

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayeitzei

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

MAKING AN IMPACT

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“Yaakov departed from Be’er Sheva and went toward Charan.” (28:10)

Parshas Vayeitzei begins: ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה – “Yaakov left from Be’er Sheva and went to Charan.”

Rashi notes that the first phrase of this pasuk - “Yaakov left from Be’er Sheva” - seems superfluous. We already knew where Yaakov was living, and where he was leaving from; the pasuk needed to inform us only where he was now leaving to. These words were written, Rashi explains, to teach “שיציאת צדיק מן המקום עושה רושם” - that a righteous person’s departure from a place makes an impact.” Rashi adds: “For when a righteous person is in a city, he is its majesty, he is its radiance, and he is its beauty. When he departs from there, its majesty has left, its radiance has left, and its beauty has left.”

The Torah tells that ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע to indicate that Yaakov’s departure was felt in the city of Be’er Sheva. The presence of a tzaddik impacts upon the community; there is a certain “glow” that is keenly sensed. And so, when a tzaddik departs, the people whom he leaves behind feel a void.

This must be part of our mission in life, a goal to which we should aspire - that our impact is felt, that we matter, that we make a difference, that we leave an impression. Rav Wolbe cites Rav Yisrael Salanter as teaching that the way to earn a favorable judgment on Rosh Hashanah is to be an איש הקהלה - a “communal” figure, not necessarily in the sense of publicity, but rather in the sense of making a contribution and an impact. If we are needed, if we contribute meaningfully to the people around us, then we can earn a favorable judgment by virtue of the important role that we play. We should strive to be people whose “majesty,” “radiance” and “beauty” are felt by the community. We need to get involved, to make a difference, to get to know people, to help out, to volunteer, to be needed. This goal is not only for tzaddikim, but rather something for each and every one of us to aspire to.

FINDING HASHEM IN THE MUNDANE

Rabbi Yaakov Klein

“Yaakov departed from Be’er Sheva and went toward Charan.” (28:10)

The Midrash states that before his departure from Be’er Sheva to work in the fields of Lavan, Yaakov Avinu considered the lives of his forbearers and grew discouraged (Bereishis Rabbah 68:1). - אשא עיני אל ההרים - Yaakov looked at the elevated lives of Yitzchak and Avraham, lives shining with Torah and intense spirituality, and was frustrated with his lowly lot. But then he strengthened himself, saying, 'עזרי מעם ה' - “Just as they remained bound with the Creator, so will I stay close to the Master of the world.”

The Ishbitzer explains that Yaakov Avinu’s initial discouragement was founded upon the assumption that busying himself with the mundane responsibilities of making a living in Charan would necessitate distance from Hashem and His service. However, he soon came to the realization that because “there is no place vacant from Him,” and, “His Glory fills the earth,” he would be able to remain connected to Hashem as a shepherd as well, not despite his occupation, but specifically because of it.

The Gemara (Niddah 30b) states that before a soul is sent down to the physical realm, it is taught that the world below is fraught with spiritual danger and sworn to a life of righteousness. The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that the entire purpose of the soul’s descent is to reveal the G-dliness concealed within the mundanity of human life; to turn the human experience into a dwelling place for Hashem’s presence.

This, he explains, is the meaning of the first verse in our parsha: ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע. This refers to the departure of the soul from the upper realms after the vow (שבועה) is taken, “וילך חרנה”: The word חרנה may be read “חרן ה’”. The reason for the soul’s descent to this world is to demonstrate that hidden deep within the “חרן”, the wrath of an existence apparently devoid of G-dliness, is the final “ה’” of Hashem’s Name, the Shechinah which longs to be revealed in the depths of physicality.

This idea is expressed once again in Yaakov's famous dream. In this vision, Yaakov Avinu sees a ladder stretching from heaven to earth upon which angels are ascending and descending. The ladder symbolizes the Jew's task to draw his earthly endeavors up to heaven, and to draw heaven down into his earthly endeavors.

The stones which unify under Yaakov's head represent the ability for the disparate responsibilities of a Jew's life - both the overtly spiritual in nature, and the seemingly mundane - to become unified with the light of a common purpose, a single striving: to serve as a means toward closeness with Hashem.

If there is one thing that all of our unique life circumstances have in common, it is the potential to use them as an opportunity to reveal the light of Hashem's presence in the world. It makes little difference where one lives, what one does, or how one makes a living. Every inch of physicality is occupied by another ladder stretching heavenward; the abiding ability to encounter the Master of the world and channel His light into the world with honesty, health, clarity, and joy. To discover the "ה" within חן - this is the goal of life.

SHOWING APPRECIATION

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went toward Charan." (28:10)

Rashi tells us that when a tzaddik leaves a city, it makes an impression. The midrash comments that only when a tzaddik leaves a city is he missed; when he's in the city, however, he's not appreciated.

Unfortunately, this is a very common phenomenon. People do not appreciate what they have until it is gone. The Hebrew word for appreciation is ha'arachah, but when we discuss the middah of gratitude we call it hakaras hatov. This is because the essence of this middah is to recognize the good that one has. There are many people who have quite a lot; yet they are very poor. There are those who have little; yet they are extremely wealthy. Why are they wealthy? Because they appreciate whatever they have.

In truth, the essence of a Jew and his connection to his Creator is dependent on this middah of hakaras hatov. True hakaras hatov is recognition of the One and only Source of Goodness - which is Hashem. The more a person sees Hashem in his life, the more appreciation he will feel. For this reason, a Jew is called a Yehudi, and the very first words that he speaks when he wakes up in the morning are Modeh Ani.

Rav Shimshon Pincus zt'l points out that we say Modeh Ani and not the more grammatically correct Ani Modeh, because the first word that a Jew should pronounce upon opening his eyes should not be "ani" (I) making it all about himself, but rather it should be an expression of thanks to Hashem for giving him back his life each morning.

TAKING THE LAND WITH HIM

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went toward Charan." (28:10)

This is intended to tell us that the departure of a righteous person from his city makes an impression... when he leaves it, its glory, splendor and beauty depart with him. (Rashi)

Whenever anyone leaves the Holy Land, the departure is described as a "going down" or "descent," for it is written that "the Land of Israel is more exalted than any other country in the world." Why, then, does the text cited above read "And Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva " and not "And Yaakov went down"?

In answer to this question, Rashi explains that when a righteous person leaves the Holy Land, "its glory, splendor and beauty depart with him." The holiness of the Land of Israel accompanied Yaakov on his journey abroad.

As a matter of fact, Rashi relates in his comment to pasuk 17 that even Har HaMoriah was moved from its original place to Charan. Thus, leaving the Land of Israel was no "descent" for Yaakov, for the glory of the Land - which was purely spiritual in character - went abroad with him. Wherever Yaakov was, the Land of Israel was there also. Hence, the use of the expression "and Yaakov went out" rather than "went down" is justified.

ELEVATING MATERIALITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went toward Charan." (28:10)

Yaakov left the holy environment of the Land of Israel, descending to the less-than-holy environment of Charan, knowing that he would have to survive the schemes of his future father-in-law, Lavan, who was well-known as a deceiver. Yet Yaakov faced this challenge and passed his tests heroically.

Yaakov's precedent endows us with the spiritual strength to face similar moral and ethical challenges in our daily lives. Our homes should indeed be havens from the materialistic world, permeated with the Torah's wholesome and holy values. However, once we have established such a home, we need not be afraid to venture into the outside world - our personal Charan - in order to refine and elevate reality.

Furthermore, just as Yaakov's descent to Charan actually propelled him to great spiritual heights, the same holds true for us: our temporary forays into the non-spiritual milieu of the material world with the aim of elevating it will not only not harm us, but will prove beneficial to our spiritual growth, as well. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 60-61, vol. 3; *ibid.*, pp. 788-789; Sefer HaSichot 5752, vol. 1, p. 139) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Reb Noson of Nemirov

“Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went toward Charan.” (28:10)

When a Jew wishes to ascend from one level to the next, obstacles spring up to confront him. These obstacles are mainly in his imagination and illusions, and stem from G-d's wrath. Thus, when Yaakov wished to ascend from the “seventh” level - i.e., Be'er Sheva (literally, “well of seven”) - to a higher spiritual plane, he left for Charan (חרן), which is similar to Charon (חרון אף, Divine anger), signifying the obstacles he would face before attaining his goal.

Nevertheless, Yaakov was resolute in his determination to serve G-d, and came upon HaMakom (the Place). He could identify it as such because he knew he was not experiencing a descent (as he had already embarked on his spiritual journey), yet he faced obstacles which prevented his continuing on that journey. Every person has a “place,” a point in life where he finds difficulties going forward. “The sun had set” - alluding to the obstruction of the intellect, when a person must rely upon faith. Yaakov gathered twelve stones corresponding to the Twelve Tribes and the collective good points of the Jewish nation - and placed his head (with its obstructed intellect) upon those stones, as if to assert that he was not giving up.

He dreamt of a ladder with angels ascending and descending, hinting that this is man's mission in this world, to ascend from level to level and not allow obstacles to sidetrack him. One who accepts this mission can recognize which is an ascent and which is an obstacle that causes descents. Despite the obstacles he faced, Yaakov surged forward and merited to a vision of G-d, Who promised to be with him always (for such is the reward of one who seeks G-d). Then Yaakov promised to tithe his income, for the main means of overcoming obstacles is by giving charity.

Then Yaakov “lifted his legs” - alluding to elevating the lower levels - and “went towards the land of the people of Kedem (קדם) - a reference to G-d, Who preceded (קדם, Kadam) everything. Yaakov traveled to those who are created by G-d, yet who find themselves trapped in the “land” and materialism of this world. The “well” represents the wellsprings of Torah that can bring life to all, but there is a “big stone” upon the well - a “heart of stone” (Yechezkel 36:26) that represents the Evil One and the obstacles to spiritual living. The “three flocks” allude to three types of people: righteous, average and wicked. When they gather together, they can remove the stone for a short period while they “water the flocks” and draw spiritual sustenance. But this is only temporary, and the “stone” is returned to its place.

