

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

What is it that made Jacob -- not Abraham or Isaac or Moses -- the true father of the Jewish people? We are called the "congregation of Jacob," "the Children of Israel." Jacob/Israel is the man whose name we bear. Yet Jacob did not begin the Jewish journey; Abraham did. Jacob faced no trial like that of Isaac at the Binding. He did not lead the people out of Egypt or bring them the Torah. To be sure, all his children stayed within the faith, unlike Abraham or Isaac. But that simply pushes the question back one level. Why did he succeed where Abraham and Isaac failed?

It seems that the answer lies in parshat Vayetse and parshat Vayishlach. Jacob was the man whose greatest visions came to him when he was alone at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next. In parshat Vayetse, escaping from Esau, he stops and rests for the night with only stones to lie on, and he has an epiphany: "He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.... When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'" (Gen. 28:12-17)

In parshat Vayishlach, fleeing from Laban and terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau again, he wrestles alone at night with an unnamed stranger: "Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.'...So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.'" (Gen. 32:29-31)

These are the decisive spiritual encounters of Jacob's life, yet they happen in liminal space (the space between, neither a starting point nor a destination), at a time when Jacob is at risk in both directions -- where he comes from and where he is going to. Yet it is at these points of maximal vulnerability that he encounters God and finds the courage to continue despite all the hazards of the journey.

That is the strength Jacob bequeathed to the Jewish people. What is remarkable is not merely that

this one tiny people survived tragedies that would have spelled the end of any other people: the destruction of two Temples; the Babylonian and Roman conquests; the expulsions, persecutions, and pogroms of the Middle Ages; the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth-century Europe; and the Holocaust. It is truly astonishing that after each cataclysm, Judaism renewed itself, scaling new heights of achievement.

During the Babylonian exile, Judaism deepened its engagement with the Torah. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem it produced the great literary monuments of the Oral Torah: Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara. During the Middle Ages, it produced masterpieces of law and Torah commentary, poetry, and philosophy. A mere three years after the Holocaust it proclaimed the State of Israel, the Jewish return to history after the darkest night of exile.

When I first became Chief Rabbi I had to undergo a medical examination. The doctor had me walking at a very brisk pace on a treadmill. "What are you testing?" I asked him. "How fast I can go, or how long?" "Neither," he replied. "I will be observing how long it takes for your pulse to return to normal, after you come off the treadmill." That is when I discovered that health is measured by the power of recovery. That is true for everyone, but doubly so for leaders and for the Jewish people, a nation of leaders. (This, I believe, is what the phrase "a kingdom of Priests" [Ex. 19:6] means).

Leaders suffer crises. That is a given of leadership. When Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of Britain between 1957 and 1963, was asked what the most difficult aspect of his time in office was, he famously replied, "Events, dear boy, events." Bad things happen, and when they do, the leader must take the strain so that others can sleep easily in their beds.

Leadership, especially in matters of the spirit, is deeply stressful. Four figures in Tanach -- Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Jonah -- actually prayed to die rather than continue. This was not only true in the distant past. Abraham Lincoln



suffered deep bouts of depression. So did Winston Churchill, who called it his "black dog." Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. both attempted suicide in adolescence and experienced depressive illness in adult life. The same was true of many great creative artists, among them Michelangelo, Beethoven, and Van Gogh.

Is it greatness that leads to moments of despair, or moments of despair that lead to greatness? Do those who lead internalise the stresses and tensions of their time? Or is it that those who are used to stress in their emotional lives find release in leading exceptional lives? There is no convincing answer to this in the literature thus far. But Jacob was a more emotionally volatile individual than either Abraham, who was often serene even in the face of great trials, or Isaac, who was particularly withdrawn. Jacob feared; Jacob loved; Jacob spent more of his time in exile than the other patriarchs. But Jacob endured and persisted. Of all the figures in Genesis, he was the great survivor.

