

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Judaism is supremely a religion of love: three loves. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." (Deut. 6:5); "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Lev. 19:18); And "You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in a strange land." (Deut. 10:19; See also Leviticus 19:33-34.)

Not only is Judaism a religion of love. It was also the first civilisation to place love at the centre of the moral life. C. S. Lewis (*The Abolition of Man*) 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, 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 Game Theorists call reciprocal altruism or tit-for-tat. Some form of this altruism, (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*).

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*) 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 this 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, and works for seven years so that he can marry her. A deception is practised on him, and

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when he wakes up the morning after their wedding night, he discovers that he has married Rachel's elder sister Leah. Livid, he confronts Laban. Laban replies: "It is not done in our place to marry the younger before the elder." (Gen. 29:26) He tells Jacob he can marry Rachel as well, in return for another seven years of 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 halachic implications. *Keriat ha-Torah* is, according to most Rishonim, a *chovat ha-tzibbur*, 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 poignant 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." (Gen. 29:31)

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, for whom the Torah says that he worked for seven years "but they seemed to him like a few days because he was so in love with her." (Gen. 29:20)

Leah was not hated. She was less loved. But someone in that situation cannot help 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 fifteen 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 Rebecca loved Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, more than his other sons. From these came two of the most fateful sibling rivalries in Jewish history.

Yet 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 God 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 God created us in love and forgiveness, asking us to love and forgive others. Love, God'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 God, love. If you want your home to be filled with the light of the Divine Presence, love. Love is where God 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. Niels Bohr, the Nobel prize winning physicist, once discovered that his son had stolen an object from a local shop. He realised that he could have two separate reactions to the situation: he could view his son from the perspective of a judge (justice) or through his perspective as a father (love), but he could not do both simultaneously. (Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, p. 51)

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. Love is not enough. 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 God. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©5775 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed" (Gen. 28:12-13). Dreams have a unique capacity to inspire us to aim higher, to remain focused on a distant goal even when the present circumstances give us little reason for optimism. But what happens when the gap between dream and reality seems insurmountably vast? Jacob's dreams throughout this week's Torah reading of Vayetze shine a bright light on this question, and offer important insights into his evolution as a person, as well as lessons about his descendants' mission in the world and destiny as a nation.

Jacob begins his journey from his father's home into exile with the loftiest of dreams: a ladder rooted in the ground while reaching up to the heavens with angels ascending and descending upon it. This visual symbolizes his and his descendants' Divine mandate: even in exile, to unify heaven and earth so that the Divine Presence can be manifest in the world.

Unfortunately, something goes awry along the way, as Jacob's long sojourn with his father-in-law Laban has a corrupting influence on him. In order to hold his own with his devious employer, Jacob perfects the art of deception, and in time, the bright nephew even out-Labans his clever uncle, becoming wealthy in his own right.

It must be said that Jacob has not completely forgotten the traditions of his youth, despite the distance from his parents' home: "With Laban have I dwelt, and the 613 commandments have I kept" (Rashi on Genesis 32:5) is what Jacob reports after the ordeal has passed. Although it may be true that, technically speaking, he has remained faithful to his roots, his focus of concentration has become the livestock on earth rather than the stars of the heavens.

Indeed, Laban has certainly corrupted his aspirations. Just look at his new dream after a period in Laban-land: "And I saw in a dream and behold, rams that leapt upon the sheep were speckled, spotted and striped" (ibid. 31:10). Jacob now dreams of material success devoid of any spiritual component.

It is upon coming to this spiritual nadir that he soon receives the life trajectory-changing command of the Divine messengers: "I have seen everything that

Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Beit El...now rise, leave this land and return to the land of your birthplace" (ibid. v. 13). In other words, leave the land of obsession with materialism. Return to the land – and to the dream – of your forefathers, who walked with God!

More than twenty years in the prime of one's life is a significant period. Jacob must have been devastated when he realized what had become of him and his dreams. He must have seen himself as an abject failure. He must have questioned whether he would ever succeed in achieving his original aspirations. He knows he must leave Laban before it is too late.

When he leaves Laban's home, with his large family in tow, he has a third dream, even more momentous than those that preceded it: "And Jacob went on his way and he was met there by angels of God...and he called the name of that place Mahanayim (Divine encampments of God's messengers)" (Genesis 32:2-3).

This dream, which concludes Parshat Vayetze, is a parallel to the one that opened the reading, with Jacob again meeting angels of God. This time, however, there is no ladder; but instead two distinct encampments, family compounds, one outside Israel and the other in Israel.