Yaakov asks them, “Where are you from?” and the shepherds answer, “From Charan (חרן)” - from the Charon (חרון אף) - meaning, “we suffer from all the obstacles.” Yaakov asks, “Do you know Lavan?” since Lavan is the

chief obstacle, the archetype of all the false leaders who deflect a Jew's sincere desire to serve G-d. They answer, “We know him” - that is, “we are familiar with the illusions the Evil One presents, and we cannot break them.”

“Here is his daughter Rochel coming with the flock” - Rochel represents the Torah that can lead the flock, except that Lavan's presence obscures its truth. Yaakov says, “The day is still long” - the battle is not yet over, and the exile will take its toll - “water your flocks.” When the shepherds protest that they cannot do it alone, Yaakov rolls off the stone himself, demonstrating that the true tzaddik has the power to counter all the obstacles, evil approaches, and false leaders. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 11a-15b)

IN TIMES OF DARKNESS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Yaakov encountered the place and stayed there for the night.” (28:11)

Yaakov stopped for the night to rest on his way to Lavan's house. The Gemara (Berachos 26b) teaches that we learn from this pasuk that Yaakov instituted the tefillah of Maariv.

The Slonimer Rebbe (Nesivos Shalom) asks why Yaakov waited until now to compose Maariv. Yaakov spent 63 years in the house of his father Yitzchak and 14 years learning in the yeshivah of Shem v'Eiver. One would think that Yaakov, who was immersed in an environment that was completely ruchani - spiritual, prior to this journey would have identified an opportune time to introduce Maariv. Why wasn't Yaakov inspired to formulate Maariv until this juncture in his life?

The Slonimer Rebbe explains that Yaakov recognized that he was about to confront a new environment which he never had to encounter before. Until this point, Yaakov was surrounded by people whose sole focus was their relationship with Hashem. Now Yaakov was about to enter a world of unethical and immoral behavior. He was going to have to navigate uncharted waters where the people he would be dealing with would constantly look to trick and mislead him. It was specifically at this moment when he anticipated entering a world of choshech - darkness, that Yaakov was moved to compose the tefillah of Maariv. Yaakov realized that Hashem was the only One Who he could trust to illuminate his world of darkness. Yaakov instituted Maariv to show all of us that when a Jew finds him or herself in a challenging situation, the first thing he or she needs to do is daven to Hashem for help.

As part of life, we continuously confront personal obstacles and challenges. We must constantly remind ourselves that Hashem is in charge, and He is the One Who has the final say. If we want something to change, then we, like Yaakov, need to formulate our tefillos in a way in which we demonstrate our complete and total faith in Hashem. With this approach, we are sure to deepen and enrich our relationship with Hashem.

YOU DO YOUR PART; HASHEM WILL DO HIS

Bikkurei Aviv

“And Yaakov encountered the place...” (28:11)

To teach you that the road shrank beneath his feet. (Rashi)

When Yaakov went to Charan where he was to meet Rochel, whom he married, the road shrank beneath his feet so that he arrived at his destination quickly. We are told that Eliezer, too, had this experience when he went to find a wife for Yitzchak.

This is to teach future generations that exile and lack of means to give their children a proper dowry and support after marriage should not deter them from marrying off their sons and daughters at an early age. Let them trust in G-d, for He will help them, even by miracle, should the need arise. The ground will rise to meet them on the way so that they will be able to accomplish what they set out to do.

UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE

Reb Noson of Nemirov

“And Yaakov encountered the place and stayed there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place...” (28:11)

Vayifga (he encountered) refers to prayer. Yaakov established the Evening Prayer (Berachos 26b). Yaakov passed by the place and then returned to it. (See Chullin 91b). Foreseeing the long night of exile facing his children, Yaakov established the Evening Prayer. Through this, he taught us that even in absolute darkness, one can find hope by turning to G-d. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 446)

The fact that Yaakov initially passed by the place indicates that at first he didn't think of praying during the dark exile. But he realized he was wrong - a person must arouse himself to G-d, even in the darkest moments. Therefore, he returned to the place and established the Evening Prayer. As he retraced his steps, the Temple Mount came to greet him (Rashi on Bereishis 28:17), since his “arousal from below” caused an “arousal from Above.” He gathered the stones from the place and put them under his head, implying that all the sparks of holiness to be found there could be rectified when placed “under his head” - under the control of a mind free from evil thoughts. Then Yaakov dreamed of a ladder with angels ascending and descending, alluding to the “arousal from Above” and the “arousal from below.” It was at that time that Yaakov grasped the greatness of the place. He realized that with an “arousal from below,” one can evoke great sanctity and inspire all Israel to return to G-d even in the darkest night. By establishing the Evening Prayer, Yaakov established the ability to make an “arousal from below.” (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 224a)

There are times when a person begins to serve G-d and experiences a very sweet feeling from his devotions. He thinks that finally! finally! he will merit to be a G-d-fearing person. Suddenly, “the sun sets.” He is forced to “lie down” - to reduce his spiritual activity.

In Yaakov's dream, the angels ascended and descended, just like a person who tries to serve G-d experiences many highs and lows.

But if one is stubborn in his desire to draw close to G-d, he will eventually see his efforts rewarded. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 276)

Stones represent stumbling blocks created by opposing opinions. Yaakov, the man of truth, can unite opposing sides, for everyone is joined together by the truth. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 209a)

PRAYING FOR HASHEM FIRST

Tiferes Shlomo

“And Yaakov encountered the place...” (28:11)

Our Rabbis interpret the word “paga” (encountered) to denote praying. (Rashi)

At a later point (pasuk 20) we are explicitly told that Yaakov did indeed pray. He is quoted as saying: “If G-d will be with me and will keep me... and give me bread to eat and clothing to wear...”

But what was the prayer he said (before he beheld the vision described in pesukim 12-15)?

Va'yifga ba'makom (“and he encountered the place”) may also be rendered as “he prayed concerning the Omnipresent,” with ha'Makom (lit., “the place”) denoting He Who is present in every place.

Thus, we know that before praying for the fulfillment of his personal wants (pasuk 20), Yaakov prayed on behalf of the Omnipresent's glory, and for the Bais Hamikdash that was to rise centuries later at the spot where Yaakov spent the night on his way to Charan.

INDICATIVE DREAMS

Reb Meir of Premishlan

“He dreamt, and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens.” (28:12)

A dream tells a lot about the dreamer. It often uncovers the hidden thoughts buried within a person.

Thus, Yaakov Avinu dreamt about a ladder that reached into the Heavens and he literally saw “Hashem standing upon it.” This was what was on his mind during the day.

Pharaoh, on the other hand, dreamed about seven fat cows and seven skinny cows!

FOCUSING ON OUR OWN JOURNEY

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"He dreamt, and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." (28:12)

As Yaakov fled from his homeland, he slept along the roadside and beheld the famous dream of a ladder extending from the ground to the heavens, upon which there were angels climbing to the heavens and descending to the earth.

A number of commentators explained Yaakov's vision as representing our effort to connect our worldly existence to the heavenly, spiritual realm through our performance of mitzvos. There is an invisible "ladder" that extends from the earth to the heavens, whereby we can reach the heavens. We create this connection through the mitzvos that we perform. The mitzvos are symbolized by the angels ascending the ladder, as it is through the mitzvos which we fulfill here in our world that we connect to Hashem.

Rav Moshe Sternbuch, in Ta'am Va'da'as, adds a further dimension to this understanding based on Rashi's description of the ladder which Yaakov saw in his dream. Rashi (28:17) writes: the base of the ladder was situated in Be'er Sheva, and the top of the ladder was positioned over the town of Beis El. The middle of the incline was located directly above Yerushalayim, the site of the Beis HaMikdash.

Rav Sternbuch noted the significance of the fact that this ladder - like all ladders - did not extend directly upward, but was rather positioned on an incline. In order for a ladder to stand firm, it must rest on a vertical surface, thus necessitating an incline, as opposed to standing upright.

As a result, when someone is standing on any given rung of the ladder, there is nobody directly beneath him or above him. If he looks up, he sees the sky, how much higher he can still climb, and when he looks down, he sees the ground, how much he has already risen.

What he does not see is the other people on the ladder, those above or below him, because they are off to the side.

When we work to "climb" the ladder of life, to grow spiritually, we are not to be comparing ourselves to anybody else. We should not be looking to see what other people are doing, where they currently stand in their journey.

We should see only the progress we have made and the progress that we still have to make; the progress of the people around us should not interest us.

Each of us is making his own, individual journey. We each stand on our rung of the ladder. Looking at what other people do will only distract us from our own journey, from our own ascent. We need to focus our attention on our own growth, without looking at what other people are doing, so we can invest maximum effort in our journey to the heavens.

In the corporate world, we talk of a "corporate ladder," the struggle to rise from an entry-level position to a senior management position, which brings more money, better perks, and more prestige. This "corporate ladder" is vertical; it's a competitive process, as rising necessarily entails leaving people underneath us, and there are always people on top of us.

The "ladder" of life should never be vertical. We should be looking only at our own journey, without trying to compete with anybody else. What should matter to us is our own progress, and not our position vis-à-vis the people around us.

TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"He dreamt, and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." (28:12)

At the beginning of a person's Divine service, he is very excited by the realization that he controls the higher world. For it is through his Divine service that all the higher worlds are elevated. This encourages him and fortifies him in his Divine service.

Once a person is already strong and fortified and established in his service, he no longer has any thoughts other than those that are directed to G-d, that G-d should derive enjoyment from his service, that he should be a chariot, as it were, for the Divine Presence.