The ability to survive and to recover is part of what it takes to be a leader. It is the willingness to live a life of risks that makes such individuals different from others. So said Theodore Roosevelt in one of the greatest speeches ever made on the subject: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat." ("Citizenship in a Republic", speech given at the Sorbonne, Paris, 23 April 1910.)

Jacob endured the rivalry of Esau, the resentment of Laban, the tension between his wives and children, the early death of his beloved Rachel, and the loss -- for twenty-two years -- of his favourite son, Joseph. He said to Pharaoh, "Few and evil have been the days of my life" (Gen. 47:9). Yet, on the way he "encountered" angels, and whether they were wrestling with him or climbing the ladder to heaven, they lit the night with the aura of transcendence.

To try, to fall, to fear, and yet to keep going: that is what it takes to be a leader. That was Jacob, the man who at the lowest ebbs of his life had his greatest visions of heaven. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had placed under his head, and set it up as a monument, and poured oil on the top of it." [Gen. 28:18] Our Biblical portion, Vayetze, tells of Jacob's journey into exile and, not coincidentally, the first instance of a monument (matzeva) to God in Jewish history. Until this point, the great Biblical personalities have erected altars (mizbahot, singular, mizbeah), to God: Noah when he exited from the ark, Abraham when he first came to Israel, Isaac when he dedicated the city of Be'er Sheva, and Jacob on two significant occasions. An altar is clearly a sacred place dedicated for ritual sacrifice. But what is a monument? An understanding of this first monument in Jewish history will help us understand the true significance of the Land of Israel to the Jewish People.

Fleeing the wrath of his brother, Esau, Jacob leaves his Israeli parental home and sets out for his mother's familial home in Haran. His first stop, as the sun is setting, is in the fields outside Luz (Beit El) – the last site in Israel he will spend the night before he begins his exile. He dreams of a ladder standing (mutzav) on land with its top reaching heavenwards, "and behold, angels of God are ascending and descending on it" [ibid. v. 12]. God is standing (nitzav) above the ladder, and promises Jacob that he will return to Israel and that this land will belong to him and his descendants eternally. Upon awakening, the patriarch declares the place to be "the House of God and the Gate of Heaven" [ibid. v. 17]. He then builds a monument (matzeva) from the stones he has used as a pillow and pours oil over it.

Jacob's experience leaves us in no doubt: a monument is a symbol of an eternal relationship. It is the physical expression of a ladder linking Heaven and earth, the Land of Israel and the Holy Temple of Jerusalem (House of God), which connects the descendants of Jacob to the Divine forever. A monument is a gateway to Heaven, a House of God on earth. The Land of Israel, with its laws of tithes, Sabbatical years and Jubilee, magnificently expresses the link between humanity and the Almighty, and the promise of Jacob's return from exile bears testimony to the eternity of the relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel.

Furthermore, a monument is made of stone, the Hebrew word for stone being even, comprised of the letters aleph-bet-nun. It is also a contraction of parent-child (Hebrew, av-ben) which also uses the letters aleph-bet-nun symbolizing the eternity of family continuity. And the monument is consecrated with oil, just as the Redeemer will be consecrated with oil – and herald eternal peace and redemption for Israel and the

world.

In exile, Jacob spends two decades with his uncle Laban, who does his utmost to assimilate his bright and capable nephew / son-in-law into a life of comfort and business in exile. Jacob resists, escaping Laban's blandishments, and eventually secretly absconds with his wives, children and livestock to return to Israel. Laban pursues them, and they agree to a covenant-monument: "And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a monument" [ibid. 31:45]. Here again, we find the expression of an eternal promise: Abraham's descendants will never completely assimilate – not even into the most enticing Diaspora.

The Torah continues: "And Jacob said to his brethren, gather stone, and they took stones and made a heap.... And Laban called [the monument] Yegar-Sahaduta, but Jacob called it Gal-Ed" [ibid. v. 46-47].

