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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

This week's parsha relates a powerful, primal vision of prayer: Jacob, alone and far from home, lies down for the night, with only stones for a pillow, and dreams of a ladder, with angels ascending and descending. This is the initial encounter with the "house of God" that would one day become the synagogue, the first dream of a "gate of heaven" that would allow access to a God that stands above, letting us know finally that "God is truly in this place."

There is, though, one nuance in the text that is lost in translation, and it took the Hassidic masters to remind us of it. Hebrew verbs carry with them, in their declensions, an indication of their subject. Thus the word yadati means "I knew," and lo yadati, "I did not know." When Jacob wakes from his sleep, however, he says, "Surely the Lord is in this place ve'anokhi lo yadati." Anokhi means "I," which in this sentence is superfluous. To translate it literally we would have to say, "And I, I knew it not." Why the double "I"?

To this, Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz (Panim Yafot) gave a magnificent answer. How, he asks, do we come to know that "God is in this place"? "By ve'anokhi lo yadati -- not knowing the I." We know God when we forget the self. We sense the "Thou" of the Divine Presence when we move beyond the "I" of egocentricity. Only when we stop thinking about ourselves do we become truly open to the world and the Creator. In this insight lies an answer to some of the great questions about prayer: What difference does it make? Does it really change God? Surely God does not change. Besides which, does not prayer contradict the most fundamental principle of faith, which is that we are called on to do God's will rather than ask God to do ours? What really happens when we pray?

Prayer has two dimensions, one mysterious, the other not. There are simply too many cases of prayers being answered for us to deny that it makes a difference to our fate. It does. I once heard the following story. A man in a Nazi concentration camp lost the will to live -- and in the death camps, if you lost the will to live, you died. That night he poured out his heart in prayer. The next morning, he was transferred to work in the camp kitchen. There he was able, when the guards were not looking, to steal some potato peelings. It was these peelings that kept him alive. I heard this story from his son.

Perhaps each of us has some such story. In times of crisis we cry out from the depths of our soul, and something happens. Sometimes we only realise it later, looking back. Prayer makes a difference to the world -- but how it does so is mysterious.

There is, however, a second dimension which is non-mysterious. Less than prayer changes the world, it changes us. The Hebrew verb lehitpalel, meaning "to pray," is reflexive, implying an action done to one -- self. Literally, it means "to judge oneself." It means, to escape from the prison of the self and see the world, including ourselves, from the outside. Prayer is where the relentless first person singular, the "I," falls silent for a moment and we become aware that we are not the centre of the universe. There is a reality outside. That is a moment of transformation.

If we could only stop asking the question, "How does this affect me?" we would see that we are surrounded by miracles. There is the almost infinite complexity and beauty of the natural world. There is the divine word, our greatest legacy as Jews, the library of books we call the Bible. And there is the unparalleled drama, spreading over forty centuries, of the tragedies and triumphs that have befallen the Jewish people. Respectively, these represent the three dimensions of our knowledge of God: creation (God in nature), revelation (God in holy words) and redemption (God in history).

Sometimes it takes a great crisis to make us realise how self -- centred we have been. The only question strong enough to endow existence with meaning is not, "What do I need from life?" but "What does life need from me?" That is the question we hear when we truly pray. More than an act of speaking, prayer is an act of listening -- to what God wants from us, here, now. What we discover -- if we are able to create that silence in the soul -- is that we are not alone. We are here because someone, the One, wanted us to be, and He has set us a task only we can do. We emerge strengthened, transformed.

More than prayer changes God, it changes us. It lets us see, feel, know that "God is in this place." How do we reach that awareness? By moving beyond the

Please keep in mind
בנימין שמחה בן עדינה מניה
for a refuah shelaima

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first person singular, so that for a moment, like Jacob, we can say, "I know not the I." In the silence of the "I," we meet the "Thou" of God. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

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 fathers house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God and I shall erect a monument." (Gen. 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 Tvul 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 the patriarch Jacob, setting out on a dangerous journey far from home, who also takes a vow saying 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 pretense!

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)' [Gen. 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 wordless which is fraught with deep emotion. I would suggest that between the lines the Torah is telling us that when Jacob heard of his son's deception, he became enraged, even livid with anger, but 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 (Gen. 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…' [Gen. 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? But 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.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Jacob was a very strong and physically powerful 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.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

To be sure, Ya'akov was lonely. Running from Esau he was forced to leave home. It is therefore conceivable that his tears were tears of joy that he had once again connected with family. Sensing that he would gain comfort and solace in Rachel, he cries. Tears of happiness stream down his face.

