

# *Pachad David*

## *Bereshit*

*With gratitude to Hashem,  
The servant of Hashem, **David Chananya Pinto**,  
The son of my Father, my master and teacher,  
The tzaddik, Moreinu Rabbi **Moshe Aharon Pinto**, zy"א,  
Grandson of the holy tzaddik, Rabbi **Chaim Pinto**, zy"א*

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# Table of Contents



## **Bereishit**

<i>A Proselyte's Soul</i> .....	1
<i>Honoring One's Parents</i> .....	6
<i>The Teshuvah of Adam Harishon</i> .....	10
<i>The Secret of the Ten Sefirot</i> .....	12
<i>The Power of the Yetzer Hara</i> .....	17
<i>The Influence of the Kelippah</i> .....	21
<i>Doing Hashem's Will</i> .....	29
<i>Haman and Adam Harishon</i> .....	33
<i>The Expulsion from Gan Eden</i> .....	39
<i>The Sin of Adam and Chava</i> .....	42
<i>Being Grateful to Hashem</i> .....	51
<i>Keeping the Spark Aflame</i> .....	55
<i>David and Adam Harishon</i> .....	59

## **Gems on Parashat Bereishit**

<i>Strengthening Our Belief every Morning</i> .....	63
<i>The Power of Torah</i> .....	66
<i>Let Our Feet Lead the Way</i> .....	67
<i>Good Things Start at the Beginning</i> .....	68

<i>The Creation of Man</i> . . . . .	69
<i>Keeping the Rules</i> . . . . .	71
<i>Full-time Learning</i> . . . . .	73
<i>The Sin of Adam</i> . . . . .	75
<i>Perfecting Our Middot</i> . . . . .	76

## **Noach**

<i>The Difference between Avraham Avinu and Noach</i> . . . . .	79
<i>Preserving Kedushah in the Generation of the Flood</i> . . . . .	88
<i>Righteous Tzaddikim</i> . . . . .	92
<i>The Yeshiva – A Place to Grow</i> . . . . .	100
<i>The Duration of the Flood</i> . . . . .	110
<i>Noach Entered the Ark Involuntarily</i> . . . . .	114
<i>Combating Passion and Desire with Torah</i> . . . . .	119
<i>The Power of Unity</i> . . . . .	126
<i>Noach and the Raven</i> . . . . .	135
<i>The Remedy for Difficult Circumstances</i> . . . . .	142
<i>The Effort for a Mitzvah Enhances the Mitzvah</i> . . . . .	149
<i>Exertion for a Mitzvah</i> . . . . .	155

## **Gems on Parashat Noach**

<i>Noach vis-à-vis Avraham</i> . . . . .	160
<i>The True Man Overcomes His Natural Impulses</i> . . . . .	162
<i>The Generations that Noach Weathered</i> . . . . .	163
<i>Influential Power</i> . . . . .	164
<i>The Influence of Am Yisrael on the World</i> . . . . .	166
<i>Punished by Water and by Fire</i> . . . . .	168

## **Lech Lecha**

<i>Spreading Hashem's Name in the World</i> .....	171
<i>Our Purpose in this World</i> .....	174
<i>The Value of Time</i> .....	183
<i>Keeping the Rules of Tzeniut</i> .....	187
<i>For Heaven's Sake</i> .....	193
<i>Lessons from the Lives of the Avot</i> .....	197
<i>The Severity of Bitul Torah</i> .....	205
<i>Responding to Inspiration</i> .....	209

## **Gems on Parashat Lech Lecha**

<i>Leaving it Behind</i> .....	216
<i>Sarah's Deferential Humility</i> .....	217
<i>With Perfect Faith</i> .....	218

## **Vayeira**

<i>Chapters of our Forefathers, a Guide for Life</i> .....	221
<i>Inviting Guests vs. Greeting the Shechinah</i> .....	226
<i>Bringing Out Our Potential</i> .....	230
<i>Akeidat Yitzchak</i> .....	240
<i>Avraham's Greatness of Character</i> .....	244
<i>Serving Hashem with Vision</i> .....	253

## **Chayei Sarah**

<i>Overcoming Nisyonot</i> .....	261
<i>The Nisayon of Avraham and the Sacrifice of Yitzchak</i> .....	266

<i>In the Image of Avraham Avinu</i> .....	269
<i>Chessed Says it All</i> .....	273
<i>Using Our Time</i> .....	278
<i>Going All the Way</i> .....	286
<i>Yishmael's Demise</i> .....	291

### **Gems on Parashat Chayei Sarah**

<i>Avraham's Blessing</i> .....	297
<i>Hashem's Salvation</i> .....	298
<i>A Fitting Match</i> .....	300
<i>Creatures of Hashem</i> .....	302
<i>The Faithful Servant</i> .....	304
<i>Precious Words</i> .....	306
<i>The Fountain of Youth</i> .....	308
<i>Lavan's Acquiescence</i> .....	309
<i>Lavan's Berachah</i> .....	313
<i>Hagar's Return</i> .....	314
<i>A Fragrant Smell</i> .....	315
<i>Avraham's Other Children</i> .....	316

### **Toldot**

<i>The Effects of Derision</i> .....	319
<i>The Acquisition of Torah</i> .....	322
<i>Truth vs. Falsehood</i> .....	329
<i>Yaakov Avinu's Rise to Greatness</i> .....	340
<i>The Tent of Yaakov and the Field of Eisav</i> .....	348

<i>Yaakov vs. Eisav</i> .....	351
<i>The Selling of the Birthright</i> .....	354
<i>Dividing Up Two Worlds</i> .....	358
<i>The Berachot of Yitzchak</i> .....	366
<i>Taking the Berachot</i> .....	370
<i>Special Garments</i> .....	374
<i>The Power of Clothing</i> .....	377
<i>Yaakov's Kibbud Av V'em</i> .....	385
<i>Good Middot Are Everything</i> .....	388
<i>Achdut amongst Am Yisrael</i> .....	398
<i>Children who Turn their Backs</i> .....	401
<i>Eisav's Spiritual Atrophy</i> .....	403
<i>The Splendorous Countenance of Yaakov</i> .....	408

### **Gems on Parashat Toldot**

<i>The Descendants of Yitzchak</i> .....	413
<i>The Voice of Yaakov</i> .....	414
<i>The Blessings of Eisav</i> .....	415
<i>Yaakov's Journey to Charan</i> .....	417

### **Vayeitzei**

<i>The Virtue of Learning Torah</i> .....	419
<i>The Pride of Be'er Sheva</i> .....	421
<i>The Power of Torah</i> .....	432
<i>The Evening Prayer</i> .....	440
<i>Preparing for the Adversary</i> .....	448

<i>Yaakov's Reprimand</i> .....	451
<i>A Temporary Residence</i> .....	454
<i>The Vitality of Torah</i> .....	459
<i>A Rasha like Eisav</i> .....	465
<i>The Scent of Mandrakes</i> .....	468
<i>The Pact Which Set Them Apart</i> .....	472

### **Gems on Parashat Vayeitzei**

<i>Heavenly Protection</i> .....	481
<i>Ascending the Ladder</i> .....	483
<i>Righteous Progeny</i> .....	484

### **Vayishlach**

<i>Fraternizing with Eisav</i> .....	487
<i>Keeping the Mitzvot</i> .....	491
<i>The Worthlessness of Money</i> .....	497
<i>The Portal of the World to Come</i> .....	503
<i>The Hasmonean Connection</i> .....	508
<i>Those Who Dwell Alone</i> .....	516
<i>Doing Mitzvot in their Entirety</i> .....	520
<i>Flasks of Oil</i> .....	524
<i>A Nation Who Dwells Alone</i> .....	527
<i>A Heavenly Struggle</i> .....	533
<i>The Gid Hanasheh</i> .....	537
<i>Torah Support</i> .....	541

### **Gems on Parashat Vayishlach**

<i>One Hundred Berachot</i> .....	548
<i>The Strength of Life</i> .....	550
<i>True Greatness</i> .....	551
<i>Being Careful</i> .....	553

### **Vayeishev**

<i>Relaxing One's Efforts</i> .....	557
<i>Created to Work</i> .....	569
<i>Torah of the Humble</i> .....	572
<i>Auspicious Dreams</i> .....	578
<i>Reuven's Fragrant Actions</i> .....	584
<i>The Selling of Yosef</i> .....	591

### **Gems on Parashat Vayeishev**

<i>Doing More</i> .....	595
<i>Yosef with His Brothers</i> .....	596

### **Mikeitz**

<i>Shortening the Galut</i> .....	599
<i>Pharaoh's Dream</i> .....	606
<i>True Humility</i> .....	616
<i>Yosef and His Brothers</i> .....	620
<i>Without Compunction</i> .....	625
<i>Reaching Great Heights</i> .....	631
<i>The Power of Unity</i> .....	638
<i>Yosef's True Identity</i> .....	645

### **Gems on Parashat Mikeitz**

<i>Time for Redemption</i> .....	651
<i>The Joy of Torah</i> .....	652
<i>The Importance of a Beard</i> .....	654

### **Vayigash**

<i>The Meeting of the Kings</i> .....	655
<i>The Cure before the Illness</i> .....	658
<i>The Dream of Pharaoh</i> .....	662
<i>Gratefulness</i> .....	665
<i>Hashem's Reassurance</i> .....	669
<i>Torah's True Strength</i> .....	672
<i>The Power of Truth</i> .....	678

### **Gems on Parashat Vayigash**

<i>Constant Interest</i> .....	681
<i>Learning on The Road</i> .....	683
<i>Every Person's Portion in Torah</i> .....	684
<i>The Light of Torah</i> .....	686

### **Vayechi**

<i>The Pillar of Torah</i> .....	687
<i>The One Who is Commanded</i> .....	691
<i>Menashe and Ephraim</i> .....	695
<i>The Wars of Yaakov</i> .....	699
<i>The Merit of the Forefathers</i> .....	702

<i>Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael</i> .....	708
<i>Bitul Torah</i> .....	711
<i>Am Yisrael</i> .....	715
<i>Asking Forgiveness</i> .....	718

**Gems on Parashat Vayechi**

<i>Living by Them</i> .....	722
<i>The Power of a Berachah</i> .....	723
<i>The Berachah of Menashe and Ephraim</i> .....	725

<b>Glossary</b> .....	727
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# Bereishit



## A Proselyte's Soul

*“At the beginning, Hashem created the  
Heavens and the Earth”*

*(Bereishit 1:1)*

When creating man, Hashem gave thought to two major goals. Without these two, Hashem would not have even begun to form Heaven and Earth. This is alluded to by the first word of the Torah, which hints at the two primary purposes of Creation. Rashi explains that the word בראשית (at the beginning) contains the word ראשית (first and foremost), and both the Torah and Am Yisrael are called ראשית, as they were foremost in Hashem's thoughts when He created man.

This is also mentioned by the *Navi* (*Yirmeyahu* 33:25) where it is written, “If not for my covenant day and night, I would not have placed the Heavens and Earth upon their course.” This ‘covenant’ refers to the learning of Torah (*Nedarim* 32a). The Torah demands from us constant study, day and night. It is the learning of Torah which gives our world its continued existence. The Gemara also connects the word ‘covenant’ to *brit milah*. When Am Yisrael

perform a *brit* by removing the *orlah*, and continue that covenant by keeping the laws of marital fidelity, they are upholding the firmament and keeping the world on its course.

The Torah was actually created before Hashem brought our world into existence. Similarly, the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael preceded Creation. Our question, though, focuses on the *neshamot* of the proselytes, non-Jews who convert to Judaism. Were they also created before the Heavens and Earth? Or were they part of the slew of *neshamot* created later, along with those of the nations of the world?

I once heard that the *neshamot* of these precious Jews actually heard and desired the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, but were unable at that time to translate their desire into action. Hashem did a tremendous *chessed* for those *neshamot* by sparking their desire at a later date and expediting their halachic conversion. This, though, still begs the question. Were their souls created along with those of the Jewish nation, and just await the proper procedure of conversion to be carried out, or do they derive from a different stock altogether?

Perhaps we can find an allusion to our question in this pasuk. The numerical value of the word ברא (created) equals that of גר (a proselyte), signifying that Hashem created their *neshamot* alongside those of Am Yisrael. At the initial stage of Creation, when Hashem created the Heavens and the Earth, He planned for the inclusion of converts to Am Yisrael (the ראשית). Even more, the word שמים refers to the *neshamot* of Jews, whose source of derivation is from the Upper Spheres, whereas the word ארץ refers to those of the proselytes, who first walked upon the face of the earth before their acceptance of Judaism. Thus, we were all created at the same time as the Torah.

Hashem performed a tremendous *chessed* for these proselytes by creating them earlier than their fellow non-Jews. By creating them at the same time as the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael, their eventual integration with the Jewish people is made so much easier. Had Hashem not done so, perhaps Am Yisrael would not have been willing to accept the converts and treat them as brethren. Hashem thus looked to the future and knew which *neshamot* would choose to live a life of Torah and mitzvot, and gave them the fundamental character and abilities needed to successfully join the Jewish people.

Another allusion to the addition of proselytes to the Jewish nation is from the connection between the last two words of the Torah, כל ישראל (all of Israel), to the first two words, בראשית ברא. As we explained before, the word ברא refers to the proselytes. A proselyte may convert at old age, but his acceptance of Judaism makes him be 'born anew.' He becomes part of the Jewish people, of כל ישראל, specifically because he was created בראשית, at the very Beginning. And the blessings given at the end of the Torah by Moshe Rabbeinu equally apply to him.

My talmid, Rabbi David Ben Shalom Hakohen, added further insights on this topic, along these lines. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 2:7) says, "And Hashem created man from the earth and blew into his nostrils a living soul (נשמת חיים) and so man became a living creature." What is the significance of the words 'a living' soul? Doesn't the word 'soul' sufficiently describe what Hashem gave man?

It would seem that the soul is much more than just another created being. We are taught that the *neshamah* is a part of G-d, as the pasuk (*Mishlei* 20:27) says, "A man's soul is the candle of Hashem." It is a transcendental entity which originates in the Heavenly spheres, from underneath the Throne of Glory. It derives

its source from the *Ohr Ein Sof* of the Creator. Thus the innate nature of the soul is eternal, just as its Divine source is.

Similarly, its clarity and illumination is unequaled in all of Creation, even greater than that of the Heavenly angels or the *sefirot*. Although our bodies may wither and pass away, die and decay, our *neshamot* continue on. The world of the soul knows no (natural) death, as it was created to be eternal.

The Ramban (*Sha'ar Haggmul*) writes that every person is destined to pass through two worlds, our present temporal world, and the World to Come. This world uses the means of death to rectify our bodies, and the next world has its own forms of rectification, purifying the *neshamah* and allowing it to cleave to its source, the Source of all life.

Chazal (*Berachot* 18a) say that tzaddikim are considered alive even in their death, whereas reshaim are considered dead even when alive. The meaning of this now becomes clear. When one moves away from his Source of life by doing evil (רע), Hashem removes His presence and severs this *neshamah's* attachment from Him. The word רע refers to the reason for his defection, his רצון עצמו (selfish desires). After becoming more entangled in sin, he descends to the lower level of רשע which is an acronym for the words רצון של עצמו (extremely self-centered and pleasure seeking).

Conversely, a pure *neshamah* contains an eternal spark of Divinity. The word נשמת can be split into two, נש and מת. This hints to that spark, as we shall explain. Hashem's Name is referred to in the pasuk (*Shemot* 3:15) זה שמי, "This is My Name." And Am Yisrael is blessed with Hashem's presence using that very same name, as it says, "For the Name of Hashem is called upon you" (*Devarim* 28:10). Even Heavenly angels owe their existence to Hashem's Name being called upon them, as it says, כי שמי בקרבנו, "For my Name is within

him” (*Shemot* 23:21). The word נש has the same numerical value as the word שמי. This is why members of the Jewish nation, even after death (מת), are still very much alive. They have a constant attachment to Hashem’s Name. One who sins loses that attachment and association. All that is left is the word מת, and he is considered dead, even in this world.

This now explains why the pasuk describes the gift of life as נשמת חיים. We enjoy not only a soul, but also a direct link to the Source of Life, the Creator. Without having the Name of Hashem associated with their being, the nations of the world are far removed from that Source. It was Hashem’s great compassion which allowed the *neshamot* of the proselytes to be created alongside those of Am Yisrael. Through proper conversion, their *neshamot* can rise to the Throne of Glory and win everlasting life.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Before Hashem created man, He created ראשית (first and foremost) the Torah and the *neshamot* of Am Yisrael. Without these two, Hashem would not have even begun the task of forming Heaven and Earth. Our question is if the *neshamot* of the proselytes were also created before the Heavens and Earth.
- ◆ The numerical value of the word ברא equals that of גר, signifying that Hashem created their *neshamot* alongside those of Am Yisrael. A proselyte may convert at old age, but his acceptance of Judaism makes him be ‘born anew.’ He becomes part of the Jewish people, of כל ישראל, specifically because he was created בראשית, at the very Beginning. This is how the last two words of the Torah are connected to the first two words.
- ◆ Hashem created man from the earth and blew into his nostrils a living soul. What is the significance of the words “a living soul”?

- ◆ The *neshamah* is a part of G-d, and originates in the Heavenly spheres, from underneath the Throne of Glory. Thus the innate nature of the soul is eternal, just as its Divine source is. Although our bodies may die and decay, our *neshamot* continue on. We enjoy not only a soul, but also a direct link to the Source of Life, the Creator.
- ◆ Tzaddikim are considered alive even in their death, whereas reshaim are considered dead even when alive. When one moves away from his Source of life by doing evil, Hashem removes His Presence and severs this *neshamah's* attachment from Him.
- ◆ The word נשמת can be split into two, נש and מת. The word נש has the same numerical value as the word שמי. This is why members of the Jewish nation, even after death (מת), are still very much alive. They have a constant attachment to Hashem's Name (שמי). One who sins loses that attachment and association. All that is left is the word מת, and he is considered dead, even in this world.



## Honoring One's Parents

*“And Hashem created man from the earth and blew into his nostrils a living soul and so man became a living creature”*

*(Bereishit 2:7)*

Rashi explains that Hashem collected earth from all over the globe in order to create man. In this way, wherever man may die, his body could be interred and find a place to rest. Actually, had Adam not sinned, he could have lived forever. What, then, was the reason for this collection of earth in man's creation? Hashem knew that he would one day sin and be punished with death. He therefore created

man in such a way that his body would find an earthly resting place, and prepared for this eventuality before he was even created.

Chazal (*Kiddushin* 30b, *Niddah* 31a) teach us that, “There are three partners in the formation of a person: Hashem, one’s father, and one’s mother.” A person’s father and mother provide him with organs and limbs, while Hashem gives him his soul. Without the participation of Hashem and His gift of life, the efforts of the parents would be of no avail. We see this clearly from the birth of a stillborn. If Hashem does not do his part and provide the soul, there is nothing the parents can do to create or sustain life.

Adam Harishon, though, was created solely by the Creator Himself, without the participation of human parents. Adam Harishon therefore had a ‘threefold’ obligation to listen to Hashem, because only Hashem was responsible for his existence. We, on the other hand, have an obligation to honor our parents because they are also responsible for our being here today.

Perhaps with this we can understand why we are commanded to honor our parents even after their death (*Kiddushin* 31b). Although parents may no longer be alive, their children continue on, due in part to their parents’ formative efforts. Hashem also continues His contribution to their existence by allotting them life and not recalling their souls. This prolonged partnership of the parents obligates the children to continue to honor them for their part as well, even after they leave the scene.

With this, we can also come to a deeper understanding of the test of Avraham Avinu. Hashem told Avraham Avinu to leave home and travel to a different land. What made this test so difficult? The people of Charan were wicked. Why wouldn’t Avraham Avinu want to leave them and travel to Eretz Yisrael?

We must remember that Terach, the father of Avraham was still alive. Avraham Avinu wanted very much to be able to honor his father. By doing so, he would be constantly reminded of the third, hidden partner in his life, Hashem. Hence Avraham did not want to leave Charan. Perhaps Avraham would have gone up to Eretz Yisrael with his father, had Hashem not told him (*Bereishit* 12:1) לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך (Go from your relatives and from your father's house), which implied that he should make a total separation from Charan and its inhabitants, including his father.

This is hinted to by the words לך לך. The double usage of the word לך refers to the nature of the journey. As Rashi and the Ramban explain, Hashem was telling Avraham that it would be good and beneficial for him to go on this trip, without having his father come along. As long as his father was with him, Avraham could not serve Hashem to the best of his capabilities. Even though Terach did eventually do teshuvah, there would always remain a small trace of his idolatrous past that would prevent Avraham Avinu from realizing his full potential. For this reason, Hashem did not want Terach to go up to Eretz Yisrael with Avraham.

This was the test that was given to Avraham Avinu. Avraham found it hard to understand how one could leave one's parents behind, or what benefit could come from cutting off all ties with them. If not for his command to go, he would never have left. And in the end it was לך לך, a journey for his true good. He truly benefited from this difficult test.

With this we can now understand why every convert to Judaism is called a disciple of Avraham Avinu. Not only is Avraham Avinu our Patriarch, he also became the father figure of every convert (and as such, each convert's paternal lineage is listed as '*ben Avraham*'). It was only after Avraham Avinu came to Eretz Yisrael and severed contact with his family that he achieved greater heights in his

service of Hashem. Similarly, every convert severs his genealogical ties, as it states (*Yevamot* 22a) “A *ger* who converts is as if he was born anew.” He is called a descendant of Avraham Avinu because he walks in Avraham Avinu’s footsteps, leaving his progenitors behind to start a new life for himself.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ The Midrash says that Hashem collected earth from all over the globe in order to create Adam Harishon. Hashem knew that Adam would sin and eventually die, and prepared for this by creating him from this earth. In this way, wherever he would die he would find a resting place.
- ◆ Chazal teach us that every person has three partners in his creation, Hashem, his father, and his mother. Adam Harishon, though, had but one, as he was the handiwork of Hashem. For this reason we are obligated to honor our parents, for without them we would not exist.
- ◆ Even after our parents’ death, we are still required to honor them. This is because we live on only as a result of the continued partnership with Hashem, and in their merit.
- ◆ Avraham Avinu was tested by Hashem to see if he would leave Charan. Avraham wanted to stay in order to continue to honor his father. But Hashem knew that he would benefit from going to Eretz Yisrael only if he went without his father.
- ◆ A convert is called ‘*ben Avraham.*’ This is because he follows in the footsteps of Avraham Avinu who became like a new person by leaving home. Every convert leaves his family fold and becomes a ‘newborn.’



## The Teshuvah of Adam Harishon

*“But of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad you must not eat from, for on the day you eat of it you shall surely die”*

*(Bereishit 2:17)*

It is difficult to understand Adam Harishon’s punishment for eating from the Tree of Knowledge. If Adam Harishon were to die, who would observe the Shabbat? Who would learn the Torah and keep all the mitzvot? Why should Hashem destroy the world just because of one sin?

Even harder to understand is if he were to die immediately after doing wrong, how could Adam Harishon do teshuvah? Did we not learn that teshuvah originated even before the world was created (see *Pesachim* 54a) in order that man could return to Hashem?

We know that Adam Harishon did not actually die on the same day that he ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Perhaps we can best understand his punishment by explaining the concept of death. Death could mean the physical termination of life, or it could mean the end of a spiritual existence. Hashem was hinting to Adam Harishon that were he to sin, his evil act would rule him a rasha. About such a person the Gemara says (*Berachot* 18b), “Reshaim, even in their lifetime, are considered lifeless.”

Aside from the physical death that Adam would be subject to, the Torah also refers to the Divine sentence of ‘spiritual death,’ one that would prevent his close, eternal connection to Hashem. Hence, keeping Shabbat or learning Torah could still be done, but Adam

would lose out his former spiritual status. And the world would continue to exist, but no longer on the same spiritual level.

Yet Hashem did create teshuvah for Adam in order to help him make amends. It did not help him to return to Gan Eden, but after his teshuvah, he received atonement for his wrongdoing.

As a sign that they were on the road to teshuvah, the Torah says that Adam and Chava made for themselves חגורות (waistbands) from fig leaves. The word חגורה contains a hint to the day upon which they did teshuvah. Adam was created on Friday, the sixth day of Creation. That day was the first day of the month of Tishrei, Rosh Hashanah. On that very same day, Adam sinned, was judged, and subsequently forgiven. Thus the day of Rosh Hashanah became for him a חג, a joyous festival. The word חגורה can be split into three, רה-ו-חג. They sinned on ו, the sixth day of Creation, which was רה, the Hebrew acronym for Rosh Hashanah, and it became for them a joyous חג.

There is also a deep connection between teshuvah and Shabbat. Although he sinned on Friday, it was only on the following day that Adam properly reflected on his sin. We are told that every day of Creation had a special aura of light that emanated forth. On Shabbat, however, there was a much larger concentration of light. Besides the light of that day, there was a phenomenal illumination that went beyond the scope of our understanding. It was of a magnitude and intensity reserved for the Seven Days of Creation. Adam Harishon distinctly felt that aura of light and it inspired him to designate that first Shabbat for deep introspection and teshuvah. Through his actions, Shabbat became an everlasting day for spiritual uplift and rejuvenation. This is hinted by the word השבת which has the same letters as תשובה, if we include the ו from the day that Adam was created and given the opportunity to return and be forgiven.

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**In Summary**


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- ◆ Hashem told Adam Harishon that he would be punished with death if he ate from the Tree of Knowledge. This presents a difficulty. Who would do the mitzvot or learn Torah if he would die? How could Adam do teshuvah if he would be punished right away?
- ◆ There is a physical death and there is a spiritual one. When one sins, he is considered a rasha, and although he may be physically alive, he is spiritually lacking his connection to Hashem.
- ◆ Adam realized that he was ‘bereft’ of the mitzvah that was given to him and made himself a waistband to wear. This represents the day that he did teshuvah. The word חגורה can be split into three, רה-ו-חג. Adam sinned on ו, the sixth day, which was רה, Rosh Hashanah, and it became a חג, festive day, as he was forgiven on that day for his sin.
- ◆ Shabbat also became an opportune day for teshuvah, since its aura of light inspired Adam Harishon to contemplate his level of Divine service and to strive to come closer to Hashem.



## The Secret of the Ten Sefirot

*“And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’”*

*(Bereishit 3:4)*

Rashi explains that the serpent pushed Chava against the Tree of Knowledge, thus ‘proving’ that she would not die. He reasoned with her, just as she did not die from touching the tree, even though Adam Harishon said that she would, so too she would not die from eating from it. And so Chava was tempted to eat from the tree.

The Zohar (*Sefer Habahir, oht reish*) writes that the Angel of Evil controlled the serpent as a rider does a horse. It was his sway over the serpent that also influenced the woman to sin. After Adam and Chava sinned, Hashem cut off the hands and feet of the serpent to punish him for his instigation. This weakened the powers of the Angel of Evil. Had Hashem not done so, the power of evil and the forces of *tumah* would be so strong that they would prevent people from doing teshuvah and hinder the performance of all mitzvot.

The forces of *tumah* are opposed by the forces of *kedushah*. Hashem created and contained the forces of *kedushah* within ten *sefirot* of light. Each *sefirah* contains its own set of ten *sefirot*, so when added together they equal a total of one hundred *sefirot* of *kedushah*. These *sefirot* envelope one who performs a mitzvah with an aura of spiritual light and give him the power to ward off the forces of *tumah*.

The Angel of Evil, Samael, is abbreviated in Hebrew by the letters מ"ד. The numerical value of this name equals one hundred, representing the forces of *tumah* which derive their source from Samael. Thus we see how the forces of *tumah* oppose the one hundred *sefirot* of *kedushah* and try to prevent us from coming close to Hashem.

Another lesson that we learn from this name is from the shape of the letters. The letter ד is closed on all sides, whereas the מ is not. This shows how his influence is not as all enveloping as the forces of *kedushah*, which surround us completely with their circular aura of light. One who sins may be affected by the forces of *tumah*, but their influence does not linger. Hashem weakened the force of *tumah* and left space for us (the opening on the bottom of the מ) to break free from the *Yetzer Hara* and return to Him.

The ten *sefirot* of *kedushah* emanate spiritual light from their source and origin, the *Ohr Ein Sof* of the Creator. Each *sefirah* in turn

illuminates that light within its own set of *sefirot*. The light that is generated when one does a mitzvah is similar to an electric current. Just as a current of electricity flows round and round within a closed circuit, so too the forces of *kedushah* begin with the actions of man who does a mitzvah, bringing forth an aura of enveloping light, which in turn influences the *sefirot* above to continue to reflect their light upon him and help him to do more mitzvot. For this reason, Hashem created the *sefirot* in the form of a complete circle (unlike the forces of *tumah*), in order to give man the ability to be surrounded constantly by their *kedushah* without interruption.

We find in parashat *Beha'alotcha* (*Bamidbar* 8:2) that Aharon Hakohen was commanded to light the Menorah in the Mishkan. Kindling its lights was meant to bring forth a spiritual light upon the world. That is the nature of our actions; the light which is created by our mitzvot goes up to the Heavens, which in turn causes a Higher form of light to shine down upon us with its hallowed rays. What is puzzling is the addition of the words *ויעש כן אהרן*, "And so Aharon lit the Menorah." Asks the *Pituchei Chotem*, what novelty is there in Aharon doing as he was commanded to do? Would I have thought that he would have done otherwise? Perhaps we can answer that Aharon did as Hashem commanded, understanding that through his action he would be able to bring forth the spiritual light upon Am Yisrael that comes from the influence of one's good deeds.

Perhaps we can now explain the eating of round matzot on Pesach. Part of the reason that Am Yisrael went down to Egypt was to rectify the *nitzotzot* that were scattered there by Adam Harishon. For 130 years after eating from the Tree of Knowledge Adam Harishon separated from his wife (*Sha'ar Hakavanot*, *Drush Pesach* 1). Although his intention was to do teshuvah, *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* became submerged in the land of Egypt as a result of the *keri* that he experienced (*Eiruvin* 18b). Through the enslavement of the

Egyptians, Am Yisrael were able to bring about a *tikkun* to those *nitzotzot* by gathering them in and returning them to their source of *kedushah*. The original source of these *nitzotzot* was the *sefirot* of *kedushah* that are round in nature, hence the round shape of the matzah to commemorate their *tikkun*.

Another approach is expressed by the Admor of Sanz zt"l. A round object is equally distant on all sides from its center point. This represents unity. A square object, on the other hand, is quadrilateral and has corners, not uniformly circular. Thus matzot are round, in order to remind us that the redemption can come about only through *achdut*. And so it was in Egypt, and so it will be with the final redemption.

We can add to this by understanding how *achdut* plays a role in influencing our world. The *Chessed l'Avraham* elaborates on the channel through which Hashem sends down His blessing into this world. There are actually four worlds, into which this blessing descends, *Atzilut*, *Briah*, *Yetzirah* and *Assiah*. Man becomes the channel through which this blessing flows, but if his actions are faulty, *chas v'shalom*, then that connection of spiritual current is broken. Without *achdut*, we do not have the ability to connect our quad-tiered world with that of the spiritual one. By eating round matzot we show that we understand the strength of *achdut* and recognize its symbolic spiritual blessings.

Now we can have a deeper understanding of the connection between the *berachot* we say every day and the role that they play. David Hamelech instituted that each person should say one hundred *berachot* every day (*Tur Orach Chaim*, 46). Through our *berachot*, we bring down the *shefa* of spiritual blessing that originates in the *sefirot*. These one hundred *berachot* parallel the one hundred *sefirot* of *kedushah* mentioned before, and it is only when we appreciate and do Hashem's will that they can shine forth and

enlighten us with their illumination. David Hamelech instituted these one hundred *berachot* after a plague ravaged Am Yisrael, and saw how influential *berachot* could be in preventing future plagues.

Avraham Avinu also understood the significance of the one hundred *sefirot* of *kedushah*. Hashem told him לך לך מארצך, to go up from his land to Eretz Yisrael, as only there could he become completely attached to Hashem. The numerical value of לך לך is one hundred, and it was a journey לך (for his benefit.) Through his righteous actions and attachment to Hashem, he would be able to bring forth the aura of *kedushah* from the one hundred *sefirot* and channel their spiritual blessing into this world.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ Rashi explains that the serpent tempted Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge by saying that she would not die from eating just as she did not die from touching it. The Zohar writes that the Angel of Evil controlled the serpent as a rider upon a horse, and was able to use his influence to cause Chava to sin. After the sin though, Hashem cut off his hands and feet in order to weaken his power. Without this, we would be unable to fight his influence over us.
- ◆ The forces of *tumah* are opposed by the forces of *kedushah*. Hashem contained the forces of *kedushah* within ten *sefirot*, each one having its own ten *sefirot*, equaling one hundred *sefirot*. These *sefirot* illuminate one who does a mitzvah with an aura of light. Enveloped within their one hundred *sefirot*, we have the ability to battle against the forces of *tumah*.
- ◆ The acronym מ"ט of the Angel of Evil also has the numerical value of one hundred. Even so, the forces of *tumah* are weaker and temporary, as they do not completely surround a person, unlike the *sefirot* of *kedushah*. This is represented by the מ in that Angel's name, which

has an open space on the bottom. Thus Hashem gave us the opportunity to conquer our evil inclination.

- ◆ Through the mitzvot a person can bring forth *kedushah*, as we find by Aharon Hakohen. The Torah says ויעש כן אהרן (he lit the Menorah as commanded by Hashem.) It is unnecessary to tell us that Aharon did as he was told. Aharon understood the influence he would have in bringing this *kedushah* upon Am Yisrael.
- ◆ We customarily eat round matzot on Pesach. This signifies the rectification that Am Yisrael accomplished in Egypt. After Adam Harishon sinned, *nitzotzot* of *kedushah* scattered throughout Mitzrayim, whose origin were from the circular *sefirot* of *kedushah*. Am Yisrael was able to return those *nitzotzot* to their source, and the round matzot remind us of those *sefirot*.
- ◆ For this reason, David Hamelech instituted that each person should say one hundred *berachot* every day. These *berachot* are a channel through which spiritual *berachah* can flow down into our world. These one hundred *berachot* parallel the bountiful abundance that emanates from the one hundred *sefirot* of *kedushah*. By expressing our appreciation when we say a *berachah*, we merit to be surrounded with an aura of *kedushah*.



## The Power of the Yetzer Hara

*“And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For Hashem knows that on the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you shall be like Hashem, knowing Good and Bad.’ And the woman saw that the tree was*

*good to eat from, a delight to the eyes and a desirable means to become wise, and she took of its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband with her and he ate”*

*(Bereishit 3:4-6)*

Who ate from the Tree of Knowledge? Rashi (based on the *Yalkut Shimoni*, 959) explains the words, “And she gave also (וְגַם) to her husband with her and he ate,” that not only did Chava give fruit to Adam Harishon to eat, she even gave the animals to eat. We learn this from the extra word וְגַם, to include other creatures as well.

Why did Chava give all the animals to eat from the Tree of Knowledge? Was it not enough that she herself transgressed and ate the forbidden fruit?

Another point to ponder is why the serpent was punished for enticing Chava to eat from the tree. We know (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 13) that the *Sitra Achra* controlled the serpent and was instrumental in tempting Chava to sin. In which case, the serpent was forced against his will. Why, then, was he punished?

Even more puzzling is Adam Harishon’s answer to Hashem. Adam said, “The woman whom you gave me, gave me from the tree and I ate (וְאָכַלְתִּי)” (*Bereishit* 3:12). The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 19:12) comments (on the present tense of the word וְאָכַלְתִּי) that Adam defiantly replied, “Not only did I eat, but I would even eat again.” How could Adam answer back in such an impudent and defiant manner to Hashem? Why would he continue to eat from the tree if given the chance?

From here we see the influence of the *Yetzer Hara*. The Midrash says that “one sin leads to another.” When one does a sin, he brings upon himself the forces of *tumah* and associates himself with the

*Sitra Achra*. This encompasses him within a *kelippah* of *tumah* and entices him to sin even more.

We can now begin to understand the punishment of the serpent. The serpent was not as innocent as we think. Had he done nothing wrong, the Angel of Evil would not have had any hold over him. Instead, however, he saw what he had no business to see. Hashem told him only to serve Adam and Chava, but he lingered on to see them cohabiting. This awakened his desire to kill Adam Harishon and take Chava for himself. He was responsible for arousing evil thoughts and thus allowing the forces of *tumah* to encompass him within their *kelippah*. He was thus punished for the train of events that followed as a result. This included pushing Chava against the tree, enticing her to eat from its fruits, and convincing her to transgress the command of Hashem.

Chava, too, was responsible for her own sin. Although she was enticed by the serpent, she played a role in his desire of her. Chava should have urged Adam to wait for nightfall to be together, on Shabbat night when it would be dark and they would have more privacy. Instead, she consented to Adam's wishes and thus caused *tumah* to prevail over the serpent. In turn, she was influenced by that same *kelippah* as a result, and overcome with a spirit of *tumah*. Her sin only led to a greater sin, that of feeding the animals from the forbidden fruit.

We can also understand the sin of Adam Harishon. The Arizal says that Adam made the mistake of having relations during the day. This is hinted to by the words (*Bereishit* 2:25) ולא יתבוששו, "and they were not ashamed," which is semantically related to בושש, to delay. Adam did not delay, and by not waiting until nightfall to be together, he was also guilty of arousing the serpent's desire. This initiated the chain of events which led to his own transgression. Allowing the *Sitra Achra* to 'stick his foot' in the door led Adam to the greater sin

of openly defying Hashem's wishes. This is the nature of sin. After sinning ever so slightly, a person is drawn to greater sins, so long as he declines to do teshuvah. No wonder that the sages detected in Adam's words, "And I ate," his crude desire to eat again from the tree and its impudent connotation.

When a person gives the *Yetzer Hara* an opening into his heart, he causes himself to be enveloped with a spirit of *tumah* and be tempted to do greater sins. He can even go so far as to deny Hashem's existence. On the other hand, the Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:2) states that Hashem says, "My children, open an aperture in your hearts to do teshuvah (even but) the size of the eye of a needle; and I will create an opening large enough for coaches and wagons to pass through." Whatever exists in the forces of *tumah* also exists in *kedushah*. Just as one sin leads to another, so too, when one allows righteous thoughts to enter his heart, he is drawn after good deeds. Our job is to open our hearts and take one step towards Hashem. Only then will Hashem open that aperture wide and help us to come closer to Him.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Rashi explains that Chava gave fruit from the tree not only to Adam but to all the animals as well. What possessed her to give all of the creatures to eat the forbidden fruit? Was it not enough that she herself ate?
- ◆ Why was the serpent punished for enticing Chava? He was prevailed on by the *kelippah* of *tumah*. Also puzzling is how Adam could be so impudent to answer back to Hashem, that not only did he eat but he would eat more if given the chance.
- ◆ From here we see the power of the *Yetzer Hara*. One sin leads to another. After a person does a sin, he is overcome by a spirit of *tumah* and is led to greater sins. Thus the serpent was responsible for his

‘forced’ actions because he willingly entertained evil thoughts and intentions. If not for his own initiative to sin, he would not have been overcome by the *kelippah* to entice Chava to sin. That is why he deserved such a harsh punishment.

- ◆ Adam and Chava came to the point of temptation after not acting appropriately. By having relations in the daytime before the serpent’s eyes, they were partially responsible for arousing his desire. Their small sin thus led to greater sins.
- ◆ The forces of *tumah* are countered by the forces of *kedushah*. Just as one sin leads to another, so too, one good deed leads to another. If a person opens his heart to do teshuvah, Hashem opens it wide and helps him to come much closer.



## The Influence of the Kelippah

*“And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat from, a delight to the eyes and a desirable means to become wise, and she took of its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband with her and he ate”*

*(Bereishit 3:6)*

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 15b) relates how Rabbah bar Rav Shila once met Eliyahu Hanavi and asked him what Hashem was presently doing. Eliyahu answered that Hashem was repeating statements from various Rabbonim, but omitted mentioning any from Rav Meir. Rabbah bar Rav Shila asked why. Eliyahu told him that it was inappropriate to cite from Rav Meir as he learned Torah from Acher,

who had abandoned his religious observance. Countered Rabbah bar Rav Shila, Rav Meir's words of Torah should not be disregarded. His learning from Acher can be compared to one who finds and eats a pomegranate; he eats the inside and throws away the rind. So too, Rav Meir absorbed only the teachings that were worthy and suitable, and discarded all of Acher's irreligious behavior.

In order to understand this concept, we need to review the events which changed the very nature of the fruits we eat. When Hashem created the world, the fruits, their peels (*kelippot*), and even the bark of the trees, all had the same taste as the fruit itself (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 21). After Adam Harishon sinned, however, the bark lost its taste, and the outside layer of the fruits also developed their tasteless husks and peels (see *Sefer Halikutim* of the Arizal, *Vayeitzei* 36).

There is a fruit which, even today, is eaten whole, the outer *kelippah* along with its inner fruit. The pasuk (*Tehillim* 92:13) compares the tzaddik with this fruit. "The tzaddik shall flourish like the date." A tzaddik has similar qualities to the date, as his visible actions and perceptible behavior are as resplendent as his sublime inner character.

Our job is twofold. First, we need to differentiate between the fruit and its outside layer, between our inner selves and our outward actions. Second, we need to aspire to the level of the tzaddik, whose *kelippah* takes on the attributes of the fruit and has equal taste. It goes without saying that we must constantly be on guard that no 'worms' should enter our fruit, i.e. we must check our performance of mitzvot and see that they do not conceal any impure motives. Our actions should always be *l'shem Shamayim*, with virtuous intent and to fulfill Hashem's Will.

In a similar vein, we can understand the change that took place in Adam Harishon's service of Hashem. Before Adam sinned, he was

clothed with **חשמל**, a pure spiritual light. After the sin, Hashem fashioned for Adam a different garment, composed of **אור נוגה**, a splendid (more physical) light (*Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar 49:5*). The word **נוגה**, though, can also be translated as 'dark and dreary.' Perhaps we can understand these garments better by identifying their purpose. Before the sin, Adam and Chava had no use for physical clothing, as they were not embarrassed to be unclothed. In this context, they were similar to the fruits which did not have or need any outer layers or *kelippot*. After the sin however, the world descended into a more base existence, and the fruits developed *kelippot* as a result. Hence Adam and Chava now were embarrassed by their lack of clothing and were unable to serve Hashem as they could have in their previous state. Hashem thus gave them new clothing, which reflected their new (lower) level of Divine service. That clothing was made of **אור נוגה**. Their job now was to fight the darker and coarser elements of this world and to bring out the lustrous splendor of the Divine that lies within.

On a broader scale, we may think of the distance between this world and the next as far-flung and exceedingly great. This is because they operate at opposite ends of 'space,' the home of the material world. Upon deeper reflection though, we discover that only a hairline distance actually separates one from the other. We all know how small is the dividing line between good and bad. By association with the *kelippah*, one can quickly fall from one end of the world to the other! This is hinted to by the *Navi* when he describes the Creation of the world in the plural form (*Yeshayahu 26:4*), "For Hashem is the Rock of Shelter of the worlds." The letter **י** in Hashem's Name **י-ה** represents the World to Come, while the letter **ה** represents our present world (*Menachot 29b*). Thus the very nature of these two worlds is symbolized by two letters of Hashem's Name. At the present they are distant from each other, as a result

of our sins. Our job is to bridge the gap that separates them and unite the Name of Hashem that they represent. We do this by removing the barrier caused by the *kelippot* which created this hairline division.

The Alexander Rebbe zt"l used to say, that our work lies in transforming the material world into a spiritual one. We can only do this by giving our materialistic existence the shape and form of religious life. Similarly, the *Chiddushai Harim* zt"l said that our job is to bring Gan Eden into our daily lives. Tzaddikim actually experience this feeling even in this world. As they learn Torah, they feel a similar pleasure as those who sit in Gan Eden and bask in the Divine splendor of the *Shechinah*.

There are actually two forms of *kelippot* to deal with (*Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar* 49:3). One kind we have already described, where we need to transform the *kelippah* to resemble its fruit. The other type requires a different approach. That *kelippah* we must remove completely from our lives.

The *Chachamim* (see the *Rakanti* in parashat *Tzav*) write that in the future, Hashem will change the characteristics of the pig and make it kosher. This will come only after Hashem's Majesty and Sovereignty will be revealed. Such a manifestation of His Kingdom will not allow for any incongruent elements to exist within. Automatically then, the pig will be re-created as a kosher animal, simultaneously with the rectification of any trace of impurity found in Creation. This is very similar to the impurity of the *kelippah* that we need to rectify, and can be compared to the rind (*kelippot*) of citrus fruits that become edible and tasty when made into jelly. However, at times, one must discard the husk of a fruit because it is incapable of being transformed into an edible product.

The *Ben Ish Chai* (*Vayeitzei, Shana Rishona*) is perplexed by the *brit* between Yaakov and Lavan. Ordinarily the purpose of a *brit* is

to join. Here, though, the purpose of the *brit* between them was to divide them, so that they should not dwell near one other or interfere with each other. Why then was their pact called a *brit*?

Perhaps we can answer by understanding the significance of the *brit milah*, an example of the quintessential *brit*. By a *brit milah*, a man makes a covenant with Hashem and removes a flap of skin called the *orlah*. The purpose of the *brit* is to come closer to Hashem. Closeness to Hashem comes only after a person distances himself from the distractions of this world. The true *orlah* is the flap of materialism which overlaps our hearts and separates us from Hashem. It is the *kelippah* of *tumah* which tries to encircle us in its grip. The more we free ourselves from the pursuit of pleasure and its enticements, the more we can attach ourselves to learning Hashem's Torah and coming close to Him.

The *kelippah* cannot exist without attaching itself to a tzaddik. This concept is mentioned in the pasuk (*Nechemiah 9:6*), "And you preserve them all." This teaches us that Hashem preserves and sustains even the forces of *tumah*. For this reason, we wash our hands when we wake up in the morning, as well at the end of a meal. We wish to remove the spirit of *tumah* which tries to derive its sustenance from our involvement in worldly actions. *Tumah* is naturally drawn after mundane actions such as eating and sleeping. We can infuse those actions with *kedushah* by doing them in order to live and better serve Hashem. Their *kelippah* does not wish to let go so easily, so we give it some material benefit (the washing of the hands) as we remove its grasp.

The *Ramak* (*Harav Moshe Cordovero*) explains from the Zohar Hachadash how the sin of Adam Harishon changed the forces of *tumah* and its influence over man. At first, the Angel of Evil had some connection to *kedushah*. He was created to serve Adam, to help him accomplish those activities such as eating, drinking, and having

relations. However, he used his influence to cause Adam to sin, thus bringing him under his sway. As a result, the Angel of Evil was not allowed to enter into the realm of *kedushah*. And so it will be, until the day when he will be completely neutralized, at which time Hashem will finally remove his influence and end his existence.

At one point Am Yisrael returned, for a short period of time, to the level that Adam achieved before his sin. The seeds of that greatness were planted in the days of our Forefathers, as they laid the groundwork for their children to receive the Torah and build the Mishkan. As the Ramban explains (*Shemot* 35:1), the building of the Mishkan was not just to rectify the sin of the Golden Calf. It was an extension of the purpose of Creation, a means to bring the world back to its pristine state. In order for Betzalel to build the Mishkan, Hashem revealed to him all of His 'names' that were used in creating the world (*Berachot* 55a). This was done in order to strengthen the forces of *kedushah* and weaken the influence of the *kelippah*.

In truth, even before the building of the Mishkan, Am Yisrael had these Names of Hashem in their hands. We are taught (*Zohar, Chelek* II 151b) that Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. In the Torah lies the potential for using these names to perfect the world. To our chagrin, the Angel of Evil caused Am Yisrael to sin by making the Golden Calf. It would seem that along with the breaking of the *luchot*, the access to these names was thereafter denied. Another opportunity to rectify the sin of Adam and to return the world to its former level of *kedushah* was thus lost. Soon after, Hashem gave Betzalel the understanding required to build the Mishkan using these names. Thus the Mishkan was to house that spiritual potential for completing Hashem's Kingship and perfecting the Creation with His Sovereignty. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, this too was insufficient. Our sins caused the Mishkan, and the subsequent Beit Hamikdash, to be destroyed. Since then there

has always been the constant battle between the Angel of Evil and the forces of *kedushah*.

Earlier in history we find the struggle between the two sons of Yitzchak Avinu, Yaakov and Eisav. Eisav became the epitome of the forces of *tumah* because of his evil actions. Already from birth, he was tainted with the effects of the *kelippah* that he inherited from his immoral maternal grandfather, Betuel. This actually was conducive to Yaakov, because it drew into Eisav all of those undesirable hereditary qualities, leaving Yaakov with a purity of spirit and without any *kelippah* 'residue.' Yitzchak wanted to help Eisav and give him the power to overcome his evil tendencies by blessing him. Even afterwards, we see how Eisav continued to represent the influence of the *kelippah*. We are taught (*Bereishit* 27:22), "The voice is Yaakov's voice but the hands are Eisav's hands." So long as the voice of Yaakov (his learning of Torah) is not stilled, the hands of Eisav (his influence, the effect of the *kelippah*) have no power (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20).

In a later era, David Hamelech once found himself in a bathhouse bereft of clothing. He became agitated by his empty attire, and learnt from it a lesson of how one should feel when one stands naked of mitzvot before Hashem. Feeling defenseless, he turned to leave the bathhouse. Only after realizing that he did have a mitzvah, the *brit milah*, did he feel secure. "This mitzvah will stand by me," he said (*Menachot* 40b). As we explained before, the *orlah* that we remove by a *brit milah* represents the *kelippah*, and our job in this world is to be alert and eliminate its influence over us. For this very reason, man is not born already circumcised, in order that each man should realize for himself how necessary it is to remove the effects of the *kelippah*. David Hamelech wanted to be aware of the tools to ward off the *kelippah* he had at his disposal, and was strengthened by his constant *brit*.

On a small scale, Am Yisrael in the desert did achieve a level where the *kelippah* had less influence over them. For forty years they did not sweat or excrete waste, as these functions characterize the connection man has with the dregs and dross of sin, a by-product of the *kelippah*. During this period of time, Am Yisrael were under Divine protection and lived on a higher plane of existence, as it says (*Shemot* 19:6), “And you shall be for me a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation.” For this period, they were partially removed from the effects of the *kelippah*.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Rav Meir was able to learn Torah from Acher, despite the latter’s nonreligious behavior, because he was able to absorb the ‘edible’ teachings and discard the ‘rind’ of bad character.
- ◆ Before Adam sinned, even the bark of the tree had the same taste as its fruit. After his sin, though, the bark lost its taste and the fruit became surrounded with an inedible and extraneous outer peel. Our job is to discern between the outer peel and the fruit within, and to transform that outer layer into an edible product.
- ◆ Before the sin, Adam and Chava did not need clothing, as there was no embarrassment in being unclothed. After the sin however, they were affected by the *kelippah* and needed to clothe themselves. Hashem made for them garments of נֹרָא (light), which is also translated as ‘dark and dreary.’ This represents the work we are given to do, to illuminate our lives by eliminating the influence of the *kelippah*.
- ◆ The *kelippah* tries to attach itself to a tzaddik and derives its existence from that connection. We wash our hands in the morning and at the end of a meal in order to remove us from that grasp.
- ◆ The *Ramak* describes how at first the Angel of Evil served Adam and could have been beneficial in his service of Hashem. After the sin

though, his power grew and exerted a stronger influence over man, inducing him to pursue the pleasures of this world.

- ◆ The Mishkan was built by Betzalel who employed the Names of Hashem that were used in the creation of this world. This was done to strengthen the power of *kedushah* and weaken that of the *kelippah*.
- ◆ Eisav inherited his tainted character from the *kelippah* that was passed down from his immoral grandfather. That is why Rivka had such an evil son despite her righteousness. This was actually beneficial for Yaakov, because Eisav siphoned that *tumah* away from him.
- ◆ A man is born uncircumcised to make him realize his job in this world, to constantly remove the *orlah*, which represents the *kelippah* and its influence. At eight days, a baby is given a *brit milah* as a tool to start his lifelong job towards *kedushah*.



## Doing Hashem's Will

*“And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat from, a delight to the eyes and a desirable means to become wise, and she took of its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband with her and he ate”*

*(Bereishit 3:6)*

It is quite perplexing how Chava could have been tempted to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. She did not have any *Yetzer Hara* (at that time) to induce her to listen to the foolish words of the serpent. So too, is Adam Harishon's answer to Hashem. On Adam's words (*Bereishit* 3:12), “The woman you presented me with, gave me from

the tree and I ate,” the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 19:12) comments that Adam replied that not only did he eat, but he would eat again. How could Adam answer so defiantly to Hashem, that he would continue to eat from the tree if given the chance?

This is even more puzzling in light of the great level that Adam and Chava were at in Gan Eden. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Yeshayahu*, 508) describes how, at the time that the serpent was trying to tempt Chava to sin, Adam was busy walking with Hashem in the Gan. Certainly this was a tremendous spiritual height, and no doubt Chava his helpmate, was also on a similar lofty level.

Another question is the serpent’s enticement that if she would eat from the tree then she would be like Hashem and discern between good and bad. The Midrash (*Tanchuma Metzora*, 2) explains the serpent’s words to mean that she would be capable of creating worlds. This defies logic. How could Chava have become equal to the Al-mighty? What was the serpent’s temptation?

We know that the serpent was the personification of the *Yetzer Hara*. The numerical value of the word **שח** is the same as the word **שח** (after adding an extra number for the word as a unit.) The evil inclination does not try to wean a person away from doing Hashem’s will in one shot. On the contrary, he begins his work by convincing us to do only minor misdeeds and stresses their altruistic benefits. From there to oblivion is but a short downhill ride.

The serpent used his cunning to reason with Chava. He slyly suggested that by eating from the tree *l’shem Shamayim*, she would be able to serve Hashem better. By truly understanding right from wrong, why, she could actually come closer to Hashem. Knowingly choosing good and running away from evil, what greater way to do Hashem’s will and increase His glory! All she had to do was to eat from the tree. Then she would win Hashem’s favor by her choice of

good – all from her own free will. She would even be able to create worlds up Above in the Heavenly spheres. This is implied by the words (*Bereishit* 2:3), “which Hashem created to do.” Hashem gave man the ability to use the powers of Creation to produce celestial worlds, through his performance of the mitzvot and good deeds. This, then, was the serpent’s enticement (*ibid.* 3:5), “and you shall be like Hashem”; you too will be able to participate in the ongoing process of Creation.

Chava mistakenly thought that eating from the tree would be a positive act, worthy of Divine favor. Hence she listened to the serpent, despite the absence of an inborn evil inclination. Adam also reassessed his prohibition, in light of the benefits that Chava professed to gain by eating its fruits. He was so convinced that he was doing a mitzvah, that he exclaimed to Hashem his desire to eat more fruits. This is the way the evil inclination works. He convinces us to do forbidden acts with the pretense that we are actually doing a mitzvah. Once we are in his grasp it is hard to break away.

I myself am witness to this. Once I rebuked someone for saying *lashon hara* about his friend. Whereupon he responded that he was doing so strictly *l’shem Shamayim*. Again I rebuked him, pointing out that he was but following the *Yetzer Hara*, who tries to convince us to do aveirot in the guise of mitzvot. After re-evaluation he agreed that his motivations were not pure, and were influenced by personal considerations and his evil inclination.

With this, we can understand the mistake that Adam and Chava made. It is true that one can serve Hashem by knowing and choosing right from wrong. But Hashem wants us to do His will and obey His commands – without deliberating on how we can do them differently. What benefit does Hashem have from the creation of more worlds, if man destroys this one in the process by violating Hashem’s word? The root of their mistake lay in the rationalization

that they made. They thought that they needed to add to what they were told, in order to do one better.

Similarly, Shaul erred (*Shmuel* I, 15) when he was commanded to wipe out Amalek. Shaul did not heed the word of Hashem, and spared their sheep from being killed. When Shmuel asked him from where he heard the sound of sheep, Shaul answered that he had saved them in order to bring them as sacrifices to Hashem. Shmuel told Shaul that, because he disobeyed Hashem's command, he forfeited the right to reign, and the kingship would be given to David instead. In truth, Shaul's desire to spare the sheep was *l'shem Shamayim*, but was punished nonetheless. Hashem wants us to listen exactly as commanded and not to add or change even a little bit.

Now we can also understand why Adam and Chava were only sent out of Gan Eden and not immediately killed. Even their expulsion was only a result of not having anything left for them to watch in the Gan (as they had already eaten from the tree) but not so much as a punishment. They already knew right from wrong and were prepared to deal with the challenges of this world and subdue their *Yetzer Hara*. They were given a second chance because they ate from the tree with good intent, not to be defiant or rebellious.

There is much here that we need to learn. We should not deceive ourselves into thinking that only if we do things our way will we find more favor in Hashem's eyes. Sometimes we may do what seems to us as a mitzvah, and in truth it is a ploy of the *Yetzer Hara* to bring us to sin.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ What compelled Adam and Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge? They were on a high spiritual level and did not have a *Yetzer Hara*. How were they enticed to sin?

- ◆ The serpent did not entice them with a sin. The *Yetzer Hara* deceives man into thinking that it would be a greater mitzvah to do differently than commanded. Thus he was able to tempt Chava into eating, in order to be able to create worlds by choosing good over evil and doing Hashem's Will even better.
- ◆ Hashem does not want us to add or change his commandments. We do his will by following as we are told, not by doing things our way. Hashem does not desire us to create more worlds by going against His will.
- ◆ Adam and Chava sinned without evil intentions. They thought they were doing a mitzvah and did it *l'shem Shamayim*, to increase the Glory of Hashem, without realizing that it was actually a sin.
- ◆ This was also the case with Shaul's sin. Shaul left over sheep when he fought Amalek and planned on bringing them as sacrifices. Shmuel told him that he would be punished because Hashem wants us to heed His word and not to make any other calculations, even if they are done with good intent.



## Haman and Adam Harishon

*“Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?”*

*(Bereishit 3:11)*

The Gemara (*Chullin* 139b) makes a cryptic statement. Where do we find Haman referred to in the Torah? In the pasuk **המֵן הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לִבְלֹתִי אָכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אָכַלְתָּ** (Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?)

What is the connection between Hashem's rebuking Adam Harishon for eating from the tree and Haman Harasha? A simple answer is that the letters of the name  $\text{הַמָּן}$  are the same as  $\text{הַמֵּן}$ , 'from which.' Still, though, we need to explain why the Torah made a reference to Haman in the incident with the Tree of Knowledge. If the Torah was only interested in the similarity of the words, it could have used a different pasuk to hint to Haman. The Gemara could have found a word which bears a closer resemblance to  $\text{הַמָּן}$ , as it says (*Bamidbar* 11:7),  $\text{וְהַמָּן כְּזֵרַע גַּד הוּא}$  (and the *Mann* was like the Gad seed).

We shall see that there is a relationship between the two, to which this pasuk alludes. The story of Adam Harishon was deliberately chosen to relay an important message.

Let us first examine the effects that Adam's sin had on the world. Our world was created along with the World to Come. This is hinted to by the *Navi*, when he describes our world using the plural form (*Yeshayahu* 26:4), "For Hashem is the Rock of Shelter of the **worlds**" (*Menachot* 29b). Chazal say that prior to Creation, Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world (*Zohar, Chelek* II 151b). The Torah contains the power to create worlds because it is a repository of the Names of Hashem. This is also hinted to by the *Navi*, by the Name of Hashem  $\text{יה}$  which he uses. This pasuk can also be translated, "For Hashem created the worlds with the Name  $\text{יה}$ ."

When Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, his action affected the whole Creation. One outcome of this was the damage done to the trees. At first, the bark of every tree had a taste similar to that of its fruits. After the sin, however, the bark lost its taste (*Likutei Torah, Bereishit*). This defect was a result of the separation that Adam caused to the Name of Hashem ( $\text{יה}$ ), which is an intrinsic part of Creation. By eating and transgressing a prohibition of the Torah,

he separated the two letters of Hashem's Name and caused a rift up Above in the Heavenly spheres.

We find a similar story by Amalek. Amalek came to fight Am Yisrael when they left Egypt. Chazal (*Tanchuma Ki Teitzei*, 9) give a parable to describe the effect of their actions. Imagine a boiling hot bathtub, of which everyone is afraid to enter. Although the one who jumps in gets scalded, he cools it off for everyone else. So too, Amalek waged war and entered the fray against Am Yisrael, paving the way for the nations of the world to follow.

This war began with the weakening of Am Yisrael's commitment to Torah. The Midrash (*Tanchuma Beshalach*, 25) says that the name of the place where this war took place hints to Am Yisrael's decreasing toil in Torah. Its name was רפידים (*Shemot* 17:8) which is an acronym for רפו ידים (their hands weakened from learning Torah). When one loosens his connection to Torah, he loosens the bond that holds the very Name of Hashem together. Thus Hashem proclaimed to Moshe, "I swear by the Heavenly Throne (על כס י-ה) that I will wage an eternal war against Amalek." Hashem uses His Name י-ה to avenge the damage done by Amalek, because their actions caused this very Name to be divided. And Hashem tells Moshe that in every generation, Am Yisrael must battle to bring this Name 'back together.'

How can we repair the damage that was done? In *Eichah* (1:13), Yirmeyahu Hanavi laments the state of Am Yisrael in *galut*. There, it says, כל היום דוה (sick throughout the day). The word דוה, when read backwards, spells out the name of the *sefirah* called הוד. The Arizal (*Eitz Chaim* 18:5) learns from here that *galut* allows the *chitzonim* to have sway over the Heavenly *sefirah* of הוד. That is why the letters of הוד are spelled backwards. In order to reverse this, we need to bring out that הוד, that glory, through our renewed commitment to Torah. Torah is referred to as הוד והדר לבשת (You

[Hashem] have donned glory [=Torah] and majesty) (*Tehillim* 104:1). Thus the learning of Torah reverses the effects of *galut* and brings the *sefirah* of הוד back to its original state.

This is the continuous battle we wage against Amalek, to strengthen our bond to Torah and thereby unify the Name of Hashem. Shmuel hinted to this, when he said to Shaul (*Shmuel* I 15:29), “The Eternal One (נצח ישראל) does not lie nor change his mind.” After Shaul did not wipe out Amalek as commanded, Shmuel told him that the battle can still be fought. The word נצח also refers to the Torah, which is eternal as well. Through the study and practice of Torah, we can continue the war against those forces represented by Amalek, which pull at us to weaken our commitment and break the bond which holds the world together.

This is also the explanation of the words (*Tehillim* 122:2) “We stood on our feet in the gates of Jerusalem.” The Gemara (*Makot* 10a) rephrases this to mean that we stood our ground in battle, as a result of those who were learning Torah in the gates of Jerusalem. The connection now becomes clear. The true battle is won in the battleground of the Beit Hamidrash. By learning Torah and struggling to unify the Name of Hashem, we are doing our part in the eternal war against Amalek, and only then do we have the ability to be victorious on the battlefield.

Now we can go back to our original question. What is the connection between the eating from the Tree of Knowledge and Haman? The Gemara (*Chullin* 139b) asks where Haman is referred to in the Torah. On deeper reflection, we see that the Gemara is looking for the small crack that Amalek (represented by Haman, the archetypal descendant of Amalek) found in Creation and took advantage of. The Gemara answers by pointing to the sin of Adam Harishon. It was the flaw in the Name of Hashem (the division between the ך and the ה) caused by Adam when he transgressed the

mitzvah of the Torah, that gave power to Amalek and their descendant Haman.

The Tree of Knowledge also represents the Torah, as it says (*Mishlei* 3:18), “It is a tree of life for those who uphold it.” Adam sinned by eating from the Tree and weakening the ‘tree’ of Torah. Amalek found that flaw in the learning of the Torah in the days of Moshe. And Haman found the breach in the disobedience of those who ate from the feast that Achashverosh made.

This, then, is the answer as to why the Gemara uses the pasuk from Adam Harishon’s sin as the reference for Haman in the Torah. His sin not only caused the tree to lose its taste, it also caused a rift in the spheres above, which led to the battles of Amalek and the plot of Haman.

The Gemara (*Megillah* 12a) relates that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai asked his talmidim why they thought that the Jews in the days of Achashverosh deserved to be wiped out. Their answer was that the Jews ate from the feast of Achashverosh. Here we see yet another connection between Haman and the sin of Adam. Both involved the prohibited consumption of food.

The deliverance from Haman and his plan to wipe out the Jews came only after they rectified their sin, by fasting. Mordechai and Esther told them to fast for Divine intervention. This, coupled with the unity that all Jews had in the face of the evil decree, helped to bring together the Name of Hashem that was split asunder. The salvation that resulted not only toppled Haman, but was the catalyst to set the stage for the eventual return to the Land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash. And the Beit Hamikdash is also closely connected to the Heavenly *sefirah* of הוּד. The word הוּד has the same numerical value as the Name of Hashem ה-י. Thus Am Yisrael were able to rectify the Name of Hashem and wrest it away from the power of the *chitzonim*.

From here we can learn the disastrous results that can happen when one eats food that is prohibited, and when one weakens his commitment to learning Torah. This tears at the very fabric of Creation by dividing the Name of Hashem in half. By upholding the Torah, we join and unify the Name of Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ The Gemara finds a reference to Haman in the Torah from the rebuke that Hashem gave Adam Harishon for eating from the Tree of Knowledge. The world was created using the Name of Hashem ה-י found in the Torah. Adam Harishon's sin caused a division in the Name of Hashem. Amalek also caused a rift in the days of Moshe, when Am Yisrael decreased their toil in Torah. Hashem vowed, using His Name ה-י, to wage an eternal war against Amalek.
- ◆ Yirmeyahu Hanavi laments the fallen state of Am Yisrael in *galut*. He describes how they are continuously weakened. The letters דנה signify the sway of the *chitzonim* over the Heavenly sphere of הרה. The word הרה also has the same numerical value as the Name of Hashem ה-י. The struggle to join the Name of Hashem together can be done through a renewed commitment to learning Torah, which is also referred to as הרה.
- ◆ The Gemara's reference to Haman can now be understood to mean – where did Haman have the ability to hold sway over the Jews. The answer is from the sin of Adam Harishon, when he ate from the Tree and split apart the Name of Hashem. The Tree of Knowledge also represents the Torah, which is known as the 'tree of life.' Haman was a descendant of Amalek. Am Yisrael in the days of Haman also weakened their observance of the Torah by eating from the feast of Achashverosh.
- ◆ Adam Harishon sinned by eating and the Jews in the days of Haman also sinned by eating. By fasting under the directive of Mordechai and

Esther, they were able to rectify their sin. Their renewed commitment to Torah helped join the Name of Hashem that was divided and led to the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash, which is also connected to the Heavenly sphere of **הוה**.



## The Expulsion from Gan Eden

*“And Hashem made for Adam and his wife garments of leather and He clothed them”*

*(Bereishit 3:21)*

The *Ben Ish Chai* explains in the name of the Arizal (*Adam Yashar, Merkevet Yechezkel*) that before Adam sinned, Hashem provided him with clothing made from **חשמל**, a pure spiritual fire. When clothed in this attire, it was possible to connect to Hashem and develop a close relationship. This was given to him in place of the 613 mitzvot, which also connect one to Hashem.

After the sin, however, Adam descended into the material world, and could no longer wear this spiritual garment. As a substitute, along with the physical leather garments of **עור** (leather) given him, he was given a garment composed of **אור** (light). This garment was to aid Adam in dealing with his *Yetzer Hara* and help him do mitzvot. By doing mitzvot, one can create worlds in the Heavenly spheres above. Even one mitzvah alone is considered as great as creating a world, as our world can be sustained in its merit. And so, Hashem made a special garment for Adam, so that he could once again find favor in His eyes and come close to Him.

Why was Adam Harishon expelled from Gan Eden? We find that after he sinned, he acknowledged his wrongdoing and hid out of embarrassment. He also sewed together fig leaves to cover himself, realizing that he was naked as a result of his sin. He felt bare of the single mitzvah that Hashem had given him to keep (Rashi, *Bereishit* 3:7). It seems that he was on the way to repentance. If so, why didn't he deserve to stay?

In order to explain this concept, let us first explain the difference between Shaul Hamelech and David Hamelech. When Shaul Hamelech sinned (see *Shmuel* I 15) and subsequently did teshuvah, his repentance was not accepted, and he lost his sovereignty. Yet David Hamelech's teshuvah (*Shmuel* II 12) was accepted, and he was allowed to continue with his rule. What is the difference between the two?

The difference is that when David Hamelech was confronted and rebuked by Natan Hanavi for his sin, he immediately repented and confessed his sin. Shaul, on the other hand, when approached by Shmuel for violating Hashem's instructions, did not accept his reproof. He began to vindicate himself. He claimed that he only had the best intentions, and was motivated strictly by the desire to do Hashem's will. That is why his teshuvah was not accepted.

In truth, Shaul did not listen to what he was told to do, for Hashem had specifically commanded him to wipe out all of the possessions of Amalek, certainly not to bring the sheep as sacrifices. Only after Shmuel repeated his rebuke, did Shaul accept and say that he sinned. But then it was too late. Had Shaul accepted Shmuel's rebuke immediately, and admitted his error, the rulership would still have been in his hands. But because he did not acknowledge and confess his sin, he lost out. A person must always admit their guilt right away when confronted with their wrongdoings and never delay their teshuvah.

With this, we can now understand why Adam Harishon was expelled from Gan Eden, even though he acknowledged his sin. Although Adam sewed garments to clothe himself, realizing that he had transgressed his only mitzvah, it was not enough. He should have immediately confessed and returned to Hashem.

We find in the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 22:13) that Adam Harishon met Kayin after he killed his brother, and was amazed that Kayin was still alive. Adam asked him in what merit was he not punished, and why did he deserve to have Hashem place a mark on his forehead. Kayin answered that this was a result of his teshuvah. Because he immediately replied to Hashem, "Please bear my guilt," Hashem accepted his words, and even afforded him a sign of protection. Upon hearing this, Adam immediately began to sit and cry and engage in a program of teshuvah, fasting and mortifying himself for the next 130 years.

Yet after all of this, Hashem did not return him to Gan Eden. The reason is because when Hashem asked Adam "Where are you...have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" Adam did not answer 'I have sinned' and admit his guilt. Instead he justified himself by saying that he ate *l'shem Shamayim*.

Kayin did teshuvah right away and merited to save himself in those fleeting moments of rebuke. Adam hesitated and eventually did admit his guilt, but lost his place in Gan Eden.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ When Adam was expelled from Gan Eden, Hashem clothed him with a garment of light. The *Ben Ish Chai* explains from the Arizal that this garment was to aid him in his battle against the *Yetzer Hara*. He needed this help only after he sinned, because until then, he did not have an evil inclination to deal with.

- ◆ Why did Adam not merit remaining in Gan Eden after he recognized his sin? The explanation lies in the difference between the teshuvah of David Hamelech and that of Shaul Hamelech. Shaul Hamelech did not admit his guilt until after he was reproved by Shmuel. David Hamelech, on the other hand, immediately accepted the reproof of Natan Hanavi and repented.
- ◆ For this reason, Adam's acknowledgment did not find favor in Hashem's eyes. It is not enough to refrain from further sin. One must also immediately confess. Because he did not do so, Adam did not deserve to remain in his exalted state and was expelled from Gan Eden.



## The Sin of Adam and Chava

*“And Hashem said, ‘Behold Man has become like the Unique One among us, knowing Good and Bad’”*

*(Bereishit 3:22)*

The Rambam asks in his *Moreh Nevuchim* (1:2) why Adam Harishon received the gift of knowledge to discern between good and evil. If he truly sinned, why did he deserve to be enlightened? Quite the contrary, he deserved to be punished for disobeying Hashem's command. The Rambam then goes on to answer to this question.

We would like to answer as follows. First, we must explain how Adam Harishon, the handiwork of the Creator Himself, came to sin. The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 58a) describes how even the heel of Adam Harishon emitted light as bright as the sun's chromosphere.

Obviously then, Adam Harishon was a great tzaddik, on a lofty spiritual level. We also learn that before the sin, he did not have a *Yetzer Hara*. If so, how did Adam Harishon come to eat from the Tree of Knowledge?

The *Baal Haturim* writes that the literal explanation of the words (*Bereishit* 3:12), “She gave me of the tree and I ate,” means that she actually gave to him of the tree itself, what we would describe as ‘giving it to him over the head.’ Chava hit Adam with the tree to make him eat. Still, this does not give Adam the right to transgress the word of Hashem. We have a golden rule: if the Rav says one thing and his student says another, we follow the instructions of the Rav. Hence, Adam was not absolved from obeying his Master’s command which prohibited him from eating, even if Chava pressured him into it.

Perhaps we can explain with the following insight. Hashem created Chava from Adam’s ribs. Out of recognition of her important status, Adam exclaimed (*ibid.* 2:23), “This shall be called woman (*אשה*), for from man (*איש*) she was taken.” The words *איש* and *אשה* are similar, differing only in two letters, the ך and ה, which constitute the Name of Hashem. When joined together as husband and wife, the union of a marriage brings the ך from the man and the ה from the woman to build a sanctuary for the *Shechinah* to rest within.

Adam saw his wife sin and lose that distinction of bearing a letter from Hashem’s Name. He reasoned that this would spell disaster for Chava. Without her Divine association with the letter ה, she would be guilty of dividing the Name of Hashem and would no longer be worthy of existing in this world (which is also characterized by the letter ה). By eating from the Tree, Adam would also lose his distinction of the letter ך, but the Name of Hashem would no longer be ‘split.’ Through teshuvah, they could both be worthy once again of Divine affiliation and the *Shechinah* would return.

This also explains why Chava began to hit Adam. After she ate and drove away the ה associated with her name, she was left with the letters וּא. And fire consumes all that lies in its path. This is even hinted at by the Torah. Adam replied to Hashem (*Bereishit* 3:12), “The woman (הַשָּׂהֵה) whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate.” The word הַשָּׂהֵה has an extra ה at the beginning, referring to the reason that Adam chose to listen to Chava (the missing letter from her name). Seeing Chava in her fallen state pushed Adam to follow suit. Thus he was not motivated out of a desire to do evil, but rather to put himself in Chava’s place, so that they could do teshuvah together and bring about a reunification of Hashem’s Name.