The message is dramatic: uniting heaven and earth requires more than ascending a spiritual ladder. It also requires making an impact on the world around us by building a family dedicated to God and Torah in the Land of Israel – and not to materialism in Laban's house of exile.

The fact that Jacob somehow manages to return to Israel – despite the inertia of habit and the comforts of his home in exile – is the reason, I believe, why he is called the 'chosen among the patriarchs' (Midrash Rabbah 76:1 on Genesis). Whereas Abraham obeys the Divine command to come to the land, and Isaac never leaves the land, Jacob returns to this land despite the sibling conflict that awaited him there.

Did Jacob's return to Israel mark the end of his difficulties and challenges? Certainly not. And so it is with his descendants. Disappointments and setbacks are inevitable, in a world still divided between the holy and the profane, the religious and the secular.

But if we keep our sights focused on preserving our Jewish heritage into future generations; if we wish to live a holistic Jewish life whose civic experience is guided by the Jewish calendar, and if our national dream is to create a society able to merge heaven and earth, then the only place where this can happen is in the land of our dreams and destiny, the Land of Israel. It is the land promised by God to Israel, the earth whose sacred gravestones below and whose dedicated mountain tops above are that very ladder which connects the human with the Divine, and the Jew to his eternal dream of a united world. ©2021 *Ohr Torah*

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In a few weeks, we will read in the Torah that the brothers of Joseph referred to him almost derisively as being the master of dreams. Yet we see in this week's reading that it is our father Jacob who is really the master of dreams.

Two of Yaakov's major dreams are recorded for us, and it is obvious from the story of his life that Yaakov is constantly guided and influenced by the dreams that he dreamt when he left the home of his parents and journeyed to an alien society.

Dreams are one of the most provocative and mysterious events that occur to human beings. They come to us on almost a daily or nightly basis. Early psychiatry held that dreams would be key to understanding human personality and reflect the emotional and mental stresses that exist in human life. The correct interpretation of dreams, according to this theory, help solve mental health disorders or, at the very least, help to diagnose them, so that perhaps they might be treated.

The Talmud teaches us that those dreams have the quality of being a minor type of prophecy. There is an entire chapter in the Talmud devoted to explanations and interpretations of dreams. The Torah itself teaches us that prophecy itself, except for the prophecy of Moshe, was always communicated through the medium of the subconscious and dreams.

Appreciating all of this will help us understand the story of Jacob and his survival in the house of Lavan. What is the secret of the strengths that Yaakov exhibits in being able to resist the culture of Aram and the influence of the house of Lavan? Jacob never forgets the dream of the ladder stretching from earth to heaven, of the angels, and of the message of God himself reassuring him of his protection and survival.

Dreams often become reality to the dreamer. And when they do, a great new force of self-confidence is given to the dreamer. There are dreams that we immediately forget upon awakening in the morning, and there are some dreams that remain with us, but they also usually are of limited influence, and after a length of time, they also disappear. It is only a great dream, perhaps even one that has frightening aspects to it, that remains embedded in our memory and consciousness. And it is this type of the dream that influences our behavior and drives us forward in our lives. This dream encompasses our ambitions, our energy, our creativity, and our direction in life. It becomes the source of our hopes, and the source of our disappointments, as well as our achievements and our shortcomings.

Our father Jacob is really the great dreamer of the family, who keeps the tradition of the Jewish people. He never seeks to escape his dream, but

rather, devotes his entire life and being toward its realization and actualization. ©2021 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

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His Wife's Sister

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The Torah forbids a man from marrying his wife's sister as long as his wife is alive: "You shall not take a woman in addition to her sister, to make them rivals, to uncover the nakedness of one upon the other in her lifetime" (*Vayikra* 18:18). It seems that the Torah wants to make sure that sisters, who naturally love each other, do not come to see each other as enemies. However, if a wife dies, the Torah allows and even encourages the marriage of the surviving sister and the widower. This is because we can assume that in a household which lost its homemaker, the person most likely to be able to maintain a similar home environment would be the sister of the departed wife.