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, sees it differently. According to this reading, Ya'akov's tears were ones of sadness for his prophetic abilities made him realize that he would not be buried with his beloved Rachel.

Rachel was buried in Bethlehem. According to the Midrash, she was buried there so that when the Jews would pass by after the destruction of the Temple they would pray at Rachel's grave. There, Rachel would intervene on behalf of her people. It seems then that Ya'akov's tears may be echoes of the tears to be shed by am Yisrael when they would be exiled. Similar tears are shed today, as Jews are being denied the right to pray at Rachel's grave.

Another thought comes to mind. It is possible that Ya'akov's love for Rachel was already so deep that he became anxious. Sometimes one's love for another is so profound that fear builds up that the love would eventually be lost. Built into love is the reality that every love relationship must terminate, for death comes to all of us. The greater the love, the greater the pain when it terminates. Hence Jacob cries. His love for Rachel is so great that he is overcome for he knows it will end and the pain was unbearable.

Here may lie a reason why we break the glass under the chupah. We do so of course to remember the Temple destroyed. But we also do so to remind bride and groom that nothing lasts forever. In the end even the greatest of marriages are fragile and will end.

Strange as it may seem, death has echoes in the wedding ceremony. In fact, juxtaposed to the Talmudic discussion of the seven blessings recited beneath the chupah are the blessings recited at a burial (Ketubot 8a, 8b). Additionally, following the marriage is a week of seven nights of family and communal gathering called Sheva Brakhot. Following death is also a week of communal and family gathering called Shiva. The relationship is not bizarre. Both of these times are ones of reflection and transition. They teach us that nothing continues forever. At the moments of greatest joy and deepest sorrow we are taught the lesson that we must live every moment of our lives in love, as life is fleeting and like a dream, flies away.

And so, this may be why Jacob cries. He is aware of the reality that we must use our time on this earth to hold on tight and to truly treasure those whom we love. *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 Place

The story of the Ladder from Heaven begins our parasha. As Ya'akov flees from his brother Esav and goes towards his uncle, Lavan, he rests overnight "in the Place" on Mt. Moriah, Har HaMoriah. Ya'akov has a dream about angels ascending and descending this ladder. As Ya'akov awakens, he realizes that this dream came to him as a prophecy, and therefore the Place on which he is sleeping is a holy Place. He says, "How wondrous is this Place, it cannot be anything but the House of Hashem (Elokim) and this is the Gate of the Heavens." Yaakov refers to the place of the Temple as a House. But this is not the only way in which this place is described. In Parashat Vayera, we find the akedah, the sacrifice of Yitzchak. Avraham refers to this Place of Hashem as a mountain. "And Avraham called the name of this Place Hashem Yiraeh, that it will be said today, on (this) mountain Hashem is seen." Here we also have a play on words. One of the names of Hashem is the Place (HaMakom) which is the characteristic of the Omnipresent.

There is still another description of the Temple Mount which is relevant to our discussion. When Yitzchak is about to meet his future bride, the Torah tells us, "And Yitzchak went out to converse (pray) in the Field." The rabbis tell us that Yitzchak went out to meet his bride and prayed to Hashem that she would fulfill all of the wishes of Avraham. Yitzchak wanted her to have the same qualities of chessed (kindness), hachnasat orchim (welcoming guests), and avodat Hashem (service of Hashem) that Sarah had. We see that his prayer is fulfilled when the miracles that had blessed Sarah's tent now blessed Rivka's. What is different in this account is that we do not see that Yitzchak names the Place the Field of Hashem. Instead we must rely on the Talmud, Masechet Pesachim 88a, where R' Elazar explains that each of these phrases are used to describe the Temple Mount.

We see that we have three different descriptions of the Place: (1) the har (mountain) of Avraham, (2) the sadeh (field) of Yitzchak, and (3) the bayit (house) of Yaakov. But what can we learn from these three descriptions. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin states that the description that Avraham gives is intended for the non-believers who are first learning about Hashem and His ways. It is as if Avraham says,

"Let us go up to the Mountain." Avraham explains to the uninitiated that when one begins the journey to understand and accept Hashem's ways, it can appear as difficult as ascending a steep mountain. The journey may be difficult, but if one raises his eyes upward (as one must when ascending a mountain) Hashem will be there to guide him and assist him. One must only keep to the path that Hashem has already provided.