Now we can understand why Hashem gave Adam the understanding of good and evil as a re-compensation for his actions. Adam sinned only out of a desire to prevent the dissolution of Hashem’s Name, but his motives were of the highest caliber.

One may ask why the sons of Aharon Hakohen, Nadav and Avihu, deserved to be punished for their sin (see *Vayikra* 10) of bringing incense that was not called for. Their motives were also good. They wanted only to come closer to Hashem.

It would seem that Nadav and Avihu entered the Mishkan with their incense offering, knowing that such an action was punishable by death. This was their wish, to experience closeness to Hashem even in the face of death. Through their passing, Am Yisrael would come to realize the power of *kedushah*. Perhaps we can add another thought. In the days of Nadav and Avihu, there were others available to continue the Divine service. Adam, though, had no replacement. Hence Hashem saw fit to punish Nadav and Avihu but not Adam.

Let us suggest another answer as to why Adam sinned. Being the handiwork of the Creator, Adam Harishon was at the pinnacle of

human perfection. Hashem gave him the mental faculties of an intellectual giant. Harav Hagaon Rav Yehudah Fasih writes in his work, *Machane Yehudah*, that Adam deduced the concept of death even though he never saw or experienced such a phenomenon. Using his intellect, he realized that it existed and feared his own loss of life. Add to his abilities the special garment of *chashmal* that was given him (*Eitz Chaim* 49:5), and we can understand why the Heavenly angels mistook Adam for a deity. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Kohelet*, 972) tells us that they wished to proclaim the *Kedushah* before him, just as they do for Hashem.

Why then did he sin? Adam wished to prove to the Angels that he was but a mere mortal. By eating from the tree and being expelled from the Gan, Adam showed them who was the Creator, and who was the created. This also answers the question of the Rambam. Adam received the reward of knowing good and evil because of his good intention and sincere motive to remove any doubt as to his human nature.

Chazal (*Eiruvin* 18b) say that Adam Harishon was a tremendous *chassid*. His level of piety and righteousness led him to fast and mortify himself for 130 years in order to atone for his sin. This is hinted to in the words of David Hamelech when he said (*Tehillim* 86:2), “Guard my soul for I am righteous.” David calls himself righteous, because he was a *gilgul* of Adam Harishon. David’s sin (see *Shmuel* II 12) is also misunderstood. We are taught (*Shabbat* 56a) “Whoever says that David sinned is mistaken.”

Here too, we need to explain the sin that was done. In truth David did not sin. Batsheva was considered divorced, as all soldiers in those days gave a *get* to their wives before going into battle. As such, her single status made her permitted to David. Let us give an example. Imagine a case where Reuven gives money to Shimon to hold and watch for him. Shimon then goes to learn and hangs his

jacket on a hook. Reuven, not wishing to disturb Shimon, goes and searches Shimon's jacket and takes his money back. For all apparent purposes, Reuven is a thief stealing money from Shimon. Those who know the whole story, though, realize that he is not. So too, David Hamelech, in the eyes of Heaven, was not guilty of adultery, even though it seemed to be the case in the eyes of the general populace. They were simply unaware of Batsheva's true status.

Adam Harishon's sin can also be explained in this manner. He was a true *chassid*, one of the greatest. His actions were done *l'shem Shamayim*, despite the appearance of a major transgression. Hashem thus sent Adam out of Gan Eden as an outward show of disapproval. But Adam was rewarded for his virtuous intent by the gift of knowledge, as explained before.

It is written that when Adam sinned, Hashem wanted to kill him. The Angels interceded and asked that he not be killed, as he was the pinnacle of Creation. Why did they plead on his behalf if he truly sinned? It would seem that they knew Adam's true intentions. Observing his diminished status allowed them to recognize who the real Creator was. Hence the Angels asked to keep Adam alive. They wanted never to be misled again into confusing man for Hashem.

Man can still climb the heights of perfection. Hashem gave us the opportunity to rise above our diminished state through learning Torah. This is hinted to by the words (*Bereishit* 28:12), "A ladder was set on earth and its top reached heavenward. And behold! Angels of Hashem were ascending and descending on it." This ladder refers to man, whose head is pointed upwards towards the Heavens when he stands upright, just as a ladder does. The Heavenly angels are the good deeds and words of Torah that are created when he performs the mitzvot. Through Torah one can climb and scale the very Heavens.

Perhaps we can now understand another puzzling detail. Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni Yeshayahu*, 508) ask where Adam was when the serpent enticed Chava to eat. They answer that Adam was walking with Hashem in the Gan. Why did Hashem not tell Adam to go and watch over Chava before she ate? And why did He not prevent Adam from eating? It would appear that Hashem knew what the outcome would be. Hashem did not intervene when the serpent tempted Chava or when she began to hit Adam. He wanted the struggle between good and evil to exist in the world. By allowing this train of events to take place, man would deserve reward for choosing good over evil. Thus in the eyes of Heaven, Adam was not blamed for eating from the tree and gaining the knowledge of good and evil.

This concept is known as *nahama d'kisufa*, 'the bread of the ashamed.' Hashem created man with the innate desire not to accept for free something that he could gain through his own efforts. Those who eat the 'bread' of charity often experience embarrassment at receiving their 'free' gift of life. Man wants to win his bread, and to deserve the reward given him. The struggle to choose good 'wins' man the right to eat his 'just deserts.'

I, too, am careful to pay those who do me a service. I once had a wealthy man who worked for me. I made sure to pay him, even though he did not need my money. This was in order to teach him the concept of *Nahama d'kisufa*, that we get reward for the work that we do.

### **Chava's sin**

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 29a) tell us that the serpent argued with Chava and claimed that she was not forbidden to eat from the tree. Chava answered, that not only was she forbidden to eat, but she was also prohibited from touching the tree. Although it is common practice for the *Chachamim* to add on and safeguard a prohibition, here the

addition of an extra precaution led to her downfall. We find that the *Chachamim* (see Tosafot in *Ketubot* 61a) added to the prohibition of a *niddah* by forbidding her husband from even handing her an object. Yet here, the inclusion of touching the Tree caused the serpent to push Chava against it, and led her to believe that she would not be punished for eating.

The serpent also used another ploy. He said that Hashem did not want her to eat, because He knew that by eating, she could become great like Him. Why was Chava convinced by such a seemingly foolish statement? Chava was also the handiwork of the Creator, a *tzaddeket* in her own right. She was worthy of being buried next to Adam. What, then, was the temptation of the serpent that enticed her to sin? And what was wrong with adding to Hashem's prohibition?

Perhaps we can answer by explaining the connection between Shabbat observance and the Creation of the world. Chazal (*Shabbat* 119b) say that whoever prays Erev Shabbat and says the paragraph (*Bereishit* 2:1), "And the Heavens and the Earth were completed..." is considered a partner in the creation of the world. Why is this so? One who keeps the Shabbat demonstrates his belief in the Creation of the world. He rests on the seventh day because the Al-mighty rested on that day. By resting from all physical creative activity, he shows that he believes in their spiritual creative power. He recognizes the transcendence of the mitzvot and their far-reaching creative powers in the Heavenly spheres. Thus he has a partnership with Hashem, for he too can create worlds by his performance of the mitzvot.

This was the enticement of the serpent. By eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Chava would be able to discern right from wrong, and create worlds by her good deeds. The serpent convinced Chava that Hashem was simply satisfied with what He had already done. His

contentment and self-effacement were the primary reason for prohibiting them to eat from the Tree. But for her own benefit, he deviously said, she should eat. What could be better than being like the Creator, creating worlds just as He? And so she took of the fruits and ate.

### **Adding to the Torah subtracts from its value**

We learn from here an important principle. One should not add or be stringent in those things in which Hashem did not command us to be stringent. This thought contains a deep insight, one which played a prominent role in the sin of Chava. Hashem never commanded her not to touch the Tree. Holding on to the stringency of not touching it, because Hashem said so, was like grasping onto falsehood. The more one goes along with a lie, the more he absorbs it as truth. And this ultimately caused Chava to let go of the truth that was already in her hands.

They say of the Steipler zt"l that he would buy an *etrog* in every store that he entered. Later on, he would choose only one of them to use for his mitzvah. When asked why, he replied that he didn't want people to think that one of the stores he visited did not have good merchandise. From here we can learn how careful we must be not to let our stringencies cloud our view of good and bad. Even though the Steipler searched only for the finest *etrog*, he was careful not to cause others a loss as a result of his self-imposed strictness.

In a similar vein, we find that Shaul Hamelech (*Shmuel* I 15) tried to supplement the words of Hashem and lost his kingdom as a result. Shmuel had told him to wipe out Amalek and all of their possessions. Shaul, on the other hand, had inappropriate compassion and spared the sheep. He brought them as sacrifices to Hashem. Shmuel told him that Hashem does not want us to add and change His word, and prophesied that Shaul would lose his rule.

Chava too, wanted to do good, even one better than what she was told. She also had good intentions, just as Adam had. That is why she was punished and yet still rewarded with the knowledge of good and evil, just as Adam was.

Nonetheless, it is quite apparent that this is not what Hashem wants from us. We should listen to what we are told and do what we are commanded. We should not add or subtract from the Torah on our own, nor be stringent at the expense of others.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ The Rambam asks why Adam and Chava received the gift of knowledge to discern between good and evil. They did not deserve any reward for the sin that they did.
- ◆ Adam and Chava had the Name of Hashem encrypted within theirs. The letter ך from the word **שׂא** and the ה from the word **השא** form the Name of Hashem. When Chava sinned, she lost her connection to that letter and caused a rift in the Name of Hashem. Adam ate from the Tree out of concern, and his good intentions, coupled with his teshuvah, were rewarded by the gift of knowledge and the return of the *Shechinah*.
- ◆ Nadav and Avihu were punished even though they had good intentions. Either they brought the incense offering, knowing and desiring their death, or the Divine service would still continue even after their passing. Adam however did not eat with such motivation, and there was no one to take his place.
- ◆ Another reason why Adam sinned was to show the Angels his mortality. At first, the Angels did not differentiate between Adam and Hashem. By seeing his fallen stature, the Angels could see who the Creator was and who was man. Thus Adam's sin was done with virtuous intent.
- ◆ David Hamelech was a reincarnation of Adam. He, too, did what appeared to be a sin. In reality, Batsheva was already divorced when

her husband went into battle, and David did not sin.

- ◆ Hashem knew the outcome of the events with Adam and Chava from the start. Hashem did not tell Adam about the enticement of the serpent, nor did He prevent them both from sinning. Hashem wants the struggle between good and evil to exist in the world, in order to give man his well-deserved reward for his choice of good over evil.
- ◆ Through Torah one can climb the ladder of perfection and scale the heights of Heaven. The possibility of being like Hashem is what tempted Chava to eat. Just as Hashem created the world, he gave man the ability to create worlds through his mitzvot. This was the temptation of the serpent.
- ◆ By adding to the command, Chava actually subtracted from its importance. This led to her downfall. We learn from this not to add or be stringent where it can cause a loss to others or when it goes against Hashem's word.



## Being Grateful to Hashem

*“And Kayin brought an offering to Hashem from the fruits of the ground. Hevel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and from their choicest. Hashem turned to Hevel and to his offering, but to Kayin and to his offering He did not turn. This angered Kayin exceedingly and his countenance fell”*

*(Bereishit 4:3-5)*

Kayin was first to offer a sacrifice to Hashem. He enjoyed the bounty of the world and was busy tilling the soil, yet he understood

the concept that everything is a gift from Hashem. We need to show our appreciation for His blessing. Kayin initiated the idea that a human being can relate to Hashem and connect to Him by offering Him from the fruits of one's labor, in return for the good He bestows upon us.

This was a revolutionary concept, one which Hevel his brother quickly learned. Although Hevel was perhaps greater than Kayin, he did not come to this on his own. He understood the worthlessness of this world (as his name Hevel, vanity, indicates) but was moved to bring an offering to Hashem only after watching his brother in action. Which causes us to wonder. Why did Hashem turn and take interest in Hevel's offering but not in Kayin's? As the originator, Kayin should deserve more attention from Hashem than Hevel.

The answer lies in the words of the pasuk. Kayin brought "from the fruits of the ground," which implies that they were of inferior quality and leftovers from what he kept for himself. Hevel, on the other hand, gave the first and foremost of his hard-earned produce.

This leads us to ask another question. Why did Kayin, the one who initiated the idea of bringing an offering out of gratitude to Hashem, not bring from the very best that he had? He went so far as to offer it upon an altar made of dirt, signifying his earthly and humble origins. And yet he fell short 'in-deed,' when it came to the quality of the produce. Even Hevel, who followed in his brother's path, knew to give the choicest to Hashem. Where did Kayin go wrong?

I saw an explanation to this question in the works of the Admor from Slonim zt"l. He writes that Kayin was mistaken in his understanding of what gives Hashem satisfaction. Kayin thought that Hashem would derive pleasure from a show of gratitude, but not from the actual fruits themselves. Hashem has no physical body

and has no need for food. As such, why give Hashem the best of something that He will never partake of? This is why Kayin gave only the inferior produce in return for the good that he received.

Hevel watched his brother and learned from him. He took the concept of an offering one step further, by bringing the best that he had before Hashem. His deep feeling of gratitude led him to offer the finest, as he found no better way to show his great appreciation. Although Hashem has no need for our offerings, we need to show Him how much His kindness and benevolence means to us. By bringing the very best, Hashem is pleased with our reciprocation. This is the purpose of the offering, to bring us closer to Him and to find favor in His eyes through our wholehearted gift. The offering of Kayin lay unheeded because it lacked the most important quality of all.

Kayin did not learn from his mistake. He became jealous, got angry at his brother, and killed him. Instead of learning how to serve Hashem better, he did something abhorrent. This only pushed him farther away from Hashem.

This touches on the contrast between the two brothers. Kayin was obstinate and unwilling to bend and learn from his brother. Instead of trying to understand what was different about Hevel's offering that merited such attention, he coupled his obstinacy with animosity until it led to murder.

Even after Hashem gave him a second chance and accepted his remorse, his attitude remained the same. It says (*Bereishit* 4:16), "And Kayin left the presence of Hashem." The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 22:13) explains that he exited His presence as a thief, thinking he could 'pull the wool' over Hashem's eyes. Despite his teshuvah, he remained obstinate until the end.

This is what we should learn from the story of Kayin and Hevel. We should recognize the good that Hashem does for us and thank Him for it. When we appreciate the good that Hashem showers us with, we should show it with a complete heart. When one goes to the Beit Hakeneset to pray and praise Hashem for His bounty, he should concentrate on the words of the prayers and not speak in the middle. Certainly one should not be obstinate when he sees that he made a mistake. One can, and should, learn how to serve Hashem from each and every person.

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### In Summary

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- ◆ Kayin and Hevel both brought offerings to Hashem. Hashem did not pay attention to Kayin's but did accept Hevel's.
- ◆ Kayin understood the concept of showing gratitude and building a relationship with Hashem by bringing an offering. Even so, his efforts went unnoticed. Hevel followed in his brother's path and succeeded in finding favor in Hashem's eyes. Where did Kayin go wrong?
- ◆ The offering of Kayin was of inferior quality. Kayin reasoned that Hashem has no need for the offering itself. Hence the gesture should be good enough. Hevel went one step further and gave the finest he had. His offering came from the great appreciation he felt and was wholehearted. Thus Hashem accepted his offering.
- ◆ The source of Kayin's mistake lay in his obstinacy and refusal to learn from others. Instead of seeing where he went wrong, he grew angry at Hevel and killed him. Even afterwards, he didn't learn from his mistake and thought that he could fool Hashem.
- ◆ One should learn to appreciate what Hashem gives us and thank Him for it. Being obstinate can sometimes lead one away from Hashem. One should learn from all people and every event a lesson on how to serve Hashem better.



## Keeping the Spark Aflame

*“And it was after a period of time that Kayin brought an offering to Hashem from the fruits of the ground. Hevel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and from their choicest. Hashem turned to Hevel and to his offering, but to Kayin and to his offering He did not turn. This angered Kayin exceedingly and his countenance fell. And Hashem said to Kayin, ‘Why are you angry and why has your countenance fallen? Surely if you improve yourself you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is toward you, yet you can conquer it.’ And Kayin spoke with his brother Hevel. And it happened when they were in the field, that Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him”*

*(Bereishit 4:3-8)*

Kayin succeeded in reaching a high plateau in serving Hashem. He was the first to bring an offering to Hashem. Through this, he hoped to come closer to Hashem. Yet, as we continue on in the parashah, we find that Hashem only accepted Hevel’s offering, but paid no heed to Kayin’s. This is despite the fact that Kayin was the originator of this idea and Hevel was just following in his brother’s footsteps.

Kayin realized that Hashem favored Hevel’s offering over his and became jealous and angry at Hevel and killed him. This is quite

disturbing. How did Kayin fall from such high aspirations to commit such a despicable act, murdering his own brother? Even when Hashem asked where Hevel was, he answered, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” with pretended innocence. His answer leaves us dumbfounded at his audacity and change of character. The whole chain of events begs for an explanation.

It would seem that Kayin did not serve Hashem wholeheartedly. He wavered between his devotion to Hashem and his own self-aggrandizement. At times, his bad character traits ruled over him, and on occasion he rose above them and desired closeness to Hashem. Kayin could be inspired by a revelation one day, and be numbed to its inspiration the next. He did not seize the stirring of the spirit and the spur of the moment to translate it into action.

There are times in every person’s life when they are moved and inspired by some event in their lives. Hashem is sending them a signal, beckoning them to come closer to Him. Our job is to watch over that spark of inspiration and not let it be extinguished. Don’t wait for Hashem to personally invite you again. Opportunity knocks only once, take advantage of it right away.

The *Yetzer Hara* knows how to take advantage of his opportunities. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 4:7) says, “Sin crouches at the door.” He waits for the first sign of weakness and submission, and then traps man in his net. We, too, need to take advantage of our opportunities; the Heavenly signs sent us, before they disappear and our interest is subdued. We can harness the power of those inspirational moments by keeping their fire burning within us at all times. And if they dissipate, we should kindle new sparks of interest and devotion to draw us closer to Hashem.

Kayin was Divinely inspired to serve Hashem, and sought to give concrete expression to his inspiration by bringing an offering to

Hashem. Unfortunately, he failed at keeping that spark aglow, and it was quickly extinguished. His bad character traits took over and pushed him to kill his brother and be insolent to Hashem.

After this incident, Hashem reproached Kayin for killing Hevel. When Kayin asked for leniency, Hashem placed a sign on Kayin's forehead as a sign of protection. Even so, Rashi explains the words (*Bereishit* 4:16) "And Kayin left the presence of Hashem" to mean that Kayin gave the appearance of acknowledging his sin, but in truth, stole away as a thief, thinking that he could fool Hashem as to his true feelings. Kayin continued to slumber away his life, ignoring the new opportunity of Divine acceptance and protection that Hashem offered him.

Hashem waits for us to open the gates to our hearts. Says the Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:2), Hashem declares, "My sons, open for me your penitential hearts but the size of a point of a needle." We need but to show our desire to come close to Him, and He will open our hearts as wide as the grand entrance of the Sanctuary in the Beit Hamikdash.

Similarly on Yom Kippur, there are those who do not take advantage of the golden opportunity afforded them. On the holiest day of the year, we have the ability to come close to Hashem by firing our enthusiasm and being inspired to reach higher levels. Those who remain passive in their service of Hashem walk away from Yom Kippur the same as they approached it. Because they fail to absorb the unique spirit and devotion of Yom Kippur, they quickly return to their daily routine, unchanged and unaffected.

An offering draws one close to Hashem and signifies the sacrifices one is willing to make for his Creator. Kayin, with all of his good intentions, was content with his half-hearted service of Hashem. And so, he continued his lackadaisical approach, despite the Divine

inspiration which awakened him to build an altar and bring an offering to Hashem. This was characteristic of his tendency to serve Hashem with whatever came to hand. He did not exert himself to find the choicest fruits of the ground nor take advantage of the opportunity to further his relationship with Hashem.

We can take a lesson from Kayin on what not to do. When inspired, flame that spark into a fire by acting upon it, not by sleeping on it. Take advantage of your opportunities for spiritual growth. Exert yourself to achieve new plateaus of Divine service. Don't wait for Hashem to draw you close and do your work for you. Procrastinating can jeopardize your service of Hashem and lead you to the abyss of spiritual stagnation.

#### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Kayin ascended the ladder of Divine service by building an altar and bringing an offering. Yet, after seeing his brother's offering accepted by Hashem over his, he rose up and killed him. Why did Kayin act in such a contradictory manner? Even more, why did Kayin answer back to Hashem "Am I my brother's keeper?" after he previously sought His favor and offered a tribute?
- ◆ It would seem that Kayin was inspired to come close to Hashem but did not use the opportunity to further that connection and keep the fire burning. His spark of inspiration was extinguished, and his bad character traits pushed him to kill his brother and run away from Hashem.
- ◆ Every person has moments of inspiration. Hashem sends us signals. We need to take advantage of our opportunities to come closer to Him. Don't slumber away your life. Only through constant aspiration can one climb the ladder of Divine service.



## David and Adam Harishon

*“All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died”*

*(Bereishit 5:5)*

Chazal (*Shlah Hakadosh* in the name of the *Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 41) say that Adam Harishon was allotted one thousand years to live. Hashem then showed him a preview of all the future generations, person by person. Adam saw David Hamelech destined to die a few hours after birth. Out of compassion, Adam expressed his desire to give up seventy years of his life for David. Hashem agreed to his request and asked Adam to sign a written contract. Adam was taken aback by Hashem’s request, and asked of Him, “Do you not trust me?” Hashem answered, “No, I don’t.” And so, Adam signed the contract.

When Adam was 930 years old, Hashem called for Adam’s departure from the world. Adam insisted that he still had more years to live, as originally allocated. Whereupon Hashem showed him the contract he signed, which stated that he had given those years to David Hamelech.

This is a bit unclear. Did Adam forget his written agreement granting seventy years to David? Even more puzzling is why Hashem demanded a written contract to begin with.

Perhaps we can offer several reasons why Adam failed to recall his commitment. First of all, Adam put the whole conversation he had with Hashem out of mind. This was a result of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Forgetfulness is a natural consequence of sin (where one forgets himself and acts inappropriately). Accordingly,

Hashem knew that Adam would eventually forget, and therefore had him sign on the dotted line.

A second reason is the penitence that Adam went through, after he ate from the Tree. Recognizing the monstrous effects of his actions, Adam sat in mourning and sackcloth, fasting for 130 years (*Eirubin* 18b). Hashem accepted his teshuvah and presented him with a special garment to wear. During those years, Adam pushed his attention from all worldly activities out of mind, and preoccupied himself with learning Torah. This reminded him of the bliss he had in Gan Eden. Wrapped up in his own world, he forgot the events that led up to his departure from the Gan, as well as his commitment. And so, he recalled only the original allotment of one thousand years of life, until reminded by his own signature.

Another reason why Adam Harishon 'forgot,' could be his strong connection to Torah. Before experiencing the sweetness of Torah, Adam happily donated seventy years of his life to David Hamelech. At the end of his days, however, after learning and enjoying its sublime taste for 930 years, Adam didn't want to give up life. He realized how precious each and every second is worth and enjoyed the beauty and pleasure of learning Torah.

When Adam originally planned on giving David Hamelech years from his life, Hashem knew that he would later regret his decision, once he savored the sweetness of Torah. And so, Hashem prepared for this eventuality by having Adam sign a contract, in order to have proof of Adam's commitment on hand.

On a similar note, we find that many tzaddikim are so bound up and deeply satisfied with their learning, that they are reluctant to leave this world. They find it extremely difficult to part with their miniature Gan Eden they have here on Earth, where they can practice Torah and perform mitzvot. As the pasuk (*Tehillim* 117:16)

says, “Difficult in the eyes of Hashem is the death of his devout ones.” At first glance, one might assume that tzaddikim would look forward to their demise. Who wouldn’t want to enter true, eternal paradise? Tzaddikim, however, do not anticipate death. They find it difficult to bear, as they already experience a taste of that Gan Eden here on Earth. This was the feeling that Adam Harishon had when faced with his own death.

Another point to ponder is the need for Adam Harishon to present David Hamelech with years of his life. Hashem knew the future achievements of David, his righteousness and holiness. From David will come the Mashiach, who will be singly instrumental in the world-wide recognition of Hashem. Why, then, was it necessary to wait for Adam to make his offer? It should be obvious that Hashem did not need Adam’s generosity in order to set aside seventy years for David’s life.

There is a tremendous lesson here. In truth, all stories of Torah have a message. There is a well known Zohar (*Chelek* II 96b) which writes that the stories of the Torah, as well as the details of the mitzvot, contain instructions and guidance on how to connect with Hashem. One can glean from the accounts of the Avot, their unsurpassable love for Hashem and how much they treasured and practiced each mitzvah. The story of Adam Harishon demonstrates for us the inherent value of life and how much we should appreciate each and every hour that we live.

This becomes apparent from the story of Adam Harishon. At first, Adam was quite willing to give away years of his life for David Hamelech. After experiencing the taste of Torah, though, he was extremely reluctant to part with its life-giving elixir. No longer was he eager to keep his promise. “For its [the Torah’s] commerce is better than the acquisition of money,” says the pasuk (*Mishlei* 3:14). Adam fell into the category of those who first hand (*Tehillim* 34:9)

“taste and see that Hashem is good,” and understood that after his death, he would no longer be able to do mitzvot.

Hashem wants us to value the days of our lives and be prudent in our usage of time. Adam Harishon savored every minute that he spent learning Torah. We should take from this story of Adam Harishon and David Hamelech a lesson on the importance of time, and the irreplaceable loss of squandering it away.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Adam Harishon was allotted one thousand years of life. The Midrash states that he gave away seventy years of his life to David Hamelech. Hashem asked Adam to give it in writing and had him sign a written contract. When it came time for Adam to pass away, Adam claimed that he still had another 70 years to live, and Hashem showed him the contract. How did Adam forget that he had signed a contract with Hashem?
- ◆ It could be that the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge caused him to forget, as every sin has an element of forgetfulness. Also, Adam became so preoccupied with Torah after the sin, that he felt an affinity to Gan Eden and forgot the events which led to his expulsion.
- ◆ Tzaddikim find death difficult to bear, as they feel a taste of Gan Eden in their learning. Hence it was difficult for Adam Harishon to part with years of his life because of his attachment to Torah. Adam was willing to give away years of life before he experienced the taste of Torah. After enjoying its sweetness, though, he was not so eager to give it away.
- ◆ Why did Hashem not give David Hamelech life without resorting to Adam Harishon? This contains a tremendous lesson for us. We should learn to appreciate the value of time and take advantage of the days of our lives, not to squander them away.



## Gems on Parashat Bereishit



### Strengthening Our Belief every Morning

*“In the beginning Hashem created the Heavens  
and the Earth”*

*(Bereishit 1:1)*

Rashi begins his commentary on the Torah with the famous words of the Midrash. “Rabbi Yitzchak said, why did the Torah begin with the account of Genesis?” We interpret this question to mean as follows. It would have been far more practical for the Torah to begin with an explanation of one of the mitzvot. The performance of mitzvot is the basis for the giving of the Torah to Am Yisrael. In which case, why start with a description of the Creation of the world?

One can argue that the narration of the Creation provides a firm foundation for belief in a Creator. This leads us to ask another question. Why should one’s belief in a creator not be triggered by a direct examination of the wondrous works of Creation? As David Hamelech said, “When I observe the Heavens, the work of Your hands” (*Tehillim* 8:4). After noting the wisdom inherent in Creation,

David proclaimed (*Tehillim* 104:24), “How wondrous are your works, Hashem!”

It would seem that without the account of the Creation of the world, we would not begin to appreciate its wonders, nor strengthen our belief in Hashem when learning the rest of the Torah.

At one point, I went with Harav Chaim Walkin, shlita, to visit Maran Harav Shach zt”l. He spoke to us about the concept of belief in Hashem. His words were perhaps elementary and unembellished, but they spoke volumes of thought.

If one concentrates on the content of what is being said, one can learn even from a simple person. As David Hamelech said, “From all those who taught me I grew wise” (*Tehillim* 119:99). How much more so from an astute scholar, about whom it is said (*Avodah Zara* 19b) that even the everyday speech of a *talmid chacham* requires analysis and examination. This is because a *talmid chacham* is very careful with his words and doesn’t waste time. Similarly, we find that the students of Rabbi Akiva were punished as a result of not learning from each other. In the words of the Gemara (*Yevamot* 62b), they did not give one another the proper respect. This came from their lack of appreciation of their fellow student and his wisdom.

I distinctly remember Maran Harav Shach zt”l telling us that when we wake up in the morning, if we were to think about the One Who gives us the sense of sight and the ability to hear, we simply would not sin or misuse our faculties of perception.

We can add to this thought the words of the Arizal Hakadosh, on the *pasuk*, “Refreshed every morning, your belief and commitment is greatly evident” (*Eichah* 3:23). The Arizal explained that this refers to the belief of one who awakens every morning with a fresh commitment to serve Hashem. As we rest at night, our souls enjoy

spiritual nourishment in the world above. Our minds are thus refreshed and invigorated when we wake up in the morning. Experiencing such nourishment provides us with the strength and conviction we need to begin our day of service and belief in Hashem anew.

In order to take advantage of this opportunity, though, we need to bring that potential belief to its faithful conclusion. It says (*Yoma* 38b), “One who comes to be purified is given a helping hand.” Acting on belief is doing our part in moving forward and acquiring a lease for a new day. The beginning is always in our hands and left up to us, as it says, “Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven” (*Berachot* 33b).

Maran Harav Shach continued by recalling his feelings of invigoration that he had when learning in the proximity of the Brisker Rav zt”l. Said Harav Shach, “Even if I won’t merit a seat in Gan Eden in the next world, I already had that enjoyment here in this world.” So great was his pleasure in learning Torah! How fortunate is the one who derives such enjoyment from learning.

We perhaps do not experience feelings as deep as Maran Harav Shach. This is because we don’t exert ourselves in learning. Some effort is required on our part. A hungry person needs to eat in order to be satiated. One who wishes to become prosperous and affluent needs to work hard. So too, we cannot expect to feel any pleasure in learning Torah without putting in our own positive efforts.



## The Power of Torah

*“In the beginning Hashem created the Heavens  
and the Earth”*

*(Bereishit 1:1)*

Rashi quotes a famous Midrash on this pasuk: Rabbi Yitzchak said, “Why did the Torah begin with the account of Genesis? It should have started from (*Shemot* 12:2), ‘This month shall be for you the first of all months,’ which is the first mitzvah that Am Yisrael was given. The reason is in order to tell His nation the ‘power of His might.’” He is the One Who gave us the land of the other nations as an inheritance. If the nations of the world claim that the Jews robbed them of their land by conquering the seven Canaanite tribes, we can respond that the whole world belongs to Hashem. He created it and gave it to whomever He deemed appropriate. His original desire was to give it to those nations, and subsequently His desire was to take it away from them and give it to us.

What is clear from this Rashi is that the Torah’s account of the Creation of the world can be used as a proof of our ownership of Eretz Yisrael. Based on this narrative, we can refute any non-Jew’s claim of inheritance and legal possession. What is not clear, however, is why a non-Jew should accept the validity of this claim. If he does not believe in the Torah, what does it matter what is recorded there?

We see from this the power of the Torah. When studied and practiced by Am Yisrael, the Torah becomes universally accepted by all the nations of the world. Even non-Jews will agree to its legal standing, provided that Am Yisrael themselves believe in it and live by its laws. They will understand and consent to our claim because

the Torah openly states that Hashem created the world and decided who to give Eretz Yisrael to. As the pasuk says (*Devarim 28:10*), “And all the nations will see that the Name of Hashem is associated with you and will be fearful of you.” Such is the power of the Torah.



## Let Our Feet Lead the Way

*“In the beginning Hashem created the Heavens  
and the Earth”*

*(Bereishit 1:1)*

Chazal say (*Avot D'Rebbe Natan 31:3*) that the ‘Heavens and the Earth’ correspond to man and his twofold nature. A person is connected to the heavens and to the earth, through his head and feet. Our heads are positioned at the top of our bodies, linking us to the heavens above, while our feet are at their bottom, positioning us upon the earth below. This is similar to a ladder, whose feet rest on the ground while its top is pointed upwards. So too, our minds, the sanctuary of our soul, attach us to the Heavenly realm by their aspirations for the Divine, while our feet connect us to the earth below, giving us a physical base to stand upon.

This is hinted to by the ladder that Yaakov saw in his dream (*Bereishit 28:12*), “And behold, he saw a ladder resting upon the ground and its top reached the heavens.” As important is our goal to strive ever higher, we should never forget that part which stands us on our feet. Our feet are not less important than our heads. If one’s feet hurt, then the whole body can feel the pain, including the head.

The feet are also the ‘tools’ we use to move around. If our feet won’t assist us in performing acts of Torah and mitzvot, our heads won’t succeed in implementing them either. This could explain why the Gemara mentions (*Bava Batra* 58a) the luminosity of the heel of Adam Harishon but does not report any quality to describe his head. This is because of the over-riding importance of the feet in propelling one to greatness and leading one along the right way.



## Good Things Start at the Beginning

*“In the beginning Hashem created the Heavens and the Earth”*

*(Bereishit 1:1)*

Rashi brings the Midrash, “Rebbi Yitzchak said, why did the Torah begin with the account of Genesis? It should have started from the first mitzvah (*Shemot* 12:2), “This month shall be for you the first of all months.”

I would like to suggest the following answer. The Torah begins with ‘In the Beginning,’ because that is where all good things begin. If one starts off on the right foot, he can look forward to a good continuation. After one learns the parashah of the Creation of the world, he can then advance to learn the rest of the Torah, because he now has the right starting point.

In the yeshivot and study halls the world over, every *seder*, and certainly every *zman*, is a new beginning. A good start promotes the success that one will have later on, because it all starts from there.

One can even feel this propelling force at the beginning of a new *zman*. This is similar to the (*Bereishit* 1:2) “spirit of Hashem which hovered over the surface of the water” that we find at the very Beginning.

After a while though, this feeling of invigoration tends to fade away, and one could fall back to a perfunctory, almost mechanical routine. David Hamelech alludes to this when he requests (*Tehillim* 27:4) “One thing I ask of Hashem... to sit in the house of Hashem all the days of my life... and to look in on Your Sanctuary.” It was in response to this tendency that David said these words. David wished that every visit into the Sanctuary would provoke the same feeling he had as the first time he visited it. He wanted to feel this freshness and impelling force, every day of his life.



## The Creation of Man

*“And Hashem said, ‘Let us make man in Our image and in Our likeness’”*

*(Bereishit 1:26)*

Hashem’s declaration נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם, “Let us make man” is perplexing. Hashem made Adam by Himself without any help whatsoever, from any other being. Why then did Hashem speak in the plural?

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah*, 8:8) answers this question with a lesson in ethical conduct. Hashem turned to the angels on High, in order to ask their advice. From here we learn the proper ethical behavior of conferring with one’s subordinates. Hashem wished to

teach us this lesson by His personal example, and therefore asked for advice from the angels before creating man.

This lesson is so important for us that it justifies Hashem's statement being said in the plural form. Skeptics use this pasuk to bolster their contention that two Deities exist. Those who wish to be misled will always find sources for their opinions. Hashem found it so necessary to teach us proper behavior, that He said "Let us make man," despite its possible misinterpretation.

Actually, when Hashem sought counsel from the angels whether or not to create man, they answered in the negative (*Yalkut Shimoni* 12). The angels reasoned that since man would eventually sin, his existence would cause a desecration of Hashem's Name. Hashem immediately incinerated them and created others in their place. Hashem then asked the new group of angels the same question, and created man right away without waiting for an answer. Upon seeing Adam Harishon, the angels mistook him for a deity and wished to sing his praises and worship him. After watching Adam fall asleep and have physical limitations however, they realized that he was only human (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu* 394).

Why did Hashem not listen to the first group of angels? And why did He burn them up? In truth, man, in some ways, is greater than an angel. Man lives in the mundane world, surrounded by physical desires and temptations. He sanctifies the Name of Hashem greatly by learning Torah and rising above materialism. An angel, on the other hand, does not have an evil inclination. He serves Hashem without facing opposition. Thus, the sanctification of G-d's Name caused by man's efforts is far greater than that of any angel.

This tremendous quality of man came to the fore when Am Yisrael came to Mount Sinai. At Mount Sinai, they reached a level similar to that of Adam Harishon before the sin. There, they accepted the

Torah and proclaimed (*Shemot* 24:7), “We will do and we will listen.” Their acceptance of the Torah was done with the same compliance as an angel. Am Yisrael consented to do Hashem’s will even before hearing what it entailed. This is similar to an angel undertaking his Heavenly duties. Their acceptance of the Torah preserved the world’s continuing operation, because the world exists only through the learning of Torah. This is indicated by the pasuk (*Yirmeyahu* 33:25), “If not for my covenant [of Torah] day and night, I would not have placed the heavens and earth upon their course.”

This vindicated Hashem’s decision to create man. By expressing their desire to accept the Torah and to help maintain the existence of all Creation, Am Yisrael proved that Hashem was right. Man could rise above the materialistic world and become greater than the angels. He could bow to Hashem’s authority without hearing first what is required of him. This is the powerful secret behind Am Yisrael’s acceptance of the Torah.



## Keeping the Rules

*“And Hashem blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, for on that day He rested from all of His work that Hashem had created to do”*

*(Bereishit 2:3)*

The final words of this pasuk are a bit difficult to understand. What is the meaning of the words “to do”? What was there ‘to do’ after Hashem already created everything?

Perhaps we can understand these words as follows. Chazal (*Shemot Rabbah* 47:4) tell us that the world exists on the precondition that we keep the Torah. This is hinted to by the pasuk (*Yirmeyahu* 33:25), “If not for my covenant [of Torah] day and night, I would not have placed the heavens and earth upon their course.” If we keep the Torah and learn its laws, then the world will be sustained. And if we do not do our part of the deal, then the world will be destroyed.

This explains why the pasuk tells us that Hashem created everything in the world ‘to do.’ Everything was created with this prerequisite in mind. By doing what the world was created for, we keep the world in its present state of existence. Had Hashem not made such a stipulation, the world would have continued to exist despite no effort whatsoever on our part. Hashem’s word can keep the world running no matter what. But now that the world was created ‘to do,’ this then becomes a precondition for its continuation.

This teaches us an important rule. It is always necessary to keep the required rules and regulations, ‘to do’ what is expected of us. This applies in all areas of life. A Beit Hamidrash also has rules to follow. We need to fulfill its stipulations and keep to the learning schedule that is demanded from us. He who keeps the rules, upholds the Beit Hamidrash with his actions. And the opposite is also true. The one who breaks them is responsible for its dissolution, *chas v’shalom*.



## Full-time Learning

*“And Hashem commanded Adam saying, ‘From all of the trees of the garden you may surely eat. But of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad you must not eat from, for on the day you eat from it you shall surely die’”*

*(Bereishit 2:16-17)*

Adam Harishon was given one mitzvah to keep, not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Hashem gave him this mitzvah because He wanted to show the angels how Adam accepted upon himself Hashem’s authority and was submissive to Him. Only by following a command can one’s subservience become apparent. This is indicated by the saying (*Kiddushin* 31a), “Greater is the one who is commanded and does his obligations, than one who is not commanded and does so anyway.” He is greater because he demonstrates a greater sign of subservience and servitude.

Unfortunately, Adam did not keep his mitzvah. Hashem then gave Noach seven mitzvot, the seven Noahide laws. Actually, Noach was knowledgeable in the whole Torah. He is referred to as a very righteous tzaddik, well-learned in the ways of Hashem. But true submission comes as a result of listening to commands, as we explained before. And the ancestors and descendants of Noach did not comply. The seven mitzvot correspond to the seven days of the week, which were defiled by the generation of the Flood.

When Hashem saw that even these mitzvot were not enough to bring man to subservience, He gave Am Yisrael 613 mitzvot. These 613 mitzvot parallel the number of organs and veins in the human body. The 248 positive commandments parallel the 248 organs, and

the 365 negative commandments correspond to the 365 veins and arteries. In this way, man is surrounded by mitzvot, which are conducive for his spiritual growth.

In today's spiritually-impoverished generation, the situation calls for a period of time where men can completely submerge themselves in Torah. This learning environment is referred to here in Eretz Yisrael as *Torato Umanuto*, a student whose main vocation is to learn Torah. This should be a true description of one's status, not just a social genre on some government form. Those who are perhaps lax in their dedication to learning should realize their real position in Hashem's eyes. Do not misuse your privileges. An *uman* is a skilled craftsman, and your job is to be skilled in the art of learning and creating gems of Torah. Be careful with your time as much as other craftsmen are with theirs. And keep the laws of a hired worker mentioned in *Choshen Mishpat*, similar to any other paid employee.

There are many stories of tzaddikim who lived with this understanding and were extremely careful of their time spent learning. They took their obligation seriously. The *Maharsha* zt"l would place his feet in ice water in order to keep himself awake while learning. Similarly, Harav David Ben Chazan zt"l, a member of the Beit Din of Harav Chaim Pinto zt"l in Morocco, would tie his *payot* to the wall so that he would not fall asleep while learning. This should serve as an inspiration for those who have chosen Torah as their 'vocation,' not to be lax or discredit their position while they are 'on the job.'



## The Sin of Adam

*“And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat from, a delight to the eyes and a desirable means to become wise, and she took of its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband with her and he ate”*

*(Bereishit 3:6)*

How can we understand the sin of Adam Harishon? If he was the handiwork of Hashem, and Hashem’s work is perfect in every way, how could he possibly have sinned? We would like to suggest the following answer. The very fact that he was created by Hashem is the reason that he did not refrain from sin. This can be understood with the help of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot.

The Mishnah says (3:1), “Reflect on three things and you will not come into the grip of sin. Know from where you came, to where you are going, and before Whom you will have to render account and reckoning. From where you came: a putrid drop. To where you are going: a place of dust, decay, and earthworms. And before Whom you will have to render account and reckoning; before the Supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.” Contemplating these three things makes one aware of his lowliness and human imperfection, and discourages him from sin. However, these concepts did not apply to Adam Harishon, and he did not have these deterrents from sin. Because he was formed by Hashem, he could not reflect on the frailty of his mortal existence or on the deficiencies of human nature. Had he been more aware of his imperfections, perhaps he would have refrained from sinning. I found this answer once in a sefer.

On the other hand, Hashem's creation of Adam placed a tremendous obligation on him not to sin. Because he was the handiwork of Hashem, who breathed into him life without the help of any other being, Adam was singly responsible to listen to Hashem and not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Adam should also have explained this special connection with Hashem to Chava. She was also formed by Hashem and indebted to Him. Adam should have rebuked her for tempting him to sin, and expressed their obligation to respect and obey His commands. Not only did Adam not reproach her, he even listened to her. This was despite her status and relationship to Adam (as she was created second, taken from Adam's ribs.)

Even so, Adam's creation by Hashem has a redeeming factor. Lacking the ability to reflect on his imperfect nature and mortality, Adam was thus more prone to sin. This is how the *Chachamim* find a point of merit to excuse his failure.



## Perfecting Our Middot

*“And Hashem called out to man and said,  
‘Where are you?’”*

*(Bereishit 3:9)*

Rashi explains that Hashem knew full well where Adam was. Hashem asked Adam his whereabouts only in order to initiate a conversation. Adam could have been startled by Hashem's sudden appearance and too dumbstruck to respond. That is why Hashem

proceeded with care and called out to Adam before He appeared on the scene.

We can learn from here a tremendous lesson. It is very important to be in control of one's actions and *middot* at all times. There are many who wish to show that they are the boss in their home. They cause their wife and children to fear their presence. This is not the way that Hashem works. Even though Adam sinned, Hashem still approached him with soft words, understanding that His sudden presence could shake him up. Certainly, one who is angry should take care not to let that anger burst forth and terrify all those who surround him. He should learn how to be in charge of, and control, his anger, not to let his anger control him.

We are witness to how our teachers and masters would watch over their temperaments and take themselves to task for showing poor character. If they stumbled, they immediately reproached themselves. It is well known that the Gaon from Vilna zt"l appointed someone to admonish him and call him to account for all his deeds. My saintly grandfather, Harav Chaim Pinto zt"l, once mistakenly stepped on a sefer. Right away, he called over his *shamash* and asked him to hit his (my grandfather's) feet with a leather strap, and not to stop until told to. At first the *shamash* was frightened to do so, but my grandfather insisted, using his authority as the Rav to request his compliance. The *shamash* began to hit his feet and was not allowed to stop until they were swollen and began to bleed. Only then did he tell the *shamash* to stop.

The *Yetzer Hara* is an expert in using all sorts of tricks to urge people to sin. Without constant *mussar*, we cannot overcome his wiliness. I once compared his strategy to the cunning attempts of a cat trying to capture a bird. The cat watches silently, waiting for his chance. Only after the bird enters his 'range of prey,' does he swiftly

pounce. So too, the *Yetzer Hara* waits patiently for man to come closer to him and lower his guard, and only then attacks. He grabs the opportunity to cause man to trip and tumble. Only with great caution and large doses of *mussar* can we stay far away from his ploys.



## Noach



### The Difference between Avraham Avinu and Noach

*“These are the descendants of Noach; Noach was a righteous man, complete in his generations. Noach walked with Hashem”*

*(Bereishit 6:9)*

*“And Noach began to farm the land and he planted a vineyard”*

*(ibid. 9:20)*

At the beginning of the parashah, we find praise at the mere mention of Noach's name. He is called **איש צדיק** (a singular righteous man) complete in his service of Hashem and walking with Him in deed and spirit. It would seem that Noach searched for every opportunity to do Hashem's will. Yet strangely enough, we find later on that Noach is referred to as **איש האדמה** (a man of the earth). He is characterized after the Flood by his agricultural activity and given a title as a farmer. This is a far cry from his original title of respect.

When we compare Noach with Avraham Avinu, our question only grows larger. The Father of our nation, Avraham Avinu's first appearance in the Torah does not elicit any grandiose titles. Yet his righteousness and devotion increase until he becomes the Patriarch of the Jewish nation. What is the difference between these two great figures in Jewish history? Why does Avraham Avinu rise in his virtuousness while Noach sinks into the swamp of agricultural cultivation?

Perhaps we can explain using the words of David Hamelech. David says to his son Shlomo (*Melachim I*, 1:2), "Strengthen yourself and be as a man (לְאִישׁ)." David urges Shlomo to become the very 'man' that he lauds in the very first pasuk in Tehillim. There it says, "Fortunate is the man who has not followed in the council of the wicked or stood in the path of the sinner or sat in the company of the scoffer. And his only desire is the Torah of Hashem, to articulate it day and night." David encourages his son and apparent heir to be a man and strengthen his commitment in serving Hashem. Success and distinction come only through one's unrelenting efforts. By continuously focusing on the areas which need improvement and searching to advance one's Divine service, one can become the 'fortuitous man' destined for greatness.

There are two roads to climb the mountain of greatness. One such road is the single-minded determination to become great. This often requires an extra measure of precaution not to sway from its path. We find that Yaakov Avinu is described as an (*Bereishit* 25:27) אִישׁ תָּם, "A simple man who dwelled in tents (of the Beit Hamidrash)." The word תָּם, when read backwards, spells מָת (death). Yaakov's learning was so absolute that he wearied himself almost to death. He denied and renounced all other forms of activity while in the Beit Hamidrash. For this reason, when Yaakov later wanted to rest from further spiritual activity, Hashem sent upon him the episode of

Yosef's abduction (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:3). Even the mere thought and desire to halt his upward climb was grounds for the Heavenly Court to demand more concentrated efforts on his part. The very name of יוסף (to add) contains a hint to the purpose of Yaakov's travail. Yaakov was expected to add to his service of Hashem and heighten his accomplishments, not to put an end to them.

For this reason, Noach failed to accomplish more in life. The name נח (to rest) is related to the word מנוחה, as found by the words (*Tehillim* 23:2), "Upon tranquil waters (מי מנוחות) have You led me." Noach led his life guided by his tranquil disposition. This hampered him from ascending the mountain of Divine service and increasing his spiritual activity. Even building the Ark stretched over a period of 120 years (*Bereishit Rabbah* 30:7), partially due to his reposeful character. Thus Noach epitomized his name.

A similar idea is found by Shmuel Hanavi. In order to spread the learning of Torah, Shmuel would travel by foot from town to town. And so, Chazal praise him for his righteousness in undertaking the wearying journey, time and time again. His sons, who carried the mantle of leadership after him, were not as righteous as he (*Shmuel* I, 8:3). They avoided walking in the beaten path of their illustrious father, preferring to stay in one place instead (*Shabbat* 56a). This gave the people the feeling that whoever would need the Rav must come to him. We can learn an important principle from their erroneous behavior. Those who want to learn Torah and teach others without exerting effort, preferring instead the reposeful state of (in)activity, do not find favor in the eyes of Hashem. Only through physical exertion and constant effort can we reach true perfection and fulfill Hashem's will.

Avraham Avinu took a different approach in life. Hashem told him (*Bereishit* 12:1), "Go forth from your land and your birthplace," charging him with his lifelong mission. He traveled the breadth and

length of the land to spread the belief in Hashem. This constant striving and effort was the fundamental difference between Noach and Avraham, and explains why they are recorded in history with such disparate accomplishments. Avraham walked up the mountain of spiritual greatness and eventually reached a tremendously high plateau. Noach did not remain at his original level of religiosity. He descended into his new vocation and became known as a 'man of the earth.'

I once encountered two men in one week who had been diagnosed with the same illness and were about the same age, even having similar names. I advised both men to strengthen and increase their performance of Torah and mitzvot. Only Torah has the ability to protect us from harm and avert a terrible Divine decree. It stands by one's side on the day of reckoning, testifying on his behalf. One man accepted my words without hesitation and assured me that he would try his utmost to do whatever he could. The other man found all sorts of excuses why he would be unable to carry out my advice. He couldn't bring himself to bolster his Torah learning or intensify his mitzvah performance. With the passage of time, the first man was completely healed without any sign of his original disease. The second man unfortunately passed away.

This story serves us an important lesson. When Hashem sees us increase our efforts to do His will, He sends us *Siyata di'Shemaya* to achieve our goal. Towards those who wish to sit back and refrain from any exertion, Hashem follows suit and withholds His Divine intervention.

This is especially true when climbing a mountain. Without constant effort to advance one's position, one inevitably loses ground. The angle of the upward incline leaves no room to stand by casually or stay fixed in one's place. It is for this reason that Hashem chose to give the Torah to Am Yisrael on a mountain. It became a

symbol of the effort we need in order to acquire Torah. Am Yisrael witnessed Moshe Rabbeinu, in his 80's, climbing this mountain not once, but several times. Despite his advanced years and the difficulty involved, they saw him climb up and down its steep slope. This was to demonstrate to us that the road to greatness is an uphill climb.

It is said that the mother of the Vilna Gaon zt"l once nearly drowned in a river, and was saved by miraculous means. Rav Chaim Volozhiner would travel to that river bank every year, to say the *berachah* "Who did a miracle for me on this spot." When asked how he could make a *berachah* on a miracle that didn't even happen to him, he replied: had the Vilna Gaon's mother not been saved, he would not have been born. And had the Vilna Gaon not been born, I would not be what I am today. That is why I make the *berachah*.

What we can learn from this story is how Rav Chaim Volozhiner aspired to grow in Torah to his maximum capability. So meaningful to him was the Torah that he heard from the lips of the Gaon, that he had to thank Hashem for the miracle which saved his mother's life. It was his yearning for greatness which prompted Rav Chaim Volozhiner to express his gratitude for the wondrous works of Divine Providence.

Looking deeper into Noach's vineyard horticulture, Chazal say (*Bereishit Rabbah* 36:4) on the pasuk (*Bereishit* 9:20) "And Noach began to farm the land and he planted a vineyard," that on the very same day that Noach planted his vine, it yielded grapes and Noach was able to sample its wine. The *Maharil Diskin* asks, how was Noach allowed to drink the wine if the fruits had the status of *orlah* (forbidden fruits of a tree for the first three years)? He answers that a tree planted for the general populace is not classified as *orlah* (according to one opinion in *Orlah* 1:2). The *Even Yisrael* counters that only Noach and his children were around at the time of

planting. How could this be described as a public vineyard? He gives a different answer. The miraculous growth of the vine convinced Noach that it was not bound by the laws and limitations of *orlah*. According to the *Maharil Diskin* though, Noach's intention of making this vineyard accessible to all of his descendants was enough to rule it as public property.

What requires explanation is why Noach is faulted for planting a vineyard in light of his altruistic intentions. Why was he called a "man of the earth" with its derogatory connotation, for planting a vineyard to benefit mankind?

Perhaps Noach should have taken into consideration the contesting view, that the *orlah* fruits of a tree planted for public use are prohibited. We can also explain the contention against Noach in the following manner. After the Flood, in a world destroyed of all civilization, Noach should have been more concerned over the spiritual future of his descendants than their physical needs. Although he chose to produce wine (יין) which has a numerical value of seventy (referring to the Torah which has seventy facets of understanding, as mentioned in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:15), he should have planted actual seeds of Torah by opening a yeshiva (as his son Shem did later on) or founding a Beit Hakeneset. This is what Rashi refers to when he writes (*Bereishit* 9:20) that, "Noach profaned himself (by planting the vine) for he should have first engaged in a different sort of planting."

Here too we see the difference between Avraham and Noach. Avraham Avinu also planted an orchard. The Torah (*ibid.* 21:33) describes this as an *אשל*, and Chazal derive from its acronym that Avraham provided his guests with food (*אכילה*), drink (*שתיה*), and lodging (*לינה*). Avraham Avinu did the ultimate hospitality, concerned with both the physical and spiritual needs of all who came into contact with him. He influenced the masses to recognize

Hashem as the true Provider of all humanity and never gave his guests food devoid of its inner content or stripped down to its mere physical sustenance. Noach on the other hand, focused on producing mundane fruits and was grounded in his aspirations for further growth.

Preceding his vineyard, Noach brought an offering to Hashem. The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 8:20-21), “And Noach built an altar to Hashem. And he took from all the *tahor* animals and birds, and offered them as burnt offerings on the altar. Hashem smelled the pleasant smell and said to Himself, no longer will I curse the earth because of man’s sins.” This fragrant smell came from the virtuous actions of Noach. Hashem derives tremendous pleasure from our mitzvot that are done *l’shem Shamayim* and immediately showers us with His blessing (see the *Ohr Hachaim* on this pasuk). Noach looked at the past events of the Flood to find the source of evil that he could rectify. He “built an altar” (ויבן) which also denotes understanding (בינה). He understood that the underlying sin of the Generation of the Flood lay in their seizure of other people’s property. They believed that man lives by the power of his hands to grip and grab what belongs to others. Noach understood that he needed to counter this attitude. He wanted to demonstrate mankind’s humility and submission to Hashem. He wanted to express man’s recognition of Him as the Source of all assets and the Adjudicator of all property. An altar symbolizes these qualities. Thus Noach’s building of an altar was a tremendous source of pleasure to Hashem. Had Noach used this opportunity to begin a yeshiva or some other edifice of Divine worship to glorify Hashem, there would be no end to the amount of gratification that Hashem would have had. He would have then planted the future ‘seedlings’ of Divine service for his descendants.

The Gemara asks (*Berachot* 20a) why earlier generations in history

merited such wondrous Divine intervention, whereas later ones did not. The Gemara answers that the earlier generations' devotion to Hashem, and their sacrifices for His Torah merited them their constant Divine Providence. Later generations however lacked such quality and spirit, and thus were not privileged to see the full extent of Divine Providence at work. This can also describe the difference between Avraham and Noach. Avraham Avinu gave up everything for Hashem and merited miraculous protection and blessing as a result. This prompted him to reach even higher levels of Divine service. Noach led life tempered by his tranquil disposition. He preferred repose over effort and suffice over sacrifice. Lacking the enthusiasm and fervor to reach greater spiritual heights, he did not merit the same open Divine intervention. With nothing to spur him on to greatness, he stagnated in his religious aspirations. No wonder then that he was titled a "man of the earth."

We see clearly the vast difference between Avraham, the Father of our nation, and Noach, the father of all civilization. It all depends on where one puts his religious goals and how he tries to achieve them. A tranquil existence does not necessarily help one to aspire to do Hashem's will. In some ways it can even be a deterrent to His service. Only the constant and concentrated effort to do Hashem's will can help us to reach the summit of spiritual greatness.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Noach is described at the beginning of the parashah as **אִישׁ צַדִּיק** (a singular righteous man). Later on, Noach is referred to as **אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה** (a man of the earth). This change of character is quite puzzling. Even stranger is the lack of description of Avraham Avinu. He is mentioned without any titles, yet becomes the Father of our nation.
- ◆ David Hamelech urges his son Shlomo to become a man. David refers Shlomo to the first pasuk in Tehillim where he elaborates on the

qualities of the **ש"ס** as the one continuously striving to grow in his service of Hashem.

- ◆ The difference between Noach and Avraham lay in their approach to life. Noach chose to live without hardship or sacrifices, content with his tranquil existence. One who doesn't climb the mountain of Divine service eventually slides down its steep slope. Avraham was constantly advancing, as hinted by the words, "Go forth." He was always walking further, never relying on past achievements. This is what made him into the Patriarch of the Jewish nation.
- ◆ Similarly we find by Yaakov Avinu, who wanted to desist from further spiritual growth, that Hashem sent him the episode of Yosef's abduction to spur him on. Tzaddikim don't rest in this world as their job is never finished. Their Divine service is one of constant effort to do Hashem's will.
- ◆ Chazal say that on the day that Noach planted a vine, it grew grapes and he sampled its wine. The *Maharil Diskin* asks that such fruits should be forbidden as they are *orlah*. He answers that a vineyard planted for public use does not have the status of *orlah* according to some authorities. The *Even Yisrael* counters that there were no other families alive at the time so it could not be classified as public property. His answer is that Noach, upon witnessing the miraculous growth of the vine, reasoned that the laws of *orlah* did not apply to it.
- ◆ The Gemara asks why the earlier generations merited having miracles whereas the later generations did not. The Gemara explains that the earlier generations made tremendous sacrifices for Hashem and His Torah. They in turn saw Divine Providence and had miraculous intervention. Later generations lacked such fervor in their service of Hashem. The road to greatness requires a constant climb, with the aspiration to reach ever higher levels of Divine service.



## Preserving Kedushah in the Generation of the Flood

*“And the earth became corrupted before Hashem and was filled with theft”*

*(Bereishit 6:11)*

The Flood was Hashem’s response to the world-wide corruption of humanity. Rashi brings the Gemara (*Avodah Zara 23b*) which regards the Generation of the Flood as a prime example of promiscuity, which is abhorrent to Hashem. “It was taught in the Beit Hamidrash of Rabbi Yishmael, wherever the Torah uses the term חמס (corruption), it refers either to immorality or to idolatry. Immorality, as it is written (*Bereishit 6:12*) “For all flesh had corrupted its way on earth.”

What becomes apparent from our parashah is that licentious behavior severely damages the ‘law and order’ of Creation, the family unit and genealogical purity which are the building blocks of all future generations. The pasuk states that the earth itself became corrupted as a result of man’s depravity and sin. This sin even came “before Hashem,” as it tore at the Name of Hashem from which the world was created. Hashem created the world using the shortened version (י-ה) of His Four-Letter Name. This is hinted to by the pasuk (*Yeshayahu 26:4*) כִּי בִּי-ה' צוֹר עוֹלָמִים, which can also be translated as “For Hashem created the worlds with the Name י-ה.”

This name also refers to the harmonious relationship between a husband and wife. The words אִשָּׁה and אִישׁ are similar, differing only in two letters, the ה and י, which constitute the Name of Hashem. When joined together as husband and wife, the union of a marriage brings the י from the man and the ה from the woman to build a

sanctuary for the *Shechinah* to rest within. Immoral conduct touches on, and tears at, the integral unity and solidity of our world, bringing with it the destruction of mankind and the dissolution of Hashem's Name. This is why the pasuk stresses that the Earth was corrupted "before Hashem." Their actions pierced the Heavens and affected the very core of Creation.

Later on in the parashah we read (*Bereishit* 8:4), "And the Ark came to rest on the seventeenth day of the seventh month upon the mountains of Ararat." What is the significance of this? It is obvious that every word in the Torah has a message or thought which we can learn from. What can we learn from the name of the mountains that the Ark came to rest on?

I suggest that the numerical value of אררט (410) is the same as קדוש, indicating a connection between the two. Holiness is not just an esoteric or abstract concept. Rashi (*Vayikra* 19:2) explains the pasuk "You shall be holy, for I, the L-ord, your G-d am holy" to mean that Hashem commands us to be holy by abstaining from illicit relations. This ties very well with what we have said before. The Flood came as a result of that generation's rampant immorality, which degraded the holiness of human relations and profaned the Name of Hashem. After they were wiped out by the Flood, the world returned to the pristine state represented by Ararat and its numerical value of holiness. Noach and his righteous family came to rest upon the mountain of holiness and chastity because they abstained from the debauchery of their contemporary society. And at the same time, the Name of Hashem was rectified by the purifying waters of the Flood.

Based on this idea, the *Kli Yakar* elaborates on the dimensions of the Ark. It says (*Bereishit* 6:15) "And this is the size you shall make it, the length of the Ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits." Here too one can ask, what is the

lesson that we can learn from its measurements? Why did the Torah see fit to include this detail in the story of the Flood?

The dimensions of the Ark contain an allusion to the sin of that generation. If we multiply its length (three hundred cubits) by its width (fifty cubits), we come out with fifteen thousand squared cubits, a number divisible by fifteen. If we factor in the height of the Ark (thirty cubits) and multiply its squared meterage by thirty, we also arrive at an amount divisible by fifteen. Even if we divide this cubic area by three, corresponding to the height of each of the three levels in the Ark, we still reach a number that is a multiple of fifteen. This, explains the *Kli Yakar*, is a direct reference to the Name of Hashem ה-י, which has the numerical value of fifteen. Thus Hashem's euonym was unified by the physical dimensions of the Ark. And the Ark was also instrumental in bringing the world and all its flesh back to the level of holiness and purity that had existed before the Generation of the Flood.

The number fifteen recurs several times throughout our parashah. The height of sea level which rose above the highest mountains was fifteen, as it says (*Bereishit* 7:20), "The waters prevailed upwards fifteen cubits and covered the tops of the mountains." The days of the Flood also repeat this message, as it says (*ibid.* 7:24), "And the waters prevailed upon the Earth a hundred and fifty days." The *Kli Yakar* uses these pesukim as examples of how the Flood was a punishment for the immorality which had affected Hashem's Name. We can add and point out how the Hebrew word for the Ark תיבה, also contains the letters י and ה in alternating sequence.

We see again how the Ark not only protected Noach and his family from the raging elements of destruction; it also remedied the estrangement of all flesh and the disunity of Hashem's Name, when the 'earth became corrupted before Hashem.'

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**In Summary**

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- ◆ The generation of the Flood corrupted the earth by their licentiousness behavior. This sin also affected the Name of Hashem יה-י, whose letters of י and ה are symbolically joined together by the marriage of husband and wife. Immoral conduct destroys the unity of mankind and dissolves the bond which holds Hashem's Name together. This is why it says "And the earth became corrupted before Hashem."
- ◆ Why does the Torah mention that the Ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat? The numerical value of אַרְרַט is the same as קְדוּשׁ. Holiness is not just an esoteric or abstract concept. It is the abstinence from illicit relations, as Rashi writes in parashat *Kedoshim*. The Torah hints to this rectification by saying that the Ark came to rest upon the pristine mountains of Ararat.
- ◆ The *Kli Yakar* explains that the measurements of the Ark also refer to the dissolution of Hashem's Name caused by their actions. The square and cubic meterage of the Ark is equally divisible by fifteen, which is also the numerical value of Hashem's Name יה-י.
- ◆ Other references to the number fifteen can be found in the height to which the waters rose above the tops of the mountains, as well as the days of the Flood's duration.
- ◆ Even the Hebrew word for the Ark (תִּיבָה) also contains the letters י and ה in alternating sequence. Thus the Ark came to remedy the corruption of flesh that tore at Hashem's Name.



## Righteous Tzaddikim

*“And Hashem looked upon the earth and behold it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its way on earth”*

*(Bereishit 6:12)*

The words of the pasuk, (*Bereishit* 6:12) “for all flesh had corrupted its way (דרכו) on earth,” hint to the degree of corruption that the people had reached in the days of Noach. The word דרכו (the way of man and his means of procreation), can be split into two: דר and כו. The letters דר mean to dwell, and the numerical value of the letters כו is twenty-six, the same as the Four-Letter Name of Hashem. This signifies Hashem’s desire to dwell within each and every one of us.

From our very inception, Hashem is already an active participant in our lives, as the Gemara explains (*Niddah* 31a): There are three partners in the formation of a child, his mother and father and Hashem. Hashem provides the soul. Man has the responsibility to guard over its holiness by remaining virtuous and pure from sin. The Generation of the Flood sullied this Divine spark by their debauchery and promiscuity. They pushed Hashem out of the inner recesses of their heart. Thus Hashem could no longer dwell amongst, and within man. This is why the pasuk says (*Bereishit* 6:12), “For all flesh had corrupted its way on earth.” Their corruption was total, removing any remnant of their entrusted Divine spirit. By acting immorally and making the earth spiritually uninhabitable, they sealed their Heavenly verdict.

In contrast, Noach is called (*ibid.* 6:9) איש צדיק (a righteous man). The word צדיק demonstrates Noach’s chastity and moral behavior.

He remained pure and holy, not allowing himself to be corrupted by their rampant promiscuity. This was similar to Yosef, who obstinately refused to defile himself with the wife of his master Potiphar. And so Noach deserved to be spared from the Flood. He is also referred to as **איש**. This word contains the letter **י** from Hashem's Name which denotes that spark of divinity which Hashem places in man. Noach acted in a way that allowed that spark's continued existence, and guarded over it so that he could be worthy of Hashem's presence.

It is said that Gan Eden is the juncture which links our world with the next. The next world is a state of eternal life, and life in our world draws its source from the next. The designated title of the next world, **עולם הבא**, describes this process. It is an **עולם**, denoting its permeating life force, and it is **הבא**, as it goes forth and spreads that force. The word **הבא** has the numerical value of eight. It is a world above the limitations and constraints of the temporal world created in seven days. That is why life there has no end. Man's connection with Hashem is through the letter of His Name that He places within man, the **י** that represents the Divine spark of life. It also represents the life force which flows in from the next world, as the letter **י** also symbolizes **עולם הבא** (*Menachot 29b*). Thus the letter **י** in **איש** serves a dual function.

The Generation of the Flood eradicated the **י** in their name and severed their connection to Hashem. This also severed the juncture through which all life flows. This is why the Flood was decreed upon mankind. Only an **איש צדיק** who adhered to the laws of marital fidelity and family purity deserved to live. Even today, one who keeps that connection open and allows the life force of the next world to relay him its vitality, breathes in the air of the next world even as he walks here on planet Earth.

Chazal extol the virtues of the many tzaddikim who guarded their thoughts and actions and experienced the presence of Hashem as a result. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 161) brings a story about the righteous Rabbi Mattia ben Charash, who never entertained stray thoughts or gazed at other women. The Satan received permission from Hashem to test his unswerving piety, and appeared before him in the guise of the most beautiful woman that the world had ever seen. Rabbi Mattia ben Charash turned his face away to gaze in a different direction. Not giving up so quickly, the Satan appeared from that direction, still trying to attract his attention. Afraid that he would be tempted to sin, Rabbi Mattia ben Charash asked his students to bring him two iron rods in order to poke out his eyes, so great was his aversion to taking a lustful peek and contemplating impure thoughts. He felt the Divine presence within his being and guarded his purity with zealousness.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 19a) depicts the relationship between Palti ben Layish and Michal, the daughter of Shaul. Although officially wed by order of her father the King (see *Shmuel* I, 25:44), Palti was concerned over her marital status, as she had originally been betrothed to David after he killed Goliath. Thus he was uncertain if she was permissible to him as a wife. Not wanting to be enticed into any wrongdoing, Palti ben Layish thrust a sword in the ground, creating a no man's land between him and her. He vowed that the one who would pass over to the other side would die by that sword. Similarly, Noach did not have any relations with his wife while in the Ark (as commanded by Hashem, see *Rashi* to *Bereishit* 7:7). It was Cham who broke the rules and violated this restraint and thus gave birth to the wicked Canaan (*Sanhedrin* 108b). The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 23:11) describes how Boaz was faced with a dilemma. Ruth, after gleaning stalks from the field of Boaz, went one night to 'impress' upon him their family ties. She hid at the foot of

his bed. This put Boaz in a very awkward position, as her sudden presence demanded him to master his impulses and exercise tremendous self control. Guarding himself from sin, Boaz swore using Hashem's Name that he would not touch her until they were legitimately married.

Actually, this presents a difficulty. How could Boaz allow her to stay there all night, knowing the power of vice and allure of the forbidden fruit? Isn't this an *issur* of *yichud*? In truth, the *issur* of *yichud* with a single (ritually pure) girl had not yet been instituted. Still, Boaz would not have wanted to be in a situation that would even entertain the possibility of sin. Perhaps Boaz saw in almost a prophetic vision that this union would one day bring about the Kingship of David and the future Mashiach. Realizing the crusade of the forces of *tumah* to taint and sheathe the souls of such future descendants with *tumah*, Boaz deceived the Satan by staying in his predicament. He threw the Satan off his tail with a ruse of joining his ranks and submitting to his authority. This was done *l'shem Shamayim* and obviously is not to be used as a precedent for similar circumstances.

There is however, an awesome lesson to learn from this story. At first Boaz was frightened at her appearance, imagining that she was some demon or evil spirit. Yet, when he recognized Ruth for who she was, a different fear gripped him. The temptation to lie with her as she lay at his feet became so real, that he immediately vowed using the sacred Four-Letter Name of Hashem, in order to hold his impulses at bay. Boaz recognized and responded to his situation in light of its potential developments. Exchanging small talk with her, even if motivated by common decency, could have led to disastrous results, especially under such circumstances. It has been said time and again: there is no mortal, flesh and blood custodian who is infallible when dealing with or watching over members of the

opposite gender. Boaz was so wary that their conversation would continue unabated and develop into a serious relationship that he swore not to touch her. This gave him the strength and protection to shield him from his *Yetzer Hara*, despite her being there all night.

Let us take these stories to heart and understand their ramifications. By creating a place for Hashem to dwell (יָד) within ourselves, Hashem interposes His Presence (as signified by the numerical value of כו) within us and sanctifies our actions and thoughts. We can become a worthy receptacle for the Divine presence if we but guard that spark of holiness and state of purity from being eroded by the temptation of sin.

Chazal (*Menachot* 29b) teach us that when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to the Heavens to receive the Torah, Hashem showed him the future generations and their leaders. Moshe saw Rabbi Akiva busy making crowns (crown-like flourishes on the tops of Hebrew letters) in a Sefer Torah. He also saw Rabbi Akiva's end – sanctifying Hashem's Name whilst being put to death. Witnessing Rabbi Akiva's great erudition and righteousness, Moshe asked Hashem why the Torah was not given through him. Hashem silenced Moshe and said: This is the way that I have determined it to be. What did Hashem mean by that?

I would suggest that Hashem was pointing out Moshe's limited perception of Rabbi Akiva and his greatness. It would not help to give the Torah through the agency of Rabbi Akiva, as all his achievements were based solely on Moshe's transmitting the Torah to Am Yisrael. It was the power of Moshe's transmission that raised Rabbi Akiva to his great level.

This helps us to understand another story concerning Rabbi Akiva. The Gemara relates (*Ketubot* 63a) how Rabbi Akiva returned home after an absence of twenty-four years, followed by twenty-four

thousand students. As he approached, his wife Rachel, the daughter of Kalba Savua, threw herself at his feet, so happy was she to be his help-mate and elated at his accomplishments. The students did not understand who she was and attempted to remove her from his path. Said Rabbi Akiva, "Leave her; whatever I and you have accomplished in learning is in her merit."

Where did Rabbi Akiva learn to respond in this manner? Rabbi Akiva's outlook really only mirrored the response that Hashem gave to Moshe. Hashem answered Moshe Rabbeinu that all of Rabbi Akiva's Torah achievements originated from the wellspring of his Torah. Similarly, Rabbi Akiva taught his students that all of his Torah was achieved through the sacrifices of his wife who sent him off to learn.

Rachel, the wife of the great Rabbi Akiva, merited being the help-mate of the one who was lauded for such phenomenal achievements in Torah and raised such outstanding students as Rabbi Meir. She gave up twenty-four years of her relationship with her husband for the sake of his learning. Her strength lay in her modest behavior. She personified the dictum that a Jewish woman's honor lies within the confines of her own home. Her efforts were rewarded by having a husband who was a *nitzutz* (spark and spiritual remnant) of Moshe Rabbeinu. Thus her modesty was the cornerstone of all of his accomplishments.

From here we see the triumphal fait accompli of one who guards his or her chastity. Who else can, and should be responsible for the spark of divinity entrusted in our care, if not ourselves? By practicing self-restraint and adhering to the precepts of morality, one becomes worthy of feeling the Divine presence which dwells within, as the pasuk says (*Iyov* 19:26), "From my flesh I see Hashem's existence."

The Gemara (*Menachot* 44a) brings a story of one who was tempted to sin with a woman but suppressed his desires after the fringes of his *tzitzit* miraculously smacked him in the face. It is well known that the *tzitzit* bring forth a supernal light (*Sha'ar Hakavanot, Tzitzit* 4) to protect its wearer from sin. The *Shechinah* rests on the one who puts *tzitzit* on his clothing, and this saves him from being enticed by the *Yetzer Hara*. The Torah writes adjacent to the mitzvah of *tzitzit* (*Bamidbar* 15:39), “And you shall see them and remember all of my mitzvot,” the words “and you shall not stray after your heart or eyes.” This reiterates the function and power of the mitzvah of *tzitzit*.

