

United We Stand

10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION!

Written By Yehuda Dov Reiss, Talmid of Gruss Kollel (YU Israel)

November 25, 2023

Parshas Vayeitzei

12th of Kislev 5784

The Parsha's Path

My first ever *United We Stand* Dvar Torah was about a famous Rashi at the beginning of this week's Parsha. When Yaakov decides to rest his head for the night as he flees from the wrath of his brother, the verse (28:11) describes how he took *from the stones of the place*, referring to "stones" in the plural. However, just a few verses later (18), it says how *he took the stone that he placed at his head*, in the singular. How do we understand this discrepancy?

Rashi cites the Midrash, which homiletically explains that the stones were fighting over which would have the honor of having Yaakov's head resting on them, so G-d fashioned them into one stone.

This, I wrote, demonstrates what unity is all about. When we all seek righteousness, even when it seems that the ways we feel we need to get there are mutually exclusive, we're really tapping into what makes us one - and G-d helps bring us together. There is no place for competition or enmity when pursuing the path of G-d, for the path of G-d leads to oneness.

As I reflected on this insight this year and looked through the Parsha, I noticed that Yaakov dedicates this very stone as a monument to G-d, and pledges to make its sight into a House of G-d - according to the midrash, the future Beis-Hamikdash. Perhaps it was precisely because those quarreling stones united as one for a higher purpose was what made this stone so fitting to symbolize the future Beis Hamikdash; as we know, the Beis-Hamikdash was destroyed due to *sinas chinam*, hatred and division between Jews, and it will only be built in the merit of our love and unity.

This is why I started my Parsha sheet ten years ago; it was when I first learned that *sinas chinam* was the cause for our exile and I realized that the one and only thing that will solve every issue the Jewish people have faced for the last two thousand years is unity. It did not take me terribly long to realize, however, that unity doesn't come just by talking about its importance; it's critical to understand all the things that prevent it, and work on ourselves in so many ways to increase it. We have to free ourselves from a narrow-minded focus on what sets us apart and open ourselves to a bigger, brighter perspective on humanity. Now, amidst the tragic and tumultuous events our nation is immersed in, our achdus

is more important than ever before. Let us all take this opportunity to work extra hard on our own sense of love and unity, and please help spread the message further by sharing and publicizing this sheet as well as any other publications that inspire you.

From The Archives

In honor of our tenth anniversary, we feature several articles on Parshas Vayeitzei from years past that are just as timely as ever, newly edited and revised:

5776

My Brothers, Where Are You From?

This Dvar Torah is based on a piece in 1 Small Deed Can Change the World, compiled by Nachman Seltzer.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zt"l, notes how this week's Parsha mentions that when Yaakov came to Charan he saw a group of shepherds sitting round a well with their flocks. *He said to them, "My brothers, where are you from? ... Look the day is still long"* (29:4-7). Yaakov asked why the shepherds were idle and admonished and advised them. Chazal tell us how he said they were either being unethical or illogical - if they were hired, they should still be out in the field with their flocks, for the day is not over, and if they owned the flocks, it was not wise economically to bring them in early. Now, Rav Kamenetzky's question was, how could it be that Yaakov was listened to, and even received an explanation and a civil response? Why did they take Yaakov's words respectfully and not get angry, as you might expect?

This was because when he approached them, the first thing he said was, *Achai, meiayin Atem - My brothers, where are you from?* He approached them with warmth and a sense of brotherhood, which showed that all he said to them was with good intentions and out of genuine concern. This is why the shepherds responded respectfully and with acceptance.

We often find ourselves confronted by situations where people don't act the way they should - whether it's our own family members, members of our community, or people we never met before. Naturally, we want to correct them and show them why they're acting wrongly. It's critical to recognize, however, that if we're not making

it clear that we're coming from a place of genuine love and concern for their best interests, our criticism will only drive them further away, just as how we feel when people criticize us. However, Yaakov teaches us that when we make a point of showing a genuine feeling of brotherhood, the gates of dialogue can open like we never imagined. Valid criticism can be of critical importance, but even more critical is to communicate our love.

5777

Animosity Vanquished

Vatikra Shemo Reuven - and she called his name Reuven (29:32).