By the time these same non-believers came under the tutelage of Yitzchak, they had already ascended to a much higher level. They had reached the flat plain at the top. Here was a Field where they could plant and watch their spirituality and faith grow. They no longer needed to constantly look upward for guidance and courage. They now had the strength and the experience to focus entirely on growth. Of course, they still sought out Hashem's guidance, but they did not see Him as being far away. Hashem was now a large part of everything they did.

The Torah states that after Ya'akov experienced the dream of the ladder, he named the place "the House of Hashem." From this we learn that at this stage of their experience, non-believers are so close to Hashem that they feel that they are members of Hashem's family, they are a part of Hashem's House. The uninitiated no longer feels uninitiated. He reaches a level where he is part of the family and shares the same love for the family that one feels who was born into it. The non-believers no longer must focus on a distant Hashem, as if on a mountain, or concern themselves with only growing and producing in their beliefs as in a field, but can now focus on the love that binds all members of the family together. The non-believer will then come to the final step of serving Hashem out of love.

Up to this point we have been talking primarily about converts or uninitiated people who are searching for Hashem and the right path. We might think that this description of the "Place" as a mountain, field, and house, is limited to a discussion of the path of outsiders who want to join in our belief in Hashem. One should note that the name given to the "Place" by Ya'akov is "the house of Hashem (Beit El)." Rashi, the Ramban, and others are concerned because the same name was mentioned earlier in the Torah as being in a different area than Mt. Moriah. Our tradition tells us that the "Place" where Ya'akov experiences his dream, the "Place" of the mountain, field, and house, is the site of the "Binding of Yitzchak" and the subsequent First and Second Temples. This cannot be the same Beit El that is described as near Ha'ai in the mountains north of Jerusalem. Yet, perhaps, the fact that this name occurs in different parts of the land is an indication to us of another message from Hashem. Beit El is not one place alone.

The House of Hashem must be sought wherever one is found and is not limited to any one place or location. The path that is referred to by Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov in their descriptions of the Place is a path that must be traveled by everyone. The person born in a religious home where mitzvot are observed regularly, might begin his journey with a better background and appreciation for Hashem, but he still must make his own connection to Hashem. His mountain may not be so steep or so high, his field may be more fertile and better irrigated, his house may be more comfortable and better built, but he still must make the journey for himself. He must travel the same path to the mountain, through the field, and into the house as part of his own development.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the House of Hashem is a house into which Hashem moves. When we recognize that Hashem is with us in our journey, we help Hashem to become part of our lives. We say to newly married couples that they should build a "bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael, a loyal house of faith in Yisrael." May Hashem guide us all through our path to build our house as a place in which Hashem will dwell.

RABBI ELIAKIM KOENIGSBERG

TorahWeb

At the beginning of Parshas Vayeitzei (28:12), Yaakov Avinu dreams of a ladder with angels going up and down. Rashi explains that the angels of Eretz Yisrael were ascending the ladder, while the angels of Chutz L'Aretz were coming down to accompany Yaakov on his journey to Charan. Similarly, at the end of the parsha, on his way back from Charan, Yaakov Avinu meets two camps of angels (machanayim) -- angels of Eretz Yisrael coming to greet him and angels of Chutz L'Aretz leaving him. Why is it that at the beginning of the parsha, Yaakov Avinu is still in Eretz Yisrael -- he is in Beit El -- when angels of Chutz L'Aretz come to greet him, while at the end of the parsha, angels of Eretz Yisrael come to greet him although he is still in Chutz L'Aretz?

Perhaps the answer is that a person is defined not by his physical location but by his mindset. Although Yaakov Avinu was still in Eretz Yisrael at the beginning of the parsha, he was already thinking of Chutz L'Aretz. He was contemplating the long journey ahead and the challenges he would experience in the house of Lavan. He may have still been in Eretz Yisrael physically, but emotionally and mentally he was already in Chutz L'Aretz. That is why angles of Chutz L'Aretz come to greet him. But at the end of the parsha, Yaakov Avinu was still in Chutz L'Aretz, but he was thinking of Eretz Yisrael. He was dreaming of his parents' home. He was excited that his long, difficult journey was nearly over. And that is why angels of Eretz Yisrael come to greet him.