The eyes can be an instrument to remember and fulfill the mitzvot, thereby sanctifying their owner. At the same time though, they can cause man to become *tamei* by gazing at forbidden sights. The *Ba'alei Mussar* compare the role of eyesight to radar, pinpointing the enemy's position and determining the site of battle. So too, looking can arouse one's passion to sin. Chazal compare (*Yerushalmi Berachot* 9a) the eyes to a broker who acts as the middleman between a buyer and seller, dealing in illegal merchandise. By seeing immodesty, the eyes provoke one to buy their wares and sell one's soul in exchange for their immoral goods.

It is our responsibility to guard our eyes and protect our souls. Through self-control, one can reach tremendous levels in serving Hashem. Instead of allowing our eyes to roam about and bring us down, we should raise their 'sights' heavenward and extend our range of vision to behold the splendor of the Divine. Through purity of thought and clarity of sight, we can destroy our surrounding *kelippah* of *tumah* and merit being a repository of the Divine presence, creating within ourselves a “Mikdash that I shall dwell within” (*Shemot* 25:8).

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**In Summary**

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- ◆ In describing the Generation of the Flood and their great sins, the pasuk says, “For all flesh had corrupted its way (דרכו) on earth.” The letters דר mean to dwell, and the numerical value of the letters כו is twenty-six, the same as the Four-Letter Name of Hashem. This means that they corrupted their spark of divinity to the core, pushing away Hashem’s presence which dwells within each and every one of us.
- ◆ Man’s connection with Hashem is through the letter of His Name that He places within man, the ׳ that represents the Divine spark of life. It also represents the life force which flows in from the next world. By sinning, one extinguishes that spark and severs his life-giving link with the next world. Chazal extol the virtues of the many tzaddikim who guarded the purity of their thoughts and the clarity of their sight, such as Rabbi Mattia ben Charash who asked to poke out his own eyes, and Palti ben Layish who thrust a sword in the ground between him and his wife Michal.
- ◆ Boaz swore using Hashem’s Name that he would not touch Ruth until legitimately married. He did so in order to keep his impulse to sin at bay. This gave him the strength and protection to shield him from his *Yetzer Hara*. Although one should flee from a similar situation, Boaz acted to deceive the Satan in his crusade against him, convincing the Satan that no future king would ever come from such a union.
- ◆ Moshe asked Hashem why the Torah was not given through Rabbi Akiva. Hashem silenced Moshe and said; this is the way I have determined it to be. This indicates that all of Rabbi Akiva’s achievements were based solely on Moshe’s, and thus it was not possible to transmit the Torah through Rabbi Akiva. When Rabbi Akiva returned home after an absence of twenty-four years, he was followed by twenty four thousand students. He was approached by his wife Rachel who threw herself at his feet. Rabbi Akiva said to his students, leave her for whatever I and you have accomplished in learning is in her merit. It was due to her modesty that she merited a

husband who was a *nitzutz* of Moshe Rabbeinu – her modesty was thus the cornerstone of all of his accomplishments.

- ◆ The Gemara brings a story of one who was tempted to sin but suppressed his desires after the fringes of his *tzitzit* hit him in the face. The eyes can be an instrument to remember and fulfill the mitzvot and sanctify their owner, as it says adjacent to the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, “and you shall see them and remember all of my mitzvot.” At the same time though, they can cause man to become *tamei* by gazing at forbidden sights, as it says, “And you shall not stray after your heart or eyes.”
- ◆ Eyesight is compared to radar which can pinpoint the enemy’s position and determine the site of battle. So too, looking can arouse one’s desires and urge one to sin. Instead of allowing our eyes to roam about and bring us down, we should lift our gaze to behold the splendor of the Divine that dwells within man.



## The Yeshiva – A Place to Grow

*“And Hashem said to Noach, ‘Go into the Ark, you and your whole family, for I have seen your righteousness before me in this generation’”*

*(Bereishit 7:1)*

The *Ba’alei Mussar* say that the safest place to hide from spiritual danger is in a yeshiva. In a sense, it is like the security of the Ark which protected Noach and his family from the Flood. I would like to point out a different facet of this comparison. It is true that the Ark afforded Noach a place of recluse from the mighty waters of the

Flood. On the other hand, it also contained a great deal of responsibility, even being a potential source of danger. The vicious animals almost killed Noach when he once tarried in bringing them their dinner (see *Tanchuma*, 9). Perhaps we can find a similarity between the Ark and a yeshiva in this area as well.

A yeshiva affords its students a safe haven from the prevalent dangers of society that lurk outside its four walls. However, if a *bachur* enters a yeshiva without knowing why he is there, he is at risk. There are some boys who learn Torah as if compelled to by a demon, without any energy or enthusiasm. Their uphill spiritual climb can quickly become a downhill slide. There is no concept in a yeshiva of staying stagnantly still; either one ascends and progresses forward, or one falls, Heaven forbid! A *bachur* who does not take advantage of his time in yeshiva to grow will only develop into a wild animal, wreaking havoc wherever he goes. Because he fails to imbibe the spirit and learning of Torah, he becomes a menace, not only to himself but also to all the boys who surround him.

When *bachurim* return to the yeshiva from *bein hazmanim*, they find their 'disengagement' from material possessions and physical comforts extremely difficult. At home, these same *bachurim* are used to eating full course meals, being exposed to activities which are not related to their studies and undoubtedly much less preoccupied with their learning. Hence their return after an extended period gives them a hard time when they try to acclimate themselves back into the world of the yeshiva. I remember when I was but ten years old and my parents sent me off to learn in yeshiva in France. For seven full years I didn't see my family. At the end of that seven-year stretch, I returned back home to Morocco for a family reunion. I returned to the yeshiva in France only after a short period, but faced with the tremendous difficulty of adjusting back to life in a yeshiva.

I had gotten so used to the comforts of home and my family's royal treatment that I was filled with a desire to leave and contemplated returning home.

My master and teacher Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian zt"l spoke to me warmly, persuading me to stay in the yeshiva. At the same time, the yeshiva began studying a topic which interested me and drew me back into the Beit Hamidrash. Without the words and encouragement of my Rebbi and the pull of that subject matter, who knows where I would be today and what I would be doing.

I once sincerely desired to give encouragement to a righteous convert who lived in France and had strayed off the path of religious observance. On one occasion he visited our Beit Hakeneset on Simchat Torah, the second day of Yom Tov. When I saw him, I was elated at the opportunity and offered him to hold a Sefer Torah. To my surprise, he accepted and began dancing energetically, with heart and soul. Making note of his devotion, I mentioned to him that it is far more important to keep what is written in the Sefer Torah than to dance with it. I specified the mitzvah of Shabbat, explaining the need to rest from work on the seventh day and to keep the laws of Shabbat. After Simchat Torah, the convert returned home and I did not see him for quite some time. One day he showed up in Yerushalayim where I was living at the time, and I seized the moment to stress again the importance of keeping Shabbat. How happy I was to hear that he had already resumed keeping Shabbat in its entirety, accepting my words from day one.

This episode ended on a joyous note, but unfortunately there are many instances where people remain fixed in their ways, even after being shown their mistake. Similarly, every *bachur* is faced with a choice. Either he can strive to grow in Torah learning and *yirat Shamayim*, or he can get stuck in the mud of worldly pursuits and materialistic drives, with an animalistic *kelippah* reigning over him

and hampering any spiritual pursuits. Only if a *bachur* enters the yeshiva interested in improving himself and wanting to sanctify the Name of Hashem will he attain any level of success.

When Noach came out of the Ark, he looked for spiritual opportunities to bring forth Divine favor and to do Hashem's will. This is hinted to by the words (*Bereishit* 8:20), "And Noach built an altar for Hashem." The Hebrew word ויבן (to build) also connotes בינה (understanding). Noach understood that building an altar to Hashem would show man's humbled Divine service and new approach towards life. Yet later on in the parashah, we find that Noach got sidetracked and (*ibid.* 9:20) "began to farm the land." Rashi explains that "Noach profaned himself (by planting the vine) for he should have first engaged in a different sort of planting." We are faced with a difficult question. Noach is described at the beginning of the parashah as a singular righteous man. Later on, Noach leaves the Ark, understanding the importance of building an altar. Afterwards though, he is faulted for acting in a mundane, even profane way, planting a vine and becoming drunk. This change of character is quite puzzling and requires more explanation.

I suggest the following answer. Noach thought that he could continue outside the Ark with the same lifestyle that he had lived within. In truth though, he was mistaken. Life could not continue in the same manner as it had been before the Flood. The Ark provided a temporary haven from the corruption of the generation, momentarily protecting Noach from any trial or tribulation. But upon exiting the Ark, Noach should have searched to protect himself from the dangers of the new era which began after the Flood. Building an altar was the first step in the right direction, and was done still under the influence of life in the Ark. This did not last for long though, and the stimulus to grow and achieve quickly dissipated. Because he did not find the means to inspire himself to

greater achievements, he fell from his high level and became imbued with a more mundane existence.

Unlike Noach, Shem and Ever were able to continue their exalted spirit and Divine inspiration that they absorbed from their year in the Ark. In establishing a yeshiva, they channeled those spiritual powers into its concrete walls. Thus the influence of life in the Ark continued centuries after the mighty waters of the Flood had already dried up.

I remember when I once returned home from the yeshiva and tried to prove to my father of blessed memory, how I could still learn and act as if I was in the yeshiva, even at home. Father zt”l smiled with an expression of some secret understanding which I did not fathom at the time. Looking back, I realize that he was trying to hint to me the difficulty in keeping the pattern and structure of the yeshiva’s spiritual rigor outside of its confines. His suggestive smile indicated that it would be wise to quickly return back to my place in the Beit Hamidrash, if I did not want its spiritual influence to wane.

Chazal bring (*Devarim Rabbah* 11:3) a conversation held between Moshe Rabbeinu and Noach, up Above in the Heavenly Realm. Noach contested that he was greater in stature, as he was instrumental in saving the entire world from utter destruction. Moshe countered that his actions to save Am Yisrael from being annihilated after the sin of the Golden Calf demonstrates his pre-eminence. Said Moshe: I davened to Hashem to spare the whole of the Jewish nation from the impending danger, not just myself. That is why I am greater than you. You succeeded only in extracting your family from the Flood and no one else.

From this dialogue we see that a *bachur’s* personal development and individual learning is not enough. He should shoulder a

responsibility towards other *bachurim* as well, helping the weaker ones in their struggle to master the material and grow in character. By using his strengths and donating his energy to the cause, he follows in the path of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe's concern for all of Am Yisrael led him to pray on their behalf and win them Divine favor. This proved Moshe's superior capacity as a leader as well as his greatness of spirit. Noach on the other hand, did not succeed in saving his generation from their terrible fate.

We should always strive to include others in our personal development and growth. A *bachur's* growth in a yeshiva can be compared to an airplane's ascent. A plane hurtles forward on the runway, only to rise gradually and incrementally in altitude with its load of passengers. So too, after he builds his own character and works on himself, a *bachur* can help others rise with him, step by spiritual step. It is an uphill climb, requiring hard work and constant effort. Only with a slow but steady progression will a *bachur* see results and produce fruits.

Another facet of this analogy is the airplane's constant motion. A plane cannot stop its flight in mid-air without exploding and killing all of its passengers. Likewise, Divine service and learning cannot come to a sudden standstill. Such a withdrawal from one's spiritual activities will only cause an abrupt drop into the abyss of spiritual defection. Chazal teach us (*Avot* 1:2) "On three things the world stands, on Torah, on Divine service, and on kindness to others." Perhaps we can explain this statement to refer to the miniature world of man as well. Only through the synthesis of these three things does a person have any permanent footing. Without integrating *chessed* into a *bachur's* daily schedule; such as helping another *bachur* understand an intricate topic for example, his own learning lacks the foundation needed to endure. A *bachur* in a yeshiva should strive to emulate Moshe Rabbeinu, who didn't

suffice with merely thinking about Am Yisrael – he also took responsibility for their fate and davened for their deliverance, and was thus able to bail them out.

The Gemara (*Berachot* 64a) mentions the reward for those who learn Torah. It says that the one who davens and then immediately returns to his learning, merits to greet the Divine presence. I would point out that the simple explanation of ‘greeting the Divine presence’ is to witness Divine assistance in one’s learning. Without question, Bnei Torah who sit and learn in yeshiva and form their schedule around the fixed times of study and prayer, will merit seeing the Divine presence in the next world. Actually, their prerogative to learn actually becomes their responsibility. The opportunity to utilize every minute of time in spiritual pursuits demands the appropriate response. If a *bachur* ignores his duty to be persistently involved in spiritual matters, he gives room for materialism to rule the roost. He becomes vulnerable to the unsanctified fate that befell Noach, who did not continue the good work he started when building an altar, and thus ended up tilling the ground.

Perhaps we can point to another factor which led to Noach’s eventual earthy, mundane existence. At first, Noach was true to the definition of his name נח (being pleasant), finding favor in the eyes of Hashem and approval in the eyes of man. Yet by building the Ark for so many years, it caused the opposite reaction. As time went on, people became used to seeing Noach and his handiwork and were unimpressed by his words. Instead of moving them to do teshuvah, his actions provoked feelings of scorn. They ridiculed his prophecy that there would be a flood, proving their point by its prolonged construction without any flood in sight. Noach should have been busy traveling from place to place, awakening the masses to their Father in Heaven. This has always been a sign of a righteous leader.

Elkanah would journey from place to place, urging people to go to Yerushalayim for the Festivals (*Kohelet Rabbah* 5:25) as prescribed to by the Torah. Shmuel Hanavi also traveled amongst the people, leaving his home in Rammah to make his rounds and strengthen their Torah observance and *yirat Shamayim* (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:10). The greatest advocate and paragon of peace, Aharon Hakohen, would go from one person to the next, making peace and bringing harmony. So too, Moshe Rabbeinu's unceasing circuit of Am Yisrael to transmit to them the word of Hashem was done out of concern for their spiritual needs.

Noach on the other hand, did not exert himself to move his generation to do teshuvah. He was satisfied to stay in his place, building an Ark over the span of more than a century. This only caused a backlash of scorn and ridicule amongst the masses. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 36:3) find fault in Noach's eventual status as a farmer, pointing to the word ויחל (and he began) to indicate his descent to the level of חולין (preoccupation of the mundane). The Torah is hinting to the consensus of his peers, who saw his inferior ability to influence and inspire them to do teshuvah, despite his virtuous interior and righteous character.

The pasuk says (*Tehillim* 19:6), "And he (the sun) is like a groom exiting his *chuppah*, rejoicing like a warrior, running on its course." I have heard those who ask why it does not compare the sun to the groom who enters his *chuppah*. My reply is that one cannot compare the groom before his wedding to the same groom afterwards. When a groom goes to the *chuppah*, he is still single, filled with high aspirations for building a true Jewish home, but lacking the fundamental quality of stability. After the *chuppah*, he is tempered by the realities of life and accompanied by his new wife, already starting the actual building process together as a married couple. Thus we bless the new couple that they should carry this spirit of

good will and high hopes to fruition, through the test of time and the realities of life. Only if they aim to succeed in this goal can the groom radiate true splendor. This glow of success is what we compare the sun's radiance to.

Perhaps this can also explain Noach's change of character. The entrance into the Ark was done with trepidation, realizing the impending doom about to befall mankind. When the waters ceased and the Flood came to an end, the awe that gripped Noach began to dissipate. His level rapidly deteriorated upon exit, and he began to preoccupy himself with planting a vine and becoming drunk. And so the Torah refers to him as "a man of the earth." Instead, he should have been involved in furthering his spiritual building of character, in order to benefit the new world along with him.

A *bachur* who enters the doors of the yeshiva at the beginning of the *zman* is certainly filled with strong feelings and high aspirations to grow in Torah and *yirat Shamayim*. As a Ben Torah, he should make sure that this spirit should also accompany him when he leaves. The enthusiasm that powers his spiritual climb in the yeshiva should accompany him through *bein hazmanim*, helping him to grow even at home.

Hashem should help us to open our minds to the wisdom of His Torah, enrapture our hearts with His love and imbue it with the Fear of Heaven.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ The *Ba'alei Mussar* say that the yeshiva nowadays is like the Ark which protected Noach and his family from the Flood. I would like to add that similar to the wild animals in the Ark, so too in a yeshiva. A *bachur* who does not desire to learn Torah and grow spiritually in a yeshiva will only develop into a wild animal, wreaking havoc amongst his friends.

- ◆ When *bachurim* return to the yeshiva from *bein hazmanim*, they find the adjustment very difficult. During *bein hazmanim* one is less involved with learning Torah, hence the difficulties in climbing back up the same ascent. Every *bachur* should try his utmost and aspire to greatness.
- ◆ Upon exiting the Ark, Noah also began to ascend in his level of devotion. This is hinted to by the words (*Bereishit* 8:20), “And Noah built an altar for Hashem.” The Hebrew word **וִיבֵן** also connotes understanding. Noah understood that he should build an altar to bring forth Divine favor. Noah however did not find the means to inspire himself to greater achievements and fell from his high level. He became imbued with a more mundane existence, as it says the word **וַיַּחַל** (and he began) which indicates his descent to the level of **חֹלְיִן** (preoccupation of the mundane).
- ◆ Shem and Ever were able to continue their exalted spirit that they absorbed in the Ark. They established a yeshiva and channeled their spiritual powers into its walls, thereby creating a haven for future generations to learn Torah.
- ◆ Chazal bring a conversation held between Moshe Rabbeinu and Noah. Noah contested that he was greater in stature, as he was instrumental in saving the entire world from utter destruction. Moshe countered that his actions to save Am Yisrael from being annihilated after the sin of the Golden Calf shows his pre-eminence. Moshe said: I davened to Hashem that He should spare the whole of the Jewish nation from the impending danger, not just myself. That is why I am greater than you. From this dialogue we see that a person should shoulder responsibility for others. A *bachur* in a yeshiva should help his peers in their struggles.
- ◆ Chazal teach us, “On three things the world stands, on Torah, on Divine service, and on kindness to others.” Perhaps we can explain this statement to refer to the miniature world of man as well. A *bachur* establishes himself based on his Torah and tefillah, and on the chessed he does with his friends.

- ◆ The building of the Ark for so many years caused the opposite reaction of what Noach hoped it would accomplish. Instead of moving people to do teshuvah, people ridiculed Noach's prophecy that there would be a flood, proving their point by its prolonged construction. Noach should have been busy traveling from place to place to arouse the masses to teshuvah as Elkanah and Shmuel Hanavi did.



## The Duration of the Flood

*“For in another seven days I will bring rain upon the earth, for forty days and forty nights. And I will wipe off the face of the earth all living creatures that I have made”*

*(Bereishit 7:4)*

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 32:5) correlates the length of the Flood to the sins of that generation. Said Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, they transgressed the Torah which was given in forty days and forty nights, therefore they were punished by the waters of the Flood for that amount of time. Similarly, they distorted and defaced the features of their offspring by their promiscuity, and by the same measure they were washed away and wiped out of existence.

The Midrash (*ibid.* 32:7) also describes the period of probation they had to change their ways. It says (*Bereishit* 7:10), “And it was after seven days.” This teaches us that Hashem waited another seven days before bringing the Flood. These seven days were actually the period of mourning for Mesushelach who had died. It was no coincidence that he died just before the Flood, for Hashem

was offering them one last chance to do teshuvah. Perhaps the people would take this righteous man's death to heart, and realize that the passing of the last tzaddik of the generation was a sign of their defunct morality.

The people of that era, though, were beyond reproach. On the pasuk (*Bereishit* 7:13) "On that day came Noach," the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 32:8) explains that the emphasis is on Noach entering the Ark in the middle of the day. Had Noach gone into the Ark at nighttime, the people would have claimed that he was powerless to stand up against them. "Let's see him try to evacuate," they said. "We won't let him get away." Hashem's response was, Noach will enter "on that day," in broad daylight; and leave no room for anyone to doubt His power or claim to be able to prevent His decree.

How did Hashem view the Flood? The pasuk (*Bereishit* 7:17) uses the Hebrew word ויהי (and it was) to describe the Flood, "And the Flood was forty days upon the earth." This word generally refers to some distraught feeling. Hashem was sad over their fate. What was there to be sad about the destruction of the wicked? Apparently, Hashem wanted them to do teshuvah and rectify their sins. He wanted them to bring the world back to its preexisting state, the way it had been before they destroyed it. They had the ability to change their lives and save humanity, and instead wasted it away. That is why Hashem found their situation so distressful.

Not only did that generation reject living a Torah's way of life, they failed to keep the few mitzvot given them. They even undermined the very first mitzvah of procreation by their rampant immorality, affecting the whole of Creation as a result. This is hinted to by the words (*ibid.* 6:11) "And the earth became corrupted." The very earth itself became corrupt. It did not produce the right vegetation from the seeds that were planted. Even the animal

kingdom was influenced by their *tumah*, as it is written (ibid. 6:12) “For all flesh had corrupted its way on earth.” Because their actions affected everything that was created in the seven days of Creation, Hashem gave them the seven days of mourning for Mesushelach. It was one last opportunity to rectify their sins. It is well known that the death of a tzaddik can absolve those surrounding him of their sins, as his death urges them to repent (*Mo’ed Katan* 28a). This is represented by the name of מתושלח, which can be rendered מלוש, “his death was sent.” It was a Heavenly sent opportunity to reach out to Hashem. And yet, they rejected Hashem’s offer of teshuvah and paid no attention to His show of grace, preferring their descent into utter oblivion instead.

We can now understand why Noach was given a set of mitzvot after the Flood. They are called the “seven mitzvot of *Bnei Noach*” (see *Sanhedrin* 56b). After Noach’s generation succeeded in corrupting everything which was created in seven days, the world no longer had any redeeming factor or ‘grounds’ to exist. Only by keeping the seven mitzvot would the world now be able to achieve some rectification and merit its existence.

At the beginning, when Adam Harishon served Hashem in Gan Eden and was in His constant presence, the world sufficed on a single mitzvah to keep it in place and turning on its axis. With the proliferation of sin and the descent of humanity, one was simply not enough. The “seven mitzvot of *Bnei Noach*” were given to tide the world through the passage of time and facilitate the preservation of life. Unfortunately, that too was not sufficient, as we find Noach’s descendants breaking down the laws of decency and altering the basic tenets of belief (as seen in the Tower of Babel). Thus it was necessary for Hashem to choose one of the descendants of Noach, an offspring of Shem, to carry out the mission of universal

preservation of mankind. That is why Hashem gave the 613 mitzvot to the descendants of Avraham Avinu.

We merit life only through the performance of the 613 mitzvot. These mitzvot correspond to the organs and sinews in the human body. The 248 limbs correspond to the 248 positive commandments, while the 365 sinews relate to the 365 negative commandments. By observing the mitzvot, we sustain the pulse of life in our bodies and connect our physical being to its spiritual force.

This is also the reason for the various mitzvot and safeguards that the *Chachamim* instituted throughout the generations. Witnessing the decent of their time period, they saw the need to add another fence of protection, one that would preserve man from the element of his own self-destruction. As we listen to their instructions, we become worthy of a continued existence and entitled to live off the merit of their righteous deed.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ The Midrash says that the Flood lasted forty days because the people transgressed the Torah which was given in forty days. The Midrash also says that Hashem waited another seven days before bringing the Flood. These seven days were the period of mourning for Mesushelach who had died. A third Midrash states that Noach entered the Ark in the middle of the day, to counter their argument that had Noach entered by day they would have prevented his evacuation.
- ◆ What reason was there to be sad about the destruction of that wicked generation? Their actions affected the whole of Creation and caused the earth to be corrupt. Why was Hashem so distressed? Hashem wanted them to do teshuvah and to rectify their sins. They had the ability to change their lives and save humanity, and instead wasted it away.

- ◆ The “seven mitzvot of *Bnei Noach*” correspond to the seven days of Creation. By keeping their mitzvot, the earth could have had a basis and merit to exist. Unfortunately, this was not sufficient, as we find Noach’s descendants breaking their laws and disregarding the basic tenets of belief. Thus it was necessary for Hashem to give 613 mitzvot to help preserve mankind from self-destruction. These mitzvot have a direct correlation to the organs and tendons in the human body. By keeping the mitzvot, we become worthy of existing and entitled to live off the merit of their righteous deed.



## Noach Entered the Ark Involuntarily

*“And Noach, his children, his wife and the wives of his children, all entered with him into the Ark ahead of the waters of the Flood”*

*(Bereishit 7:7)*

Rashi writes that Noach was lacking in firm belief. He believed that there would be a Flood and yet doubted that it would come about. This is why he did not enter the Ark until forced to by the rain.

This statement of *Rashi* requires further explanation. We know that the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 108) brings two opinions as to the level of Noach’s righteousness. Although the pasuk describes Noach as a complete tzaddik, one opinion holds that it was only said in reference to his contemporaries. Had Noach lived in a different era, he would not have been held in high regard. Hence we can understand the contention that Noach was not a firm believer. But

according to the opinion that Noach was singularly righteous, even more so than Avraham Avinu, how do we understand his lack of belief?

In a cryptic statement of the Satmar Rebbe, Harav Yoel Teitelbaum zt”l, he writes that Noach believed that there would be a Flood and yet didn’t believe in its actualization. In what way did he not believe in the Flood?

Perhaps we can explain this concept of ‘diluted’ faith with the following story. This story took place when I started my rabbinic career and began to lead a congregation. Almost Heaven sent, three members of the community approached me, one after the other, with their tales of misfortune. Each one had lost a dear loved one in totally unrelated mishaps. After attempting to console them over their losses, I told myself when they left that this whole episode requires me to strengthen my own faith in the One Above.

Automatically, when one hears such tragic events, one’s natural tendency is to begin to doubt and question Divine providence. For example, one of the women involved had lost her husband in a bus explosion on his way to kollel. The initial reaction is to ask the age old question: Is this then the reward for those who learn Torah? Our job though is to accept and believe that everything is Divinely ordained, and not to question why. We learn this from Avraham Avinu, who was told by Hashem to bring his son Yitzchak up on the altar. He was tempted to question Hashem’s command. Hadn’t he been promised (*Bereishit* 21:12) “for in Yitzchak your progeny will continue”? If Avraham were to slaughter Yitzchak, how would Hashem keep His promise? How could Hashem command him to do this? But Avraham did not ask and did not ponder. He went to do what he was told, with complete trust and perfect faith.

Noach's faith lacked this sterling quality. He believed and knew intellectually that Hashem could, and would bring the Flood. But he doubted the actual materialization and ultimate transpiration of a world-wide event of such magnitude. He questioned how Hashem could bring about the destruction of the whole world in one swift blow.

Because Noach did not wholly believe in, or consciously feel the reality of the impending doom, he did not pray to Hashem to prevent it. His lack of belief inhibited him from reacting in the same way that Avraham did when he prayed for Sodom, or from having concern the same way Moshe Rabbeinu had for Am Yisrael after the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe's concerns gave rise to his petition (*Shemot* 32:32) "And if you shall not heed my prayer then please remove me from your book."

This is part of Chazal's general criticism of Noach, that he did not lead the people to teshuvah. It is true that for one hundred and twenty years, Noach campaigned a public display of building the Ark. He responded to inquiries regarding its purpose and necessity with a warning of the Divine retribution awaiting mankind. Yet he did not take matters into his own hands. He did not try to overcome his impassivity and go out to the masses or pray on their behalf. He should have wandered amongst them as well, in the attempt to influence them to do teshuvah and desist from their evil ways. So we find by Shmuel Hanavi, who went from city to city to spread Torah (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:10), and so we learn from Moshe Rabbeinu who did not turn to his own personal needs but (*Shemot* 19:14) "went down from the mountain to the people" straight away. Thus the Flood is called (*Zohar, Chelek* I 67b) "the waters of Noach" in reference to Noach's acquiescence to that generation's cataclysmic end.

### Guarding against chillul Hashem

Perhaps we can suggest another approach why Noach did not enter the Ark of his own accord, why he needed Hashem's rainy 'close down' to give him that final push.

We mentioned the opinion of those who hold that Noach was more righteous than Avraham. According to them, Noach specifically waited until forced indoors, in order for everyone to see the truth of his prophecy. By delaying his entry until the heavy rainfalls began, Noach could show how the will of Hashem was carried out in its entirety. Noach wished to prove that righteous deeds bring about Divine grace, and wicked ways bring on a 'shower' of Divine retribution. Thus Noach acted *l'shem Shamayim*, hoping that the people would do teshuvah in the final hour and abolish the decree.

There was a flaw to this reasoning though. By waiting until Hashem closed the door behind him, Noach gave the wrong impression. Not only did he appear skeptical over the Flood's occurrence, people even took his apparent reservations as permission to disbelieve. That is why the Flood is called "the waters of Noach." His indirect influence shaped their view of the situation. They took a cue from Noach's behavior to bolster their cynicism and strengthen their obstinacy. Perhaps if Noach would have entered right away, before the sky became darkened by the looming clouds, they would have taken their first step towards repentance.

In truth, there were other events which could have stirred them to do teshuvah. Miraculously, animals came from all corners of the globe to find shelter with Noach. Only those animals that did not mate with other species were admitted and granted sanctuary (*Tanchuma Bereishit*, 12). The people also saw the mule (a prime example of forbidden crossbreeding) being denied entry. They had

other opportunities to awaken them from their stupor, had Noach not reinforced their disregard by waiting outside. He gave the impression of doubting his own words about the ensuing Flood, entering the Ark involuntarily and under duress. Had they seen Noach acting on his own words, perhaps they too would have taken everything to heart and accepted the call for teshuvah.

We can a lesson from here to be careful and not let others learn the wrong behavior from us. Certainly those who learn in a Beit Hamidrash should not sit and talk idly in the outside courtyard. It only gives room for an outside observer to criticize all those sitting inside the Beit Hamidrash and say that they do not take their learning seriously. Taking something from another's jacket pocket hanging in the hallway can also be misconstrued as stealing, even if granted permission to do so by its owner. Any act which can lead others to claim a precedent and learn the wrong behavior is included in the category of *chillul Hashem*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Noach did not enter the Ark of his own accord. He needed Hashem to push him into it by bringing the rain and sealing the door of the Ark after him. According to the opinion that Noach was more righteous than Avraham, why was he so full of doubt?
- ◆ The Rebbe of Satmar wrote that Noach believed in, but did not fully believe in the Flood.
- ◆ His diluted faith was actually a failure to picture the Flood's actual materialization; not consciously feeling the reality of the impending doom. His lack of belief inhibited him from praying for his generation or wandering amongst them to inspire them to do teshuvah.
- ◆ Perhaps another explanation is that Noach acted *l'shem Shamayim*. He wanted to show that his entry was due solely to the Flood, as a reward

for doing righteous deeds, while they were being punished for their sinful ways. Yet Noah was mistaken. The people's disregard was only reinforced by his apparent delay. Their impression was that Noah doubted his own words about the ensuing Flood and entered the Ark involuntarily and under duress. This is why the Flood is referred to as "the waters of Noah."

- ◆ Every person should take care that his actions should not give room for others to misconstrue them or learn improper behavior and thereby bring about a *chillul* Hashem.



## Combating Passion and Desire with Torah

*“And Hashem remembered Noah and all of the wild and domesticated animals with him in the Ark, and Hashem caused a current of air to move over the earth and so the waters came to rest”*

*(Bereishit 8:1)*

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 7) compares the words וישוכו המים (and the waters came to rest) with the appeasement of anger, as it says (*Esther* 7:10) וחמת המלך שככה (and the King's anger was pacified). According to this Midrash, Hashem remembered Noah and caused the waters of the Flood to be cooled down. They had actually been boiling hot, similar to a seething, almost scalding fit of anger. Said Rav, “They sinned with the attribute of heat (passionate desire), and were therefore punished with heat.” Human

desire is compared to fire, and their desires were aflame with sin. Thus the intense heat of the waters of the Flood was their fitting Divine retribution. Their rage for self-gratification and sensual desires also tore at the Name of Hashem from which the world was created. We need to be careful in these areas of moral conduct and *kedushah* and not corrupt the earth with illicit behavior or improper thoughts.

There is much that we can learn from the cautious measures and protective hedges against passion and desire that our teachers had in previous generations.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 81a) relates a story about Rav Amram Chassida. Once, a group of redeemed female captives found shelter in his house in Nehardaya. Wary of being caught in a situation which would be considered *yichud*, he lodged them in the attic and had the heavy ladder leading up to it removed at the beginning of the night. In middle of the night though, Rav Amram grabbed hold of the ladder (which ordinarily required ten men to move), and single-handedly placed it upright. Halfway up the ladder, Rav Amram took hold of himself and began to shout, "There is a fire in the house of Amram!" The uproar that followed brought his talmidim running to save the day, only to find Rav Amram himself at the scene of the 'crime.' Absent of any fire, they realized that the shouts were but a ploy to subdue his evil inclination and save him from sin. They complained about the ensuing embarrassment caused by his urgent appeal for help. He replied with his guiding principle for life: It is far better to be embarrassed in this world than to be eternally shamed in the next. It is apropos that Rav Amram used a cry of fire to save his skin, as the desire to sin is compared to a raging fire, ready to devour and scorch everything in its hedonistic path.

### The fire of passion destroys shalom bayit

A couple once came to me, distraught over their lack of *shalom bayit*. I asked both the wife and the husband how they viewed each other. Both replied that they saw good, even unique traits in their spouse. I told them that if such is the case, the reason for their lack of *shalom bayit* has to do with gazing at forbidden sights and arousing one's passion to sin. By looking at immodesty and thinking promiscuous thoughts, one affects the Name of Hashem that is associated with each person.

There is an etymological source for this. The Gemara says that if a husband and wife act virtuously, the *Shechinah* comes to rest between them. The letter ך from the שׁן bonds with the letter ה from the הן and forms the word ה-י, the Name of Hashem. If they are unworthy though, these letters fade away. What is left of the couple and their former characterization is but the letters שן, and so fire erupts between them and scorches their marriage. This shows the direct correlation between the fire of desire and the ensuing blaze of contention.

To elaborate, we find an argument about how one should dance at a wedding and gladden the heart of the bride. It says (*Ketubot* 17a) “*Beit Shammai* said, we say before the *kallah* appropriate praises, according to her nature. *Beit Hillel* said, we praise her by saying *kallah na'eh ve'chassudah*.” This is the opinion prescribed in halachah (see *Tur Even Ha'ezer*, 65). Why is the method of praise so important that it warrants a halachic dispute and adjudication?

The purpose of marriage is to build a house worthy of Hashem's *Shechinah*, a mini-sanctuary for the Divine presence to rest within. This is hinted to by the pasuk (*Shemot* 25:8) “And you shall make for me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell within you.” The use of the words “within you” (instead of “within it”) hints at this idea, for it

alludes to the *Shechinah's* dwelling within each and every person (*Alshich*). As mentioned before, every man and woman has a letter from Hashem's Name associated with their own. There is even a reference in the Torah where the word **שׂוֹרֵר** is used to describe Hashem Himself, as it says (*Shemot* 15:3), "Hashem is a man of war." Thus every couple contains the spark of the Divine already within them from birth. A good marriage brings out its luster and shine to its radiant splendor.

The bond of marriage is legally created when the husband places the ring on his wife's finger. The Hebrew word for hand is **יָד**, and has the numerical value of fourteen. Each spouse uses their hand (equaling fourteen) to reach out to the other. This procedure binds the other spouse to them and brings the total to fifteen. And fifteen is the numerical value of Hashem's Name **יהוה**. Here we see the deep symbolism of a Jewish marriage and the meaningful significance behind one of its ceremonies.

The start of this life-long bond between the **שׂוֹרֵר** and the **הַשֵּׁרֵר** thus calls for the proper atmosphere and one's best behavior. This is why the *Chachamim* were so deliberate about how one should dance at a Jewish wedding. It is so important to lay the right foundation for the couple to build their home on. Improper dancing or gazing only chase away the Divine presence and prevent the *chatan* and *kallah* from creating their sanctuary and filling it with that radiant splendor.

### **Guarding one's eyes requires constant vigilance and self control**

When the Chofetz Chaim was advanced in years, he found the walk from his home to the yeshiva difficult. Occasionally he rested

along the way, and was served tea. Once, when he was brought tea by a woman, the Chofetz Chaim began to cry out loud. His talmidim asked him what was bothering him and he said: “Why did you allow her to bring me the tea, did you want to give me a stumbling block?” The talmidim didn’t understand. “The Rebbe is old and the woman who poured you the tea is also old, what is there to worry about?” they said. The Chofetz Chaim answered, “In the eyes of the *Yetzer Hara*, I am still young and so is she.”

In today’s day and age, the tests of life are great. Materialism and hedonism are rampant. The *Yetzer Hara* stakes his claim and holds his sway over most of humanity. When I was little, we lived in the small village of Osverra in Morocco. There was no landmark or prominent feature other than the Beit Hakeneset. I remember when the first person brought a freezer, one which even produced ice, to our village. The excitement was so great that people lined up all day long to see the miraculous invention. Today, everyone has refrigerators and freezers. And they are stocked full of goodies and replete with contraptions. The *Yetzer Hara* has broadened his field of activity and upgraded his tactics. This requires more diligence on our part, not to be enticed by his wares or snared by his lure.

Several years ago, when Eretz Yisrael was embroiled in a war, I picked up a newspaper to find out some news of its welfare. As I passed by a gas station, my eyes looked up to see a woman newscaster on television reporting the news. Immediately, I turned my gaze away from her profile. A month later, back in Leon, I was in middle of *Shemoneh Esrei* and her image flashed before my eyes. This is real *mussar* for us; how impressionable we are, and how much we need to be careful and guard our eyes from indecent images.

### Learning Torah renews our bond with Hashem

The best way to combat the *Yetzer Hara* is by learning Torah. When we fortify ourselves through learning Torah, we also help to preserve the world. As the Gemara says (*Berachot* 8a) “Hashem has nothing else in the world save the four *amot* of halachah.”

This needs a bit of explanation. By what merit does the rest of the world, outside of those four *amot*, exist? What is their connection to Hashem? In truth, it is a misperception to think that learning Torah bonds only the one who learns it with Hashem. The converse is the correct view. His ‘four *amot* of halachah’ give the whole temporal world its attachment to the upper worlds. Our world was created with the letter ה from Hashem’s Name, and the upper worlds are represented by the letter י from Hashem’s Name. It is the Torah which joins the two letters together and bridges the gap between these worlds. Thus Torah preserves the existence of Creation, and those who learn Torah help sustain its pulse of life. Even more, the numerical value of מֵאָה (45) is equal to the numerical value of Hashem’s Name ה-ו-ה-י, when its letters are enunciated and spelled out as (6=א=ה=ה, 12=ו=ו=ו, 6=א=ה=ה, 20=י=י=י). This is why man, through learning Torah, has such tremendous potential to bring together the Name of Hashem and unify all of Creation.

It is important to remember that we can connect to Torah even in our time. We can keep the world going, despite our inferior level and smaller stature when compared with that of the previous generations. For us, one hour of learning Torah, in a generation fraught with temptation and abounding with distractions, is worth the equivalent of one hundred hours of theirs.

I once visited my master and teacher Harav Chaim Shmuel Lopian zt”l. In the middle of our conversation he gave a deep groan of pain. I asked the Rav what was wrong, and he said that he had terrible

pain in his back. When he groaned again, I asked him what bothered him now. He answered that his teeth and feet ached him tremendously. He constantly suffered from pain. I asked him how he could learn Torah amidst all of his afflictions and debilitating pain. He told me that when he sits down to learn and begins to delve into the depths of halachah, all of his pain vanishes. This was due to his deep involvement in learning Torah and tight connection to it.

We saw with our own eyes how one who is bound up in learning could actually detach himself from physical discomfort and agonizing pain. How he could be so attached to his pursuit of the hereafter, even as he existed bodily here on earth. By harnessing the power of Torah and connecting oneself to its way of life, one can preserve the upper worlds and the world below. We need but to strengthen ourselves and link in to that force of Torah, which binds all of Creation together and keeps it going on its path towards destiny.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Rav Amram Chassida once embarrassed himself and shouted “Fire!” as a ploy to save himself from sin and to subdue his evil inclination. He explained that it is far better to be embarrassed in this world than to be eternally shamed in the next. Rav Amram cried fire because the desire to sin is compared to a raging fire, ready to devour and scorch everything in its hedonistic path.
- ◆ The Midrash states that the Generation of the Flood was punished with boiling water in retribution for their sins. This refers to the sin of illicit behavior and immoral conduct. Human desire is compared to fire, and their desires were inflamed with sin. Thus the intense heat of the waters of the Flood was their fitting Divine retribution.
- ◆ We say “*kallah na’eh vechassudah*” and are deliberate on how we dance and gladden the bride. This is to prevent us from having immoral

thoughts and improper gazing, which only chase away the Divine presence and prevent the *chatan* and *kallah* from being able to create their mini-sanctuary and fill it with the *Shechinah's* radiant splendor.

- ◆ The bond of marriage legally created when the husband places the ring on his wife's finger contains a deep symbolism. The Hebrew word for hand is **י** and has the numerical value of fourteen. Each spouse uses their hand (equaling fourteen) to reach out to the other, connecting the other spouse to them by this procedure and thereby bringing the total to fifteen. And fifteen is the numerical value of Hashem's Name **יהוה**.
- ◆ The Torah binds the two letters of Hashem's Name, the **ה** which represents our temporal world and the upper worlds which are represented by the letter **י**, and bridges the gap between them. Thus Torah preserves the existence of Creation, and those who learn Torah help sustain its pulse of life.



## The Power of Unity

*“And he sent the raven out and it went back and forth until the water dried up from the land”*

*(Bereishit 8:7)*

When the waters of the Flood receded and the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, Noach sent the raven to check out the situation and look for dry land. Rashi explains that the raven “went back and forth”; he circled round the Ark and did not turn to see the inhabitable condition of the earth. Continues Rashi, the raven was distrustful of Noach and even cast suspicion on his true

motives for sending him away. He also worried over the future of his spouse. He complained to Noach that were he to die, she would have no recourse than to mate with a different species, being that they were the only pair of ravens left in the world. This would be a regression to the ways of the Generation of the Flood. That is why the raven did not carry out his job.

Noach did not press the issue and sent the dove instead. Hashem reinforced the raven's refusal by telling Noach that the raven was needed for a different task, to be a courier in the days of Eliyahu Hanavi. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Noach*, 8) says that during a severe drought, the ravens sustained Eliyahu by bringing him bread and meat (as written in *Melachim I* 17:4). Hence, the right occasion for the raven's flight of merit and errand of mercy had not yet arrived.

We are puzzled by a few questions. Why does Noach go to the trouble of sending the raven to find dry land? Why not wait for Hashem's signal that the coast was clear? And even after Hashem tells Noach about His future plans for the raven, Noach continues by sending the dove on the very same mission. Why? Even more puzzling, asks the Sanzer Rebbe, is why couldn't the raven carry out both missions, Noach's and Eliyahu's?

To answer these questions, let us first explain the importance of having a partner to share one's life. The Gemara (*Ta'anit* 23a) describes the anguish that Choni Hama'agel had when he woke up from a Heavenly-induced hibernation. After sleeping miraculously for seventy years, Choni felt lost and forlorn when he realized that the world no longer recognized him for who he was. In desperation, he prayed for his demise, so painful were his feelings of being alone. Every person needs their friends; "Either a *chavruta* or death," says the Gemara (*ibid.*). Without friends, the lack of sociality and companionship is tantamount to being non-existent, a living death.

This is especially true when it comes to learning Torah. A *chavruta* broadens the horizons of the mind and invigorates one's spirit with new life. In some ways, learning by oneself doesn't even come close to learning with a *chavruta*. Partners in learning give each other the dexterity to ask and the freedom to discover new approaches and deeper understanding, things which they wouldn't have come to on their own.

My master and teacher Harav Betzalel Rackow zt"l explained a Mishnah in Pirkei Avot based on this concept. The Mishnah (*Avot* 1:1) says והעמידו תלמידים הרבה, "And you should bring up ample talmidim." He explained that the Mishnah is not referring to the amount of talmidim but rather to their abundant qualities. The Rav should concentrate on producing individuals of stature, abounding with Torah and fear of Heaven and brimming with good *middot*. We can add to this thought by pointing out the *gematria* of the first letters of these words, והעמידו תלמידים הרבה (412, after adding one for including the subject at hand) is equivalent to the *gematria* of בית (a home). A home is worthy of its name only when stocked with the necessary basics. Four walls of stark emptiness do not classify a structure as a home. Similarly, a talmid is one who can be filled with the essential ingredients that create a worthy receptacle for the *Shechinah* to find lodging. One of the greatest tools for creating those qualities in a talmid is a good *chavruta*. Learning with a *chavruta* opens one's eyes and puts one on his feet. By giving the talmid the opportunity to grow in learning, a Rav helps create the 'home' for the *Shechinah* to rest within.

Perhaps even greater than the intellectual growth is the spirit of comradeship that learning with a *chavruta* fosters. Besides the personal growth and advancement of each individual *chavruta*, there is tremendous power to the bond of unity created when learning with a partner. As an example, we can look at the dissolution of

society in the Era of the Dispersion. The people rallied together at first, building one of the wonders of the world, the Tower of Babel which reached up to the heavens. Although their intentions were evil, their unity gave them great power and success. Hashem saw their rejection of His sovereignty as well as their diabolical desires, and took action. He confused them by mixing up their languages, automatically preventing open communication and comradeship between the people. Lacking any solidarity, they quickly deteriorated from a belligerent rabble into social rubble, losing all of their hard-earned success.

The power of unity is hinted at in the words of *Kriyat Shema*. After we proclaim Hashem's unity (ה' אחד) we continue with the following words of ואהבת את ה' אלהיך (*Devarim* 6:4-5). Through unity one can come to the powerful feeling of love.

Noach understood that this lack of unity is what caused the Flood. When someone in that generation would see something he wanted, he had no qualms taking it for himself. They acted as if it belonged to them all along. They would grab everything from each other just as we grab today a bite to eat. As it says (*Bereishit* 6:11), "And the earth became full of theft." It was their complete anarchy, caused by a lack of unity and a breakdown of brotherhood, which sank their boat.

This is why Noach sent the raven to find dry land. The Hebrew word for raven (עורב) is similar to the word for a guarantor (ערב); one who bails his friend out and provides security for a loan. This is also the meaning behind the Gemara (*Shavuot* 39a) "All of Am Yisrael are ערבים for one another," as they are guarantors on, and provide security for each other. Noach didn't wait for Hashem to tell him when to leave the Ark. He chose to send out the 'עורב', the raven, in order to demonstrate to all future generations the need for

solidarity and the power of unity. Noach was showing us that without unity, man would once more be swept away by the tidal waves of unlawful impropriation only to drown in the sea of dissonance.

Noach was not content with his attempt to send the raven, since he saw that it did not fully portray or convey his message of unity. He sought another way to show the world its importance and sent the dove. The dove is known for its fidelity to its spouse. The Gemara (*Berachot* 53b) compares *Kenesset Yisrael* with the dove for this reason. The words *Kenesset Yisrael* means the gathering together of Israel and their identification with each other. It is from this episode that the dove became the universal symbol of peace and harmony.

The raven was not willing to go and leave his mate behind. He knew that the Flood had come because of the generation's lawlessness and promiscuity. He worried over the fate of his spouse were he not to return. He did not want to die and have his spouse degenerate and mate with another species. This is why he refused to do Noach's bidding. Once Hashem saw the raven's worthy intentions, He set aside a different task for him to do.

This also answers the question of the Sanzer Rebbe, why the raven couldn't carry out both missions, Noach's and Eliyahu's. The answer is because he was too worried over his fate and the fate of his spouse.

We see from here how much even the birds and animals understood the cause of the Flood, why the world was washed away. They understood the rules that the world needs in order to run its course, unlike Cham who sinned in this area and had relations in the Ark.

During the days of Achav, Hashem specifically sent the ravens to bring food for Eliyahu Hanavi who was in hiding. The food they

brought actually came from Achav's kitchen. Hashem used the עורב to be his messenger in order to show Eliyahu the ערבות (solidarity) which existed amongst the Jews. What better way to demonstrate this than by sending the raven who once displayed this virtue, and whose name reflects this very quality, with food from the King himself?

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 26:2) describes how, despite the wickedness of Achav and his influence over the people, they would constantly win wars and defeat their enemies. This is attributed to the unity and harmony between the Jews in his kingdom, and demonstrated by the story with the prophets that hid from his wicked wife, Izevel. After Izevel finished killing any *Navi* that she could lay her hands on, Ovadiah hid the remaining one hundred prophets and fed them scraps from the royal kitchen. Even though Ovadia's actions were well-known, not a single member of the palace breathed one word to Achav or Izevel. This was due to their spirit of comradeship and feeling of unity. It was this same virtue which protected the armies of Achav and propelled them to victory, despite their idolatrous failings. Their triumphs exceeded those of David Hamelech, as his people were not as solidly and fraternally united.

In that same time period, a terrible drought took place. Eliyahu went to find recluse in the desert, and Hashem sent the ravens with food to provide him with nourishment. The ravens actually filched food from Achav's palace. Hashem sent him his food in this manner in order to show him the mutual cooperation and unity amongst Am Yisrael. This was actually in response to Eliyahu's accusations against Klal Yisrael and their evil ways. Hashem was giving a veiled hint for Eliyahu to acknowledge their good qualities and desist from acting as their prosecutor.

For this reason, Hashem provided Eliyahu Hanavi with food from Achav rather than from the palace of King Yehoshafat (the king of the tribes of Yehudah and Binyamin) who was known for his righteousness and high standards of *kashrut*. (This is the opinion of the Gemara in *Chulin* 5a; the Midrash in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 23:9 states the opposite – that the food was from Yehoshafat’s palace.) Obviously, there are halachot which would ordinarily prohibit us from relying on birds to bring us food. Tosafot points out the issue of meat which is removed from eyesight (see *Yoreh De’ah*, 63). The Gemara explains that he ate only after given the Divine understanding that it was kosher. Here was another hint from Hashem to show Eliyahu their virtue. The nation had sinned, but they were still a worthy people, with high standards. Even the sinful King Achav adhered to a high standard of *kashrut*. As their *Navi*, Eliyahu should have also considered their merits and touted their virtues.

Out of righteous indignation and zealousness for Hashem’s honor, Eliyahu could not bring himself to tolerate their idolatrous backsliding. He could only accuse them and lament on their worship of the *Ba’al*. When Hashem saw how much he was pained by their situation, He decided that the time had come to remove Eliyahu from office. A *Navi* who doesn’t find any merit in Hashem’s people is not fit for the job. The *Ben Ish Chai* reveals to us Eliyahu’s eventual rectification. Hashem sends Eliyahu Hanavi to be present at every *brit milah* made in Am Yisrael. Even a *brit* performed by a father who abandoned his religious observance is rewarded by a visit from Eliyahu Hanavi. This is the fitting reparation for his condemnations. He can now give a good report on the observance of all Jews and their insistence on performing the mitzvah of *brit milah*.

We can take a lesson from the raven and learn about the importance of ערבות and unity in the eyes of Hashem. So long as Am Yisrael has solidarity and mutual understanding, they can win wars and defeat their enemies. Hashem will tolerate us if we tolerate each other. It is when man breaks the bonds of brotherhood and disregards the laws of rightful property and righteous propriety, that the world loses merit in Hashem's eyes and waives its right to exist.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ After the Flood, when the Ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat, Noach sent the raven to look for dry land. The raven did not accede to be his messenger. Rashi explains that the raven was worried over the future of his spouse. Perhaps she would have no recourse than to mate with a different species. Noach thereby sent the dove instead.
- ◆ Hashem reinforced the raven's refusal by telling Noach that the raven was needed for a different task in the days of Eliyahu Hanavi. Why does Noach send the raven and not wait for Hashem's signal to leave the Ark? Why does Noach continue by sending the dove? Even more puzzling, asks the Sanzer Rebbe, is why couldn't the raven carry out both missions?
- ◆ Every person needs their friends; "Either a *chavruta* or death." A *chavruta* broadens the horizons of the mind and invigorates one with new life. Besides the personal growth of each individual *chavruta*, there is a tremendous power to the bond of unity created when learning with a partner. With this force, one can build towers reaching up to the heavens. Although their intentions were evil, the unity of the Era of the Dispersion gave them great power and success, until Hashem mixed up their languages.
- ◆ This lack of unity is what caused the Flood. They grabbed each others' money and their wives, acting as if they were theirs. This is why Noach sent the raven to find dry land. The Hebrew word for raven (עורב) is

similar to the word for a guarantor (ערב). Noach wanted to demonstrate the world's need for solidarity and support by sending the עורב on his mission. Without unity, man would once more be swept away by the tidal waves of unlawful impropriation. This is why he did not wait for Hashem to tell him that it was time to leave the Ark.

- ◆ This is also why the raven refused to do Noach's bidding. He worried over the fate of his spouse. He did not want to die and have his spouse degenerate by mating with another species. Noach sent the dove instead. *Kenesset Yisrael* is compared to a dove. The very term *Kenesset Yisrael* means 'the gathering together of Israel' and their identification with each other, resembles the trait of the dove. This was Noach's way of showing the power of unity to all future generations.
- ◆ Hashem sent Eliyahu food with the ravens, in order to show him the mutual cooperation and unity amongst Am Yisrael. This was also a veiled hint for Eliyahu to acknowledge their good qualities and desist from acting as their prosecutor.
- ◆ Despite the wickedness of Achav and his influence over the people, they would constantly win wars and defeat their enemies. This is attributed to the unity and harmony between the Jews. Yet, Eliyahu could not bring himself to tolerate their idolatrous backsliding. He was thus removed from his position as their *Navi*. Eliyahu's rectification is to be present at every *brit milah*, even one where the father has abandoned his religious observance. He can now give a good report on the Jews and their insistence on performing the mitzvah of *brit milah*. We can take a lesson from the raven and learn about ערבות and the importance of unity in the eyes of Hashem.



## Noach and the Raven

*“And he sent the raven out and it went back and forth until the water dried up from the land”*

*(Bereishit 8:7)*

We can learn an important principle from the *shelichut* of the raven. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Noach*, 8) says that the raven did not want to go on his mission to find dry land. The raven contested that Noach chose him simply because he was dispensable, being a *tamei* bird that could not be eaten by man or brought upon the altar as a *korban*. Noach however insisted on sending the raven despite his objections. Seeing that he had no choice, the raven went round the Ark without doing his appointed task. Hashem then told Noach to take the raven back into the Ark, as he would be needed in the future. Eliyahu Hanavi would one day be hiding out and need the service of the ravens. And so Noach allowed the raven to return.

What is puzzling is why did Hashem tell Noach to take back the raven? Why not tell the raven to do two both missions? This question was also asked by the Sanzer Rebbe zt”l.

Many are familiar with the concept that an angel is not given two tasks to accomplish (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 50:2). Man is different from an angel in this regard. Man can accomplish many tasks or perform a number of mitzvot all at the same time. One can wear tefillin and *tzitzit* and be learning, all at once. Hashem endowed us with the tremendous capability to do different things simultaneously. We may look at someone just sitting and learning and not realize that he has a hand in the upkeep of the world, as it

says (*Yirmeyahu* 33:25) “If not for my covenant (of Torah) day and night, I would not have placed the Heavens and Earth upon their course.” His learning gives him a share in all good deeds and every breath of life which take place on earth.

Hashem told Noach that the raven does not have the same capabilities as man. The one mission that he will do for Eliyahu is enough for him. Don’t expect him to do more than that. Conversely, we have to realize that our potential as human beings to do more, also implies a responsibility to do more. Because we can uphold the world with our learning, this obligates us to be careful with our time. We cannot afford to squander away our heaven-sent opportunity or spiritual power to fortify the world.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 108b) mentions that Noach was forbidden to have marital relations while in the Ark. This is hinted to by the pasuk (*Bereishit* 6:18) “And you shall enter the Ark, you and your sons; your wife and their wives with you,” which places the spouses in separate injunctions. So the *Chachamim* explain how the command to enter the Ark indicates this marital prohibition. Only after the Flood did Hashem command them to leave the Ark as couples, as it says (*Bereishit* 8:16), “You and your wife, your sons and their wives,” thus permitting them to engage once more in procreation.

Why was Noach prohibited? The Midrash (*Aggadat Bereishit*, 7) says that Hashem forbade relations because the world was suffering from the Flood. This answer begs the question; why suffer because of the destruction of the wicked? They got what they deserved, their punishment fit the crime. It was not for no small reason that they were wiped out with a world-wide flood. Chazal describe how their lawlessness and promiscuity affected the very fabric of Creation. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 108a) says on the pasuk (*Bereishit* 6:12) “For all flesh have corrupted their way on earth,” that even the birds and

animals mated with other species, influenced by man's actions. They corrupted the plant kingdom and their genera as well. This is learned from the literal translation of (ibid. 6:11) "and the earth became corrupt." Man would plant one species and a different species would grow.

As an example of how far gone they were, the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 32:8) points out their impious remarks against Hashem. They threatened Noach that if he would try to enter the Ark, they would prevent him and smash it to pieces. Their blasphemous threats ended with Hashem telling Noach to enter in midday, showing their inefficacy and thwarting their coup. The Torah though, doesn't need to tell us the extent of their evil for the sake of it, for the benefit of our knowledge. It is written in order to teach us a lesson about the ways of Hashem.

Even after they saw the building of the Ark and the death of Mesushelach, they still scorned and rejected everything good and holy. How did they sink to such a low level? Why did they not awaken from their stupor? Normally, one who sins still harbors a spark within that can be ignited and aroused to teshuvah. Their evil ways extinguished the last vestiges of that Divine spark. They lost their *tzelem Elokim*, the image of G-d with which mankind is endowed. By acting licentiously, they aroused the wrath of Hashem to the extent that He wanted to 'forget' about His world and blot them out of existence. This explains why later on it says (*Bereishit* 8:1), "And Hashem remembered Noach"; which implies that until then Hashem forgot him, so to speak. It was mankind's path of wanton corruption which led them to be blocked out of mind and buried deep undersea.

Such evil truly deserves Divine punishment. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 33:1) explains the pasuk (*Tehillim* 36:7) "Your righteousness is great like the mighty mountains; your judgments

are deep like the vast depths of the sea.” Said Rabbi Yishmael, the tzaddikim who accepted the Torah which was given on a high mountain are righteously rewarded with a towering compensation. The wicked who did not accept the Torah, are punished by the depths of Divine Judgment. How much more so did the Generation of the Flood deserve a fitting retribution for being so evil to the very core of their being.

Which brings us back to our question; why should Noach have been distressed over their death and prohibited from procreation? Didn't we learn that “with the loss of reshaim comes joy” (*Mishlei* 11:10)? True, on the death of the Egyptians, the Heavenly Angels wanted to sing *shirah* and Hashem did not allow them to do so (see *Megillah* 10b). This however is due to the few instances where the Egyptians recognized Hashem's hand in their misfortune, and they pointed to (*Shemot* 8:15) “the finger of Hashem.” Even Pharaoh confessed (*ibid.* 9:27) “Hashem is the righteous one.” This explains the Divine dispensation not to sing *shirah* on their demise. Yet the Generation of the Flood were so evil that even when they saw the Flood coming and realized that their time was up, they still denied Hashem and refused to do teshuvah. Perhaps it would have been worthy to sing *shirah* over their punishment. Why then did Noach have to suffer on their account?

In order to answer this question, let us look at what Chazal say about Noach. The pasuk says (*Bereishit* 6:9), “Noach was a righteous man, complete in all his generations.” Rashi brings an argument between those who understand these words to be in favor of Noach, and those who find fault with Noach. Those who see these words in favor of Noach, say that if Noach was a tzaddik in a generation filled with reshaim, how much more so would he have been in a generation of tzaddikim. Whereas those who do not see Noach in such a favorable light explain that had Noach lived in a different

generation, he would not have been on the same level as other tzaddikim. He was righteous in his generations, only when compared with the resham of his era.

This requires a bit of explanation. We know that Noach was unquestionably righteous, building an Ark for one hundred and twenty years despite the ridicule and scorn of his contemporaries. He worked continuously and with tremendous self-sacrifice, undaunted by their jeers and oblivious to their derision. Where do some *Chachamim* see any shortcoming? Why is the Flood known also as 'the waters of Noach' (*Zohar, Chelek I 67b*), almost as if he was responsible for it, or at least could have prevented it from happening?

We see from here an important principle. Although Hashem does not demand from us the impossible or expect us to accomplish beyond our capabilities, He does expect us to do all that we can do. A person should use all of his abilities and not let them lie dormant, as they were given to him for the purpose of serving Hashem. This, we shall soon see, is the reason for their criticism of Noach. Moshe Rabbeinu became the leader of Am Yisrael and merited transmitting the Torah for all future generations. How did he merit such greatness? He recognized his strong points and used them selflessly for Am Yisrael. As a prelude to this, the Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah 2:2*) describes how Moshe watched over the sheep of his father-in-law in the desert. Once he noticed the absence of a lamb and went searching for it immediately. After observing Moshe's care and concern, Hashem said, "You are attentive to each sheep in your care; you are fit to watch over my sheep as well. You will be a trustworthy shepherd for leading Am Israel."

Similarly, David Hamelech was anointed as King shortly after he revealed his selfless devotion to his father's sheep. The pasuk says (*Shmuel I, 17:35-36*), "And I went after the lion and smote him... the

lion and the bear your servant has struck.” Every person is endowed with great powers and latent capabilities. Hashem asks us to develop these dormant powers and use them in His service. This is what happened with Moshe Rabbeinu and David Hamelech. They uncovered their hidden potential and displayed tremendous self-sacrifice for each sheep, and were thus privileged to use those strengths in leading the flock of Israel.

Noach on the other hand, was lacking in this area. True, it wasn't easy to spend one hundred and twenty years building the Ark and explaining its purpose. But Noach could have done more. He could have made it his responsibility to go to the people and inspire them to teshuvah. He could have beseeched the Al-mighty for compassion, to forgive them for their sins. He had tremendous capabilities that could have been used to influence his generation. This is the claim against Noach. He was a great man with great powers. If only he would have tried harder to speak to the people. Because he squandered his potential and stunted on his outreach, the Flood was named after him, 'the waters of Noach.'

With this, we can understand what happened when Noach exited the Ark. The Midrash says that Noach began to cry when he saw the utter desolation. Hashem asked him why he was crying, and Noach replied that he was crying at the destruction of the world. Hashem answered: Now it's too late. You should have cried before the Flood and realized the import of its decree of 'liquidation.' Had Noach cried then, perhaps the Flood would have been averted. Being that he lost his opportunity, Hashem forbade procreation for Noach while he was in the Ark.

Perhaps we can add another connection between Noach's prohibition and his previous actions. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 19b) tells us that one who teaches the son of a friend is as if he bore him. Had Noach gone to the people and influenced them to change their

ways, they would have been considered his 'children.' He would have been credited with giving them new life. However, since he did not put himself out for their spiritual needs, he was temporarily forbidden to bring new children into the world.

How important it is to know one's strengths and to develop them. One should always be aware of what one is capable of and where one is holding. Only then he can know what is expected of him and where to put his efforts. Had the Generation of the Flood been attuned to their situation, they would have seen what was coming. They sinned with their body which is mostly composed of water and is constantly warmed by body heat, and so Hashem sentenced all flesh with a deluge of water and the element of heat. If we pay attention to the Divine acts of retribution and the Heavenly interplay in our lives, we can motivate ourselves to mend our actions. Couple this with developing our hidden strengths and unleashing the power of our dormant potential, and we will be on our way to eternal life.

### **In Summary**

- ◆ The raven was not held responsible to do more than one mission. Man, on the other hand, can accomplish many tasks or perform a number of mitzvot all at the same time. We have to realize that our potential as human beings to do more also implies a responsibility to do more.
- ◆ Noach was forbidden to have relations in the Ark. The Midrash says that the world was in a state of suffering due to the Flood. What was there to suffer over the destruction of the wicked?
- ◆ There are those *Chachamim* who state, that given his abilities, Noach could have influenced his generation to do teshuvah. This is why he was held accountable and prohibited from procreation in the Ark. Additionally, had he reached out and won them over, he would have been credited with giving them new life, akin to bearing them as his children.

- ◆ This is what happened with Moshe Rabbeinu and David Hamelech. They uncovered their hidden potential and displayed tremendous self-sacrifice for each sheep in their flock. This is why they became leaders of Hashem's nation. They developed and used their hidden strengths and were therefore privileged to use those same strengths in leading Am Yisrael.



## The Remedy for Difficult Circumstances

*“And Noach began to farm the land and he planted a vineyard. He drank from the wine and became drunk and uncovered within his tent”*

*(Bereishit 9:20-21)*

The Torah describes what Noach did when he left the Ark. After the great Flood had washed away all life, Noach began to settle down and plant a vineyard, getting drunk in the process. Rashi compares the word ויחל (and he began) with the word חולין (mundane). Noach began his descent to the level of חולין by embarking on a mundane endeavor. The Torah finds fault with Noach's preoccupation of the mundane displayed in his planting a vine and drinking himself into a stupor.

We need to understand this criticism of Noach. We also need to explain what brought Noach, the complete and righteous tzaddik as described in the beginning of the parashah, to consider drinking wine upon exiting the Ark.

If we think about the Torah's description of life in the Ark, especially in light of the words of Chazal, we see how difficult it was for Noach. His catering to the needs of the animals gave him no rest. Every animal had their specific food which had to be given at a specific time. This daily, round the clock activity became a heavy burden on Noach. And when Noach was delayed, the animals did not take it sitting down. The Midrash (*Tanchuma Noach*, 9) describes how the lion struck Noach for not bringing him his food on time. Perhaps even harder on Noach was his time and energy that had always been spent in Torah and mitzvot now being relegated for animal provision and beastly preservation. This must certainly have pained him greatly.

With this in mind, we can better understand Noach's disposition. Despite Noach being the only one saved from all of humanity, the period of the Flood was a hard one for him. And when one goes through a difficult time, or has some serious situation to contend with, there is always a certain amount of soul-searching done. It is important to examine where one is holding and why he is going through such difficulty.

A man once asked me to describe the punishment of *karet* for the one who commits adultery. To paint a picture of the magnitude of *karet*, I gave an example of a family traveling by car, involved in a terrible accident. All of the members of the family were killed, save one. *Karet* can take two forms, either one can die before his time, or one can be left bereft of one's kin and descendants. Thus a family tragedy is also considered *karet*. Immediately, the man I was speaking to broke down and lamented over his own personal tragedy, being the only one left alive from his whole extended family.

In such a case, one doesn't have to search far to relate the spiritual cause with the tragic outcome. The Torah is quite clear in

saying that one who has illicit relations is a prime candidate for *karet*. All misfortunes have their spiritual source and primary causes as well. Thus they all require self-scrutiny and self-examination to determine the root of their occurrence.

A tzaddik like Noach must also have sat down to examine why he was undergoing so much tribulation in the Ark. Certainly he must have related his suffering to his failure to influence the generation to do teshuvah, given his stature and ability to influence others. Eventually, he came to an understanding and accepted the whole ordeal, as hinted to by the words (*Bereishit* 8:20) “And he built an altar” (ויבן) which also denotes understanding (בינה). Noach understood why these events came to be and why he needed to suffer so.

Part of Noach’s self-scrutiny was contemplating on how he could deal with his situation and mitigate his pain. The truth is, the only true way to deal with, and face a dire situation, is to strengthen one’s resolve and to renew one’s dedication to a Torah way of life and its principles. I can personally attest to many cases where people were miraculously healed, after accepting and committing themselves to living a Torah life.

My great-great-grandfather in Morocco, the tzaddik Harav Chaim Pinto zt”l, had a close friend by the name of Harav David ben Chazan. It is passed down through the generations that he placed two nails on the wall of the room that he learned in, above his seat. According to their accounts, he would tie his long *payot* to those nails on the wall so that he would not fall asleep in middle of his long and tiring nights of learning. Were he to nod off, he would be rudely awakened by the tug on his *payot*. There are similar stories told of other great tzaddikim. The *Maharsha* would place his feet in ice water in order to keep himself awake. These tzaddikim realized that a renewed commitment is the right antidote for any difficult

situation or hardship. They focused on their evening hours because of the statement (*Eirubin* 65a) “Nighttime was solely created for learning.” It also says (*Yehoshua* 1:8), “And you shall learn Torah day and night.”

The following story demonstrates the capacity of Torah and mitzvot to alleviate hardship. I remember one Erev Shabbat my face registered a worried look. My daughter approached and asked me, “Abba, why do you look so sad? Today is Erev Shabbat!” I had good reasons for being worried, but her mention of Shabbat awakened me to my present situation, and I immediately and enthusiastically returned to the household preparations.

This is one thing that I learnt from my father zt”l. Friday is reserved for helping in the home and preparing for Shabbat. My father would do the most menial chores and even drew looks of astonishment at the way he would demean himself, so to speak. Actually, getting the house ready in honor of Shabbat is our privilege and pride. By receiving Shabbat *Hamalkah* in our homes, we gain the honor of hosting the *Shechinah*. We become a partner in the weekly recurrence of the Creation of the world. That is the underlying concept of Shabbat. And so we find the *Amora'im* (*Kiddushin* 41a), each one in his own way, personally pitching in and doing some chore in honor of Shabbat.

My Rabbanit once asked me why I spend so much time and effort setting up the house before Shabbat. When I am in the Beit Hakeneset, the children play and so by the time I return home, there is no semblance of order left behind. I explained that in honor of Shabbat, I am more concerned over the house’s appearance when I go to the Beit Hakeneset than when I come back. This way we greet the Shabbat *Hamalkah* with the proper respect and honor that she deserves, making our homes clean and neat already at the outset of Shabbat.

In any case, my renewed interest and enthusiasm in preparing for that Shabbat caused me to forget my worries. After Shabbat, my daughter reminded me of the worried look I had shown on erev Shabbat. In truth, the cause of my worries did not go away. But their distressing influence was dissipated by my involvement and preoccupation with a mitzvah. Strengthening one's resolve and dedicating oneself to Torah and mitzvot is the best remedy for the trials and tribulations of life.

When Noach left the ark, he did not dedicate himself to learning Torah or doing mitzvot. Perhaps he needed to de-stress and reorient himself after all of the tension and hardship that he had endured throughout the past year. He planted a vineyard and drank wine instead. He lowered his standards and became 'Noach the farmer' instead of 'Noach the righteous.' This is why the Torah refers to his preoccupation as mundane. The word ויחל indicates that Noach 'began' by using the 'mundane' way to deal with, and acclimatize himself to his situation, instead of absorbing his attention on spiritual pursuits or Torah accomplishments. The word ויחל is itself a word which alludes to distress, as it starts with the letters וי (similar to ויהי). Noach only had anguish from what he had done, later regretting that he had not dealt with his situation in the right way.

With this we can understand the conversation that Noach had with the Satan. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bereishit 8*) says that the Satan came to Noach and offered his help. "Would you like me to be your partner," he asked Noach, "and help you plant a vineyard?" Noach said, "Yes." The Satan immediately brought a sheep and slaughtered it, watering the vine with its blood. He then proceeded to slaughter a lion and then again a pig, drenching the tender seedling with their life's blood. Why did the Satan do this? This is actually a metaphor for a person who drinks wine. With the

first cup, he becomes like a sheep, amenable and unassuming. After the second cup he begins to speak arrogantly, with the strength of a lion. After the third or fourth cup he becomes like a pig, wallowing in filth and even wetting himself.

[I often encounter the bitter truth and sharp message of this Midrash when I am invited to a *simchah* or some other function. When I come in, there is a certain element of tension in the air, either due to the natural respect that people have for Rabbanim, or because they knew my saintly grandfather, Harav Chaim Pinto of blessed memory. Regardless, eventually one of the organizers goes around, handing out drinks of the alcoholic variety. Immediately there is a perceptible change in the air. After one drink, their fears dissipate. After two, the level of conversation rises. And after three, many don't even realize that there is a Rav present.]

There are several questions on this Midrash. One, since when does the Satan seek to become a partner and give people advice, like he did with Noach? Second, why did Noach agree to the Satan's proposition? And third, why didn't Noach protest over the actions of the Satan and prevent him from watering the vine with the slaughter of the animals?

The truth is that the Satan is a very sly and scheming character. He often presents us with his counsel and lures us by his temptation. He is constantly busy testing our weaknesses. And yet, this is done within the confines of our own hearts. When considering an action, one can be fooled by the 'masked' Angel at work, not realizing that it is the guile of the Satan, in the guise of our feelings and thoughts on the matter, which is urging us on.

Then, after succeeding in causing us to sin, he takes us to court. In the next world, he uncovers his double-faced identity by acting as our prosecutor and testifying against us. He even initiates the

proceedings by asking us: Why did you listen to my advice and sin instead of learning Torah?

Perhaps we can now understand Chazal's criticism of Noach. Noach looked for a way to alleviate the depth of pain that he had from the whole ordeal of the Flood. His thoughts turned to the tranquillizing properties of wine and his feelings generated desire, as they were fueled by the Satan's devious incitement. Noach accepted his partnership, thus beginning his tenure as a 'mundane farmer.' While tending to the vine, he consented and then consorted with his evil inclination every step of the way. He descended from the amenability of a sheep to the presumptuousness of the lion and eventually wallowed in disgrace.

Our job is to recognize the deception of the *Yetzer Hara* and disassociate ourselves from his collaboration. We shouldn't take the 'mundane' way out to deal with our situations. We should absorb our attention on spiritual pursuits and preoccupy ourselves with Torah accomplishments instead. By strengthening our resolve and dedicating ourselves to Torah and mitzvot, we have the best remedy for the trials and tribulations of life.

### **In Summary**

- ◆ The Torah criticizes Noach for planting a vine the first thing after the Flood.
- ◆ Noach had many trials and tribulations in the Ark and suffered a year of hardship. He wanted to alleviate some of his tension and distress by drinking wine. The only true way to deal with and face a dire situation is to strengthen one's resolve and to renew one's commitment to a Torah way of life. Noach's actions earned him the title of 'farmer'.
- ◆ The Satan came to Noach and offered to help him in planting a vineyard. He thereby proceeded to slaughter a sheep, lion, and pig.