In this week's Parsha, Yaakov goes to Lavan's house and marries Rachel and Leah, and they begin having children. Rashi notes that our Rabbis explain why Leah chose the name *Reuven* for her first son – she said, *Reu Mah Bein Bni LiVein Chami -- see what is (the difference) between my son and the son of my father-in-law (i.e., Eisav son of Yitzchak)*. Eisav sold the right of the firstborn to Yaakov, while Reuven never sold his right of the firstborn to Yosef (it was taken away from him and granted to Yosef for a separate reason). When Yosef received the right, Reuven did not protest over the matter, and he even sought to save Yosef from the pit that the brothers threw him into later on.

Reuven may have deserved to have his birthright taken away from him, but how he handled the situation is something we can all learn from, as his very name is meant to imply. He was deprived of a privileged status, which was instead granted to his younger brother -- not even from the same mother! -- and yet instead of becoming bitter and holding a grudge, he didn't protest at all, and even had a special compassion for Yosef in wanting to save him from the pit later on. Reuven teaches us that ridding ourselves of animosity is achievable, and looking at actions against us with an objective, positive attitude is possible. Indeed, this sort of selflessness could be found in his mother, Leah, as well as Rachel. In Rachel, it was exemplified when Lavan planned to trick Yaakov into marrying Leah on what was supposed to be his wedding night with Rachel. To prevent Leah from being embarrassed, Rachel revealed to her the secret signs Yaakov had arranged with her. With Leah, the trait was exemplified when she prayed not to have a seventh son so that Rachel would bear a second son to Yaakov and not be inferior to the maidservants in giving birth (see Rashi 30:21). This trait is also seen in Yaakov. Rashi comments (29:30) that when Yaakov worked for Lavan an additional seven years to gain Rachel's hand, which he was tricked

out of the first time around, he worked the next seven years with the same good faith as he did originally, despite Lavan's deceit. Clearly, such gracious and selfless attitudes were not lost on Reuven, and may they not be lost on us, either. Let us all strive to achieve an attitude of selfless acceptance, mercy, and love.

5778

The Source of Our Strength

... and there was a well in the field. And there were three flocks of sheep lying there beside it (29:2).

In this week's Parsha, Yaakov, after fleeing his brother Eisav, arrives at a well of water. The well is blocked up by a large stone, and three flocks of sheep and their shepherds lie before it. He inquires of the shepherds present as to why they do not water the sheep, and they explain that they are unable to lift the stone to get water from the well until all the flocks of sheep were assembled (presumably, they were waiting for the additional arm-power of the shepherds that were to come). Then Yaakov sees Rachel, the righteous daughter of the wicked Lavan, who had come to water her father's sheep. He immediately manages to push the rock off the well by himself and water the sheep for her. Ultimately, this leads to Yaakov's marrying both Rachel and her sister, Leah.

Ramban wonders why the Torah spent so much time on this little episode in the story. Why do we need to know about the three flocks of sheep, and even the miracle of Yaakov pushing the rock off of the well? Are those really pertinent details?

Ramban explains that Yaakov had just come from a long journey, and was surely very exhausted. We also can deduce, based on the flocks of sheep present, that there were many shepherds and watchmen by the well. Nevertheless, the joint efforts of all of those people were clearly not sufficient to remove the stone. Despite all this, however, Yaakov managed to move the stone all by himself. Why? Because, as the *pasuk* (Yeshayahu 40:31) relates, *Those who trust in G-d will renew their strength*, and, as the *pasuk* (Mishlei 14:26) states, *Fear of Him gives might*. In other words, Yaakov's superhuman strength clearly came not from his physical abilities, but because he trusted and feared G-d.

G-d has granted man extremely finite capabilities, and no matter how impressive some people's talents may seem, in the big picture they are nothing. There is a way, however, that we can achieve an infinite level of capabilities, and greatness that knows no bounds. And that way is to venture beyond ourselves, and strive to nullify our finite being within the Infinite Being.