This idea is suggested by the word for "he dreamt" (ויחלם), which denotes strength, as in the verse (Yeshayahu 38:16) "you cured me (ותחלימני) and gave me life." At the beginning of his Divine service, he is strengthened - he dreams.

What motivates and strengthens him? The understanding, the vision, that, as the verse quoted above continues, "a ladder was set up on the ground and its top reached Heaven" - "The ladder was set upon the ground" refers to man in this world, but "its top reached Heaven" means that his service has cosmic ramifications.

The verse continues, "And behold, angels of G-d were ascending and descending upon it." The angels are elevated through his service, and this is alluded to in the world by the word "upon it," meaning "depending upon the actions of man."

The contrary, G-d forbid, is also true. Man's actions could cause a descent. As our Sages say (Chagigah 13b) the Heavenly retinue has been diminished since the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, as it were.

However, afterward, when a person has matured in his Divine service, he attains the level alluded to in the following verse, "and behold G-d was standing upon it," literally, "upon him." Through his service, he becomes a veritable chariot for the Divine Presence.

Understand this.

LADDER OF CONCIIOUSNESS

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"He dreamt, and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." (28:12)

Yaakov passed by the place and didn't realize that this was Heaven's gate. He returned and lay down to sleep. He did not sleep the entire fourteen years that he studied at the yeshiva of Shem and Eiver, but he slept at Heaven's gate! (Rashi)

Yaakov dreamt about a ladder, which represents the ability to combine the upper levels with the lower levels. The ladder was "standing on earth" - signifying that one must realize G-d is with him even on the lowest levels of this material world - "with its top reaching to the heavens" - indicating that at the same time, one knows nothing about G-d's greatness, since He is Infinite. This is the essence of a person's devotions all the days of his life: to combine "knowing" with "not knowing" G-d.

Why did Yaakov lie down to sleep in such a holy place? "Sleep" indicates a lowering of consciousness, a decision to set aside one's intellect and place oneself totally in G-d's hands. It represents the lofty level of "not knowing" G-d - i.e., recognizing Him as Infinite. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 15a)

Yaakov dreamt that three angels ascended and descended the ladder to Heaven. The fourth angel, corresponding to the fourth and current exile, ascended but did not descend. (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeitzei 2)

Yaakov was on his way to Lavan, the foremost double-dealer, who would trick him in every way possible. Yaakov understood that this would be the challenge of the fourth and final exile, too: the chicanery and lies that would be presented before the Jews to distance them from G-d. He was very much afraid, but was strengthened by G-d's promise: "I will be with you... I will not leave you." That is, G-d will always be with us, no matter what we endure. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 51a)

The ladder in Yaakov's dream alludes to three concepts. The lower point is the student, who must be firmly grounded in order to receive his master's teachings. The upper point is the master, whose lofty teachings can inspire even those who are mired in earthly, materialistic pursuits. The ladder itself, stretching between the two, reflects the teachings of the master and the channel through which the student can draw down those teachings. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 56)

When one practices humility and considers himself as lowly as the earth, he merits to attain heights as high as the heavens. (Likutey Halakhot 5, p. 352)

SMALL ACTIONS, BIG IMPACT

Rabbi Yaakov Klein

"He dreamt, and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." (28:12)

As the world continues to grow more and more interconnected and the link between disparate systems across every level of human functionality grows more stark, we are becoming increasingly aware of the way in which the repercussions of a seemingly "local" event echo far more widely than we might imagine.

The tzaddikim teach that this principle is even truer in the realm of our individual spiritual efforts and personal growth: a few words of tefillah whispered with sincerity, a few lines of Gemara with Rashi and Tosafos, a small act of chessed - these soul-revelations have an enormous impact on all the heavenly realms, changing the equilibrium of the world. Unfortunately, the same is true for egotistic acts of lowliness; these, too, have their effect.

The tzaddikim see this lesson hinted to in Yaakov Avinu's dream. ויחלם והנה סלם מצב ארצה - Yaakov sees a symbolic representation of the Jewish person; his feet firmly rooted in this world, in the realities of his own personal life. וראה מגיע השמימה - But in truth, his actions impact the state of the very heavens above. והנה מלאכי אלהים - The very angels ascend or descend, בו - depending on his actions. How incredibly powerful we are!

LADDER OF WEALTH

Baal Shem Tov

"He dreamt, and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." (28:12)

The numerical equivalent of סולם (ladder) is the same as ממון (money). From this we learn that money is like a ladder; one can use it for charity and chessed to ascend and draw nearer to Heaven, or one can degrade himself with it by spending on wicked or wasteful things. It all depends on how one uses one's money and for what it is employed.

HUMBLE GREATNESS

Reb Avraham Chaim of Zlotchov

"He dreamt, and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." (28:12)

If a man regards himself as humble, "planted on the ground," then "his head will reach the Heavens." G-d will consider him truly great. As the Holy Zohar puts it: "He who is small is actually great." Then, too, he will deserve to have "G-d stand beside him" (pasuk 13), to have the Shechinah hover above, as it is written (Isaiah 57:15): "I dwell, and with the crushed and humble of spirit."

POWER OF OUR ACTIONS

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"And behold, angels of Hashem were going up and down on it." (28:12)

The Midrash teaches: The angels were going up and going down with Yaakov; they were dancing with him. When Yaakov Avinu saw that the angels were "dependent" on him and his actions, he said, "If I would have known how big of an impact my actions have, I would have never slept".

The Chiddushei Harim comments on this midrash: If a Jew would realize how far his actions can reach, he would never "ignore" even a single good deed or opportunity to serve Hashem. Through his actions he can add shefa (flow of blessings) and simcha in the upper worlds.

WHAT GOES UP MUST COME DOWN

Rav Yaakov Moshe Kulefsky

"...and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." (28:12)

Yaakov Avinu saw a ladder which represents the connection of all spheres and worlds up to the Heavens. Yet this ladder was mutzav artzah - "entrenched in the ground," meaning that the good deeds and mitzvos that are performed in This World determine how it connects to the upper Heavens. It is for this reason that the angels were "olim v'yordim," first going up and taking good deeds up to the Heavens and then coming down with the corresponding bounty and reward that these deeds caused.

THE MIRROR EFFECT

Baal Shem Tov

"He dreamt, and behold, a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." (28:12)

We must contemplate and remind ourselves that we are "a ladder planted on the ground with its head reaching the heavens." If we are mindful of the reality that each of our movements, actions, and words generate repercussions in heaven, we will be careful to do everything for the sake of G-d.

Conversely, if we question our ability to damage or repair matters in the heavens and on earth, whereby our every deed has a direct influence Above, we will eventually throw off all responsibility. We will follow our instincts, claiming that there are no consequences.

This is falsehood. Through our good deeds, we literally attach ourselves to G-d Himself, as it is stated, "You shall go in His ways" (Devarim 28:9). Meaning that His ways are influenced by the way we go: If we act mercifully on earth, the attribute of Divine mercy is awakened in heaven and radiates within all of the worlds. And the same is true of the other attributes.

For it is stated, "Know what is above you..." (Avot 2:1), meaning that the way to "know what is above," i.e., to identify the Divine attribute currently dominating the heavens and influencing its decisions, is from "you," through recognizing the attribute that you are currently projecting.

HASHEM IS ALWAYS WITH US

Reb Aryeh Leib of Plotzk

"And Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said: 'Hashem is surely in this place, and I did not know it.'" (28:16)

According to the Midrash, Yaakov's flight from his home to an alien land presaged the Jews' exile. By revealing to Yaakov the vision of the ladder and the angels, G-d meant to show him that just as this Heavenly vision went with him into a strange land, so too, would the Bais HaMikdash's sanctity accompany the Jews into exile and be built into the synagogues and yeshivos that they would establish in the lands of their dispersion.

Yaakov said: "Surely Hashem is in this place": I see now that the Shechinah will dwell in the midst of the Jewish people even here, in an alien land, "and I did not know it" - this I never knew before.

NO PAIN, NO GAIN

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said: 'Hashem is surely in this place, and I did not know it.'" (28:16)

Rashi explains that when Yaakov said, "I did not know," he meant that if he had known that Hashem was in this place, he would never have gone to sleep.

One could certainly wonder how it could be that Yaakov regretted falling asleep. He experienced nevuah - prophecy, when he was sleeping. Why would Yaakov feel badly that he had slept there?

The Kotzker Rebbe (Emes v'Emunah) says that Yaakov didn't want to experience high levels of spirituality without having to put in the effort. He wanted his relationship with Hashem to be a result of his hard work, not just a free gift. What Yaakov was saying was that he regretted experiencing this lofty level of closeness to Hashem without having to exert any energy. Had he known that this place was holy, he would have worked hard to elevate himself to the level where he would be worthy of nevuah.

We live in a world where our society looks for the quick fix. People want results without having to put in the work to attain their goals. Yaakov is teaching us that the right approach to our avodas Hashem, along with anything else in our lives, is as Chazal teaches, l'fum tzaara agra - "no pain, no gain." Anything worth something requires us to work hard. With this mindset, we are sure to strengthen and deepen our relationship with Hashem.

SPIRITUAL SLUMBER

Reb Aryeh Leib of Plotzk

“And Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said: 'Hashem is surely in this place, and I did not know it.’” (28:16)

Many people go through life as if asleep. The pasuk tells us otherwise: “Va’yikatz Yaakov mi’shnaso” - when a Jew will wake up from his spiritual slumber, “va’yomer, achein yesh Hashem b'makom hazeh” - and he will recognize and proclaim that there is a G-d who runs this world, “v'anochi lo yadaati” - he will then realize that although he does not have all the answers, Hashem will see to his needs and care for him on this world!