Why did Noach agree to the Satan's proposition and let him continue to drench the tender seedling with their life's blood?

- ◆ Noach considered planting a vine and drinking its wine because he was fooled by the masked Angel at work, not realizing that it was the guile of the Satan, in the guise of his feelings and thoughts on the matter, which urged him on. His thoughts turned to the tranquillizing properties of wine and his feelings generated desire, as they were fueled by the Satan's devious incitement. This is how the Satan influences us to sin.



### **The Effort for a Mitzvah Enhances the Mitzvah**

*“And Shem and Yefet took the garment on their shoulders and they walked backwards and covered the nakedness of their father”*

*(Bereishit 9:23)*

Rashi explains why the word וַיִּקַּח (and he took) is written in the singular. Although both brothers covered their father with a garment, Shem initiated the act whereas Yefet agreed to go along. Writes Rashi, because Shem put more effort into the mitzvah, his descendants merited to be covered with the garment of *tzitzit* (i.e. they received the mitzvah of *tzitzit*). Yefet who went along with his brother, merited to have his descendants properly interred after their passing, at the End of Days.

If we compare the two rewards, we can see the vast difference between them. Shem received *tzitzit* which covers and conceals the

body in one's lifetime, while Yefet was awarded burial, shelter for one's body only after death. Even more, the *tzitzit* provide an extra coverage as well. It is well known that the mitzvah of *tzitzit* has the ability to protect its wearer from sin. Chazal (*Menachot* 43b) elaborate on the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 15:39) "And you shall see the *tzitzit* and remember all of the mitzvot of Hashem and do them." Says the Gemara, by looking at *tzitzit* one comes to remember all of the mitzvot; and by remembering one comes to do them.

As an example of its special protection, the Gemara (ibid. 44a) relates the following story. There was a man who was careful in keeping the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. He heard of a harlot on a foreign island who would take four hundred golden coins as wages for her services. Interested in meeting her, he sent her money and set a date. When the appointed time came, he went to her house and sat by the front steps. She sent a message for him to enter. Her suite contained an elaborate bunk bed, consisting of seven beds, one above the other. Each bed was made of silver and bedecked with fine linens, except for the top bed which was made from gold. Silver ladders led from one bed to the next, the final ladder also being made out of gold.

She went to the top bunk and sat there, awaiting him. He climbed up after her, and sat nakedly facing her. Then, the four fringes of his *tzitzit* miraculously came and slapped him in the face, and he reacted by sliding down all seven beds and sitting on the floor. She said to him, "I swear by the idol (or: the Caesar) of Rome, I will not let you go until you tell me what blemish you saw in me." He answered, "I swear that I have never seen anyone as beautiful as you. But we have a mitzvah from our G-d called *tzitzit*. He wrote twice 'I am the L-rd your G-d' by the commandment of *tzitzit*, to teach us these concepts: I am the One Who will one day punish those who do not heed My word, and I am the One Who will one

day reward those who do. The *tzitzit* at this moment ‘strike’ me as resembling four witnesses (warning me that they are waiting to testify on my actions).”

Astounded, she told him, “I won’t let you go until you tell me your name, your city of origin, the name of your Rabbi, and the name of the Beit Hamidrash that you learn in.” He wrote out for her the information, left it in her hands and left. She arose and divided her estate, a third she gave to the authorities, a third she distributed to the poor, and a third she took with her in cash, along with the fine linens that bedecked her suite. She found the Beit Hamidrash of Rabbi Chiyah and asked him to arrange her conversion to Judaism (telling him the whole story and expressing her sincere desire to convert). Whereupon she married this talmid, taking the very same linens that had been laid out for sin and using them in a licit and permissible manner.

Concludes the Gemara, this is just the bonus that he received in this world, but the reward in the next world – one cannot even begin to fathom.

The *Ben Ish Chai* also elaborates on the premium coverage and protective powers of the *tzitzit*. The pasuk (*Tehillim* 119:164) extols the virtue of the one who observes “seven times a day I have praised you.” The Gemara (*ibid.* 43b) says that the number seven in this pasuk refers to the daily mitzvot that surround a person and constantly remind him of Hashem. These are: *tzitzit*, which has fringes on all four corners; tefillin, which is composed of the *shel rosh* and the *shel yad*; and mezuzah.

Even looking at *tzitzit* can add a deeper dimension to one’s performance of the mitzvot. We are taught (*Kiddushin* 40a) that “Hashem credits one’s intentions to do a mitzvah with reward as if one actually put them into deed.” Thus when we look at our *tzitzit*

and contemplate doing mitzvot, we can be accredited with their performance. And how much more so is our mitzvah of *tzitzit* enhanced if we are inspired by them and actually bring our thoughts to fruition by expressing them in deed.

The story of the Vilna Gaon's tears on his deathbed is well known. When his talmidim asked him why he was crying, he answered that soon he will pass on into the next world where there is no more opportunity to do mitzvot. See how one can do here such a lofty and illustrious mitzvah such as wearing *tzitzit*, he said, that involves such little effort and so little cost, and yet yields such unfathomable reward.

What is puzzling is why Shem merited so much more reward than Yefet. Although Shem put more effort into covering his father's nakedness, in the end both brothers did the actual mitzvah together.

This would suggest that there is something unique about exerting oneself when doing a mitzvah. Making the effort when doing a mitzvah is not just a minor or insignificant aspect of the mitzvah. It is part of beautifying the mitzvah. By doing so, one 'packages' his mitzvah with a beautiful wrapping and enhances it greatly. This is related to the concept of *hiddur* mitzvah, learned from the pasuk (*Shemot* 15:2) "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him." The Gemara (*Shabbat* 133b) explains these words to mean that one should glorify Hashem by making the mitzvot beautiful, adorning oneself by taking a beautiful lulav and etrog, tallit, etc. *Hiddur* mitzvah is to beautify the object of a mitzvah, making the mitzvah complete with aesthetic features. Similarly, one should exert oneself when doing mitzvot. It glorifies a mitzvah when we do it with alacrity and go the extra mile. This is why Shem was accredited with a greater award than Yefet. The lustrous beauty of his efforts far outshined his brother's complacent go-along attitude.

During tefillah, many are accustomed to sway back and forth. This is actually based on the same principle of putting effort into our mitzvot. Moving back and forth involves our bodies in tefillah and helps us to focus on the words we say. This component of tefillah is even mentioned in *Tehillim*, as it says (35:10), “All my limbs shall say (Your praise)” (and is mentioned in the *Mishnah Berurah* 95:7).

It is said of the wife of the Vilna Gaon, that she would collect *tzedakah* with a friend every erev Shabbat to give out to the needy. They would make their rounds, making sure to visit a certain wealthy family at a set hour, who would then give them a sizable donation. One erev Shabbat they were a bit delayed and had to hurry their steps, hoping to catch the master of the house while still home. When they reached the street facing the entrance of his house, they saw him exit and start to walk away. The friend of the Vilna Gaon’s wife lifted her hand to catch his attention, but was unsuccessful.

After a while, this woman became ill and the Vilna Gaon’s wife came to visit her. The sick woman agreed that if she were to pass away, she would do a favor and come in a dream and describe the place reserved for her in the next world. They shook hands to confirm the promise. Sometime later, the friend appeared to her in a dream, saying that she was keeping her promise, now that she had passed away. Describing the difference between our world and the next, she used the story of that Erev Shabbat as an example. “I received more reward than you,” she said. “Even though we didn’t expect to catch the man, I received reward for making the effort of catching him, by lifting my hand.” This reiterates and underscores our point. Effort on behalf of a mitzvah enhances the mitzvah and raises its caliber to a higher level.

We can learn from here how much we should exert ourselves to do mitzvot, despite the difficulty involved. It is well worth the effort. For example, those who need to go through parts of the city which

have pictures or people not appropriately dressed, may find it difficult to guard their eyes from seeing such immodesty. But we need to do our part, realizing that a mitzvah done with effort is worth all of the hardship involved, and assured that Hashem helps those who try their best.

A similar point exists by tefillah. There is a difference between two types of people who pray. There are those who come to the Beit Hakeneset tired and burdened, there only to show face and lip prayer. And there are also those who come with *simchah*, fresh and eager to pray, ready to put in their effort. Such people really deserve tremendous credit and can look forward to great reward.

I once had a very busy day, on the go the whole day long. At around four in the morning, I wearily returned to my home in Paris, completely exhausted. That day was Rosh Chodesh, and I felt that I did not have the strength to get up for *minyan*, already thinking of excuses why it would be permissible for me to continue sleeping. But then I thought to myself – if a wealthy donor from Brazil would arrive in town, wouldn't I get up, overcome my weariness and go to greet him? How much more so should I prevail over and exert myself to pray before the Master of the World, Who waits for me to come to the Beit Hakeneset. He is the One Who gives me life and good health. We all live off the bounty of His goodness.

Likewise, we may groggily wake up when our babies cry out in the middle of the night and feed and comfort them, even several times a night. How much more so should we extend ourselves when doing all the mitzvot of Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Shem and Yefet took a garment and covered their father. Shem initiated the act and exerted himself more than Yefet and is thus given more credit for the mitzvah.

- ◆ Shem received *tzitzit* as a reward for his efforts, which covers us in our lifetime, whereas Yefet was awarded burial, which shelters the body only after death.
- ◆ The mitzvah of *tzitzit* has the ability to protect its wearer from sin. An example of its special protection is the man who was careful in keeping the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, which miraculously saved him from harlotry. The Vilna Gaon cried on his deathbed saying that in the next world there is no more opportunity to do mitzvot. Here one can do such a lofty and illustrious mitzvah such as *tzitzit*, that involves such little effort and small cost to do, and yet yields unfathomable reward.
- ◆ Just making the effort to do a mitzvah is itself a part of the mitzvah. By doing so, one packages his mitzvah with a beautiful wrapping, similar to the way one beautifies a mitzvah and adorns himself with a beautiful lulav and etrog.
- ◆ We should exert ourselves to do mitzvot despite the difficulty involved, no differently than the way we would welcome a wealthy individual or take care of a crying baby. It is well worth the effort.



## Exertion for a Mitzvah

*“And Shem and Yefet took the garment on their shoulders and walked backwards and covered the nakedness of their father”*

*(Bereishit 9:23)*

The Torah describes how Shem and Yefet heard that their father Noach lay naked, and made sure to cover him. Each brother received a special reward. Shem, who put more effort into the

mitzvah, was written first in the Torah, and his descendants, the Jewish nation, received the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. The children of Shem also merited having the *Shechinah* dwell on their property, in the Beit Hamikdash.

Yefet (meaning, his descendants) was given a proper burial. This was in reciprocation – in reward for covering his father, Yefet’s descendants will measure for measure be interred, when they will fall in the battle of Gog and Magog at the End of Days (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 36:6). It is a meritorious deed to bury the dead, even of one’s enemies. We find that David Hamelech buried the fallen soldiers of his enemies, and was extolled for this virtuous act (Rashi on *Shmuel* II 8:13).

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 9:27) brings yet another *berachah* given to Yefet. Rashi explains the words, “May G-d extend Yefet,” to mean that Yefet will be blessed with wealth and property. The Gemara (*Megillah* 9b), however, interprets this to refer to Yefet’s hand in building the second Beit Hamikdash, by his descendant Koresh. The language of one of the children of Yefet (Greek) was used in the Beit Hamikdash (see *Shekalim* 3:2). Similarly, *sifrei kodesh* were permitted to be written in Greek, for the same reason, as a consequence of this *berachah* of Noach (see *Megillah* 1:8).

Actually, the whole concept of learning Torah and translating it into another language finds its source in Noach’s *berachah* to Yefet. The translation of the word יָפַת (to extend) is based on its Aramaic derivation. As the Chasam Sofer (on *Bereishit* 8:23) points out, the Torah is actually using an Aramaic word. From here, the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 36:8) comments, is a source that one may learn, translate, and teach in a foreign language. This is why the Torah was translated into Aramaic by Onkelos the *ger*. Even the Gemara was written in Aramaic, as it was the spoken language in the days of the

*Amora'im*. Perhaps Noach was alluding to this eventuality by using an Aramaic term in his *berachah*.

When Am Yisrael learns Torah, it sends a shower of blessing upon the world. And the country whose language they use receives a good portion of this 'shower.' Thus the nations of the world do not realize or appreciate the real benefit they have from the small contingent of Jews who live in their land, speak their language, and learn Torah. The same goes for the blessings of peace and prosperity that come as a result of these Jews praying for the welfare of the country in which they live. Would they understand how much they benefit from the Jews, the nations would do whatever is in their power to make the Jews keep Torah and mitzvot (instead of sometimes it being the other way around).

### **Working hard**

The difference between Shem and Yefet's *berachot* lay in their fulfillment of their mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em*. Shem took the garment and preceded Yefet in covering their father. This is a lesson on how we need to take the initiative in doing mitzvot, not to procrastinate or drag our feet. Shem's *berachot* were thus of a more spiritual nature. He received *tzitzit*, a mitzvah, in return. The pasuk itself distinguishes between them, as the word "and these" (*Bereishit* 10:1) was written to differentiate between Noach's progeny.

Taking a look at the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, we can better appreciate the benefits of making the right choice and exerting oneself for a mitzvah. All mitzvot require exertion. The first section of the Shulchan Aruch teaches us that every Jew must gird himself with strength, 'like a lion' to do the will of Hashem. We rise in the morning and exert ourselves to pray, before we start our day.

Yet the mitzvah of *tzitzit* seems to involve less exertion than most. This we see from the Vilna Gaon zt"l. He cried before his death,

aware of his imminent passing and limited opportunity to do mitzvot, and pointed to his *tzitzit* saying, “Here is an ‘easy’ mitzvah – which in the next world I won’t have another chance to fulfill.” Even more, through *tzitzit*, one can come to remembering all of the mitzvot of the Torah (*Menachot* 43b). Hashem can combine our desire to do mitzvot and our inability to do them, and reward us as if we did. Thus *tzitzit* can be the vehicle to shower us with additional reward, despite its minimum physical effort. It harbors such reward because it was received as a gift for Shem’s exertion. Thus we, the descendants of Shem, benefit from his act, without requiring great exertion on our part.

Another place that we find where exertion paid off, was by Nebuchadnezzar. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 96a) explains that he grew to become a mighty world power as a reward for his efforts. When the king of Assyria, Merodach, wanted to send a letter of greeting to Chizkiyahu, the scribe inadvertently prefaced his salutations with a greeting to the King of Yehudah, before mentioning Hashem. Nebuchadnezzar, the chief scribe, who was absent when the letter was written, protested, saying that it was inappropriate to greet the king before his G-d. Whereupon, he took a few steps to catch up to the exiting scribe, and had him change the letter. The Gemara tells us that these few steps rewarded him with ruling the entire world. How much more so will Hashem reward us for our efforts!

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Shem and Yefet were Heavenly reciprocated for covering their father Noach, measure for measure. Shem (i.e. his descendants) merited the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, whereas Yefet received a proper burial.
- ◆ The Torah uses an Aramaic word to describe the *berachah* of Yefet. We learn from here that the Torah was permitted to be translated and taught in foreign languages. This is actually a source of blessing for

the nation in whose language their Jews are learning Torah.

- ◆ Shem exerted himself to do the mitzvah first and preceded his brother in covering his father. His reward was of a spiritual nature, one which harbors in it much more reward than that of Yefet. Through his exertion, he merited to receive *tzitzit* which involve less exertion than most mitzvot.
- ◆ Nebuchadnezzar was rewarded for exerting himself and taking three steps for the honor of Hashem. This is why he became the king of the entire world, and his children ruled it for three generations.



## Gems on Parashat Noach



### Noach vis-à-vis Avraham

*“These are the descendants of Noach, Noach was a righteous man, complete in his generations”*

*(Bereishit 6:9)*

Rashi brings two ways to interpret the words “in his generations.” There are those who understand these words to be in favor of Noach, and there are those who find fault with Noach. Those who learn these words in favor of Noach say that if Noach was a tzaddik in a generation filled with reshaim, how much more so would he have been in a generation of tzaddikim. Whereas those who see Noach in an unfavorable light explain that although Noach was a tzaddik in his generations, had he lived in the era of Avraham Avinu, he would have not been up to par. It was only when compared to the Generation of the Flood that he was considered righteous, as they were evil through-and-through. Yet had he lived in the generation that boasted Avraham Avinu, who was renowned for his righteousness, Noach would not have been considered a tzaddik.

It is puzzling why there are those who look unfavorably upon Noach. Noach exercised a great deal of self-sacrifice by building the Ark. According to the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 30:7), Noach was busy working on it for one hundred and twenty years. His contemporaries scorned and scoffed, while he continued on, undaunted and undeterred. All things considered, why was he not judged a true tzaddik for his actions?

I suggest that there is a fundamental difference between Noach and Avraham Avinu. After Avraham recognized the existence of a Creator and the need to serve Him, he did not stop there. He began to campaign. Avraham put tremendous effort into winning over others to the belief of a Divine Ruler and in recognizing and thanking Him for all the good He bestows upon us, for the wondrous world that He created.

Avraham also practiced what he preached. He excelled in hospitality. Whoever entered his domain received food, drink, and lodging. On their way out, as they tried to thank him for his kindness and generosity, he pointed to the One Above, saying, "Don't thank me; thank Him for His benevolence" (Bereishit Rabbah 54:6). By demonstrating the goodwill and benevolence of the Creator, Avraham succeeded in winning over the masses of his generation to do teshuvah, convincing them of the fallacy of serving foreign idols and influencing them to accept the monotheistic belief and worship of the Creator.

Noach on the other hand, did not excel in considering the needs of his generation or reaching out to the people. He didn't try to influence them to do teshuvah or even pray that they see the truth of his words. This is the reason why he was considered inferior to Avraham.

A tzaddik is not someone who is only concerned about his own service of Hashem. To a true tzaddik, it is important that all of

Hashem's children serve him. He has a sense of responsibility for the public at large, one that comes from an understanding of the honor due Hashem. This feeling of responsibility makes him effective in guiding and directing each individual on the road that leads him to Hashem.

Because Noach did not exercise his influence over others and help them to be saved, he was not held in high regard. He was unworthy of the distinction awarded Avraham Avinu who truly was a tzaddik in his generation.



## The True Man Overcomes His Natural Impulses

*“These are the descendants of Noach, Noach was a righteous man, complete in his generations”*

*(Bereishit 6:9)*

In the Torah's description of Noach's righteousness, this virtue is appended to with the word “man.” Noach was a righteous “man.” The significance of this word can be understood from the words of David Hamelech when he says to his son Shlomo (Melachim I, 1:2) וחזקת והיית לאיש, “Strengthen yourself and be as a man.” David urges Shlomo to overcome his natural tendencies and disposition. The truly righteous man learns how to control himself, keeping his impulsive character in check and his boisterous nature at bay. That is why the pasuk says וחזקת, as it takes the strength of man to go against his grain and in opposition to his untamed will.

When a Rav gives a shiur, often his questions arouse interest in his talmidim. A talmid may immediately think of a solution and jump into the fray. He may blurt out his answer, stopping the Rav in mid-sentence and breaking his train of thought and the flow of ideas. This comes from impulsiveness. Every talmid should learn to restrain his impulsive nature by being a man, even waiting for the end of the shiur to give his answer. This way, no one suffers and everyone only gains from the shiur.



## The Generations that Noach Weathered

*“These are the descendants of Noach; Noach was a righteous man, complete in his generations”*

*(Bereishit 6:9)*

The pasuk describes Noach as being completely righteous, not only in his generation but in his generations; as if to say that there was another generation besides that of the Flood. What generation was this? I saw written somewhere, that the second generation that Noach weathered and lived through was that of the Tower of Babel. These two eras signified two different areas of defiance against G-d.

The Generation of the Flood sinned by being immoral. In contrast, that of the Tower of Babel wanted to rebel against Hashem and show Him that He does not run the show. They built their gigantic tower from bricks, as it says (Bereishit 11:2), “Come, let us make bricks and fire them into blocks. And they had bricks in place of

stone and used clay instead of mortar.” Why did they use man-made bricks? Why didn’t they build with natural stone and blocks of solid rock? It would seem this was all part of their defiant attitude. They wanted to show that man was not bound by Divine Providence or affected by Divine intervention. He could manage on his own and do just fine, depending on the work of his hands. Even the materials for their building were all man-made, for this reason.

It was against these two generations that Noach stood straight and tall, not being swayed by their opinions or influenced by their behavior. That is why he is awarded the accolade of being righteous “in all of his generations,” outliving and eclipsing them all with his righteousness.



## Influential Power

*“These are the descendants of Noach; Noach was a righteous man, complete in his generations”*

*(Bereishit 6:9)*

Rashi brings those who interpret the pasuk in Noach’s favor and say that had Noach lived even in the generation of Avraham Avinu, he would have shone with righteousness. Whereas those who interpret this title of Noach unfavorably explain that although he was a tzaddik in his generations, had he lived in the era of Avraham Avinu or Moshe Rabbeinu, he would have not been up to par; he would not have been considered a tzaddik.

The Midrash (Tanchuma Hayashan, Noach 6) gives a metaphor of a woman who lives chastely in the company of two harlots. One may praise her by saying that she does not have a bad reputation. This could then be interpreted as a sign of her morality and upright character. Even though she lived near these wayward women, she still maintained her virtuous conduct and was not influenced by their ways. Or this can be interpreted in a disparaging manner. Her distinction lies only in her conduct when compared with the utter depravity of these women. When placed in a different setting, in proximity with truly modest women, she would fall short of their standards and fade away into an insignificant nobody. According to this second interpretation, we can ask: Why would Noach have been obscure in the generation of Avraham or Moshe and have been considered a common person?

Perhaps we can learn from here the tremendous influence of our surroundings. Had Noach lived in the era of Moshe, the rarified atmosphere and sublime spiritual climate would have brought out his very best. The dissemination of Torah in Moshe's generation would have developed Noach into a great person. But living before the advent of Torah, and amidst the depravity of his generation, stifled Noach's greatness. Even though he was learned, and passed down the teachings he received to his son Shem (who in turn passed them on to Avraham Avinu) it was nowhere equal to the Torah given on Har Sinai.

The influence of our surroundings cannot be underestimated, for good or for bad. This can be compared to the one who enters a store containing a very strong smell. If it is a store which sells perfumes, even without touching a thing, he will walk out with the fragrance of fine scents lingering over him. When walking out of a tannery though, he will be accompanied by the stench of raw hides even after he leaves.

We find a similar concept in spiritual matters. One who finds himself in the proximity of Torah visionaries and luminaries can be swept into action and affected by their influence. My good friend Harav Hagaon Rav Nissim Ravivo zt”l was an example of this. He influenced people wherever he went. He once persuaded me to buy a disc which contained four thousand sefarim, as it would benefit me and him at the same time. He would get a good bargain from the dealer, and I could avail myself of so many sefarim. His desire to learn was contagious, and he succeeded in convincing others to acquire sefarim to learn from.

On the other hand, one who finds himself in the company of reshaim can be influenced to do evil. Even the animals were affected by the sins of the Generation of the Flood. They would mate with those not of their own species, as it says (Bereishit 6:11), “And the earth became corrupted before Hashem” and again (ibid. 6:12), “For all flesh have corrupted their way on earth.”



## The Influence of Am Yisrael on the World

*“And Hashem said to Noach, the end of all flesh has come, for the earth is filled with theft as a result of them. Behold I will destroy them with the earth”*

*(Bereishit 6:13)*

Hashem bore witness to the sins of that generation and found them guilty. He saw how their actions influenced and corrupted the

whole of Creation. As a sign of how far they had been corrupted, the pasuk says (Bereishit 6:11), “For all flesh had corrupted its way on earth.” Rashi explains that even the animals and birds mated with species that were not their own, learning from their corrupted ways. Hashem passed judgment on them too, blotting them off the face of the earth. He wished to preserve the sanctity of His world, keeping it vacant of their vile existence and empty of their offensive crimes.

Why is Hashem not concerned today over the actions of the reshaim? Why does He continue to accept their indignities with such equanimity? Unfortunately, we all know how much evil there is in the world, and how little honor is given to the Al-mighty. Even in Eretz Yisrael, the land found worthy of the Divine presence, as it says (Devarim 11:12), “A land upon which the eyes of Hashem your G-d rests, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year,” there are still many that heap insult upon indignity to the honor of Hashem by their sinful actions. They go so far as to advertise their obscenities and express their antagonistic sentiments against Hashem and His Torah.

I would like to suggest the following answer. At the time of the Flood, the Torah was not yet given to man. Although Adam Harishon and Noach did have some mitzvot, however, the Torah as we know it, was still under Heavenly jurisdiction and not yet officially part of the earthly domain. Thus any affront to the teachings and exhortations of the Torah, of necessity had to result in punishment, in order to prevent any irreparable breeches. Yet after the Torah was given, Hashem relies on His nation and their learning to reveal His honor. Since the Torah is in our domain, we can restore some of the glory which is lost by the evil deeds of others through our learning. The forces of tumah are weakened, and even the wrongdoers are moved to do teshuvah as a result of Am Yisrael’s influence.

There is a famous saying of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter. When a bachur dedicates himself to learning Torah in his yeshiva in Lithuania, a Jewish student in Paris keeps the Shabbat. This hidden cause and effect is really a Divine form of providential involvement. Hashem runs His world in this way. When the level of kedushah increases, the power of tumah can not gain a foothold. The influence of evil even begins to dwindle away, prompting the evildoers to desist from their mad race to oblivion.

Thus even today, where there are many people who do not keep the Torah and mitzvot, there is still hope. Hashem appears silent over the indignity and dishonor to His Name because He is relying upon us to combat their influence. The power of kedushah that Am Yisrael creates by learning Torah and doing mitzvot can nullify the evil that is perpetuated and bring about the abdication of sin.



## **Punished by Water and by Fire**

*“And behold I will bring the Flood of water upon the earth”*

*(Bereishit 7:17)*

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Noach, 86) says that the Generation of the Flood was punished with boiling hot water. Thus they were punished with two of the four primeval elements of Creation, which are: fire, water, air, and earth.

Exploring the matter, we will see that a person’s body is also composed of different elements. We are told (Zohar, Chelek I, 80a)

that man was created from earth, and his form was shaped by the addition of water and the inclusion of heat. Thus his body actually contains three of these basic elements. After death, the body loses its element of heat, leaving behind a cold corpse. The body also decomposes, exuding its element of water. We once opened the coffin of a man whose body had been flown from France a year after his demise. We were startled to find the coffin filled with liquid.

Recognizing this reality is really part of our basic training and strategic defense against our Yetzer Hara. When a person thinks about the primeval elements that our bodies are composed of, he realizes the frailty of man and the worthlessness of earthly endeavor. Our element of heat serves also to remind us of the fire of Torah, as it says (Devarim 33:2) that Hashem gave us a “fiery law.” This reminds us of our obligation to learn Torah. Man can relate to Torah, for he too has a fiery constitution and was created with the life-sustaining attribute of heat.

Not only did the Generation of the Flood not take these thoughts to heart, they added iniquity to their sins by rejecting their underlying message. They corrupted their Divine Image and eradicated any likeness they had with G-d, as it says (Bereishit 6:12), “For all flesh had corrupted its way.” And so Hashem punished them accordingly. Because their sins tainted the elements of water and heat in the human body, they were punished by these elements. Similarly, they were flooded out of existence in a deluge of forty days, corresponding to the forty days of the creation of a human embryo (Bereishit Rabbah 32:5). Thus they were punished measure for measure.

Once, a man came over to me to tell me the terrible dream that he had had. In his dream, he saw his left hand being cut off. It occurred to me to look for a connection between the dream and his mitzvah observance, and so I asked him if he generally put on tefillin

(which are usually placed on the left hand). He answered that for the past four days he had not put on tefillin. I told him that if so, his dream was a sign from Heaven. The system of Divine retribution always judges and punishes a person measure for measure. Perhaps he was being shown how he deserved to have his hand cut off for not wearing his tefillin; he definitely had some merit directing him to do teshuvah before receiving any punishment. Hearing this, he took my words to heart and immediately went to put on tefillin.



## Lech Lecha



### Spreading Hashem's Name in the World

*“Hashem said to Avram, ‘Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation and bless you and make your name great, and you shall be filled with blessings’”*

*(Bereishit 12:1-2)*

Hashem commands Avraham to leave his homeland and promises in return to give him the blessings of wealth, children, honor, and acclaim. He assures Avraham that his renown will one day spread around the world, winning the recognition and esteem of all mankind. This raises a serious question. Did Avraham seek honor or acclaim for himself? It should be self-evident that a tzaddik doesn't need or even want such 'blessings'; and a giant of virtue like Avraham Avinu wasn't looking for any such reward. What then was the purpose of this promise?

Even more, if Hashem was offering such tremendous blessings as an incentive for Avraham, what was his ordeal in leaving the

country? The Midrash (*Tanchuma Noach*, 3) lists this as one of the ten trials of Avraham. What type of trial is this, to do something which offers such great reward?

With *Siyata di'Shemaya*, I reached the same answer as one of the great *mekubalim* of Morocco, the author of the *Magen David*. To understand the answer, let us first pose an additional question: We know that every Jew has a Divine soul of high stature, one which radiates their distinct and discernable Divine Image. Every morning, we thank Hashem for this by saying the *berachah*, “Who has not made me a non-Jew.” Why don’t we stress the positive and say “Who has made me a Jew”? When we truly value something, we describe it in positive, glowing terms. We don’t express our admiration by pointing out what it is not. There is even the antagonism of the non-Jews to take into account, when we thank Hashem for not making us like them.

I suggest that the *berachah* was instituted for Jews from all walks of life, without differentiation. While perhaps many Jews can easily be distinguished as Jews, their demeanor reflecting the spark of Divine that lies within, however, there are some Jews whose actions leave something to be desired, and whose physical appearance isn’t so different than that of a non-Jew. For them, a *berachah* praising Hashem for making them a Jew could almost be classified as a *berachah l’vatalah*. That being the case, the *Chachamim* instituted a *berachah* which would be appropriate all across the board, even for those Jews who do not have any distinguishing mark to demonstrate their Jewishness. The only thing that such people can thank Hashem for – is that they were not created a non-Jew.

Avraham Avinu, in contrast, was deserving of having Hashem express His appraisal of him and of his future accomplishments in glowing, positive terms! He did not bless Avraham by promising the absence of evil and destruction. That would not herald any sign of

distinction. Instead, He promised honor and acclaim, qualities of a more positive nature, as befitting Avraham's virtuous character and righteous deeds.

This served also to increase the honor of Hashem. By listening to Hashem and walking in His ways, Avraham would be bringing honor to Hashem and glory to His Name. Avraham's name even carries the letters of Hashem's Name interposed within his own, as the letter ה which Hashem added to his name (אברהם) signifies this achievement. Thus the honor given Avraham as a reward for leaving his home and country behind, reflects on the honor due Hashem, and was not meant to be a vanity package deal or a personal claim to fame. By accepting the blessings of Hashem, Avraham would only foster and accrue honor to the One Whom honor is truly due.

This actually increased the difficulty of his trial. Avraham was given the mission of spreading Hashem's Name and increasing His glory in the world. He had to put aside his feelings of inadequacy, of seeing himself as "but dust and ashes" (*Bereishit* 18:27) and take on this daunting task despite all of the obstacles along the way. Avraham was tested to see if he would carry out his mission and bring honor to Hashem and glory to His Name, which he did with flying colors.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Hashem commands Avraham to leave his homeland and promises great reward, the blessings of wealth, children, honor, and acclaim. Why would Avraham Avinu desire such reward? A tzaddik has no desire for self acclaim. Besides, if there was indeed such great reward being offered, what was the trial of Avraham to leave home?
- ◆ The *Magen David* describes how each Jew has a special mark of distinction, a Divine spark which radiates their discernable Divine

Image. We say a *berachah* every day that Hashem did not make us a non-Jew, omitting our distinction as a Jew. This is because there are some Jews who unfortunately do not distinguish themselves as Jews, and so it is better not to institute a *berachah* which could possibly be made in vain.

- ◆ The promise to bring recognition and esteem to Avraham Avinu wasn't to satisfy his quest for fame. It was a corollary of bringing glory to the Name of Hashem. Through the honor of Avraham, people would recognize Hashem and give honor to the One Whom honor is truly due. The name of Avraham even has a letter of Hashem's Name interposed within its own letters. Thus the blessing of honor that Hashem promised Avraham was just a secondary consequence, a result of being the servant of Hashem, carrying His Name within his own and increasing His glory in this world.
- ◆ This was also part of the trial of Avraham. Leaving home was just the first step in his mission of spreading the Name of Hashem. Despite all of the difficulties, Avraham carried through and sanctified the Name of Hashem wherever he went.



## Our Purpose in this World

*“And Hashem said to Avram, ‘Go... and leave your land, your birthplace, and your family to the land that I will show you’”*

*(Bereishit 12:1)*

The Commentators explain that this pasuk contains a veiled reference to the journey of the *neshamah*. The *neshamah* is told to leave its “land” of spirituality, the world above, as well as its

“birthplace,” its source of origin from beneath the Heavenly Throne. It is commanded to go forth and travel “to the land that I will show you” and descend into our present physical world.

What is the purpose of this journey? The *neshamah* at its source and in its original state of being cannot make any spiritual progress. It needs the uphill climb, the spiritual battlefield of this world to bring out its powers and develop its essence of character. Hashem tells the *neshamah*: Go there “and I will make you into a great nation” (*Bereishit* 12:2). Go and leave the world of the souls and descend into the temporal world. Battle the *Yetzer Hara* and conquer your inner space of human imperfection, and you will create spiritual worlds of great magnitude. You will rectify Creation in your quest for spiritual refinement and bring tremendous satisfaction to Hashem.

Initially the *neshamah* has no interest in descending to earth. It would much rather stay where it is. This is expressed by the Mishnah (*Avot* 4:22), “For against your will you are born.” Yet Hashem tells the *neshamah*, go forth (לך לך) for your own benefit; just as Hashem told Avraham how beneficial it would be for him to leave home. Here is where it is at. Only here in this world can the *neshamah* perfect itself by working the soil of human imperfection and braving the elements of temptation. After seeing the results and witnessing the fulfillment of Hashem’s promise, the soul eventually wishes to remain in the physical arena of life and sanctify its corporeality. This is why the *neshamah* doesn’t want to leave. And so, the Mishnah continues (*ibid.*), “for against your will you die.”

I found this concept briefly mentioned in the sefer *Magen David*, written by the *mekubal* Harav David Peretz zt”l. I would like to add to this thought. We know that this world is referred to as the World of Falsehood, and the one above as the World of Truth. The Torah itself, which existed even before the creation of our world, is labeled

the Doctrine of Truth, as it represents the eternal wisdom of Hashem – and is thereby the ultimate arbitrator of truth. It is the yardstick and standard to determine all truth by. Perhaps this is why the Torah was not part of this world's original article of faith and religion. This is because our world contains the admixture of falsehood and truth, and is thus incongruent with the fundamental reality of Torah. It required the emergence of a nation seeking truth before the Torah could be presented to mankind.

The contrast between our world and the one above is brought out by the following story. When Moshe went up to accept the Torah, he had to contend with the objections of the angels and defend the right of man to receive it. Once convinced, the angels offered Moshe Rabbeinu gifts. Even the Angel of Death presented Moshe with a gift, the secret of the *ketoret* (*Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar*, 752), which has the power to avert the punishment of death. This may seem to conflict with the job of the Angel of Death, whose duty it is to take the soul of man away. How could he relinquish this secret and offer such information to Moshe? Moshe could easily prevent the *Yetzer Hara* from doing his job. Yet in the World of Truth, such considerations play no role in deciding matters. There, the angels do what is right and true without reservations or personal considerations.

Still, we are a bit perplexed. Hashem's ways are but good and just, always truthful in every account and 'straight' down to the last detail. We are told that "His signet ring is inscribed with the *middah* of truth" (*Shabbat* 55a). How could it be then, that Hashem created a world where falsehood reigns supreme?

The 'truth of the matter' is that our world also contains the reality of truth at its core, as any genuine product of Divine workmanship should. All obscuration of truth is but the workings of the *Yetzer Hara*. Hashem gave the *Yetzer Hara* a free hand to alloy the truth

with falsehood. The job of the *Yetzer Hara* is to present us with a life of falsehood, painted over with the veneer of truth. By distorting reality and alloying the truth with his counterfeit goods and their illusive pleasures, the *Yetzer Hara* can mislead man to buy his wares and fall prey to his exploitations.

Our job is to uncover the lie of falsehood and live a life of truth. Let us examine a few examples of this. A person could sway and pray, paying lip service to the truisms of life, while his mind is preoccupied with other thoughts. He may eat; an act necessary to sustain life and facilitate religious observance, and yet feast solely for enjoyment's sake. This is the way the *Yetzer Hara* works. He wants us to live in the world of falsehood and let its fabrication guide our lives.

We need to combat the influence of the *Yetzer Hara*, and let the Torah, the ultimate guideline and doctrine of truth, be our guide. Through the Torah, we can convert the falsehood within ourselves to unadulterated truth; to pray knowing that Hashem is listening to every word; to eat in order to serve Hashem. It is for this reason that Hashem gave us the Torah via the World Above, where truth reigns supreme. Man cannot justify his actions by blaming the 'untruthfulness' of the Torah or try to find excuses for his shortcomings by pointing to its terrestrial origin. Its source is in the World of Truth – far, far away from the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara*. With Torah, he can aspire to live by its eternal truths. By learning and absorbing its teachings he can remove the mountain of falsehood which lies in his path.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 35b) relates that after a man dies, he appears before the Heavenly Tribunal. There, Hashem admonishes those who did not learn Torah. As each person presents his defense to justify his actions, Hashem counters by pointing to others who had the same excuse and yet were still able to learn. To the poor, He

directs their attention to Hillel, who continued to learn under the most trying circumstances. To the handsome and attractive, He shows them the trials of Yosef with the provocative wife of Potiphar. Each situation has a precedent to illustrate how one can overcome the wiles and seductions of the *Yetzer Hara* and succeed in learning Torah. This also demonstrates the power of the Torah and its supernal origin. As the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30b) says, “I created the *Yetzer Hara*, and I created Torah as its antidote.” Even after the Torah descended into our world, it still retains its *kedushah*, its link to the World Above. Whoever desires can avail himself of its singular power to disengage man from his materialistic moorings and dock him in the port of truth.

Once, the Rashash was baffled by a Tosafot. When he met the *Netziv*, their topic of conversation eventually turned to this Tosafot, and the *Netziv* gave an answer to his question on the spot. When the *Netziv* saw his friend’s consternation and sorrow at not having reached the answer himself, he comforted him by saying that he himself understood the Tosafot only by the merit of learning Torah amidst poverty, not by the dint of his erudition. Certainly, Torah learning and a life surrounded by luxuries and pampered by comforts don’t always go hand in hand. The pleasures of this world are ‘hyper-tactual,’ as they contain a ‘direct link’ to the attribute of falsehood and its materialistic fabrication, preventing one from comprehending the finer intricacies of the Torah.

This would explain a statement made by Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi, known simply as Rebbi. The Gemara (*Ketubot* 104a) describes how, before his death, Rebbi lifted his ten fingers heavenward and proclaimed: Hashem, you are my witnesses that I did not derive any enjoyment from this world for pleasure’s sake. This was despite Rebbi’s immense wealth. Rebbi understood that using his wealth for personal enjoyment would be akin to enveloping himself in the

world of falsehood. This does not mean that one should hoard his money and never use it. Hashem wants to shower us with His blessings, and generously provides His selected recipients with the blessing of wealth. Wealthy people can use their gift wisely and make the most of their money, serving Hashem with the very blessing that He gave them. A tzaddik like Rebbi though, sees money in a different light. For him, any extra pursuit of wealth becomes another link to the world of falsehood. Better to shun luxuries and comforts than to be constrained by their want and tethered to their need.

One of the Gemara's descriptions of Rebbi's wealth is that his table never lacked radishes or lettuce, neither in the heat of summer nor in the frost of winter (*Avodah Zara* 11a). The Hebrew word for radish is צונן, and is related to the word צונן (cold). Rebbi cooled off the influence of the *Yetzer Hara* by not indulging himself with this world's counterfeit and illusive pleasures. This concept is expressed in the words of Chazal as "sanctify yourself with (declining) the permissible." Rebbi had no qualms of others eating from his table and savoring his cuisine. But this was not for him. He wanted to remove the shackles of the *Yetzer Hara* by declining personal enjoyment. Similarly, we find by Rav Chanina ben Dosa (*Berachot* 17b) that he subsisted on a weekly intake of but a *kav* of carobs for this reason. These great people sanctified themselves by refraining from any unnecessary physical pleasures, even those that appear on the surface as unavoidable human necessities.

The pasuk says (*Mishlei* 3:6), "In all of your ways recognize Hashem." This refers to our material and physical involvement with this world. Eating, drinking, and resting are all bodily activities that can be used to serve Hashem. When we do what we have to, in order to live and not simply for pleasure's sake, they all become part of

our Divine service, and introduce the element of recognizing Hashem – in all of our ways.

Chazal (*Nedarim* 20b) relate that Rabbi Eliezer would feel as if compelled by a demon when having relations with his wife. What is the connection between not having pleasure and the intimidation of a demon? Did he actually succeed in removing all sensation of pleasure? I suggest that Rabbi Eliezer was expressing his outlook on intimacy more than his experience of it. His sole intention was to perform the mitzvah of procreation and to fulfill his obligation to his wife's needs, not his own personal pleasure. He looked at the pleasure as a side reaction; a compulsory recoil of sensation that almost intimidated him by its magnitude from fulfilling his true purpose and focusing on his altruistic intent. This demonstrates what we have explained until now. Tzaddikim do not seek pleasure. They decline it wherever possible, looking only to do the will of Hashem and perform His mitzvot.

In the upper world of pure unadulterated truth, there is tremendous clarity of vision. Many secrets of the Torah, which are inaccessible in our world, are revealed there. Shlomo Hamelech said (*Kohelet* 7:23), "I said that I would discern it but it has eluded me." This refers to Shlomo's struggle to understand the secret of the *parah adumah*. Only Moshe Rabbeinu merited to learn this secret in its entirety (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:6) when he ascended on High, into the World of Truth, to accept the Torah. Hashem specifically retains this secret in the upper regions, not divulging the solution to its enigmatic paradox, similar to one who treasures and caches a highly valued object. Shlomo understood far beyond what others did, even of the mitzvah of *parah adumah*. But he was not privy to grasp its complete picture.

This can help us value the Torah that we did receive, here in this world. Hashem presented us with the gift of Divine wisdom. But in

order to draw from its wealth of understanding and drink from its wellspring of truth, we need to put in our efforts. By absorbing the teachings of the Torah, we can attach ourselves to the world of truth and begin to see secrets of the Torah that were otherwise inaccessible.

Each and every Jew can advance and understand on his level, according to how much he invests in learning Torah. Merely being part of Am Yisrael and believing in the Torah already gives us an advantage. We can derive from the Torah the ability to perceive the truth behind the façade of the *Yetzer Hara*. The Hebrew word for belief (אמונה) comes from the word אמן, which denotes giving credence to Hashem. (We say Amen in response to hearing a *berachah* because we regard as true that Hashem is the source of all blessing.) Thus a Jew's belief in the ultimate truth of the Torah already puts him on a higher plane, giving him a greater clarity of vision when dealing with the *Yetzer Hara*.

The nations of the world walk in the darkness of this world, without Torah or belief in Hashem. They ask to understand the reasons for the mitzvot even before accepting the existence of a Creator. Thus they cannot see the falsified reality of this world, much less the Divine wisdom behind His commandments. Even a mitzvah like "do not steal" can never truly be fathomed by them. They see only the human logic of not stealing, which can be so easily alloyed with falsehood and altered to fit the whims of human desire. And so, their understanding and practice of truth is 'truly' limited, completely restricted by their this-world understanding of life.

Only Am Yisrael knows the enemy and are wary of his tactics. They can penetrate the veneer of the *Yetzer Hara* because they have the eternal doctrine of the Torah to guide them, a product of the upper world of truth. When Am Yisrael accepted the Torah and said,

“We will do and we will listen,” they placed their trust in Hashem that every word of the Torah is true, even before they understood why. This is why they can advance in their comprehension and see deeper and deeper understandings of the Torah. Only by learning Torah and battling the influence of the *Yetzer Hara* can we sanctify the physical world and purify its admixture of falsehood within the crucible of truth.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Hashem tells Avraham to leave his land and birthplace. This contains a reference to the *neshamah's* journey to this world. Initially, the *neshamah* does not want to leave its source of origin. But Hashem commands it to go, telling it that this is for its benefit. Only in this world can the *neshamah* perfect itself by working the soil of human imperfection and battling the elements of temptation.
- ◆ This world is referred to as the World of Falsehood. The *Yetzer Hara* distorts reality and alloys the truth with his counterfeit goods and their illusive pleasures. He misleads man into buying his wares and falling prey to his exploitations. Our job is to uncover the lie of falsehood and live a life of truth. We need to combat the influence of the *Yetzer Hara* and let the Torah, the guideline and doctrine of truth, be our guide.
- ◆ The pasuk says, “In all of your ways recognize Hashem.” This refers to our material and physical involvement with this world which can be used to serve Hashem. When we do what we have to, in order to live and not simply for pleasure’s sake, our bodily activities all become part of our Divine service, and we can recognize Hashem, in all of our ways.
- ◆ By absorbing the teachings of the Torah, we can attach ourselves to the World of Truth and uncover the veneer of falsehood of this world. We can begin to see secrets of the Torah that were otherwise inaccessible. In the upper world of pure unadulterated truth, there is a tremendous clarity of vision and many secrets of the Torah are revealed

there. Moshe Rabbeinu merited learning the secret of the *parah adumah* when he ascended on High to accept the Torah.

- ◆ This is the difference between Am Yisrael and the nations of the world. The nations of the world see only the human logic of the mitzvot, which can be so easily alloyed with falsehood and altered to fit the whims of human desire. And so, their understanding and practice of truth is limited and restricted by their shortsighted understanding of life. Am Yisrael placed their unconditional belief in Hashem that every word of the Torah is true. This is why they can advance in their comprehension, revealing ever deeper understanding of the Torah.



## The Value of Time

*“There was a famine in the land, and Avram descended to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land”*

*(Bereishit 12:10)*

This pasuk raises a serious question. When Avraham Avinu leaves Canaan because of the famine, there is no miraculous shortening of his journey or Divine intervention to pave the way. Yet when Eliezer goes to find a wife for Yitzchak, there is a supernatural contraction of the earth, and he arrives in Charan almost immediately after setting out. This inconsistency requires some explanation. Why does Avraham, who is going with the expressed will of Hashem, not deserve at least the same treatment as Eliezer, who was going with the command and blessing of Avraham? Even more, Hashem knows how much tzaddikim value their time, and so Hashem values their

time as well. This just reinforces the question; why didn't Hashem expedite Avraham's trip to Mitzrayim as he did for his servant Eliezer?

Perhaps the difference lies in the nature of the trip. Avraham's journey to Mitzrayim was a test, to see if he would complain over the seeming contravention of Hashem's word, to lead Avraham to the Promised Land. Thus the longer trip served a two-fold purpose; it became a greater trial for Avraham, and at the same time (or specifically because of its length) it became a greater source of remuneration in the long 'run.' Every step of the way was another source of merit for Avraham and for his descendants as well. Eliezer's journey on the other hand, was too much of a test. Eliezer wanted Yitzchak to marry his daughter (*Bereishit Rabbah* 59:9) and any delay would have given Eliezer the extra burden of overcoming his personal considerations. Hashem does not place a person in a situation which is too difficult for him to bear. And so Hashem paved the way for Eliezer's speedy expedition and quickly set the stage for its preordained ending.

The story is told of the Vilna Gaon, that once Eliyahu Hanavi came to him and offered to teach him Torah. The Gaon refused to accept his offer, not willing to accept any shortcuts in his Divine service. Explained the Gaon, this is the difference between a person and an angel. An angel is referred to by the *Navi* as עומד, standing in one place, static and unchanging. This is why the angels were not given mitzvot to do. They do not need the sanctification of mitzvot, as they were created perfect. Man on the other hand is called מהלך, mobile and in constant motion. This indicates his ability to rise in his service of Hashem and deepen his understanding of the Torah. Hashem gave us the mitzvot in order for us to be on the go, always changing and growing from one mitzvah to the next. Even more: "One mitzvah leads to another" (*Pirkei Avot* 4:2). Mitzvot provide us

with the opportunity to be on the never-ending upward climb to perfection. If I were to learn Torah from Eliyahu, explained the Gaon, I would remain stagnant in my understanding, atrophied by the tutelage of an angel. I would prefer to learn by myself and be able to discover new insights on my own. This is a lesson for us all, to delve into the depths of the Torah and not to look for the easy way out, attempting to learn Torah by using shortcuts.

The Gemara (*Berachot 26a*) says that if one brings a *korban* after its appointed time, its offering is null and void. One who brings a *korban* at the right time shows his understanding of the purpose of the *korban*. He anticipates its offering because he appreciates the closeness it creates between us and Hashem. However, one who fails to bring it until after the scheduled time, shows his lack of regard for the *korban*, and therefore it is not accepted. The same is true of tefillah. Each day is divided into time slots for different tefillot and after their respective span of time, those tefillot can no longer be said. By allowing time to slip by without praying, one displays his gross ignorance and insensitivity to this fundamental central component of Judaism.

Once, Harav Shach zt"l delivered a *sichah* before his talmidim on the subject of Divine judgment. He explained that every person is ultimately (in the next world) shown the details of each and every day of his life. As he said these words he began to cry. He explained that just that very morning he omitted some of his usual and punctual stringencies when reciting the morning *Kriyat Shema*. As it was already after the time allotted to say *Kriyat Shema*, he no longer could rectify that omission.

If Hashem sees that time is important to us, He helps us to utilize our time, to maximize and benefit from every second. I saw with my own eyes how my master and teacher Harav Chaim Shmuel Lopian zt"l had such providential assistance when searching for a specific

topic in the Gemara. How often did he open the Gemara straight to the page he was looking for! In my mind, there is no doubt that he was aided by Heaven, in order to minimize the time it would take to find the reference, and use it instead for actual learning. A similar story is told of Rav Elchanan Wasserman zt”l, who asked his son to return a pair of shoes that required tying with laces, as he couldn’t afford to spend the extra time every day tying his shoes. Such tzaddikim valued every minute of their lives.

The Gemara (*Makot* 10b) teaches us that “in the way man wants to go, Heaven leads.” This aptly applies to both Avraham Avinu and his servant Eliezer. Both had the Divine intervention that was necessary for their service of Hashem. One’s journey was lengthened to increase his reward, whereas the other had his shortened, to help him ‘on his way.’ The Divine interplay in our lives is dealt to us measure for measure, and the Heavenly clock of ‘relativity’ ticks by for each individual, according to their utilization of time. The seconds pass by the one who squanders them away, and play into the hands of the one who knows how to value time.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Avraham Avinu went to Egypt because of a famine, without any miraculous shortening of his journey. Eliezer on the other hand, went to find a wife for Yitzchak and had a supernatural contraction of the earth. Why did Avraham, while going with the consent of Hashem, not merit Divine intervention, whereas Eliezer who went with the command of Avraham did?
- ◆ The journey of Avraham was both a test and a source of reward. Every step of the way was really another merit in his favor. For Eliezer, a long journey would have been too much of a test, as he really wanted Yitzchak to marry his own daughter, and so he had his trip shortened.

- ◆ Angels are described as עומדים, standing in their place, because they do not have mitzvot to do. A person on the other hand, has the ability to change and grow, and so he is labeled a מהלך, in constant motion. The mitzvot are there to help him to go from one level to the next. This is why the Vilna Gaon did not want to learn Torah from Eliyahu Hanavi. He preferred to learn by himself and discover new insights on his own.
- ◆ A *korban* that is brought at the right time is accepted. One that is brought past its scheduled time is not. By not bringing it on time, one shows that he does not appreciate their *korban* or his service of Hashem. The same is true of tefillah. Once the time slot for a particular tefillah has passed, the tefillah can no longer be said.
- ◆ Time is precious. In the way man wants to go, Heaven leads. One can have his journey lengthened or shortened, all depending on each individual's utilization of time. The seconds pass by the one who squanders them away, and play into the hands of the one who knows how to value time.



## Keeping the Rules of Tzeniut

*“He said to Sarai his wife, ‘Now I know that you are a beautiful woman’”*

*(Bereishit 12:11)*

Rashi brings a Midrash to explain Avraham's words “now I know how beautiful you are.” Says the Midrash, until now Avraham was not familiar with her beauty, as he did not gaze at his wife due to the *middah* of *tzeniut* which existed between them.

This story teaches us several things about *tzeniut*. Avraham is praised by the Torah for not reveling in or relishing over his wife's beauty. Sarah is also praised for her *tzeniut* and for helping Avraham in his goal. She valued *kedushah* as well as Avraham did, and her internalization of *tzeniut* only unified them in purpose and allied them with constant fidelity. And we also learn about the degree of *tzeniut* held by the first Patriarch and Matriarch of our nation. They abstained from what they considered as mere pleasure-seeking and self-gratification. Even in their private life, they refrained from immoderation, according to their high spiritual level, and denied themselves any overindulgence of the senses. This is why Avraham was not overly familiar with his wife's beauty.

The Gemara (*Eiruvim* 53b) tells a story concerning Rabbi Yossi Haglilli which reiterates this point. Rav Yossi was once traveling and reached a fork in the road, whereupon he noticed Bruriah, the wife of Rav Meir, standing there. He asked her, "Which one of these two roads will lead me to Lud?" She berated him by saying, "Simpleton, the *Chachamim* have already warned you (*Avot* 1:5): Do not excessively converse with a woman. Your drawn out question borders on this prohibition. You should have asked instead, 'Which one to Lud?' and I would have understood your intent."

At first glance, this sounds a bit disconcerting, especially to our untrained ear. Why such sharp criticism? Certainly Rav Yossi's intention was harmless, his question unprovocative. Yet in light of his great stature, and under the scrutiny of the magnifying glass of the Torah, this was a breach in the walls of *tzeniut*. The rule of thumb is: Excessive conversation with members of the opposite gender is to be refrained from, wherever and whenever feasible.

The grandson of Maran Harav Shach zt"l told me the following story. When he went to meet his future wife for the first time, they

spoke for over three hours. His first stop after the date was to visit his grandfather and tell him how it went. Rav Shach asked him, "Where were you until now?" He answered, "I went to meet my future wife." Maran Harav Shach was dismayed. "A date need not be more than an hour," he said. "Why did you waste your time for no reason?" I understood from Harav Shach that it is possible to see in the span of one hour's time, whether or not the other person is destined to be one's spouse. Anything more than necessary, borders and infringes upon the realm of *tzeniut* and Torah protocol. This rule obviously must be formulated individually for each person according to their level, and will depend on what may be considered excessive and superfluous for his or her needs.

When one scrupulously keeps the Torah proprieties of chastity, he is rewarded with a mark of distinction and afforded premium 'coverage.' The story of Rabbi Mattia ben Charash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 161) is a case in point. Hashem praised his virtuous conduct and unswerving piety before the Satan. Said the Satan, "Give me permission to test him. We will yet see him withstand my blandishments and enticements." Hashem gave His permission, and the Satan came to Rabbi Mattia disguised as a beautiful woman, to the very Beit Hamidrash where he was leaning with his talmidim. (The talmidim did not see the Satan, just as no one else sees the Angel of Death, save his victim.) Rav Mattia turned his eyes away to look in another direction. The Satan followed suit by moving his place, still trying to get his attention. Seeing no alternative to his predicament, and afraid that he would be tempted to sin, Rav Mattia asked his talmidim to bring two iron rods from the furnace, and proceeded to poke out his eyes. So great was his aversion to taking a lustful peek and seeing immodesty, that he would rather go blind than be tempted to sin. The Angel Raphael even came to heal him, but he refused, not wanting to be tempted again. Only after

receiving a promise that he wouldn't be tempted did he consent to be healed.

Actually, this story presents a difficulty. The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30b) says that "were it not for the help of Hashem, we would be unable to withstand the enticements of the *Yetzer Hara*." How did Rav Mattia succeed in combating his evil inclination without supernal assistance? Once the Satan received permission to tempt him, automatically Rav Mattia was left unassisted in his battle. How did he prevail?

The answer is that when one keeps the Torah's proprieties and doesn't bend the rules to fit his own desires, he is fortified from within to fend off the pernicious enticements of the *Yetzer Hara*. This is how Rav Mattia succeeded. His scrupulousness in upright moral behavior vaccinated him from the influence of the *Yetzer Hara*. Only the one who wavers in his fidelity and vacillates in his righteousness needs the *Siyata di'Shemaya* to overpower his spiritual adversary. Hashem helps such people to withstand the enticements of the *Yetzer Hara* by virtue of their yearning for perfection and purification. As the saying goes, he who seeks purity is (Heavenly) assisted in being purified.

An unusual woman is mentioned in the Gemara (*Yoma* 47a) who merited having righteous children. Kimchit had no less than seven of her sons officiate as Kohanim Gedolim during the second Beit Hamikdash. The Gemara records the reason she thought that she deserved this great honor. She said that it was because she did not let down her hair, even indoors, within the confines of her own home. Her extra precaution of *tzeniut* (although not obligatory) reflects the high level of modesty held by the heroes of our people. By applying 'kedushah guidelines' and consecrating herself with a (non-compulsory) restraint, she elevated herself, and all of her children were elevated as a result.

There are other (more compulsory) restraints that the Torah places on our senses and their gratification. Chazal (*Berachot* 24a) say that one is forbidden to gaze and derive pleasure from even the smallest finger of a woman (other than one's wife). The Ramban writes in his commentary on the pasuk (*Vayikra* 19:2) "You shall be holy," that we are required to sanctify ourselves with what is permissible to us, curbing excessive conversations with women, for example.

An underlying factor in *tzeniut*, which is a pre-requisite to modesty, is the attribute of belief. In order to attain the *kedushah* of *tzeniut*, one must first believe in Hashem's existence and His all-encompassing presence. To use Kimchit as an example, her modesty in covering her hair sprang from her deep belief that Hashem is found everywhere, and one must act appropriately and modestly before His presence. This belief is also a sign of one's attachment and devotion to Hashem, and is expressed during one's prayers.

I heard a story involving the Chasam Sofer. Once, when the Chasam Sofer was not well, his son the Ksav Sofer took over his *shiur*, delivering a lecture in his father's place. After the *shiur*, the talmidim approached the Chasam Sofer and expressed their amazement, noting that the prowess of the son exceeded that of the father. "How did you merit to have such an unusual son?" they asked. The Chasam Sofer answered, "How many tears did I shed, how many prayers did I plead, to merit children who would be *talmidei chachamim*." Without doubt, the level of modesty exhibited in the Chasam Sofer's home was a significant factor in the upbringing of his children. This was a result of his belief in Hashem and the power of tefillah, and together they were instrumental in producing a tzaddik of such caliber.

One who wants to combat his *Yetzer Hara* for self-gratification and

achieve any level of *kedushah*, would be wise to refrain from excessive contact with members of the other gender. Extra precautions of *tzeniut* only enhance the quality of life. At first, one may be assaulted by the *Yetzer Hara* and deterred by his vehement protest. However, he should know one thing. Hashem helps those who struggle to master their evil inclination, and strengthens their resolve to walk in His ways. We can succeed by the force of conviction and through our constant prayer to withstand his influence,

This is the meaning of the words, “Were it not for the help of Hashem, we would be unable to withstand the enticements of the *Yetzer Hara*.” When one realizes that he truly needs Hashem’s help, and unconditionally puts his faith in the One Above, this itself is a great merit, worthy of saving one from the *Yetzer Hara*. It even has the power to save us from death. This is similar to *tzedakah*, which the Gemara says saves one from death. There is even a reference to this comparison in the Torah. When Avraham expressed his belief in Hashem, “Hashem considered it an act of *tzedakah*” (*Bereishit* 16:6). Avraham’s acceptance of Hashem’s sovereignty, and his belief in the Divine jurisdiction over the events in his life was akin to giving *tzedakah*. So too, our knowledge of His help and our allegiance to Hashem and His authority is the greatest form of giving that we can do for our Creator. And that is why it has the power to save us from the clutches of the *Yetzer Hara* and spiritual death.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Avraham and Sarah kept the Torah’s rules and protocols of *tzeniut*. It was only when they went down to Mitzrayim that Avraham realized her beauty and sought to protect her.
- ◆ Maran Harav Shach zt”l once showed his displeasure over a grandson whose date lasted more than an hour. The expectation was that he

could have sufficed with an hour's time to see if she was his destined spouse.

- ◆ Rabbi Mattia ben Charash would rather have gone blind than be tempted to sin. He prevailed over the enticements of the Satan by keeping the Torah's proprieties and not bending the rules to fit his own desires. Thus he was fortified and vaccinated to fend off the enticements of the *Yetzer Hara*.
- ◆ Kimchit merited having seven of her sons officiate as Kohanim Gedolim. This she attributed to her extra precaution of *tzeniut* (although not obligatory) of not letting down her hair even indoors, within the confines of her own home. She sanctified herself with what is permissible.
- ◆ An underlying factor in *tzeniut* is the attribute of belief. In order to attain the *kedushah* of *tzeniut*, one must first believe in Hashem's existence and His all-encompassing presence. Through such belief one can come to act appropriately and modestly before His presence.



## For Heaven's Sake

*“But it occurred, with Avram's coming to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they lauded Sarai to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house”*

*(Bereishit 12:14-15)*

The story of Sarah's abduction raises the following question. We know that Avraham Avinu was fearless when it came to fighting

others. He stood up against the greatest of his time. Take Nimrod for example. Nimrod made himself into a deity, and all cowered and trembled before him. When he walked outside, a natural fear gripped the animals that saw him, as he wore the clothing of Adam Harishon which had all of the creatures of the world depicted on it (*Pesachim* 54b). Avraham though wasn't fazed by his presence, and defied his authority. Even later, when Avraham's nephew Lot was captured, Avraham singlehandedly ambushed and chased after the four kings, together with his servant Eliezer. The leader of these four kings was none other than Nimrod, as Rashi explains the name (*Bereishit* 14:1) "Amrafel" to refer to Nimrod.

However, if Avraham had the courage to fight Nimrod, couldn't he have also fought Pharaoh and wrested Sarah away? The same goes for Avimelech, King of the Philistines, who also abducted Sarah when they arrived in his land. Instead of being up in arms and battling for her return, Avraham "picked up the Psalms" and prayed. Why did he not let out a cry for war?

It would seem that Avraham Avinu differentiated between his personal needs and the needs of Heaven. Regarding his own needs, and those of his very immediate family, Avraham placed his trust in Hashem and relied unequivocally on His help. Even more, he looked at himself as (*Bereishit* 18:27) "dirt and ashes." He was self-effacing and submissive to Hashem's will. And so for his own needs, as well as for his family's, he submitted his necessities of life and the wrongs of justice to the True Judge, praying for Divine deliverance. He did not see himself as the final arbitrator or adjudicator to decide his own case or take matters into his own hands.

But when it came to the needs of others, and especially by an attack on the honor of Hashem, he exchanged his submissive character for an assertive one. He became the fearless champion of righteousness. Avraham chose to battle Nimrod (whose Hebrew

name נמרד signifies rebellion, מרד) after he declared himself a leader of the defectors from Hashem, in order to return Lot back to civilization. This is why Avraham stepped out of character and fought against the mightiest nations on earth.

This is also apparent from the aftermath of the battle. The pasuk (ibid. 14:21) says that the king of Sodom made Avraham an offer. "Give me the people and the possessions take for yourself." Yet Avraham answers (ibid. 14:23), "From a string to a shoelace, I will not take a thing." He refused to take any plunder or benefit for himself. It was a war waged solely for the sake of Heaven, without any self-consideration, down to the tiniest detail.

When it came to his own personal needs though, Avraham relegated them to the discretion of the Al-mighty. He followed Hashem wherever he was told to go. Hashem told him (*Bereishit* 12:1) "Go forth... to the land which I shall show you," and yet immediately after his entry into the land, Avraham left with the advent of a famine. A regular person would have complained and voiced his grievances at being led on a wild goose chase, asking if this indeed was the land promised to him. Instead, Avraham put his faith in Hashem and followed His lead, accepting the decree of Hashem to descend to Egypt with full trust and without any personal misgivings. This is how we should act also, when faced with hardships and difficult circumstances.

The country of Venezuela in Southern America is known for its stormy and treacherous rains, which often cause major flooding. Hundreds and even thousands of people are swept away every year during the rainy season. I myself had Divine intervention which saved me from these tempestuous rains. I was once staying by someone's house there and on the day of my departure to France, I asked my host to take me to the airport six hours early. At first he did not see the point in going so early, but some inner voice kept

pushing me to go as soon as possible. After he agreed, we set out for the airport. Fifteen minutes after we arrived, a sudden storm broke, wreaking havoc and destruction in its wake. The roads leading to the airport were devastated, and had we not gone when we did, I would have been left stranded there for the next two weeks until the flights resumed.

Some time ago, I met a Jew living there who described how he was miraculously saved twice from these stormy floods. Once he was in his car, and a flood threatened to wash it away, even shattering his glass windshield. It seemed as he had found his grave. Miraculously, the door of his car opened, almost as if a hidden hand reached out and yanked it open. He ran out and was saved. Another time, again he was in his car, when terrible winds and battering rain threatened to drag his car into the ocean. His car suddenly jammed into a depression in the earth, and he was left alive.

I asked this fellow Jew if he puts on tefillin. He said that he used to but stopped. I said, "Already twice you were saved from death by miraculous means. Don't you see the writing on the wall urging you to commit yourself to some action? Your car was overhauled and renovated; doesn't your soul need some restoration too?"

A person who only sees his personal needs may often overlook the will of G-d. We may feel fortunate in being saved, without realizing that we need to show our appreciation to Hashem. This follows what we explained before. Those things which pertain to our own personal needs shouldn't overshadow what requires our extra attention. So the Avot Hakedoshim have taught us. The honor of Hashem should override our needs and initiate a peremptory reaction. For the sake of Heaven, we should learn to take the initiative, not relying on Hashem to lead the way.

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**In Summary**

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- ◆ Why did Avraham Avinu not fight to bring Sarah back, just as he fought Nimrod to return Lot? Avraham was prepared to battle the mightiest kings on earth for the honor of Hashem, just as he fought Nimrod who made himself into a deity. Yet for his own needs he was complacent and relied on Hashem.
- ◆ A lesson that we can learn from Avraham is to take the initiative when it comes to matters pertaining to Heaven, whereas in our personal needs we should put our faith in Hashem and rely on Him to lead the way.

**Lessons from the Lives of the Avot**

*“So Avram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers... Please separate from me: If you go left then I will go right, and if you go right then I will go left’... and Lot journeyed from the East; thus they parted, one from his brother”*

*(Bereishit 13:8-11)*

The parshiyot which relate to the Avot Hakedoshim are more than just stories. When we read these parshiyot and learn about the Avot Hakedoshim and the events of their lives, we are actually finding the guideposts which point us in the direction of Hashem’s will. By observing their actions and taking note of their good *middot*, every

Jew, from any walk of life, can learn from their righteous behavior how to act.

Taking this concept one step further, we see what constitutes true success in life. Success is not measured by any acquisition of materialism. It is measured by one's service of Hashem. A close look at the world around us shows the Divine design and individual purpose that each object or creature inherently has. What is the purpose of a Jew? To grow in Avodat Hashem until he can become self-reliant and capable in serving the Al-mighty, almost like a toddler who grows from day to day in his prowess to stand on his own. We can grow in our avodah if we look for purpose in life and pursue it sincerely and willingly.

This is why the parshiyot of *Bereishit* describe in great detail the lives of the Avot and do not concentrate on explaining the mitzvot (as later parshiyot do). The underlying message is: learn how to act from the Avot as a prerequisite for keeping the rest of the Torah. This concept is expressed in Pirkei Avot (3:17): "If there is no *derech eretz*, there is no Torah." The Torah is compared to water. Just as water can be accumulated by allowing it to flow into a container, so too we can hold and retain Torah only by refining our character and perfecting ourselves. Working on one's *middot* fashions the receptacle of the human soul to contain the timeless wisdom of the Torah.

In this vein, we can begin to appreciate the story of Lot and his separation from Avraham. There is a very deep lesson in Avodat Hashem to learn from their parting of ways. At first glance, Lot appears to be a righteous individual as well as a firm believer in Hashem. When he went down to Egypt with his uncle Avraham, he did not disclose Sarah's true marital status, despite the opportunity to cash in by revealing this information to the Egyptian authorities.

And as a sign of his belief, perhaps we can point to his consent to allow his shepherds to graze his sheep in the fields of others. By doing so, he demonstrated his belief in Hashem. Since he was the apparent heir to Avraham, and the ultimate recipient of the Promised Land, he thought that the land was his. Actually, Avraham never told Lot that he would be his heir. Although childless for many years, Avraham trusted in Hashem's promise (*Bereishit* 12:2) "and I will make you into a great nation," that he would one day have a son. Avraham also understood the words (*ibid.* 12:1) לך לך, which have a numerical value of one hundred, as hinting to the birth of a son at the age of one hundred. What Avraham told his men who accompanied him was that Hashem had commanded him to go a new land, "to the land that I shall show you." Lot inferred that if Hashem had sent Avraham to leave Charan and go to a different land, then that land would one day be his. Lot thought that since Avraham was barren, he himself would eventually become the rightful heir and owner. Thus Lot was not stealing (in his own eyes). He was just taking what was already promised and would eventually end up as his own.

As we continue in the parashah, we find more examples of Lot's seeming piety and righteousness. By taking in the Heavenly wayfarers and providing them with lodging in Sodom, he not only risked his life, he also jeopardized the welfare of his two daughters. Even Avraham Avinu did not keep the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* in such trying circumstances. Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 82) add that Lot gave his guests matzot, as it was Pesach. Lot kept what he learnt from Avraham Avinu, and evidently removed all of the chametz from his possession as well. Specifically regarding the mitzvot of Pesach, the Arizal says that whoever keeps the laws of Pesach properly will not stumble or cause others to fall and sin. This all goes to show how Lot sacrificed for the sake of mitzvot.

The obvious question is – why did Lot choose to live in the city of Sodom, which was known for its depravity and wickedness? What connection did he have with these evil people? The truth of the matter is that Lot did feel an affinity with the residents of Sodom. A person naturally gravitates to those whom have similar interests as he. Beneath his religious appearance lay indifference to taking the property of others, similar to the Sodomites and their thieving ways. That was his base motive for allowing his shepherds to graze their sheep wherever they wanted. Even according to his underlying assumption that he would one day inherit his uncle this did not justify the misappropriation of property before their rightful acquisition. This behavior is similar to the one who procures all of the properties in a game of Monopoly at the beginning of the game, by reasoning that he would win the game anyway due to his opponent's lack of knowledge of the game. This was Lot's mistake.

I suggest that there were other, deeper motives for Lot, why he allowed the sheep to pasture wherever there was fodder. One possibility is that he based his actions on religious grounds and rationalized its virtuousness. By stocking up on animal feed, Lot thought that he would then be able to provide more food for indigent people, almost like one who steals from the rich to give to the poor. Such a warped perception of good and evil was the fundamental difference which divided between them. Avraham Avinu expressed this contention when he said, "For we are brothers," referring to their common goal of *chessed* and providing for others. Unfortunately, Lot's way of doing things was flawed and illegitimate.

Perhaps Lot based himself on the actions of Hashem. Often, Hashem employs the *middah* of Divine Judgment when dealing with His creatures and uses this course of action of taking from one and giving to the other. After all, the possessions of man are like

deposited securities, allocated to each recipient according to the Divine decree. Lot figured that he was walking in Hashem's path by permitting himself what he saw as rightful appropriation. But this too was a mistake. To take from someone is a *middah* reserved only for the One Above, Who runs the world and apportions our material wealth in the first place. Avraham Avinu on the other hand, acted in the opposite manner. He followed Hashem's *middah* of compassion, which is indeed our obligation, as it says (*Yalkut Shimoni Shemot*, 255), "Just as He is compassionate, so shall you be." This is why Avraham excelled in the *middah* of *chessed*, without resorting to appropriating the possession of others. He gave only what was rightfully his, what he acquired by the sweat of his brow.

If we investigate further, we are still puzzled at Lot's affinity to the people of Sodom. What pulled him to befriend those who obtained their wealth by seizing property purely for personal reasons without any intention of good? They were spiritually distant from Lot, despite his misguided philanthropy. Did they not see that his goals were not synonymous with theirs, even before the angels ever stepped foot on their soil?

It would seem that Lot actually had personal reasons for his acts of *chessed*. The underpinnings of honor and acclaim, as well as his sensitivity to the public eye, motivated Lot to act kindly to all. His *chessed* wasn't of the same caliber of his uncle as it lacked the true inner desire to really help the other person. It was done more for show, to show Avraham that he was superior and a worthy heir, to show others what a good person he was. By displaying his aggrandizement when it came to the possessions of others, he revealed the true reasons for his actions and relinquished any accolades for their benevolence. The flaw that existed in his good deeds reared its ugly head and demonstrated to all the resemblance he had to the wicked people of Sodom.

We need to remember where the parameters of *chessed* lie. Hashem wants us to do *chessed* according to our abilities, but the quality of our acts is more important than the quantity. Chazal say (*Berachot* 5b), “Whether one does a lot or a little, the main thing is to direct one’s thoughts to fulfill the will of Hashem.” Avraham Avinu demonstrated his lack of personal gain when he went to sacrifice his son Yitzchak on the altar. An act of altruism, when done without fanfare and publicity, is of tremendous caliber. The *Akeidah* was done without anyone watching, a true act of Divine service. This just brings out the vast difference between Lot and Avraham.