OUR MISSION

To Bring The Third Beis - Hamikdash By Facilitating Jewish Unity Through Torah

According to Ramban, there wasn't necessarily a special reason why Yaakov was suddenly able to push an impossibly heavy rock on his own; he naturally drew his strength from the Creator. This may also explain why Avraham was able to single-handedly defeat four kingdoms to rescue Lot; of course, no man is capable of such impossible strength, but Avraham drew his strength from G-d. Let's always strive to put our full trust and fear in G-d in all that we do, and then may we achieve the feat of the Ultimate Redemption, Bimheira Viyameinu.

5781

When Silence is Bliss

This week's Parsha recounts how, after Yaakov takes the blessing from Yitzchak, Eisav seeks to kill him and Yaakov flees to the house of his uncle, Lavan. There, he falls in love with Lavan's younger daughter, Rachel, and offers to work for seven years as Lavan's shepherd in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage. Lavan deceives Yaakov, however, and gives him Leah, a fact which Yaakov doesn't realize until the day after the wedding. Yaakov then agrees to work another seven years to marry Rachel.

Later in the Parsha, it is revealed that Leah is well aware that Yaakov views her as inferior to Rachel, and G-d grants her the gift of fertility in giving birth to six of the twelve shevatim in compensation. One day, Leah's oldest son, Reuven, gives Leah some *dudaim*, a species of plant. Rachel asks her to give them to her, to which Leah responds, *Isn't it enough you've taken my husband, and now you also want to take my son's dudaim?* (30:15). Rachel replies by offering to trade her night with Yaakov in exchange for the *dudaim*, to which Leah agrees.

Later in the Parsha, Yaakov finally leaves Lavan's house with his family and possessions. Fearing Lavan would stop him from taking his family and belongings with him, he leaves stealthily, and Lavan chases after him. Lavan accuses him of stealing his idols, and searches for them in vain (Rachel, unbeknownst to Yaakov, took them and hid them well). Yaakov, seemingly for the first time, finally confronts Lavan, pointing out how Lavan had deceived him constantly in the terms of his wages and discussing some of his other conniving ways. Lavan leaves and Yaakov treks on.

The Midrash states that Rachel is praised for her trait of *shetika*, silence, for when Lavan substituted Leah for her, Yaakov anticipated he might do that and gave Rachel signs through which to identify herself to Yaakov. Rachel gave these signs to Leah so she wouldn't be humiliated upon being exposed at the wedding.

Several questions emerge based on this Midrash. For one thing, Rachel's act seems to demonstrate the *middah* of chesed, not silence. Why does the Midrash hone in on this characteristic? Secondly, why would Leah agree to go along with Lavan's trick? Thirdly, why did Leah accuse Rachel of "stealing" her husband after Rachel selflessly gave him to her? Fourthly, how come Yaakov didn't mention Lavan's trickery in switching wives when listing his deceptions later in the Parsha?

Rabbi Asher Brander quotes Rav Avraham Willig who quotes Rav Shalom Schwadron zt"l (a similar Dvar Torah was formulated by Rebbetzin Peshie Neuburger), who suggests that maybe Leah never knew that Rachel gave her the signs to tell Yaakov. The Midrash says that Yaakov's "signs" included the laws related to family life, so maybe Rachel simply told Leah these laws in the course of conversation, enabling Leah to unwittingly give these "signs" to Yaakov on the wedding night. Leah was under the impression that Yaakov really wanted to marry her first, and somehow along the way Rachel became his favorite. She thus understandably bore a grudge against Rachel, at least on some level. Yet Rachel never revealed that she gave the signs and always responded humbly to Leah's accusations. It seems that Yaakov was also sensitive to Leah's position, which is why he didn't stress Lavan's deception, especially in Leah's presence.

Rabbeinu Bachye points out that Rachel and her descendants epitomized the trait of silence; they spoke up when it was necessary and productive, but they also understood how, often, the best thing to do was to keep silent. Yosef in Egypt and Esther in Achashverosh's palace are particularly poignant examples offered of how Rachel's progeny knew how to keep secrets until the time was right.

For our matriarchs and patriarchs, silence did not require a conscious struggle and effort. It was a natural outgrowth of their personalities. Rachel was a master of self-effacement. Her single-minded commitment to G-d and her people made it only natural for her to observe Leah's position, help her out, and remain silent about it. Her self-confidence made it unnecessary and unnatural to talk about her good deeds; she had no need for the acknowledgement of others.

