

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

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 God. 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 God were ascending and descending on it. And, look, the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God 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 God, 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 "God." Hence in a poetic way the phrase *vayifga ba-makom* could be read as, "Jacob happened on, had an unexpected encounter with, God."

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 God 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 God 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 God. 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, God 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 God from the heart of darkness, afflicted, alone, pained, afraid:

Save me, O God,
for the floodwaters are up to my neck.
Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire;
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 God that God 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 God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise”(Ps. 51:17). God “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 God 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.” (Likkutei Maharan 2:46)

We find God 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. God 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 God was with him. That simple faith gave him immense dignity and strength of mind.

That was his heritage from Jacob, as it is ours. Though we may fall, we fall into the arms of God. Though others may lose faith in us, and though we may even lose faith in ourselves, God never loses faith in us. And though we may feel utterly alone, we are not. God 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 God, and becomes the gate of heaven. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt”l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z”l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and

clothing to wear, so that I shall come back to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God and I shall erect a monument.” (Genesis 28:20-21) What does it really mean ‘to return whole, in peace, (beshalom) to one’s parents’ home? Is it really possible to ‘come home’ again? The Torah portion of Vayetzeh speaks volumes about parents, adult children and what it really means to come home.

Rabbi Yeshoshua Baumel, in his collection of halakhic inquiries called Emek Halakha, writes the following fascinating responsum. A certain individual vowed to give a hundred dollars to a local synagogue if his son came back ‘beshalom’ – usually understood to mean whole – alive, in one piece – from the war. As it turned out, the son returned very much in one piece; the only problem was that he brought along his gentile wife, whom he’d married in France, as well as their child. The father now claimed that the conditions of his vow had not been met since the forbidden marriage constituted a breach of the ‘beshalom.’ The synagogue rabbi and board of trustees disagreed, claiming that as long as the son had returned home from the front without a war wound, the father owed the hundred dollars. Both parties agreed to abide by Rabbi Baumel’s ruling.

Rabbi Baumel ruled that the father was required to pay the money to the synagogue, based on a Mishna in the little-known Tractate Tvu Yom.

I believe that we need not go all the way to a Mishna dealing with heave offerings in order to define the words ‘to return to one’s father’s home beshalom.’ Our biblical portion deals with our patriarch Jacob setting out on a dangerous journey far from home, who also takes a vow that if God protects him and he returns to his father’s house in peace – beshalom – he will then erect a monument to the Lord.

The definition of ‘beshalom’ in the context of Jacob’s vow might shed more direct light on the question asked of Rabbi Baumel.

It should be noted that although Jacob leaves his Uncle Laban’s home and employ at the conclusion of Chapter 32 of the book of Genesis, he wanders all over the Land of Canaan until the end of Chapter 35, when he finally decides to return to his father’s house. I would submit that Jacob was waiting for the peace which comes from his being accepted by his father, the peace which comes from a loving relationship between father and son. Without this sense of parental acceptance, no child can truly feel whole. And you will remember that Jacob is haunted by his having deceived his blind father by posing as his brother Esau and thereby his having received his father’s blessing under false pretenses!

Unless he feels that his father has forgiven him for the deception which haunts him throughout his life, he knows that he will never be able to ‘return to my father’s house in peace.’

Thus, we can read the series of events that begins with Jacob's departure from Laban at the end of Chapter 32 and his reunion with his father three chapters later as a crucial process in Jacob's development vis-a-vis his paternal relationship.

It begins with a confrontation between the brothers in which Jacob bends over backwards to appear subservient to Esau, repeatedly calling him 'my master'; plying him with gifts, urging him to 'take, I pray, my blessing' – all to the end of returning the fruits of the deception to the rightful biological first-born.

Then we encounter the worst betrayal of all, the terrible act of Reuven having usurped, or interfered with, the sleeping arrangements of his father. Whether we understand the words literally, that Reuven actually had relations with his father's concubine, Bilha, or whether we follow the interpretation of the Midrash, that Reuven merely moved his father's bed from Bilha's tent to the tent of his mother, Leah, after the death of Rachel, his action was a son's flagrant invasion of the personal, private life of his father.