We find a similar idea in the realm of halacha as well. In the morning we recite a birchas haTorah, we

learn a little bit, and then we become involved in different activities throughout the day. And yet when we engage in Torah study later in the day, we do not recite another bracha. The rishonim are troubled by this halacha. Why is Talmud Torah different than other mitzvos? If a person recites a bracha of leisheiv b'sukka when eating in a sukka in the morning, and then he becomes involved in other activities and returns to the sukkah later in The day, he must recite another bracha of leisheiv b'sukka. Why is the halacha different for Talmud Torah?

The Rosh (Brachos 1:13) answers that no new bracha is necessary when returning to the study of Torah because ideally a person should always be looking forward to resuming his Torah learning after he finishes his other activities. Certainly if one is working for an employer, he must concentrate fully on his job when he is at the office. But subconsciously, one should always be thinking of his Torah studies. So his involvement in other activities during the day does not constitute a hefsek, an interruption, in his learning. That is why there is no need to recite another bracha when returning to one's Torah studies.

This idea that a person is defined by his mindset also relates to tefillah. The Gemara (Brachos 30a) says, "One who is davening outside of Eretz Yisrael should 'direct his heart' toward Eretz Yisrael... One who is in Eretz Yisrael should direct his heart toward Yerushalayim... One who is in Yerushalayim should direct his heart toward the Beis HaMikdash... What emerges is that one who is standing east of Eretz Yisrael turns toward the west and one who is standing west of Eretz Yisrael turns toward the east."

Why should one davening outside Eretz Yisrael have to face Eretz Yisrael if he is already directing his heart toward Eretz Yisrael? Apparently, Chazal wanted a person to have a mindset of standing in the Beis HaMikdash when davening, no matter where he is located. That is why they required him to direct his heart toward Eretz Yisrael, Yerushalayim and the Beis HaMikdash, and for the same reason, Chazal said that when davening, a person should even face Eretz Yisrael because that makes it easier for him to focus on the Beis HaMikdash.

While Chazal applied the concept of a spiritual mindset to Torah and tefillah, the idea is relevant to life in general. A person is not defined by his physical location, but rather by his dreams and aspirations. No matter where a person finds himself in life, no matter what situation he is in, it is his mindset that determines the kind of a person he really is.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Ya'akov got up early in the morning and took the stone which he had placed under his head. He set it up as a monument and poured oil on the top of it." (Bereishis 25:18) We are now in Chanukah territory. Kislev has begun and the Zohar says that the 24 days of Kislev in advance of Chanukah correspond to the 24 letters of the second verse of the Shema. The 25th day, when Chanukah begins, corresponds to the 25 letters of the Shema. I now have three books on the topic: The Light of 36, Chanukah Lite, and Once Revealed, Twice Concealed, so if you want a better understanding of all of this, read the books.

It has been pointed out countless times how the miraculous military victory that led to the holiday of Chanukah plays second fiddle to the main Chanukah miracle of the Menorah. The most common explanation is that, as amazing as the military victory was, it was not impossible, just highly unlikely. Smaller armies, if clever enough, CAN bring down larger armies, and have at different points in history.

One day's worth of oil burning for eight days IS impossible without a miracle. It's not even a phenomenon, just plain miraculous. The military victory could not have happened without Heavenly help, but maybe it was just a temporary respite from exile. Who says it was meant to become a holiday?

But, when the oil burned for seven extra days, well, that was a whole different story. That meant God had changed the world, albeit temporarily for the Jewish heroes of that time. It revealed, retroactively, just how miraculous the military victory had actually been.

It is not unlike the story of the mann. The Torah writes: "God told Moshe, 'I am going to rain bread for you from heaven, and the people will go out each day and collect it, so that I can test you, to see if you'll keep My Torah or not. Vehayah -- on the sixth day, they should prepare that which they will bring; there will be twice the amount they collect daily.'" (Shemos 16:4)

That was in advance of discovering the extra portion of mann for Shabbos. This was after it: "'Vayehi' -- on the sixth day they collected the double portion of bread, two omers; the leaders of the people reported it to Moshe. He said to them, 'This is what God said... It is a Shabbos, a holy Shabbos to God...'" (Shemos 16:22)

In the first verse, in which God tells Moshe of the impending miracle, it begins with the word "vehayah." However, in the second verse about the actual collecting of the Shabbos portion, it begins with the word "vayehi." The Talmud explains that there is a difference between these two words: "vehayah" alludes to a joyful event, and "vayehi" indicates a sad occurrence.

Thus, the verse of when Moshe learns of the double portion begins on a happy note. The verse that records the realization of the miracle begins on a sad note. Why this difference?

