yaakov "stole Lavan's heart." Here too, though, the verse is being taken out of its plain meaning, that it is Yaakov's fleeing from Lavan being referred to. Chasam Sofer's son, K'sav Sofer, makes the same switch, but takes it in the opposite direction. Yaakov had told Lavan that he fled from his brother, and that he did so because his life was in danger, in order to lay the groundwork to be able to flee from Charan when it became necessary. Knowing that Yaakov had serious troubles back home, Lavan was confident that he wasn't going to go back, and therefore took no precautions to prevent it from happening. Had Yaakov waited to tell Lavan why he left Canaan and came to Charan -- that it was not just to find a wife -- after he was there for a while, Lavan would have realized that he was only being told this now to try to mislead him into thinking that he (Yaakov) wouldn't go back so that he (Lavan) would let his guard down; by telling him this right away, Lavan never suspected that Yaakov told him this in order to eventually make it easier to escape. "Yaakov stole Lavan's heart by telling him, when there seemed to be no need to, that he had to escape" from Canaan. Again, though, this is not a straightforward reading of the verse.

S'fornu (31:21) tells us that Beis-Reish-Ches refers to running away without being chased, while

Nun-Samech-Hey refers to running away while being chased. In Sefer HaShoroshim (Beis-Reish-Ches), Radak quotes his father as explaining the word to sometimes mean "leaving quickly," even without running away from anything or anyone. (He specifically applies this to Yonah "running away" to Tarshish to get there quickly, as opposed to running away from G-d.) If we apply this definition here, there would be no issue with saying "Yaakov stole Lavan's heart by not telling him that he would leave so quickly." Nevertheless, if this is what the Targum and Rav Saadya Gaon meant, they would have added the word "quickly" to their translation. However, if the word can (also) refer to leaving without permission, and not just leaving without the other person knowing, their translation works well.

"And Yaakov stole Lavan's heart by not telling him that he was leaving -- and that he would leave even if he wasn't given permission to do so." Whether Yaakov made the right decision by not telling Lavan is not the discussion here. [It's quite likely that Lavan would have done whatever he could to prevent Yaakov from leaving, leaving Yaakov no choice but to leave without telling him first; I therefore see no need to speculate as to what could have been gained by Yaakov telling Lavan he was leaving.] What is under discussion is what the cause of Lavan's heart being "stolen" was. The verse could very well be telling us that Lavan was heartbroken that Yaakov didn't tell him he was leaving whether or not Lavan agreed. Since the term here does not (and cannot) refer to leaving without Lavan's knowledge (as how could Yaakov be expected to tell Lavan he was going to leave without his knowledge), the Targum and Rav Saadya Gaon translate it simply as "going." But because it refers to "going without permission," the word the Torah uses is Beis-Reish-Ches. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

How is it possible that Yaakov (Jacob) didn't know that he spent his wedding night with Leah rather than Rachel? The text says, "and it came to pass in the morning and behold it was Leah." (Genesis 29:25)

Some commentators suggest that this reveals the extraordinary modesty of Yaakov and Leah--all through the night, they did not see or even speak to each other. (Radak)

The Talmud explains that Yaakov could have been fooled in another way. Suspecting that Lavan (Lavan, Leah and Rachel's father) would switch Leah for Rachel, Yaakov gave Rachel signs through which she could identify herself to him. When at the last moment, Lavan exchanged Leah for Rachel, Rachel feared Leah would be embarrassed, and gave her sister the special signs. (Megillah 13b)

But all this leads to another question. If in fact

Yaakov didn't know it was Leah, how could the marriage have been legitimate? Isn't this a classic case of an agreement which is considered null and void because of faulty assumptions, known as mekah ta'ut?

Perhaps it can be said that Yaakov's surprise came that evening, yet he still accepted Leah as his wife. When the text indicates that on the next morning "behold, it was Leah," it is the community that learned of the switch.

Outside of these attempts to understand Yaakov being fooled, there is a kabbalistic approach. This approach teaches something fundamental about love. Rachel represents the woman Yaakov wished to marry. But it is often the case that once married, we find elements in our spouse's personality of which we were previously unaware. These unknown factors are represented by Leah. In any relationship, there will be pieces of our partner's personality that take us by surprise.