We now find one of the most striking passages in the Torah – not because of what it says but because of what it does not say. The literal reading of the biblical text records that Reuven went and slept with Bilha, his father's concubine. 'And Israel heard about it... (vayishma Yisrael)' (Genesis 35:22). Not only does the biblical sentence end here, but what follows in the parchment scroll is a complete break in the Torah writing. It is not just a gap of white space that continues on the same line, but it is rather a gap which continues until the next line, an open parchment space which generally signals a wordlessness which is fraught with deep emotion.

I would suggest that between the lines, the Torah is telling us that when Jacob hears of his son's deception, he becomes enraged, even livid with anger, but that he holds his wrath inside, remains silent, and thinks a great deal – perhaps amidst many tears.

The text continues by presenting us with an almost superfluous fact: "Now the sons of Jacob were twelve" (Genesis 35:23) – including Reuven. Then come four verses listing all the names of the twelve sons, at long last followed by the verse, "And Jacob came unto Isaac his father to Mamre, to Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron..." (Genesis 35:27).

Apparently now – and not before – Jacob is finally ready to come home.

But why now? Is it not reasonable to assume that the last event which the Torah records, the cause of understandable rage between Jacob and his son, is what surprisingly led to Jacob's reconciliation with his father Isaac!

I would suggest that the blank space following Jacob's having heard of his son Reuven's indiscretion might have begun with rage, but it concluded with resolve for rapprochement. Jacob still thinks that

Reuven's arrogance is beyond contempt, but how can a father divorce himself from his son? And even more importantly, is it Reuven's fault that he acted the way he did? Am I myself not at least partially to blame for having rejected my first-born Reuven in favor of the younger Joseph? Perhaps Reuven was trying to tell me – albeit in a disgraceful and convoluted way – that he was my rightful heir, and I had rejected him unfairly.

So does Jacob agitate within himself. And he decides at last that if he can and must forgive his son for his deception towards him, it is logical to assume that his father, Isaac, who was also guilty of preferring one son over the other – Esau over Jacob – must have forgiven him for his deception as well.

Now, finally, Jacob is ready to return to his father's home in peace. He has made peace with his father because he believes his father has made peace with him. Finally, he can make peace with himself.

When does a son return to his father beshalom? Only when the father accepts the son, and the son accepts the father – in a personal and emotional sense, as well as in a biological one.

So, does the father in our responsum have to pay the money to the synagogue? Only if he is ready and able to accept his son and his new wife beshalom. And that depends on the father and on the son in all the fullness, complexity and resolution of their relationship – past, present and, only then, future. ©2022 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Jacob was a very strong and powerfully physical person. We read of his physical prowess in his previous encounter with the shepherds of Haran and later of his wrestling match with the angel of Esav, at the river of Yaabok. His sons, though young in years, are also very powerful and strong physically and filled with self-confidence, without fear of confronting dangerous enemies. We will see that his two sons, Shimon and Levi, destroy the city of Shechem in their rage and sense of justified revenge for the behavior against their sister Dena. And according to Jewish legend, as quoted by Ramban in his commentary, Jacob engaged in many battles against hostile tribes after entering the Land of Israel.

And yet the overall picture of our father Jacob that emerges from the narrative recorded in the Torah is one of appeasement and an avoidance of confrontation at almost all costs. He allows both Lavan and Esav to threaten him and, in effect, he chooses to buy them off with words and gifts. There is little evidence of the true strength and power of Jacob in the Torah narrative itself. It is obvious that that there is a dual nature present in the portrait that the Torah describes regarding our father Jacob. And there is a profound lesson present in that purposeful presentation

that the Torah has made for us to learn and follow.

We are all aware that the narrative regarding the lives and experiences of our patriarchs and matriarchs is meant to be instructive, as are all the events in Jewish history. During first and second Temple times, when the Jewish people had national sovereignty, they engaged in many wars and battles and were well known throughout the area as a fierce foe. As a matter of fact, Josephus records that the wars of the Jews were the most fearsome in the history of the Roman Legions.