Because there were two ways to collect the double portion of mann for Shabbos. The most obvious

way was to physically collect two omers, and see the extra one not rot. The second way was more dramatic: collect one omer while saying, "L'chavod Shabbos Kodesh" -- this is for the honor of Shabbos -- and watch one omer become two!

A miracle like that would have been totally outside the natural realm, and would have transformed the entire nation. Collecting two omers and watching one not rot as it normally did would have only been a "phenomenon." It would have been worthy of investigation, but not of much excitement. Its transformative powers would have been far weaker.

It was to this latter category of miracle that the military victory of Chanukah belonged. It was to the first category of miracle that the miracle of the Menorah belonged. The military victory was like collecting two omers and one not rotting: not likely, but possible. The Menorah burning for seven extra days was like collecting one omer of mann and watching it become two because of a couple of words -- simply impossible, without a miracle.

The same thing happens to Ya'akov Avinu in this week's parsha as well. After he had his fantastic dream of the ladder, he built a monument to God and then anointed it with olive oil. Where did he find oil if Eliphaz, Eisav's son, robbed Ya'akov of everything he owned?

The midrash explains that a jar of oil just "happened" to be attached to the rock Ya'akov slept on. It was a highly unlikely occurrence, but not an impossible one. Stranger things have happened for the Forefathers.

But, as excited as Ya'akov was to find the oil, he became FAR more excited when he used it to anoint his monument, and he ended up with the same amount of oil with which he started. THAT was impossible, clearly a miracle.

It's a hard thing to get used to, like getting water from a rock. We have a difficult enough time relying on "phenomena," but it takes a real ba'al bitachon, someone who trusts in God completely, to believe a miracle can occur for him out of nowhere. But that is precisely what we're supposed to be working on during this 24-day build-up to Chanukah, the belief that miracles do happen, even in the most impossible of ways.

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Simultaneous Smachot

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

At first glance it would seem from the actions and words of Lavan in this week's portion when saying to Yaakov "finish this week and then we will give you Rachel(to marry)", that we derive the law that one may not mingle two joyous occasions together (Ein Mearvin Simcha B'simcha). However the Talmud (Moed Katan 9a) derives this axiom from the behavior of King Solomon at the dedication of the Beit Hamikdash. During that dedication which occurred at the same time as the holiday of Succot, King Solomon made sure that the week of celebration for the dedication of the Temple did not interfere with the Holiday of Succot.

One might explain this law forbidding the "mingling of celebrations" by postulating that it is difficult for one to properly celebrate two smachot (celebrations) simultaneously. This is why we do not celebrate any weddings on a Chag (Jewish Holiday) or Chol Hamoed (the intermediate days of a holiday).

One might ask –What is the law when celebrating a wedding on the holiday of Purim? Does the law of "mingling Smachot" only apply to a holiday that is derived from the Torah (as Succot) or does it apply as well to a holiday which is mandated by our Rabbis (as Purim is)? From the behavior of Lavan, it would seem that it really wouldn't matter- since the seven days of rejoicing following a marriage is certainly mandated by our Rabbis, yet Lavan with Jacob's concurrence waited the week so as not to mix the two Smachot.

Upon further investigation, one might also conclude that the law of mixing smachot is only applicable to a wedding, for a Brit Millah (Circumcision) and the subsequent festive meal (seudah), or a Pidyon Haben (the redeeming of a first born) would be celebrated on the holiday regardless of the conflict. Additionally the only time that we reference Simcha (joyousness) is at a wedding when we say the words Shehasimcha bmono (the joyousness is present) and thus the true Simcha is at a wedding.

Additionally, according to Torah law, a man may marry several women at the same time under the same Chupah, or even (if not for the fear that it would cause enmity and jealousy) different couples may be married off at the same time under the same Chupah, and there would not be a problem with the "mingling of Smachot". Hence we might conclude that this law of "mingling" only applies when there are two distinct and different Smachot as with a wedding and a Chag, however when the smachot are all the same theme, this law would not apply.

If we apply all this to our Parsha, Lavan could have allowed the wedding of both Leah and Rachel simultaneously on condition that they would both celebrate the subsequent seven days of celebration (shivat yemei hamishteh) separately.

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

"Rochel was jealous of her sister. She said to Yaakov, 'Give me children!'" Be'er Yosef: "Rashi cites a midrash that Rochel's jealousy

was of Leah's good deeds. She reasoned that only Leah's righteousness could account for Leah's fecundity and her own barrenness, and was jealous of the merit that Leah possessed that she herself lacked."