One of the seven Noachide laws is a ban on sexual immorality. Is marrying two sisters included in this prohibition? Some say that it is. When the Torah speaks of marrying two sisters, it uses the word "*tikach*" (take). This is the same verb used later in the Torah to refer to the mitzva of taking a wife. Thus they argue that the prohibition relates specifically to Jewish marriage (*kiddushin*), rather than to sexual relations. *Kiddushin* is a halachic framework relevant only to Jews but not to Noachides (non-Jews). Indeed, Ramban (in his commentary on *Yevamot* 97a) and many other *Rishonim* (medieval rabbis) see this as the reason that Yaakov was permitted to marry two sisters. Since the Torah had not yet been given, he was considered a Noachide.

However, others disagree. They point to the verse that introduces all the forbidden sexual relationships, "Any man shall not approach his close relative to uncover nakedness" (*Vayikra* 18:6). The verse is inclusive, with "any man" including non-Jews as well. Those who follow this opinion need a different explanation for how Yaakov was allowed to marry two sisters. One possibility, suggested by Ramban in his Torah commentary, is that as long as Yaakov lived outside the Land of Israel, he was not subject to the commandments, and, therefore, was permitted to marry two sisters. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Three verbs are used to describe how our patriarchs prayed. Each relates to different aspects of

kavanah (proper intent) in prayer:

- Amad (Genesis 19:27). This word, literally “stood,” depicts Abraham’s prayer and may refer to the preparatory phase necessary before any prayer experience. As one rises up, one should remove all the mental clutter and disturbances that could impede one’s ability to communicate with God.

- Sichah (Genesis 24:63). This term, found when Isaac prayed, means “deep discussion.” In conversation, one must obviously comprehend the content of one’s words. So too, Isaac’s prayer teaches that one should clearly understand every word. Only then can prayer be meaningful.

- Pagah (Genesis 28:11). This word, found in Parashat Vayetzei concerning Jacob’s prayer, means “to encounter.” Indeed, the rabbis interpret the phrase va’yifga ba’makom not only to mean that “he lighted upon the place,” but to mean “Jacob encountered God:” he encountered the Makom, the omnipresence of God.

In other words, separate from understanding the content of the prayer, it is important to feel God’s presence. In the words of Rabbi Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik, “it would seem that this aspect...is integral to the act of prayer. If his heart does not turn from other things, and he does not see himself as standing before God and praying, then this is not an act of prayer. He is like one who is busy with other matters and not involved in the mitzvah act [mitasek]” (Grach al haRambam, Laws of Prayer 4:1).

Bearing in mind that understanding words and feeling the presence of God are two distinct elements of prayer, it follows that one may understand every word while still not sensing the Divine. Pagah teaches us that awareness of God is crucial to the prayer experience, intrinsic to the very essence of tefillah (prayer).

To borrow from the terminology of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, there exists the pe’ulah, the action of prayer, and the kiyum, the fulfillment of prayer. Pe’ulah relates to the enunciation and understanding of the external words; kiyum to the recognition that we are standing before God. In prayer, pe’ulah merges with kiyum. They are inextricably bound. Without recognizing, as Jacob did, the presence of God, one can only offer a prayer devoid of substance. Such prayer lacks meaning; it is body without soul.

Thus, these biblical terms serve as a how-to guide for kavanah in prayer. They also connect us, through prayer, to the patriarchs themselves. After moments of amad (preparation), we carefully begin to take cognizance of our sichah (the words we recite), from which may be inspired pagah (a deep awareness of God).

People come to synagogue for many reasons. Too often, encountering God is last on the agenda when, in fact, it should be first. ©2021 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 DAVID LEVIN

The Rock Over the Well

The Torah begins our discussion of the Well in Charan where Ya’akov met Rachel, “And he looked and behold a well in the field, and behold there were three flocks of sheep lying there beside it, for from that well they would water the flocks, and there was a large rock over the mouth of the well. And when all of the flocks gathered there, they would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and then they would put back the stone over the mouth of the well in its place. And Ya’akov said to them, ‘from where are you,’ and they, said ‘we are from Charan.’ And he said to them, ‘do you know Lavan the son of Nachor?’, and they said, ‘we know.’ And he said to them, ‘is it well for him?’, and they said, ‘it is well, and behold Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep.’ And he said, ‘look, it is still broad daylight, it is not time yet to bring in the livestock, water the sheep and go on grazing.’ And they said, ‘we are not able until all of the flocks will have gathered and they will roll the stone off the mouth of the well, then we will water the flock.’”