NOT A PLACE FOR SLEEP

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said: 'Hashem is surely in this place, and I did not know it.’ And he became frightened...” (28:16-17)

The fact that Yaakov Avinu was “afraid” is to his credit. If the average person had a dream similar to the one that Yaakov had, explains the Sefas Emes, Rav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter zt'l, with angels and a personal guarantee from the Almighty to protect and watch over him, he most likely would have acted differently. He would have told others about it, boasting that Hashem spoke to him, much like Lavan did later on when he told Yaakov, “I have it in my power to harm you, but your father's G-d spoke to me last night and said be careful not to speak good or bad to Yaakov” (31:29). Yaakov, however, was truly frightened, due to his fear of Heaven, because he was a sincere man of truth.

Rashi clarifies Yaakov's words here: “In truth, Hashem is in this place, and I did not know it” - for had I known it, I never would have slept in a holy place like this. “What a tremendous lesson to be learned from here,” exclaimed Rav Aryeh Levine zt'l, while delivering a shmues to a group of young yeshivah bachurim. “Yaakov Avinu spent fourteen years studying constantly and tirelessly in the yeshivah of Shem and Eiver. He finally rested on the mountain that Hashem chose for him, and when he awoke, his first reaction was that he never should have slept at all!”

“My dear boys,” R' Aryeh said with true love and paternal affection, “this is the feeling you should maintain in your younger years. You must realize that these years that you are fortunate to spend in the walls of the yeshiva studying Torah are the greatest of your lives. You may not recognize how valuable this time is now, but let me tell you that it is supremely important and essential in shaping who you will be for the rest of your lives. If you know now what you will surely learn then, you will have no need to say in the future, 'Had I known this, I never would have slept in such a holy place!’”

READY FOR SERVICE

Reb Meir of Premishlan

“And Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said: 'Hashem is surely in this place, and I did not know it.’” (28:16)

As soon as Yaakov awoke, he proceeded to serve Hashem. Pharaoh, as we know, awoke, turned on his side, and went back to sleep. Herein lies the difference: Yaakov immediately started to serve Hashem.

ALWAYS HUMBLE

Sefas Emes

“...And he became frightened.” (28:16)

The Torah is telling us how modest Yaakov was. When someone has a dream in which Hashem appears to him, he usually develops an arrogant manner, but when Yaakov awoke, the Torah tells us, “He became frightened.”

CONSTANT SERVICE

Ohev Yisrael

“And Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said: 'Hashem is surely in this place, and I did not know it.’” (28:16)

While Yaakov was in the yeshivah of Shem v'Eiver, he never slept while he studied so as not to disturb or waste time in his service to Hashem. However, Yaakov did fall asleep during his journey, and he had a dream. He dreamt that the “Angels were ascending and descending” (28:12). Yaakov awoke from his sleep and noted that “Hashem is surely in this place” - even when one sleeps one can worship Hashem, and “I did not know” the entire time that I was at the yeshivah.

GATEWAY TO HEAVEN

Baal Shem Tov

“How full of awe is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of Heaven.” (28:17)

The Sages say: “Woe to he who has no dwelling place but makes himself a gate to the dwelling.” (Shabbos 31)

The analogy: “He who has no dwelling place but makes himself a gate to the dwelling” describes one who studies the Torah but doesn't fear G-d. The Torah is likened to a “gate” and the fear of G-d is likened to the “dwelling place.”

Yaakov studied the Torah for fourteen years at Shem and Eiver's school. (This was the school of Noach's son and great-grandson, respectively, who, according to tradition, conducted the school at which the Patriarchs studied Torah.) But he felt that he had not acquired the fear of G-d until the time he had come to this place.

He therefore exclaimed in amazement: "How full of awe is this place." This spot, where I first acquired the fear of G-d, must be G-d's dwelling place. And this - my Torah study in which I have engaged until this day - "is the gate of Heaven." All my study and knowledge of the Torah represent a mere gate on the way to Heaven.

VOW OF CONFIDENCE

Rebbe Nachman

"Yaakov vowed: 'Hashem will be with me, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear...'" (28:20)

Making and fulfilling a vow rectifies a person's fallen faith. This applies not only to faith in G-d, the Torah and the tzaddikim, but also to faith in oneself. A person must believe that he, too, is important in G-d's eyes.

Yaakov made a vow not because he doubted G-d's promise to him, but because he doubted his own worthiness. Realizing that his faith in himself was flawed, he made a vow to rectify it. (See Likutey Moharan I, 57:2)

ABILITY TO ENJOY THE BLESSINGS

Maharshal of Lenchne

"Yaakov vowed: 'Hashem will be with me, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear...'" (28:20)

It's obvious that bread is meant to be eaten and clothing to be worn. Isn't Yaakov's statement redundant?

Not at all. Yaakov prayed not only for bread, but for good health in which to enjoy the bread, since many people have plentiful food but cannot eat because they are ill. Yaakov prayed not only for clothing but for prosperity, so that he would not have to pawn his garments, and for peace of mind so that he would be able to put them on.

THINKING OF OTHERS

Sassover Rebbe

"Yaakov vowed: 'Hashem will be with me, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear...'" (28:20)

It is quite obvious that one needs bread to eat and clothing to wear. However, Yaakov did not make the request for himself alone. He asked for enough food and clothing so that he might share with others.

THE BARE MINIMUM

Reb Dovid Lelover

"Yaakov vowed: 'Hashem will be with me, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to put on...'" (28:20)

Yaakov did not ask for more than he needed. It is for this reason that the Torah states: "And give me bread to eat and clothing to wear" - that and no more.

FEEDING AND CLOTHING THE SOUL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yaakov vowed: 'Hashem will be with me, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, returning me to my father's house untainted...'" (28:20-21)

Bread and clothing refer allegorically to the study of the Torah and to the performance of G-d's commandments, respectively.

When we study the Torah, G-d's wisdom becomes part of us, just as the food we eat becomes part of us. When we perform a commandment, we are enveloped by an external, transcendent feeling of inspiration, much as a garment surrounds and warms us.

In this context, "returning to my father's house untainted" alludes to our return to the domain of holiness after venturing out temporarily into the mundane world in order to refine and elevate it to holiness. (Sefer HaMa'amarim Melukat, vol. 2, pp. 162-163) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

LOOKING PRESENTABLE

Koiznitzer Rebbe

"...and I will return in peace (b'shalom) to my father's house." (28:21)

By changing the position of the letters of the word b'shalom (בשלוּם), the word malbush (מלבוש - "clothing") is formed.

Yaakov, our father, asked not only for spiritual clothing (clothing of holiness) but also for respectable clothing.

TRUE WEALTH

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"...and of all that You shall give me I will surely give the tenth part to You." (28:22)

Yaakov said to G-d: "Only that of which I am willing to give one-tenth to charity will remain truly mine, entrusted by You to me by virtue of my pledge to tithe it. All other money is not really mine and will not remain mine."

For the only possessions we can truly call ours are the ones we give away to charity.

SHIELDED BY CHARITY

Sefas Emes

"...and of all that You shall give me I will surely give the tenth part to You." (28:22)

Yaakov was instructing future generations that if, G-d forbid, one finds himself in a time of distress, he should give charity.

GOING ABOVE OUR NATURE

Baal Shem Tov

“And Yaakov lifted up his feet...” (29:1)

The Hebrew word regel (feet) is related to the word meaning habit (hergel). Yaakov elevated his daily habitual actions and transformed them into holiness. As the navi Yeshayahu said: “If you turn away your foot because of the Shabbos, I will feed you with the heritage of Yaakov your father” (58:13). If you make an effort to rise above your hergel, base instinct, in order to bring holiness into the world, Hashem will reward you for your actions.

HAPPY FEET

Rebbe Nachman

“And Yaakov lifted up his feet and set out for the land of the people who lived to the east.” (29:1)

He rejoiced in G-d's promise of protection and drew that joy into his heart, which then lifted up his legs to walk effortlessly. (Rashi)

A person must draw his joy into his heart in order to infuse his legs with joy - so that, for instance, he can lift his legs in dance. (See Likutei Moharan I, 10:6; *ibid.*, I, 32)

LIGHT-FOOTED CONFIDENCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And Yaakov lifted up his feet and set out for the land of the people who lived to the east.” (29:1)

Even though Yaakov was on his way to enter a spiritually dangerous environment, his joy in fulfilling his Divine mission and trust in G-d's protection permeated his entire being, down to his feet, making him light-footed.

Following Yaakov's example, we can adopt the same joyful and confident attitude when we set out to tackle life's numerous daily, mundane activities, even though they may not seem as spiritual. The key is to make sure beforehand that, like Yaakov, we are properly nourished (by studying the Torah), properly clothed (by observing G-d's commandments), and properly focused on our goal (of making the world into G-d's home). (Sichot Kodesh 5731, vol. 1, p. 178) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

REQUESTING SINCERITY

Sefas Emes

“Roll the stone from upon the mouth of the well...” (29:2)

When it comes to prayer, it may seem as if a stone is in a person's mouth. There is very little sincerity, and it doesn't seem to be a service from the heart.

This is why, before the Amidah prayer, we say, “My Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise” - Roll the stone from my mouth so that I may praise You with sincerity.

COMBINING LOVE AND FEAR

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[The shepherds] would together roll the boulder off the opening of the well.” (29:3)

The well represents our inner wellsprings of holiness, the boulder represents the materialism that often blocks these wellsprings, and the “shepherds” are our love and our fear of G-d. But just as one shepherd alone could not remove the boulder, we cannot unblock our wellspring with only love or only fear of G-d. This is because both love and fear of G-d can easily slip into unhealthy forms if we are not careful. An example of unhealthy love is the love of material indulgence; an example of unhealthy fear is acting harshly toward others.