The wily Laban wants the monument to bear an Aramean name, a symbol of the gentile aspect of Jacob's ancestry, while Jacob firmly insists upon the purely Hebrew inscription of Gal-Ed – the eternal, Israelite language.

When they take their respective oaths at the site of the monument, the deceptive Laban still endeavors to manipulate: "May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor, the gods of their fathers, judge between us" [ibid. v. 53]. Jacob refuses to give an inch; this monument must give testimony to the eternity of his commitment to Israel, both the faith and the land: "But Jacob swore to the fear of his father Isaac" [ibid.]. Jacob's response is a subtle – but emphatic – rejection of Laban's attempt at assimilation.

Although this monument is erected with Laban after Jacob leaves his home, it is nevertheless still established in exile; therefore it is not anointed with oil. Whatever important role the Diaspora may have played in the history of Israel – as long as we maintained our unique values and lifestyle – the oil of redemption will emerge only in the Land of Israel. When Jacob returns to Beit El, the House of God, he will erect another stone monument in order to fulfill his oath [ibid. 35:14]. And, of course, that monument – erected to God in the Land of Israel – will be anointed with oil. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd Rachel said, "G-d has judged me and heard my voice and given me a son, so his name was called Dan... I have twisted with turnings to be like my sister and I have prevailed, and she called his name Naphtali." (Beraishis 30:6-8)

Watching her sister give birth to son after son to Yaakov Avinu, Rachel was distraught. Taking a page out of Sarah Imeinu's book, she gave her maid, Bilhah, to Yaakov, hoping that she would merit children through this act.

When the first boy was born, Rachel reflected on how Hashem had judged her and seemingly punished her with being barren. This birth was a turning point and she felt she was finally acquitted of whatever crime it was that she had committed. She would no longer be the victim.

When the second child was born, her reaction was much more positive. She said, "I have prayed so many prayers to be able to keep up with my sister (in bearing the twelve Tribes of Israel,) and I have done it!"

When we look at the two children, we see a tremendous difference in them, which was very likely caused by the way she behaved with the birth of each of them.

Dan was a troubled tribe. They had an idol in their midst for a long time. Even Shimshon, the Judge who came from their tribe, had a shadowy existence that bordered on sacrilege. He became involved with Philistine women and died after a tortured existence in captivity.

Naftali, on the other hand, was a calm and peaceful person who was always willing to help. He ran to get the deed to Me'aras HaMachpela when Yaakov died and Esav delayed the burial, and in this parsha he called Rachel and Leah to come speak privately to Yaakov, even though his mother was not privy to the conversation.

In V'zos HaBracha, Moshe Rabbeinu calls Dan a lion cub. They had a portion in the land but it wasn't enough for them so they went to war and captured more. Naftali, however, was "s'vah ratzon," fulfilled with satisfaction. Their land, we are told, met all their needs. They were a happy Tribe.

Perhaps, the foundation of these differences was the way their mother Bilhah's mistress, Rachel, acted when they were born. With Dan, Rachel was licking her wounds. With Naftali, she felt elation. In fact, the posuk says, "so his name was called Dan," which implies she felt powerless, while "she [actively] called his name Naftali."

Our attitudes are very powerful things. If we are negative, we will breed negativity, but if we are positive and optimistic, then that is what we will reap, and every day will be one of constant feasting on Hashem's goodness.

An elderly woman was meeting with the administrator of a nursing home. Her husband had passed on and her children lived far away. She could no longer live on her own and she understood that this would be her final dwelling place on earth.

As the Administrator spoke of the activities, meals, and rooms, the woman kept smiling. "It sounds wonderful," she said. "I love my room and I'm sure that I will make good friends here."