However, after the destruction of the second Temple and the rise of Christianity and later Islam, the Jews became a persecuted minority and almost powerless in terms of physical strength. The entire history of the exile is how the Jewish people lived by their wits, with low profiles and with appeasement of their enemies. Since the exile has lasted for such a long time, this attitude and self-assessment became ingrained in the Jewish psyche. It is only when the nadir of the Jewish exile was reached through the Holocaust that the situation of Jewish self assessment and self assertion began to change.

The creation of the State of Israel is undoubtedly the catalyst for this change. The success of the Jewish State, far beyond even the wildest hopes of previous generations, has emboldened Jewish life throughout the world. It has enabled Jews to become publically Jewish and observant even while holding high office in non-Jewish societies and countries. It is the time of the children of Jacob reasserting themselves in pride and strength. May it continue to embed itself in the brains and hearts of Jews. ©2022 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As Jacob flees Esau, he arrives near his uncle Laban's home. There he sees his cousin Rachel. The Torah tells us, "And Jacob kissed Rachel and cried" (Genesis 29:11).

But why does he cry? To be sure, Jacob was lonely. Running from Esau, he was forced to leave home. Readers might sense that he cried tears of joy because he had once again connected with family. Sensing that he will gain comfort and solace in Rachel, he cries. Tears of happiness stream down his face.

Rashi, however, quoting the Midrash, sees it differently. According to this reading, Jacob's tears were from sadness, for he prophetically saw that he would not be buried with his beloved Rachel (Bereishit Rabbah 70:1). While Jacob was buried in Hebron, Rachel was buried in Bethlehem. According to the Midrash, she was buried there so that when the Jews

passed by after the destruction of the Temple, they would pray at Rachel's grave. There, Rachel would intervene on behalf of her people, imploring God that they soon make their way back (Pesikta Rabbati 3:2). Alternatively, Rachel prays for the ten tribes of the North, often called the Kingdom of Ephraim, her direct descendants. Having been previously exiled, she prays they be reunited with the southern Kingdom of Judah in a glorious return to the Holy Land. It seems, then, that Jacob's tears foretold those that would be shed by Rachel and Am Yisrael when they were exiled (Jeremiah 31:15-17).

Another thought has been suggested. It is possible that Jacob's love for Rachel is instantaneously so deep that he becomes anxious. Intense love makes a person vulnerable, as it carries the risk of loss. Built into love is the reality that nothing lasts forever; indeed, the greater the love, the greater the pain when it terminates. Hence Jacob cries. His love for Rachel is so great that he is overcome, for he knows it will end, and the anguish will be unbearable.

Herein may lie a reason that we break the glass under the chuppah. We do so, of course, to remember the Temples' destruction. But we also do so to remind bride and groom that even the greatest of marriages is fragile and will someday end.

Strange as it may seem, death has echoes in the wedding ceremony. In fact, juxtaposed to the Talmudic discussion of the seven blessings recited beneath the chuppah are the blessings recited at a burial (Ketubot 8a, 8b). Additionally, following the marriage is a week of communal gathering called sheva berachot (literally, "seven blessings," referring to the blessings that are added to the Grace after Meals in honor of the new marriage). Following death is also a week of communal and family gathering called shivah.

The relationship between these happiest and saddest of events is not as bizarre as it might seem. Both death and marriage are times of reflection and transition. Jacob's tears even at a happy moment remind us that nothing continues endlessly. At the moment of greatest joy, we are taught the lesson that we must live every moment of our lives with great love, as life is fleeting and – like a dream – flies away. ©2022 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

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 SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

What a bizarre reaction Yaakov has when he first sees Rachel, his wife-to-be: He kisses her and loudly cries. (*Beraishis*, 29:11). Stranger still, at least at first read, is one of the explanations the Midrash Rabbah offers (and Rashi quotes) for Yaakov's tears: "Because he foresaw through Divine inspiration that she would not be buried with him in the cave of Machpelah."