If, however, we both love and fear G-d, our fear of G-d can prevent us from falling into negative forms of love, and our love of G-d can protect us from falling into negative forms of fear. This is why the “shepherds” were able to remove the “boulder” from the “well” only when working together.

Yaakov, however, was able to remove the boulder by himself, because he embodied both love and fear of G-d. (Likutei Torah 4:5a-b; Ma'amarei Admor HaZakein 5573, pp. 3-4; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5628, pp. 29-34) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

A PLEA FOR SUSTENANCE

Reb Meir of Premishlan

“[Yaakov] said, ‘It is not yet time to bring the cattle in, water the sheep and go and feed them.’” (29:7)

Master of the Universe, if “it is not yet time to bring the cattle in,” that the Jews should be gathered together and redeemed from their exile, I pray to You, at least, to “water the sheep and go and feed them,” to allow the Jews to make a living so that they will have enough to eat and drink until the time is ripe for their deliverance.

POWER OF TRUTH

Reb Meir of Premishlan

“Yaakov came forward and removed the rock from upon the mouth of the well...” (29:7)

Yaakov's strength is truth, and truth enables us to roll even the heaviest of boulders of deceit and concealment from the well of living waters.

ALWAYS UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And it was when Yaakov saw Rochel, daughter of Lavan - his mother's brother - and the flock of Lavan - his mother's brother - Yaakov came forward and removed the rock from upon the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan - his mother's brother.” (29:10)

One cannot fail to notice the repetition of the words “his mother's brother” after every mention of Lavan in this verse. Not only do we already know that Lavan is Yaakov's mother's brother from previous parshios, but once we are reminded at the beginning of the verse, why would it be necessary to repeat it another two times in the same verse?

The Ohr HaChaim answers that since Yaakov was performing acts of kindness toward Rochel - a stranger to him at the time - the shepherds would certainly become suspect of him and his principles. Therefore, in order to allay any of their suspicions, Yaakov mentioned out loud, several times, that Rochel was his close relation and not some random woman whom he was trying to impress.

Similarly, the Torah tells us that we must not only act in a proper way in the eyes of Hashem, but we must also behave in a way that does not engender suspicion from others - even when our actions are perfectly permitted in Halachah. (As the verse says, “You shall be blameless from Hashem and from Israel”; Bamidbar 32:22, with Yoma 38a.)

Such actions saved the lives of many Jews during World War II through the wise counsel of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky who had just been appointed Rav of Tzitevian. One time, he was approached by a man who had received too many stamps from the Post Office clerk and wanted to know whether he should return them. Rav Yaakov advised that he should do so in order to make a kiddush Hashem, sanctify Hashem's name among the nations. Another time, the Rav himself was given too much change after a very complicated calculation involving many different factors. When Rav Yaakov recalculated the clerk's error, he returned the additional money immediately.

Rav Yaakov managed to escape Tzitevian before the atrocities of the Holocaust took place, but he was devastated to learn of the fate of most of his townspeople. However, he also discovered that many of the local Jews were saved by the Post Office clerk who had made so many “mistakes” all those years ago. When questioned why he would risk his life, the clerk answered, “I tested everyone who came to me, and the only ones who were honest were the Jews! How could I not try and save them?”

REMOVING THE STONE

Reb Noson of Nemirov

“Yaakov came forward and removed the rock from upon the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan - his mother's brother.” (29:10)

There are times when the “stone” upon one's heart is very heavy and cannot be moved easily in order to reveal the wellsprings of Torah that lie hidden underneath. The way to get the stone moving is by longing to serve G-d.

“The stone covering the mouth of the well” refers to the clouded vision that prevents people from perceiving the beauty of Torah. Yaakov, the tzaddik, can reveal the life-giving waters and water his “flock” - the people who follow him - with refreshing insights and soul-satisfying inspiration. (Likutey Halakhos VIII, p. 49b-50a)

PURE INTENTIONS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And Yaakov kissed Rochel, and he raised his voice and he cried...” (29:11)

Rashi explains that Yaakov cried because he was coming to Rochel empty-handed after all of his possessions were stolen by his nephew Eliphaz, who was on a mission to kill Yaakov at the request of his father, Eisav. However, because Eliphaz was a student of Yitzchak, he was ultimately unable to go through with Yaakov's murder. When Eliphaz reached Yaakov, he said to him “What should I do about my father's command [to kill you]?” Yaakov replied, “Take my possessions, because a poor person is considered like a dead person” (Nedarim 64b). As a result, Eliphaz was able to keep his father's command by “killing” Yaakov.

Using this extreme example, Rav Chaim Shmuelevits expresses the great contrast of good and evil that is found within every person, adding that even Torah learning cannot necessarily save someone unless his intentions are pure. As it says in Hoshea (14:10), “For the ways of Hashem are straight, and the righteous will walk in them, and the rebellious will stumble in them.” Another example of this is brought in the Gemara (Shabbos 88b) which compares Torah to a powerful drug - if it is used properly it will bring life; if not, it will be like a deadly poison. Similarly, the Vilna Gaon (Even Sheleima 1:1) writes that Torah represents water and causes anything that it comes across to grow - whether for good or bad. He explains that both plants used for medicine and those which are poisonous all grow when watered. So too, Torah causes whatever is in the heart to grow, whether for good or bad.

Another source for this principle can be found with Yaakov himself when he finally comes face to face with Eisav. He says, “I lived with Lavan” (Bereishis 32:5), which Rashi explains to mean, “Despite living with Lavan, I did not learn from his wicked ways, and I kept all of the Mitzvos.” Why does Yaakov need to add that he did not learn from Lavan's wicked deeds if he has already highlighted the fact that he kept all the Mitzvos; surely one who keeps all the Mitzvos will not follow in wicked ways? From here, Rav Zev Leff says that if one abuses the true intentions of the Torah, it is perfectly possible to live life as a “Kosher Goy” by following the strict letter of the law but ignoring the intention behind it.

Therefore, it is essential that we approach our Torah learning with the purest intentions, and then, with Hashem's help, its nourishing, life-giving waters will allow us to flourish into great people.

MAKING EVERY DAY COUNT

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Yaakov worked for Rochel for seven years, and they felt like just a few days in the eyes of Yaakov because of his love for her.” (29:20)

Rav Aharon Kotler asks how it is possible that Yaakov felt that seven years was but a few days. Typically, when a person is excited and waits for an occasion to arrive, it feels like time is moving slowly and as if the day will never arrive. How could Yaakov feel like those seven years were just a few days?

Rav Shimshon Dovid Pincus explains, based on Rav Aharon Kotler's answer, with the following mashal. If a person was told that at the end of a hundred days they would be paid a million dollars, the next one hundred days would seem like an eternity. However, if that very same person was told that each day he worked he would receive ten thousand dollars, which would result in a million dollars at the end of one hundred days, those one hundred days would fly by because the person would be so busy each day trying to accomplish their goal.

This is how we are to understand Yaakov's perspective. Yaakov knew that he was going to be the one to build Klal Yisrael with the twelve shevatim; this was no small responsibility. In advance of starting this family, Yaakov needed time to prepare himself so that he could handle the task. Therefore, Yaakov wasn't waiting around for seven years, rather he was making every one of those days count by working on himself in order to be ready to raise the shevatim. It is for this reason that the Torah describes his experience as “just a few days” that flew by because he was so busy.

There are times in our lives when we wait around to see what will happen as a casual observer or bystander. Let us learn from Yaakov that we need to make every one of our days count so we can accomplish great things as individuals and impact the world around us.

FULFILLED LOVE

Apter Rav

“...and they [the seven years] felt like just a few days in the eyes of Yaakov because of his love for her.” (29:20)

Shouldn't the reverse be true, i.e., that a day would seem to Yaakov like years because of his love for Rochel? One explanation is that the wording of this passage is meant to convey to us the profound spiritual nature of the love that bound Yaakov and Rochel to one another.

In a love based on physical desire, the couple wants the time of separation to pass quickly because each day they are apart seems like a year. However, in a spiritual love, devoid of self-seeking desire, it's unimportant whether the object of affection is near or far. The spiritual love between Yaakov and Rochel had already found fulfillment, and therefore the seven years seemed to Yaakov only a few days.

NO TIME CONSTRAINTS

Rebbe Nachman

“And Yaakov worked for Rochel for seven years, and they felt like just a few days in the eyes of Yaakov because of his love for her.” (29:20)

When a person serves G-d out of love, the amount of time he spends on his devotions is of no consequence to him. (See Likutey Moharan II, 79)

ALL THE MORE REASON

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“...and [Yaakov] loved Rochel more than Leah...” (29:30)

The main reason Yaakov was working in the house of Lavan was on account of Rochel. As is known, it was only because of Rochel that he went there. And through her, he also married Leah. Thus, Rochel was instrumental that Leah should also be Yaakov's wife.

Now, Yaakov loved Rochel for Rochel herself. But, in addition to the innate love that he had for Rochel, the verse tells us that there was another aspect to his love: He loved her in appreciation that it was through her that a righteous woman like Leah also became his wife.

That is why the verse says, “and he also loved Rochel,” meaning that there was another reason for loving Rochel, and that was “more than Leah” (מלאה), literally, “from Leah,” as Rochel had been the catalyst for Yaakov to marry Leah, and therefore Yaakov loved Rochel all the more.

(The verse may thus be read, “he also loved Rochel because [she had caused him to marry] Leah.”) Understand this.

HASHEM DESIRES PRAYERS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“G-d saw that Leah was hated, and He opened up her womb.” (29:31)

The Midrash comments, “the deeds of Eisav were hated in her eyes” (Tanchuma, Vayeitzei 4).

The matter can be explained as follows: At times, G-d deliberately altered nature for the tzaddikim, preventing them from benefiting from that which would naturally occur. He does so because He longs for their prayers, as is known (Yevamos 64a). So, for this reason, the Imahos were barren, in order that they pray for children.