"Don't you want to see the rooms first?" he inquired. "That's not necessary," she replied with a soft smile. "My happiness does not depend on what my

room looks like or how the food tastes. It depends on my decision to be happy." ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

We are all aware of the famous comment of Rashi on the opening word of this week's Torah reading: that the departure of a pious man from the community leaves a void and a negative impression. This comment is in line with the pattern that we have seen from the beginning of the Book of Bereishit, i.e. that the Torah is more interested in the lives of individuals, than in the general pattern of societal history and culture.

It is the individual that makes the difference between good and evil, between eternity and the mundane, that evaporates so quickly. Therefore, the presence of a righteous person in a community is a precious asset that should not be ignored, minimized, or trivialized. One righteous person represents an entire world and can be the difference between destruction and survival for a community. Throughout Jewish history, Jews have always attempted to live in the proximity of scholars and pious people. It is not only that they hope that some of their scholarship and piety would influence them, but it was also the realization that as long as there are pious, righteous people and scholars within the community, that community has a future and a purpose. It was common throughout Jewish history when referring those scholars and pious people, the surname of the city where they lived was added so that the community in which they lived would be remembered and treasured, and because a righteous individual once lived there and was of influence.

In a world population of billions of people, we tend to believe that the individual does not count for much. This is an erroneous and certainly a secular view of life. It was the Soviet Union and Communism that saw people as being mere cogs in a great machine, the state, where everything had to be sacrificed in order to maintain that machine, even when it crushed millions of people and destroyed societies.

This is not so is the Jewish belief, for we are convinced that the individual has inestimable worth, power and influence. We believe that Heaven responds to, and, in fact, guides the life and deeds of individuals. No one is worthless or extraneous on the face of this planet, and it is wrong to think that individuals should be sacrificed for what is temporarily considered to be the greater general good.

That was the idea behind of the binding of Isaac by Abraham. In the world of that time, sacrificing human beings to appease the gods was an acceptable practice, believing then that the general population could somehow benefit. When the angel tells Abraham

to stay his hand and touch Isaac, and certainly not to kill him, the angel is also saying that one Isaac is worth an entire world. This idea must be reinforced repeatedly, for human society tends to forget or even ignore this concept. This is a powerful lesson for our time, and we should ponder these words of Rashi that introduce this week's Torah reading to us. ©2020 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

The Torah in this week's portion tells us that as Ya'akov (Jacob) left home he "encountered the place— va-yifga bamakom." (Genesis 28:11) The Talmud understands the word va-yifga to relate to prayer. (Berachot 26b) In other words, Ya'akov did not only encounter a physical place, but also encountered, praying to God who is sometimes called Makom.

Bearing in mind that all this occurs at night, the Talmud concludes that Ya'akov right then introduced the idea that one should pray in the evening.

In fact, there is an opinion in the Talmud that the three prayer services were instituted by the patriarchs. Indeed, it has been suggested that the characteristics of each of the three avot (patriarchs) inspired them to pray at different times.

- Avraham (Abraham), who introduced a new faith commitment to the world, prayed at dawn, the beginning of the new day. (Genesis 19:27)

- Yitzchak (Isaac) the mediator who evaluated and then transmitted Avraham's novel ideas, was passive, content to follow in his father's footsteps. He was taken to Moriah to be offered as a sacrifice, had a wife chosen for him, and reopened the wells which his father had discovered. He was a man who contemplated rather than initiated. Therefore, he prayed in the afternoon, as the sun set, an especially suitable time for contemplative thought. (Genesis 24:63)

- Ya'akov was the loneliest of the biblical figures. Hated by his brother, he was separated from his parents for twenty-two years. His beloved wife, Rachel, died young, his favorite son, Yosef (Joseph), disappeared and was believed to be dead. Appropriately, Ya'akov prayed at night, a time when one is often overcome by fear and a sense of loneliness. (Genesis 28:11)

Hence, the Talmudic opinion that prayer corresponds to the avot, who prayed when they felt the personal need to reach out to God. They did so at times which best reflected their inner feelings and aspirations.