Hashem protected Lot from being ‘swallowed up’ by the people of Sodom. It was in the merit of Avraham that Lot was saved from their hands, at first by them not paying attention to him, and ultimately by being wrested away from their grip. He was saved from their destruction because Hashem saw the pain that it would cause Avraham, not because of the tainted righteousness of Lot.

Another lesson we can take from this parashah is from the defection of Lot. At first, he convinced himself that he was walking the righteous path, leaving Avraham Avinu in order to shower others with his generosity. His departure would best be classified as *shogeg*. Yet as time went on, he remained steadfast in his alienation from Avraham and continued to deteriorate. He did not want to accept the reproof of Avraham. As David Hamelach says (*Tehillim* 119:99), “From all of my teachers I grew wise.” This refers even to the words of a child who speaks the honest, and often bitter, truth. How much more so when coming from a tzaddik like Avraham Avinu! When the Angels came to Sodom, they reasoned with him, but their words fell upon deaf ears. When one does not accept words of reproof, his conduct changes its status to that of *meizid*. This is something we can all take to heart, as Hashem has many messengers and often sends warnings for us to change our ways.

The contrast between Avraham Avinu and Lot now begins to become evident. At first glance we see similarities between the sacrifice of Avraham, who gave up his son for Hashem, and the sacrifice of Lot, who offered up his daughters for the sake of *hachnasat orchim*. Both men kept the laws of Pesach, ate matzah, and burned their chametz. We can even point to the generous hospitality of both men. But beneath his veneer, Lot had ulterior motives and personal gain at stake. Avraham Avinu on the other hand, had a heart of gold, sterling in his motivation and virtuous through and through.

The divergence of their drives and ambitions eventually led each one to their respective destination. The one who had only the will of the Creator in mind continued to grow in his aspirations and Divine service. This is hinted at by the words לך לך, which refers to Hashem's urging of Avraham to go forth on his continuous journey of spiritual ascent. The one who was driven by more base and personal motivations however, descended from his altruistic pursuits into the abyss of spiritual defection. Even after the destruction of Sodom, Lot continued in his flight of defection. Instead of doing teshuvah and returning to his uncle the tzaddik, he chose to dwell apart and fathered two illegitimate children, causing a great deal of embarrassment to Avraham Avinu in the process.

How shaken are we, to see Lot, with all of his good intentions, stoop and stumble in two of the very sins which led to the Great Flood: stealth and immorality. Even more unfortunate is to witness the same descent amongst many of our contemporaries, who perhaps mean well and display an interest in doing righteous deeds, only to fall and become prey to the ills of our decadent society. Often in the guise of righteousness, they are capable of carrying out despicable acts of the basest nature.

Perhaps the one redeeming factor that Lot had was his original good intentions. It was in that merit that one of his descendants returned to the Jewish nation, and thus with the appearance of Ruth the Moabite, Lot became a progenitor of the ultimate Mashiach.

By thinking about the events in the lives of our great forefathers and their righteous ways, we can begin to appreciate many of the laws of the Torah. We can see the ill effects that violating Torah prohibitions can have on man. Stealing becomes more than some archaic prohibition. We see it for what it really is – a one-way street to spiritual defection, even if one does not personally benefit from taking what belongs to others. By reading these parshiyot of the Avot, we have the preface to begin our journey of understanding the Torah's laws and growing in our love of Hashem.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ The Torah is the guide to life, and the events of the Avot Hakedoshim are the guideposts which point us in the direction of Hashem's will. Every Jew, in any walk of life can learn from their righteous behavior how to act.
- ◆ What was the difference between Avraham Avinu and Lot? What can we learn from the story of Lot and his separation from Avraham? Lot gave an appearance of being righteous. But beneath the veneer, we see why he chose to live near Sodom. He allowed his shepherds to graze his sheep in other people's property, thinking that he would eventually become the rightful owner of the land. But beneath his religious appearance lay the indifference to taking the property of others, similar to the Sodomites and their thieving ways.
- ◆ Perhaps Lot was motivated by the desire to show how he did more *chessed* than Avraham, or else he based his actions on religious grounds, thinking that it was legitimate to take from the rich to give to

the poor. He also thought that he was walking in the ways of Hashem, Who often employs this form of justice. Avraham on the other hand emulated the *middah* of compassion of Hashem, without resorting to appropriating the possession of others. He gave only what was rightfully his. And so Lot was saved because of the righteousness of Avraham, not by his own merit. His *chessed* lacked the true inner desire to really help the other person. It was done more for show, to show Avraham that he was superior and a worthy heir, to show others what a good person he was.

- ◆ One should take the Heavenly signs alerting him to do teshuvah. When one does not accept words of reproof, his conduct changes its status to that of *meizid*.
- ◆ Lot's original intentions were praiseworthy, and through his descendant Ruth, he merited to become a progenitor of the ultimate Mashiach.



## The Severity of Bitul Torah

***“And when Avram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he armed his disciples... three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them until Dan”***

*(Bereishit 14:14)*

The pasuk describes how Avraham Avinu set out to free his nephew Lot from captivity. He mobilizes several hundred of his men to action, who begin with him on his trek. Rashi interprets this pasuk slightly differently: he says that it is Eliezer, Avraham's prize

servant, who becomes his one-man army. This is hinted at by the word חניכיו (pupil) which refers specifically to his unique servant whom Avraham had חינכו (educated and raised) to do mitzvot. All of the other men fell back and returned home. The Torah does in fact accept a soldier's withdrawal from combat, under the claim of fear or faint-heartedness, before they enter into battle. Thus the other men left for home with Avraham's permission.

Chazal (*Nedarim* 32a) however, point out a negative repercussion of this conscription. Avraham is faulted for drafting men who are busy learning Torah. This disturbance of their learning even results in a punishment for Avraham and his descendants (similar to other major sins that affect one's children as well.)

What is puzzling about Hashem's response to Avraham's campaign is that at the same time that He punished him, He also rewarded him. After the battle, Hashem tells Avraham (*Bereishit* 15:1), "Fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is exceedingly great." It would seem that Hashem is satisfied with Avraham's actions, even promising him reward for saving his nephew. Why then does Avraham deserve to be punished? The answer is that one does not conflict with the other. Hashem does not hold back reward for one's good deeds even if those actions are diluted or mixed with some infringement of the law. Avraham deserved to be rewarded for his courageous fight for Lot's life, and at the same time, disrupting the learning of several hundred men warranted a penalty.

From this episode we learn about the severity of disturbing others from learning Torah, as well as the value in the eyes of Hashem of every minute spent learning.

At one point, Avraham falters in his pursuit of Lot's captors. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 14:14) says, "And he pursued them until Dan." Rashi explains that Avraham Avinu stopped his chase at Dan because he saw by Divine revelation that in that very spot, his descendants would one day deteriorate and worship idolatry. A bit of explanation is necessary. Why did Hashem see fit to show this revelation to Avraham in the midst of his chase? Why jeopardize his whole plan of action? Was there not perhaps a more appropriate time to let him know such details?

I suggest that Hashem wanted Avraham Avinu to realize the outcome of his actions. Specifically at this juncture of time, after he disturbed others from learning, Hashem hinted to Avraham what he did wrong, by showing him the relapse of his descendants many years later. The similarity between idolatry, where one is detached from his Creator, and *bitul* Torah, where one is detached from his spiritual lifeline, was meant to arouse Avraham to reflect and repent. Additionally, Avraham was being called upon to account for Eliezer's *bitul* Torah as well. Eliezer's presence did not swing the balance of power to Avraham's side. Hence his help was not as necessary as Avraham thought it would be. The words וַיִּרְדּוּ עַד דָּן hint to this reproof, as their final letters form the word פָּדֶן (to liberate) as Avraham had the capability of setting Lot free without outside help. It was at this point that Avraham Avinu faltered and ended his chase.

The message that we learn from here is the importance of valuing the time we spend learning. Even Avraham, who was engaged in setting his nephew free from captivity, was taken to task for the *bitul* Torah of his protégés. He was faulted for placing the responsibility of saving Lot on the shoulders of those who learn Torah, despite the Torah's high regard for the mitzvah of redeeming captives. The

resulting punishment for Avraham and his descendants is a sign that such action is not taken lightly in the Heavenly Court up Above.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Hashem faulted Avraham for drafting his men who were learning Torah in order to free his nephew Lot from captivity. This resulted in a punishment for Avraham and his descendants. But is this really so severe as to warrant punishment?
- ◆ Avraham deserved to be rewarded for his courageous fight for Lot's life, as Hashem does not hold back reward for one's good deeds even if they are diluted or mixed with some infringement of the law. At the same time, Avraham warranted a penalty for disrupting the learning of several hundred men.
- ◆ Avraham Avinu stops his chase at the place where he sees by Divine revelation that his descendants would one day deteriorate and worship idolatry. Why does Hashem see fit to show this revelation to Avraham in the midst of his chase? I suggest that Hashem was hinting to Avraham Avinu specifically after when he disturbed others from learning, the severity of *bitul* Torah by showing him the relapse of his descendants years later. This was meant to arouse Avraham to reflect and repent.



## Responding to Inspiration

*“So Sarai, Avram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maidservant – after ten years of Avram’s dwelling in the land of Canaan, and gave her to Avram her husband, to him as a wife”*

*(Bereishit 16:3)*

Rashi explains a bit of Hagar’s background. Hagar was actually of royal lineage, the daughter of Pharaoh. Her entrance into Avraham’s household resulted from Avraham’s journey to Egypt. After Pharaoh heard about the miracles that occurred with Avraham Avinu, and witnessed firsthand the miracles in his own palace with Sarah, he reasoned that Hagar would be better off in the house of Avraham as a maidservant, than as a queen or wealthy matron anywhere else.

In truth, Hagar was no ordinary woman. She was righteous and worthy in her own right. What did she do to merit marrying Avraham? The *Chachamim* find a reference to her greatness in the name that the Torah gives her, Keturah (*Bereishit* 25:1). The word קטורה is related to the word קטורת (incense). Hagar was similar to incense as her actions carried the fine fragrance that comes from righteous deeds.

The very fact that Hagar agreed to leave a life of luxury and pomp, and begin to lead a life of austerity and virtue, demonstrates the nobility of her soul. To be a maidservant in the house of Avraham Avinu meant more than eschewing dainty delicacies and regal festivities. Her acceptance meant menial chores and lowly serfdom. She had to make an abrupt change in her lifestyle and accept a degrading lower standard of living. Hagar reflected upon the

greatness of spirit found in the house of Avraham, and willingly chose to lead the life of a maidservant – forgoing the royal treatment and palatial pleasures found in her father’s home.

Perhaps we can find a hint to her greatness of character in her name. The numerical value of the word **הגֵר** (when we also add one for the word itself) is the same as that of the word **אָחַר** (different). She became a different person. After she began to appreciate Avraham and Sarah’s unique greatness, and negate her previous existence, her life changed.

We find that the *Chachamim* nicknamed someone by the name of Elisha ben Avuyah as **אָחַר**. He was a learned scholar who threw off the yoke of Torah and mitzvot, and thus earned the title “Acher” for his change for the worse. This epithet can also be used to describe someone who changes for the better. Kalev, who had a different outlook than the other spies, was praised for his ‘different,’ independent spirit (*Bamidbar* 14:24). Similarly, Shaul merited receiving the gift of prophecy and he became an **אִישׁ אָחַר** (*Shmuel* I, 10:6). Thus there exists an **אָחַר** by holiness and virtue, just as there is one by impurity and vice. Hagar became a different woman when she consented to join the household of Avraham and subject herself to servitude, under the wings of these great tzaddikim.

What is puzzling is why only Hagar understood this concept and not her father Pharaoh. He himself sent her to the house of Avraham Avinu. Pharaoh was a first-hand witness to Avraham and Sarah’s greatness of character and righteousness. This prompted him to send off his daughter and abdicate her monarchic place of honor. Why then did he not take it to heart and change for the better?

The answer is that the *Yetzer Hara* is wily and cunning. Some people practice what they preach. The *Yetzer Hara* persuades us to

preach, but to forget the part about our own practice. He slyly convinces us that it is no longer necessary. He even deceives people into believing that they are righteous, because after all, they have already spouted words of *mussar* and exhorted others to change their ways. By reflex, they feel smug about themselves and complacent about their own shortcomings and degeneracy. In truth, only after we make a change in ourselves can we help others change their ways.

This was Pharaoh's instinctive reaction. The *Yetzer Hara* influenced Pharaoh to feel content, even righteous, about sending off his own daughter, as long as he himself did not have to make any changes. Thus Pharaoh continued his hedonistic life and did not do teshuvah.

We find a similar idea by Yaakov and Eisav. When Yaakov returns home after an absence of twenty-two years, he tells Eisav (*Bereishit* 32:5), "I dwelled by Lavan and tarried until now." Chazal (see Rashi, *ibid.*) rearrange the letters of the Hebrew word גרתי (to dwell) to spell תרי"ג (an acronym whose numerical value refers to the 613 commandments). Yaakov hints to Eisav that he kept all of the commandments, despite living so many years in the house of Lavan. He remained the same Yaakov, not learning from Lavan's wicked ways, simple as always, guileless as before. Yaakov even had a special shine. The pasuk (*Kohelet* 8:1) says, "The wisdom of man enlightens ones features." Despite the bright countenance of Yaakov, which spoke of his inner beauty and all-encompassing truth, Eisav was not moved to make adjustments in life or change his step. What was Eisav's reaction to Yaakov's appearance, or to the appearance of his exemplary children? Total indifference. Eisav did not look on with admiration at Yaakov's virtues or acknowledge his aura of wisdom. He only wanted to press his teeth into Yaakov's neck and vent his anger and longstanding hatred.

At the end of their encounter though, Eisav is moved to offer a token show of respect. He says to Yaakov, “Travel on and let us go, I will proceed alongside you” (*Bereishit* 33:12). Perhaps Eisav wished to serve Yaakov by escorting him and leading the way. Why did Yaakov push his offer aside? Yaakov saw that Eisav was not willing to make a change within, to allow himself to be affected. Without genuine sincerity or any interest of continuity, Eisav’s show of respect was meaningless. It lacked the permanence needed to effect a change in his evil ways.

Herein lies a lesson on the power, and responsibility, of responding to inspiration. When we hear words of reproof or comments and corrections on our behavior, we need to take them to heart and inspire ourselves to change our ways. It is not enough to feel a pinprick of enthusiasm or have a spark of interest. We need to pierce our thick skin of stubborn indifference and fan that spark of interest into a flame. It is only when we peer into ourselves and seek to refine our character that the inspiration can stand a change of finding permanence in our hearts. We can change ourselves if we put our minds to it. Even simple and ordinary people have risen to great heights by searching within themselves and making changes in their lives.

The Gemara (*Mo’ed Katan* 17a) relates that one time a maidservant in the house of Rebbi saw a man commit a sin, whereupon she excommunicated him. Rebbi did not remove this ostracism even after her death. The *Rosh* (ibid. *siman* 11) explains that Rebbi doubted his halachic authority to undo her excommunication. Rebbi’s uncertainty lay in his appraisal of his maidservant’s greatness of character. He thought that she was greater than he.

This is quite puzzling. What led him to think that this simple maidservant was in fact greater than he, an erudite sage, the head

of the Sanhedrin? The answer is that Rebbi took note of her response to sin. How could an ordinary maidservant, whose sole occupation was to cook and clean, become so aghast at someone's sin? From where did she draw such a fiery response? Her need to express her feelings of righteous indignation, her vehemence, could only have come from a heart filled with righteous thoughts. Rebbi concluded that she must have spent her working hours and menial chores thinking about spiritual matters, stirring her spirit with thoughts of Hashem and harnessing the power of inspiration. She became a different person, noble in spirit and great in deed. This is why Rebbi did not undo her excommunication. Even a simple and ordinary person can climb the rungs of contemplation and explore the reaches of inner space, reflecting on the purpose of Creation and the greatness of G-d.

We can now understand another puzzling figure in Yaakov Avinu's life. His father-in-law, Lavan Ha'arami, remained a conniving and crooked character, despite having Yaakov around and witnessing his greatness of spirit. Not only was he uninspired, he even ran after Yaakov to try to kill him. Didn't he see the prosperousness of Yaakov's hands, the bounty of blessing which graced his home upon Yaakov's arrival? This was the very reason that Lavan himself deterred Yaakov's departure for so many years. He wanted to benefit from his presence. And yet Lavan kept his idols and steadfastly clung to his crooked ways. Why?

The answer is as we stated previously. It is not enough to feel inspired for the moment. We need to respond, to 'translate' that inspiration into action. If we search into ourselves and allow that inspiration to touch the very fiber of our being, we can become different people. Contemplation leads to change; disregard and inactivity lead to spiritual stagnation and deterioration. Lavan saw

and remained the same because he did not take that inspiration and respond to it.

What prevented Lavan from changing? What did he lack, causing him to brush aside the inspiration from Yaakov's righteousness? He lacked Torah. Torah is the foundation to build on, to build good character and construct edifices of virtuous conduct. Without a strong foundation, one cannot begin to build. Lavan had the golden opportunity to learn Torah from the mouth of Yaakov Avinu. He could have studied Torah with his own grandchildren, the righteous Shevatim. Armed with a background of Torah, one can use the moments of inspiration to develop character and perfect one's *middot*. Without it, one is helpless to effect a change and bring such inspiration home, into the realm of the spirit, into the inner reaches of the human soul.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Pharaoh sent his daughter Hagar to Avraham, reasoning that she would be better off being a maidservant in the house of Avraham than a queen somewhere else. Why did Pharaoh only think of benefitting his daughter and not bettering himself? Why didn't he himself change his evil ways?
- ◆ The *Yetzer Hara* persuades us to preach, but only at others. When it comes to personal practice, he slyly convinces us that it is unnecessary to respond. After spouting words of *mussar* and inspiring others to change their ways, people then feel smug about themselves and instinctively are complacent with their own shortcomings.
- ◆ Eisav saw the greatness of Yaakov, his air of virtue and his aura of wisdom, and remained the same. Similarly, Lavan had the opportunity to learn from Yaakov and yet he steadfastly clung to his crooked ways, brushing Yaakov's righteousness aside.

- ◆ Hagar became a different woman when she consented to join the household of Avraham and subject herself to servitude. She reflected upon the greatness of spirit found in the house of Avraham and eventually merited to marry Avraham as a result. So too, the maidservant in the house of Rebbi spent her working hours while doing menial chores thinking about the purpose of Creation and the greatness of G-d. Rebbi took note of her response to sin and concluded that she was greater than he.
- ◆ It is not enough to feel inspired for the moment. We need to respond, to translate that inspiration into action. We can stir our spirits with thoughts of the greatness of Hashem and harness the power of inspiration. We can change ourselves if we put our minds to it. Even simple and ordinary people can rise to great heights by searching within themselves and making changes in their lives.
- ◆ The foundation to build good character on and help us effect changes in our life is the Torah. Without a strong foundation, one cannot begin to build. Armed with a background of Torah, one can use the moments of inspiration to develop character and perfect one's *middot*. Only after we make a change in ourselves can we help others change their ways.



## Gems on Parashat Lech Lecha



### Leaving it Behind

*“Hashem said to Avram, ‘Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you’”*

*(Bereishit 12:1)*

Avraham’s traveling away from home suggests a deeper kind of journey, a journey of the mind. The words לך לך, when placed together, can be read as לכלוך (dirty and squalid). Hashem was hinting to Avraham that the atmosphere in his father’s house was preventing his spiritual ascent. His road to living a life of Torah was being hampered by the luxuries found at home. The delights and pleasures of this world cloud and ‘dirty’ the soul with their murky refuse of self-indulgence and gratification. Thus the ‘squalid’ conditions of his home were not conducive to his future growth in Torah.

By leaving it all behind, Avraham would be able to fill his mind with the illumination of the Torah. The words “to the land that I will show you” hints at this idea. In the Land of Israel, one can gain deeper understandings and more spiritual insights than anywhere

else on earth. This is because it is the “land that... Hashem’s eyes are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the year’s end” (*Devarim* 11:12). Hashem sent Avraham Avinu to the land where he could loosen and scour out the dirt and grime of his father’s home. And through learning Torah in Eretz Yisrael, he would benefit from the light of Hashem’s countenance, as it says (*Tehillim* 33:18), “The eye of Hashem is on those who fear Him.”



### **Sarah’s Deferential Humility**

*“And Sarai said to Avram, ‘See, now, Hashem has restrained me from bearing; consort, now, with my maidservant, perhaps I will be built up through her.’ And Avram heeded the voice of Sarai”*

*(Bereishit 16:2)*

It is amazing that Sarah allowed Avraham to take a lowly, foreign maidservant to be his wife. Why did she think that Hagar, the daughter of Pharaoh, would one day bear Avraham’s children? What brought her to say (*Bereishit* 16:2), “Perhaps I will be built up through her”? The only answer is that Sarah saw special qualities in Hagar. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 61:4) make mention of the good deeds that she did, as signified by her second name קטורה which is related to the word קטורת (incense). Her good deeds gave off a fine fragrance, the pleasure that Hashem had from her actions. This is why Sarah originally thought that their union would prove beneficial, leading to the emergence of the Jewish nation.

But Hashem decided otherwise. He declared to Avraham (*Bereishit* 21:12) that only “through Yitzchak will offspring be considered yours.” Yishmael would not be designated as Avraham’s progeny or worthy of carrying on the family lineage. Only the descendants of Sarah Imeinu would have that title and lay claim to his Patriarchic ancestry. Her combination of humility and deference to Hagar was actually the catalyst which led to this turn of events. Hashem saw Sarah’s virtuous behavior and blessed her accordingly.



### With Perfect Faith

*“When Avram was ninety-nine years old,  
Hashem appeared to Avram and said to him,  
‘I am G-d...’”*

*(Bereishit 17:1)*

Hashem introduces the mitzvah of *brit milah* to Avraham Avinu by instructing him to “walk faithfully before Him.” Why is the *middah* of ‘walking faithfully’ so important when serving Hashem? Why did Hashem not tell Avraham to be totally dedicated or trustworthy? Are dedication and trustworthiness not also worthy components of Divine service?

I suggest the following. Often, one may be presented with a puzzling Divine turn of events. It would seem in the eyes of the beholder, that G-d’s ways are unfair and unjust, and that the proper course of events should have been arranged differently. One may even cast aspersions on the workings of Providence, questioning its

logic and crying foul on its discrimination. It may require a formidable effort of faith to accept the will of Hashem. Complete faith means turning a blind eye to the limited vision of man and opening one's eyes to the awareness of G-d.

A good example of this is Avraham's journey to Eretz Yisrael. After being told to leave home and travel to a new land, Avraham arrives in Canaan only to discover a severe famine, which forces his sojourn into Egypt. Similarly, when Avraham is Heavenly compelled and bound for Gerar, the land of the Philistines, he winds up with his wife being held captive by no one less than the king himself. Avraham could have taken the opportunity to cast doubt on the ways of Hashem. Instead, he did the opposite. He used it as an opportunity to submit himself, and his finite human logic, to the authority of a Higher Authority. By dint of love, and through the power of faith, Avraham withstood his *nisyonot*, the Heavenly 'Reagents' which determine our character and bring our dormant potential to the fore.

This *middah* is a must for anyone who wants to 'run before' the King and 'lead' Him on His way. Only by walking before Hashem with perfect faith can we merit to be the Divine receptacle and instrument in bringing His glory into this world.





## Vayeira



### Chapters of our Forefathers, a Guide for Life

*“Hashem appeared to him in the Plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and saw, and behold! Three men were standing before him. He saw, and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and bowed toward the ground”*

*(Bereishit 18:1-2)*

Rashi explains that the high temperature of that day was from no ordinary heat wave. The sun had shed an outer atmospheric layer, which normally enveloped it and retained its intense heat. This was similar to an object being removed from its sheath. Hashem purposely removed the sun from its natural casing, in order to keep people off the roads and visitors away from Avraham Avinu.

What is the reason for such great heat? Hashem commands the nonagenarian Avraham to give himself a *brit milah*. It is hard for us

to imagine the pain that an older man would have at undergoing such a surgical procedure. After experiencing severe discomfort, Hashem sends the Angel Raphael to heal him (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 82). As we all know, Avraham was the paradigm of *chessed*, and he took every opportunity to invite guests and welcome them into his home, all while urging them to recognize the Al-mighty as the true host of all-time. Hashem thus removed the sun from its sheath in order to give Avraham Avinu some peace and quiet from the successive stream of guests who graced his home, thereby relieving Avraham from feeding and entertaining them (*Bava Metzia* 86b).

And yet we are puzzled by Avraham's reaction to the heat. Instead of taking it easy and accepting it as a Heavenly sign to recuperate, Avraham gets up from bed and peers at the horizon looking for guests. If he knew that Hashem sent the heat wave specifically for this purpose, to prevent wayfarers and to curtail his hospitality, why does he search for company? Isn't this a defiance of Hashem's will?

Perhaps we can add another question to our puzzle. Chazal (*Berachot* 64b) say, "Tzaddikim are never given rest, not in this world, nor in the next." This concept is mentioned in relation to Yaakov Avinu. His desire to rest and enjoy some tranquility and security after so many years of struggle with adversaries, was shattered by the disappearance of Yosef (*Bereishit Rabbah* 82:3). Why then did Hashem want Avraham to take a break from his Divine service?

I suggest that Hashem was actually testing Avraham to see how far he would take his unaccustomed vacation, how much he would linger over his bed rest. Would he enjoy his break from having guests? Was Avraham relishing his time off in the shade?

Witnessing the unusually hot sun and intense heat, Avraham knew that something was 'afoot.' Such an event demanded his attention. Perhaps there were wayfarers about in dire need. This is what prompted Avraham to get up and check for potential visitors wandering about. He was not defying the will of Hashem. He was responding to the call of the hour, the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* that Hashem was waiting to see him do, with true *mesirut nefesh*.

Times of rest contain a potential danger. It is all too easy to glide through vacations, coasting and soaring on the currents of inactivity, only to skid and fall into the holiday trap. Chazal with their far-ranging vision saw this and exclaimed (*Ketubot* 59b), "Lack of activity leads to boredom, and boredom leads to sin."

Imagine one who wins a lottery and finds himself suddenly with more money than he ever dreamt of. His thoughts may turn to the life of ease which awaits him, putting him in a euphoric state of mind. Yet as knowledgeable adults, we know that money blinds people's eyes and can fill their thoughts with an unhealthy infatuation. A person can be 'possessed' by his fortune and worried over its fate. As Chazal describe the one who prospers materialistically (*Avot* 2:7), "An increase in wealth increases one's worries." The *Yetzer Hara* knows very well how to manipulate us, and attach importance and grandiosity to anything which could lead to *bitul Torah*. The attitude that money generates a life of bliss is rooted in a mistaken and distorted view of life. The exact opposite is true. Money has the potential to take over one's life and nag at his attention until he has no more tranquility or peace of mind left. As the *Alshich* (*Vayikra* 25:39) once remarked: the *nisayon* of wealth far exceeds the *nisayon* of poverty.

Avraham Avinu was wary of his unaccustomed 'vacation' and its tempting ebb of inactivity. He realized that the road of life is full of 'potholes' which deter one from serving Hashem. A tzaddik cannot

rest in this world as there is always more good to do. He is frequently faced with the *nisayon* of a forced rest which could very well hinder him from carrying out his usual broad spectrum of Divine activities. This is what motivated Avraham to go searching for guests and continue doing his prized mitzvah.

Chazal tell us that (*Sanhedrin* 90a) “every Jew has a portion in the World to Come.” This declaration of faith customarily precedes our recitation of Pirkei Avot. This however is not a guaranteed promise of reward, an open invitation without any criteria of good deeds or any standards of religious behavior. When does one gain the right to request his portion of everlasting life? Only when one walks in the footsteps of the Forefathers and affiliates himself with their way of life. Thus it is appropriate that we say this terse declaration before Pirkei Avot, the “Chapters of the Fathers,” which delineates so eloquently the righteous behavior expected of us, the proper conduct and ethical way of life, as lived by our saintly heroes of yore. The source for this promise is the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 60:21) “Your people will all be righteous, they will inherit the land forever...” “The land” refers to the World to Come, the eternal ‘land of life’ (*Tehillim* 116:9). By learning Pirkei Avot, we take an insider’s view into the actions of our forefathers, who molded our nation and blazed the trail of righteousness, marking the path for us to follow and showing us the road to eternity.

After every meal we eat, we have but a temporary respite from food. Our hunger may be satiated and our need for food abated, only to be aroused within a matter of hours at the next mealtime. So too, our hunger for inspiration and need for spiritual guidance should spring up after a brief respite from learning. We shouldn’t satisfy our fill of Pirkei Avot with a one time reading. Nor should we sit back with a smug smile of accomplishment after finishing the

*masechta*. Every *siyum* of Pirkei Avot should spark a renewed interest and act as a springboard to start the tractate again.

The *Yetzer Hara* is well acquainted with our moments of rest and knows just how to take advantage of our hard earned vacation. He urges us to take full advantage of our lull in activity, and weakens our resolution to do good deeds and constantly serve Hashem. We should learn from Avraham Avinu not to rest on the laurels of our past accomplishments. Despite infirmity and scorching heat, he did not sit back and let another opportunity to invite guests go by. By resisting the enjoyment to relish our periods of inactivity, we model ourselves after the giants of spirit and men of righteousness, using their lives as guideposts on the road to our portion in the World to Come.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ After he circumcised himself, Avraham Avinu was forced into bed rest. Hashem took the sun out of its natural casing and created a tremendous heat wave, in order to keep visitors away from Avraham Avinu.
- ◆ Instead of taking it easy and accepting it as a Heavenly sign to recuperate, Avraham got up from bed, and began to look for guests. If he knew that Hashem had sent the heat wave specifically to curtail his hospitality, why did he search for company? Wasn't this a defiance of Hashem's will?
- ◆ We know that "tzaddikim are never given rest, not in this world, nor in the next." Why then did Hashem want Avraham to take a break from his Divine service?
- ◆ I suggest that Hashem was testing Avraham to see how far he would take his unaccustomed vacation. Was Avraham relishing his time off? Or would he stand up to the *nisayon* and search for guests?

- ◆ Avraham was not defying the will of Hashem. He was responding to the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim*, looking for those in dire need. Avraham Avinu was wary of his unaccustomed ‘vacation’ and its tempting ebb of inactivity. He realized that the road of life is full of ‘potholes,’ which deter one from continuing his service of Hashem. A tzaddik cannot rest in this world, and he is frequently faced with the *nisayon* of a forced rest, which could very well hinder him from carrying out his usual broad spectrum of Divine activities. This is what motivated Avraham to go searching for guests and continue to do his prized mitzvah.
- ◆ We should learn from Avraham Avinu not to rest on the laurels of our past accomplishments. Despite infirmity and scorching heat, he did not sit back and let another opportunity to invite guests go by. We should walk in the footsteps of our forefathers, learning from Pirkei Avot the proper conduct and ethical way of life as lived by our saintly heroes of yore.



## Inviting Guests vs. Greeting the Shechinah

*“And he said, ‘My L-rd, if it pleases You and I find favor in Your eyes, please pass not from before Your servant’”*

*(Bereishit 18:3)*

Rashi explains that Avraham Avinu said these words to Hashem. He asked Hashem to wait for him until after he would run to invite the guests in and serve them.

From the actions of Avraham Avinu we learn a tremendous lesson. Hashem came to visit Avraham after his *brit milah*, just as a person

visits the sick in order to ease his pain. And yet, when Avraham saw the wayfarers, he jumped and ran to invite them in, asking Hashem to wait for him. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 127a) derives from here an important lesson. Great is hospitality, greater than receiving the *Shechinah*.

We have an apparent contradiction from a Gemara in *Berachot*. The Gemara says (30b) that it is forbidden to interrupt one's tefillah in order to greet a friend and say hello. Even if a king comes by and greets us, it is forbidden to interrupt our prayers by answering him. This is because when we pray, we are actually standing before the King of Kings, Whose honor vastly exceeds the honor due a mortal king. This presents us with a difficulty. If Avraham Avinu interrupted his conversation with Hashem in order to receive the company of guests, wouldn't that lead us to infer that one can also interrupt his tefillot in order to greet others? What does it mean that hospitality is greater than receiving the *Shechinah*? These questions were asked me by my talmid Rav Yehonasan Lugasi.

After much thought, I suggested the following answer. For ordinary people, Hashem's 'existence' takes on meaning only when one begins to say their Shemoneh Esrei, and ends when they finish. Perhaps during those brief moments they begin to contemplate on how they are actually standing before the mightiest ruler, The King of all kings, and are indeed fortunate to have the opportunity to approach His Majesty and beseech His favor. But for the rest of their waking hours, they do not realize, nor try to impress upon themselves, the truth of this reality; how we are constantly in the presence of Hashem.

Avraham Avinu felt Hashem's presence every second of his life. Wherever he went, whatever he was doing, he recognized and was cognizant of the Divine presence. For a giant like Avraham Avinu, there was no claim of disrespect when he turned to take care of

guests. His whole life, from beginning to end, was one of constant ‘basking’ in the presence of Hashem. Thus he was never taken to task for ‘interrupting’ his service of Hashem by involving himself with mundane activities. He was always living and experiencing Hashem’s ever-present guidance and protection.

We, on the other hand, come nowhere near such devotion and cognizance. Our moments of closeness with Hashem, the minutes we stand before Him in prayer, require us to keep that concentrated focus and try to gain the feeling of Hashem’s presence. As an example, picture a king who visits his relative only on unique occasions. Were the host to excuse himself in order to take care of some minor errand, he would be evoking the wrath of the king by interrupting his private audience for naught. However, towards one who hosts the king on a regular daily basis, even if he were to miss one meal with the king, for whatever reason, the king would not have such indignation. So too, Avraham Avinu’s constant ‘hosting’ of the *Shechinah* gave him the free hand to tend to his guests without arousing Hashem’s anger. Lacking Avraham’s level though, we do not enjoy such dispensations. This is why we are enjoined to develop that special, spiritual bond and not to interrupt our few minutes engaged in tefillah by attending to the needs of guests or answering the greetings of a mortal king. Would that we be able to feel Hashem’s presence for those fleeting moments of time!

The vast difference between Avraham Avinu and us is perhaps hinted at by the words (*Bereishit* 24:1) “And Avraham was old, well on in years.” Chazal say that this refers to Avraham’s possession of time; he was the master of his fleeting minutes of time, not letting them rule over him. How many times do people say today: I don’t have time, my time is not my own. This is because they are bound and restricted within the confines of time, not prevailing over its progressive element of momental development. Avraham on the

other hand, whose every moment was another living expression of Divine service and devotion, was not restricted in this way. Additionally, his recognition of Hashem surpassed the boundaries of time, not being limited to any individual point or juncture of time. Thus he gained the right to respond to the needs of guests even as he received the *Shechinah* in his home.

In a different vein, we can explain how Avraham's hospitality is relevant to us. We can see its pertinence on how to entertain guests, and answer our question of propriety at the same time. Avraham Avinu focused on the spiritual aspect of hospitality, quenching the thirst of the guest's soul to recognize Hashem and come close to his Maker, even as he fed his physical hunger. We can feel the effect of heat on someone's hands if he holds them near an open flame and touches us afterwards. So too, the warmth of *yirat Shamayim* and *ahavat Hashem* that infused Avraham's being was conveyed to his company, warming their hearts and turning them to do teshuvah. This is why Avraham's reception and entertainment of company was not viewed as a sign of disrespect to the Divine presence.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Chazal learn from Avraham Avinu that receiving guests is greater than receiving the *Shechinah*. This would seem to contradict the prohibition of interrupting one's Shemoneh Esrei even to answer a king. If so, why did Avraham Avinu leave the *Shechinah* in order to tend to the needs of his guests? And if he was given a Divine dispensation, why then is it forbidden for us to interrupt our tefillah?
- ◆ I would suggest that Avraham was permitted to receive the guests as he felt Hashem's presence every second of his life. For ordinary people though, whose contact with Hashem is limited to their few minutes of tefillah, it is a gross sacrilege to interrupt our tefillah in order to attend to a mere mortal.

- ◆ As an example, imagine a king who goes to dine with his relative. If the king visits on a daily basis, a one time failure to be in his company would not arouse the wrath of the king. But for a relative whom the king visits only on unique occasions, his absence would cause the king great displeasure.
- ◆ In a different vein, perhaps Avraham's reception of guests was an extension of his reception of the *Shechinah*. He used the opportunity to influence his company and turn their hearts to Hashem.



### Bringing Out Our Potential

*“And it happened after these things that Hashem tested Avraham and He said to him, ‘Avraham,’ and he said, ‘Here I am.’ And he said, ‘Please take your son, your only one, whom you love – Yitzchak – go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there as an offering on one of the mountains which I shall tell you”*

*(Bereishit 22:1-2)*

From *Akeidat Yitzchak* we can see how much Avraham loved Hashem. The final *nisayon* of Avraham Avinu, it was also the hardest of them all. Avraham expressed his love of Hashem by undertaking and fulfilling every indication of His will, under all circumstances. Not only in the public arena did he do *chessed* for others or campaign for the monotheistic belief in Hashem, but even in his private life, he was willing to give up his son, his most cherished

possession, for Hashem. He didn't just teach others to believe or do; he was a living example, one who practiced what he preached.

This concept is mentioned in Pirkei Avot. The Mishnah says (*Avot* 1:17), "Study is not the *ikar*; it is the practice (of what one has learnt that counts)." Avraham Avinu's *nisayon* translated his potential love of Hashem into concrete action, and proved that his learning was of the right caliber.

There are some who learn Torah, but do not apply their learning or put it into practice. Actually, by not putting their learning into practice, they are liable to handicap themselves from learning more. Learning always entails mental effort, and for many people it requires some pay-off to feel its worthwhile investment. Positive and conclusive action naturally crowns us with such a content feeling, equal to the satisfaction one receives from a hard-earned commission. And so, when one fails to practice what he learned, he lacks the impetus that such action offers.

This can be compared to one who gets paid after working hard at a job. The money that he spends and benefits from his wages gives him the impetus to work more. What other benefit is there from money, if not to spend or invest it? Were he to hoard the money and never use it, he would lack that push to earn more. Similarly, if one learns (for example) about *hilchot* Shabbat, the practical applications and real-life examples of his learning can give him the satisfaction and drive to learn more.

### **Desist from evil and do good**

Harav Chaim Vital zt"l helps us to understand, on a deeper level, why we choose right from wrong, and what we gain by living by our religious beliefs. As human beings, we have two souls, the *nefesh* and the *neshamah*. The *nefesh* is a lesser, subjacent soul, grounded

in our corporeal bodies, and is similar to the life-force found in other creatures. The *neshamah* on the other hand, is a transcendental entity which originates in the Heavenly spheres. Our job is to connect the two, and allow the *neshamah* to release the *nefesh* from its materialistic moorings and help its spiritual ascent.

The way we can establish this connection between them is by living according to the two-pronged formula of David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 34:15) סור מרע ועשה טוב, “Desist from evil and do good.” The abstinence from evil is related to the realm of the *nefesh*, the more animalistic aspect of man. The doing of good is associated more with the *neshamah* and its upper-world sphere of existence. Thus by staying away from sin and doing mitzvot, we can raise our *nefesh* to a higher level.

The word טוב has an additional connotation, the element of Torah. This is because Torah exemplifies the ultimate good, as it says (*Mishlei* 4:2) כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתי אל תעזובו, “For I have given you a good (or: the best) commodity, do not forsake My Torah.” When we permeate our lives with Torah, we connect the animalistic *nefesh* to the spiritual soul, and spark their affiliation and subsequent elevation.

Torah study is a key ingredient in combating the *Yetzer Hara*, who tries to prevent the soul from its spiritual climb. This is made clear from Hashem’s response over the creation of evil. “I have created the *Yetzer Hara*, and I have created the Torah as its antidote” (*Kiddushin* 30b). Hashem has given us the ability to ward off the *Yetzer Hara* through learning Torah.

The Torah also serves to enlighten us as to the nature of good and evil. The *Yetzer Hara* is a master of disguise. He makes evil appear as good, obscuring the difference between them. He encourages us to partake of his concoction of ‘fine’ living and ‘success.’ The

nations of the world always point to the norms of society and social conventionality, as established facts of life and reasonable guides for behavior. The Jew knows better, as he has the Torah as his guide. With the clarity of Torah we can see the deep chasm which divides between the so-called 'good life' of the nations and the true 'good' of the Torah.

The reason for their cloudy vision is that the Torah was given only to the Jewish nation, as it says "Do not believe that there is Torah by the nations" (*Eichah Rabbah* 2:13). After a Jew learns Torah, he begins to see that what he thought originally as 'fine and dandy' is actually not. Without Torah, everything one does or can do is righteous and good. With Torah, we can see where we fall short and what we need to rectify. It is only through the implementation of Torah that we can start our **סור מרע** and come to **עשה טוב**; to overcome the materialistic impediments which hinder our effectuation of good and the elevation of our *nefesh*.

This dichotomy between good and evil came to a fore in the days of Avraham Avinu. Avraham saw a world gone mad, worshipping idols and believing in their world view of 'good.' Avraham experimented at first with idolatry, all the while searching for truth and looking for the One Who created the world. Seeing the evil in that way of life, he was **סור מרע** and started to be **עשה טוב**; beginning his service of the true Creator by smashing his father's idols and encouraging others to do the same.

We are taught that there are 248 limbs in the human body and 365 sinews, corresponding to the positive and negative commandments of the Torah. When we elevate ourselves, we sanctify our limbs and organs as well. (One can discern this attribute by tzaddikim who succeeded in sanctifying their *nefesh* and achieved *kedushah*, and consequently do not exude ordinary body odors or perspiration, as these are related to earthly corporeality.) What puzzles us though

is why the gentiles are excluded from the mitzvot – do they not have the same number of limbs as us? Why then don't they also have mitzvot?

On a superficial level, we can answer that had Adam Harishon not sinned, the world would have been very different. There would not have been any difference between men; all would have been righteous and good in every way. This sin is what gave our world a downward spin and sent mankind tumbling earthward. This also led to the division between races and creeds, as mankind continued in their earthly descent and lost their bearings of good and evil.

Perhaps we can point to a more fundamental and underlying difference between Jew and non-Jew. There is a sign on our bodies which distinguishes us. This is the *brit milah*, the first mitzvah given to Avraham and his descendants. A Jew with a *brit milah* actually has a more 'complete' physical being, as Hashem told Avraham Avinu (*Bereishit* 17:1), "Walk before me and be perfect." Before his *brit*, Avraham was unable to experience the same degree of prophecy that he was able to afterwards. This is because the *orlah* is considered an imperfection of man, a natural impediment to spiritual refinement and elevation. It is the *brit milah* which sets us apart and stands us on our feet as believing and practicing Jews. This is even demonstrated by the ability of the Jew to learn and understand Torah, and reach levels of *kedushah*, all unattainable by non-Jews. Once a Jewish baby has a *brit milah*, he has the means to succeed in Torah and make spiritual progress.

This 'minor' imperfection of the *orlah* is actually a major obstacle to spiritual growth. We find a similar idea by a Sefer Torah, where the lack, or even disfiguration of even one letter, makes the entire Sefer Torah *pasul*. So too, the lack of *milah* is a defect of one's entire being. Only with a complete and 'perfect' body, and after hard work, will our efforts have *Siyata di'Shemaya* and bear fruit.

This concept is hinted also by Avraham Avinu's name. Rashi (ibid.) explains that Hashem added a letter to his name אברם and made it אברהם. This extra ה brought the numerical value of his name to 248, representing the 248 limbs now placed under his control. In the merit of the mitzvah of *milah*, Avraham was made whole.

### The names of the Avot

There is a great deal of significance in the names of the Avot. We see that Hashem gave each of the Avot a name. Originally, Avraham Avinu was called "אברם" by his father Terach. This name signified his fatherly benevolence (אב) as well as his higher status (רם). His influence was confined though to his circle of followers. When Hashem added the letter ה to his name, making it אברהם, it took on new significance. Now Avraham became the paternal guardian of all the nations, the אב המון גוים, "father of a multitude of nations" (*Bereishit* 17:5). Through the intermediary of *chessed*, Avraham's limited greatness reached worldwide proportions.

The letter ה also contains a reference to the creation of this world. The Midrash (*Midrash Tehillim* 62) comments on the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 26:4) כי ביה ה' צור עולמים (which can be literally translated: "For Hashem created the worlds with His Name י-ה") that the letter י in His Name was used to create the World to Come, while the letter ה was used to create our present world. Thus the addition of the letter ה to Avraham's name teaches us that Hashem found our world worthy of existence only in the merit of Avraham. A similar Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 12:9) learns this idea from the word בהבראם, "when they were created" (*Bereishit* 2:4), which interchanges the letters of Avraham's name, indicating that the Heavens and Earth were created in his merit.

Avraham's great merit was his *middah* of *chessed*. This gave our world its basis of existence and justified its continuation. That is

hinted at by the literal translation of the words (*Tehillim* 89:3) עולם חסד יבנה, “A world is built on *chessed*.” Avraham Avinu promoted and personified the *middah* of *chessed*. By adding a ה to his name, Hashem gave Avraham the ability to shelter all the nations under his expansive wing, caring and guiding for the המון גוים as a father does for his children, and building civilization on the pillar of *chessed*.

Yitzchak Avinu was also given his name by Hashem. There are two *middot* associated with Yitzchak which typify his character, the *middah* of *gevurah* and the *middah* of *simchah*. The name Yitzchak itself translates as an expression of laughter and joy. The association with fear of G-d is mentioned later on (*Bereishit* 31:42) “The fear of Yitzchak.” Both *middot* are necessary ingredients in serving Hashem, as it says (*Tehillim* 100:2), “Serve Hashem with *simchah*” and (*ibid.* 2:11) “Serve Hashem with fear and rejoice with trepidation.”

Yitzchak called his son יעקב from the word עקב (the heel). Yaakov incorporated the *middah* of self-effacement, as represented by his name יעקב which refers to his secondary, inferior status. Yaakov made himself small when compared to his forefathers. Hashem reversed this by calling him ישראל which contains the word ראש (the head) as well as שר (a high-ranking officer). As a sign of his striving for greatness, Yaakov saw a ladder in his dream, whose feet rested on its ‘heels’ and whose ‘head’ reached the very heavens. This symbolizes how one must have his head always involved in learning, while his feet should be planted on the ground. This came as a result of Yaakov’s efforts to overcome his spiritual adversaries and withstand his *nisyonot*. This is why his name was changed after his sojourn by Lavan. It was only after he subdued the *kelippot* and returned home complete in body and spirit that he reached the head of the ladder. Thus Yaakov incorporated both the *middah* of

making oneself small (עקב) and also of reaching new heights in serving Hashem (ישראל).

In the introductory *berachah* of Shemoneh Esrei, we approach Hashem by evoking the merit of the Avot. Thus we start off by saying, “The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov.” They were the ones who led the way and taught us how to serve Hashem. Each one, in his own way, paved the road for us to follow. This is hinted at by the Mishnah, (*Avot* 1:2) “On three things the world stands, on Torah, on *avodah*, and on *gemilut chassadim*. Yaakov represents Torah, as he was “a dweller of tents” (*Bereishit* 25:27), found constantly in the Beit Hamidrash. Yitzchak represents *avodah*. The two major components of *avodah* are *simchah* and *yirah*, happiness and fear; not forgetting that we are still in the presence of Hashem and need to act accordingly, even as we radiate *simchah*. *Gemilut chassadim* is represented by Avraham. The world cannot exist without *chessed* just as it cannot exist without Torah or *avodah*. By doing *chessed* with all people, not just one’s immediate circle, one helps the world continue to exist.

One of the acts of *chessed* of Avraham also hints to the three Patriarchs. The pasuk says (*ibid.* 21:33), “And he planted an *Aishel* (orchard).” The Hebrew word אשל is an acronym for the words אכילה (food), שתייה (drink), and לינה (lodging). These correspond to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

אכילה refers to Avraham, as he provided all with food. שתייה refers to Yitzchak, as he dug wells (see *Bereishit* 26). The act of digging also alludes to the *middah* of *avodah*, which requires effort in order to produce results. לינה refers to Yaakov, as he was wont to learn without taking a break. This *middah* of Yaakov is mentioned by the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:11), which states that Yaakov did not take an ordinary night’s sleep for fourteen years, until

(*Bereishit* 28:11) “he encountered the place and spent the night there.” After placing stones around his head to protect himself, he fell asleep. The pasuk then says (*ibid.* 29:1), וישא יעקב רגליו, “And Yaakov lifted his feet.” This episode hints to both *middot* of Yaakov, those symbolized by the heel and the head. He lifted his feet to journey forward, while protecting his head from adversary. His superhuman effort to learn without sleeping prompted Chazal to remark (*Ta’anit* 5b) “Yaakov Avinu did not die.”

Avraham’s planting of the *Aishel* thus symbolizes the seeds of fine *middot* sown by Avraham for his descendants to follow. By walking in the ways of the Avot and using their example to develop our character, we learn to serve Hashem in the right way, enjoying the efflorescent garden of fine *middot* all year round.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ “Study is not the *ikar*; it is the practice (of what one has learnt that counts).” If one learns but does not apply his learning or put it into practice, he lacks the impetus that such actions can give. Practical applications give the satisfaction and drive to learn more.
- ◆ Avraham Avinu’s *nisayon* translated his potential love of Hashem into concrete action, and proved that his learning was of the right caliber. He didn’t just teach others to believe or do; he was a living example, one who practiced what he preached.
- ◆ We have two souls, the *nefesh* and the *neshamah*. The *nefesh* is a lesser, subjacent soul, similar to the life-force found in animals. The *neshamah* is a transcendental being which originates in the Heavenly spheres. Our job is to connect the two and spark their affiliation and subsequent elevation. The way we can establish this connection is by fulfilling the words of David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 34:15) סור מרע וועשה טוב, “Desist from evil and do good.”

- ◆ Torah exemplifies the ultimate good. When we permeate our lives with Torah, we can see where we fall short and what we need to rectify. We also have the ability to ward off the *Yetzer Hara* and connect the animalistic *nefesh* to the spiritual soul. Only through the implementation of Torah can we start our **סור מרע** and achieve **עשה טוב**; overcoming the materialistic impediments which hinder our effectuation of good and the elevation of our *nefesh*.
- ◆ There are 248 limbs in the human body and 365 sinews, corresponding to the positive and negative commandments. The *brit milah* distinguishes us from the nations of the world, and gives the Jew a more ‘complete’ physical being. The *orlah* is considered an imperfection of man, a natural impediment to spiritual refinement and elevation. This is why the non-Jews cannot achieve levels of *kedushah*. The lack of *milah* is a defect of one’s entire being.
- ◆ We find hints to developing good character in the names of the Avot. Avraham was at first called **אברם**, signifying his great influence, which was confined to his circle of followers. Through the intermediary of *chessed*, Hashem changed his name to **אברהם**, denoting a paternal guardian of all the nations, **אב המון גוים**. Thus his limited greatness reached world-wide proportions.
- ◆ There are two *middot* associated with Yitzchak which typify his character, the *middah* of *gevurah* and the *middah* of *simchah*. Both *middot* are necessary ingredients when serving Hashem.
- ◆ Yaakov incorporated the *middah* of self-effacement, as represented by his name **יעקב** (the heel). Hashem then changed his name to **ישראל**, denoting striving for greatness.
- ◆ In the Shemoneh Esrei we evoke the merit of the Avot by saying, “The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov.” They were the ones who led the way and taught us how to serve Hashem. Each one, in his own way, paved the road for us to follow.
- ◆ The Hebrew word **אשל** is an acronym for the words **אכילה** (food), **שתיה** (drink), and **לינה** (lodging). These correspond to Avraham,

Yitzchak, and Yaakov. אכילה refers to Avraham, as he provided all with food. שתיה refers to Yitzchak, as he dug wells (see *Bereishit* 26). The act of digging also alludes to the *middah* of *avodah*. לינה refers to Yaakov, as he was wont to learn without sleep. Avraham's planting of the *Aishel* thus symbolizes the seeds of fine *middot* sown by Avraham for his descendants to learn from.



### Akeidat Yitzchak

*“And it happened after these things [literally: these words] that Hashem tested Avraham and He said to him, ‘Avraham,’ and he said, ‘Here I am.’ And he said, ‘Please take your son, your only one, whom you love – Yitzchak – go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there as an offering on one of the mountains which I shall tell you’”*

*(Bereishit 22:1-2)*

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 55:4) ask what the pasuk is referring to when it says “and it happened after these things.” After which things? Rashi, basing himself on the literal translation, explains that “these words” refers to the accusation of the Satan. According to some Sages, the Satan denounced Avraham to Hashem. Said the Satan, “From the whole celebration that Avraham made (over the birth of Yitzchak) he did not offer even one (thanksgiving) sacrifice!” Hashem answered back, “Was he not celebrating over his son? Were

I to ask him to sacrifice his son to Me, he would not hesitate to do so!”

How do we understand the dialogue between the Satan and Hashem? I suggest that the Satan was questioning, even doubting Avraham’s loyalty to Hashem. Hashem responded by giving Avraham a *nisayon*, thereby demonstrating his unswerving faithfulness. By asking Avraham to sacrifice his only son, the one whom he had waited for so patiently and longingly for so many years, Hashem brought to the fore Avraham’s boundless devotion. It was tried and true, through and through. Avraham was willing to undertake and fulfill every indication of Hashem’s will, under all circumstances and at all costs. His fulfillment of Hashem’s command to bring his son up upon the altar successfully silenced the instigations of the Satan and put an end to his pernicious dubiety.

The pasuk begins the account of the *Akeidah* with the following declaration, “Hashem tested Avraham.” This teaches us an important lesson. Offering one’s son up on the Mizbeach is not an acceptable way of serving Hashem. We cannot learn from Avraham’s *nisayon* the virtue of sacrificing our own children. Hashem does not want such sacrifices, nor do they have any value. The exact opposite is true. The sacrifice of children to *Molech* (see *Vayikra* 20) was abhorrent, and the offering was considered an abomination. The whole parashah of the *Akeidah* was meant only as a response to the claims of the Satan, to demonstrate Avraham’s *mesirut nefesh*.

This is readily apparent from the rest of the story. When it came time for Avraham to use his slaughter-knife on Yitzchak, Hashem said (*Bereishit* 22:12), “Do not stretch out your hand on the lad,” stopping him from carrying out his worthy intent. Whereupon Avraham requested to be allowed to do something ever so small, to show his willingness to do Hashem’s Will. Hashem answered (*ibid.*),

“Nor do anything to him.” Thus it is clear how Hashem had no interest in the action of Avraham for its own sake and did not want to shed Yitzchak’s blood. *Akeidat Yitzchak* was merely a means of revealing Avraham’s unswerving faithfulness.

This is also clear from the story with the King of Moab. The *Navi* (*Melachim* II, 3:27) relates how the King took his oldest son and sacrificed him as a burnt offering. This caused a backlash of anger and indignation at Am Yisrael, as some of them practiced the same form of worship. Although the King brought his son as a sacrifice to Hashem (see *Sanhedrin* 39b), his intentions were not altruistic. He wanted to prove his superiority over the first Patriarch of the Jews, who never carried through with the *Akeidah* (*Tanna D’bei Eliyahu Rabbah* 9). What we learn from this is that the act of offering up one’s children is terribly wrong, even if done with the most noble of intentions. Outside of a Divine imperative, it is nothing less than an abominable act.

Another lesson we can take from the parashah of the *Akeidah* is our approach to mitzvot. As a sign of what we need to do, the Torah says, “And it happened after these things.” This metaphorically symbolizes our service of Hashem and overcoming our *nisyonot*, which begin only after we brush ‘these things’ aside; the ‘things’ of life that clamor for our attention and fill up our time. We need to put the vain luxuries and mundane pleasures of this world behind us before we can properly do Hashem’s Will. As long as one is tethered to their enticements and restricted by their earthly pull, he will lack the strength of character and determination to carry out Hashem’s Will. He will lack the necessary *mesirut nefesh* to do Hashem’s mitzvot.

This adds another dimension to the reading of the parashah of the *Akeidah* on Rosh Hashanah. The most obvious reason for this

reading is to point out the merit of Avraham Avinu and his selfless act of *mesirut nefesh*. This serves to arouse Divine mercy on the Day of Judgment for all of his descendants.

Yet, another reason is as we explained before. As Hashem sits in judgment, evaluating the existence of our world and its yearly prolongation, He takes a close look at mankind's race towards materialism and their preoccupation with all sorts of 'things.' Was it worthwhile to create the world? Does Am Yisrael justify its continuation? Reading about the *Akeidah* on Rosh Hashanah puts many 'things' into perspective. It reminds us about the most important 'thing' of them all. It places the act of *mesirut nefesh* for Hashem and His mitzvot in the forefront of our consciousness and raises it up on the altar of Divine service. By releasing our grip on the mundane pleasures of this world and refraining from 'browsing' through its empty enticements, we free our hands to grab hold of the rope of Divine service and devotion, pulling ourselves towards the shore of life for yet another year.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ “And it happened after these things [lit. “these words”].” Rashi explains that “these words” refers to the accusation of the Satan. The Satan was questioning, even doubting Avraham's loyalty to Hashem. Hashem responded by giving Avraham a *nisayon*. This demonstrated his unswerving faithfulness. His fulfillment of Hashem's command to bring his son up upon the altar successfully silenced the instigations of the Satan and put an end to his pernicious dubiety.
- ◆ “Hashem tested Avraham.” This teaches us an important lesson. Hashem does not want such sacrifices. The whole parashah of the *Akeidah* was meant only as a response to the claims of the Satan, to demonstrate Avraham's *mesirut nefesh*. Outside of a Divine imperative, it is nothing less than an abominable act. The sacrifice of

children to *Molech*, as well as the sacrifice of the King of Moab, was abhorrent and their offerings considered abominations.

- ◆ “And it happened after these things.” This symbolizes our service of Hashem and overcoming our *nisyonot*, which begin only after we brush aside ‘these things.’ We need to put the vain luxuries and mundane pleasures of this world behind us before we can properly do Hashem’s will.
- ◆ Reading about the *Akeidah* on Rosh Hashanah puts many ‘things’ into perspective and reminds us about the important “things” of life. Hashem takes a close look at mankind’s race towards materialism and their preoccupation with all sorts of ‘things.’ By doing mitzvot with *mesirut nefesh* we justify the continued existence of the world.



### Avraham’s Greatness of Character

*“And it happened after these things that Hashem tested Avraham and He said to him, ‘Avraham, ’ and he said, ‘Here I am.’ And he said, ‘Please take your son, your only one, whom you love – Yitzchak – go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there as an offering on one of the mountains which I shall tell you”*”

*(Bereishit 22:1-2)*

We read in this parashah about the most difficult *nisayon* that Avraham Avinu ever faced, *Akeidat Yitzchak*. After this *nisayon*, Avraham asked Hashem never to be tested again (*Bereishit Rabbah*

56:11). Chazal also describe Avraham's difficulties on the way to the *Akeidah* (*Tanchuma Bereishit*, 22) which made it all the harder for him. What was so special about this *nisayon*? What is its hidden lesson?

In order to answer, let us examine a statement of Chazal. At the end of the parashah, after Avraham did what Hashem commanded, Hashem tells Avraham (*Bereishit* 22:12), "Now I know that you truly fear G-d." The obvious question is – did Hashem have any doubt? What did Hashem mean?

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 101) explains Hashem's terse words as follows: Until now, only I knew of your greatness. Now I will let all know that you truly fear Me. What requires elaboration though, is who was going to let everyone know. The only ones to witness the *Akeidah* were Avraham and Yitzchak; and they certainly had no interest in self-aggrandizement or publicity.

Perhaps if we take note of the difference between Avraham Avinu and Lot, we will have the key to solve this enigma. Both were actively involved with *hachnasat orchim*, and both kept Pesach. What divided them apart was their approach. Lot did hospitality to gain attention. He wanted all to know of his righteousness and be awed at his *mesirut nefesh*. He was so concerned over this, that he was willing to risk the lives of his unmarried daughters for his guests' sake (see *Bereishit* 19). Avraham on the other hand, did things quite differently. He didn't do things just so everyone should know. He did mitzvot quietly and modestly, strictly *l'shem Shamayim*.

This is why Avraham did not tell Sarah why he was going and what he was about to do. Even though Sarah Imeinu would have been happy to know that they were going to do Hashem's will (and according to some, she died because of her concern over Yitzchak

not being sacrificed in the end, see *Talelei Orot*), still, Avraham preferred not to publicize what Hashem asked of him. He was not looking for attention or seeking to boost his reputation. Avodat Hashem needs to be done without fanfare, not for personal fame or honorable acclaim, not even for the 'name.' This is what it meant by doing mitzvot *l'shem Shamayim*. Avraham did the *Akeidah* completely *l'shem Shamayim*, and Hashem let everyone know, inscribing his merit for eternity and portraying his shining example for us to follow.

The same is true of Torah. Learning Torah, like any other mitzvah, should be done with the right intention. Actually, we do find a measure of public display by those engaged in the learning of Torah. People naturally express their Torah learning vocally, raising their voices in debate or even just reading aloud. This would seem to contradict this ideal. The truth is, though, that we learn out loud, not to attract attention to ourselves, but as an expression of our thirst for Torah as well as our contentment. Our yearning for wisdom wells up inside of us and voices its 'song of ascent.' This, then, is really learning Torah *lishmah*.

This concept is expressed by the *Navi* (*Michah* 6:8) when he extols the virtue of one who "walks humbly and modestly with Hashem" (הצנע לכת), without any airs or claims to fame. The words הצנע לכת also contain a veiled reference to one's learning, as the Torah refers to learning as בחקתי תלכו, "walking in My statutes" (see Rashi on *Vayikra* 26:3). Thus the pasuk tells us what Hashem looks for; sincere devotion alongside study. Such a person walks with Hashem even as he delves further into the intricacies of Torah.

Getting back to our discussion, we can now see the contrast between Lot's fateful end and Avraham's last *nisayon*. Avraham Avinu did his actions wholly for the sake of Heaven, and so Hashem

placed his righteous deeds at the forefront of history, recognizing his virtuousness with Scriptural acclaim. Lot on the other hand was interested in having his benevolent actions widely acclaimed. And so, to his everlasting chagrin, they were forgotten in the overturn of Sodom and lost from the annals of history. The Torah chronicles Lot's actions as a mere backdrop for Avraham's, contrasting Lot's character with Avraham's greatness, and highlighting Avraham's actions as being done completely *l'shem Shamayim*.

There were those who were skeptical of Avraham and doubted his being thrown into the fiery furnace at *Uhr Kasdim*. Were it true, how could Avraham been saved from that dire fate? And so Hashem gave a sign to show its veracity. He caused Bera, the King of Sodom, to fall into a pit of pitch while running away from the four kings (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 14:10). His miraculous rescue gave credence, retroactively, to the miracle that happened to Avraham, and Bera even publicized its occurrence for this very purpose. Because Avraham did not seek glory for his *mesirut nefesh*, Hashem gave him the honor that he deserved.

This also applies to the *Akeidah*. It was singled out from the myriad of human sacrifices of the ancient nations as a source of merit. It was their widespread practice to offer their children as sacrifices. But while they did so amidst pompous ceremonies and with great fanfare, Avraham brought his son on the Mizbeach without attracting any attention, not even that of his close attendants. This is the way to serve Hashem and do His mitzvot. We are commanded to serve Hashem wholeheartedly, as it says (*Devarim* 6:5), "And you shall love Hashem your G-d." This love includes doing His service in a self-sacrificing manner, for His sake alone. We do our job, and Hashem will see fit to let others know, giving us the recognition that we deserve.

## Learning Torah

I want to share a story which brings out the value of learning Torah. A man who did not merit having children once came to see me. I asked him why he didn't adopt children. He answered that it would be too difficult for him to raise such children. I didn't understand – why would it be difficult, if he wanted so much to have children? He explained, "I want something of my own. Adopting children is not my own." I was astounded at the truth of his words. I thought to myself, this should be our attitude towards learning Torah. He who learns makes the words of Torah 'his own.' This is the meaning of the words of David Hamelech (*Tehillim* 1:2) "and in his Torah he meditates day and night." (The commentators explain that at first the pasuk describes the Torah as Hashem's, and then ascribes it to the person himself. This is because after one learns Torah, it becomes 'his,' as if he acquired it). Such learning is even more rewarding than donating to Torah causes. Although the supporter of Torah has a share in the learning of others, it is not the same as if he learnt on his own, no different than the one who wants to have his 'own' children. Learning does not come easily, but its acquisition is deeply satisfying, and all one's own.

Without Torah, one is considered as poor as a pauper. So David Hamelech says (*Tehillim* 119:92), "Had your Torah not been my preoccupation, I would have perished in my poverty." The pasuk also anticipates the positive. One who learns despite his affliction will be rewarded in the end with the wealth of Torah.

On the topic of learning, I heard a story which involved my saintly ancestor, the tzaddik and *mekubal*, Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt"l. Once, a man came to the Beit Hamidrash on Shabbat afternoon and began delivering a *derashah*. It was apparent from his knowledge of the

material that he was very learned, and so the audience showed him respect. After the *derashah*, they even walked him out, in the direction of his lodging. Harav Chaim did not accompany them though, and heard some who questioned his reason for this. “Why did the Rav not show him *kavod*, as befitting a *talmid chacham*?” they asked. “You are making a mistake. You will yet be disappointed,” he replied. After Shabbat the man disclosed his identity. He was simply a non-Jewish worker in a yeshiva, who paid close attention to the discussions going on, and was able to parrot their words. Those who heard the *derashah* were astounded, and asked Rav Chaim how he knew that he was not Jewish. The Rav answered, “It says (*Mishlei* 6:23), ‘For a mitzvah is a candle and the Torah is light’; ‘A man’s soul is the candle of Hashem’ (ibid. 20:27). These pesukim tell us that our involvement in Torah should be like the flame of a candle, which flickers and flares when it burns. So too, one who learns or teaches Torah should be sparkling with animation and dancing with joy. This man stood motionless during his *derashah*. That is how I knew that he was not Jewish. He does not have the soul of a Jew, and so the words he spoke did not have any life.”

I myself experienced a similar story. A non-Jew once came to me to discuss Torah thoughts. He then revealed to me that he was non-Jewish, and enjoyed studying the tomes of the Talmud as an intellectual pastime.

I would suggest another reason for swaying when we learn. We know that the *Yetzer Hara* is compared to a fly, constantly circling about and trying to find a perch. When we move around, the flies cannot land on us. Our constant activity in Torah, which reflexively generates physical movement, is a symbol of how we prevent the *Yetzer Hara* from getting a grip on us.

### On that very day

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 17:23) stresses that Avraham Avinu did the *brit milah* “on that day.” The *Yad Ramah* asks, why the emphasis? Which day does the Torah refer to? His answer is that Avraham circumcised himself on Yom Kippur (which is also referred to by these words, see *Vayikra* 23:28). What requires more explanation is what the connection between Yom Kippur and *brit milah* is.

If we take a close look at Yom Kippur, we will discover a special property of that day. The very holiness of Yom Kippur contains a purgative agent which washes away our iniquities and cleanses us from sin (see *Yoma* 85b). According to one *Tanna*, it has the ability to purify even one who does not do teshuvah. One who lives through the experience of Yom Kippur is akin to one who enters the portals of *Olam Haba* and breathes in its rarified, purifying air.

This did not start only after the Torah was given. On the very first Yom Kippur, Adam Harishon was absolved from his sin. The Midrash (*Pesikta Rabbasi*, 40) describes how Hashem punished Adam for his sin while using *Middat Harachamim*, the attribute of Divine Compassion.

Some ask: Are the curses that he received worthy of being called “compassion”? The truth is – if we analyze the consideration that went into Hashem’s judicial proceedings, we will see the compassion that graced His Divine verdict. A sin lowers our status as human beings. It instills in us animalistic desire and swings our natural disposition towards evil. We need a measure of Divine compassion just to return us to our original, higher level. This is what Hashem mercifully reckoned with in Adam’s case, and does so for us every year on Yom Kippur as well. In His infinite compassion, he resets our *neshamot* back to their initial ‘manufacturer’s’ setting, automatically rejuvenating us with new life.

The day of a *brit milah* also contains a similar experience. It is the day when a pure soul descends upon the one who does the *milah* and creates a person's bond with *Olam Haba*. This is what Avraham Avinu experienced by his *brit milah*. And this is why the Torah stresses that Avraham Avinu did this mitzvah on Yom Kippur. It was "on that day" that he went through his purifying experience, so symbolic of its calendar day of Yom Kippur.

### **Without apprehension**

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Vayeira*, 3) relates how Avraham Avinu approached his close friends, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamrei, and asked for their advice. Should he do the *brit milah* as Hashem commanded? Two of them answered that it wasn't such a wise choice. "You are old," they said. "You will lose a great deal of blood. It is too dangerous. Besides, your enemies will take the opportunity to try to kill you, and you will lack the strength to run away."

Avraham, though, paid no heed to their words of caution. He chose to do Hashem's will without reservation, relying on Hashem without second thought.

This teaches us a general rule by all mitzvot. We do Hashem's commands without qualm or anxiety, placing our reliance on Hashem. Such actions are worthy replicas of Avraham's *brit milah*, where he defied the skepticism of others and overcame his own apprehension. Our peremptory actions to do Hashem's will reflects the very deed of the first Patriarch when entering the Divine covenant and fulfilling the first mitzvah of Judaism.

### **In Summary**

- ◆ Avraham did not tell Sarah that he was going to do the *Akeidah*. He brought his son to the Mizbeach without attracting any attention, not even that of his close attendants. Avodat Hashem needs to be done

without fanfare, not for personal fame or honorable acclaim. Avraham did the *Akeidah* completely *l'shem Shamayim*, and so Hashem let everyone know about it, inscribing his merit for eternity, recognizing his virtuousness with Scriptural acclaim.

- ◆ Lot on the other hand, practiced hospitality in order to gain attention. He wanted all to know of his righteousness, and in the end he was lost from the annals of history. The Torah chronicles Lot's actions as a mere backdrop for Avraham's, contrasting Lot's character with Avraham's greatness.
- ◆ One who learns Torah makes the words of Torah 'his own.' Learning does not come easily, but its acquisition is deeply satisfying, and all one's own. We learn out loud, not to attract attention to ourselves, but as an expression of our thirst for Torah as well as our contentment. This, then, is really learning Torah *lishmah*.
- ◆ Avraham circumcised himself on Yom Kippur, "on that day" (*Bereishit* 17:23). There is an integral connection between Yom Kippur and *brit milah*? The very holiness of Yom Kippur washes away our iniquities and cleanses us from sin. It is a measure of Divine compassion, to return us to our original, higher level. The day of a *brit milah* is also a day when a pure soul descends and creates a bond between the circumcised person and *Olam Haba*. This is what Avraham Avinu experienced by his *brit milah*. And this is why the Torah stresses when Avraham did the mitzvah. It was "on that day" that he went through his purifying experience, so symbolic of its calendar day of Yom Kippur.
- ◆ When Avraham Avinu did his *brit milah*, he defied the skepticism and apprehension that he faced as he entered the Divine covenant and fulfilled the first mitzvah of Judaism. When we do Hashem's commands without qualm or anxiety, placing our reliance on Hashem, our actions are worthy replicas of Avraham's *brit milah*.



## Serving Hashem with Vision

*“On the third day, Avraham raised his eyes and saw the place from afar. And Avraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here by yourselves with the donkey, while I and the lad will go up to here; we will worship and we will return to you’”*

*(Bereishit 22:4-5)*

On the third day of his journey, Avraham Avinu saw his destination from afar and knew that he had indeed found the right spot. How did he know where to do the *Akeidah*? Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 56:1-2) tell us that Avraham looked up and saw an unnatural cloud hovering over the mountain. Avraham then asked Yitzchak if he saw the same cloud, and Yitzchak replied in the affirmative. But when he asked his two attendants, Eliezer his servant and Yishmael his son, they answered in the negative. In turn, Avraham responded, “Stay here by yourselves with the donkey” – essentially equating them with the very animals which they rode upon.

This Midrash raises several questions. Was Avraham Avinu trying to put them down? Why did he even bother asking them if they saw the cloud? Was he testing them merely in order to belittle them?

We know that Eliezer was a talmid of Avraham Avinu. Avraham himself described him as (*Bereishit* 15:2) דמשק אליעזר, “the Damascene Eliezer,” and Rashi homiletically explains that he was busy being דולה ומשקה, drawing forth and spreading his master’s teachings. And as a devoted servant of Avraham, he was imbued with the spirit of righteousness that infused the household of Avraham Avinu. A giant of virtue such as Avraham would not have

been content with anything less from his servants. The Gemara (see *Bava Batra* 58a) relates how, even on High, Eliezer is still serving the Avot faithfully in the world above.

It would seem that Yishmael was also virtuous, already having done teshuvah for his youthful misconduct (see *Bereishit* 21). This is quite apparent from his being included on the journey to begin with. Had Yishmael still been delinquent, Avraham would not have taken him along. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, misbehavior adversely affects bystanders, even those who do not actively participate in such antics, and Yishmael had already been sent away once by Avraham for being a bad influence on Yitzchak. Second, even to look upon the visage of a rasha is detrimental (see *Megillah* 28a). Thus Avraham's taking along of Eliezer and Yishmael would signify that they were, for the present moment, tzaddikim. Why, then, did they not see the cloud over the mountain?

I suggest the following answer. There is a reference here to two different approaches in serving Hashem. There is the superficial approach and there is the deeper approach. The deeper approach encompasses a broader outlook on why we do mitzvot, and determines how far we are willing to go in order to do them.

Those who only see superficially often lack the initiative to do more than what is expected of them. Even if they do not tarry or delay when doing mitzvot, they only do those mitzvot which they are presented with. They fall short however, when it comes to initiating or finding new mitzvot to do. This is a symptom of their superficiality. They see only the inherent difficulties – tangible, intellectual, or emotional – so intrinsic to commencing an activity and bringing new ventures to life. Their short-sighted vision does not allow them to view the broader picture or the distant goal – that of doing Hashem's will. As an example, there are some people who

happily go to the Beit Hakeneset, as long as it is right next door. Once the Beit Hakeneset is situated far away, their eagerness to brave the elements and travel the distance dwindles, and they frequently prefer to stay and pray at home.