Not the most romantic reaction, to put it mildly. Sort of a "meet morbid."

But it shines a blazing light on a major disconnect between how contemporary society views love between husband and wife and how the Torah does.

The disconnect is equally evident in the fact that the seven years that Yaakov worked for Lavan before being granted Rachel as a wife were to him like a mere "few days because of his love for her" (*ibid*

29:20).

As the Malbim notes, a typical suitor would find having to wait seven years to marry his intended interminable. But Yaakov's experience was the opposite.

Because he saw his attainment of Rachel as his wife not as a quenching of desire but as a calling, a destiny, a mission of love.

A mission whose very end he foresaw in a prophecy, prompting his tears; and his kiss, which, in Yaakov's mindset, was the epitome of chaste.

As the Kotzker famously remarked, one who "loves fish" doesn't really love fish; he loves his palate. The true fish lover is an aquarist.

So many in our world today marry out of self-love, not true love of another. They "fall" in love and thus, so often, "fall out" of love. When the two parts of a new couple see each other as partners in working toward a mutual goal, their marriage becomes not an end of love but rather its nurturing. ©2022 Rabbi A. Shafran and *torah.org*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"He looked and behold there was a well in the field, and behold there were three flocks of sheep lying near it..." (*Beraishis* 29:2) Upon arriving at the well which served the people of Charan, Yaakov encountered three flocks of sheep and their shepherds, all loitering around the well. He took this opportunity to ask about Lavan, and when he was told Lavan's daughter, Rachel, was approaching, Yaakov asked the shepherds why they didn't water the sheep and getting back to work. They replied that it took all the shepherds together to move the stone from the mouth of the well in order to water the sheep. When Yaakov saw Rachel, he was buoyed by the sight of his intended and he moved the stone himself.

The Torah seems to spend a lot of time on this story by listing a myriad of seemingly unnecessary details. Why do we care where the well was or who was there at the time? But of course, the Torah, as they say, is not a history book, and everything that is mentioned has a message and purpose. The meforshim all discuss the wells, and say they represent the Bais HaMikdash. That is because the Bais HaMikdash is the source of Torah, which is compared to water. Of course, it is our very source of life as well.

The three flocks of sheep surrounding the well, waiting to be watered from it, represent the Jews who would go up to Yerushalayim each Regal, on Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. Alternatively, they represent the three groups of Jews, Kohanim, Levi'im and Yisraelim, who comprise our nation. Those sheep were not there "by accident."

The huge stone, say the commentaries, is to teach us the strength of Yaakov, which power he got by

his faith in Hashem. It was called, "the stone," not "a stone," to indicate that it was naturally impossible to move, but Yaakov was able to do so because, "Those who hope to Hashem renew their strength." (Yeshaya 40:31) What all of the shepherds watching those three flocks could not do, Yaakov did singlehandedly. Which brings us to the current day.

Each of the Avos encountered a well. We know that when Yitzchak dug three wells, the first two were contested, but the third - because of Hashem's direct hashgacha (involvement) - was left in peace. Chazal tell us these three wells represent the three holy Temples. In that case, this well, that of Yaakov, represents the Bayis Shlishi, the third Bais HaMikdash.

The placement of it, off in a field as opposed to the well Eliezer went to which was near the city, teaches us that the ultimate Bais HaMikdash will be far removed from the hustle and bustle of our materialistic lives. The three flocks, representing our nation, remind us that the Bais HaMikdash requires us all to be a part of it and play our respective roles.

And the fact that Hashem gave Yaakov the strength to move the boulder from the mouth of the well teaches us that when we are unified in our service of Hashem, we can move mountains. Nothing is coincidence; it's all part of Hashem's plan.

The Brisker Rov once lent a man a not-inconsiderable amount of money. When the time for repayment arrived, the man did not have the money and was ashamed to come to the Rov for an extension. He avoided him for some time but since the Brisker Rov never mentioned it again, he assumed the Rov had forgotten. He relaxed and waited until he was able to repay the loan.