This interpretation seems to make the rest of the episode unravel. If Rochel decided that her plight stemmed from the insufficiency of her own merit relative to Leah, she seems to have hit on the wrong strategy. She should have focused on Leah's actions, and learned from her sister how to become more righteous! What prompted her to look for short cut through the prayer of her husband? She should have strived to multiply her own merit, and deserve children in her own right.

When we first meet Leah, we are told that her "eyes were tender."(Bereishis 29:17) The gemara (Bava Basra 123A, cited by Rashi) offers us the back-story. The talk of the "street" was the shidduchim -- to-be between the sons of Yitzchok and the daughters of Lavan. Everyone knew what would happen: the older daughter would go to the older son. Naturally, Leah had some interest in this story, and began inquiring about her apparent intended. She quickly learned that his reputation preceded him -- but not in a good way. His evil exploits were a matter of record. The more she learned about Esav, the more she was repulsed by him -- and took to crying incessantly. When Hashem saw how much Leah hated Esav's lifestyle and misadventures, He had pity upon her, and gave her the gift of the ability to bear children.

Rochel, on the other hand, led a charmed life. She was aware of the blessing of her attractiveness. More importantly, she knew she was destined to marry Yaakov the tzaddik. Her demeanor was one of happiness and th ankfulness -- and hence her dilemma. She understood that her sister had achieved great merit in fully reacting against Esav's deeds with disgust. Because Leah thought she was going to be drawn into his life, she was able to personalize the rejection of his evil. While Rochel certainly rejected Esav's evil, she knew that she could not feel it as intensely as her sister. She could not attain Leah's merit, because she was an entirely a different person. Lacking that merit, she turned to her husband to daven for her, hoping that his merit could compensate for what she could not supply.

We know that Yaakov spurned her request -- and used some sharp, acerbic language to boot. Essentially he told her that this was her problem, and not his. He had children through Leah. Rochel was the one in trouble.

Rochel was not only rejected, but Yaakov's apparent coldness got her thinking. Perhaps, if I can't provide children to Yaakov, he won't really need me. He will consid er divorcing me. If he does, what will happen if Esav then sets his eyes on me? (Rashi, in fact, on pasuk 22 writes that even though there was no divorce contemplated, Esav did set his eyes upon Rochel, and desired to make her his!)

The upshot of this nightmare was that Rochel began to react to Esav exactly the way her sister had! In her new position of vulnerability, she was able to look upon Esav with heightened contempt. When that happened, Hashem rewarded her with a pregnancy.

But why should having children hinge on hatred for Esav. We know that both Rochel and Leah were tzidkoniyos. Both achieved prophesy. Did they have no other merits that justified giving them children?

Perhaps this was the reason. Our meforshim are troubled that Yitzchok could father an Esav after his experience at the Akeidah. There, he had become a pure, elevated olah. How did Esav become part of his family?

Some of them pin the birth o f Esav on Rivka, Yitzchok's wife. There was an ample font of evil in her familial roots; she had not purged herself entirely from its burden. Some of the unresolved evil in her background took shape in the person of Esav. (These commentators find support for this theory in the verse that predicted the clashing personalities of the two children she would bear. "There are two nations in your womb." Since this was written in response to her question about her difficult pregnancy, why would the Torah emphasize the words, "in your womb?" Rather, the Torah means to localize the source of Esav and his evil. Because he was a product of Rivka's womb -- and not of the purity of Yitzchok alone -- Esav was well connected to the evil that was a legacy of Rivka's forebears. This is also evidenced by the reactions of his parents when Esav marries women not to their liking. "They were a source of grief to Yitzchok and Rivkah." (Bereishis 26:35)

A midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 65:2) sees precision in the word order: they caused more grief to Yitzchok, who had been entirely purged of all evil, than they caused his wife. Because Esav's evil ultimately was sourced in her family roots, Rivkah did not react against it the same say.

Divine Providence had a different plan for Yaakov. His progeny had to be united in their commitment to their father's principles and message. Somehow, the residual evil in the family had to be dealt with. HKBH engineered the context within which their mothers would operate. First Leah, and then Rochel, were placed in situations where they would develop a fierce contempt for Esav and all that he stood for. Only in this way could they become suitable mothers of the shivtei Kah; only this way would they merit having children. (Based on Be'er Yosef, Bereishis 30:1)