Leah, however, turned to G-d in prayer regardless. She was praying that she would not have to marry Eisav (Rashi on Bereishis 29:17).

Since she was praying to G-d regardless, G-d had no need to impede her from becoming pregnant because she was praying in any event. Understand this.

ACKNOWLEDGING HASHEM

Tiv Gittin

"[Leah] conceived again, and bore a son, and declared: 'This time I will give thanks to Hashem.' Therefore, she called his name Yehudah..." (29:35)

From the day the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, there was no one who gave thanks to the Holy One, blessed be He, until Leah came. (Berachos 7)

The statement in Berachos in connection with the above pasuk seems odd. Doesn't tradition tell us that the three Patriarchs instituted the daily prayers? How, then, can it be said that no one gave thanks to G-d before Leah?

The thanksgiving Leah offered to G-d when Yehudah was born is not the same as that associated with the three Patriarchs' prayers. The literal translation of the Hebrew word *hodaah* ("thanksgiving") is "to acknowledge." The term implies a situation in which one person acknowledges that another person previously thought to be wrong or unjust - had been right and just all along.

Such was Leah's situation. First, she had seen only unhappiness. Feeling unwanted and unloved, she was convinced that G-d had wronged her. But when she had given birth to three sons, one after another, she realized that her initial unhappiness had helped make her worthy to become the ancestor of most of the tribes of the Jewish people. She therefore said: "This time I will praise Hashem." She acknowledged that what she had thought was evil and unjust was actually an act of Divine favor.

The Patriarchs and their families had reason many times to praise G-d, but they never had occasion to "acknowledge" the wisdom of G-d's ways as did Leah.

ETERNAL GRATITUDE

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"[Leah] conceived again, and bore a son, and declared: 'This time I will give thanks to Hashem.' Therefore, she called his name Yehudah..." (29:35)

In the Future, all the sacrifices will be abolished other than the thanksgiving-offering. (Vayikra Rabbah 9:7)

Odeh (אודה, I will thank) refers to the Korban Todah (קרבן תודה, thanksgiving-offering). As Yehudah symbolizes Mashiach, his descendant, and the concept of always giving thanks to G-d, the thanksgiving-offering will remain in place even after Mashiach comes. (Likutey Halachot I, p. 242)

HEALTHY JEALOUSY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Rochel saw that she had not borne Yaakov any children; Rochel was jealous of her sister [Leah]." (30:1)

Destructive, petty jealousy is born of the fear that the other person's successes will lessen our own self-worth.

In contrast, Rochel attributed Leah's fertility to her righteousness, and was therefore jealous of her sister's good deeds. This sort of jealousy is constructive since it spurs us on to improve ourselves. Our sages similarly state that jealousy among Torah scholars increases wisdom, for it stimulates study (Bava Basra 21a). Jealousy can be a positive force in our lives when we learn to apply it correctly. (Hitva'adut 5745, vol. 2, p. 870, citing Ohr HaTorah, Bereishis, vol. 1, 218a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PROVIDING STRENGTH AND HEART

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And she said to Yaakov, 'Give me children; if not, I am dead.'" (30:1)

This parshah, in which most of the shevatim are born and raised, contains many lessons in chinuch. It is interesting to note that two of the main ingredients in chinuch are found hidden in the chapters that begin and conclude this parshah. Vaveitzei begins in Chapter 28 which is כח (strength) and ends in Chapter 32 which is לב (heart). This is a tremendous lesson for all parents. They must show their children how important they are to them. Even though nowadays parents are so busy with other pursuits - making a parnassah, doing chessed, running to classes on self-fulfillment - which take up so much time and koach, they must always remember that really it's all about the children. Years ago, a child would at least come home to a mother, even if his father was busy all week making a living. But now, it is also the mothers who are supporting or supplementing the income, which leaves little time and koach for their children.

Explains the Dargah Yeseirah, even more important than the Roach is the lev - the heart - and unconditional love parents must give to their children. They must make them feel so loved and cherished, as if each one is an only child. They must know that it is not anything they do or say that makes their parents love them; it is simply the fact that they are exactly who they are that earns them the highest place in their hearts.

In numerical value, the word בית (home) plus לב (heart) equals מִקְדָּשׁ - the holy sanctuary of Hashem. If one truly wishes to create a dwelling place for Hashem on this earth, he must show Hashem that he is taking good care of His children by infusing them with Torah and yiras Shamayim through a never-ending pipeline of koach and lev.

PERSISTENT PRAYERS

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"Rochel said, 'I have struggled with my sister with divine struggles, and I have succeeded.' She named him Naftali." (30:8)

Naftali (נפתלי) comes from the same root as Naftalti (נפתלתי, "I wrestled" or "I struggled"). (Rashi)

This concept is similar to Tefillah (תפילה, prayer), for one must struggle and be persistent in praying to G-d when he has not yet received the answers to his petition. Eventually, his prayers will be answered, as were Rochel's. (Likutey Halachot I, p. 80a-81a)

BOUND BY PRAYER

Rebbe Nachman

“Rochel said, ‘I have struggled with my sister with divine struggles, and I have succeeded.’ She named him Naftali.” (30:8)

Menachem ben Seruk teaches that the name Naftali (נפתלי) comes from the same root as the word Petil (פיתיל, cord), rendering this verse as “By bonds from G-d have I been joined to my sister.” (Rashi)

The letters of the name Naftali (נפתלי) contain many of the same letters as the word Tefillah (תפילה, prayer).

When we consider that “the name Naftali comes from the same root as the word Petil (cord),” we can understand that prayer is the principal devotion that binds a person to G-d. (Likutey Moharan II, 84)

NEVER TOO EARLY TO EDUCATE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Reuven was taking a walk during the season of the wheat harvest and found mandrakes (dudaim) in the field.” (30:14)

In the harvest season, cut grain is lying unsupervised in the fields and people can easily get away with taking some for themselves. Yet Reuven gathered only ownerless, wild mandrakes. He knew that it was not right to take wheat that did not belong to him (see Rashi).

Reuven was a mere child in this episode, no more than five years old. Yet he possessed the moral fiber to go against the immoral practices of his society.

This demonstrates the quality of training that Yaakov and his wives gave their children. Even as children, unable to fully comprehend the precepts of the Torah, they knew to follow the example of Yaakov, who was scrupulously honest in all his dealings.

Similarly, we should never think that our children are too young or unsophisticated to notice our behavior or to be taught to be ethical. Rather, we can and should begin their moral education from the youngest age. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, p. 793) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SECRET AND SELFLESS SACRIFICE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And she said to her, ‘Was it a small matter that you took my husband; and you want to take my son's dudaim?!’” (30:15)

In a bid to have a child after so many years of marriage, Rochel asks Leah for the dudaim that Reuven had brought for his mother (dudaim were known to facilitate conception; Rabbeinu Bachaya, Bereishis 34:14). Leah's harsh response to Rochel is very surprising. After all, Yaakov had spent seven years working for Lavan in exchange for Rochel's hand in marriage only to be deceived at the wedding, marrying Leah in her place. If so, how could Leah say that Rochel “took” her husband? If anything, Leah “took” Rochel's husband!

The Gemara explains that Yaakov knew that Lavan may try to deceive him. Therefore, he taught Rochel a secret code - the laws of challah, niddah and Shabbos candles - as a means of checking whether the bride before him was really Rochel, for only she would know these secret signs. However, in a superhuman act of self-sacrifice, when Rochel realized how humiliated Leah would be when the trick was discovered, she taught her these signs, knowing full well that this would enable Leah to marry Yaakov.

This only strengthens our question: How can Leah now say to Rochel, “You took my husband”?

The answer, Rav Shalom Schwadron explains, is that Rochel's degree of self-sacrifice is greater than we first thought. Because in reality, Leah never knew the tremendous act that Rochel had done for her. For, when Rochel taught Leah the laws of challah, niddah, and Shabbos candles, she never told her sister that it was a secret code. Leah thought that Rochel was simply teaching her the laws relevant to a married woman.

With this explanation, we can now understand why Leah was upset with Rochel - because she did not know, and likely never knew, what Rochel had done for her. We can also appreciate the difficulty of Rochel's test, that even when accused of stealing Yaakov, she still never revealed the secret in order not to hurt her sister's feelings!

Rochel's unbelievable sacrifice is unmatched in history, but the ability to put one's own desires and needs aside for the sake of another's happiness is still prevalent among the Jewish People. One such example of this was set by Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel when one of the Mir Yeshivah's major benefactors was making a wedding in Argentina and invited Rav Nosson Tzvi to attend. The yeshivah's fundraising team was excited when the Rosh Yeshivah agreed and booked a hotel suite in the hotel where the wedding was to take place. With so many high-profile guests attending, they calculated that the donations he would receive would total over a million dollars. However, to everyone's surprise, at the last minute Rav Nosson Tzvi changed his mind. He explained that he had spent a long time thinking it over, and although the parents would be honored by his attendance, ultimately, the attention he would receive from the guests would actually detract from the simchah of the new couple. When asked how he could forgo the million dollars when the yeshivah needed the money so desperately, Rav Nosson Tzvi simply answered that no amount of money was worth causing someone else pain!

KEEPING IT FRESH

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"[Rochel] named him Yosef ["May He add," in Hebrew], saying, 'May G-d add another son for me.'" (30:24)

Yosef (יוסף) earns the title of "tzaddik" because he continually adds (מוסיף, Mosif) freshness to his devotions. Every day he wants G-d to see him as a "new" son.

This verse also implies that the tzaddik constantly works to bring new souls back to G-d. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 77a)

BRINGING THEM BACK HOME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Rochel] named him Yosef ["May He add," in Hebrew], saying, 'May G-d add another son for me.'" (30:24)

Rochel's prayer sums up Yosef's spiritual mission in life - to turn an "other," i.e., a seeming stranger, into a "son."