When that time came, he approached the Brisker Rov with a slightly sheepish smile on his face. "I'm sure the Rov doesn't remember," he began, "but some time ago you lent me money, and I am here to repay the loan." "Not remember?!" exclaimed the sage. "Of course I remembered! There are two ways to walk from my home to the Bais HaMidrash. The shorter way gets me there faster but takes me past your house, while the longer way is quite circuitous but does not pass your home.

Since the day I lent you the money, I have taken the longer way so as to avoid the issur of appearing demanding. I went out of my way to make you comfortable in borrowing the money and thus lend properly. I did not forget about the money, but neither did I forget about you." ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Speckled and Spotted

When Ya'akov had completed the seven years of servitude to Lavan and expected to receive Rachel as his wife, Lavan tricked him and gave

him Leah instead. He then fulfilled the week of marriage to Leah and married Rachel, with the promise that he would work an additional seven years for Lavan. When the fourteen years were over and all his sons except for Binyamin were born, Ya'akov wished to return to his family in Canaan. Lavan wanted Ya'akov to continue to work for him, since Hashem had blessed him with great wealth through Ya'akov.

"He (Lavan) said, 'What (wage) shall I give you?' And Ya'akov said, 'Do not give me anything; if you will do this thing for me, I will resume pasturing and guarding your flocks: Let me pass through your whole flock today. Remove from there every speckled or dappled lamb, every brownish lamb among the sheep, and the dappled and speckled among the goats -- that will be my wage. Let my integrity speak for me in the future when it will come regarding my wage before you; any that is not speckled or dappled among the goats, or brownish among the sheep, is stolen in my possession.'"

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains why Ya'akov told Lavan that he did not wish that Lavan should give him anything. Ya'akov understood the way that Lavan viewed any deal in which he maintained possession of the promised payment. Lavan had already tricked him with Leah, and Ya'akov did not wish to leave any reward he was to receive in Lavan's hands. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin compares Ya'akov's reluctance to accept his wages directly from Lavan's hands to Avraham's refusal to accept even a shoelace as his reward from the evil King of Sodom. Avraham did not want people to say that he had become wealthy through an evil man. Ya'akov so did not wish to appear to become rich through an evil man, so he presented a way for him to receive his reward directly through the blessings of Hashem. Still, he told Lavan that he would return to his household so that Hashem would also bless Lavan while He blessed Ya'akov.

Still, Lavan was a man who found pleasure in tricking others. Lavan went through his flock and removed all the male and female kinds of sheep and goats specified by Ya'akov, and he gave them to his sons and had them separate from Ya'akov, a distance of three days. This would prevent any of the speckled and spotted sheep and brown goats given to his sons from mating with Ya'akov's flock. According to HaRav Hirsch, Lavan knew that this would diminish Ya'akov's chances of having many speckled and dappled sheep and goats. Ya'akov had proposed a situation where he would receive the unusual offspring of the entire flock. That is why he specified the less desirable and less common offspring as his reward. This would still leave Lavan with the greater number and more valuable animals as his blessing from Hashem. After Lavan's deception, Hashem rewarded Ya'akov and diminished the reward to Lavan by making all the sheep born during that time fit into the limited categories granted to

Ya'akov.

"Ya'akov then took himself fresh rods of poplar and hazel and chestnut. He peeled white streaks in them, laying bare the white of the rods. And he set up the rods which he had peeled, in the runnels, in the watering receptacles to which the flocks came to drink, facing the flocks, so they would become stimulated when they came to drink. Then the flocks became stimulated by the rods, and the flocks gave birth to ringed ones, speckled ones, and spotted ones. Ya'akov segregated the lambs, and he made the flocks face the ringed ones and all the brownish ones among Lavan's flocks. He formed separate droves of his own and did not mingle them with Lavan's flocks. Whenever it was mating time for the early-bearing flock, Ya'akov would place the rods in the runnels, in full view of the flock, to stimulate them among the rods. But when the sheep were late-bearing, he would not emplace; thus, the late-bearing ones went to Lavan and early-bearing ones to Ya'akov."