The Ramban explains many of the stories of Sefer B’reishit with the concept of ma’aseh avot siman l’banim, the actions of the fathers are a sign (of future events) for the sons. B’reishit Rabbah, the Midrash of Sefer B’reishit, explains the Well and the flocks in this story as alluding to the time of the Beit HaMikdash. Ya’akov arrived at the well while the large rock was still over its mouth. This was an indication that Ya’akov would succeed in finding a wife here, and that his children would be worthy of opening the well of Torah. The Midrash expounds: “The well alludes to the Sanctuary, and the three flocks of sheep are symbolic of the pilgrims ascending to the Sanctuary during the three festivals.” The water of the Well is the Divine inspiration of the Torah (which is likened to water). Another Midrash interprets the Well to be the Sanhedrin (the 70 judges) and the three flocks to be the rows of students who sat at the entrance to discuss the law as it was exposed from the rock, namely the Nasi (prince) of the Sanhedrin, who would expound the law. The rock was then placed once again over the Well so that the students could debate that law. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin indicates that the rock was the yeitzer hara, the evil inclination, that would take all of the righteous together to move it away from the good that was inside that Well of Torah. The Kli Yakar tells us that the three flocks of sheep were symbolic of the three greats in our history who found their wives at the Well: Yitzchak, Ya’akov, and Moshe.

It was not uncommon to place a stone over the opening of a well. This would minimize the amount of evaporation from the Sun. The stone of our Well, however, was exceptionally large. The Or HaChaim

explains that the term for a large stone would simply have been "even g'dolah." Here the Torah emphasizes the size of the stone by calling it "v'ha'even g'dolah", the large stone. The Or HaChaim suggests that this indicated Ya'akov's strength, which must have been supplemented by a miracle. The Radak gives a more practical answer for the large rock covering. This was the only source of water for the town and they were concerned that each flock should get an equal amount. The stone then was too large to be moved by onema n and each shepherd would have to wait until all of the flocks gathered at the well. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch describes the size of the rock was as a negative. Most wells were covered with a light covering to enable easy access. Here this introduces "the character of the Arameans – no one trusted the other and nobody meant anybody else to have the slightest advantage."

Ya'akov listened to the men and he reacted to the waste of time and the flock owner's money that was caused by the need to have all of the flocks gather together in order to water them. This caused the shepherds to end their day early and shortchange the owners. Ya'akov said to them, "It is still broad daylight, it is not time yet to bring in the livestock, water the sheep and go on grazing." As Hirsch explains, "he called the flocks mikneh, property, and reminded them of their duty towards the owners; the sheep should not be allowed to lie about idle, but should be taken to the pastures." Ya'akov could not remain silent in the face of this injustice to the owners of the sheep. Sforno tells us that "an unjust man is an abomination to the righteous."

The lesson of the Well and the rock which covered its mouth can speak to all of us. Whether the water represents the Torah or mitzvot which nourish our souls and which keep us alive or whether it is some other treasure or skill which we feel we need is not important. In either case, we have set a large rock over the mouth of this well which prevents us from gathering what we need by ourselves. This obstacle keeps us stagnated and unable to proceed, because we feel that we cannot successfully remove this object by our own desire. Ya'akov was struck with emotion much as we may become motivated by an incident or an encounter, and he did not stop to think whether his strength was sufficient to remove the rock. He set a goal and he did everything within his own power to accomplish this. He would not have refused assistance, but he was not to be delayed if that assistance was not forthcoming.

Many Jews today did not grow up with the advantages of a top-of-the-line Jewish education in a city filled with observant families with whom to learn. We then begin to place obstacles in our paths that delay our future growth. We begin to stagnate, and that allows us to place even greater obstacles in our paths. But it need not remain that way. Hashem has given mankind many technical advances which have enabled

us today to have myriads of books and audio and visual materials in a large number of languages. If one is not confident enough to approach these texts on one's own, Hashem has provided us with internet partners who are willing to learn Torah even if thousands of miles apart. Technology has enabled us to store thousands of shiurim online which are readily available. These people together with these tools can help anyone remove those obstacles to knowledge that we have artificially placed in our own paths. We must develop the strength like Ya'akov did to take the first step. We, too, are capable of moving that rock. The well of Torah will quickly rise and overflow for us. The time is now to accept that challenge. ©2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**G**-d listened to Leah, she conceived and bore a fifth son to Yaakov." (Beraishis 30:17) It would seem that Hashem heard the prayers of Leah, yet the Sifsei Chachomim points out that Rashi says she was answered because of her great desire to bear and raise the Tribes of Israel. Though other commentaries say she did pray, the Sifsei Chachomim explains that her sheer desire to be the mother of Klal Yisrael was the greatest prayer she could have offered.