This mission expresses itself in three ways: First, in making the mundane world - which appears to be separate from G-d - acknowledge and celebrate its Divine source. Second, in personal repentance, through which we transform ourselves from estranged "others" into "sons" who belong to G-d. Third, in reaching out to those who seem estranged from G-d, revealing to them that they are G-d's precious children, for whom living life according to G-d's plan is simply natural. (Hitva'aduyot 5743, vol. 2, p. 783)

Let us not feel inadequate or incapable of effecting such transformations, for we do not work unaided. Rochel said, "May G-d add for me another son" - we are merely G-d's instruments, and it is really He who lovingly welcomes His estranged children home. (Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 2, p. 1112) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DISPUTING THEIR CLAIMS

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"It came to pass when Rochel had borne Yosef, that Yaakov said to Lavan: 'Send me away so that I may go to my own place...'" (30:25)

[It came to pass] after the birth of he who was to become Eisav's adversary. (Rashi)

[Yaakov made the request] because he knew that Eisav would fall only by the hand of Rochel's sons. (Midrash Rabbah)

Rochel's son, Yosef, would be the one best fit to answer Eisav when he clamors for vengeance for Yaakov's act of deceit. "Listen," Yosef could say to Eisav, "my brothers did me much more harm than Yaakov did to you. They sold me into slavery. And yet I rewarded their evil with good." This impressive argument should be sufficient to cause Eisav to "fall," ceding the victory to the Jews.

RAISING THE LOWLY

Rebbe Nachman

"G-d blessed you [Lavan] because of me." (30:30)

Ya'vevarech YHVH otcha le'ragli (G-d blessed you because of me) literally means "G-d blessed you at my feet."

Yaakov elevated the "feet," the lower levels of reality, to serve G-d, and so he attained blessing. (Likutey Moharan I, 24:4)

EVERYTHING WILL MAKE SENSE

Rebbe Nachman

"My righteousness will answer for me in the future..." (30:33)

Our world is comparable to the Vacated Space, where a person cannot find answers to deep questions regarding reward and punishment, and must rely on faith.

When one strengthens his faith in this world, then, in the Messianic future, we will attain the answers regarding our "righteousness." (See Likutey Moharan 1, 64:6)

OUR PRIMARY ASSET

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yaakov] thus became exceedingly prosperous. He owned prolific flocks." (30:43)

Yaakov worked primarily with sheep because sheep submit humbly to the direction of their shepherd. They are therefore a metaphor for the humble submission to G-d's will that we must cultivate in order to keep our spiritual bearings during our "sojourn with Lavan," that is, when we are involved in the mundane world.

Nonetheless, selflessness alone is not enough to fulfill our Divine mission; we must also employ the more advanced aspects of our personality. These are alluded to by the "bondwomen, bondmen, camels, and donkeys" that Yaakov later bought. (See Torah Or 24C; Torat Chaim, Bereishit 185d)

Making use of these other aspects of ourselves involves acting with self-awareness and self-assertion. But cultivating self-assertion could undermine the self-negation that we need in order to succeed in our encounter with "Lavan."

Yaakov therefore "purchased" each of these aspects with "sheep," meaning that his use of these aspects was based on and infused with the selflessness characteristic of sheep.

This is also why Yaakov continued to maintain sheep as his primary asset, and likewise, we should value our sheep-attitude as our basic approach to life, so that our actions will always be permeated with selflessness. (Likutey Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 252-257) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SPIRITUAL WEALTH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yaakov] thus became exceedingly prosperous." (30:43)

Aside from his material wealth, Yaakov also attained true, spiritual wealth: he succeeded in raising all of his children to follow in the righteous ways of Avraham and Yitzchak, and did not produce a single wicked son (of the likes of Eisav or Yishmael, who were born to his forbears Avraham and Yitzchak).

Yaakov was able to do this because he synthesized the inspirational approach of Avraham and the self-disciplining approach of Yitzchak. By relating to G-d with simple sincerity, Yaakov both transcended the differences between the opposite approaches of his forebears and was able to relate equally well to each of his children's different personalities. It was also because of his simple sincerity that Yaakov was able to outwit the crafty, scheming Lavan.

Yaakov's example teaches us that while logic and reason have their place, the foundation of our relationship with G-d is simple sincerity. This sincerity then enables us to relate effectively to others no matter how different they may be from us. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 63-65; Sichot Kodesh 5740, vol. 1, pp. 448-451) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

EASING THE BURDEN

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Hashem said to Yaakov, 'Return to the land of your fathers and of your birthplace, and I will be with you...' Yaakov sent for and called Rochel and Leah to the field, to his flock, and he said to them, 'I have noticed that your father's disposition is not towards me like it was in earlier days... and an angel of Hashem said to me in a dream... 'Now, arise, leave this land and return to your birthplace.'" (31:3-13)

An angel of Hashem appears to Yaakov in a dream and tells him to leave Lavan's house. However, when telling Lavan's daughters, Rochel and Leah about their necessary departure from their father's home, Yaakov first tells them that Lavan no longer shows favor towards him and then after presenting further reasons to leave, Yaakov finally says that Hashem had actually instructed them to go. Surely this should have been the first reason, and perhaps the only reason that he offered to Rochel and Leah?!

In fact, we can ask the same question later in the Torah on the words that Yosef used to reject Potiphar's wife's advances. Yosef said to her "He [Potiphar] has not denied me anything except for you, for you are his wife, so how can I perpetrate this great evil and sin against Hashem?" (Bereishis 39:9). Once again we can ask, sinning against Hashem should have been the ultimate and definitive reason not to give in to his yetzer hara, so why did he not mention that first?

From these questions, the Alter of Kelm learns a fundamental teaching. Whilst we must always follow what Hashem wants from us, it is important for us to be creative in reducing the test that we are facing, thereby making it easier to overcome.

Obviously Rochel and Leah needed to leave Lavan's house because of Hashem's instruction, and it is clear that Yosef would have been "sinning against Hashem" had he succumbed to Potiphar's wife's enticement. Nevertheless, in order to somewhat reduce their struggle, they thought of other reasons why following Hashem's will was the right decision.

This way they would be infinitely more grateful to Hashem for His Supreme direction in life, and never feel a hint of remorse over doing what was right.

FUTURE BLESSINGS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"I am the G-d of Beis El." (31:13)

In the Amidah, we say "the great, mighty, and awesome G-d, the supreme G-d..." referring to G-d by the name Kel. The principle is as follows. Some types of kindnesses G-d performs for us now. But there are other, greater kindnesses that we are awaiting and anticipating.

Concerning the latter, our Sages, of blessed memory, applied the verse (Yeshayahu 64:3) "No eye has seen it" (Berachos 34b). As such, it follows that the kindnesses that G-d shows us now are just a "garment" for the greater kindnesses that He will bestow upon us in the future.

Now, in general, the Divine name Kel indicates kindness (Zohar 3:30b). As the verse says, "the kindness of Kel is every day" (Tehillim 52:3). This, then, is the import of our verse, "I am the G-d [Kel] of Beis El." The kindnesses in this world are like a "house" for the kindnesses of the future.

This is the meaning of the word "Beis El" - "House of G-d." And this is the meaning of the words "the great, mighty, and awesome G-d, the supreme G-d [Kel]." Understand this.

EMULATING GREATNESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"He led all his livestock and all the wealth which he had amassed - all his possessions that he had acquired in Padan Aram - to come to Yitzchak, his father." (31:18)

Now, why does the verse explicitly mention where Yaakov was going? This would seem to be superfluous, because surely Yaakov was going to his father.

The answer seems to be as follows: We know the tremendous stature of the righteous in the eyes of G-d and His tremendous love for them, for we see that G-d can issue a decree, yet the righteous can nullify it (Moed Katan 16b).

Seeing that this is so, it is appropriate for each and every individual to attempt to emulate them, i.e., to cleave to the worship of G-d solely because He is our Ruler and Master, the Source of all worlds (Zohar, Intro. 11b), there is no place vacant of His Presence, and His glory fills all the worlds. We should worship G-d for no other reason, meaning, “not to receive a reward,” as our Sages say (Avos 1:3). Such motivation was alien to our forefathers. They served G-d entirely for exalted and spiritual reasons.

Nonetheless, not everybody is capable of such altruistic and spiritual service. A person must prepare arduously to attain such a lofty level. Our holy Avos, however, because of their great refinement, thought it simple to achieve this level. Thus, the Torah gives us ethical advice, encourages us “to come to Yitzchak, his father,” i.e., a person should strive to be like Yitzchak, who was not motivated by thoughts of reward that G-d had promised him, but by an exalted perception of G-dliness, as mentioned above. Understand this.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Lavan was told on the third day that Yaakov had fled. He took his brethren with him and pursued him...” (31:22-23)

When Yaakov Avinu took his wives and children and ran away from the house of Lavan, his father-in-law chased after him. The meforshim learn a number of important lessons from the manner in which Yaakov conducted himself when he met Lavan.

Yaakov meant to lash out at Lavan for probing in his wives' tents. In truth, he had every right to protest the intrusion into his family's privacy. Instead, says R' Mendel Rimanofer zt'l, the pasuk says: “He (Yaakov) said to Lavan, 'What was my sin, what was my misdeed?’” Rather than putting Lavan on the defensive by speaking harshly (va'yidaber), Yaakov Avinu spoke softly (va'yomer), using words that shifted the focus off Lavan and onto himself. From Yaakov we learn an important lesson: The best way to defuse tension is through non-confrontational words.