From this perspective, prayer has a spontaneous element. It is the cry or song of individuals

who feel motivated by some experience to communicate with God.

Perhaps for this reason, Jewish law allows and even encourages each individual to insert personal requests of God during particular parts of the service. Structured prayer is not meant to stifle one's feelings, but rather – in the spirit of the avot – spur our own individual encounter with God. (Orah Hayyim 119:1) ©2020 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 Avot and Times for Prayer

The Rabbis give two reasons for the times of our daily prayers. The first and most accepted reason is that the Korbanot, the daily sacrifices, were brought during these times. There were two daily korbanot, the shacharit or morning sacrifice and the mincha offering which was done in the afternoon. There were parts of the afternoon sacrifice that were burned on the altar and left there to burn through the evening hours. For that reason, the Rabbis instituted an evening prayer to remind us of the continued burning into the evening. The second reason for the prayers times stems from p'sukim in the Torah which indicate that the Avot, our forefathers, instituted a daily set of prayers which were recorded in various circumstances.

The Gemara in B'rachot (26) credits the three prayers recited daily to the Avot. Shacharit was instituted by Avraham immediately prior to the binding of Yitzchak. We find the pasuk which contains, "and Avraham rose up early in the morning." This act of Avraham indicates that we should arise early in the morning to pray. No further parameter of this time frame is given. Mincha was instituted by Yitzchak just before greeting his new bride, Rivka. The pasuk contains the words, "and Yitzchak went out to have a conversation in the field before evening." Our Rabbis indicate that this mirrors the time of the daily afternoon sacrifice. Ma'ariv or Arvit, the night prayer, was instituted by Ya'akov. We find here the pasuk, "and he encountered the Place (Hashem) and he spent the night because the sun had set." For that reason, our Ma'ariv prayer is said at night. None of these times speaks of a sacrifice being brought, though we know that the Avot often brought sacrifices as part of their prayers. So what is it about these times of prayer which was so compelling that the Avot understood that they would mark the times of the sacrifices in the Temple and the parameters of the times of prayer?

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin presents a beautiful explanation of the Avot's choices for the time of their

prayers. Avraham's life was a life of nachat, wealth, and honor in spite of the fact that he was sorely tested ten times by Hashem. Avraham was certain of Hashem's protection during each of these tests so he approached these tests with the full "knowledge" that Hashem would save him. Each test brought him greater fame so that kings signed treaties with him. He rose up much as the sun rises, giving light to his world. It was appropriate then that he would remember in the "boker, morning" that the true source of his success was Hashem.

Yitzchak's life was also one of honor and wealth. Yet Yitzchak witnessed a decline in his life that approached sadness. Yitzchak was aware of the covenant made with Avraham at the Covenant Between the Parts, and the prophecy given to Avraham that his children would suffer at the hands of others for four hundred years. Even though he himself did not go into exile, the "exile" began for him at his birth. He understood the prediction that "your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs." He is the first Jew to be sent out of a land when Avimelech says to him, "go out from us." He also suffered from the sacrifices that Esav's wives brought to Avodah Zarah, idol worship. We are told that his eyes became weak in his old age. Yitzchak could begin to see the decline that he faced that was heading into darkness. It was appropriate then that he pray to Hashem before the evening darkness, the Mincha, the afternoon prayer.

Ya'akov faced difficulty all of his life. He saw the decline of his brother, Esav, and felt obligated to take over the responsibility of leadership from him (the stealing of the birthright). His mother insisted that he "trick" his father into blessing him with the blessing that was intended for Esav which led to his having to run away to Lavan. He was tricked by Lavan into marrying both Leah and Rachel and forced to be an indentured servant in order to marry and finally to acquire some wealth. His sons fought amongst themselves and faked the death of his favorite son in order to sell him as a slave to Egypt. It is no wonder that he answers Par'oh, upon reuniting with Yosef, that his days had been "few and bad." Even though this was said for Par'oh's benefit, there is much truth to his statement. His life was "darkness" so his prayer took place in darkness. Ya'akov understood that when things are the most difficult and it may appear that Hashem has taken away His light from before you, that is the appropriate time when a person must turn to Hashem in praise and in thanks. It is a true test of Man to praise Hashem for the good and the bad that befalls him. Ya'akov's Ma'ariv, evening prayer during this time of darkness, indicated that he understood this concept.