The other approach is taken by those who eagerly do mitzvot. By taking into account the importance and reward of all mitzvot, such people are ready and willing to give of themselves in order to do more and more mitzvot. Their ability to see “from afar” gives them the impetus to tackle things which seem difficult, or even illogical, at first glance.

Avraham Avinu was from this class of doers. He wanted to do Hashem’s will despite all obstacles. And the *Akeidah* is a prime example of this. It was a commandment which defied all logic. Hashem had told Avraham Avinu, “Through Yitzchak will offspring be considered yours” (*Bereishit* 21:12). This was a promise that the whole of the Jewish nation would come only from him. How then could Hashem command Avraham to sacrifice him, his only full-fledged son? Avraham, though, was able to focus on the explicit command of Hashem. He approached it energetically, despite its irrationality and incongruity. It may have run counter to his natural instincts and emotions, but it was in synch with his innermost desire, to do Hashem’s will.

In a similar instance, Avraham showed his willingness to do *chessed* despite extreme hardship. On the third day of his *milah*, he ran in the heat of the day to call three strangers closer and invite them for a meal, his recuperation and pain notwithstanding. He himself catered to their needs. The Midrash describes what Avraham merited as a result of his *mesirut nefesh* for the wayfarers. Each detail that Avraham saw to was rewarded by Hashem seeing to the needs of the Jews in the dessert (see *Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*,

82). The very receiving of the Torah owes its credit to Avraham's *chessed*. When Moshe Rabbeinu went on High to receive the Torah, the Heavenly Angels claimed prior jurisdiction. They did not give up so readily to Moshe's assertions, until Hashem changed Moshe's countenance and made it similar to Avraham Avinu's. Whereupon He said to them, "Are you not embarrassed at trying to prevent him from receiving the Torah, after you yourselves benefitted from his hospitality? He fed you despite his debility" (see *Shemot Rabbah* 28:1).

This is alluded to by the pasuk "and he saw the place from afar." Avraham could see the light of the mitzvah, the burning flame of the Divine will, beckoning from afar. This light traversed the gap of mortal incomprehension and pierced the emotional barrier which the *Yetzer Hara* procured to prevent him from doing the *Akeidah*. Avraham asked Yitzchak if he too had the vision to see what human logic could not see, to do Hashem's command. Yitzchak's reaction was, yes. He also had the foresight to do that which entailed difficulties and engendered lack of comprehension. He was willing to climb up the mountain of Divine service despite its steep ascent. This is all hinted to by the supernatural cloud which hovered over the mountain where the *Akeidah* was about to take place.

Eliezer and Yishmael, though, could not see so far ahead. Avraham wanted to know if they had reached the level of doing Hashem's will despite its hurdles. Were they worthy of continuing the journey and being present at the altar of supreme sacrifice? Their negative answer indicated to Avraham that they should stay behind, that the *Akeidah* was meant for him alone. They would be unable to go eagerly and willingly do what they would view as beyond human understanding. One whose service of Hashem depends on understanding the logic behind the mitzvot cannot do Hashem's will with the same exuberance and enthusiasm. This is

why Avraham told them to stay put, near the beasts of burden who journeyed alongside them. He was hinting to them to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, to see where they were really holding in life and to try to remove the humanistic blinders which restrict one's vision. Although they may have been tzaddikim, they lacked the ability to see the Divine will "from afar."

This is also hinted in a conversation that Yishmael had with Yitzchak. Rashi explains that the words (*Bereishit* 22:1) "and it happened after these things [lit. 'words']" refer, according to some, to a previous conversation held between Yitzchak and Yishmael. Yishmael had shown pride at his willingness to perform a *brit milah* at the age of thirteen. He even ventured that his action displayed a greater sign of Avodat Hashem than Yitzchak's *brit* at the age of eight days. Yitzchak countered, "With but one of your organs you want to boast? Had Hashem asked me to give up my whole being, I would have willingly acquiesced." Yishmael remained silent at Yitzchak's portrayal of true *mesirut nefesh*, and did not express a similar sentiment. This reiterates what we said before. Yishmael would have not agreed to an act that seemed so irrational. It was too inconsistent with his superficial approach towards Avodat Hashem.

Perhaps we can now explain the epithet "stay here by yourselves with the donkey" said by Avraham Avinu. Avraham compared them to a donkey, which does its assigned tasks without thinking about them or wondering why. A donkey may even do work without realizing the dangerous situation that it is being placed in. So too, by taking the superficial path of Avodat Hashem, one can find himself placed in precarious situations which threaten his continued service of Hashem.

The *Kedushah* that we say on Shabbat by Musaf contains a reference to this concept. We say *מקום כבודו להעריצו*, "Where is

Your place of glory so that I can glorify you?” (Nusach Sefarad). This can also be translated as “Where is the farthest place where I will express Hashem’s Glory?” By seeing His will from afar and accepting it ever so willingly, we glorify Hashem with the very expression of our being. Are we willing to go as far as Avraham did on his climb up the mountain of Divine service, or will we satisfy ourselves by doing just easy and accessible mitzvot, ones which don’t entail hardship and are based only on logic? This is the question we need to ask ourselves. A living example of one who lived by this concept was Maran Harav Shach zt”l. We saw how all of his actions were led by this approach, how he saw the will of Hashem from afar. Today we lack that guiding force. I remember a pivotal rally held in the Yad Eliyahu stadium. The whole country looked for some indication in his speech whether to vote for the political right or for the left. The tension in the air was palpable. And yet Maran’s speech centered on one thing – he cried over the general situation of Jewry. I am sure that it pained him that the honor of the Torah had reached such a low level, how the ignorant factions were being so misled. The Torah is our life and blood, and justifies all of existence. It should be in the forefront of all major decisions, the deciding factor to guide our future. These were his sentiments, coming from one who saw farther and deeper than most.

How many times did Maran Harav Shach give candies to children and tell them stories. For a *gadol hador* to pay so much attention to the needs and wants of children is quite unusual; it actually should give us some food for thought. This was also part of his approach to doing mitzvot. He was implanting into these children the encouragement so necessary for overcoming today’s trials and temptations. Perhaps one day, one of these children will find himself in some place where he shouldn’t be, doing something he shouldn’t be doing, and the memory of that warmth and understanding that

he felt from Harav Shach will be the right catalyst to help him return home.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Avraham Avinu saw the cloud hovering over the mountain from afar and asked Yitzchak if he saw it too. Yitzchak saw it but Eliezer and Yishmael did not. Whereupon Avraham said to them, “Stay here with the donkey.”
- ◆ Was Avraham belittling them? Why did Eliezer and Yishmael not see the cloud? They were both virtuous. Eliezer taught others Torah that he learned from Avraham, and Yishmael had already done teshuvah. Otherwise, Avraham would not have taken them along, as they would have been a bad influence on Yitzchak.
- ◆ There are two different approaches in serving Hashem. There is the superficial approach and there is the deeper approach. The deeper approach has a far broader outlook on why we do mitzvot, and determines how far we are willing to go in order to do them.
- ◆ Avraham Avinu saw the place of the *Akeidah* “from afar.” This alludes to the light of the mitzvah, the burning flame of the Divine will, beckoning from afar. This light traversed the gap of human incomprehension and pierced the emotional barrier which sought to prevent him from doing the *Akeidah*. Yitzchak also saw the cloud hovering over the mountain. This hints at his foresight to do even that which entailed difficulties and engendered lack of comprehension.
- ◆ Yishmael displayed his pride at performing a *brit milah* at the age of thirteen and thought he was greater than Yitzchak. Yitzchak countered that had Hashem asked him to give up his whole being, he would have willingly acquiesced. Yishmael’s silence at Yitzchak’s portrayal of true *mesirut nefesh* was a sign that he concurred with Yitzchak’s appraisal of their respective levels of Divine service. Yishmael would have not agreed to an act that seemed so irrational. It was too inconsistent with his superficial approach towards Avodat Hashem.

- ◆ Avraham asked Eliezer and Yishmael if they saw the cloud hovering over the mountain in order to see if they were on a higher level of doing mitzvot. Although they may have been tzaddikim, they lacked the ability to see the Divine will “from afar.” This indicated to Avraham that they should stay behind, and he and Yitzchak should go on alone. They would be unable to go eagerly and willingly do what they would view as beyond human understanding.
- ◆ By seeing His will from afar and accepting it ever so willingly, we glorify Hashem with the very expression of our being.



## Chayei Sarah



### Overcoming Nisyonot

*“Sarah died in Kiriath-arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her”*

*(Bereishit 23:2)*

If we follow the ‘train’ of events in this parashah, we will gain an insight on how to conduct ourselves at the crossroads of life and put us on ‘track.’ Especially when it comes to *nisyonot*, we need the outlook of the Torah to guide us through, without being derailed from our goal, and help us to get to the end of the line.

We can imagine the feelings of Avraham Avinu on his way to sacrificing his son. Every parent naturally has tremendous compassion on his or her child. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Melachim II*, 252) illustrates this with an incredible story. Tzidkiyahu, the last of the kings of Yehudah, had unusual, legendary eyes. They were impervious to the diabolical jabs of Nebuchadnezzar’s henchman, almost as if made from iron. Nebuchadnezzar then had an idea. He had the sons of Tzidkiyahu brought before their father, who watched as they were slaughtered

one by one. His compassion aroused, Tzidkiyahu cried at their death, and the tears weakened his eyes – giving Nebuchadnezzar the opportunity to remove them.

Despite this, Avraham rose above his natural emotions and went willingly to do Hashem's will. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 22:6) describes how the two of them "walked together," their hearts unified in purpose and eager to sanctify the Name of Hashem. Even after Hashem called out to Avraham, "Do not reach your hand out to your son" (ibid. 22:12), Avraham still desired to make some small commemoration of the *Akeidah*, had Hashem not restrained him by saying (ibid.), "Do nothing at all" (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 56:7). Why didn't Avraham rejoice over the good fortune of having his mitzvah rescinded? The simplest answer is that when a tzaddik starts a mitzvah, he does not want to stop. We can learn from here how important it is to do mitzvot and follow them to the end.

Following this, Avraham returned home with his son safe and sound, only to find that his wife had passed away, after becoming aware of this very *nisayon*. The Midrash (*Tanchuma Vayeira*, 23) writes that Sarah Imeinu passed away as a result of the *Akeidah*. The Satan came to Sarah in the guise of Yitzchak and described how Avraham was about to sacrifice him on the Mizbeach. The shock was too much for her, and she died from the 'tragic' news. Ordinary people in Avraham's situation may have found grounds for complaint, questioning Divine judgment and asking, "This is Torah and its reward?" Why was it necessary to undergo such tribulations?

Avraham, though, accepted it with equanimity, and masterfully dealt with the situation and its new state of affairs. He eulogized Sarah and cried over her demise. At the same time, he sent Yitzchak away, to study in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. These were not actions done out of anguish or for some other psychological need.

The mitzvah to eulogize is to show *kavod* for the *niftar*. Sarah was a tremendous tzaddeket; pure and righteous in her older years just as she had been in her youth (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 58:1). Avraham thus mourned the void left by her passing. The passing of any tzaddik places the world in a state of moral deficiency and righteous deprivation, something truly worth mourning about. And so Avraham Avinu passed his next *nisayon* by doing what needed to be done with perfect faith.

Why did Hashem test Avraham Avinu? What gave Avraham the ability to withstand such difficult tests? Perhaps we can answer these questions by explaining the words of Chazal (*Berachot* 64b) “There is no rest for tzaddikim in this world, nor in the next.” As devoted servants of Hashem, tzaddikim view their responsibilities not as burdens but as privileges. Similarly, they see their difficulties not as barriers to their goal but as the vehicle to get them there. Every *nisayon* is another building block of experience, forging our character on the anvil of life. Going through a *nisayon* only brings out our potential and draws us closer to Hashem. If so, the more *nisyonot* we have, the better off we become.

This is why Hashem sends *nisyonot* to tzaddikim. They appreciate the end result and look forward to that goal. This gives them the stamina to deal with difficult situations. They know Who is orchestrating the events behind the scenes, and put complete trust in His direction of affairs. Hashem has only our best in mind, and if we have a *nisayon*, it is solely for our good. This is what gave Avraham the strength to overcome his personal suffering and rise to the task that lay ahead.

Very often, we may lack the foresight to see the ultimate good of a situation. As human beings, we often focus on pressing, material needs while overlooking the spiritual ones. One may mistakenly ask

Hashem for something which is really detrimental to his future, without realizing it. Not so long ago, the country of Venezuela had a serious economic recession. The Jews there no doubt prayed that they be spared the trial of poverty and be returned to their former wealth. This is not always the best for us though. Materialism and spiritualism do not always go hand in hand. A prosperous and booming economy often leads to a downswing in religious observance. And the opposite is also quite possible. After the economy crashed in Venezuela, there was a resurgence of people seeking spirituality, and many came closer to their roots.

People come to me for *berachot* for different things. Sometimes they ask me to pray that they will win a lottery, or pass their driving test. At times, I answer as follows – how do you know that this is the best for you? Who is to say that it won't cause a downslide in your religiosity, or be the “vehicle” to involve you in a car accident, *chas v'shalom*? We need to realize that Hashem does indeed know what is best for us. This is the deeper meaning behind the saying (*Berachot* 48b), “Bless Hashem for the bad just as one blesses Him for the good.” This is more than just mere lip-service of realizing the Divine Providence at work. We are expressing our inner conviction of what is our ultimate good. Even what may appear on the surface as ‘bad’ really harbors inside nothing but ‘good.’

Similarly, when we pray for something, we should add a disclaimer to our tefillah. We should say that our request is conditional on what is truly best for us, the details of which are known to the One Above and obscured from those of us down below. By focusing on our goal in life and letting the Great Conductor of human affairs run the show, we can have the strength to pass our tests with perfect faith.

**In Summary**

- ◆ Avraham rose above his natural compassion and went willingly to do the *Akeidah*. Avraham and Yitzchak “walked together,” their hearts unified in purpose and eager to sanctify the Name of Hashem.
- ◆ Following this, Avraham returned home, only to find that Sarah Imeinu had passed away as a result of hearing about the *Akeidah*. He eulogized Sarah and cried over her demise, not questioning the Divine judgment, but mourning the void left by her passing. The passing of any tzaddik places the world in a state of moral deficiency and righteous deprivation, something truly worthy mourning about.
- ◆ Why did he have to undergo such tribulations? What gave Avraham the ability to withstand such difficult tests?
- ◆ Tzaddikim see their difficulties not as barriers to their goal but as the vehicle to get them there. Every *nisayon* is another building block of experience, forging our character on the anvil of life. Going through a *nisayon* only brings out our potential and draws us closer to Hashem. Hashem has only our best in mind, and if we have a *nisayon*, it is solely for our good. This is what gave Avraham the strength to overcome his personal suffering.



## The Nisayon of Avraham and the Sacrifice of Yitzchak

*“Sarah died in Kiriath-arba which is Hebron in the land of Canaan; and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to weep for her”*

*(Bereishit 23:2)*

Rashi explains why the death of Sarah Imeinu is placed adjacent to the story of the *Akeidah*. This alludes to the reason why she passed away. She heard that Avraham almost sacrificed him, and she died from the ‘tragic’ news.

I heard perhaps a deeper understanding of this. Sarah Imeinu wasn’t concerned that Yitzchak would die, if that was Hashem’s will. The exact opposite is true. Sarah experienced pangs of anxiety after hearing that Yitzchak did not give up his life to sanctify the Name of Hashem. Her deep feelings were stirred, causing her soul to depart (*Talelei Orot*).

This actually presents a difficulty. From one account of the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit, 98*), when Avraham Avinu was getting ready to go to the *Akeidah*, he told Sarah that he wanted to take Yitzchak to learn Torah in a yeshiva. Why didn’t Avraham tell her where he was going without bending the truth? Was he worried at how she would react? According to the explanation we gave above, Sarah would have been overjoyed to hear of the Divine mission and Heavenly merit that awaited her cherished son. If so, Avraham should have had no reason to hide the true purpose of his trip.

Perhaps we can answer this question by making a connection between learning Torah and bringing an offering. The pasuk says

(*Bamidbar* 19:14) “This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent.” Chazal (*Shabbat* 83b) homiletically translate this to refer to a man’s study of Torah, done in a ‘tent’ of learning. This the way one should learn Torah. Involvement in learning does not leave room for outside distractions or extraneous diversions. One who is committed to learning knows that it takes all of his energy in order to delve into the intricacies of Torah and understand its laws. The Torah compares learning with dying in a tent, as it requires the subjection of one’s *Yetzer Hara*, to the point where one negates his physical desires. While in the Beit Hamidrash, within the ‘tent’ of Torah, one renounces all other needs and activities. This is hinted to by the words (*Vayikra* 1:2) “When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem.” Torah requires self-sacrifice, and this negation of physical desire is akin to bringing an offering to Hashem from one’s own ‘flesh and blood.’

Torah learning also encounters a meta-physical undercurrent of opposition. When the *Yetzer Hara* sees that someone wants to do a mitzvah, he tries to persuade him against it and begins to throw obstacles in his path. How much more so by learning Torah! A person has to contend with his *Yetzer Hara* before he can succeed in learning. No easy adversary!

Avraham Avinu wanted to introduce Sarah to the idea of the *Akeidah* indirectly, in a way that would reflect its inner essence of sacrifice and submission to Hashem’s will, and allow Sarah to understand the correlation on her own. This is why Avraham referred to *Akeidat Yitzchak* as taking Yitzchak to a yeshiva. Torah learning in a yeshiva is a living *mesirut nefesh*, a submission of our human physicality to the Divine Will, no less than a sacrifice upon the Mizbeach. And this is the lesson that we learn from Avraham. One who enters the Beit Hamidrash to learn Torah is similar to Yitzchak Avinu on the way to the *Akeidah*, fulfilling Hashem’s Will

with the same spirit of yore, one which founded our nation and set us on the path towards Sinai.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ Rashi explains that Sarah Imeinu passed away as a result of *Akeidat Yitzchak*. Sarah Imeinu wasn't concerned that Yitzchak would die. She experienced pangs of anxiety after hearing that Yitzchak did not give up his life to sanctify the Name of Hashem.
- ◆ Avraham Avinu told Sarah that he wanted to take Yitzchak to learn Torah in a yeshiva. Why didn't Avraham tell her where he was going without bending the truth? She would have been overjoyed to know that they were going to the *Akeidah*. What is the connection between learning Torah and bringing an offering?
- ◆ A person has to contend with his *Yetzer Hara* before he can succeed in learning Torah. It does not leave room for outside distractions or extraneous diversions. It requires self-sacrifice, the subjection of one's *Yetzer Hara* and the negation of physical desire. Man's study of Torah, done in a 'tent' of learning, reflects the inner essence of sacrifice and submission to Hashem's will. This is why Avraham referred to *Akeidat Yitzchak* as taking Yitzchak to a yeshiva.
- ◆ One who enters the Beit Hamidrash to learn Torah is similar to Yitzchak Avinu on the way to the *Akeidah*, fulfilling Hashem's Will and bringing an offering to Hashem from one's own 'flesh and blood.'



## In the Image of Avraham Avinu

*“Now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything”*

*(Bereishit 24:1)*

Rashi writes that the word **בכל** has the same numerical value as the word **בן**, alluding to his true *berachah* – his son Yitzchak. This raises a question. Why did the Torah not say outright that Hashem blessed Avraham with a son? Why the ambiguity?

I suggest that there is more hinted to here than just the birth of Yitzchak. The Torah wants us to know just what type of son Yitzchak was. Chazal (*Tanchuma Toldot*, 1) already point out how Yitzchak was similar to Avraham in his facial features. The commentators add that the similarities did not stop there. An integral part of the *berachah* that Avraham received was that Yitzchak should be like him in spirit and in deed. And so, the blessing of Avraham was to have a son who was **בכל**, full of all the good qualities and exemplary *middot* that personified Avraham Avinu. What was it about Yitzchak which was such a blessing to Avraham? Everything. That is why the Torah says **בכל**. It was the greatest blessing that any father could ever want.

The Midrash goes on to explain why Yitzchak resembled Avraham. This was to counter the gossipmongers, who tried to spread a rumor that Yitzchak was not the legitimate son of Avraham. Avraham was too old to have children, they said. Sarah must have become pregnant from Avimelech. To prevent any aspersion on Yitzchak’s genealogy, Hashem made Yitzchak’s countenance mirror Avraham’s.

The Torah tells us that on the day that Yitzchak was weaned,

Avraham Avinu made a festive meal, inviting the kings and leaders of the generation to join him. The list of attendees included Shem and Ever, as well as Avimelech (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 21:8). Why did Avraham invite Avimelech? Wouldn't it only lead to more gossip? The answer is that the complete resemblance between Yitzchak and Avraham left no doubt as to whom his father was. Every observer could see that Yitzchak was Avraham's son merely by looking at him.

### **More than meets the eye**

Actually, the whole episode with Avimelech contains an allusion to our situation with the Palestinians. Why did Hashem arrange the abduction of Sarah to Avimelech's palace shortly before her pregnancy with Yitzchak? It only served to arouse speculation. Wouldn't it have been better off for Hashem to stage such an event at a different time?

I would venture to say that the whole story with Avimelech, the King and sire of the Palestinian nation, plays a pivotal role in defining and determining the Palestinian conflict. History records numerous skirmishes with the Palestinians, dating back to the days of the Prophets. Our past is intertwined with theirs, as they also claim legal inheritance to the Land of Israel. And this is not without Divine purpose. The very first contact between the Jews and the Palestinians is in this parashah, and it expresses this conflict; as well as how this conflict is meant to be resolved.

The Palestinians claim to be the original owners of the Land. They already had a permanent settlement before Avraham sojourned and found himself in their environs. They point to Sarah's abduction to justify their prior possession and control over its inhabitants. They doubt the validity of Avraham's claim and even question Yitzchak's lineage. Here is where the whole conflict begins.

Imagine someone who has his picture taken while standing next to the king. Whoever looks at this picture afterwards will be led to believe that this lucky man was actually a confidant of the king. It will be a great source of pleasure for him, as well as ‘proof’ of his alleged assertion. From a conceptual perspective, this is what happened by the Palestinians. They bolster their claim by pointing at the obscurity of the Divine plan and the anonymity of its main characters. Doesn’t the Land belong to the one who was here first? How do we fight such claims?

When we live a life of Torah, we have the greatest proof of all. No one can usurp Hashem’s open Writ and expressed Will to bequeath the Land of Israel to the Jewish people – provided that we can prove our ancestry. When we live by the laws of the Torah and keep the mitzvot related to the Land, if we can show our genealogical ties to Avraham Avinu, and even more – our spiritual line of descent, we will have the one, and only, answer to the claims of the Palestinians. On the other hand, if we break that bond which links us to Hashem and His Torah, we lose all right of possession, and validate the Palestinians’ struggle to establish their homeland in Israel. Hashem put the Palestinians in this land and gave them prior jurisdiction, for this very purpose. He wants to see us walk in His ways.

This now explains the Divine arrangement of Yitzchak’s resemblance to Avraham Avinu, as well as the Providential timing of Sarah’s abduction. At the same time that our landholder rivalry began, its resolution was already prearranged and finalized. By acting as the spiritual heirs of the Patriarchs, we demonstrate our similarity to the Avot. It is this similarity which disproves the claims of the Palestinians. When our lives and actions will resemble those of the Avot, to the point where one can discern the *middot* and image of the Avot reflected in their children, we will have the

validation we need to claim proprietary of the Land in accordance with its Divine proprietor.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Hashem blessed Avraham Avinu בכל, which Rashi explains alludes to having a בן. Why did the Torah not say outright that Hashem blessed Avraham with a son? Yitzchak was similar to Avraham not only in his facial features, but also in spirit and in deed. And so, the blessing of Avraham was to have a son who was בכל, full of all the good qualities and exemplary *middot* that personified Avraham Avinu.
- ◆ The Midrash goes on to explain why Yitzchak resembled Avraham. Rumors circulated that Sarah became pregnant from Avimelech. To prevent any aspersion on Yitzchak's genealogy, Hashem made Yitzchak's countenance mirror Avraham's.
- ◆ On the day that Yitzchak was weaned, Avraham invited Avimelech along with other kings and leaders to a festive meal. Why? Wouldn't this only lead to more gossip? The complete resemblance between Yitzchak and Avraham left behind no doubt. Every observer could see that Yitzchak was Avraham's son merely by looking at him.
- ◆ Why did Hashem arrange Sarah's abduction to Avimelech's palace shortly before her pregnancy with Yitzchak? Didn't it just arouse speculation? The Palestinians claim to be the original owners of the Land. They bolster their claim by pointing at the obscurity of the Divine plan and the anonymity of its main characters. How do we fight such claims?
- ◆ Hashem put the Palestinians in this land and gave them prior jurisdiction for this very purpose. He wants to see us walk in His ways. By acting as the spiritual heirs of the Patriarchs, we demonstrate our similarity to the Avot. It is this similarity which disproves the claims of the Palestinians.



## Chessed Says it All

***“Rather, to my land and to my kindred shall you go and take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak”***

*(Bereishit 24:4)*

Avraham Avinu made Eliezer take an oath that he would only take a wife for Yitzchak from his birthplace, Charan. The *Ran* asks, why did Avraham insist on this condition? Was there any difference between the daughters of Charan and the daughters of Canaan? Both groups equally worshipped idolatry.

I suggest the following answer. In one way, the inhabitants of Charan were vastly superior to their counterparts in Canaan. They had the *middah* of *cheded* in their blood. The very attribute of *cheded* is a step-up from the base character of man, and it gives us the ability to raise ourselves to even higher levels. This is hinted at by the literal translation of the words (*Tehillim* 89:3) עולם חסד יבנה, “A world is built on *cheded*.” Our entire world, as well as the microcosmic universe of each individual, is built on the *middah* of *cheded*. It is this *middah* of *cheded* which keeps our world on its course, and gives us each individually the propelling force to grow. This is what Avraham wanted for his son.

Avraham didn’t have far to look to see the depravity of those living in Canaan. Sodom and Emorrah were known as the antithesis of *cheded*. They detested any form of charity or hospitality, punishing the donors and recipients with death. This could explain the King of Sodom’s request from Avraham (*Bereishit* 14:21), “Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself.” His

totalitarian attitude and objection to *chessed* expressed itself by subjugating the captives to servitude.

Efron was no better off. When Avraham looked for a burial plot for Sarah, he approached Efron, who made it seem that he would give it for free, even acting as Avraham's close friend. But when it came to the actual acquisition, Efron showed his apathy to the needs of others and asked for an astronomical sum of money. Chazal (*Bava Metzia* 87a) explain that this is why the Torah writes his name עפרן lacking the letter ך. His friendliness and generosity lacked any depth of character or degree of virtue. Instead of understanding Avraham Avinu's feelings or his need to bury Sarah, he bargained over the price and exploited the opportunity to make it rich. He even requested that the coins be in mint condition, all while Sarah lay unburied before them.

Lavan had one redeeming feature, one which demonstrates the very quality which Avraham was looking for. At first, the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 109) describes how Lavan ran to find Eliezer, trying to do him in. Eliezer saw his evil intentions and said the sacred Name of Hashem, miraculously elevating himself overhead, along with his retinue and their camels, out of Lavan's reach. Whereupon Lavan changed his tune and exclaimed (*Bereishit* 24:31), "Come, O blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside when I have cleared the house and place for the camels?" Rashi explains that Lavan was referring to emptying the house from idols. He knew that Avraham and his men would never step into a house where there were idols; hence he quickly cleared them away. Here you see the difference between the people of Charan and Canaan. As wicked as he was, Lavan still harbored some understanding of the needs of others and took them into account. Seeing that he couldn't kill Eliezer, his inherent *chessed* took over and extended its arm of hospitality.

### The righteousness of Rivka

The *Rama m'Panu* (*Asarah Ma'amarot, Eim Kol Chai, 3:29*) says that Yitzchak Avinu went to learn with the angels for three years after the *Akeidah*. This caused the Divine presence to rest on him. When Rivka was brought to Canaan, she saw the *Shechinah* above Yitzchak and hid her face. How did Rivka merit seeing the *Shechinah*?

Rivka was singularly righteous; she was surrounded by evil people and negative influences and still remained pure. What set her apart was her love for the *middah* of *chessed*. The other girls, those who accompanied Rivka, as well as the ones of Be'er Sheva (Yitzchak's home town), did not see anything special about Yitzchak. Only Rivka merited seeing the *Shechinah*. This was a result of her *middah* of *chessed*. Hashem based the world on the pillar of *chessed* because it is a prime Divine attribute. When one walks in the ways of Hashem and forms himself in the Divine Image, he merits beholding the splendor of the *Shechinah*.

Picture the scene. A big burly man asks for a drink of water, and a little three-year-old girl willingly agrees to bring enough water for his whole retinue of thirsty camels. I would estimate that an average camel would drink at least one hundred liters (about twenty-six gallons) to quench its thirst. Multiply that by Eliezer's ten camels – and you can imagine the effort it took for Rivka to do this act of *chessed*. Her spirit of hospitality literally carried her away with enthusiasm and gave her supernatural strength. She followed in the footsteps of Sarah Imeinu and became the Matriarch of our nation by being righteous and acting with *chessed*. She merited having three daily miracles: candles which stayed lit from week to week; a Heavenly cloud which hovered over her tent; and the blessing in her dough, just as Sarah had (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 60:16).

## Deep roots

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 60:8) make an unusual statement: “The details of the servants of the Avot are precious to Hashem, more than the Torah of the children.” So many of the laws of the Torah are written in terse form, or inferred from a minor inflection of a word, whereas Eliezer’s search for a wife for Yitzchak is elaborated on at length and even repeated. What can we learn from this?

I think that the overriding message in this parashah is the importance of the *middah* of *chessed*. The Torah describes how far Eliezer went to determine Rivka’s level of *chessed*. Our world is built on *chessed*. Every aspect of this parashah is another revelation of this fundamental attribute, one which gives our world its basis of existence and justifies its continuation.

Taking a step back in time, we know that Avraham Avinu experienced pain after his *brit milah*. Hashem visited him on the third day, fulfilling the mitzvah of *bikur cholim*, and took away some of his illness. Upon seeing three wayfarers though, Avraham gets up, forgets his pain, and runs to greet them. He even asks Hashem to wait for him until he finishes with his company. Chazal (*Shabbat* 127a) learn from here an important principle, “Great is hospitality to guests – greater than receiving the Divine presence.”

How did Avraham have the audacity to ask Hashem to wait for him while he waited on his guests? For a whole day, Avraham was busy taking care of those whom he thought to be Arabs, providing them with their needs and preparing a whole gourmet meal. This is really what Avraham learned from Hashem. He saw how Hashem takes care of our needs despite our inadequacy and human deficiencies; how Hashem came to visit him when he was sick. Avraham expressed his feeling of insignificance when receiving Hashem’s *chessed*, and said (*Bereishit* 18:27), “I am but dirt and

ashes.” Thus Avraham knew to do *chessed* to every human being, influencing them to come closer to Hashem, just as Hashem took care of him.

The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a) tells us about a certain *Amora* who was on the verge of death. As he lay on his deathbed, he saw how Hashem prevented the Angel of Death from taking away his soul. This was a result of constantly overcoming his bad *middot* and assisting others. Hashem saw fit to reward him by delaying the Angel of Death and giving him additional years of life. By overlooking the faults of others and stepping out of our selfish tendencies, the Heavenly Court makes allowances for our own inadequacies and finds room to pardon our shortcomings.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Avraham made Eliezer swear that he would not take a wife for Yitzchak from Canaan. The *Ran* asks, in what way were the daughters of Charan superior to those of Canaan? Didn't both of them serve idols?
- ◆ I suggest that the *middah* of *chessed* was in their blood. The very attribute of *chessed* is a step-up from the base character of man. This is hinted at by the literal translation of the words עולם חסד יבנה, “A world is built on *chessed*” (*Tehillim* 89:3). Our entire world, as well as the microcosmic universe of each individual, is built on the *middah* of *chessed*.
- ◆ Sodom and Emorrah were known as the antithesis of *chessed*. They detested any form of charity or hospitality. Efron too showed his apathy to the needs of others. This is why the Torah writes his name עפרן lacking the letter ך. His friendliness and generosity were devoid of any virtue.
- ◆ Lavan knew that Avraham and his men would not step into a house where there were idols, and therefore removed them. As wicked as he

was, Lavan still harbored some understanding of the needs of others and took them into account. Seeing that he couldn't kill Eliezer, his inherent *chessed* took over and extended its hospitality.

- ◆ Rivka merited seeing the *Shechinah* above Yitzchak and hid her face. This was a result of her *middah* of *chessed*. When one walks in the ways of Hashem and forms himself in the Divine Image, he merits beholding the splendor of the *Shechinah*.
- ◆ The events of Eliezer's search for a wife for Yitzchak are elaborated on at length, the overriding message being the importance of the *middah* of *chessed*. Our world is built on *chessed*. Every aspect of this parashah is another revelation of this fundamental attribute.
- ◆ Upon seeing three wayfarers, Avraham got up, forgot his pain, and ran to greet them. He even asked Hashem to wait for him until he finished. This is really what Avraham learned from Hashem. He saw how Hashem came to visit him when he was sick. Avraham knew to do *chessed* to every human being, influencing them to come closer to Hashem, just as Hashem took care of him.



## Using Our Time

***“Then the servant took ten camels of his master’s camels and set out with all the bounty of his master in his hand and made his way to Aram Nabaraim to the city of Nabor”***

*(Bereishit 24:10)*

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 59:11) tell us that when Avraham Avinu sent his servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak, Eliezer

merited a supernatural contraction of the earth, and arrived in Charan almost immediately after setting out. This raises a serious question. When Avraham Avinu left Charan at Hashem's command, there was no miraculous shortening of his journey or Divine intervention to pave the way. Didn't Avraham, a great tzaddik going with the expressed will of Hashem, merit the same, if not greater, 'royal treatment'? Why didn't Hashem expedite Avraham's trip as he did for his servant?

I suggest the following answer. We have an ironclad rule. Hashem does not test us or put us into a predicament which we would be unable to master or overcome. He makes sure that we have the strength of character we need in order to withstand our *nisyonot*, even before he puts us to the test. And if *chas v'shalom* someone does falter, we attribute his failure to a lack of effort on his part. He didn't apply himself as necessary.

Eliezer had a daughter of marriageable age, and he wanted Yitzchak to marry her (*Bereishit Rabbah* 59:9). Hashem knew too well that a long journey would have been too much of a test for Eliezer. His trial already had the maximum degree of hardship that he could deal with. This is why Hashem shortened his journey. In this way, Eliezer would now be able to fulfill his master's command in its entirety. And so Hashem paved the way for Eliezer's speedy expedition.

In contrast, Avraham's journey to Charan was itself a test. Hashem told Avraham (*Bereishit* 12:1), "Go... and leave your land, your birthplace and your family to the land that I will show you." We infer from here (see Rashi) that every step of the way was part of this command, and an examination of Avraham's character and will. Hashem knew that Avraham had the spiritual stamina to withstand a long journey to an unknown destination. Thus the longer trip served a two-fold purpose; it became a greater trial for

Avraham, as he did not see any destination in sight. And at the same time (or specifically because of its length and explicit command) it became a greater source of remuneration in the long 'run.' Every step of the way was another source of merit. This is why Hashem did not expedite Avraham's journey to Canaan.

Once we understand this axiom and acknowledge the Heavenly-controlled environment in the laboratory of life, we can now understand its corollary of our utilization of time. Hashem apportions time for us to accomplish our mission in life – according to how well we can master its window of opportunity. For those whom the length of time would be a burden too difficult to bear, Hashem exempts them from taking that exam.

This could well explain another perplexing event in Eliezer's journey. When Eliezer reaches Charan, Lavan runs out to greet him while 'bearing his arms,' intending to do him in. Whereupon Eliezer sees his evil intention and says the sacred Name of Hashem, miraculously elevating himself overhead and out of Lavan's reach (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 109). Was he afraid of Lavan? We know that he was a strong warrior, as he alone helped Avraham to successfully battle the five Kings (see *Bereishit* 14). So why did Eliezer use such supernatural powers to run away and not face Lavan head-on?

It would seem that Eliezer was well aware of his mission and its difficulties. Realizing that any delay would burden him with overcoming his personal considerations, and the additional effort could very well sway him from his master's wish, he took the quickest way out. This is why he did not resort to physical warfare.

The way back home though, was a different story. Eliezer traversed the distance without any miraculous shortening of his journey. The reason for this should now be quite obvious. Once

Eliezer completed his mission by finding a wife for Yitzchak, he no longer had any more reason or subconscious desire to delay his journey home. He saw with his own eyes how Hashem quickly set the stage for its preordained ending, and that no one can ever foil or thwart the Divine plan. After passing his condensed ‘finals,’ the lengthy way back no longer presented much of a test. Whatever difficulty did remain for Eliezer to return would not sway him, and was indeed worthy of reward for its ‘surface tension.’

The story is told how Eliyahu Hanavi once came to the Vilna Gaon, and offered to teach him some secrets of the Torah. The Gaon refused to accept his offer. At first glance, we may wonder why one would refuse such a precious opportunity. But the Gaon reasoned as follows. With a teacher such as Eliyahu, any difficulties or complexities of Torah would be resolved instantaneously, without any effort on his part. This would require him to forgo the reward that one gains for learning Torah through toil and exertion. And for the Vilna Gaon, this was too much of a price to pay.

As mere mortals with but human capacities, we often struggle to understand a difficult Gemara and reach some level of comprehension. This may require delving into intricate passages, theoretical arguments and abstract reasoning for hours on end, totally engrossed by the words of the Gemara. Without doubt, such study of Torah is priceless, and every minute spent is a world gained. This is why the Vilna Gaon did not want to learn under the tutelage of Eliyahu Hanavi. Because he fully appreciated its everlasting reward, he was not willing to accept any shortcuts in his Torah learning.

Another story of the Gaon demonstrates his value and utilization of time. Once, his sister came to visit him, after a separation of many years. The Gaon inquired about her well-being for a few brief minutes, and then excused himself and resumed learning, acting as

if he saw her on a daily basis. When asked by his family why he had such a short conversation, he justified his actions. Our time in this world is so limited, he said, fixed by the Heavenly Decree and its mortality table of life and death. We don't know when our appointed time will come. That is why I cut our conversation short. Every second is precious beyond words, and we need to take advantage of our time. After one hundred and twenty, all of our pleas and entreats to spend another minute at the Gemara will have no effect.

### **The creation of time**

On the very first day of Creation, Hashem created 'Space' and the primeval matter to form our Universe. The *sifrei kabbalah* say that this primeval matter was subsequently transformed into the basic chemical elements of our physical world. On each day of Creation, Hashem fashioned another realm of our physical world from this matter, and completed yet another phase of Creation. This teaches us that every day of our lives has the capacity to complete another phase of our life's mission.

Similarly, Hashem created the entity called 'Time.' In the continuum of Time, the solar and lunar cycles allow us to differentiate between periods of time. This is not without purpose. Hashem divided Time into days, months and years, in order for us to make full use of our 'lifetime.' He wants to see if we will value our time and be attentive to our mission here on earth. Each intermission of Time is like a red light; it gives us another opportunity to evaluate where we are holding. Similarly, the arrival of Shabbat or the passing of seasons and Yamim Tovim allow us the respite we need to determine if we have furthered our service of Hashem or developed our *middot* since the last interlude. By varying and alternating 'Time' with each of these auspicious intervals, man

is constantly invigorated by the change, and jarred into reflection by their discordance of continuity.

### **Taking time out**

As an example of taking time out to evaluate ourselves, I heard a story which shows how Maran Harav Shach zt"l put this into practice. Once, one of his talmidim came across Harav Shach as he was berating himself and crying over his situation. When asked why he was crying, he explained that he did not say Kriyat Shema that morning with the same punctual stringency as he usually did. As it was already after the time allotted to say Kriyat Shema, he no longer could rectify that omission, and was therefore overly distraught.

The Gemara (*Berachot 26a*) says that if one brings a *korban* after its appointed time, its offering is null and void. One who brings a *korban* at the right time shows his understanding of its purpose. He anticipates its offering because he appreciates the closeness it creates between us and Hashem. However, one who fails to bring it until after its scheduled time shows his lack of appreciation. This is why it is not accepted. His procrastination displays his gross insensitivity to the importance of his *korban* and its timeless opportunity.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once explained this with a parable. Imagine someone who fasts for three days. At the end of three days, he is brought all of the courses and meals of the past three days in one large feast. Would he eat everything at one sitting? Obviously not. One could not possibly enjoy or even swallow such a large quantity of food. But there is a deeper reason why such a meal would not satisfy his 'three-day' hunger. A person can't fill his desires of yesterday. He can only satisfy his present appetite and its immediate vacancy. What was pressing then, is no longer relevant to his needs of today. So too, once the time for a *korban* passes by,

its effective influence can no longer be reawakened by bringing that same *korban* today. A *korban* after its appointed time can no longer fill the same void.

Harav Shach writes in a letter to one of his talmidim, that after one hundred and twenty years, a person is presented with a long list detailing every single action that he did in his whole lifetime. This inventory is similar to a shareholder who monitors a stock in which he invested a great deal of money. He wants to know what's doing, every second of the day. So too, Hashem invested a great deal of creative activity in our formation and development, even more than what a parent does for his child. Hashem also put into our hands a very precious commodity, one than can never be replaced. That commodity is called Time. This is why He wants to re-evaluate our usage of Time, to see if we are utilizing it or wasting it on frivolous trifles and incessant vanities. Whoever does not take advantage of his time will be held 'highly' accountable by the Highest Authority at the Supreme Court of Justice. On the other hand, when Hashem sees us taking time out to do mitzvot, He rejoices.

It is true that Hashem created us as flesh and blood, human beings with physical needs and timetable constraints. However, many people slumber away their lives, frivolously wasting their most precious commodity on empty nothings. If we take a time-out from those daily activities such as eating or sleeping, and use it to learn some words of Torah, we are actually mastering the Universal constant of Time. And Hashem exclaims, "My sons have been victorious over Me," in response. "Instead of enjoying the food and drink I prepared for them, instead of limiting their utilization of Time, they spend their time reveling in My Torah." This is how Hashem rejoices over us. By overcoming our constraints of Time

and maximizing its usage, we give Hashem a ray of joy and a measure of deep satisfaction.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Eliezer went to find a wife for Yitzchak and merited a supernatural contraction of the earth. Why did Avraham, while going with Hashem's explicit command, not merit any miraculous shortening of his journey?
- ◆ Hashem does not test us with a *nisayon* which we would be unable to overcome. He makes sure that we have the strength of character we need, even before He puts us to the test. Hashem knew that a long journey would have been too much of a test for Eliezer, as he really wanted Yitzchak to marry his own daughter. He already had the maximum degree of hardship that he could endure. In this way, Eliezer would now be able to fulfill his master's command in its entirety.
- ◆ The journey of Avraham was both a test and a source of reward. Hashem knew that Avraham had the spiritual stamina to withstand a long journey to an unknown destination. Thus every step of the way was another source of merit. This is why Hashem did not expedite Avraham's journey to Canaan.
- ◆ Hashem apportions time for us to accomplish our mission in life, according to how well we can master its window of opportunity. Hashem exempts those for whom the length of time would be a burden too difficult to bear.
- ◆ When Eliezer reached Charan, Lavan greeted him while 'bearing his arms,' intending to do him in. Eliezer elevated himself miraculously by saying the sacred Name of Hashem. Why did Eliezer use such supernatural powers to run away and not face Lavan head-on? Eliezer was aware of his mission and its difficulties. Realizing that any delay or additional effort could very well sway him from his master's wish, he took the quickest way out.

- ◆ The Vilna Gaon did not want to learn Torah from Eliyahu Hanavi. With a teacher such as Eliyahu, any difficulties would have been resolved instantaneously, without any effort on his part. This would have required him to forgo the reward that one gains for learning Torah through toil and exertion. In another story, after a separation of many years, the Gaon inquired about his sister's well-being for but a few brief minutes, because he valued every second of life and wanted to take full advantage of his time.
- ◆ On the very first day of Creation, Hashem created 'Space' and 'Time.' Every day can be used to complete another phase of our life's mission. Hashem divided Time into days, months, and years, to see if we will value our time and be attentive to our mission here on earth. By varying and altering 'Time' with auspicious intervals, man is constantly invigorated by the change, and jarred into reflection by its discordance of continuity.
- ◆ Many people slumber away their lives, frivolously wasting their most precious commodity on empty nothings. If we take a time-out from our daily activities, and use it to learn Torah, Hashem rejoices, saying, "My sons have been victorious over Me, as they spend their time reveling in My Torah."



## Going All the Way

*"The man was astonished at her, reflecting silently to know whether Hashem had made his journey successful or not"*

*(Bereishit 24:21)*

The timing of these words is a bit intriguing. If we will take a deep look at the context of this pasuk and the scene where it takes place,

we will uncover a concept that will enlighten us with its eternal message.

We are all familiar with the story. Eliezer brought his retinue of men and their camels to the city well, right before the girls of the town came to draw water. Eliezer prayed to Hashem and asked that the future wife of Yitzchak pass a test. The one who would offer to give him and his camels to drink would be the right match. The pasuk then goes on to describe how immediately afterwards, Rivka came to the well, Eliezer asked her for a drink, and she hurriedly ran back and forth bringing him, and then his ten thirsty camels, plenty of water. And then comes our pasuk and describes Eliezer's astonishment and uncertainty if she was the right one.

What is difficult to understand is why Eliezer still had any doubt. Rashi (*Bereishit* 24:17) explains Eliezer's initial reaction at seeing Rivka. Eliezer ran towards Rivka, because he saw the water miraculously rise at Rivka's arrival at the well. Such a miracle would seem to be a sure sign of her righteousness. And then Rivka willingly acceded to his request for a drink, and even began to draw water for the whole lot of camels. What other test did she need to pass before Eliezer could determine her suitability for Yitzchak?

We can explain this question better with the use of a parable. Imagine someone who prays to Hashem that he should reach the airport in time to catch a plane. Would he still be questioning if Hashem would grant him success, even after he is already sitting on the plane? What, then, was Eliezer's uncertainty?

Perhaps we can answer by understanding what it means to finish a mitzvah. Chazal (*Tanchuma Eikev*, 6) tell us, "One who starts a mitzvah, is told to finish." The reason for this is because until one actually finishes a mitzvah, it is still incomplete. It lacks the stamp of approval by the Divine Board of Directors, given when our actions

pass their Heavenly requirements. This is similar to someone who buys a house and makes all of the financial arrangements, and yet is lacking a signature on one crucial paper. Obviously the sale is not valid. So too, before we complete the final act of any mitzvah, it lacks the fulfillment of a Divine command.

This is why Eliezer was still uncertain whether or not Hashem had blessed his search with success. Even after witnessing the water miraculously rising, and seeing how Rivka proceeded to bring him water, he still had reason to doubt her suitability before she finished altogether. Refraining to bring water for the last of the ten camels would have made her ineligible to become Yitzchak's wife. This also explains why the following pasuk (ibid. 22) says that after she finished satisfying all of the camels' thirst, Eliezer gave her jewelry. He knew that he had found Yitzchak's match only at the end of her act of *chessed*. We learn from here an important lesson. Even the biggest mitzvah, when done without *sheleimut*, is lacking in quality.

Perhaps we can use this concept to explain the difference between the *chessed* of Avraham Avinu and Lavan. On the third day of his *brit milah*, Avraham Avinu no longer had the ability to stand, as it says (*Bereishit* 18:1), "He was sitting at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day." The pain of the *milah* was debilitating enough to make him sit. Still, Rashi explains that Avraham wanted so much to invite guests, that he sat there, scanning the horizon and looking for wayfarers in need. And when he saw three people standing and waiting from afar, he jumped up and ran to them, as it says (ibid. 2) "He saw, so he ran towards them from the entrance of the tent." In his love to do the mitzvah and his rush to do *hachnasat orchim*, he forgot all of his pain. This gave him the ability to attend to all of their needs, running and making sure they would have fresh bread, tasty tongue, and a variety of condiments. Until they got up and left, Avraham did not have a second to sit and relax, and he

happily waited over them. He did all of this because of his deep desire to do the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* in its entirety, finishing it to the end.

In contrast, we see a different picture regarding Lavan. Lavan also ran out to greet his guests, and he even removed the idols from his house in order for them to enter. Rashi explains, though, the motives behind Lavan's welcome. On the pasuk (*Bereishit* 24:29), "Lavan ran to the man, outside to the spring," Rashi says that Lavan saw the jewelry that Eliezer gave his sister Rivka and he already began to deliberate how he could get his hands on Eliezer's money. According to one account, Lavan wanted to do Eliezer in, despite the foolish impudence of such a deed. His desire for money made him think that he could be triumphant over Eliezer and his men, and he got a bit carried away. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 109) then describes how Lavan then changed his mind after Eliezer demonstrated supernatural powers, and exclaimed (*Bereishit* 24:31), "Come, O blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside?" His innate hospitality surfaced and demonstrated that he had also considered the possibility of welcoming guests, being from the same stock and domestication as Avraham Avinu.

Here we see the dual personality of Lavan. On the one hand, he was willing to kill for money, and this was just a small sample of his evil nature. On the other hand, he had a natural predisposition towards hospitality. Even the *hachnasat orchim* that Lavan did was totally inferior to Avraham's *chessed*, as it lacked the quality of taking this mitzvah and going all the way.

### **Torah learning**

We can apply this principle in many ways and to a variety of deeds. Take Torah, for example. The mitzvah of learning doesn't stop after we voice and articulate its words of wisdom. Chazal tell

us (*Avot* 1:17), “Study is not the *ikar*; it is the practice (of what one has learnt that counts).” Similarly, they praise the one who “lectures eloquently and acts just as well” (*Chagigah* 14b).

We say on the first night of Pesach, in the Haggadah, “It happened (one Pesach night) that Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariyah and Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon were reclining in Bnei Brak, recounting the Exodus from Egypt that entire night.” They didn’t just tell their students about the obligation of *sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*. They did themselves what they taught others to do, and went all the way, not even realizing that the morning had arrived. Their learning was done with *sheleimut*. This is even hinted at by the words “it happened” (מעשה). Their learning took on the status of deed by their actualization of Torah study.

Imagine the preparations that go into a wedding (and there are plenty). As many as there are, they all lack purpose and intent, as well as finality, without the groom placing the ring on the finger of the bride and taking her for his wife. Similarly, one who learns Torah but does not put his learning into practice will always lack that materialization of spirit which the complete deed of Torah perpetuates. When we do mitzvot and go all the way, we make the greatest acquisition of all, bringing ourselves ever closer to *sheleimut*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Eliezer stood by, watching uncertainly as Rivka drew water for him and his ten thirsty camels. What other test did she need to pass before Eliezer could determine her suitability for Yitzchak?
- ◆ It would seem that Eliezer was waiting to see if Rivka would finish her mitzvah of *chessed*, all the way to the end. Even the biggest mitzvah, when done without *sheleimut*, is lacking in quality.
- ◆ Both Avraham Avinu and Lavan welcomed guests. Avraham’s

hospitality was complete in deed and spirit, despite his pain due to his *brit milah*. Lavan had actually considered the possibility of welcoming guests, and in the end did show his hospitality, despite his greed for money and willingness to kill Eliezer along the way. The *hachnasat orchim* that Lavan did do was totally inferior to Avraham's *chessed*, and lacked the quality of taking this mitzvah and going all the way.

- ◆ The mitzvah of learning doesn't stop after we articulate its words of wisdom. Study is not the *ikar*; it is the practice of what one has learnt that counts. Learning should be done with *sheleimut*. This is even hinted by the words "It happened" (מעשה) in the story with the *Chachamim* as they recounted the Exodus from Egypt the entire night. Their learning took on the status of deed by their actualization of Torah study.



## Yishmael's Demise

*"These are the sons of Yishmael, and these are their names by their open cities and by their strongholds, twelve chieftains for their nations. These were the years of Yishmael's life: one hundred and thirty-seven years, when he expired and died, and was gathered to his people. They dwelt from Chavilah to Shur – which is near Egypt-toward Assyria; over all his brothers he dwelt"*

(Bereishit 25:16-18)

It is not without reason that the Torah calculates the number of years of Yishmael's life. By ascribing importance to his age, the

Torah is alluding to the teshuvah Yishmael did before he died. Rashi points at another indication of Yishmael's eleventh hour penitence. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 25:17) says, "When he expired," and we know that the Torah uses such wording only referring to the passing of a righteous person. This would indicate that at some time before his death Yishmael repented from his evil ways.

The Torah also lists twelve chieftains that Yishmael merited descending from him over the next few centuries. Again, this is not without reason. This was a consequence of the one mitzvah that he kept, that of *brit milah*. The Zohar (*Chelek* II 32a) adds that we can derive an important lesson from this. Hashem does not withhold even one iota of reward for any act of good that one may do. Each and every righteous act deserves its compensation, no matter who did it. If Yishmael, who had only one mitzvah, received so much reward, how much more so will we Jews, who observe a Torah lifestyle and do Hashem's mitzvot, receive our just desserts.

The last pasuk of the parashah describes the sorry state of Yishmael's descendants. Once Yishmael died, his children dwelt, "over all his brothers" (*Bereishit* 25:18). This is a reference to the *milah* of the Yishmaelites and its waning influence at the End of Days. On that final day of reckoning, when Hashem will grant reward to all the inhabitants of earth, Yishmael's descendants will no longer be able to request reward for their observance of this mitzvah. Why not?

Some *sefarim* explain that before that final 'payday,' Hashem will ask to see the genealogy of those who want to be included on His 'payroll.' When the descendants of Yishmael will show up, and point to the father of their nation and his father Abraham, they will be unable to bring any records of their lineage. This will not be due to a lack of written documents, as Hashem has no need for such

primitive documentation. This refers instead to the incidents of mixed marriages and illegitimacy that will be apparent from the Heavenly Registry. None of them will have any pure line of descent, and this will automatically invalidate their claim of reward for the mitzvah of *brit milah*.

Other commentators explain that the proof of lineage referred to here is that of keeping the doctrine of the Torah. Hashem will require registered Divine documentation of observing the laws of the Torah, and failing to provide such evidence will adversely seal their fate. This is why the pasuk uses the Hebrew word נפל “dwelt” (literally translated as “fell”). This denotes their descent of character and lowly ‘standing’ on Judgment Day. Am Yisrael, on the other hand, will be found worthy of reward, in line with their authenticity of who they are and their high fidelity to the moral code of the Torah. This is another explanation of Yishmael falling ‘over all his brothers.’ His spiritual bankruptcy and shameful status will be made apparent for all to see.

The Ba’al Shem Tov zt”l explains the etymology behind Yishmael’s name. Avraham Avinu made it his life’s mission to spread belief in Hashem. On his travels from place to place, he declared forthright אין עוד מלבדו (there is none other, save He), and urged all to believe only in Hashem. This is what led Avraham to call his son Yishmael. The Hebrew letters of his name ישמעאל can be rearranged to form יש א מעל, there is a One Above. By giving this name, Avraham helped others to realize that our world has a Heavenly Superior who created it and keeps it on its course. This subliminal message was implanted into their consciousness by the constant repetition of Yishmael’s name. Avraham hoped that one day they would realize the implications of his name and acknowledge Hashem as the Creator.

An abrupt change took place once Yitzchak was born. When Sarah saw Yishmael adopt ways that bordered on idol worship, she turned to Avraham and asked him to “drive out this slave woman with her son” (*Bereishit* 21:10). Sarah referred to Yishmael without even mentioning his name, calling him the “son of the slave woman,” as she saw Yishmael’s complete lack of merit or redemptive qualities. By serving idolatry, Yishmael displayed his unsuitability for having the Divine appellation and its message of belief attached to his name. This continued for some time, as we find even later on that Avraham referred to him as a ‘lad’ (*ibid.* 22:3). Not until before his death, after Yishmael did teshuvah, does the Torah recognize him and revert to using his proper name. His last-minute repentance was accepted by the One Above and written down below for us to learn from.

Centuries later, when the vast majority of his descendants accepted the religion of Islam, Yishmael ‘fell’ once more. Besides believing in one G-d, they also believed in an ‘updated’ version of the Torah as well as their ‘contemporary’ prophets, even adding forms of idol worship to their practice of religion. Discarding the way of life as taught by Avraham Avinu, the Yishmaelites lost any link to their distinctive name and its worthy connotation.

Another explanation why the Torah records Yishmael’s demise at the end of this parashah has to do with Sarah’s previously mentioned driving out “this son of the slave woman.” Actually, Yishmael lived for quite a number of years more, and yet the Torah prefers to record his death here and not in the correct chronological location, in a later parashah. This is due to Sarah Imeinu’s objection of any contact between Yitzchak and Yishmael. Because Hashem agreed to Sarah’s opposition, the Torah finishes recording all there is about Yishmael before it begins to chronicle the life of Yitzchak in parashat *Toldot*. This indicates and heralds the

underlying chasm and innate difference which lies between these two nations.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ The Torah calculates the years of Yishmael's life, alluding to the teshuvah Yishmael did before he died. This is also why the Torah describes his death using the words, "when he expired," which we know is used only in reference to the passing of a righteous person.
- ◆ The Torah lists twelve chieftains that Yishmael merited descending from him. This was because of the one mitzvah that he kept: *brit milah*. If Yishmael, who had only one mitzvah, received so much reward, how much more so will we Jews, who observe a Torah lifestyle and do Hashem's mitzvot, receive our just desserts.
- ◆ Once Yishmael died, it states about his children, "Over all his brothers he dwelt." This is a reference to the *milah* of the Yishmaelites. At the End of Days, Hashem will ask to see the genealogy of those who want to be rewarded. Yishmael's mixed marriages and illegitimacy will be apparent from the Heavenly Registry and they will no longer be able to request reward for this mitzvah. Am Yisrael, on the other hand, will be found worthy of reward, in line with their authenticity and high fidelity to the Torah.
- ◆ The Ba'al Shem Tov zt"l explains the etymology behind Yishmael's name. Avraham Avinu made it his life's mission to spread the belief in Hashem. The Hebrew letters of the name **ישמעאל** can be rearranged to form the letters **יש א מעל**, there is a One Above. Avraham helped others to realize that our world has a Heavenly Superior and all should acknowledge Hashem as the Creator. This message was implanted into their consciousness by calling his son, Yishmael.
- ◆ Yishmael displayed his unsuitability for his name when he began to adopt ways which bordered on idol worship. Avraham referred to him as a 'lad,' and Sarah referred to him without mentioning him by name, calling him, "Son of the slave woman" instead.

- ◆ Sarah Imeinu objected to any contact between Yitzchak and Yishmael. Hashem agreed to Sarah's opposition, and so the Torah finished recording all there is about Yishmael before it began to chronicle the life of Yitzchak in parashat *Toldot*. This is another explanation why the Torah records Yishmael's demise at the end of this parashah.



## Gems on Parashat Chayei Sarah



### Avraham's Blessing

*“Now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything”*

*(Bereishit 24:1)*

Chazal (Bereishit Rabbah 51:2) tell us that whenever the pasuk adds the prefix ׀ to Hashem's Name, this denotes the additional involvement of the Heavenly Court. In our parashah, when the Torah mentions Avraham's blessing, the Name of Hashem has this extra ׀. Thus we can infer from here, that Hashem included His Heavenly Tribunal when endowing Avraham with berachah.

It would seem then, that the Attribute of Judgment, being part and parcel of Hashem's court of justice, also participated in bestowing good upon Avraham. Even more, the word בכל in our parashah contains the same letters as the word כלב, referring to the powers of the kelippah, which also agreed to Avraham's berachah. Why would the forces of tumah agree to bestow Avraham Avinu with blessing? What would they gain?

I suggest that there was a selfish reason for this participation. The powers of tumah understood that their existence in this world depends on their ability to attach themselves to the forces of kedushah. Knowing that Avraham was a tzaddik whose descendants would continue in his path of righteousness and spread the teachings of Hashem, they readily acceded to his berachah to have a son. Without this attachment, the kelippah of tumah lacks endurance. This is why the Heavenly Court was unanimous in bestowing Avraham with berachah.



### Hashem's Salvation

*“And he said, ‘Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, may You so arrange it for me this day that You do kindness with my master Avraham’”*

*(Bereishit 24:12)*

Eliezer's tefillah to Hashem to help him find a match for Yitzchak was accepted immediately. This is evident from the words (ibid. 24:15) “And it was when he had not yet finished speaking that suddenly Rivka was coming out.” The lesson to learn from this story is that when we look to Hashem to send us a salvation, we cannot possibly know where or when such a salvation will come. As the saying goes, the salvation of Hashem can come in the blink of an eye.

This becomes readily apparent from the whole train of events that occurred by Yetziat Mitzrayim. When Am Yisrael stood at Yam Suf,

they found themselves surrounded by adversaries on all sides. In front lay the ocean, behind were the pursuing Egyptians and their Heavenly Angel (see Bereishit Rabbah 15:15), and on both sides lay the great desert with its denizens of wild animals. Am Yisrael turned in the one direction that was left for them to turn – Heavenward. They raised their eyes to the One Above and prayed with all their heart. And they stood there, not knowing from whence their salvation would come. Would Hashem wage war on the Egyptians? Would He blaze a trail in the desert? When the Yam split asunder, they were unexpectedly surprised at Hashem’s miraculous deliverance.

From personal experience I can tell you that whenever I placed my confidence in someone to help me out, I was always disappointed in the end. They never pulled through. Even those whom I helped in their time of need were unable to help me when I mistakenly relied on them. This concept is expressed by David Hamelech (Tehillim 40:5) who said, “Praiseworthy is the man who has made Hashem his trust, and does not turn to the arrogant or those who stray after falsehood.” We should allow Hashem to choose through which avenues He wishes to bestow blessing, and not place our trust and reliance in His human emissaries.

As an illustration of this principle, I heard the following story. Once, a man told a friend that he was going out to work to bring parnasah home to his family. When asked in which direction he was planning to go, he answered, to the right. Whereupon his listener countered, how do you know? Maybe today your parnasah will come from the left? We can never know from where our deliverance will come. We just have to do our job, putting in whatever hishtadlut is required and befitting, and allow Hashem to send His blessing and salvation from the direction He so chooses.



## A Fitting Match

*“Behold, I am standing here by the spring of water and the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water. Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say: Please tip your jug so I may drink, and who replies: Drink, and I will even water your camels, her will You have designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak; and may I know through her that You have done kindness with my master”*

*(Bereishit 24:13-14)*

In Eliezer’s plea to Hashem for finding a wife for Yitzchak, he stipulated that the girl should come to the town well to draw water. Obviously, the most important attribute Eliezer was looking for was her chessed for him and his camels. What was the significance of testing her by a well? Does this have any connection to being a suitable wife for Yitzchak?

The Hebrew word for well is באר, and has a numerical value of 203, the same as the word גר (to dwell). This alludes to the covenant between Hashem and Avraham Avinu, when Hashem proclaimed (Bereishit 15:13), “Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens (גר) in a land not their own, and they will serve them, and they will oppress them.” The affliction that Am Yisrael would be subject to in Mitzrayim, and the work that the Egyptians would one day force them to do, the “hard work, with mortar and with bricks, and with every labor of the field” (Shemot 1:14), was actually a prerequisite to Rivka’s shidduch with Yitzchak.

The purpose of the galut in Mitzrayim was to lead Am Yisrael to Har Sinai, where they would accept the Torah and truly serve Hashem. That galut was the ultimate crucible of faith and test of character. And Am Yisrael lived up to par. Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:19) say that they did not change their tongue, names, or mode of dress. By keeping themselves separate from the Egyptian culture and preserving their own heritage, they were found worthy to receive the Torah.

Part of the purification process of living in Mitzrayim was to learn to appreciate their hard earned freedom. This concept is readily apparent from our own daily endeavors. One who does not work hard to achieve results can never fully appreciate his acquisitions. Imagine someone who wins a lottery. He may be overjoyed with his new fortune, but he will be quick to spend it frivolously and waste it on petty things. It is the one who worked hard that knows how to appreciate what he has and how to take good care of it. Similarly, a child can appreciate his dessert or sweet even more, when he understands that it is a reward for eating something healthful that he doesn't want to. If the child eats his food in order to receive his dessert, he too acquires a 'taste' of this concept, that hard work earns its reward.

Hashem wants us to acquire Torah, in our own merit and through our own hard labor. This is the only way that we can come to appreciate the phenomenal gift He gave us. Eliezer knew that this 'lesson plan' was in store for Avraham's descendants, and looked for a girl who would accept this Divine plan for her children. This is why he went to the well. Here is where he hoped to find the suitable wife, at the fount of water which became the harbinger of Divine service and aspiration. From this well would one day emerge a nation who would go to Sinai and drink from the 'waters' of the

Torah. And so, immediately after Eliezer's prayer, Rivka came to the well and became the fitting match for Yitzchak.



### Creatures of Hashem

*“Let it be that the maiden to whom I shall say: Please tip over your jug so I may drink, and who replies: Drink, and I will even water your camels, her will You have designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak; and may I know through her that You have done kindness with my master”*

*(Bereishit 24:14)*

Eliezer was wise to screen the girl who would one day be wife of Yitzchak. By testing Rivka's middot, he was able to see her inner qualities and generous nature. Eliezer added to her test of chessed and scrutinized her reaction to the thirsty camels as well, for this very purpose. How one treats animals speaks a lot about a person. There is a famous picture of the father of my Rebbe, the tzaddik Harav Eliyahu Lopian zt"l, bending over with a bowl of milk for the cats in the neighborhood to drink from. This sprang from his middah of rachmanut for all of Hashem's creatures. And this is what Eliezer found in Rivka.

It is important to point out though, that care and protection of animals does not take precedence over caring for human beings.

Were Rivka to bring water just for the camels, she would not have been a suitable match. We know of many organizations whose sole concern is to protect animals, and yet do not care much for the welfare and preservation of people. The reason for this is their lack of understanding on the role and standing of human beings. In their minds, there is no difference between man and animal. They themselves act in many ways like animals.

The Torah however, defines man as an upright, superior being with a spiritual soul. Only those who define their lifestyle and behavior using the Torah's guidelines deserve the appellation of being called "man." This is expressed by the statement of Chazal (Bava Kama 38a) **אתם קרויים אדם**, "You are called 'man,' whereas the nations of the world are not." The Hebrew plural pronoun **אתם** used in this Gemara contains the same letters as the word **אמת**, referring to Am Yisrael's standing. They are true to Hashem. The Torah itself is called **אמת** (see Mishlei 23:23). Because they keep to their mission as Jews and live by the Torah's definition of the true "man," the Jewish nation can proclaim their superiority over the 'beasts of nature' and Hashem's myriad of creatures.



## The Faithful Servant

*“He said, ‘Blessed is Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, Who has not withheld His kindness and truth from my master’”*

*(Bereishit 24:27)*

*“He said, ‘Come, O blessed of Hashem! Why should you stand outside when I have cleared the house and place for the camels?’”*

*(ibid. 31)*

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 60:7) tells us that at the very moment that Lavan said these words, Eliezer’s facial features changed to mirror those of Avraham Avinu. Until then, Eliezer (a descendant of Cham who was cursed by Noach) had black skin. Yet in one split second it became similar to the light-colored skin of Avraham. This change was actually the removal of the curse of Canaan, and reflected a raise in his status.

Perhaps we can explain the rationale behind this change. Eliezer acted as Avraham’s messenger, representing his best interests. This ‘power of attorney’ is called shelichut. The Torah considers the actions of the shaliach as if they were done by the one who sent him on his mission. The Gemara refers to this as שלוחו של אדם כמותו; the act of an emissary is legally binding as if done by the person himself. By doing his shelichut for Avraham Avinu, Eliezer singularly identified himself with Avraham and merited to exit the camp of the ‘cursed’ and join that of the ‘blessed.’

What requires more explanation is why the Torah reckoned his shelichut as being concluded only now, with this statement of Lavan.

Hadn't Eliezer already found Rivka and chosen her to be Yitzchak's helpmate? And if the culmination of the shelichut was the finalization of the shidduch, the Torah should have waited until Eliezer brought Rivka back to Yitzchak.

The key to this enigma lies in the words of Eliezer said a few lines back. In his thanks to Hashem, Eliezer demonstrates his feelings of subordination to Avraham, calling him "my master." Despite his vested interest in having his own daughter marry Yitzchak, and in spite of being hundreds of miles away from Avraham, Eliezer still referred to him by this title of honor. How often do we hear people using grandiose titles of respect when speaking face to face with Rabbonim, only to remove their titles of honor when out of earshot. This comes from a lack of esteem for these worthy people, for who they really are. Eliezer succeeded in overcoming this pitfall, and was able to bring his mission to a successful conclusion. The turning point for Eliezer was when he showed his 'true colors' as a faithful servant of Avraham, and overcame his own inner nature. That is why he was rewarded with the physiognomy of Avraham Avinu immediately after his prayer to Hashem.



## Precious Words

*“I came today to the spring and said, ‘Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, if You would graciously make successful the way on which I go’”*

*(Bereishit 24:42)*

The Torah goes to great lengths to describe the prayers and conversations of Eliezer. The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 60:8) notes the discrepancy between this parashah and other parshiyot, and says, “The details of the servants of the Avot are precious to Hashem, more than the Torah of the children.” So many of the laws of the Torah are written in terse form, or inferred from a minor inflection of a word, whereas Eliezer’s search for a wife for Yitzchak is elaborated on at length. What was so special about his search?

It would seem that the Torah wants us to learn from Eliezer’s actions. With all of Eliezer’s greatness of character, he humbled himself when it came to his master. The Torah (Bereishit 24:61) calls Eliezer an **שאי**, a word which denotes righteousness, as we find in the pasuk (see Tehillim 1:1) **אשרי האיש**, “Fortunate is the man.” He is even awarded the description of being blessed (see Bereishit 24:31) for carrying out his mission with such exemplary subservience and submission. Even when he stood before Lavan, he called himself simply the servant of Avraham (ibid. 24:34). Because he mastered his ego to such a degree, he became the prototype servant, a worthy example for us to follow and show our subservience to our Master on High.

Avraham Avinu also demonstrated this middah when he came to Bnei Chait and asked to buy a plot in order to bury Sarah. When

they began to draw out the conversation and strike a bargain, Avraham took it in stride. And when Efron bargained over the price and exploited the opportunity to make it rich, even requesting that the coins be in mint condition, Avraham accepted it magnanimously.

To act subserviently does not mean that one must be meek and timid, or lack the upper hand. Avraham was indeed the true owner of the land, as Hashem had promised him (Bereishit 17:8) “And I will give you and your descendants after you the land of your sojourns.” Yet he did not feel that it was necessary to approach Efron in an aggressive or demanding manner. He didn’t tell Efron outright that it was his by right. Instead, he hinted to Efron that Hashem had promised him the land. This is alluded to in the pasuk (ibid. 23:4), “I am an alien and a resident among you,” which Rashi explains to mean, “If you like, then I will act as an alien, but if you don’t approve (of the sale), I will act as the resident owner.” Why then did Avraham not act or respond in an assertive manner? Because Avraham valued true humility above all else. He did not argue and haggle over the price, nor did he use force. He recognized the true Owner and accepted His nisyonot willingly, displaying his love for Hashem despite all adversity



## The Fountain of Youth

*“Behold, I am standing by the spring of water;  
let it be that the young woman who comes out  
to draw and to whom I shall say: Please give  
me some water to drink from your jug”*

*(Bereishit 24:43)*

Here we find a peculiar description of Rivka. When Eliezer narrated his test of Rivka to Lavan and Betuel, instead of the traditional word נערה (young girl) which is used profusely throughout the parashah, the Torah refers to her as העלמה (the youthful maiden). What is the intended association of this unusual designation?

I suggest that the Torah is hinting at Rivka’s ability to support all of Creation through her youthful spirit and zeal. The word עלמה is related to the word עולם, and hints at the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (1:2) which states, “The world rests on three things: on Torah study, on the service of Hashem, and on gemilut chassadim.” All three things found a receptive welcome in Rivka’s heart. The water which rose up to greet her at the well (see Rashi on Bereishit 24:16) refers to the water of Torah which nourishes us with its soul-quenching elixir of life. Her prayer to Hashem to be removed from her difficult home situation and find shelter and even marriage in a righteous environment (as evidenced by the Divinely expedited mission of Eliezer, done also on her behalf) was a symbol of the service of Hashem. And the drawing of water to satisfy the thirst of Eliezer and his camels was the epitome of gemilut chassadim. A lack of any of these three attributes would have disqualified her immediately. Similarly, the world depends on the continued practice of all these

three pillars. The removal of any one of these would spell disaster for Creation and put an end to civilization.



### Lavan's Acquiescence

*“Then Lavan and Betuel answered and said, ‘The matter stemmed from Hashem! We can say to you neither bad nor good. Here, Rivka is before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master’s son as Hashem has spoken’”*

*(Bereishit 24:50-51)*

Lavan’s swift reply leaves us wondering. What was in it for him? Was he so awe-inspired by Eliezer’s story and righteously motivated by the chain of events? Did he really want the best shidduch for his sister Rivka? How then did he agree to send Rivka away to a foreign country with a strange man?

Basing ourselves on the premise that Lavan was a rasha, we can best understand his thought-process by noting the difference between Lavan and Rivka. They were worlds apart. Lavan was the ultimate swindler, rotten to the core. Rivka was the paradigm of righteousness, overflowing with chessed. The forces of evil are naturally repulsed by the forces of good, and are insoluble to their permeable influence. Thus it is no wonder that Lavan was happy to send Rivka with Eliezer. He simply felt hampered by her presence and wanted her out of the way.

Nowadays, we find a similar dichotomy between good and evil. The various religious rites and houses of worship amongst the gentiles are noted for their quiet and solemn, almost emotionless, activity. L'havdil, at the other end of the waveband of religious activity, we find the Jews with their Batei Kenesiot alive with enthusiasm and vibrant with emotion. And in the Batei Midrashot we hear the “voice of Yaakov” (Bereishit 27:22) reverberating throughout its study halls and corridors. Compare this with the quiet stillness of the university library and college study rooms, and you will gain a deeper understanding of the vast chasm that lies between them.