Later, we find another lesson in derech erez. Yaakov and Lavan built a monument of stones as a witness to their treaty. The pasuk tells us that Yaakov spoke to “echav” - Rashi translates echav as his sons - and told them to gather stones for the monument. However, when it came time to sit down to a full feast, the pasuk writes: “He called to his ‘echav’ to eat bread.” This time, Rashi says that echav means Lavan's entourage. What is the meaning of this discrepancy?

R' Yechezkel of Kuzmir zt'l explains that the sons of Yaakov were the waiters at this meal. Yaakov taught his children that when guests come, the children should get up and help out, instead of sitting idly at the table and waiting to be served. Thus, the “echav” written regarding the meal cannot be referring to Yaakov's children, since they were not eating. They were serving and allowing the others to partake.

We see one last lesson. As they parted ways, the pasuk follows through: “Lavan returned to his place and Yaakov went on his way.” The Meshech Chachmah, R' Meir Simcha HaKohen zt'l, says that from here we see the difference between a tzaddik and a rasha. Yaakov was constantly “on his way” - always striving to elevate himself to higher levels of spirituality, whereas Lavan simply returned to his evil ways.

AIDED BY EVIL

Rav Chaim Kanievsky

“He [Lavan] took his brethren with him and pursued him [Yaakov]...” (31:23)

Lavan was no match for Yaakov Avinu, whose physical strength was legendary ever since the day he set foot in Charan and lifted the boulder off the well. Still, Lavan chased after Yaakov in order to retrieve his avodah zarah.

What can Klal Yisrael say when our enemies are ready to go on suicide missions in the name of their G-ds? Can we claim the same willingness and dedication? The difference, though, is that our mesiras nefesh needs to overcome a mighty yetzer hara, while in their case, the yetzer hara is the one giving them the strength and fortitude to carry out their missions.

SWEET-TALKER

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“G-d appeared to Lavan the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, ‘Beware, lest you speak with Yaakov either good or bad.’” (31:24)

When Lavan decided to chase after Yaakov and his family, presumably to harm them, Hashem came to him in a dream and warned him: “Beware, lest you speak with Yaakov either good or bad.” Bad can be understood, but why not talk to him from a positive angle? Because Lavan was a sweet talker and had he turned on the charm and spoken to Yaakov kindly, he may have convinced him to come back to Charan with him. This, Hashem didn't want.

SHOWING HIS TRUE COLORS

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

“[Lavan said to Yaakov,] ‘Why did you flee secretly and did not tell me, for I would have sent you away with gladness, with songs, with timbrel and with harp, and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. It is in my power to do you harm.’” (31:27-29)

First, Lavan talks of farewell parades, then of kissing his sons and daughters farewell. In the same breath he cries out that it is in his power to do them harm. Is that the way of a good and loving father? It is all quite in keeping with Lavan's character. His farewells and demonstrations of love serve only to conceal his scheming to do evil to Yaakov and his family.

WICKEDNESS ABHORS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"[Lavan said to Yaakov,] 'Why did you flee secretly and did not tell me, for I would have sent you away with gladness, with songs, with timbrel and with harp...'" (31:27)

Although Yaakov seemed to converse peaceably with the wicked Lavan, all his actions and speech were actually focused on G-d alone. Only superficially did it appear to the wicked Lavan as if Yaakov were adopting his ways. For in truth, the wicked person hates the righteous, even though the wicked benefits from the tzaddik's righteousness. Nonetheless, the wicked cannot tolerate the tzaddik and so sends him off and distances himself from him.

It is only that Lavan thought that Yaakov was coming around, becoming like him, and therefore, Lavan was friendly to him. Afterward, however, Lavan became aware of Yaakov's steadfast righteousness, that in his heart Yaakov had continually avoided him and ran from him, and that all of Yaakov's deeds and words were attuned to G-d.

At that moment, Lavan told him, "Now I know that you have always concealed your true self from me, that you were always running from me, and that you did not tell me. Had you been upfront with me, I would have sent you forth with joy, with songs, with drum, and with harp," because Lavan had no desire whatsoever to have a relationship with a tzaddik, since evil cannot tolerate what is good.

LONGING FOR HOME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Lavan said to Yaakov,] 'You departed now because you longed continuously for your father's house.'" (31:30)

Yaakov's stay with Lavan foretold our own sojourn in exile. Just as Yaakov was far away from his physical home and immersed in an environment that opposed spirituality, our exile comprises both a physical Diaspora and - more importantly - the spiritual darkness of the unredeemed world.

And just as Yaakov was never comfortable in his place of exile and constantly yearned to return to his father's home, so must we constantly yearn to return to our Father's "home." No matter how successful we are in fulfilling our Divine mission in exile, we must never feel "at home" in it.

When we consider how long the exile has continued, we might erroneously feel that our longing has not borne any fruit. The truth is, however, that the more we realize the significance of our spiritual exile, the more our longing for the Messianic Redemption is intensified, which in turn hastens the Redemption. (Hitva'aduyot 5746, vol. 1, pp. 655-656, 664-605) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

JUSTIFIABLE ANGER

Chiddushei HaRim

"Yaakov became angry with Lavan." (31:36)

Anger was really not part of Yaakov's personality. However, we do read: "Give truth to Yaakov." And it is difficult for a person of truth to stand by and see conniving and not get angry.

We learn from this that one must know when and how to be angry.

UNDER WATCHFUL EYES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Had not the G-d of my father, the G-d of Avraham, and the fear of Yitzchak been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. My misery and the labor of my hands were seen by G-d, and He rebuked you last night." (31:42)

Mashal: There was once a rabbi who accepted a call to become the spiritual leader of a community in Houston, Texas. Some weeks after he arrived, he was riding the city bus from his home to the downtown area. After boarding the bus and paying the driver, he discovered that the driver had accidentally handed him too much change.

As he considered what to do, he thought to himself, "I should give the quarter back. It would be wrong to keep it."

But then another thought came to him. "Oh, forget it, it's only a quarter. Who would worry for such a little amount?"

The entire ride, he grappled with his conscience, but when his stop came, he paused at the door and handed the driver the quarter. "Here, you gave me too much change," he said.

The driver looked at him. "Aren't you the new rabbi in town?" he asked. The rabbi nodded, taken by surprise at the question.

"Well," said the driver, "lately, I've been thinking about where to worship. I just wanted to see what you would do if I gave you too much change. See you in shul on Shabbos."

The rabbi got off the bus feeling faint. "Thank you, Ribono shel Olam," he said. "I almost sold a Yid for a quarter!"

Nimshal: How exacting must a Jew be in his daily and business affairs. Let us learn from our Patriarch, Yaakov Avinu, who made it very clear to Lavan that no matter what happened during the twenty years he worked for him, every single penny was accounted for.

As Jews, we too, must be exacting in our dealings with others, since the "others" are watching us. Always be on guard and remember that you carry the Name of Hashem on your shoulders when you call yourself a Jew.

RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Lavan said to Yaakov,] 'I will not cross over to you beyond this mound, and you will not cross over to me beyond this mound and this monument.'" (31:52)

As opposed to a solid wall, a mound is a collection of unconnected stones, signifying that the separation between Lavan and Yaakov would not be absolute. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, p. 129)

Spiritually, this means that Yaakov was not erecting an impenetrable barrier between himself and the realm of Lavan. He would continue to enter Lavan's realm for the "business" of harnessing the sparks of holiness that reside there, but he would do so while remaining detached from the negative influences of Lavan's philosophy of life.

Similarly, the conceptual "mound" that we must erect to distinguish between ourselves and the mundane world around us must be left semi-permeable. Although we must cross that mound in order to conduct our business of sanctifying the material world, we at the same time, must remain immune to its negative aspects. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, p. 794) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

REMEMBERING HIS FATHER

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"...Yaakov swore by the fear of his father Yitzchak." (31:53)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "...Yaakov swore in fear of his father Yitzchak."

Yitzchak had always taught Yaakov not to take a vow unless absolutely necessary, and if he had to take an oath to do it with the reverence and respect proper in such cases. Hence, when Yaakov found himself compelled to take an oath, he did so filled with "fear of his father Yitzchak" - he was filled with reverence for the ideals his father had taught him.

DEFENDING ANGELS

Kotzker Rebbe

"Yaakov went on his way, and angels of G-d encountered him." (32:2)

For those who follow the ways of Torah, even the Angels of Justice ask mercy for them in times of need and trouble.

HAFTORAH

STEPPINGSTONE OR STUMBLING BLOCK

Kochav M'Yaakov

"For the ways of Hashem are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but sinners stumble in them." (Hoshea 14:10)

Wicked people claim that G-d hates humanity and therefore burdened people with a heavy yoke, in the form of commandments, to deprive them of their freedom. The fallacy of this view becomes obvious when we see how happy and content good people are to observe these commandments from which they gather strength for all their lives. Obviously, the only ones who find the commandments a burden are the wicked who have deliberately left G-d's ways. If they find the Torah burdensome, they have only themselves to blame.

The above may be illustrated by the following parable: A wealthy man known far and wide for his hospitality arranged an immense feast for passing travelers. He served only the finest and most expensive foods. Yet one of the guests, a man who was not in good health, became seriously ill after having eaten heartily of the delicacies at his host's table. Outraged, he insisted that his host had wanted to poison his guests. But the host said to him: "Let's ask the other guests whether the food agreed with them or not. I understand that you are not well. Therefore, if my food made you ill, you only have yourself to blame, since I prepared the meal for healthy people and not for people who were ill."

In a similar vein, Hoshea declares: "For the ways of Hashem are right," as proven by the fact that "the righteous will walk in them" and live by them in contentment and happiness. "But sinners stumble in them" - Those who regard these laws as burdens are transgressors, in whom the habit of sin is deeply rooted and to whom, therefore, G-d's law is a stumbling block that interferes with their lifestyle. But if this is the way in which G-d's law affects them, they only have themselves to blame. The fault lies not in the character of the laws, but in their own character.

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