The silent person uses his energy not on superficial self-expression and the pursuit of esteem and recognition, but on self-building, taking the time to reflect on his own goals and how he can uplift others. He speaks up and gets involved when necessary, but does not waste his energy getting involved just for the sake of getting involved. He lives a life of purpose and deliberateness, and in this way is able to achieve levels of kindness and wisdom that baffle the mind. If this age of pointless noise,

OUR MISSION

To Bring The Third Beis - Hamikdash By Facilitating Jewish Unity Through Torah

hatred, and doubt has taught us anything, it's the power and value of silence.

5782

The Only Place to Turn

Can I take the place of G-d, who has denied you fruit of the womb (30:2)?

This week's Parsha features Yaakov's adventures in the house of Lavan, including his marriage to Rachel and Leah. While Leah has several children, Rachel doesn't have any for a long time, and she tells Yaakov, *Give me children, or I shall die (30:1)*. Yaakov becomes angry at her, informing her that he is not G-d and cannot simply choose to give her children.

Ramban explains that while of course Yaakov had tried davening that Rachel should have a child, his prayers went unanswered. Rachel tried to push Yaakov to pray more, but Yaakov informed her that there was a limit to what he could do. It was at this point that Rachel realized it was up to her. She gave Yaakov Bilhah, her maidservant, as a means in which she could at least indirectly have kids, and she also started davening for herself. It was only then that she merited having children of her own.

Rabbi Mayer Twersky explains that this is analogous to how Rav Soloveitchik explains the episode of Channah at the beginning of Sefer Shmuel. Channah's co-wife, Peninah, is blessed with ten children, and Channah has none. One year on their annual pilgrimage to the Mishkan, her husband, Elkanah, sees her distress and asks her why she's upset. "Am I not better to you than ten children?" he asks. Channah doesn't respond. It is in that moment, the Rav explains, that Channah realizes that her husband does not understand her suffering. It is only then that she goes to the Mishkan and cries out to G-d from the depths of her soul, begging for a child, and she is answered with a son, Shmuel, who becomes a prophet and leader of the Jewish people.

In both the cases of Channah and Rachel, it is only when they realize that nobody can help them, not even their husbands, that they are suddenly able to reach a new level of prayer that merits an answer. Before that point, they thought that they had whom to rely on to help them. It's only when they felt all alone in the world that they were able to turn to G-d with all their hearts and say "I have no one to turn to but you."

Rav Twersky told the story of how there were once two Chassidishe Rebbes who were brothers. It was known that those who went to one of the Rebbes always had their tefillos answered, but that was not the case of

the other one. The unsuccessful Rebbe asked his brother what his secret was. The Rebbe explained:

"When people come to you, you comfort and reassure them, telling them everything will be okay, and you fervently daven for them. When people come to me, my assistant tells them they have to wait four months before they can have an audience with me. During that time, they wait around, sleeping on the hard benches of the Shul. Finally, when it's their turn for an audience, my assistant tells them that they have exactly two minutes with me and not a moment more. They come in and barely manage to formulate their request before the assistant comes to kick them out. Right before they leave I give them some vague reply. When they leave they're in tears, feeling utterly hopeless and alone. It's at that moment that they give a sigh and say, "G-d! You're the only one I can turn to." It's that sigh that G-d is waiting for."

Often in life we find ourselves struggling with the same problems again and again, and we can't seem to break free. We may convince ourselves that we'll find a way to make it better and continue to pursue solution after solution, and while that effort is certainly of critical importance, we also need to realize that no matter what we do, the only One who can ensure our success is G-d. It's only when we appreciate that our fate is in His hands that we can merit His salvation.

Goal of the week

Write a letter to a lone soldier, displaced family, or another Jew in need of support.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Shelaima for Shaindel Temma bas Rachel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, Bracha bas Shoshanah, Reuven ben Golda, Yitzchok Moshe haKohen ben Miriam, Ephraim Melech ben Tzilah, Yitzchak Elimelech ben Chanah Sarah, and Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, as well as all those injured from the war in Israel and for a safe return of all the captives and soldiers. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

OUR MISSION

To Bring The Third Beis - Hamikdash By Facilitating Jewish Unity Through Torah