HaRav Sorotzkin continues with an explanation of the very times when these prayers were instituted. Ya'akov davened Ma'ariv in darkness when he was fleeing Esav who intended to kill him. His prayer was

not only for his safety but that his brother would not commit murder for which he would be killed in punishment. Yitzchak davened Mincha as he came to the field prior to sunset to greet his new bride. He undertook this marriage knowing full well that the children from this marriage and the generations that followed would become slaves in a land not their own. Avraham davened Shacharit several times as recorded in the Torah. He praised Hashem on the news of the birth of Yitzchak, on the destruction of the evil people of S'dom (understanding that the evil people there deserved their punishment and that Hashem had agreed to save those who were righteous even though there were none), and he arose early in the morning to praise Hashem even though he was to leave on a journey to sacrifice his son. Avraham understood that praise goes to Hashem at all times, through good and bad, and that all that befalls Man is for his own benefit.

Our prayers are primarily to praise Hashem. But we also realize that the times of our prayers indicate that we must praise Hashem when we see both light and darkness in our lives. Both the light and the darkness are gifts from Hashem! We may not understand the gift, but it is a gift none the less. Our forefathers understood this concept and practiced it at appropriate times in their lives. May our prayers and our praise rise to Hashem and may He grant us Peace.

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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 PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"And Ya'akov left Beer Sheva, and he went to Charan." (*Bereishis* 28:10) And Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva, never to come back again. Never to come back? He comes back to Be'er Sheva and his family 36 years later, family, possessions, and all, in Parashas Vayishlach! Not really. By the time he returns home, he has been transformed. He comes home a different person, even with a different name: Yisroel.

And as the Ramban points out in Parashas Lech-Lecha, "the events of the fathers are signs for the children." In other words, what they went through we were destined to go through in some way or another throughout the history that followed. So, just as Ya'akov fled home in search of a higher identity, likewise the Jewish people have done so as well. When we finally come back home, as we have been doing for hundreds of years now, it won't be as "Ya'akov," but as "Yisroel."

This is not my vort. It comes from the Malbim: "For thus said God: Sing, O Ya'akov, with gladness, exult on the peaks of the nations; announce, laud [God], and say, 'O God, save Your people, the remnant of Yisroel!' Behold, I will bring them from the land of the North and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, the pregnant and birthing together; a great congregation will return here. With weeping they will come and through supplications I will bring them; I will guide them on streams of water, on a direct path in which they will not stumble; for I have been a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn." (*Yirmiyahu* 31:6-8)

"At the end of their exile the oppression will be removed from them, and they will be joyous because they will be at the peak of the nations. The gentiles will give them honor and they will be their leaders, instead of being disgraced and lowered amongst them as they were at first. 'Ya'akov' will be the masses of the people, and the lesser amongst them. 'Yisroel' are the great

ones. The joyousness from being at the peak of the nations will be Ya'akov's only, and not Yisroel's, because they will want to return His Presence to Tzion. However, at that time they will announce and publicly proclaim, and praise God when they say, 'O God, save Your [righteous] people, the remnant of Yisroel,' because they will want the true salvation of the ingathering of the exiles and return to Tzion. Then it will be like that, that God will return them: 'Behold, I will bring them...' (Malbim)

Don't get it wrong. Ya'akov was a great person to begin with, a tremendous talmid chacham and ba'al middos. Apparently though becoming Yisroel was a step up, at least. It built on whatever it was that Ya'akov achieved until he left home, and added so much more, and it is something that we are all supposed to be aiming for as well, each on his or her personal level.