We find a similar message earlier, when the Torah tells us, "Hashem saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb..." The Gemara in Bava Basra (123a) comments on this. "If the Torah doesn't speak ill of even impure animals, how could it disparage the righteous [to say that Yaakov hated her.] Rather, it was because she hated the actions of Esav that He opened her womb [and she merited the firstborn.]"

The Gemara there relates how everyone used to say, "Rivka has two sons and Lavan has two daughters. The older one for the older one and the younger one for the younger one." Leah would sit at the crossroads and ask travelers for reports of Esav's behavior. When she heard terrible things, she began to cry and pray that she not become his wife. She cried so much that her eyelashes fell out. Thus, when Hashem saw that Leah hated what Esav was doing and stood for, He opened her womb and allowed her to have a child. Not only that, but the firstborn.

Chazal say that you can tell a lot about a person's values by what he praises, and Leah's devotion to proper behavior and to raising righteous members of the future Jewish Nation said it all. The way she conducted herself was a constant prayer to Hashem that He enable her to serve Him. He heard that and answered her favorably.

Each of us has desires, goals, wants, and needs. If we align them to our Avodas Hashem, and earnestly seek to be good and do good, then Hashem will hear our prayers and open doors for us to succeed.

Like Leah Imeinu, we should strive to be a living embodiment of the good we wish to achieve, and we will be blessed by Hashem.

Rabbi Yehoshua Eizek Shapiro z"l of Slonim was known as R' Eizel Charif (The Sharp One). When his daughter was ready to get married, R' Eizel sought out the top yeshiva student in the famed Yeshiva of Volozhin. He entered the study hall and announced: "I have a very difficult question on a passage in the Gemara. Whoever can supply the correct answer will win my daughter's hand in marriage."

Soon a long line formed, and one by one the students tried to provide the answer. One by one, R' Eizel explained how their answers were incorrect. This went on for three days, but when no one came up with the correct answer, R' Eizel had no choice but to pack his bags and leave.

He had just reached the edge of the city, when he heard a voice shouting after him: "Rebbi! Rebbi! The answer, the answer!" R' Eizel turned around to see a young man running in his direction. R' Eizel's eyes lit up and he asked: "Do you have the answer to my question?" The student responded: "No, Rebbi, but even if I can't marry your daughter, I want to know the answer."

"Aah!" exclaimed R' Eizel with joy. "If you have such a desire to know the truth, then you shall be my son-in-law!" © 2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

A person is either coming or going in life. We come into the world at birth, and from that point onward we're on the way out. It may take another ninety years before a person actually leaves, but we live with the reality that it can happen much sooner.

I always have this problem when going on vacations, even for a week. I know before I even check in that I will have to check out in a few days. I enjoy the break and comfort knowing that it will all come to an abrupt end at checkout time. For this reason, no matter how long I am staying, I always make a point of moving in by putting all my clothes away in the drawers as if I'm staying for months.

We do the same thing with our lives. We move in and act as if we're going to be here for a long, long time. And though one hundred years is a long time in human years, it is not even a drop in the bucket compared to eternal life in the World-to-Come. But that doesn't stop us from pretending that this world is where it's at, and investing most of our marbles in it.

Not Ya'akov Avinu though. Even when he wanted to finally settle down he wasn't able to. As Rashi says at the beginning of Parashas Vayaishev, the moment he tried to slow down the episode of Yosef began, dashing his hopes of "early" retirement. The last 17 years of his life were tranquil, but they were also in

Egypt, far away from his beloved Eretz Yisroel.

The Talmud says that a person cannot eat from two tables at the same time (Brochos 5b). This means that it's either spirituality or materialism, and anyone who thinks that they have struck a balance is only fooling themselves. It just means that they are satisfied with their level of spirituality, but it doesn't mean that God is. It just means the sacrifices they have made for the materialism they have, are acceptable to them. Who says that God agrees?

The only exception is when the driving force behind the materialism is spiritual. If it wasn't for some mitzvah, they would just as easily avoid the materialism. That was Ya'akov Avinu. As he will tell Eisav in Parashas Vayishlach, he had everything he needed. That is, everything he needed to do his mitzvos. Non-mitzvah possessions did not interest him.

He was only passing through, and he only wanted to take with him what he could bring to the next world.

There is another going out in this week's parsha that is not looked on so favorably. Rachel insisted upon buying Reuven's flowers intended for his mother, Leah. The sale price? Rachel's night with Ya'akov Avinu.