The quiet these nations bestow on their study is akin to the stillness of sound found by the worshippers of the Ba'al, when Eliyahu taunted them (Melachim I, 18:26), “But there was neither sound nor response (to their entreaties).” The introduction of evil to the world, at the onset of Creation, was done without magniloquence and ceremony, and hence its supporters do not raise their voices. Our expression of learning though, reflects the way that the Torah was transmitted to us at Sinai, amidst the reverberating thunder and soul-piercing word of Hashem. That is why we learn out loud.

Another example of the emptiness of their beliefs is the segulot that they developed over the ages. In Middle Eastern countries, one throws a rock at the wall to banish the Satan from his house. There is no deep connection between the two. Our religion does not use artificial or contrived segulot to remove a satanic influence. We have Divinely inspired conventions to effect our immunity. Take the lulav and etrog for example. On the Festival of Sukkot, we take the four species and wave them in all four directions. This prevents the destructive winds and adverse dew-condensation from affecting our future crops. The symbolism rings true and is divinely orchestrated,

harmonizing the creative forces of man with the identifying properties of these four species, each of which represent another element of man's service of Hashem. The lulav symbolizes our backbone, the hadasim our eyes, the aravah our lips and the etrog our heart (Vayikra Rabbah 30:14). When joined in unison, they symbolize our complete actions, bringing forth the joyous melody of Divine service. It is only through the mitzvot of Hashem that we can battle the forces of the Satan and his deafening cacophony of evil.

Throughout the generations we find this pattern repeating itself again and again. Good and evil do not mix or collaborate. Their inherent nature sets them apart. So we found by Kayin and Hevel, and so we found by Yaakov and Eisav. In the days of the Greeks, the Chashmonaim separated from the Hellenists, and so it has continued down to our day. This was the impetus of Lavan to send Rivka on her merry way. She was a constant reminder of being good and a living example of how to act. He wanted to do his thing and could not tolerate her in his vicinity.

I once had a story with a family who rejected their mother. She visited me when I was in Argentina, and showed me a picture of her family sitting in front of a restaurant. She asked me for a berachah, explaining that the relationship between her and the rest of her family was causing her a great deal of anguish. They had no interest in having any connection or contact with her.

I told her that the problem was not so much the children as it was the picture. She took the picture back and peered at it intently, trying to find some hint of what I discerned, and said that she couldn't find anything wrong with the picture. Whereupon I told her that every person is biased and overlooks the faults of themselves as well as their children. That is why she could not see any defect when observing the 'picture' of her family. Taking this concept one

step further, Hashem also has a close relationship with us. This is why He created a Heavenly Court of Justice, along with Divine messengers of good and evil. There are advocates of merit and prosecutors to accuse. And so, each person is judged for good or for bad, and the Heavenly messengers execute their decree.

As regards to the picture, I told her to look closely at the name of the restaurant where they were sitting. The background of this family portrait was a non-kosher restaurant in Chile. The woman still did not understand. What was the connection between eating non-kosher and her family relationship? I explained that the Torah forbids eating treifut because such foods distort one's perspective of life as well as people's affinity towards others. They no longer see anyone but themselves and their own base desires. They don't even want to foster a relationship with their mother. In general, treifut stuffs our ears from hearing words of mussar and hardens the arteries of our hearts from responding to inspiration. Even a small amount can have a profound influence and cause damage to the functioning Divine spark within. Thus it was no wonder that her children had nothing to do with her. In their picture of life, she had nothing left to offer.



## Lavan's Berachah

*“They blessed Rivka and said to her, ‘Our sister, may you come to be thousands of myriads, and may your offspring inherit the gate of its foes’”*

*(Bereishit 24:60)*

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 60:13) says that Hashem did not bless Rivka with children until after Yitzchak prayed. The reason for this is so people shouldn't point to the berachah of Lavan as the source of Am Yisrael's existence or their myriad of blessings. Hashem cut short Lavan's influence over us by curtailing his berachah.

Taking a deeper look, one Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Shemot, 168) identifies Bilaam with Lavan. The same Lavan, who once gave a berachah to Rivka, stood ready to curse the Jewish nation after they left Mitzrayim. We can thus surmise that Lavan's berachah was not said with the most full-hearted wishes for Rivka or in her best interest.

This is perhaps one reason we include (in Nusach Sefarad) as one of the ten “remembrances” we say daily at the end of Shacharit, the pasuk of “My people, hear now, what Balak, king of Moav, schemed, and what Bilaam son of Beor answered him,” (Michah 6:5). By remembering Bilaam, we realize how any berachah we have, has no connection whatsoever with Lavan and his fatherly “blessing.”



## Hagar's Return

*“Avraham proceeded and took a wife whose name was Keturah”*

*(Bereishit 25:1)*

Rashi tells us that this “Keturah” was none other than Hagar, the mother of Yishmael. This presents a difficulty. Not too long before, Avraham Avinu eulogized and cried over Sarah’s demise. He told others of her fine qualities and expressed his admiration. He certainly appreciated her sagacious advice. How is it, then, that he went and married Hagar? In the previous parashah we read how Sarah told him (Bereishit 21:10), “Drive away this slave woman with her son,” which referred to Hagar. After finding Yishmael dabbling in idolatry (see Rashi on Bereishit 21:9), she felt it destructive to Yitzchak’s upbringing to have Yishmael nearby. Wasn’t Avraham’s second marriage then an open rejection of Sarah’s will and an affront to her memory?

Actually, we find that Yishmael was back in Avraham’s company already at the end of the previous parashah. When Avraham went to the Akeidat Yitzchak, he took (Bereishit 22:3) “two young men with him,” which, Rashi explains, were Eliezer and Yishmael. When, or better yet, how did Yishmael find his way back to Avraham? It would seem that Yishmael did teshuvah at some point, and was no longer a spiritual threat to Yitzchak, and thus Avraham Avinu accepted him with open arms. After learning right from wrong, there was no reason not to accept him back home. Even Sarah must have agreed to this turn of circumstances. She was Avraham’s right hand when it came to welcoming others and introducing them to believe in Hashem; how much more so by Yishmael, Avraham’s own son.

Thus it should come as no surprise that Avraham would one day remarry Hagar. There was no longer any reason to push her away. This was the match that Sarah would have wanted, more than anyone else off the street. Avraham could find no other fitting helpmate than the one originally chosen by Sarah herself.



## A Fragrant Smell

*“Avraham proceeded and took a wife whose name was Keturah”*

*(Bereishit 25:1)*

The name Keturah, Rashi explains, comes from the word ketoret, which gives off a fine fragrance when burnt. Hagar was called Keturah because her actions gave off the fine fragrance of righteousness.

Actually, the ketoret was a mixture of eleven fragrant substances that included an aromatic resin called חלבונה (galbanum), which has an acrid smell. Rashi (Shemot 30:34) tells us that the inclusion of this ingredient teaches us a profound lesson. By including this foul-smelling ingredient in our incense, we learn not to depreciate the inclusion of sinners when we fast and pray. Their inclusion in our tefillot adds to the satisfaction of Hashem, and causes our public outpouring of teshuvah to waft on High. Which leads us to ask – is it so praiseworthy to compare Hagar’s actions to the ketoret, which includes a foul-smelling ingredient as well?

Perhaps the allusion to Hagar by the ketoret does not indicate any intentional evil or calculated misdeed. Her actions were done with

righteousness but lacked one thing; the inclusion of Torah. This was different from Sarah Imeinu, who was complete in her righteousness and brimming with Torah content and ideology. This contrast becomes apparent once we observe the results in their children. Sarah merited having a son who inherited her righteous legacy and passed it down the ancestral line. Hagar, on the other hand, lacked that spark of Torah, and ended up with children like Yishmael and the Bnei Keturah. They inherited from Avraham ‘gifts’ (Bereishit 25:6), which Rashi explains to mean powers of tumah to help them survive. Not exactly the epitome of righteousness.

Perhaps this can also explain the beginning of the chasm that divided Yaakov and Eisav. Both grew up in a righteous environment. Yet Yaakov merited raising a family of stalwart tzaddikim, a result of his attachment to Hashem, and his (ibid. 25:27) dwelling “in the tents” (of Torah). Eisav, though, pushed it all away, focusing his mind and strength on being a “man of the field” (ibid.). Without Torah, the stench of the base nature of man wafts to the fore and overpowers us with its pungent odor.



### **Avraham’s Other Children**

*“She bore him Zimran, Yokshan, Medan, Midian, Yishbak, and Shuach. Yokshan begot Sheba and Dedan, and the children of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. And the children of Midian: Ephah [and] Epher,*

***Chanoch, Abida, and Eldaah; all these were  
the descendants of Keturah”***

*(Bereishit 25:2-4)*

What was the purpose of these children of Avraham Avinu? He already had a worthy son to take his place. Even more, why did he give them powers of tumah? Was the world lacking tumah that Avraham saw fit to give the Bnei Keturah these ‘gifts’?

I heard once the following answer. These children, although non-Jewish, had some spark of holiness that came from Avraham, as well as from Keturah. It was to their posterity that Avraham entrusted these powers of tumah. He wanted it to be kept hidden from mankind and constrained from wreaking havoc. Because of their forefather, they had the capability of guarding this tumah more than any other nation on earth.

Perhaps there were even times when the descendants of these children were able to help out some wandering Jews in galut. Avraham Avinu certainly had that in mind. He prayed that during the galut of the Jews, his other progeny would aid and shelter them, as distant relatives occasionally do. Unfortunately, we can see how our Semitic ‘brothers’ have treated us, and still do so today. The closer the relationship, the harder their treatment has been. This teaches us a fundamental lesson. There is only one that we can trust and turn to in our time of need, the One Above.





## Toldot



### The Effects of Derision

*“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham – Avraham begot Yitzchak”*

*(Bereishit 25:19)*

Rashi explains why the Torah stresses Yitzchak’s genealogy. There were those who sneered at Yitzchak’s birth, attributing Sarah’s pregnancy to Avimelech. They claimed she had lived with Avraham for so many years without having children, that Avimelech must be this boy’s true father. And so Hashem made Yitzchak’s facial features resemble Avraham’s, until all could see that it was “Avraham (who) gave birth to Yitzchak.”

What requires explanation is how this resemblance could so effectively seal their mouths from ridicule. Such people do not shut up so easily. Are facial features really such strong proof? Truth ‘abusers’ and compulsive scandalizers never cease to find ‘facts’ to prove the ‘truth’ of their story, even when confronted with logic and countered by reason. They know how to twist the facts and bend the truth to substantiate their tale, not willing to relinquish their

derision. In what way did the resemblance of Avraham and Yitzchak help?

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 103a) tells us that one of the classes of sinners who will not merit receiving the *Shechinah* in the World to Come will be the scoffers. Scorn and derision are lethal weapons, able to capsize truth and negate its influence in a single bound. I myself had an incident which verifies this. I once gave an inspiring lecture that aroused a great deal of interest from the audience. They were visibly strengthened by my words and drawn closer to Hashem. Whereupon, a member of the audience said a few choice words of derision, and in one swift blow, he cooled the atmosphere and deflated the audience's inspiration.

I suggest that the similarity to Avraham, on its own accord, was not enough to silence those who wanted to mock Yitzchak's birth. It was only the seal of Hashem's truth and the Torah's word that successfully put an end to their pernicious rumors. This is the power of Torah, the final arbitrator of truth and the word of the Living G-d.

We find another mention where all conceded that "Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak." The pasuk (*Bereishit* 26:6) says, "So Yitzchak settled in Gerar," the home of Avimelech. While in Gerar, old rumors began to surface – until people saw the object of their ridicule close up. Yitzchak's daily habits, his acts of devotion and upright behavior, proved that he was the true son of Avraham. His inner character shone through and was the greatest testimony to his illustrious lineage. Hashem told Yitzchak to stay put in Canaan and not go down to Mitzrayim for this very reason, to silence, once and for all, the rumors that had circulated at his birth.

Those who instigate and circulate rumors actually 'feed' and supply the *kelippah* with energy. This is the nature of derision and

mockery. Its caustic comments engender *tumah* and propagate evil. On the other hand, those who learn Torah and bring the light of truth into the world, remove this *tumah*. “Hashem has made one parallel to the other” (*Kohelet* 7:14). Chazal explain that this pasuk refers to the creation of good and evil, as they are diametrical opposites. On one side of the spectrum lies the power of derision. Casting derision and scorn cools off the intensity of our Divine devotion. It thickens our husk of materialism, thereby giving more power to the *kelippah*. On the other side, lies the pure, burning fire of Torah, which brings home truth and strengthens our belief in Hashem, while removing the layers of materialism which obstructs our view.

David Hamelech said it best, when he proclaimed (*Tehillim* 1:1-2), “Praiseworthy is the man that did not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the path of the sinful, nor sat in a session of scoffers. Instead, his desire is in the Torah of Hashem and he meditates in his Torah day and night.”

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Hashem made Yitzchak’s facial features resemble Avraham’s. This was to counter those who sneered at Yitzchak’s birth and attributed Sarah’s pregnancy to Avimelech.
- ◆ How did the resemblance of Avraham and Yitzchak effectively close their mouths from scorn? The similarity to Avraham, on its own accord, was not enough. It was only the seal of Hashem’s truth and the Torah’s word that successfully put an end to their pernicious rumors. This is the power of Torah, the word of the Living G-d.
- ◆ Hashem told Yitzchak to stay in Canaan and not go down to Mitzrayim. Yitzchak’s daily habits, his acts of devotion, and upright behavior proved that he was the true son of Avraham. Derision and mockery’s caustic comments engender *tumah* and propagate evil.

Those who learn Torah and bring the light of truth to the world, remove this *tumah*. The pure, burning fire of Torah brings home truth and strengthens our belief in Hashem.



## The Acquisition of Torah

*“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham – Avraham begot Yitzchak”*

*(Bereishit 25:19)*

This pasuk leave us puzzled. Why didn't the Torah list the names of Yitzchak's sons as his progeny? And if the Torah wanted to choose only Yitzchak's righteous son, why not write just Yaakov as the scion of the family?

Perhaps we can answer by suggesting a new explanation in the Midrash cited before, in parashat *Noach*. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 30:6) states that the true offspring of a tzaddik are his righteous deeds. I would explain these words as referring to the deeds of his children. A tzaddik's children who walk in the ways of the Torah are his true progeny, as they continue the righteousness of their father. Eisav, the son of Yitzchak, was not considered a 'descendant' of Yitzchak, because he did not continue that line of righteousness that his father embodied. When Yitzchak died, Eisav was not there to carry on the mantle of virtue or further his father's mission of good deeds.

At first, Eisav sat in the study hall of the Beit Hamidrash. He grew up in the house of Yitzchak and knew what it meant to be righteous.

Chazal (*Yoma* 28b) say that the Avot Hakedoshim kept the entire Torah, even before it was given on Sinai. Even Rabbinic laws enacted after Matan Torah were revealed to them, which they kept as well. For example, David Hamelech instituted that every person should say one hundred blessings, each and every day. This attention to mitzvot and appreciation of G-d's daily blessings created in Yitzchak's home an atmosphere of aspiring to do righteous deeds. Yet Eisav chose not to follow his parents lead. He rejected their way of life, desiring a life of 'freedom' and futility, as if he was some vagrant libertine. This is alluded to by the words (*Bereishit* 25:27) "the lads grew up," which Rashi explains to mean that each one developed and grew into the man of his choice. Eisav grew up and left it all behind, defecting instead to the houses of idolatry and sin.

We can now understand why the Torah did not write Yitzchak's progeny openly. The Torah did not want to embarrass Yitzchak for having a son who left the fold and chose a different way of life. Even more, such a son is not really counted amongst a tzaddik's descendants. He lacks the righteous deeds and dedicated service of Hashem, the essence of his father's character. He is of a different breed. This is why Eisav is not listed in the pasuk.

Yaakov, on the other hand, chose to dwell in the tents of Torah. He saw the righteousness of his father's house and continued that way of life. Perhaps we can still find a reference to Yaakov in our pasuk. The last letters of the words תולדות יצחק have the numerical value of five hundred. Add one hundred for the blessings said every day, and we reach six hundred, equal to the numerical value of the word קשר. Here we see an allusion to the one who kept the קשר (bond). Yaakov valued that bond of family and their relationship with Hashem. At the same time, these letters can be rearranged to form the word שקר (falsehood). Alongside the one who grew in

righteousness and attached himself to his ancestors, was the one who lived a life of fabrication and deceit. Thus both Yaakov and Eisav are hinted at in this pasuk.

We can find yet another hint of Yitzchak's faithful son in our pasuk. The first letters of the words תולדות יצחק have the same numerical value (410) as the word קדוש (holy). There was holiness in Yitzchak's offspring, namely Yaakov and his family. Hashem helped him along the path of life that he chose, carrying on the righteous way of his father.

How could Eisav abandon the way of life of his forefathers? We have a golden rule; a person is led in the way that he chooses to go. The Gemara (*Yoma* 38b) says, "The door is open for the one who wishes to become *tamei*. One who wishes to become *tahor* is assisted from Above." Free choice is given to all, and every person can avail himself of the opportunity to ascend to righteousness or descend to sin.

This concept explains numerous stories in the Torah. We know that Lavan appreciated Yaakov's presence, admitting that Yaakov had a direct influence on his new-found wealth. This is why Lavan asked Yaakov to work for him for so many years, even swindling him to stay on longer than agreed upon. If Lavan understood that this was due to Yaakov's Torah learning and righteousness, why did he not practice a similar life?

This question becomes sharper when we learn just how far Lavan tried to do Yaakov in. The Haggadah tells us that Pharaoh decreed only the death of the males, having all baby boys thrown into the Nile. Lavan however, desired to uproot the whole Jewish nation by wiping out all of Yaakov's family, not differentiating between male or female. How did Lavan sink so low, not even caring about his own grandchildren?

This only demonstrates the power of the *Yetzer Hara*. When the *Yetzer Hara* sees a person thinking and desiring to live a Torah life, he immediately tries to grab hold of this person and weaken his grip. Without the vigil of morality and the vanguard of truth, we are easy prey, liable to fall into his eager clutches. Once one is blinded by the *Yetzer Hara's* blinders of self-centeredness and hedonism, he can even stoop to murdering his own family.

This is what caused Lavan to contemplate killing Yaakov. His original perception of righteousness acknowledged the truth of Torah and the merit of Yaakov's virtue. With time though, this became distorted. It is not enough to philosophize about virtue, to understand it from a logical standpoint or theoretically value its merit. One has to put theory into practice and live by his beliefs. This too is included in the rule laid down before: The door is open for the one who wishes to become *tamei*. One who stands at the doorway of righteousness but refuses to enter, chooses by default to live in the netherworld of sin. Lavan saw the world of purity and truth in Yaakov's house. He knew the power of Torah. And yet he didn't want to change. This is what initiated him on the downward incline that led him to the abyss of evil.

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 24:1) says that Hashem blessed Avraham בְּכָל, with everything. Rashi writes that the word בְּכָל has the same numerical value as the word בֵּן, alluding to his true *berachah* – his son Yitzchak. There are those who bring (in the name of the Vilna Gaon) a Midrash that the word בְּכָל refers to the mitzvah of sukkah, as Hashem gave Avraham Avinu the mitzvah of sukkah. What is the connection between the two?

The mitzvah of sukkah differs from other mitzvot in that it is all-encompassing in its observance. Other mitzvot involve perhaps one's hands or feet or some other part of the human body. The walls

of the sukkah surround our whole physical being, giving us total enclosure on all sides. Hashem gave Avraham this mitzvah as a reward for the *mesirut nefesh* he had by sanctifying Hashem's Name and not bowing down to the idols of Nimrod. Because he was willingly thrown into the fiery furnace and wholly engulfed in their flames, Hashem gave him a mitzvah which would encompass him on all sides. This is hinted at by the word **בכל**, for it was a reward that embraced him completely with the shelter of Hashem.

This is akin to the *berachah* of having a righteous son such as Yitzchak. Avraham's blessing was that Yitzchak should be like him in spirit and in deed. Indeed, Avraham had a son who was **בכל**, full of all the good qualities and exemplary *middot* that personified Avraham Avinu. Yitzchak was but an extension of the *mesirut nefesh* that Avraham displayed by the fiery furnace, as he went willingly to the *Akeidah* and allowed himself to be sacrificed for Hashem's sake. That is why the Torah says the word **בכל**. It was a total blessing.

How does one merit having children who continue going in the right way? Let me share with you one of the 'secret' ingredients of *chinuch*. Children learn from example. The Gemara (*Sukkah* 56b) says, "The expressions of a child in the street are the idioms of his father or his mother." The words a young child chooses, and the way he says them, reflect the opinions and sentiments of his parents. They are his over-riding example of behavior. If a child sees his father learn Torah and do mitzvot without compromises and despite adversary, he will follow in his footsteps. Later in life, when he too will be faced with obstacles, he will have that example of righteousness to guide him. But if he sees his father wavering in his learning and desisting when the going gets rough, he will learn to do the same. This places a great deal of responsibility on our shoulders. By choosing good and desiring our forefather's way of

life, we make the choice which will buoy our righteous deeds to the shores of the next generation.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Why didn't the Torah list the names of the sons of Yitzchak as his progeny? The true offspring of a tzaddik are the righteous deeds of his children. A tzaddik's children who walk in the ways of the Torah continue the righteousness of their father. Eisav, the son of Yitzchak, was not considered his 'descendant' because he did not embody righteousness. The Torah did not want to embarrass Yitzchak for having a son who left the fold and chose a different way of life.
- ◆ Eisav grew up in the house of Yitzchak and knew what it meant to be righteous, of a family aspiring to do righteous deeds. He rejected what they did, desiring a life of 'freedom' instead. Rashi explains that each of Yitzchak's sons 'grew up' and developed into the man of his choice. Eisav grew up and left it all behind, defecting to the houses of idolatry and sin.
- ◆ A person is led in the way that he chooses to go. "The door is opened for the one who wishes to become *tamei*. One who wishes to become *tahor* is assisted from Above."
- ◆ Yaakov chose to dwell in the tents of Torah. He saw the righteousness of his father's house and continued that way of life. The last letters of the words תולדות יצחק (after adding one hundred for the blessings said every day) equals six hundred, equal to the numerical value of the word קשר (bond). Yaakov valued that bond of family and their relationship with Hashem. These letters can also be rearranged to form the word שקר, hinting to Eisav who lived a life of fabrication and deceit.
- ◆ The first letters of the words תולדות יצחק have the same numerical value as the word קדוש. There was holiness in Yitzchak's offspring, namely Yaakov and his family.

- ◆ When the *Yetzer Hara* sees a person desiring to live a Torah life, he immediately tries to grab hold of this person and weaken his grip. Without the vigil of morality and the vanguard of truth, we are easy prey. Blinded by his blinders of self-centeredness and hedonism, Lavan stooped to contemplating murdering his own grandchildren. One who stands at the doorway of righteousness but refuses to enter, chooses by default to live in the netherworld of sin.
- ◆ Hashem blessed Avraham בכל, with everything. Rashi writes that the word בכל has the same numerical value as the word בן. There are those who bring a Midrash that the word בכל refers to the mitzvah of sukkah. What is the connection between them? The walls of the sukkah surround our whole physical being, giving us total enclosure on all sides. This was a reward for the *mesirut nefesh* Avraham had by sanctifying Hashem's Name. Avraham had a son who was בכל, full of all the good *middot* that personified Avraham Avinu, an extension of Avraham's *mesirut nefesh*, as Yitzchak also went willingly to the *Akeidah*.
- ◆ How does one merit having children who continue going in the right way? Children learn from example. A child's parents are his over-riding example of behavior. If a child sees his father learn Torah and do mitzvot without compromises and despite adversity, he will follow in his footsteps. But if he sees how his father wavers in his learning, he learns to do the same.



## Truth vs. Falsehood

*“The lads grew up and Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents”*

*(Bereishit 25:27)*

Yaakov and Eisav were born to the same righteous parents, Yitzchak and Rivka. Both were descendants of the first Patriarch and Matriarch, Avraham and Sarah. They grew up in the same home, went to the same yeshiva, and had the same curriculum. And yet Yaakov sat and learned while Eisav went hunting. Their outer differences quickly became apparent. What went on beneath the surface that set them so apart?

We know that the next world is referred to as the world of *emet*. Why? Because there is no deception or mask of character in the World to Come. Conversely, this world is considered to be the world of *sheker*. What does this mean? If someone says that he is wearing a garment, and he actually is, is that considered *sheker*? How do we define *sheker*?

Let us take a look at the first incidence of idolatry. In the days of Enosh, the grandson of Adam Harishon, men began to worship the celestial bodies. This is quite puzzling, for Adam Harishon was still living, and with but a little investigation or introspection, one could have reached the truths of Creation and its Source of existence. And yet people turned a blind eye to Hashem. Thus we see how truth, which is so evident and easily accessible, can be corrupted by fabrication and whim. This only proves how our world is enveloped in a cloud of *sheker*.

The Midrash brings an argument held in the Heavenly realm regarding the giving of the Torah. The angels claimed that it was not befitting the Torah, which is one hundred percent truth, to be given to man, who dwells in the world of *sheker*. Moshe Rabbeinu argued back that specifically because we live in the world of *sheker* is why the Torah should be given to us. Without Torah, man would continue to walk amidst the murky materialism which obscures his view and presents him with its disfiguration of truth.

In the end, Moshe's claims were accepted. He received the Torah and consequently gave it to Am Yisrael. We use the Torah's brilliance of truth to light up the darkness that covers the earth, and to show us right from wrong. The angels, wanting to show their good-will and affinity, even offered Moshe presents. This may be similar to one who suddenly becomes wealthy and finds himself surrounded by admirers, desiring his company. What present can an angel offer? In a spiritual world, only the intangible exists. In a world of truth, only truth has any status. Thus they gave Moshe Rabbeinu pearls of "truth," secrets of Creation and insights of Torah that they gleaned from the Heavenly realm, heard from Hashem Himself. Moshe was indeed fortunate to hear such excerpts of truth.

Even the Angel of Death offered a gift. He revealed to Moshe how the *ketoret* has the ability to save lives and abolish a decree of death. This is alluded to by the words (*Tehillim* 68:19) "You ascended on High, taking captives and gifts" (see *Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar*, 752). The "gifts" refer to the secrets revealed to him by the angels, whereas "captives" is a reference to the secret of the *ketoret*. Its acquisition was akin to taking a captive, as it was not in line with the daily job of the Angel of Death.

In a different vein, I once heard (see *Adir Bamarom* of the *Ramchal*) that the Hebrew word for captives (שבוי) is a mnemonic

which stands for the one who revealed to us the Zohar, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (רשב"י). Included in Moshe's presents were the secrets of the Torah passed down in the *Torat Ha'emet* of the Zohar.

I have no doubt that Moshe's face lit up from these "gifts" and shone with an inner light. This is one explanation of the words we say during Shacharit on Shabbat, "Moshe rejoiced with his presented portion... the splendid countenance You gave him when he stood on Har Sinai." Similarly, the gift of Torah should always elicit from us an enthusiastic and radiant response.

I remember a man who once promised me that if he would be successful in a certain business deal, he would give his tithes to a few of my worthy institutions. And so it was. After some time, he returned to me with a large wad of bills, looking forward to my enthusiastic response. When it was not forthcoming, he told me, "The whole way here I was anticipating your reaction. I was expecting the Rav to show a broad smile at the size of the donation, and yet the Rav did not acknowledge my gift or show any sign of acceptance." At this point I explained to him my hesitation (while knowing very well who I was talking to). "You should know," I said, "that the one and only thing that we should smile at, is Torah and mitzvot. One who is committed to living a life of Torah deserves my wholehearted attention. Torah is eternal and accompanies us eternally, wherever we go. But money alone is worthless. It is here today and gone tomorrow. That is why I did not smile at your donation."

We may ask why the Angel of Death revealed to Moshe the secret of the *ketoret* and its unique property to save lives. This was actually used by Moshe, when a plague broke out in the desert, and Moshe sent Aharon running with the *ketoret* to atone for Am Yisrael and

ward off the epidemic (see *Bamidbar* 17:12). Isn't this a contradiction to his job as the Angel of Death? This is like revealing trade secrets to a rivaling competitor!

The answer is that in the world of truth, nothing can be concealed. Especially for Moshe, who was there to receive the Torah, everything had to be accessible in his quest for truth and bared for his inspection. Even the Angel of Death understood this. To hide the secret of the *ketoret* would have been a major defect in Moshe's reception of Truth.

The depth of truth in the next world is hard to fathom and even harder to stand up to. Maran Harav Shach zt"l once said that in the next world, they don't accept our actions at face value. The Heavenly Court does not take into account just the pertinent details and our apparent virtue. The judgment we receive there is based on the prevailing truth of the next world, which employs a deeper, broader view of man. It includes the far-reaching ramifications of our actions. There are so many more aspects and details of our lives that are revealed and assessed over there. This more penetrating application of truth is another reason why that world is called the world of *emet*.

In our present state of existence, it is hard to picture what the next world is all about. Chazal (*Avot* 4:22) tell us, "One hour in the next world is worth more than all of life in this world." Imagine all of the physical pleasures that one man could accumulate throughout his entire lifetime. If we could assess them as a combined entity, a single experience of unadulterated pleasure, this would still not equal the pleasure that the soul derives in one hour's time in the World to Come. When viewed in this light, true pleasure exists only in the next world. Any pleasure in this world is a fake counterfeit of the real thing.

This helps us to appreciate our gift of life in this temporal, finite world, encouraging us to take advantage of every opportunity we have to do mitzvot. The Vilna Gaon's sister once visited after an absence of many years. After a brief inquiry of her well-being, he returned to his studies, saying that G-d willing they would meet again in the next world where there would be plenty of time to talk. In another well known story, the Vilna Gaon held his tzitzit tightly before his death and cried, saying how we are unable to do mitzvot after death. This is an example of someone who truly appreciated life for its worth. He understood how we need to prepare for the World to Come and live by its exacting scrutiny. Each second of our lives is worth millions, and that is why the "world of truth" employs a more penetrating analysis, and rightfully demands a rigorous examination. After using the light of Torah to view our world, we can now challenge the statement I made earlier. While it is true that many people view our world as the world of *sheker*, it really depends on one's perception of life. One who holds onto Torah, can see the truth as plain as day. He can live with truth even here in this world.

I heard a story concerning the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim from Tzanz zt"l. Once, Rav Chaim was learning in his seat, totally engrossed in the words of the Gemara before him. As he stood up and turned to find a sefer, his outer garment caught fire from the candle he was learning by. So preoccupied was he with his thoughts, he didn't notice, and even raised his voice at his *shamash* who was 'disturbing' him by trying to put out the fire. This is the type of learning which depicts the 'true' man, one striving for truth.

I have another story to show the opposite side. I once visited a woman who had lived through an earthquake. A wall had fallen on her and she had been injured. I asked her, "Didn't you feel the ground shaking?" She said no. I asked, "How is it possible that you

didn't even notice?" She answered that just that day she had received a shipment of diamonds, and was sorting them out. She was so engrossed by their value and enthralled by their glitter, that she didn't even know what hit her.

We learn from here an important rule. Every person lives in his own world, his occupational environment and realm of activity. One who makes Torah his occupation, his foremost concern and overriding interest, lives in the world of truth. And one who engrosses himself with materialism, swims in a sea of darkness, always grasping at the straws of materialism to buoy him through life.

The *Yetzer Hara* knows how to pull the wool over our eyes, using the materialism of this world as his 'fabric'ation. I once went to be *menachem avel* a family. Some of the women sitting there were dressed immodestly, and I asked them to wear something more appropriate. After I said a few words of Torah, I added an afterthought. "I know that you modified your attire in my honor," I said. "But you should know that Hashem requires our *tzeniut* even more. It is the *Yetzer Hara* who encourages people to be lax in their mode of dress. He knows how to convince some of us that for the Rav one must be dressed properly, but when it comes to daily apparel, he clouds us from seeing the Divine imperative as well."

Under the influence of *sheker*, one can believe that he or she is already at the gates of the World to Come, even as they sport fashion accessories or clothing of a voguish cut that uncovers what should really be concealed. This is the power of the *Yetzer Hara*.

Another time, on a trip whose purpose was to bolster the *ruchniut* in a certain city, I noticed that every woman who came to receive a

*berachah* was sensitive enough to cover herself properly before entering. I felt that here the women were uplifted by my words and strengthened in their level of *tzeniut*. Thus I was satisfied with their, albeit fleeting, show of understanding moments of inspiration.

Returning home, I boarded the plane in a happy mood. I asked not to be disturbed by mealtime, as I would anyway not eat the meals, since they were not kosher. One of the stewardesses insisted on waking me up, though, thoroughly concerned. She felt that I needed to eat the sumptuous meal and watch the film on the large screen at the front of the airplane. I had no choice but to continue the rest of the way home with my eyes closed, contemplating my situation. What is a movie after all? Mere imagery, a supposed train of events which never happened, a fabrication of someone's imagination. This illusion of reality is the hallmark of *sheker*, the exact opposite of the world of *emet*. And the *Yetzer Hara* does his job well, enticing many and snaring them with his alluring bait.

The power of imagination does have a place in Judaism. We often tell stories of righteous ancestors, doing mitzvot or acts of *chessed*. This portrayal serves as an example for how we should act. At the same time though, the imagination can often fantasize on enjoying life in this world and living it up, portraying a false picture of what life is all about. Such imagination is the diet and fare for most people of the world. This is what led that stewardess to tell us how she was pained that we were not eating the meal on the plane. I explained to her that if I were to eat, it would be even more painful for me.

Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni Vayikra*, 626) write that we should not convince ourselves that pork or bacon is not tasty. There are many who ravenously eat it and consider it delicious. Instead, the reason we do not eat such food is because the Torah forbids it. Similarly, the marriage of those who are related to each other is forbidden

simply because the Torah prohibits it. Our entire existence is based on the premise of accepting the Torah as the guide for living life. As the doctrine of truth, it is the ultimate arbitrator of what is right and wrong. It is the yardstick and standard to determine all truth by.

Yaakov lived with the truth of the Torah. This is hinted to by the Torah's description of him as an **איש תם**. The letters of the word **תם** have the same numerical value as the word **אמת** (when we add one for the word itself). Yaakov was **יושב אהלים**, a dweller of tents, symbolizing the two worlds we live in. He was able to connect this world and the next to form a unified whole, through the *middah* of *emet*.

Eisav on the other hand, was a man of the world and at home in the wild. He chose a life of *sheker*. He savored the world of falsehood and its illusive pleasures. If the world has such pleasures, reasoned Eisav, it must be for man to enjoy. When we think a bit deeper though, we can see how this is really a disfiguration of truth. Why did Hashem create an enticing world if He wants us to live lives full of *ruchniut*? Hashem created the *Yetzer Hara* to alloy the truth with his counterfeit goods and their illusive pleasures. He created a world where one can scale the heights of Heaven or fall to the depths of She'ol. Yaakov uncovered the lie of *sheker* and lived a life of truth. And don't think that Yaakov, the one who learned in the tents of Torah, lacked anything. He had wives and children and was wealthy too.

My grandfather zt"l could have been very rich. My father too, of blessed memory, had the opportunity to become wealthy. Twice in his life, he needed money in order to print a sefer. He sent my mother to buy a lottery ticket, telling her which number to choose. My mother asked him, "Are you so sure that we will win?" He answered, "Yes, we will win whatever will be the cost of the printing.

I don't want to win more than that." My mother went to the printing press and gave the owner, David Amar zt"l, the sefer to be printed. When he asked her when she expected to pay, she answered, "Tomorrow we will win the lottery *b'ezrat* Hashem, and I will be able to pay." This was certainly quite unusual, but the owner said nothing. The next day, my parents won the exact sum of money needed for the sefer. This happened on another occasion as well. We see from here how tzaddikim don't want to take from this world any more than what they need.

Our world has a dual existence, that of *emet* as well as *sheker*. This is in contrast to the next world that has nothing but truth. Our job in this world is to uncover the lie of falsehood and live a life of *emet*, letting Torah, the doctrine of truth, be our guide. We need to follow the example of Yaakov who strived for truth, and not Eisav who blinded himself by the dazzle and glitter of tinsel land and chose to live a life of *sheker*.

When one passes away, he is covered and buried with a tallit, after its tzitzit are cut off. Normally we do not cut off our tzitzit, as it is considered dishonorable for the tallit. Why do we do this for a deceased man? I suggest that this is based on the rationale behind the mitzvah of tzitzit, which is to remember Hashem. The pasuk says (*Bamidbar* 15:39), "That you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them." A person needs the fringes of the tzitzit to facilitate his memory and accelerate his cognizance of our Divine duty here on earth. In the next world there is no need for such elicitory facilitation, as there are no mitzvot over there to do. Even more, one who kept the mitzvot here in this world will not lack any fringes on his spiritual 'garments' up Above. This is why it is unnecessary to bury one with tzitzit, as they denote a false sense of security for those who have no need for them. And so

we remove the tzitzit. Although cutting off tzitzit from the garment of a living person is considered dishonorable, having the tzitzit for the *niftar* is even more dishonorable.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Yaakov and Eisav were born to the same righteous parents, and grew up in the same home. They both went to the same yeshiva, and had the same curriculum. And yet they grew up, each going their own way. Why?
- ◆ The next world is referred to as the world of *emet*, as there is no deception or mask of character there. This world is considered to be the world of *sheker*. The first incidence of idolatry, in the days of Enosh, proves this point. They turned a blind eye to Hashem, despite the truth of Creation being so evident and easily accessible to them.
- ◆ The angels claimed that it was not befitting the Torah to be given to man who dwells in the world of *sheker*. Moshe Rabbeinu argued back that specifically because we live in the world of *sheker* is why we should be given the Torah.
- ◆ The angels revealed to Moshe Rabbeinu secrets of Creation and insights of Torah. Even the Angel of Death offered the *ketoret*. Its acquisition was akin to taking a **שבי**. Why did the Angel of Death reveal this secret to Moshe if it has the ability to save lives? In the world of truth, nothing can be concealed. Even the Angel of Death understood that for Moshe, who was there to receive the Torah, everything had to be accessible in his quest for truth.
- ◆ In a different vein, I once heard that the Hebrew word **שבי** is a mnemonic which stands for the one who revealed to us the Zohar, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (**רשב"י**). Included in Moshe's presents were the secrets of the Torah passed down in the *Torat Ha'emet* of the Zohar.

- ◆ The judgment of the next world is based on its prevailing truth which employs a deeper, broader view of man and a more penetrating analysis of our actions. The “world of truth” rightfully demands a more rigorous examination, requiring us to live by its exacting scrutiny.
- ◆ True pleasure exists only in the next world. Any pleasure in this world is a counterfeit of the real thing.
- ◆ One who makes Torah his occupation, constantly lives in the world of truth. One who engrosses himself with materialism swims in a sea of darkness. The *Yetzer Hara* knows how to pull the wool over our eyes using the materialism of this world. This illusion of reality is the hallmark of *sheker*. The imagination often fantasizes about enjoying life in this world, portraying a false picture of what life is all about.
- ◆ Why did Hashem create an enticing world? Hashem created the *Yetzer Hara* to alloy the truth with his counterfeit goods. He created a world where one can scale the heights of Heaven or fall to the depths of *She’ol*.
- ◆ Yaakov lived with the truth of the Torah. The Torah describes him as **איש תם**, whose letters have the same numerical value as the word **אמת**. Yaakov was also **ישב אהלים**, symbolizing the two worlds we live in. He was able to connect this world and the next to form a unified whole, through the *middah* of *emet*.
- ◆ Eisav was a man of the world and at home in the wild. He chose a life of *sheker* to enjoy this world’s illusive pleasures.
- ◆ Our world has a dual existence, that of *emet* as well as *sheker*. This is in contrast to the next world that has nothing but truth. Our job in this world is to uncover the lie of falsehood and live a life of *emet*.



## Yaakov Avinu's Rise to Greatness

*“The lads grew up and Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents”*

*(Bereishit 25:27)*

In these few words, the Torah paints the backdrop behind Yaakov Avinu's greatness of character. In Midrashic sources, Yaakov is referred to as the 'choicest' of the Avot. He spoke with Hashem, despite his father being still alive, whereas nowhere do we find that Hashem spoke to Yitzchak until after Avraham passed away. What distinguished his early years and started him on the road to greatness?

The Torah emphasizes that Yaakov was **איש תם יושב אהלים**, “A wholesome man, abiding in tents.” These two ingredients complemented each other. Yaakov sat in the tents of Torah, making it the focus of his life. And at the same time, he was an **איש תם**. His scrupulous honesty and perfected character were always consonant with truth. This *middah* of *emet* contrasted sharply with the deceitfulness of his brother Eisav and the connivance of his uncle Lavan.

This does not imply that Yaakov Avinu was gullible or naive. Later on, we see how Yaakov saw through his brother's deception and also prepared for Lavan's trickery. What Yaakov did though, was to take their *middah* of shrewdness and cunning, and straighten out its crookedness by using that *middah* for good.

After having to deal with Eisav in his formative years, Yaakov had to contend with Lavan Ha'arami, the master of the art. The Hebrew

word ארמי (the region we refer to as Mesopotamia) hints to Lavan's expertise. These letters can be rearranged to spell the word רמאי (swindler). Despite his shrewd circumspection, Yaakov was still hoodwinked into marrying Leah, after Lavan switched her for Rachel.

The Torah also tells us of Yaakov's successfulness. Although he lived in the house of Lavan for so many years, he did not learn from his evil ways. This is alluded to by Yaakov, when he said (*Bereishit* 32:5), "I dwelled by Lavan and tarried until now." Chazal (see Rashi, *ibid.*) rearrange the letters of the Hebrew word גרתי (to dwell) to spell תריג (an acronym whose numerical value refers to the 613 commandments). Yaakov hints that he kept all of the commandments, despite living so many years in the house of Lavan. He remained the same Yaakov, not learning from Lavan's wicked ways, complete in his spirituality, guileless as before. What gave him the spiritual stamina to remain immune to his pernicious environment, to remain righteous despite being in such close proximity to such a rasha? How did he manage to take the very weapons of evil directed against him and use them to fight his true archenemy, the *Yetzer Hara*?

The answer is that Yaakov was well prepared for his encounter with Lavan. Even after he sat and learned in the tents of Torah with his father, Yaakov saw the need to go for another fourteen years of intense learning. He made this detour on his way from Be'er Sheva to Charan, despite his father's instructions to go and find a wife. He knew that these extra years would give him the power to withstand the tests of character and forces of evil headed his way.

From Yaakov, we can learn to appreciate the value of Torah study and its untiring application. See how much Torah can achieve. This

is especially true when it is learned in *galut*, away from home and family, and with great intensity. Only such learning can penetrate the deep recesses of the heart and empower us with the strength to battle the *Yetzer Hara*.

We can now better understand a statement of Chazal. The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 30b) says, “It was taught in the Beit Hamidrash of Rabbi Yishmael, when that despicable character (the *Yetzer Hara*) meets up with you, drag him into the Beit Hamidrash.” Chazal want to point out our sole antidote in overcoming the *Yetzer Hara*. It is only through learning Torah that we can vanquish evil and subjugate our spiritual adversary. Yaakov knew this secret, and despite being sixty-three-years old, he took advantage of another fourteen years to solidify his righteousness and give him the power to withstand his rendezvous with the Artful Dodger himself.

An example of how these years uplifted Yaakov spiritually can be seen from his chastity. Before his death, when Yaakov blessed his children, he proclaimed (*Bereishit* 49:3), “Reuven, you are my firstborn, my first issue.” Rashi explains that he was indeed Yaakov’s first issue, as Yaakov never had a nocturnal emission. This was a result of Yaakov’s high level of *kedushah*. Despite only marrying at the age of eighty-four, he was not inundated with promiscuous thoughts or consumed by the allure of the forbidden fruit. The Torah he learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever bolstered his aversion of improper gazing or impure thoughts.

In truth, Yaakov’s *mesirut nefesh* for Torah raised him to an unprecedented level of prophecy. The pasuk (*ibid.* 28:12) describes Yaakov’s dream where he saw a “ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward.” He merited a Divine revelation as a result of his effort and toil in Torah. Had he known the holiness of the

place where he chose to rest, he would not have slept there. This is the explanation of the words (ibid. 28:16-17) “Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely Hashem is present in this place and I did not know!’” Hashem specifically detained him and induced sleep, in order to reveal Himself in that spot. The whole experience was another development in Yaakov’s spiritual rise, and was merited by his superhuman efforts in learning Torah.

On the heels of this major event, Yaakov gave thanks to the Al-mighty and promised his devotion and future tithe of his possessions. The pasuk then goes on to describe the continuation of his journey, “So Yaakov lifted his feet, and went” (ibid. 29:1). These words seem extra. Why does the Torah indicate his ambulatory movement and progression?

I suggest that the Torah is describing the effort it took for Yaakov to go on with his journey. We know that Yaakov toiled endlessly, not allowing himself the luxury of a good night’s sleep for all those years. He harnessed all of his energies, his whole being, into serving Hashem, while renouncing all other activities in the pursuit of His Torah. Thus it should come as no surprise that Yaakov wanted to stay put. He didn’t want to go through the rigors of the road and the diversions of the trip. It is so much harder to concentrate on learning when one is removed from his surroundings and thrust into a new venue or locale. The feet of Yaakov were at first reluctant to begin their trek, preferring to stay in the vicinity of the holy area where they had rested. To be a cause of Yaakov’s *bitul* Torah was against their very nature.

However, this was the will of Hashem; to go to Charan and marry and raise children, the future Shevatim. And so, Yaakov ordered his feet to pick themselves up and start walking. This is why the pasuk says, “So Yaakov lifted his feet, and went.”

From here we can learn how Yaakov's whole being was attuned to doing Avodat Hashem, innately attached to Torah and bound up with its laws. Despite resting for the first time after many years, his body was so conditioned to the rigors of Torah learning that it desired its continuation. He would have preferred to stay up and learn, had Hashem not induced sleep. His sleep was even punctuated with learning, as Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 69:7) point out that the word (*Bereishit* 28:16) **מִשְׁנָתוֹ יַעֲקֹב יָעִקֵץ**, "and Yaakov awoke from his sleep," is related to the word **מִמְשָׁנָתוֹ** (his memorization of learned material). This is a far cry from those who crave their beauty sleep and slumber away, to the point of taking pills in order to induce it.

Harav Moshe Chaim Luzzato zt"l, in his *Mesilat Yesharim*, describes two forms of visual impairment. There are those who are physically blind, and there are those who turn a blind eye to the truths of life. Both stumble and fall, one getting hurt perhaps in a physical way, and the other in a spiritual way. The stumbling-stones of life are a reality, and closing one's eyes to their existence does nothing to move them out of the way or negate their potential 'fall'acy. One who willingly falls prey to his *Yetzer Hara* and allows himself to be led wherever it takes him, has no less of a handicap than the visually impaired. Once, a woman came seeking my advice. She held in her hand a picture of her family, all non religious. When I pointed out their inappropriate mode of dress, she did not understand my rebuke. Her love for her children blinded her from seeing their glaring deficiencies. I added in response that she was just burying her head in the sand by not acknowledging their immodesty or listening to the plain and simple truth.

The *Mesilat Yesharim* continues by explaining that even the one who learned the truth and knows right from wrong, can be blinded by his desires and led astray. Many people fail to integrate what

they do, with what they know. This can be compared to one who is not only blind but also foolish. He may know that he lacks the ability to see and protect himself from the dangers of the road, and yet still foolishly continues along his way. Similarly, those who know that their way is fraught with spiritual danger, and still take no measures to protect themselves and filter what they see, are blinded by their urge to sin.

Hashem created the *Yetzer Hara* in order to tempt us to sin. We need to realize how even looking can arouse our passions. Chazal compare (Yerushalmi *Berachot* 9a) the eyes to a broker who acts as the middleman between a buyer and a seller, while dealing in illegal merchandise. By seeing immodesty, the eyes provoke us to buy their wares and sell our souls – in exchange for their immoral goods. Those who live with truth, are not only aware of the stumbling blocks, but also take the steps they need to in order to protect themselves from succumbing. It is the resha'im who walk with a smug sense of security, strutting and swaggering on, undeterred and undaunted by their spiritual suicide.

I want to share with you the following story. Two teenagers came to me with their question. They were undecided if they should get married. They had many differences of opinions, as well as divergent approaches to religion. I advised against them getting married, as their irreconcilable differences would only lead them to a hasty divorce. The reality of their innate differences was apparent even to them, but they were hiding from the truth, blinded by their desires and unwilling to take it to heart. She acknowledged the truth of my words more than he did, but still couldn't break loose from her infatuation. This is an example of veering from the dictates of logic and reason, just in order to satisfy one's lust, as the pasuk says (*Mishlei* 10:9), "He who walks in innocence will walk securely, but one who perverts his ways will be broken."

Yaakov Avinu was a man of complete truth. His body acquiesced to the rigors of learning Torah and his feet obeyed his inner desire to serve Hashem. There was no inner conflict between what he knew to be true and how he led his life, and so his physical body and spiritual soul lived in complete harmony.

In an unforgettable speech in the midst of the Nazi inferno, The Admor of Alexander addressed a close circle of followers and inmates, right before the Pesach Seder. He stressed the designated titles for the Seder rituals, thereby delineating a Jew's service of Hashem. The first act we do is *Kadesh*. This instructs us to sanctify ourselves, to initiate every one of our limbs in the service of Hashem. Similarly, when we wash our hands with water before every meal, we make a *berachah* which proclaims how Hashem sanctifies us with His mitzvot. Torah is compared to water. By using the purifying water of Torah, we can elevate our physical being to higher levels of devotion.

These words were said by, and to, people who went through such unbelievable suffering. Many of them died horrible deaths. And through it all, they continued to live by what they believed in, true to the homiletical explanation of '*Kadesh*' and based on the dictates of the Torah. They were tzaddikim with phenomenal strength of character, some who sang songs and praised Hashem, even as they were led to their end.

This is what Yaakov Avinu gave over to his children and instilled in them by his personal example. Whenever we feel weak in our service of Hashem, or falter in keeping the mitzvot, let us remember the eternal lesson of Yaakov and the wellspring of Torah from whence he drew his strength.

**In Summary**

- ◆ The greatness of character of Yaakov Avinu came from his total devotion to learning Torah. He learned for many years, only to add on another fourteen. This helped him to focus on Torah and live in complete consonance with truth, as well as give him the spiritual stamina to remain righteous, despite being in such close proximity to Lavan.
- ◆ Only such learning can penetrate the deep recesses of the heart and empower us with the strength to battle the *Yetzer Hara*. This also led Yaakov to higher levels of *kedushah* and prophecy.
- ◆ Yaakov toiled endlessly, not allowing himself the luxury of a good night's sleep, for fourteen years. He harnessed all of his energies in serving Hashem, while renouncing all other activities in the pursuit of Torah. At first his feet did not want to travel on to Charan, until he ordered his feet to pick themselves up and start walking.
- ◆ There are two types of visual impairment: physical blindness, and a spiritual blind eye to the truths of life, not living with what one knows to be right and true. Even one who learned the truth and knows right from wrong can still be blinded by his desires and led astray. Many people fail to integrate what they do, with what they know.
- ◆ Yaakov Avinu was a man of complete truth. His body acquiesced to the rigors of learning Torah and his feet obeyed his inner desire to serve Hashem. There was no inner conflict between what he knew to be true and how he led his life, and so his physical body and spiritual soul lived in complete harmony. This was a result of the Torah that he learned.



## The Tent of Yaakov and the Field of Eisav

*“The lads grew up and Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents”*

*(Bereishit 25:27)*

Let us contrast Yaakov and Eisav by noting their places of residence. Eisav’s pastime was not limited to hunting game. Eisav ran free, at ‘home’ in the wild, living in the open expanses and enjoying the human subjugation of nature. He had no inner content to prevent his vagrant soul from pasturing in the fields of frivolousness and bending to the winds of materialism.

Yaakov, on the other hand, was a man who dwelled within the fabric and folds of tents. A tent may be positioned on an open field, but it can be firmly fastened and secured by means of stakes and ropes. Once secured, a tent can withstand strong winds and hold up in bad weather. Obviously, the larger the tent, the larger the stakes, and the more stakes that are necessary to keep it in place. But the effort pays off in the end. This signifies the effort Yaakov Avinu made to insulate himself from his brother’s influence. By learning in the tent of Torah, he protected himself from being affected by the fallout of Eisav’s ‘occupation.’

We should take a lesson from Yaakov on how to protect ourselves. We need to secure our homes from society at large, from being blown away by the winds of temptation. Often, foreign ‘fields’ and ‘greener’ pastures contain alluring ‘sites’ or activities, which harbor tornadoes of havoc and destruction. We need to protect ourselves from their influence by withdrawing into the tents of

Torah and putting our 'stakes' in with its teachers of Divine wisdom.

A tent, besides protecting one from the external environment, also gives the enclosure so vital to building one's interior and filling it with content. We are able to exist and function, specifically because of its delimiting containment. This enclosure provides the area where our spiritual progress can thrive, despite living smack in the fields of human endeavor and weathering its 'free' markets and open theaters of activity. Yaakov Avinu took advantage of his 'tents' of Torah to remove himself from the materialism of this world and raise his spiritual levels of devotion. His meager tent became a fortress of Torah.

The Torah describes the effect that Yaakov's departure from Be'er Sheva, his home town, had on his environs. Chazal (*Ruth Rabbah* 2:12) say that when a tzaddik leaves a city, it makes an impact on the city's residents. A tzaddik's presence fills the city with an aura of righteousness and an air of devotion. He is the pride of the city, greater than any historical monument or unusual landmark. His learning and devotion also channels *berachah* to the entire region. This is why his absence is felt by all. His departure creates a void, as the splendor and glory that once was, fades away into oblivion.

Even though Yaakov may have been tucked away in some hidden corner and rarely seen in public, his presence benefited everyone. It raised the spiritual atmosphere of the whole town, and set their standard of achievement to the pinnacle of human perfection and wisdom. This was lost by Yaakov's departure. There was also a side effect to his departure. They immediately felt the result of his absence as soon as they saw their *berachah* dwindle away.

This contrast between a 'field' and a 'tent' is what created that spiritual oasis in Be'er Sheva. It transformed that town into a major

spiritual metropolis. Yaakov's tent of learning channeled such *berachah*, that he merited having the smell of Gan Eden waft into the room when he awaited his father's blessing (see *Bereishit* 27:27). The 'field' of human accomplishment, the arena of Yaakov's spiritual activity where he positioned his 'tent' truly became the "field which Hashem has blessed."

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### In Summary

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- ◆ The Torah describes where Yaakov and Eisav resided. Eisav was at 'home' in the wild. He had no inner content to prevent his vagrant soul from pasturing in foreign fields. Yaakov dwelled within the fabric and folds of tents. He insulated himself from his brother's influence by learning in the tent of Torah.
- ◆ A tent may be positioned on an open field, but it can be firmly secured by means of stakes and ropes, withstanding strong winds and holding up in bad weather. A tent also gives us the enclosure so vital to building one's interior and filling it with content.
- ◆ We need to secure our homes from the society at large and the winds of temptation by withdrawing into the tents of Torah, just as Yaakov took advantage of his 'tents' of Torah to remove himself from the materialism of this world and raise his spiritual levels of devotion.



## Yaakov vs. Eisav

*“The lads grew up and Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents”*

*(Bereishit 25:27)*

Yaakov and Eisav were twins, born from the same pregnancy and delivered in the same birth. Yet unlike other twins who bear some resemblance to each other, these two brothers were worlds apart. Yaakov dwelled in the tents of Torah. His whole life was devoted to Torah and delving into its depths. Eisav on the other hand learned how to hunt, using his talents to chase wild game, all while gaming the chase of gross materialism.

Perhaps we can differentiate between two branches of knowledge, and see which one each brother ‘excelled’ in. Yaakov involved himself in the Divinities, the knowledge of Hashem and His eternal wisdom, as written in the Torah. He applied his total self, to the extent that he renounced the enjoyment of other activities or pleasures. This is alluded to by the words **ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים**, “as Yaakov dwelled in the tents of Torah.” The word **תם** can be read backwards as **מת**, signifying Yaakov’s total absorption in Torah and his negation of all physical desires and pursuits.

Eisav enjoyed instead exploring the Humanities. He pursued his research of the baser side of human ‘nature’ and delved into anthropoidal vice. He reveled in ‘liberal’ arts and researched its physical pleasures, personally experiencing the morass of materialism and the quagmire of unregenerate behavior.

We know that Moshe Rabbeinu ascended on High to receive the Torah. For forty days and nights, he learned Torah from Hashem,

despite the difficulties of existing in a purely spiritual world. He did not eat or drink for his whole stay there. This was especially difficult at the beginning, when the angels were not indifferent to giving the Torah to man. They tried to prevent his reception of the Torah. Why, then, was it necessary to detain Moshe for such a lengthy amount of time? Couldn't Hashem teach Moshe in a fraction of the time, if He so willed?

I suggest that Moshe Rabbeinu was not interested in any shortcuts. He wanted to learn everything first hand, to be actively involved in the transmission of Torah. When one learns with a partner, the give and take of learning only increases one's depth of understanding. There is no comparison between active involvement in one's learning to a dry, passive acceptance of facts and information. This is what allowed Moshe to get to the source of each topic and analyze each detail that Hashem shared with him. And so he stayed on for forty days, negating all physical needs and desires, while toiling in Torah with all his strength.

I have a parable to explain the benefit of learning Torah amidst difficulty. In Canada, there is a large lake brimming with fish, which many people come to visit each year. Large fish are seen swimming to and fro, and by simply casting a line into the water one is sure to catch a fish. Everyone is thus assured of bringing home as much fish as they want. However, if someone were to brag on his expertise in fishing, and try to prove it by the large number of fish he caught, it would be sure to elicit a smile or snicker from anyone familiar with that lake. Even a child could successfully fish there. On the other hand, if he were to show a large catch of fish from the ocean, we would consider him an expert. In deep water, it takes a great deal of effort to catch fish, which swim where they cannot be seen. Such a person would feel tremendously satisfied, ten times more than the one who caught fish in that lake in Canada.

The Torah is compared to an ocean. One who dives to its depths and seeks to understand the intricacies of its laws, will find tremendous satisfaction. Understanding Torah is not an easy feat. One must apply himself rigorously to the task. Besides the mental effort involved, there is also the submission of physical desire and will. However, one who succeeds in understanding and mastering a difficult *sugya*, has tremendous *simchah* afterwards. This happiness comes from attaining the knowledge that he strained so hard to acquire. How often have I seen a scholar or layman all wrapped up, pondering a train of thought and hoping to unravel a knotty problem – only to express their relief and joy at finding a solution, with the help of Heaven.

Yaakov Avinu taught us what it really means to learn Torah. We need to use all of our faculties and efforts in order to understand Hashem's will. This is in complete contrast to Eisav, who symbolizes the person who puts on a good front, showing an interest in doing mitzvot just in order to deceive others.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Yaakov and Eisav were totally dissimilar, despite being born as twins. Yaakov applied himself to learning Torah. The word **אָת** can be read backwards as **תָּא**, signifying Yaakov's total absorption in Torah and his negation of all physical desires.
- ◆ Eisav enjoyed instead pursuing and reveling in the pleasures of this world. He preoccupied his thoughts on how he could sink even lower into the morass of materialism.
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu ascended on High to receive the Torah. Why was it necessary to detain Moshe for forty days and nights? Couldn't Hashem teach Moshe in a fraction of the time, if He so willed? Moshe was not interested in any shortcuts. He wanted to be actively involved in the transmission of Torah, to get to the source of each topic and analyze

each detail that Hashem shared with him, toiling in Torah with all his strength.

- ◆ We need to use all of our faculties and efforts in understanding Hashem's will, just as Yaakov Avinu did. One who succeeds in understanding Torah has tremendous *simchah*.



## The Selling of the Birthright

*“Eisav said to Yaakov, ‘Pour into me, now, some of that very red stuff for I am exhausted.’ (He therefore called his name Edom). Yaakov said, ‘Sell, as this day, your birthright to me. And Eisav said, ‘Look, I am going to die, so of what use to me is a birthright?’ Yaakov said, ‘Swear to me as this day’; he swore to him and sold his birthright to Yaakov. Yaakov gave Eisav bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, got up and left; thus Eisav spurned the birthright”*

*(Bereishit 25:30-34)*

The selling of the birthright to Yaakov raises several questions.

Eisav came in hungry and exhausted, asking for food. Was Eisav so tired that he couldn't even feed himself? Did he really need Yaakov to spoon feed him?

Why did Yaakov include bread with the porridge of lentils, something not mentioned by Eisav?

Yaakov was a worthy successor to Avraham and Yitzchak, who were known for their universal *middah* of *chessed*. Did he suddenly become heartless and unfeeling to his hungry brother by mentioning the birthright specifically at this juncture?

Yaakov sat and learned Torah, which naturally perfects our character. It instructs us to make our actions resemble the *middot* of Hashem, Who has compassion on all of His creatures. Why did Yaakov take advantage of Eisav when he was down and out?

Hashem openly declares (*Shemot* 4:22) “My son, My firstborn, Yisrael” regardless of Eisav’s contention. Why then was it so important to Yaakov to acquire the birthright?

To answer these questions, let us take a look at the events preceding this sale which happened on that very day. Rashi tells us that Avraham died that morning. There was a large funeral, and everyone was in a state of mourning at the loss of this great man. The nations of the world expressed their feelings by saying, “Woe to the world which lost its leader, and woe to the ship which lost its captain” (*Bava Batra* 91a). The *Maharsha* explains that Avraham Avinu was a leader, as he led the way by showing people who the real Leader of the world is. He taught everyone that the world doesn’t run on its own accord.

When Eisav came in, Yaakov saw that he had not been mourning over his grandfather’s demise. He had been out hunting instead. Yaakov tried to impress upon Eisav some concepts of eternal values, in light of what had just occurred. He began to discuss with Eisav what it meant to be a firstborn. He explained how the service of Hashem in the Beit Hamikdash was done (originally) only by the firstborns. He hoped that these words of Torah would awaken some spark of responsibility in Eisav to fulfill his calling and help him to return to his roots.

Yaakov sought the good of his brother by impressing him with the importance of Torah, even before he provided for his physical sustenance. When Eisav expressed his hunger, Yaakov knew that his words “Look, I am going to die” were said more to make a scene than meant in a serious vein. This is why he was nonplussed by Eisav’s pretense of death.

Eisav on the other hand didn’t want to hear. He quickly said “Feed me,” in order to deflect his brother’s words and change the topic. This is why Yaakov began to feed Eisav with bread and water, in order to prolong the conversation about the birthright and its spiritual benefits. But Eisav had no patience, and asked for the porridge of lentils.

The Rebbe from Kotzk once explained that just as Yaakov had his followers, his Chassidim, so too Eisav had his. He learned at one point in yeshiva and knew enough to sound scholarly, even asking his father how one tithes salt. He was gifted and had great potential. Seeing how Eisav had begun to fall into spiritual deterioration, Yaakov tried to awaken his conscience and turn his heart to do teshuvah. Unfortunately, Eisav had already gone overboard, and so he “scorned the birthright.” In his chase after illusive pleasures, he chose a mess of porridge over his rightful portion of eternal life.

Yaakov was hinting to a deep message when he spoke about the importance of the birthright. He was alluding to keeping the Torah. The Hebrew word for birthright **בכורה**, contains a hint to its inner content. The first two letters **ב** and **כ** equal twenty-two, the same as the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, of which the Torah is comprised. The next three letters **ורה**, have the same numerical value (after adding one for the word itself) as the word **אורה** (light), symbolizing the radiant splendor of Torah. Thus the birthright corresponded to the brilliant manifestation of Torah. Yaakov truly wanted Eisav to merit its radiant splendor.

The Torah is called ראשית (a first or a beginning) and Am Yisrael is also referred to by that same descriptive title. One who attaches himself to Torah, becomes affiliated with his heritage; just as a firstborn is always associated with his inheritance. It is not just a duty, but also a worthy birthright and a welcome asset to serve Hashem and learn his Torah.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ There are a number of questions regarding Eisav's selling of the birthright. Couldn't Eisav feed himself? Why did Yaakov add bread and water to the menu? Why did Yaakov take advantage of Eisav's hunger by buying the birthright? Wasn't it the opposite of *chessed*? Was Yaakov in such desperate need of the birthright?
- ◆ It was on that day that Avraham Avinu died, and Yaakov saw that Eisav was hungry. He tried to influence him to do teshuvah by speaking words of Torah. He also gave bread and water to buy time and draw out their conversation. He wanted only good for his brother.
- ◆ Yaakov spoke about the birthright because the first two letters of the word בכורה are ב and כ, equaling twenty-two, the amount of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The next three letters ורה have the same numerical value as the word אורה (light), symbolizing the radiant splendor of Torah.



## Dividing Up Two Worlds

***“Yaakov said, ‘Sell, as this day, your birthright to me’”***

*(Bereishit 25:31)*

Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 111) say that at some point, Yaakov and Eisav divided between themselves two worlds. Yaakov took the next world as his portion, and Eisav satisfied himself with our fleeting, transient world.

Although we know that one can legally divide an estate, and in Talmudic law there is the classic case of dividing a tallit between two parties, how does one go about splitting up worlds? They are intangible entities, existential creations which defy a grip on their substance or a division of their being.

Another puzzling question is Yaakov’s concession of this world while he still lived here. Did he give up his right to exist? How did he acquire his portion of the next world while continuing to live in this world?

When did this division take place?

Let us take a look at a different ‘divvy’-ation to help answer these questions. At a later point in time, when Yaakov returned home from Charan and Yitzchak had already passed away, Yaakov was perturbed that Eisav would have a portion in the *Me’arat Hamachpela*, the burial plot of the Avot. Thinking how he could prevent his evil brother from claiming any ownership, he devised a plan. He brought with him his accumulated wealth, precious objects of gold and silver, and made one heaping pile. He then asked Eisav which he preferred, the plot in the *Me’arat Hamachpela*, or the pile.

Eisav naturally chose the large fortune over his ancestral inheritance, and agreed to relinquish his claim to the plot. This only testified to Eisav's desires and his infatuation over acquiring every bit of *Olam Hazeih* that he could. Yaakov on the other hand, knew how to anticipate the treasures of the next world and appreciate their true value. His understanding directed him on the path of reason. He chose the right fork in the road of life, giving up material goods in return for eternal acquisitions.

This concept also applies to the division of the two worlds between Yaakov and Eisav. Each chose what was important to him, relinquishing what one had to offer in face of the other. Eisav let Yaakov have his share in the next world, in order to increase his own portion in this world. According to one Midrash, their differences began already in their mother's womb, in their embryonic stage of development. Chazal say that although a baby is just beginning to form, its soul is cognizant and fully developed. Thus Yaakov and Eisav had chosen their lifestyles and goals already then.

This difference between them directly relates to the sale of the birthright. At first, Yaakov spoke to Eisav about the nature of the birthright and its eternal value, in order to give his brother the opportunity to rethink his way of life and repent. Even the oath that he asked Eisav to swear can be explained in this manner. Yaakov pressed Eisav to proclaim his stance on the birthright, while facing his allotted birthright. He used the vow as a means of awakening Eisav to the gravity of his situation, as most people fear to swear and would think twice before proceeding. Yet Eisav defiantly swore to Yaakov that he did not want any association with his birthright, and willingly denounced his destined duties. This was tantamount to disavowing his affiliation with Hashem and giving up any portion he had in the next world.

This episode removed any doubt as to Eisav's position, as well as any claim on Yaakov. Even though later on Eisav complained that "he outwitted me these two times" (*Bereishit* 27:36), Yitzchak's only response was that Yaakov deserved the *berachot*. Yitzchak reasoned that once Eisav was not interested in *Olam Haba*, he forfeited any right to the Heavenly blessings.

### Yitzchak's deliberations

This only leads to another question. Yaakov knew that Yitzchak loved Eisav, and certainly would not have divulged the sale, so as not to sadden his father by mentioning Eisav's defection. Yet Yitzchak had a high level of prophecy. He knew of Yosef's abduction, and cried over Yaakov's suffering, even though Yaakov was not aware that Yosef was still alive (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 84:21). In that case, Yitzchak should have known of the sale of the birthright. Why then did he want to give the *berachot* to Eisav?

I would point out that the words בכרה (birthright) and ברכה (blessing) contain the same letters, suggesting a correlation between the two. Even if Yitzchak knew of Eisav's spurning of the birthright, he hoped that the blessings would spur him to repent. He thought, if Eisav wouldn't have had the privileges of a firstborn, he could still be a fitting second to Yaakov. Not that Yaakov didn't deserve any *berachah*. Yitzchak thought that Yaakov deserved and already earned his own source of *berachah*, as his Torah learning provided him with its own special merit. It has the power to protect and save us from adversary (*Sotah* 21a). It was specifically Eisav who needed such help, as he lacked Torah. This is why Yitzchak wanted to bestow the *berachot* on Eisav.

Yitzchak told Eisav, (*Bereishit* 27:3) "Now sharpen, if you please, your gear – your sword and your bow – and go out to the field and hunt game for me." The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:13) explains

that these extra words teach us what Yitzchak was instructing Eisav to do. Yitzchak told him much more than which tools of the trade he should use. He was asking him to sharpen his blades and ritually slaughter the animals he would catch. He did not want Eisav to feed him a non-kosher meal.

Actually, if Yitzchak really was concerned that Eisav would prepare something non-kosher, why did he ask for food? Perhaps Eisav wouldn't have listened to his instructions, and wouldn't have sharpened the blades properly.

I suggest that Yitzchak was hinting to something deeper. He was urging Eisav to refine his character. *Middot* are often employed as tools to either shape or hurt others, by utilizing their 'sharp' edges. They have the potential to heal, by their timely and incisive remarks, and yet they also have the potential to maim and lacerate, even killing their speaker along with the victim. This is what Yitzchak wanted from Eisav, to use his 'tools of the trade' for the right things in life.

Yitzchak also asked Eisav to bring his quarry from *hefker* animals. Eisav's acquiescence not to seize an animal and drag it away from its owner, would have symbolized his willingness to accede to the laws of the Torah. This would then have been a merit for him to receive the *berachot*. Yitzchak understood that Eisav had already despised the birthright. He hoped though that it was not too late to still give him his *berachah*. As long as Eisav followed his instructions and subjugated his will to his father's, he could still have been found worthy.

Subjugation of will was part of Yaakov's repertoire of fine *middot*. The name **יעקב** comes from the word **עקב** (the heel), referring to Yaakov's lowliness and humility. This attribute is synonymous with receiving the Torah, which was given in an empty desert, symbolic

of its accessibility for all those who seek it (see *Yalkut Shimoni Shemot*, 284). One who learns Torah also knows how to humble himself and forgo the pleasures of this world. He sits and learns in the Beit Hamidrash while ignoring the siren call of hedonism.

This would also explain another vexing question. We know that Eisav had in his possession the garments that Adam Harishon received from Hashem. These were no ordinary garments. They displayed the image of every animal, and when he wore them, all the animals would approach with trepidation and bow down to him. These garments had been passed down to Noach, stolen by his son Cham, taken away by Nimrod, and in turn stolen by Eisav. Why, then, didn't Eisav use them in his hunt for food for Yitzchak?

The answer is that Yitzchak specifically asked Eisav not to. Had he used them to capture wild game with their supernatural properties, he would not have been working on his *middot*, which was the whole purpose of the hunt for food. Only by overcoming his inner rebelliousness and perfecting his animalistic nature, would Eisav have shown himself worthy of receiving the *berachot*.

Eisav, though, did not have a change of heart. His actions belittled the *berachot* just as he scorned the birthright. His hunt for food was marred by his evil mindset. Had he not found any game, he would have stolen from others just in order to get the *berachot* (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 65:13).

Rivka knew that stealing was Eisav's *modus operandi*. That is why she did not want Eisav to receive the *berachot*. Yitzchak, who showered his love on Eisav, did not want to know of such things. That is why Yitzchak did not see, even with Divine inspiration, where Eisav was really holding.

### Yaakov or Eisav

Later on, we find that Yaakov came to receive the *berachot*, saying “I am Eisav, your firstborn” while wearing these same garments. Didn’t Yitzchak specifically tell Eisav not to go hunting with them? Why then did Yitzchak ask him to come closer so he could ‘feel’ him out?

The way that Yitzchak could determine if Eisav overcame his animalistic nature was by using his sense of smell. Tzaddikim can sense *tumah* from one who acts immorally by the foul odor which exudes from their body. This is especially true of Yitzchak, who was blind. And so Yitzchak wanted to perceive Eisav up-close, and asked Yaakov to come closer.

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:22) say that when Yaakov Avinu came into the room to receive the *berachot*, the smell of Gan Eden wafted in with him. Yitzchak sensed this unusual smell, one which he did not expect to be emanating from Eisav or his clothing. And so he did not understand why this time around Eisav had this fragrant scent lingering over him, one which is usually reserved for tzaddikim. When Yaakov drew closer, and Yitzchak identified the smell, he proclaimed (*Bereishit* 27:22) “The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Eisav.” The “voice of Yaakov” refers to the Torah that he learned, which Yitzchak discerned by the smell of Gan Eden attached to him. The “hands of Eisav” refer to the outer garments worn by Yaakov, the special clothing which he took from Eisav. Yitzchak was baffled by the paradox.

The truth is that people are sometimes judged by their descendants. Eisav may not have been worthy in his own right, but perhaps Yitzchak sought to bless him in the merit of his progeny.

Yaakov was worried that Yitzchak would consider giving Eisav the *berachot*, as some of Eisav's descendants would one day become great tzaddikim. People like Shemayah and Avtaliyon, Onkelos, Nero, Rabbi Meir, and Rabbi Akiva are all familiar names, and their origins were not from Yaakov, as they or their ancestors were proselytes. And at the same time, there were some reshaim who descended from Yaakov. And so, Yaakov wanted to hint to his father that the *berachot* were not suitable for Eisav, despite any worthy progeny. This is why he showed up wearing his brother's garments. He was the one 'suited' to receive the *berachot*, because only he wanted the birthright and its service of Hashem.