These elements may be distasteful. In such a case, the challenge is to make peace with that side of our beloved and realize that love means accepting the whole person. But, it can be that this hidden side is a positive one that never formerly surfaced. These traits have the capacity to add vibrancy and a new excitement to the relationship. At times, these new qualities can even turn out to be exactly what was always needed. In the words of Rabbi David Aaron, "Leah was not Jacob's bride of choice, but she was actually a great source of blessing to him..." (Endless Light, p. 38).

"Ve-hineh hi Leah" teaches that in every relationship there will always be an element of surprise, the element that we don't consciously choose, the element represented by Leah. ©2015 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 HERSHEL SCHACHTER

TorahWeb

In his dream Yaakov Avinu saw angels going up the ladder that led to heaven and coming down again.

The medrash offers various interpretations of this image. One of the understandings presented by the medrash is that the angels going up and down represented the historical rise and fall of various nations, with the angels representing the sar of those various nations.

The medrash continues to explain that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yaakov Avinu, "now it is your turn to climb up the ladder to represent the success of the Jewish people." Yaakov was afraid to do so, for the angels of all the other nations ultimately went down again, representing the fall of all those nations, and he didn't want the Jewish people to fall. Whereupon

Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Yaakov not to fear; "I will be with you. I will hold your hand. The Jewish people will not disappear."

The entire existence of the Jewish people from its very outset was not natural. According to tradition, the avos and imahos were akorim ; b'derech hateva none of us should exist. This is the simple meaning of the Talmudic statement (Shabbos 156), " ein mazal l'Yisroel." According to the Ramban, " mazel " is a reference to the natural rules of history. Jewish history is not subject to any of those rules. In Yaakov's fight with the malach, the malach succeeded in injuring Yaakov's leg, but Yaakov won the fight. The malach represents the laws of nature (as the Talmud tells us that every blade of grass has a malach causing it to grow) and Yaakov's victory over the malach represents the principle that Klal Yisroel is l'ma'alah min hateva.

If one were to draw a graph representing the history of any other nation or culture, the graph would go up, reach a peak, and then do gawn, representing the rise and fall of that nation. But if one were to graph the history of the Jewish people, the graph would zigzag, i.e. have many alternating peaks and valleys. When we observe the mitzvos we rise, and when we sin we fall.

The navi (Malachi 3:6) tells us that just as Hashem is above teva, and therefore not subject to change, so too Bnai Yisroel are also above teva and will not disappear. ©2015 Rabbi H. Schachter TorahWeb.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Brothers in Scorn

"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. ©2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org of Riverdale.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah is devoted to the Jewish nation's severe plunge into idolatry. The Judean kingdom ultimately succumbed to the rampant practices of the Samaritan kingdom and engaged itself in foreign worship. This abhorrent conduct traced back to the days of Yeravam ben N'vat, the first Samaritan

king. Shlomo Hamelech relied upon his unprecedented sound wisdom and permitted himself to marry women of alien descent and culture. He undoubtedly intended to eradicate from them every trace of their previous environment. However, he was unsuccessful in this and his idolatrous wives threatened to corrupt the entire Jewish nation. Hashem responded to this deteriorating situation and pledged to remove most of the Jewish kingdom from the royal Davidic dynasty. (see M'lochim 1 11:4-13) Hashem sent the prophet Achiya to inform Yeravam he would lead ten of the tribes and Shlomo's son, Rechavam would lead the remaining tribes of Yehuda and Binyomin.

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

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

The Sages add an important insight regarding this rise to power. They reflect upon the verses that describe Yeravam's act in the following words, "And Yeravam ben N'vat... was the servant of Shlomo and he raised his hand against the king. And for this matter... Shlomo built the Milo and closed his father Dovid's opening." (M'lochim 1 11:26, 27) The Sages explain that Yeravam merited the throne because of his outstanding courageous opposition to Shlomo Hamelech's conduct. But, they painfully add that Yeravam was also severely punished because he publicly shamed the king. (see Mesicta Sanhedrin 101b) Maharsha explains here that the sages sought to understand Yeravam's devastating end. They question that since Yeravam performed such a meritorious act, as is evidenced by his appointment

over Israel, how could such control result in the horrible Jewish exile? If Hashem truly appreciated Yeravam's devotion how could it develop so quickly into a rampant campaign of idolatry?

The answer is 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. ©2015 Rabbi D. Siegel