The funny thing is, if you can call it funny, is that this is also something that is barely noticed and rarely appreciated. It is especially not funny if you consider that this is the reason we are still stumbling through exile, thousands of years later, as the Malbim alludes. Being at the peak of nations is nice and has played its role in the redemption process, but it is not the endgame.

There is another thing about Ya'akov we cannot forget. He was named this because he came out into this world holding onto the heel of Eisav. It is interesting how both brothers got their names based upon how they were at birth. Eisav came out already made -- asui -- so he was called "Eisav." Ya'akov was named for the heel he held onto as he emerged into this world. I didn't even know babies could do that.

Then Eisav gets an additional name later on in last week's parsha. Because he gave up his birthright for a pottage of red lentils, he is called "Edom." Ya'akov doesn't get his new name "Yisroel" until much later, after he fought with the angel of Eisav and survived the episode of Dinah in Shechem. He is first called it by the angel before meeting Eisav, but it is not confirmed by God until after the events of Shechem.

Clearly the way of Eisav is materialism at the cost of spirituality, when necessary. Clearly the way of Ya'akov is spirituality at the cost of materialism, when necessary. But is this anything really new? Was this not the difference of agreement between the people of Noach's time, and Noach? Is this not the ongoing argument between religious people and secular people even today? We're all in this world together which is so obviously materialistic, struggling to grasp at something invisible called spirituality.

Some get it. Most have not. Even among the religious there is a struggle, especially today when there is so MUCH materialism, and it is SO accessible. Never before has it become so easy to have your material cake and eat it too. People justify excess materialism in the NAME of spirituality by infusing it

with some aspect of mitzvah.

Some people, when asked why they have acted so extreme have answered, "Because I can." But when has having the means to indulge in the material world been a reason to do it, at least according to the Torah? When has accessibility been an excuse to access it? For an Eisav, perhaps. For a Ya'akov, maybe. But for a Yisroel?

There IS a line. It separates between reason and rationalization. It stands between justified and justification. And it can be the difference between one size of portion in Olam HaBa, and a lesser one, or worse, more time in Gihennom. It takes a truly self-honest person to look for it and then live by it.

It's like the Corona virus. After about eight months of it, the world is now divided between those who take it seriously and those who do not. It is understandable why there are those who take the virus seriously and follow the rules, no matter how inconvenient. They believe the health officials, or, at least, not knowing who to believe, they have decided to err to the side of caution.

Those who do not take it seriously more than likely are not afraid of it. They have not been affected by it, at least not seriously. They may know those who have gotten it, but who also had a mild case and then recovered. They either do not know or have not heard about people with after effects. In short, the scary effects of the virus as touted by the media have not impacted their "camp," making it seem to them like the whole thing is just hype, especially if they have watched one of the many conspiracy theory movies out there today.

I wonder how many people once belonged to category 2, and only moved to the first category after Corona finally infected someone they knew who suffered, or perhaps even died. Most problems seem so distant when outside our circles of life, until they enter them. Then, all of a sudden, we wonder why we were so flippant before.

That's Eisav, alright. We saw that last week. When it came to selling the birthright for some food, he had no problem. Fifty years later, when the reality caught up to him because he lost the blessings that went with it, he regretted everything. He kicked, he screamed, and he even cried, but he could not undo what he had so carelessly done 50 years earlier. So instead, he turned to revenge, blaming Ya'akov for his own lack of foresight.

This is what it meant in last week's parsha that Eisav despised the birthright. There was no real material benefit for it in this world. The Midrash comment that when he said, "Who needs the birthright?" a Bas Kol went out and answered, "Who needs the World-to-Come?" Essentially, that is what Eisav surrendered when he sold his right of the firstborn.