Ya'akov appeared to be using sorcery or magic in order to secure his fair share of the animals that would be born with the colorations which would benefit him. The Ramban justifies his actions: "As soon as they agreed that his hire would be these colors, it was permissible for Ya'akov to do whatever he could to cause them to give birth in this manner." The Radak says that Ya'akov did not make use of the sticks in the first year, yet many of the sheep that were born were speckled and spotted through Hashem's blessing. The Ramban also points out that the stronger animals were the early-bearing ones, and the weaker ones were not shone the sticks and bore weaker, white sheep which would go to Lavan. R'Bachya says that Ya'akov did not use this method until an angel of Hashem instructed him to do so.

Our Rabbis explain why this apparent magic was necessary. Ya'akov complained later to his wives that Lavan had changed the conditions of the agreement ten times. Others say that this agreement was altered as much as one hundred times. Hirsch explains that the "form and position required for the spots and stripes" were changed frequently. In many ways, this effectively cancelled any advantage that Ya'akov could have achieved with the sticks. It was only through Hashem's intervention and blessings that Ya'akov was able to overcome all of the changes made by Lavan to their agreement.

It appears strange that Ya'akov believed it necessary to separate his flocks so that they would not mingle with Lavan's flocks. Ya'akov was aware that Lavan had separated his flocks from Ya'akov's and had taken with him any sheep or goats that could have given Ya'akov an advantage in the breeding process. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Ya'akov was now afraid that Lavan would see how weak his portion of the animals were and might then steal newborn animals

from Ya'akov and claim that they were from the flocks that he had previously separated.

In the Haggadah which is read on Pesach night, we refer to Lavan as the Aramean who tried to destroy the Jewish People. The Talmud has many references to that evil Lavan. Our story of the flocks marks only a small portion of the trickery and deceit with which Lavan operated against Ya'akov. It is only through the Divine assistance of Hashem that Ya'akov survived and prospered. Perhaps this is the lesson that we are to gain from this section of the Torah. The B'nei Yisrael can only survive through our dependence on Hashem. We must remember to turn to Hashem for our success and our protection. It is only through our Faith in Hashem that we will remain under His wing.
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RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva in the direction of Charan." (Bereishis 28:10) Ya'akov is on the run. However, not so much away from Eisav as much as toward Lavan and the fulfillment of destiny, his and that of the future Jewish nation.

But that is not the way it felt at the time. There he was, a simple man sitting in the tents of Torah, having the time of his life while dedicating himself to the most meaningful goals a person can achieve, doing what he had been sure was the will of G-d. That ended the moment his mother called Ya'akov in and included him in her plan of deception to usurp the blessings from her eldest son.

True, he stayed for 14 years in the yeshivah of Shem and Eiver on his way to Padan Aram and learned studiously, but there is a difference between learning Torah when you feel no pressure to move on and when you do. It certainly does not help one's concentration to know that one's murderous brother is out to get him, and could at any moment.

And besides, he was a changed man now. The simplicity and purity with which he once learned Torah was a thing of the past, as he indicated to his wife-to-be, Rachel: Ya'akov told Rachel that he was her father's brother. But, was he her father's brother?! He was her father's nephew! Rather, he said to her, "Marry me." She agreed but said "My father is a deceiver, and you cannot overcome him."

"He answered 'I am his brother in trickery.'" (Megillah 13b) And so he was. Lavan did try to outsmart him by deceiving Ya'akov into marrying his eldest daughter Leah, but Ya'akov had himself covered by arranging with Rachel to use a password when consummating the marriage at night. What he hadn't counted on, though, was Rachel outsmarting him by helping her father to succeed where he himself could not: she gave Leah the password.

Talk about conspiracies! Not only did Rachel's double-cross undermine Ya'akov's plan, it cost him an extra seven years to work for the wife he had truly wanted to marry, even after she betrayed him. To be sure, living and working with Lavan was no party, and even an extra day with him was like an eternity. Now he had to spend an 2,555 days with him, not to mention an extra six years after that just to build up his own fortune.