It says that when Ya'akov came home from work, Leah went out to inform him of the change of arrangement, from which Yissachar was conceived. Hence the name has the word schar -- payment in it, to allude to the business transaction that led to his birth. Perhaps that is why Yissachar was destined to sit and learn, and Zevulun went to work to support him.

The Torah doesn't say anything about Leah's going out in this parsha. We only hear about it later in Parashas Vayishlach, when Dinah, Leah's daughter, goes out to check on the women of the land, probably looking to make friends. But this is what led to her eventual violation by Shechem ben Chamor, and it is something, Rashi explains, she inherited from her mother.

The question is, what is the difference between Ya'akov's going out and Leah's? For one, it says: All honor [awaits] the King's daughter who is within. (Tehillim 45:14)

This is the verse they usually quote to say that, it is more modest for a woman to remain out of the public eye as much as possible. No one can argue that it is not more modest, but they may argue that it is not desirable, especially today, with women wanting to accomplish so much, and many doing so.

But again, just because we're happy with what we have been able to do doesn't mean that God is. Everything we do comes at a cost, and each person has to know what that cost is, and make sure it is worth it, in this world and especially in the World-to-Come.

Probably the main difference is that Ya'akov was forced to go out into the world by Hashgachah

Pratis. He was quite happy sitting in his tent of Torah study and going nowhere physically, just spiritually. It was history that pulled him out like wild horses, not his own personal agenda. When that happens God is doing it and is obliged to protect the person. As the Talmud says, a person on the way to do a mitzvah is protected (Pesachim 8a).

It's a very different world today. In fact, so different that you don't have to literally go out into the world to go out into the world. You can do it from the security of your own home and still suffer tremendous spiritual damage. What was once considered "inside" has become very "outside," forcing a person to have to take measures even in private to protect their modesty and honor.

But the truth is, "inside" still means what it has always meant, inside the person. So many people are like those who sit in front of the window looking out into the world while forgetting about everything good on the inside. There's no place like home, and there's no home like being your true self. We spend so much time looking out that we barely spend any time looking in. How many people actually know themselves that well?

People tend to know what they like and dislike, but that is not called knowing your true self. It takes a lot of introspection, and who has time for that? Actually, all of us. The problem is not the time, it is the level of priority. Self-knowledge is something that is assumed, until a person is confronted by a situation that makes them act out-of-character, or actually, in-character in a way that they do not recognize.

Too bad. The greatest pleasure in life is being yourself, not the self that was molded by the world around you.

We read these stories about the Avos and take them at face value. Face value is the entry point. We're supposed to go much deeper each year that we read, and hopefully, learn them. We don't believe in going in circles, unless they spiral upwards indicating spiritual growth.

The story of the Avos is about three extraordinary men and their extraordinary wives and families. But it is also an analogy about three periods of spiritual development. Avraham was stage one, when a soul first comes into this world and has to adjust to it. Yitzchak was stage two, when the soul works on establishing its direction in life. Ya'akov was the final stage, when the resulting person has to go out into the world and be themselves while doing their thing.

Most souls are forced to comply with the world around them, right or wrong. How many people ever question the values of the society that raises them until much later in life, after they have already become biased in one direction or another? That's why so many people are doing so many insane things today in the name of improvement. Weird values lead to weird conclusions.

Avraham fought back at an early age. He resisted the value system that he was born into because, he questioned it and found it lacking. It's amazing how intuitive children can be, and how they lose that intuition to conformity as they grow older. Adults just call them naive because they don't recognize the truth anymore, and tell the child that they will think differently once they grow up. In many societies, that's not an abandonment to truth, but of truth.

Yitzchak was introspective. He wasn't out in the world very much, only when he had to be. He worked on integrating the truths that stage one development taught him, so they could be his as well. That is why his life mimics his father so much. Yitzchak didn't just copy his father's life. He retraced his steps to make them his own.

Ya'akov was the finished product. His father and grandfather did all the initial work to make his life possible. He was the product out in the world to test its integrity, to refine it. Only once "consumer testing" was complete could he begin to father a Torah nation, the goal of the entire process. It was a process that began then, continues through Jewish history, and incorporates our lives as well.

Ma'aseh Avos, siman l'banim. What our fathers did is supposed to be an example for all their descendants. We could and should spend a lifetime discussing these stories to cull them for insights into personal development. But that means going out of our comfort zones, just like Ya'akov does in this week's parsha. ©2021 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L

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*

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