Ultimately, this is the journey of a Yisroel. A Ya'akov can hold onto the heel of Eisav, and copy his lifestyle, clearly. A Yisroel is on a journey that goes beyond this world, into the next one. Yes, the Torah promises all kinds of material success for fulfilling the mitzvos. But Chas v'Shalom it should be the reward for any mitzvos we have done! It is just divine help so we can continue to do more mitzvos and earn reward where it counts for more and is eternal, in the World-to-Come.

It's a sacrifice for sure. The question is, how much of one? That is the one question a person has to answer for themselves. As we see, God leaves room for the individual to decide for themselves. He doesn't necessarily agree with our decision as we seek our cake and eat it too. It's just His way of saying:

"Okay, that's your choice? So be it. But don't come back later and say, 'If I knew that I was giving up so much of the World-to-Come, I wouldn't have indulged so much in the world we came from.' You could have checked it out while still alive, but you didn't. You could have thought it through better, but you didn't."

Let's face it, now more than ever, many Jews ignore the topic of living in Eretz Yisroel for material reasons. Even if there is a good halachic basis to remain based in the Diaspora, your heart has to be in Eretz Yisroel -- always. Ya'akov's was, all the 36 years he was away from home. That's why it is called "Eretz Yisroel." It's HIS land. And as the Malbim explains, it's the land of every Jew who bears Ya'akov's namesake "Yisroel." After that, it is up to the individual to decide what they want to be, only a Ya'akov or a full-fledged Yisroel. © 2020 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

On his journey to Charan, Yaakov (Jacob) sleeps and dreams of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels climbing and descending it. In the dream, G-d promises Yaakov the land upon which he is sleeping. When he wakes up, Yaakov "lifted his feet" and went on his way (29:1). Why does the Torah use such strange wording for Yaakov continuing his journey?

Rashi quotes the Midrash that explains that after hearing good news, Yaakov was in a good mood, adding a pep in his step. The Lekach Tov further explains that before his dream, Yaakov thought that his journey was derailed due to his circumstances, having to run away from his brother's fury. His dream confirmed that his experiences are part of his adventure and that it was all part of the plan. The dream taught Yaakov and us an important lesson: Where we are is where we're meant to be, so seize the present, lift our feet and look forward. © 2020 Rabbi S. Ressler & Lelamed, Inc.

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky

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After Yaakov Avinu put his head on the rocks and had his famous dream of the ladder with the Angels ascending and descending, the pasuk says "And he took the rock that he placed beneath his head and he set it up as a matzevah (pillar). [Bereshis 28:18] The Ramban notes that by reading the pesukim we get the impression that Yaakov arose and he made the matzevah right there where he had been sleeping. The Ramban says, however, that this is not true. Rather, Yaakov took the rock upon which his head had been resting, and transported it with him to Luz, and that is where he erected his matzevah.

The question is why did Yaakov need to carry the rock all the way to Luz? There is no doubt that he could have found other rocks in Luz with which to build a matzevah. It is not like rocks are such a rare commodity in the Middle East!

This teaches us something that we have probably all experienced. When a person is inspired to do something, it is best to latch onto it right then and there. If a person hesitates, the inspiration often dissipates. A person may be momentarily inspired, but unless he acts upon the inspiration right away, with the passage of time the inspiration will evaporate. Yaakov Avinu was afraid of this. He was afraid that by the time he reached Luz, he would be less inspired, he would procrastinate, and the act of establishing a lasting token to his inspiration of the moment would never come to fruition. In order to make sure that this would not be the case, Yaakov immediately began the process by schlepping the rock with him at all times until he was ready to establish it as a permanent testimony to his dream.

Human beings become inspired, but with the passage of time they tend to rationalize, or get too lazy, or whatever it may be. When inspiration occurs, people need to act on the inspiration immediately. If "immediately" is impossible, then at least take symbolic action to make sure that it will eventually get done. This is what Yaakov did by carrying the rock with him from the moment he woke up from his dream until he arrived in Luz. © 2020 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org