It must have made him long for the good old days. To make matters worse, it is one thing to have two wives. It is another matter altogether to have two wives that do not get along with each other, even for good reasons. After a day with Lavan and his sons, deceivers and thieves, a person wants to find respite in his own home, which wasn't always so available while Rachel and Leah were building the House of Israel.

Even after surviving the 20 years with Lavan, and the competition between his wives, Ya'akov still had to confront Eisav on the way home, and then Shechem and the violation of Dinah. That only led to Shimon and Levi taking revenge against Shechem and his entire city, and a near war that would have wiped out the fledgling Jewish nation, had it not been for a last minute miracle.

Did I mention the all night fight with the Angel of Eisav along the way? Thirty-six years later, he was home, though he never got a chance to say good-bye to his mother, who died while he was still on the way home. But that was the least of his troubles, because it was not long after settling down that Yosef was kidnapped and sold into slavery. A happy reunion, at that point, was still 22 years away, but even that was accompanied by a whole new exile to one of the most spiritually decrepit nations of its time. If anyone had a right to complain, it was Ya'akov Avinu. So he did, to Pharaoh when he said: "Ya'akov said to Pharaoh, 'I've wandered for 130 years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, which has not yet reached the years of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.'" (Bereishis 47:9) and was fined by G-d, one year of life for every (Hebrew) word of complaint, 33 years altogether.

Some people get no breaks, which, it turns out, for some people can be the greatest break of all, as the Talmud explains: Rabbah bar Bar Chanah said: When Rebi Eliezer became sick, his disciples entered [his house] to visit him. He said to them, "There is a fierce wrath in the world." They broke into tears, but Rebi Akiva laughed. "Why do you laugh?" they asked him.

"Why do you cry?" he asked back.

They answered, "Shall the Scroll of the Torah lie in pain, and we not weep?" He replied, "For that very reason I rejoice. As long as I saw that my master's wine did not turn sour, nor was his flax smitten, nor his oil putrefied, nor his honey become rancid, I thought, G-d forbid, that he may have received all his reward in this

world. However, now that I see him lying in pain, I rejoice [knowing that his reward has been saved for him in the next world]."

He [Rebi Eliezer] said to him, "Akiba, have I neglected anything of the whole Torah?"

"He replied, 'Master, you have taught us, 'For there is not a just man upon earth, that does good and does not sin' (Kohel 7:20).'" (Sanhedrin 101a)

That was from the Talmud. However, the Midrash concurs countless times, some examples being: "A person has to show appreciation to The Holy One, Blessed is He, when he suffers, because suffering draws a person closer to The Holy One, Blessed is He." (Tanchuma, Saitzai 2) "Suffering is more valuable than sacrifices, since sacrifices involve money but suffering involves the body." (Mechilta, Yisro 10) "Suffering only comes to the Jewish people for their good and because of the love of the Jewish people." (Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Zuta, 11) "Come and see which way brings a person to the World-to-Come: suffering. Suffering is dear to The Holy One, Blessed is He, that the Name of The Holy One, Blessed is He, is attached to one who suffers." (Shochar Tov, Tehillim 94)

Apparently, yesurim, or suffering, is the Cod Liver Oil of the spiritual realm. It tastes terrible, but it is good for you, VERY good for you. This is not to say that one should go out looking for it, and to increase the suffering he may be presently undergoing. It just means that suffering in this world is not necessarily a sign of Divine disapproval, especially, as in the case of Ya'akov Avinu, who was trying hard to be a good person, and an even better servant of G-d.

On the contrary, personal suffering may very well be a sign of Divine approval, something to keep in mind since it also says: "Three portions of suffering were divided amongst the Forefathers and all of their generations, the generation of Shmad (intense persecution), and the generation of Moshiach." (Shochar Tov, Tehillim 2)

The worst, I mean the best, may be yet to come. Isn't that bad, I mean, great news? It may be an easy sell to our souls, but not necessarily to our bodies, which tend to be, and rightly so, anti-suffering. But, if it has to come, we might as well learn to use to our advantage. Its period of impact is small compared to the eternal pleasure it brings us later on, in the next world. © 2013 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