Yitzchak's reaction was actually a prophetic response as to why Yaakov was deemed worthy. Hashem put the words "The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Eisav," into Yitzchak's mouth, to say that even if Yaakov's descendants (as symbolized by his hands) may eventually sin, they will always be Hashem's children. Even the evil-doers will eventually do teshuvah. This is alluded to by the words (ibid. 27:27) "He smelled the fragrance of his garments." The Hebrew word בגדיו (his clothing) closely resembles the word בוגדיו (his rebellious ones). The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit* 115) explains that even the rebellious ones amongst us recognize Hashem and are moved to do teshuvah. Certainly the righteous ones, the vast majority of Yaakov's descendants, were found worthy of receiving the *berachot*.

Eisav on the other hand, had a multitude of reshaim who claimed descent from him, none of whom ever did teshuvah. And even the righteous ones learned to do good deeds strictly from Yaakov's descendants. Thus it is no wonder why Yaakov was chosen over Eisav.

**In Summary**

- ◆ Eisav spurned the birthright by his desire to amass wealth and derive as much pleasure from this world as possible. He let Yaakov have his share in the next world in order to increase his portion in this world. He belittled the birthright and thus lost any claim to the *berachot*.
- ◆ Yitzchak wanted to give the *berachot* to Eisav despite the fact that he had already despised the birthright, in the hope that it would help him to do teshuvah. He did not think that Yaakov needed the *berachot*, as his Torah learning would protect and save him from harm.
- ◆ Yitzchak requested Eisav to go hunting and bring back food. He asked Eisav to refine his *middot*, by not stealing from others. This would have given him the merit to receive the *berachot*. Yitzchak also asked Eisav not to wear the special garments he had. As long as Eisav followed his instructions and subjugated his will to his father's, he could still have been found worthy. Once Eisav showed his disinterest in *Olam Haba*, he forfeited any right to the Heavenly blessings.
- ◆ Yaakov came to his father wearing the garments of Eisav, and the scent of Gan Eden wafted in with him. He wanted to hint to his father that the *berachot* were not suitable for Eisav, despite any worthy progeny. Even the rebellious ones amongst Am Yisrael recognize Hashem and are moved to do teshuvah.



## The Berachot of Yitzchak

*“Now sharpen, if you please, your gear – your sword and your bow – and go out to the field and hunt game for me. Then make me delicacies such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die”*

*(Bereishit 27:3-4)*

Yitzchak’s request from Eisav to bring him a meal requires our attention. What exactly did Yitzchak mean when he asked for the “delicacies such as I love”? Did Yitzchak, who was holy and far removed from materialistic pleasures, have a penchant for fine delicacies or savory dishes?

Another question arises from Yitzchak’s request that Eisav should take his tools of the trade and capture some game. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:13) say that Yitzchak was actually telling Eisav to sharpen his blades and ritually slaughter any animal he would catch. He did not want Eisav to feed him a non-kosher meal. If Yitzchak relied on Eisav, why did he ask him to bring only kosher food? And if Yitzchak really was concerned that Eisav would prepare something non-kosher, why did he ask for food? Perhaps Eisav wouldn’t have listened to his instructions.

I suggest that Yitzchak was aware that Eisav was lacking merits. Realizing that the *berachot* needed the Divine dispensation and Heavenly will in order to be effective, he provided Eisav with an opportunity to perform a mitzvah, and use the tools of his trade to feed his father. The more that Eisav would be involved in preparing a sumptuous meal for Yitzchak, the greater would be his merit. Thus

Yitzchak's intentions were altruistic, solely for the good of Eisav, and not because he had any desire to eat such delicacies. This is why Yitzchak asked Eisav to sharpen his blades and make a kosher meal. By adhering to the myriad of details and preparing Yitzchak's meal according to the highest standards of *kashrut*, Eisav would win the Divine favor he so desperately needed in order to receive the *berachot*.

We know that Eisav is also called Edom, signifying his red, almost bloody complexion. Some explain (see the *Da'at Zekanim*) that even at birth, the redness of his skin prevented Yitzchak from giving Eisav a *brit milah*. There was a chance that such an incision would have led to a large loss of blood, and endanger the baby's life. Thus Yitzchak knew that Eisav lacked the merit of *brit milah*, and searched for a different merit which would award him the Divine blessings.

This also has a message for us. One who wants the blessings of Heaven to shower him with their fortune, needs to make himself worthy. It is the mitzvot we do which make us worthy of receiving *berachah* and form a receptacle for it. This also includes paying attention to the details of each mitzvah, and not *chas v'shalom* belittling them in any way.

We are taught that every mitzvah creates an angel up Above, and the more we glorify a mitzvah, the greater its angel is. The opposite is also true. When we do mitzvot without thought or as second-rate, the angels we create are blemished and defective. After one hundred and twenty, when we will ascend on High, all of the angels that were created by our deeds appear before the Heavenly Court and testify on our behalf. Our reward will be contingent on the mitzvot we did, and will be apportioned according to the representation of meritorious angels and their degree of perfection. And so it pays to do mitzvot to the best of our ability.

Yitzchak was not worried that Eisav would actually feed him non-kosher food. He knew that Eisav desperately wanted the *berachot*, and was willing to go to any length to receive them by doing what Yitzchak asked for. Yitzchak had an even greater trust in Hashem though, and knew that Hashem would not allow Eisav to feed him an animal that was not slaughtered properly, as Hashem “watches over the steps of the righteous” (*Shmuel I*, 2:9).

We would be mistaken to think that Eisav lacked the potential to become righteous. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:16) say that Eisav excelled in one mitzvah, *kibbud av v'em*. He would serve his father in his finest clothing, the special garments which once belonged to Adam Harishon. The Midrash goes on to describe how one *Tanna* said that he didn't even reach the ankles of Eisav in how he did *kibbud av v'em*. Eisav had tremendous powers that could have been used in serving Hashem, had he not scorned the birthright and turned his back on Hashem.

“Hashem has made one parallel to the other” (*Kohelet* 7:14). Chazal explain that this pasuk refers to the creation of good and evil, as they are diametrical opposites. These conflicting forces exist inside every person as well. One who has stronger tendencies towards evil, has the ability to harness those same powers for good and turn them into sources of merit and assets of virtue. Yitzchak knew of the latent potential which coalesced in Eisav's being, and wanted to channel that energy to a meritorious venue, that of *kibbud av v'em*. This is what motivated Yitzchak to instruct Eisav to prepare a meal and ask him to keep it strictly kosher.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Yitzchak asked Eisav to prepare a sumptuous meal in order to receive the *berachot*. Did Yitzchak, who was holy and far removed from

materialistic pleasures, want to savor such delicacies? Yitzchak also requested Eisav to sharpen his blades and ritually slaughter the animals he would catch. If Yitzchak really was concerned that Eisav would prepare something non-kosher, why did he ask for food?

- ◆ Yitzchak wanted Eisav to have a merit to receive the *berachot*, and so he provided Eisav with the opportunity to perform a mitzvah and use the tools of his trade. By adhering to the myriad of details in preparing Yitzchak's meal, Eisav would win the Divine favor he so desperately needed in order to receive the *berachot*.
- ◆ Eisav is also called Edom, signifying his red, almost bloody complexion. Some explain that at birth, the redness of his skin prevented Yitzchak from giving Eisav a *brit milah*. Thus Yitzchak knew that Eisav lacked the merit of a *brit milah*, and searched for a different merit which would award him the Divine blessings.
- ◆ One who has stronger tendencies towards evil has the ability to harness those same powers for good and turn them into sources of merit. Yitzchak knew that Eisav had tremendous potential, especially in the realm of honoring his parents, and wanted to channel that energy to a meritorious venue.



## Taking the Berachot

*“Now Rivka was listening as Yitzchak spoke to Eisav his son; and Eisav went to the field to hunt game to bring. But Rivka had said to Yaakov her son, saying, ‘Behold I heard your father speaking to your brother Eisav saying...’”*

*(Bereishit 27:5-6)*

Eisav’s hunt for food became an appalling fiasco. According to Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:13) Eisav was determined to bring Yitzchak meat, at all costs. Although instructed by Yitzchak to prepare a meal only from *hefker*, Eisav went “to bring” back whatever he could find, literally ‘by hook or by crook,’ willing to steal if need be. In the end he prepared dog meat, as he couldn’t capture anything else (see *Targum Yonatan* on 27:31). This charade of obedience was only made worse by his utter foolishness, as it should have been quite clear that Yitzchak would have been aghast to be served non-kosher food.

This raises a question. Rivka Imeinu knew her son Eisav well. Realizing how far off he had gone, why was she so worried that Yaakov would miss out on the *berachot*? As soon as Eisav entered with his ‘delicacy,’ Yitzchak already saw the abyss of Gehinnom which lay open before him (*Bereishit Rabbah* 67:2). Had Eisav brought nothing at all, perhaps Yitzchak would have blessed him for trying, as well as for abstaining from theft. But as things stood, Eisav didn’t have any chance to receive a *berachah* from Yitzchak. And thus Rivka didn’t need to send Yaakov furtively in to Yitzchak to take the *berachot* away from Eisav.

I would like to suggest why Rivka speedily sent Yaakov in to receive the *berachot*. She had a precedent from Sarah Imeinu. When Sarah asked to send Yishmael away, fearing the bad influence he would have on Yitzchak, Hashem told Avraham Avinu to “heed her voice” (*Bereishit* 21:12). Rivka wanted to create a similar division, one that would set her two sons eternally apart. Every mother watches over her children and wants to shield them from malevolent people and sinister influences. Rivka understood that Yaakov could never dwell in the same environment with his evil brother Eisav, who could stoop so low, even bringing non-kosher food to his father. This is why Rivka told Yaakov to go in Eisav’s stead. She saw an opportunity to set the stage for their ultimate divergence and separation.

Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar*, 722) say that there is a *halachah* which states that Eisav hates Yaakov. When was this rule set into motion? At the insistence of Rivka, and by the action of Yaakov. When Yaakov took the *berachot* that Eisav wanted so desperately, he caused a backlash of anger and hatred which remains in force until today.

### **Yaakov’s acquiescence**

It was extremely difficult for Yaakov, a man of truth, to disguise himself as Eisav and involve himself in such a scheming plot. Why did he agree to bring the meal to Yitzchak and secretly take the *berachot*? Why did Rivka pull Yaakov out of his natural environment of learning? What was so pressing?

One reason is alluded to by Rivka’s answer, “Your curse be on me” (*Bereishit* 27:13). The simple explanation is that there was always the slim chance that Eisav would walk away with the *berachot*. Perhaps he would have repented from his evil ways and won Yitzchak’s favor. Thus Yaakov’s fear of losing the *berachot*, and

receiving a curse instead, was based on the existent possibility of Yitzchak's free choice as well as Eisav's free will in doing teshuvah. This is why Rivka promised Yaakov that he would not suffer, as she would bear the brunt of the curse.

On a deeper level though, Rivka was a bit forceful in her directive to Yaakov. Some commentators (see *Ba'alei HaTosafot*) explain that Rivka hinted to Yaakov how he would be worthy of receiving a curse for disobeying her. This put Yaakov in a bind, as he could be cursed either way. Should he desist, on the chance that his father would uncover his ruse, he would incur the wrath of his mother. This left him with no other alternative.

Perhaps we can explain in a different vein why Yaakov agreed to bring food to Yitzchak. The Torah forbids eating non-kosher food. The Rambam (*Shemonah Perakim* chapter 6, see *Yalkut Shimoni Vayikra*, 626) explains that we shouldn't desist from eating pork, or milk and meat together, simply because we don't like their taste. That would relegate these mitzvot to the realm of personal preference. Rather we should say that had the Torah not forbidden such foods, we would have indeed savored them. But being that the Torah forbids their taste, we obey the word of Hashem and abstain. Similarly, one who smells whiffs of non-kosher food cooking, can increase his reward by abstaining from even smelling their cuisine. By distancing himself from consuming non-kosher food and partaking of their culinary art, he will merit a spiritual repast in the World to Come.

Rivka had prophetic knowledge that Eisav would bring Yitzchak non-kosher food. She also knew that Yitzchak wanted to give the *berachot* with his complete heart, and had purposely starved himself, in order to build up an appetite and reciprocate Eisav with the *berachot*. Foreseeing the distress that Yitzchak would have at

smelling Eisav's 'gourmet' meal, Rivka acted quickly. This is why she sent Yaakov in to Yitzchak.

Yaakov was an accomplice to Rivka's plan. He too wanted to avert any suffering from his righteous father. Thus his absence from the study hall of the Beit Hamidrash was really in order to save another Jew from distress. His food was flavored with the 'spice' of Torah. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:22) also point out that the scent of Gan Eden wafted in with Yaakov's entrance.

The results of this subterfuge are well known. Rivka, with her sage advice, was able to prevent Yitzchak from smelling non-kosher food on an empty stomach. Already full from Yaakov's meal, the stench that came from Eisav's 'gourmet' meal did not affect him adversely.

Yaakov went to Charan, with Yitzchak's full blessing. His father's command to find a wife, one who would be as righteous as his mother Rivka, only reinforced the *berachot* that Yaakov received furtively. Yitzchak was now aware of the ruse, and yet blessed him again. Henceforth, no one could claim that Yaakov had taken the *berachot* against Yitzchak's will.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Eisav went "to bring" whatever meat he could find, willing to steal if need be, and in the end he prepared dog meat. Eisav didn't have any chance to receive a *berachah* from Yitzchak. Why then did Rivka find it so necessary to send Yaakov furtively in to receive the *berachot*?
- ◆ Rivka wanted to create a division that would set her two sons eternally apart. Rivka understood that Yaakov could never dwell in the same environment with his evil brother, and saw an opportunity to set the stage for their ultimate separation.
- ◆ There was always the slim chance that Eisav would walk away with

the *berachot*. Perhaps he would have repented from his evil ways and won Yitzchak's favor.

- ◆ Foreseeing the distress that Yitzchak would have had at smelling Eisav's 'gourmet' meal, Rivka sent Yaakov in to avert suffering from his righteous father. His absence from the study hall of the Beit Hamidrash was really in order to save Yitzchak from distress.
- ◆ Yaakov went to Charan with Yitzchak's blessing. His father's command to find a wife only reinforced the *berachot* that Yaakov furtively received.



## Special Garments

***“Rivka then took her older son Eisav’s clean garments which were with her in the house, and clothed Yaakov her young son”***

*(Bereishit 27:15)*

Eisav's garments, which Rivka gave Yaakov to wear, once belonged to Adam Harishon (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 111). These garments had been passed down through the generations, and were no ordinary garments. They had the image of every animal displayed on them. When Eisav wore them, all the animals would approach with trepidation and bow down to him. And yet, despite having such a G-d given regalia with supernatural powers, Eisav remained Eisav Harasha, evil and wicked to the core of his being. He wore them simply to subjugate the animal world to his base desires.

When Yaakov wore these garments though, an unusual scent emanated forth. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:22) say that when

Yaakov Avinu came into the room to receive the *berachot*, the smell of Gan Eden wafted in with him. This smell came from the garments, as they had originated in Gan Eden. Because Yaakov lived on a higher level and strove to rise above his corporeality, these clothes were able to exude their fine fragrance, just as they did for their original owner.

Chazal (*Yoma* 38b) say, “In the way man wants to go, Heaven leads.” This teaches us how each person’s destiny is really in his own hands. And this principle is strikingly apparent from these coveted garments, as they responded to the one who wore them. Upon Yaakov they exuded their fine fragrance, whereas by Eisav they did not. Eisav used them to subjugate the animal world to do his will. This only displayed his base character, and that is why no fine scent lingered about when he wore these garments.

This contrast between Yaakov and Eisav is also expressed in the pasuk’s description of their youth. Eisav was known as, “One who knows hunting, a man of the field” (*Bereishit* 25:27). He was at ‘home’ in the wild, indulging in the corporeal pleasures of life. This is one explanation of the dual usage of the word *שׂוֹרֵץ* in the pasuk. He had the twofold potential to become great; he was capable in his own right, and an illustrious descendant of the righteous Avot. His defection was thus a double-edged blow to Yitzchak.

Yaakov on the other hand, was “a wholesome man, abiding in tents” (*ibid.*). Because Yaakov dwelled in the tents of Torah, the garments of Adam Harishon permeated his surroundings with their scent of Gan Eden. Yaakov lived in complete consonance with truth, as both his physical body and spiritual soul were in harmony with his purpose in life.

This can also shed some light on those who choose to dwell in the tents of Torah. As a repository of the *Shechinah*, these

magnificent structures and institutions can invest their occupants with the beautiful fragrance of learning and good deeds. Unfortunately, some can enter their portals and remain fixed in their physical state of existence, stagnant in their spiritual level. Similarly, the Land of Israel can influence us to stay our materialism and hold it at bay. It can raise our spiritual levels of devotion. It is the land “that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the year’s end.” (*Devarim* 11:12). There are those, however, who do not take advantage of its properties, and sink into the muddy morass of stark physicality and degenerate behavior.

Chazal (*Eiruv* 19a) say that the opening to Gehinnom is in Eretz Yisrael. “Hashem has made one parallel to the other” (*Kohelet* 7:14). The Land which has the potential to raise us up also contains elements of the underworld which attempt to drag us down. It all depends on each individual and their choices in life.

Another aspect of Yaakov Avinu’s greatness was his humility. The name עקב (the heel), referring to his lowliness and humility. Despite being distinguished (שׂא), Yaakov humbled himself (עקב) before Hashem and lowered himself before others. Eisav though made himself into a ‘twofold’ שׂא, dominating others while defying Hashem. This is why Hashem says (*Malachim* 1:2-3) “I loved you, says Hashem...But I hated Eisav.” This signifies another area of difference between these two brothers. The conceitedness of Eisav sprouted Divine scorn, whereas the humility of Yaakov won him Divine favor.

Hashem gives each and every person his strengths and capabilities, and expects all to acknowledge His sovereignty and accede to His rule. It is only through finding favor in Hashem’s eyes that man can climb up the ladder of success.

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**In Summary**

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- ◆ Both Eisav and Yaakov wore the special garments which once belonged to Adam Harishon. Eisav wore them to subjugate the animal world to his base desires. When Yaakov put them on, an unusual scent emanated forth. Because Yaakov strove to rise above his corporeality, these clothes were able to exude their fine fragrance with their scent of Gan Eden, just as they did for their original owner.
- ◆ Every person's destiny is really in his own hands. Some can enter the portals of Torah, or of Eretz Yisrael, and raise their levels of devotion. Others can be spiritually stagnant and sink into the muddy morass of stark physicality. It all depends on each individual and their choices in life.



## The Power of Clothing

*“So he drew close and kissed him; he smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him; he said, ‘See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem had blessed’”*

*(Bereishit 27:27)*

Rashi explains that the “fragrance of a field which Hashem had blessed” refers to the scent of Gan Eden which wafted in with Yaakov. What is the significance of this smell, and why was it attached to these garments? If we take a penetrating look at the etymological ‘makeup’ of clothing, with *Siyata di’Shemaya*, we will arrive at a deeper understanding of what clothing are all about.

The word בגד has the numerical value of ten (after adding one for the word itself). This represents the ten *sefirot* of *kedushah*. Hashem created and contained the forces of *kedushah* within ten *sefirot* of light. The ten *sefirot* of *kedushah* emanate spiritual light from their source and origin, the *Ohr Ein Sof* of the Creator. Thus our clothing analogically suggests the light of *kedushah* which draws its source from Hashem.

The forces of *kedushah* are opposed by the forces of *tumah*. The sefer *Chessed l'Avraham* explains that the *sefirot* of *kedushah* envelope one who performs a mitzvah with an aura of spiritual light, and connects him to Hashem. This gives him the power to ward off the forces of *tumah*. The *sefirot* surround the doer of mitzvot with their circular aura of light, enveloping him just as garments clothe us within the fabric of matter.

The number ten alludes to another fundamental basic of Judaism, the Ten Commandments, which are a synopsis of all the laws of the Torah. Thus Yaakov's fragrant clothing inwardly reflected the light of *kedushah* which permeated his being, and displayed his devotion to Torah, and is why his clothing was able to spread and diffuse such a fine fragrance.

Clothing also protects us from the element of cold, warming their wearer with their woven textile. Similarly, Torah warms the learner with its tapestried words of wisdom.

The element of cold also alludes to the *Yetzer Hara* and its chilling influence over our service of Hashem. This is hinted at by the Torah's description of Amalek who (*Devarim* 25:18) "happened upon you on the way." The word for happen (קרר) has the same root as the word for cold (קור). Amalek attacked Am Yisrael and cooled off their devotion of Hashem. The *Yetzer Hara* also attacks us with his enticements and seeks to put a damper on our spiritual activity. By

wearing the ‘clothing’ of Torah, we can protect ourselves from spiritual frigidity and warm our souls by its perpetual source of heat.

Yaakov Avinu personified these qualities. He dwelled in the tents of Torah and vigorously advanced his service of Hashem. The Torah describes his character as תם (complete), hinting at his constant exertion to further his learning. The word תם, when read backwards, spells מת (death). Yaakov’s learning was so absolute that he wearied himself almost to death, by denying and renouncing all other needs and activities while in the Beit Hamidrash.

Yitzchak proclaimed in surprise (*Bereishit* 27:22) “The voice is the voice of Yaakov.” When the sound of Torah, the voice of Yaakov, resonates within the study halls, the hands of Eisav have no influence over the Jewish nation (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 65:20). Eisav (as symbolized by his descendant Amalek) tries to cool off Yaakov and his children from serving Hashem, but the fire of Torah singes his hands and removes his grip.

The word בגדו has the same numerical value as the Name of Hashem, יהי. These letters of Hashem’s Name contain a reference to the creation of this world, as well as the next. The pasuk says (*Yeshayahu* 26:4) כי ביה יהי צור עולמים (which can be literally translated “For Hashem created the worlds with His Name יהי”). The Gemara (*Menachot* 29b) explains that this refers to the creation of two distinct worlds, symbolized by these two letters. The letter י in His Name was used to create the World to Come, while the letter ה was used to create our present world.

At present they are distant from each other, worlds apart. Our job is to bridge the gap that separates them, and to unite the Name of Hashem that they represent. We accomplish this by living and experiencing the pleasure of learning Torah, a spiritual form of

pleasure, while living in this world. This is alluded to by Yitzchak smelling the scent of Yaakov's clothing (as the sense of smell is a higher form of pleasure, greatly detached from our base physical pleasures).

When Adam Harishon sinned, he was stripped from the mitzvah given him and sent out of the Garden of Eden. What kept him going was the connection he still had with Hashem, the clothing He gave him (which symbolizes Torah and the ten *sefirot* as mentioned previously). Hashem also made a belt to gird Adam (see Zohar, *Chelek* I 32b). This division between the upper torso and the lower part of a person's body signifies the ability to separate our active involvement in this world from its baser, coarser aspects. Man can elevate himself by choosing right from wrong and adhering to the Torah's way of life, or he can sink into the sordid quagmire of degenerate behavior by acting indiscriminately, never differentiating between virtue or vice.

Before the primeval sin, when the world was still pure, man was cognizant of the vast difference between good and bad. His choice between the two was relatively nonexistent; he existed on a level where good far outweighed evil. Virtuous and appropriate behavior was the normal and instinctive way of life. This is apparent from how the Torah describes their life, how they walked about unclothed and yet were unabashed. They had no reason to be embarrassed, as no sin had ever defiled them or that which was created as a holy and pure deed. After they sinned though, a dark cloud of obscurity settled over the earth and muddied their perception. They could no longer clearly differentiate between good and evil. Once man's purity was defiled, he needed clothing to make that differentiation and re-establish his connection with Hashem. Our job in life is to distinguish and choose good, as it says (*Tehillim* 34:15) "Desist from evil and do good." Clothing is the time-honored

means of achieving this goal, just as it was in the days of Adam Harishon.

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 11:2) say that Hashem did not send Adam Harishon away from Gan Eden until after that first Shabbat. Thus he wore his G-d given clothing while still in the Gan. This is the where the smell of Gan Eden in Yaakov's garments originated. Centuries later, Yitzchak could still discern this scent which lingered over them. It fragrantly insinuated the connection between man and Hashem, between Yaakov and his Creator. This wisp of Gan Eden delighted Yitzchak and inspired him to prophecy.

When Eisav wore this same article of clothing though, he stank from sordid activities. His body odor reeked from sin, and overpowered any scent from the coveted garments of Adam Harishon. Yaakov on the other hand, spent years purifying himself. He thus merited that the clothing of Adam Harishon should cast their influence over him, infusing him with the air and aura of Gan Eden.

### **The dust of angels**

Perhaps we can also explain the fight that Yaakov had with the *Sar* of Eisav. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 32:25) says, "And a man wrestled with him." Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 77:3) say that this was actually a Heavenly angel, who descended to earth and took on human form, in order to throw Yaakov down to the dirt. The Hebrew word for this struggle is **ויאבק**, and is related to the word **אבק** (dust). This is part of the *Yetzer Hara's* tactics. He struggles with us and tries to dirty us with his sooty, immoral behavior. He 'dusts' our clothing with the fallout of evil misdeeds and tries to remove their fine 'scent' through his obscenities. This is all based on the struggle of Yaakov, on the Angel's attempt to permeate Yaakov's air with the stench of evil and sever his connection to Torah.

This can be compared to a sting or bite which starts off as a small perforation of the skin, but if left unchecked, can turn into a raging infection or a painful wound. Such inflammations can even cause the amputation of an entire limb. Similarly, the *Yetzer Hara* tries to find some way to penetrate our defenses and seep through our filters. If we don't shake off our clothing from his 'dust,' his influence over us can weaken our Avodat Hashem and spread his poison throughout our being.

This is why Yaakov tussled with the Angel of Eisav. He fought with superhuman strength, and according to the Midrash, dust arose from their struggle and reached the Heavenly Throne. This symbolizes Yaakov's desire not to let the Satan have any influence over his hard earned achievements or gain any grip on him. When one fights with all of his strength against the *Yetzer Hara*, Hashem comes to his help. This is what happened with Yaakov, as Hashem sent the sun to heal him from the aftereffects of his fight.

We find a similar word in the Mishnah of Pirkei Avot (1:4). There it states that one should be *מתאבק* by the feet of saintly scholars, to sit at their feet and drink in their words of wisdom. The allegory is that just like dust sits on an object and is visible to all, so too the words of the wise should color our actions and make their mark on our behavior.

This is an important lesson for us. Our job is twofold; to remove the dust of the *Yetzer Hara* and not allow it to darken our deeds. At the same time, we should 'dust' ourselves by sitting at the feet of the tzaddikim and absorbing their teachings. At first, one may find it difficult to do as they do, but with persistence, their words will become more natural to us. However if we fail, and allow the *Yetzer Hara* to infiltrate our blockade, we can lose all connection to Hashem and our portion in the World to Come. This is what we learn

from Eisav, whose special garments could do nothing to prevent him from sinking into the abyss of spiritual deterioration.

When one serves Hashem with all his heart, his Divine soul assists him on the road to purification, and ultimately helps him to enter Gan Eden. There he will be ‘clothed’ by the spiritual garments that were created by his mitzvot and be rewarded for his good deeds.

Another aspect of our job in life is to connect our world with the next one, through our actions. The Gaon of Vilna explains how this ties into Yaakov’s struggle with the Heavenly Angel. The Angel is described by the word *שׂר*, containing but the letter *ש* from Hashem’s Name (as his whole existence is based in the Upper regions). Yaakov, on the other hand, was able to access both letters of Hashem’s Name, as he unified the two worlds, bridging Heaven and Earth through his righteous deeds. This demonstrated his superiority, and is what helped Yaakov to be victorious over his adversary.

An angel is described as standing in one place, static and unchanging in his service of Hashem. Man, on the other hand, is mobile and in constant motion. This indicates his ability to rise in his service of Hashem. Even after one’s death, the soul can still ascend to higher levels. It can deepen its understanding of Torah in the World Above, as Chazal (*Berachot* 64a) say “Tzaddikim have no rest, not in this world, nor in the next.” Hashem created us with the ability to climb on the never-ending upward spiral of perfection. We just need to start our ascent.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Yitzchak smelled the scent of Gan Eden when Yaakov entered while wearing Eisav’s special garments. The Hebrew word *בגד* has the numerical value of ten. This signifies Yaakov’s connection to the ten

*sefirot*, as well as the Ten Commandments. Our clothing analogically suggests the light of *kedushah* which draws its source from Hashem. The ten *sefirot* give man the ability to connect to Hashem.

- ◆ Clothing also symbolizes Torah, as it warms a person and protects him from the elements. The element of cold alludes to the *Yetzer Hara* and its chilling influence over our service of Hashem. The *Yetzer Hara* attacks us with his enticements and seeks to put a damper on our spiritual activity.
- ◆ The word בגדו has the same numerical value as the Name of Hashem, ה-י. The letter י in His Name was used to create the World to Come, while the letter ה was used to create our present world. Our job is to bridge the gap that separates them, and to unite the Name of Hashem that they represent. We accomplish this by experiencing the spiritual pleasure of learning Torah.
- ◆ The garments of Adam Harishon connected him to Hashem after he was sent out of Gan Eden. These were the garments that Yaakov wore, which still had the scent of Gan Eden lingering about, as Adam wore them before he was sent away. It fragrantly insinuated the connection Yaakov had with his Creator.
- ◆ The belt Adam wore symbolizes the job of man to differentiate between good and evil, just as a belt separates the upper torso from the lower part of the body. Once man sinned and created the obscurity which clouds our perceptions between good and evil, it became necessary to wear clothing.
- ◆ The Angel of Eisav tried to create a cloud of dust to sully Yaakov's clothing and sever his connection to Torah. The power of the *Yetzer Hara* is like a sting, which can create a painful wound or lead to amputation, all from a small perforation of the skin. Yaakov struggled in order that the Angel should not get a grip on him or lessen his Divine service.
- ◆ Conversely, we are enjoined to sit by the feet of Torah scholars and listen to their words. The Mishnah calls this to be מתאבק by the dust

of their feet. The analogy is that dust collects on one's clothing and is apparent to all. So too, our learning should make its mark on our behavior.

- ◆ Yaakov wrestled with Angel of Eisav, whose name contains the letter ׀. Yaakov's ability to unify the next world with ours, representing the two letters of Hashem's Name, helped him to be victorious.



### Yaakov's Kibbud Av V'em

*“So Yitzchak summoned Yaakov and blessed him; he instructed him, and said to him, ‘Do not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Betuel your mother’s father, and take a wife from there from the daughters of Lavan your mother’s brother’”*

*(Bereishit 28:1-2)*

The Torah commands us to honor our parents, and yet at the same time to keep Shabbat (see *Vayikra* 19:3). Chazal (*Yevamot* 5b) learn from here that the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em* is superseded by Shabbat, as well as other mitzvot. Children are forbidden to listen to parents who ask them to desecrate Shabbat.

In this parashah, Yaakov is commanded by his parents to go to Charan and find a wife. And yet Yaakov tarried on the road, making a fourteen-year stopover in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. What urged Yaakov to delay his parents' command?

Our answer will provide us with an insight in how we should evaluate and counterbalance mitzvot. Yaakov knew what travails awaited him in the house of Lavan. Without the right preparation, Yaakov would have lost more by going there than he would have gained. He needed the vigor of a fourteen-year stretch of learning before he could live with Lavan's conniving and insidious personality. Hashem agreed with his plan of action, as it says (*Bereishit* 28:13), "And behold, Hashem was standing over him." Hashem revealed Himself in a dream, and promised Yaakov to protect him from danger or any harmful influence.

One may ask: If Yaakov indeed fulfilled the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em*, why did he not merit seeing his mother before she died?

The pasuk (*Vayikra* 7:37) says, "This is the law of the *olah*." The Gemara (*Menachot* 110a) learns from here that at present, in the absence of the Beit Hamikdash, one who learns the laws of the sacrifices is considered as if he brought those offerings up on the Mizbeach. The study of its laws pushes these sacrifices into the forefront of our consciousness, and sets the stage for their implementation. Our inability to actually bring *korbanot* is thus not due to our negligence, and we are held unaccountable for their absence.

There are many mitzvot which are undoable, beyond the reach of most. One who is happily married will never be able to keep the laws and perform the mitzvah of giving a *get*. Similarly, there are many mitzvot which can only be done under certain circumstances. The dictum (*Shavuot* 39a) "All of Yisrael are responsible for each other" applies in such situations. The one who does such a mitzvah properly, creates a merit that equally distributes its payload of eternal accreditation upon all of Am Yisrael.

This could help explain Yaakov's declaration to Eisav "I dwelled with Lavan and kept all 613 mitzvot" (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 32:5).

How could Yaakov make such a statement after living in *Chutz La'aretz*, bereft of many mitzvot related to the Land of Israel? It would seem that Yaakov spent time learning the laws of the Land, and thus was accredited with their implementation.

Perhaps one may ask, how did Yaakov keep the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em* when living so far from home? Actually, both of his parents had commanded him to go to Lavan, but only his mother had mentioned (*Bereishit* 27:44) “and remain with him a short while,” to await her call to return home. She had looked forward to the prospect that Eisav would do teshuvah and no longer pose a threat. In truth though, Yaakov’s learning and desire to perform the mitzvot and keep the laws of *kibbud av v'em* was enough of a merit to accredit him as if he had done what he could not do in practice.

One reason that Yaakov stayed so long at Lavan’s house was to wait for the birth of Yosef. Yaakov saw with Divine inspiration that he needed the force of purity which Yosef signified, to counteract the impurity of his brother Eisav and meet him head on. This is expressed by the *Navi* (*Ovadiyah* 1:18), “The house of Yosef a flame and the house of Eisav for straw.”

According to this explanation, Yaakov was not faulted for any lack of *kibbud av v'em* by tarrying in the house of Lavan. We do however find that he tarried in keeping his promise to build a Mizbeach on his return home. After his dream he had vowed that if Hashem would watch over him, he would build a Mizbeach and show his thanks by offering sacrifices. However, before he did so, he bought a plot of land, built a sukkah, and dwelt near Shechem (see *Bereishit* 33:17-19). This is why Yaakov was not able to see his mother before she passed away, as a retribution for his unhurried fulfillment of his vow.

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**In Summary**


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- ◆ Both Yitzchak and Rivka commanded Yaakov to go to Charan and find a wife. Why did Yaakov stop and learn in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever and delay his parents' command?
- ◆ Yaakov knew what travails awaited him in the house of Lavan and prepared himself accordingly. He needed the vigor of a fourteen-year stretch of learning before he could live with Lavan's conniving and insidious personality.
- ◆ Did Yaakov keep the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em* when living so far from home? Yaakov's learning and desire to perform the mitzvot and keep the laws of *kibbud av v'em* was enough of a merit to accredit him as if he had done what he could not do in practice.
- ◆ Yaakov tarried in keeping his promise to build a Mizbeach on his return home, and thus was not able to see his mother before she passed away, as a retribution for his unhurried fulfillment of his vow.



## Good Middot Are Everything

*“So Yitzchak summoned Yaakov and blessed him; he instructed him, and said to him, ‘Do not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Betuel your mother’s father, and take a wife from there from the daughters of Lavan your mother’s brother’”*

*(Bereishit 28:1-2)*

Why did Yitzchak command Yaakov not to marry a girl from Canaan? And why did Eisav marry the daughter of Yishmael, after

he heard what Yitzchak told Yaakov? Did he think it would help to add her to his wives?

Our answer is based on our explanation of the pasuk (*Bereishit* 24:1) “and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything (בכל).” Rashi writes that the word בכל has the same numerical value as the word בן, alluding to his true *berachah* – his son Yitzchak. This actually raises a question. Why did the Torah not say outright that Hashem blessed Avraham with a son? Why the ambiguity?

I believe that the Torah wants us to know just what type of son Yitzchak was. An integral part of the *berachah* that Avraham received was that Yitzchak should be like him in spirit and in deed. And so, the blessing of Avraham was to have a son who was בכל, full of all the good qualities and exemplary *middot* that personified Avraham Avinu. The word בכל also has twice the numerical value of the Four-Letter Name of Hashem, the name which represents the *Middat Harachamim*. This suggests that Avraham was blessed with a son whose personality radiated compassion and *chessed*. It is not enough for a Jew to learn Torah or to be detailed in his performance of the mitzvot. What carries us through to perfection are our *middot*.

This is hinted at by the literal translation of the words (*Tehillim* 89:3) עולם חסד יבנה, “A world is built on *chessed*.” It is this *middah* of *chessed* which keeps our world on its course and gives us the propelling force to grow. How we deal and treat our wives or others who surround us is just as important in our spiritual growth. Our world, the microcosmic universe of each individual, is built on the *middah* of *chessed*. This includes acting towards others with kindness and in a gentle manner, and not being strict or demanding of them.

When Avraham Avinu sent Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak, he was concerned about this very point. The inhabitants of Charan did

not have the despicable *middot* of their counterparts in Canaan. He sent Eliezer to Charan, as Avraham's family was known to excel in good *middot*. This is what Avraham wanted for his son, and is why he made Eliezer swear to go only to Charan. This is also why the pasuk stresses that Hashem blessed Avraham with a son who was **בכל**, specifically at the juncture of finding a wife for Yitzchak. Yitzchak's excellence of *middot* was a source of satisfaction for Avraham, and at the same time the overriding ingredient for his future wife.

Yitzchak was thus walking in the way of his father when he told Yaakov not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. He was teaching him the most important ingredient is in one's future spouse; good *middot*. It is the advice that any successful married individual would share with others. Yitzchak saw firsthand, from his righteous wife Rivka, how important it is.

Eisav, though, did not fully appreciate Yitzchak's words. He didn't delve into the 'why yes' or try to understand the reason 'why not.' This is why he came to the wrong conclusion. He figured that Yitzchak wanted Yaakov to marry 'family,' and so he approached his uncle Yishmael for the hand of his daughter in marriage. He did not realize how much Yitzchak valued *middot*, or how 'family' only reassures the good background of the child, but does not replace any loss of virtue or fill any void of character.

Eisav only succeeded in accomplishing the opposite of what his father truly wanted. He married the daughter of Yishmael, one who left Avraham in order to live his own way of life, and married women that were far from exemplifying fine *middot*. His daughter was thus not such a great catch. This was really a perversion of what Yitzchak wanted, and only added iniquity to the general subversion of his parent's wishes. Rashi learns this from the extra words (*Bereishit* 28:9), "So Eisav went to Yishmael and took Machlat, the daughter of

Yishmael son of Avraham, sister of Neviot, in addition to his wives (על נשיו), as a wife for himself.” By not divorcing his other wives, Eisav in effect rejected his father’s innermost desires. He sufficed himself with a façade of ‘family’ and a genteel appearance, and used this marriage to mask his evil character and deceive his father.

This can also explain the difference between Yaakov and Eisav. Both went to the same yeshiva and had the same syllabus. Yitzchak taught them both Torah, but they came out decidedly different. The study and inculcation of fine *middot* is really a personal struggle. It needs to be learned independently, with hands-on lessons in self-growth and character development. Yaakov worked hard to overcome his *Yetzer Hara* and perfect his *middot*. This is why he reached a high plateau, and sought a mate who would mirror his quest for perfection of character and *yirat Shamayim*. Eisav, on the other hand, wasted his time with frivolous activities. Because he did not seek to better himself or work on his *middot*, his Torah learning went down the drain. He interpreted his father’s words to fit his lifestyle, and added another wicked lady to his harem of Canaanite women.

We know that Eisav went to great lengths to observe the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em* (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 65:16). When he heard Yitzchak instructing Yaakov to take a wife from his family, Eisav wanted to do the same. Perhaps his motivations were commendable; his actions, however, were reprehensible. His father intended this search to benefit his son with a righteous mate, yet Eisav misconstrued Yitzchak’s deliberate command to mean any family member. He was so distant from Torah and tainted with bad *middot* that he convinced himself that all Yitzchak was interested in was ‘family’ and nothing more. What could have been a source of great satisfaction, quickly gave rise to displeasure and vexation.

From here we learn how much one needs to associate himself with Torah ideals and affiliate himself with its guiding principles, before he can truly understand Hashem's *ratzon*. Unfortunately, we find many people who do objectionable, even deplorable deeds and claim to act in good faith, asserting their *da'at* Torah and professing altruism. We have to be very wary about such people who pervert true *da'at* Torah and defame it. Another reason why Eisav did not take a wife from Charan as Yaakov did is because he feared their righteous influence. It is well known that a good sounding board is a stepping stone to perfection of character. Many great tzaddikim would appoint someone to sound them out and reprimand them. Eisav understood that this was part of Yitzchak's instructions to Yaakov, and did not want a wife who would hinder him or influence him to change his ways. A G-d fearing wife would only spell trouble for him, as she would constantly harp on his 'undertakings' and question his comings and goings.

In parashat *Vayetzei*, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 29:15-18) says, "And Lavan said to Yaakov... tell me, what would your wages be...? He replied, 'I will work seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.'" Why didn't Yaakov ask for both Rachel and Leah from the start? Knowing that Eisav had no intention of looking for a wife in Charan, especially such virtuous ones as Rachel and Leah, Yaakov could have requested to marry both. This would have saved himself, and Leah, much heartache. As it was, Leah cried for seven years, overly distressed by Eisav's possible incursion into her life. The Torah (*Bereishit* 29:17) describes that "the eyes of Leah were tender," as she cried often (see Rashi *ibid.*). Had Yaakov asked to marry Leah, Lavan would have agreed. He saw the blessing that materialized with Yaakov's hard work, and would have acquiesced.

The answer is that Yaakov did not want to close the door to Eisav's return. He thought that perhaps Eisav would do teshuvah

one day, and fulfill Yitzchak's desire to marry his 'family' in Charan. That is why Yaakov chose to marry Rachel. His concerns for his wayward brother led him to refrain from marrying Leah, leaving her free to marry Eisav. Eisav never came though. He couldn't bring himself to seize the opportunity and improve himself by taking a righteous helpmate, preferring to marry the daughter of Yishmael instead.

The story is told about the Rav from Ponevezh zt"l, who once told Maran Harav Shach zt"l about his desire to open a new yeshiva. In this new yeshiva, only bachurim with the sharpest minds and quickest wit would be allowed entry, giving them an unprecedented opportunity to advance their learning. Harav Shach though opposed the idea. He explained: We have a tradition that future *gedolim* are not limited by the registers of the most astute bachurim. Even a bachur who seems to lack the necessary faculties and genius of mind is not denied the possibility of developing into a *gadol*. Similarly, there is no guarantee that a promising genius will use his potential and become a *gadol* in Torah. With this, Harav Shach set forth his guiding principle on the criteria of admissions in a yeshiva. Said Harav Shach, a yeshiva should be open to any bachur who sincerely wishes to grow in learning and character, without focusing on his aptitude or level of endowment. What really matters is their fine character and their desire to toil in Torah.

Harav Aharon Kotler zt"l mentions this same idea. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (4:11) says, "Whoever keeps the Torah in poverty will merit to keep it in prosperity." The simple explanation is that, with the help of Hashem, he will eventually be able to learn without the worries of making a living. Rav Aharon, though, explains the Mishnah as follows. One who is poor in mental acumen and slow in understanding, and yet still toils in Torah, will eventually grow rich in wisdom and become a *gadol*. There are no limitations given for

the one who wants to grow. On the contrary, the Gemara (*Nedarim* 81a) says that “from the poor will bud forth Torah.” This refers to those who lack material acquisitions, and those who are impoverished spiritually as well.

This could answer another question that I had. Why did Yitzchak want to give the *berachot* to such a rasha like Eisav? Perhaps he thought that Yaakov did not need the *berachot* as he was busy learning Torah, which is the source of all *berachah*. But why Eisav? According to what we have just said, we have our answer. Yitzchak knew that Eisav was on a downward spiritual spiral, and hoped that giving him the *berachot* would be the solution. He wanted to draw him close and bring him to repentance. Eisav had one mitzvah that he kept diligently, that of *kibbud av v'em*. By actualizing this mitzvah and performing a Torah precept as a pauper in spiritual assets, Yitzchak hoped that he would grow ‘rich’ by keeping the rest of the mitzvot, achieving spiritual wealth just as the Mishnah says. This same thought went through Yaakov’s mind when he sought to marry Rachel and leave Leah for Eisav. In spite of this, Eisav did not change, and remained his evil self.

Once someone asked me the following question. Chazal (*Yevamot* 76a) say that Yaakov’s intent, when he said about Reuven (*Bereishit* 49:3) “You are my strength and my initial vigor,” was that he was born from his first emission of seed. Although Yaakov only married at the age of eighty-four, Chazal say that he never experienced a nocturnal emission. And yet we know that Leah was barren, as it says (*ibid.* 29:31), “Hashem saw that Leah was unloved, and so He opened her womb.” This would imply that Yaakov endeavored to have children from Leah and did not merit instantaneous results. How then can we say that Reuven was his first seed?

I suggest that this pasuk is really referring to Leah’s feelings during the seven years that Yaakov worked for Rachel. Leah felt

spurned. She knew that Yaakov had bought the birthright from Eisav, and nevertheless preferred Rachel over her, despite her being the older sister. Her feelings extended into the beginning of her marriage as well, but in reality, she had already become pregnant on that first night. Thus Reuven was indeed Yaakov's firstborn, in every sense of the word.

This would explain why Yaakov did not despise Leah once her identity was unmasked. The reason is because Yaakov was motivated simply out of consideration for Eisav, not from any dislike of Leah, *chas v'shalom*. Leah's feelings were perhaps unjustified, but still warranted Divine favor and were deserving of Divine intervention. Her tefillot stormed the Heavens and awarded her the vast majority of notable Shevatim. She gave birth to Yehudah, who merited royalty; to Levi, who earned Priesthood; and to Yissachar, who was laurelled with the crown of Torah. This was all a result of Leah's tefillot, not to fall into the hands of Eisav.

On Rosh Hashanah, we say the words (*Bamidbar* 10:10) "on the day of your gladness, and on your festivals..." during our tefillot. This would imply that Rosh Hashanah is also a day of rejoicing. Why is this so? I interpret this to mean that on Rosh Hashanah we rejoice at the opportunity to do teshuvah. We all know that Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the year, is similar to a birthday. It is the birthday of the Creation of the world, and even more, the creation of man. Being our 'collective' birthday, we should be happy, just as the first man was happy on the occasion of his first 'birthday.' Hashem created him without any trace of sin. It is the sins of man which cause us to worry and fear. And so, the purity of Adam Harishon was a great source of satisfaction and happiness. Add to this Adam's gift of Chava, and we can understand why his joy was complete. In honor of the occasion, Hashem drew Adam close, and the angels presented him with a fabulous feast (see *Sanhedrin* 59b).

This all changed with the sin of Adam Harishon. He was chased out of Gan Eden and distanced from Hashem, all as a result of a breakdown of *middot*. He did not have the sensitivity and refinement to wait until after sundown to have private relations with his wife.

When we stand on Rosh Hashanah before Hashem, we can return to that level that man once enjoyed, by doing teshuvah. This is the great cause for *simchah* on Rosh Hashanah, one which accredits it as being the ‘day of rejoicing.’ This is why we are enjoined to “say before Me *Malchiut*, in order to crown Me as your King” (*Rosh Hashanah* 34b). Hashem gave us the opportunity to accept his sovereignty and raise ourselves back to square one, likening ourselves to Adam Harishon who crowned Hashem on his first ‘birthday.’

The more difficult part of this *avodah* is keeping it up, even after Rosh Hashanah is over. To be steadfast in our commitment requires tremendous strength of character, much more than what the original, spontaneous aspiration called for. Consistency is a sign of someone working on their *middot*, as our inner urges press us to sin and push us to destroy whatever good we already accomplished. This *avodah* continues throughout the year, as only *middot* determine our status and measure our ascent or descent on the ladder of human perfection.

We find this concept regarding Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah says that he reached the pinnacle of greatness by the dint of his humility, as he was (*Bamidbar* 12:3, “exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth.” His *middot* are what lifted and placed him up so high. This measuring stick should certainly be employed when one is looking for a spouse. The qualities and character of a person is what makes them be the ‘right’ one. One should examine the *middot* of a potential prospect, so necessary in creating the right environment where both partners can grow

together. This is what was important to Avraham, and this is what Yitzchak sought for Yaakov. The exemplary qualities of a person display the radiance of their soul, and are the jewel in the crown of Hashem.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ Why did Yitzchak tell Yaakov to take a wife from their family in Charan, and not from the daughters of Canaan? What was Eisav thinking when he married the daughter of Yishmael?
- ◆ Yitzchak valued *middot*, as our world is built on *chesed*. He knew that his family in Charan did not have the same despicable *middot* as the inhabitants of Canaan. Avraham was blessed a son who was full of all the good qualities and exemplary *middot* that personified Avraham Avinu. *Middot* are what carries us through to perfection.
- ◆ Eisav thought that it was enough to marry ‘family,’ and mistakenly believed that he was fulfilling Yitzchak’s will by marrying his uncle’s daughter. His distance from Torah and his tainted *middot* led him astray. He did not want a wife who would tell him right from wrong.
- ◆ Yaakov did not ask Lavan for his consent to marry both Rachel and Leah. He wanted his brother to have the opportunity to marry a righteous girl who would set him on the right path. This teaches us that we can appraise someone according to their *middot*, much more than by their sharp minds or quick wit. One who learns Torah, despite material or spiritual poverty, will one day merit to learn amidst wealth. Yitzchak hoped that by blessing Eisav, this maxim would be fulfilled and he would draw him close and bring him to repentance.
- ◆ The *simchah* we have on Rosh Hashanah is the opportunity we have to do teshuvah and return to a level that Adam Harishon had on his ‘birthday.’ Lack of good *middot* is what caused the original sin, and makes a distance between us and Hashem. The most important quality to look for in a spouse is his or her good *middot*.



## Achdut amongst Am Yisrael

*“So Yitzchak summoned Yaakov and blessed him; he instructed him, and said to him, ‘Do not take a wife from the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Betuel your mother’s father, and take a wife from there from the daughters of Lavan your mother’s brother’”*

*(Bereishit 28:1-2)*

At this pivotal juncture in Yaakov’s life, Yitzchak’s blessing to Yaakov was more than just to marry and settle down. He foresaw the future nation of Am Yisrael arising from this marriage. Yitzchak must certainly have had expected Yaakov to marry one wife. Yet we know that Yaakov actually had four wives: Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah. What significance is there in the fact that Am Yisrael was established on the basis of not one, but four Matriarchs?

The message we can learn from this, is that despite their different mothers and dissimilar backgrounds, the Shevatim were a single, unified family. In later generations, the pasuk (*Tehillim* 122:4) described their unifying pilgrimage, and praised them as the “Shevatim of Hashem, a testimony to (the greatness of) Israel.” All were equal in the eyes of Hashem. This is why Hashem arranged for Yaakov to marry four wives.

One would normally expect *achdut* to occur only between the children from one mother. Nevertheless, Yosef is portrayed (*Bereishit* 37:2) as “shepherding the children of Bilhah and Zilpah.” He felt the responsibility to fulfill his father’s goal, that of *achdut*. He

cared about the welfare of all of his brothers, even the children of the concubines. This is how our nation was meant to be.

When Yosef later told his brothers his dream, they hated him, as they felt he was encouraging discord by relating it. They interpreted his vision of their stalks bowing down to his as an urge to rule over them, and the first step towards strife and contention. The breakdown of unity starts when one person seeks to dominate others. This is why they were so against him. Yosef eventually rectified this so-called rift, by using his sovereignty in Egypt for the welfare of the family. He supported them throughout their sojourn there, thus strengthening the family bond and the national 'family' unit.

Chazal (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:30) say that Moshe Rabbeinu questioned why the Jews were being punished, why they deserved the yoke of servitude in Egypt. Only when he saw one Jew hitting his 'friend,' did he understand why. It was their lack of *achdut*. Similarly, before Yaakov died, he stressed the importance of *achdut* (*Bereishit* 49:1-2), "Then Yaakov called for his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Yaakov.'" He hinted to them, if you want to continue to exist, you must keep that unity. His personal example of marrying four wives, demonstrated this concept to them. And so, the Torah enjoins us (*Vayikra* 25:36) "and let your brother live with you." Any Jew, even one who has no relatives or near of kin, is part of our large 'family,' and we are commanded to love him and treat him as our brother.

In the desert, the Jews were encamped around the *Shechinah*, on all four sides of the Mishkan. This alluded to the four Matriarchs. They formed four camps, unified in their orientation, all facing one central location. Their unity awarded them the distinction of having

flags, symbolizing their homogeneous status and rallying solidarity. This is hinted at by the title given them, “the house of Yaakov.” A house has many rooms. There is the living room, dining room, den, and bedroom. Yet all function as one unit, as they are joined in purpose and operate as a single whole. Chazal (*Shemot Rabbah* 28:2) say that these words actually refer to the womenfolk, who keep the ‘house of Yaakov’ standing and intact.

From Yaakov’s wives were born the twelve Shevatim. Hashem testified to their exceptional qualities. The words בית יעקב actually form the acronym יב, which equals twelve, suggesting this very theme of unity of the twelve Shevatim. Wherever we find *achdut*, we find the *Shechinah* resting there. We need to learn how to live amongst our ‘brethren’ in harmony, even if our ‘family’ names may differ.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Yaakov married four wives, teaching us the importance of *achdut*. Hashem described their unifying pilgrimage and praised them as the “Shevatim of Hashem, a testimony to (the greatness of) Israel.”
- ◆ Yosef’s brothers hated him, as they thought he was encouraging discord by relating his dream. Yosef rectified this so-called rift, by using his sovereignty in Egypt to support them, thus strengthening the national ‘family’ unit.
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu understood that the Jews were being punished with servitude because of their lack of *achdut*. Yaakov commanded his sons before he died to preserve that unity.
- ◆ In the desert, the Jews were encamped around the *Shechinah*, on all four sides of the *Mishkan*, alluding to the four Matriarchs. The title given them, “the house of Yaakov” alludes to the rooms of a house which function as one unit and operate as a single whole. This also

refers to the womenfolk, who keep the ‘house of Yaakov’ standing and intact.

- ◆ The words בית יעקב actually form the acronym יב, suggesting the twelve Shevatim. Wherever we find *achdut* we find the *Shechinah* resting there.



## Children who Turn their Backs

*“So Yitzchak sent away Yaakov and he went toward Paddan-aram, to Lavan the son of Betuel the Aramean, brother of Rivka, mother of Yaakov and Eisav”*

*(Bereishit 28:5)*

On the words “the mother of Yaakov and Eisav,” Rashi comments, “I do not know what this comes to teach us.” Don’t we know who Rivka was? Why is the Torah reiterating this piece of information? Rashi leaves the question hanging, saying that it requires further examination.

I suggest the following answer. We know that a mother is always worrying about her children. This is the way Hashem created the world. Similarly, Avraham Avinu cared about Yishmael, despite his idolatrous shenanigans. Surely Avraham saw with Divine inspiration what Yishmael was up to. But he allowed his paternal instinct to have sway and generate compassion. Only when Hashem told him to listen to the words of Sarah, did he agree to send Yishmael away.

Yitzchak, as we know, loved Eisav. Why though, didn’t Rivka also love him? Generally, reshaim hate tzaddikim and what they stand

for, while tzaddikim hate reshaim for their deplorable actions. But in family relationships, the bond of parents and children usually overrides such feelings. Their natural affinity and love bridges the barrier which sets them apart. This is what the Torah is stressing in this pasuk. Rivka was the mother of both Yaakov and Eisav. Why is it, then, that she disliked, even disdained Eisav, against her maternal instinct and contrary to her warm and caring character?

Let us place another family member into the picture. Rivka grew up with a father and a brother who were evil. One would expect that they would have hated her. Yet the Torah says that they blessed her before she left home to marry Yitzchak (see *Bereishit* 24:60). The pasuk (*Bereishit* 28:5) here also alludes to their feelings, as it says “and he went toward Paddan-aram ....” Lavan still felt that sibling relationship, despite their having gone separate ways. Rivka’s family honored her and held her in esteem. This only strengthens our question. Why did Rivka not allow her maternal feelings to surface when dealing with Eisav?

The answer is that our love for Hashem precludes any love we have towards those who turn their backs on Him, even if they may be family members. The Torah teaches us here that Rivka was indeed the mother of Yaakov and Eisav, but she overcame that love for Eisav because of his wicked character and antagonistic defiance of Hashem.

In Morocco, there were families whose children intermarried, *rachmana litzlan*, and left their religiosity behind. They opposed any reconciliation with their faith and religious past. The parents then broke their connection with them, and sat shivah for their children. This they learned from Rivka. She separated Yaakov from Eisav because of his sinister influence, and eventually broke off her motherly relationship because of his evil path.

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**In Summary**

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- ◆ Rashi leaves the question of why the Torah says that Rivka was the mother of Yaakov and Eisav hanging, saying that it requires further examination.
- ◆ Parents naturally love their children. Avraham had compassion on Yishmael, and so Rivka should also have had a maternal instinct to care for Eisav. Because Eisav was antagonistic to Hashem and defiantly wicked, she overcame that feeling and disdained him.



### Eisav's Spiritual Atrophy

*“So Eisav went to Yishmael and took Machlat, the daughter of Yishmael son of Avraham, sister of Nevayot, in addition to his wives, as a wife for himself”*

*(Bereishit 28:9)*

Rashi explains that Eisav's act of marrying the sister of Nevayot was not a praiseworthy deed. It was a sign of his evil character, as he did not divorce his other wives.

We know that Eisav was indeed careful to do *kibbud av v'em*. He excelled in that capacity (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:16), wearing his finest clothing when serving his father. One of the great *Tanna'im*, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, professed that he didn't even reach the ankles of Eisav in how he did *kibbud av v'em*. Thus it is quite puzzling why Eisav, who knew that his father abhorred the girls of Canaan, did not divorce his first wives. He heard Yitzchak sending Yaakov far

away to Charan, just to marry a girl from there. His conscientiousness in fulfilling Yitzchak's will should have guided him in deciding who to marry and who not.

Even more, we are taught that Eisav's wives served idols. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 114) brings an opinion that Yitzchak's loss of vision was due to the incense that these women offered before their idols. Why didn't Eisav care about his father and at least distance them from his father's vicinity? This whole episode points to but one conclusion.

This just shows the depravity of Eisav and accentuates his evil way of life. For this reason, Hashem declared (*Malachim* 1:2-3) "I loved Yaakov but I hated Eisav." Hashem tolerates many reshaim. Only by Eisav do we find Hashem openly declaring His revulsion and hatred. Eisav fit the bill. His evil knew no bounds and thus aroused the wrath of Hashem.

There are two types of people who sin. There are those who know that what they are doing is wrong. Perhaps their evil inclination grabbed hold of them, but deep down inside they still want to return, and would do so if granted an opportunity. Then there are those who no longer see what is wrong with their behavior. Their urges have twisted them into an abominable monstrosity of perversion. The mention of G-d, or any exhibition of religiosity, only arouses apathy. Eisav reached the depths of depravity, and his 'students' continue his aberrance of sin and vice even today. Such an attitude is loathsome to Hashem, and their denial to accede to any wrongdoing just adds fuel to the fire of Divine fury.

Picture someone making Kiddush on Friday night, loudly declaring its 'articles' of belief. He articulates how Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. And so we would expect him to act accordingly, and rest too. Yet the next morning,

this same fellow goes to the beach, violating Shabbat openly and pretending as if he never said those words. Where does such cold indifference come from? How can he act in such a brazen manner? This is the *middah* of Eisav, who the Torah describes as “capturing (Yitzchak) with his mouth” (*Bereishit* 25:28). His life was just one long act of deception. He resisted anything that had a religious theme or was of a spiritual nature.

Eisav’s descendant, Amalek, also acted in this manner. He cooled off the world’s fear of Am Yisrael by attacking them. This is alluded to by the words of the pasuk (*Devarim* 25:18) “that he happened upon you on the way.” The Hebrew word for ‘happen’ is קרר, related to the word קר (cold). Because of their attack, other nations were less fearful of Am Yisrael and less believing in Hashem (see *Tanchuma Ki Teitzei*, 9). This was but a continuation of Eisav, who allowed his wives to continue their destructive incense, indifferent to his father’s poor eyesight.

The Torah is called דרך (path) as it says (*Tehillim* 27:11), “Teach me Your way, Hashem.” We need to see where our path in life leads to. Is it headed in the direction of Avodat Hashem? Are we interested and motivated in doing Hashem’s will? Or is it being cooled off from the influence of Eisav and his followers?

Eisav knew that Lavan had two daughters, and it was common knowledge that the older one, Leah, was meant for Eisav (*Bereishit Rabbah* 70:16). Had Eisav been searching to fulfill his father’s wishes, he should have picked himself up and traveled to Charan. What was his plea of exemption? He was busy serving his father. Were he to go, who would take care of his needs? He found other excuses as well, touting such pious claims as “One who is involved in a mitzvah is absolved from fulfilling other mitzvot” (*Sukkah* 25a). This is the way of the *Yetzer Hara*. He finds pretexts for us to act the

way we want to, cloaking them in the frock of religion and embellishing them with the trimmings of piety. After all, how could Eisav leave his father all alone, after Yaakov 'deserted' him and left for Charan? Who else would do *kibbud av v'em*?

In reality, Eisav had no desire to go and marry Leah. No doubt he had heard of her righteousness, and wanted no part of it. This just shows how Eisav was plagued by fickle convictions and inconsistencies. At times he could be caught in a fit of religious fervor. He would excel in *kibbud av v'em* and keep all its stringencies. And yet he would cease this mitzvah when it hampered his lifestyle, completely ignoring his father's wishes. He simply refused to go against his evil desires or oppose his base character. Such apathy is a typical symptom of one who is beset by vacillating loyalties and conflicting wills.

Hashem does not deprive anyone from receiving their just reward, and Eisav was no exception to the rule. He got his just desserts. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel cited his practice of *kibbud av v'em* and used Eisav as an example of someone who excelled in this mitzvah, as he wore his finest clothes while serving his father. We also find that Eisav shed tears at losing the *berachot* of Yitzchak, and was rewarded for that as well. But he lacked consistency, was overcome with indifference, and eventually stagnated into religious frigidity.

Sometimes we come across a person who acts in contradictory ways. He may sometimes do mitzvot like a tzaddik, and at other times, aveirot like a rasha. This person lacks a tag to identify himself or a straight edge to keep him in line. He needs to learn how to iron out his inconsistencies and resolve his conflicting wills in light of the Torah's way.

Yaakov, on the other hand, could truly profess to keep mitzvot, even under the most extenuating circumstances. He was the

paradigm of one who sat and learned Torah and kept all of the mitzvot without making excuses. This was a sign of his whole-hearted dedication, and contrasted sharply with Eisav's indifference. Yaakov could thus contend how he kept mitzvot, despite being far from home, even if Eisav did not.

The Torah gives us a description of how well Yaakov fared. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 33:18) says, "Yaakov arrived intact," which Rashi explains to mean that he arrived whole in body and spirit, with his wealth intact and his Torah learning complete. Despite living in close proximity to a rasha such as Lavan, he could claim: "I dwelled (גרתי) by Lavan," keeping all the 613 (תריג) mitzvot (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 32:5) even under the most difficult circumstances. Yaakov also alluded to his mitzvot when he said (ibid.) "and I tarried until now." He tarried and postponed any business or material acquisitions until after he attended to his spiritual agenda. Eisav on the other hand, although he remained at home under the influence of Yitzchak (whose *middah* was *gevurah*), didn't absorb any of Yitzchak's stringencies or be scrupulous when it came to doing mitzvot. This only reiterates Yaakov's excellence and shows the source of Eisav's spiritual atrophy.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ Eisav was known to be a big fan of *kibbud av v'em*. Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel cited his practice of wearing his finest clothing while serving his father, and professed that he didn't even reach the ankles of Eisav in doing *kibbud av v'em*.
- ◆ Why didn't Eisav divorce his first wives? His conscientiousness towards fulfilling Yitzchak's will should have guided him in deciding whom to marry and whom not. Moreover, why didn't Eisav care about Yitzchak's loss of vision, caused by the incense that his wives burned before their idols?

- ◆ This just shows Eisav's depravity, and for this reason, Hashem declared, "But I hated Eisav." There are those people who sin, knowing that what they are doing is wrong, but deep down inside still want to return. Then there are those who no longer see what is wrong with their behavior. Their urges have twisted them into an abominable monstrosity of perversion. This was Eisav.
- ◆ Eisav knew that Lavan had two daughters. Had Eisav been searching to fulfill his father's wishes, he should have picked himself up and traveled to Charan. In truth, Eisav had no desire to go and marry Leah. He wanted no part of her righteousness. Eisav was plagued by fickle convictions and inconsistencies. He would excel in *kibbud av v'em* and yet cease when it hampered his lifestyle.
- ◆ Yaakov could truly profess to keep mitzvot, even under the most extenuating circumstances, despite living in close proximity to a rasha such as Lavan.



## The Splendorous Countenance of Yaakov

Chazal (Chulin 91b) say that the visage of Yaakov Avinu is engraved on the Heavenly Throne. What purpose does this serve? Why was Yaakov chosen as the heraldic image of Divine handiwork, more than any of the other Avot? Another point to ponder is why Hashem created Yaakov with such a splendid countenance, akin to that of Adam Harishon (Bereishit Rabbah 58:1).

First, let us recount the preeminence of Adam Harishon. We know that Hashem created Adam Harishon "in His image, in the image of G-d." He endowed him with a Divine soul and blew into him the breath of life. The name Adam (אָדָם) has the numerical value of

forty-five, equaling Hashem's Four-Letter Name, ה-ו-ה-י, when its letters are enunciated and spelled out as syllables ,הי=י ,הא=ה ,ו=ו (see Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar 8:5). The Heavenly Angels even mistakenly took him as a G-d (Yalkut Shimoni Yeshayahu, 394). Adam's purpose in life was to maintain this world, Hashem's Creation. This is hinted at by the purpose of this world (Bereishit 2:3) "that Hashem created to do." Hashem created everything in this world with the prerequisite 'to do.' By doing what the world was created for, man keeps the world in its present state of existence.

We do not realize the extent of Adam's greatness. Chazal (Bava Basra 58a) say that Adam's heel emitted light as bright as the sun. Imagine then how much his countenance must have lit up from his wisdom (see Kohelet 8:1). According to the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Mishlei, 959), at first, Adam's image was engraved on the Heavenly Throne. The imprint of his visage served as a constant reminder of Hashem's handiwork. After Adam sinned and ate from the Tree of Knowledge, though, this image was removed, so as not to draw unfavorable attention to mankind.

Hashem waited for the next man who would be worthy of symbolizing mankind. This is why He engraved the image of Yaakov on the Heavenly Throne, and why Hashem made his countenance mirror that of Adam Harishon. He took reassurance in Yaakov, as he was the "complete man, dweller of tents." And so Hashem remembered mankind as He intended it to be, pure from sin and engaged in Divine service.

When Am Yisrael walks in the path of Yaakov Avinu, and their "voice is the voice of Yaakov," the image engraved on the Throne 'bespeaks' worlds of merit. If they act, though, using "the hands of Eisav," this image will not elicit any meritorious memories or prevent negative repercussions.

One who learns Torah and does Hashem's mitzvot will merit

learning Torah in the next world as well. His spark of eternal life that was kindled by his learning will include him in those “righteous ones who, even in death, are called living” (Berachot 18a). His soul will also effuse its property of life and share its vitality with others, by attesting to the merits of those who live below. This merit of learning Torah lishmah without any thought of reward, imitates that grandeur of Yaakov Avinu, and accordingly, such tzaddikim will have their image reflected in the visage of Yaakov’s on the Heavenly Throne.

Chazal (Bereishit Rabbah 63:2) say that Avraham Avinu was saved from the fiery furnace in the merit of his grandson Yaakov. This implies that he wouldn’t have been saved on his own merit. Perhaps we can explain why, after noting the difference between their fundamental character traits. Avraham represented the middah of chessed, doing kindness for all. Yaakov upheld the pillar of Torah, lighting up the world with its exclusive Divine truth. A world built on the lone principle of chessed lacks direction and guidance. It is the Torah which gives purpose and structure to our benevolent acts. Even more, we need the Torah to urge us on to perfection and grace our lives with chessed. Thus Yaakov’s emergence as the personification of Torah, superseded the status of Avraham and overshadowed his grandfather’s prominence. This is why Yaakov was selected as the prototype of mankind and acclaimed as the choicest of the Avot. One who walks in his ways and learns Torah lishmah, merits the great honor of associating himself with this middah of Yaakov and reflecting his heraldic emblem on the Heavenly Throne.

On a deeper note, man affects all of Creation through his actions. The tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Azulei zt”l, author of the Chessed l’Avraham, writes that Hashem embedded all of the Upper Worlds, the ten sefirot, within man. Through man’s paradigmatic embodiment of the celestial spheres, streams the abundance of

Divine blessing. Thus man becomes a spiritual channel for berachah to flow into this world.

This is why man, through learning Torah, has such a tremendous potential to affect his surroundings and benefit all of Creation. And at the same time, if man falters chas v'shalom and sins, this spiritual channel gets blocked. When Am Yisrael weaken in their dedication to Torah, that pipeline of spiritual energy gets clogged. The damage that results is catastrophic. This can be compared to a power plant which produces energy and powers all of the surrounding production plants. If the water that generates the electricity would stop flowing and the turbines stop spinning, the power outage would immediately shutdown all of the machinery and bring all production to a halt. Similarly, our world is one large production plant, which runs on our learning of Torah. Torah is actually compared to water (Bava Kama 17a), and without Torah, the world could not exist or function.

Every Jew has the potential to imitate Yaakov Avinu, and mirror the splendor of his countenance which is engraved on the Heavenly Throne. We can merit being a spiritual channel of energy by learning Torah. How wonderful would it be for our image to be placed before Hashem, reflecting our visage as a tzaddik alongside that of Yaakov. How much we could accomplish, for ourselves and for all of Am Yisrael.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ The visage of Yaakov Avinu is engraved on the Heavenly Throne. Why specifically his countenance? And why was his countenance similar to Adam Harishon's?
- ◆ Adam Harishon had the preeminence of being the handiwork of Hashem. His name equals the numerical value of Hashem's Four-Letter Name, his heel emitted light as bright as the sun, and his

visage was engraved on the Heavenly Throne. After he sinned, Hashem removed that image, so as not to draw unfavorable attention to mankind. Instead, Hashem put Yaakov's countenance there.

- ◆ Avraham represented the middah of chessed, and Yaakov upheld the pillar of Torah. A world built on the lone principle of chessed lacks direction and guidance. We need Torah to give purpose and structure to our benevolent acts and guide our lives of chessed. Thus Yaakov's emergence as the personification of Torah superseded Avraham's status and overshadowed his prominence. This is why Yaakov was selected as the prototype of mankind and was the choicest of the Avot, and why Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace in the merit of his grandson Yaakov.
- ◆ One who kindled his spark of eternal life by learning Torah will effuse his vitality of life and assist others. The merit of learning Torah lishmah without any thought of reward, imitates the grandeur of Yaakov Avinu, and accordingly, his image will be reflected in the visage of Yaakov's, on the Heavenly Throne.



## Gems on Parashat Toldot



### The Descendants of Yitzchak

*“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham – Avraham begot Yitzchak”*

*(Bereishit 25:19)*

Why did the Torah not write out Yitzchak’s progeny? It seems only proper that the Torah should have elucidated that his children were Yaakov and Eisav. Why was this omitted?

I suggest that the Torah wanted to hint to Yitzchak’s children without mentioning them by name. The final letters of the words תולדות יצחק equals the numerical value of five hundred. Add to this the number of berachot a Jew says every day, and we arrive at six hundred. This is the same value as the word קשר (a connection), as well as the word שקר (falsehood). Yaakov Avinu chose to walk along the path taken by his forefathers and establish his connection with Hashem. Eisav on the other hand, chose a life of falsification and materialism, empty of any everlasting value.

This is why the Torah did not want to reveal the names of his sons. Openly recording such a son as Eisav would only have embarrassed Yitzchak.

Another indication of Yitzchak's righteous offspring is hinted at by the first letters of the words תולדות יצחק. The numerical value of these letters equals the value of the word קדוש (410). Thus we see how his sanctified son, Yaakov, is alluded to in this same pasuk.



## The Voice of Yaakov

*“So Yaakov drew close to Yitzchak his father who felt him and said, ‘The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands’”*

*(Bereishit 27:22)*

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 65:20) promises us an amazing assurance. As long as the voice of Yaakov (Torah learning) is heard in the study halls, the hands of Eisav have no grip over Am Yisrael. Why is Torah learning described by the expression of our ‘voice’? Aren’t there other aspects of learning as well?

I suggest that the ‘voice’ referred to in the pasuk is not the oral enunciation of syllables or their audible communication. It refers to the inner voice of yearning, which is expressed lingually through raising one’s ‘voice.’ The intensity of how one approaches his studies can be detected by his verbal expression. In the language of Chazal this is called Ritcha d’Oraisa (the excitement of Torah). One

whose Torah learning springs from his heart, seethes with excitement and expresses it vocally.

Perhaps this could also explain another statement of Chazal. The Gemara (Nedarim 81a) says, “Why was Yerushalayim destroyed? Because they forsake My Torah.” We can’t interpret this to mean that they did not learn Torah at all, chas v’shalom. I would rather explain that they did not learn Torah with their heart. What was lacking was this excitement, and that was enough to be called ‘forsaking’ the Torah.



## The Blessings of Eisav

*“Then Yitzchak trembled in very great perplexity, and said ‘Who – where – is the one who hunted game, brought it to me, and I partook of all when you had not yet come, and I blessed him? Indeed, he shall remain blessed!’”*

*(Bereishit 27:33)*

Chazal (Bereishit Rabbah 67:2) explain Yitzchak’s reaction to Eisav’s appearance. He trembled because he saw Purgatory lying open beneath Eisav.

Eisav was shaken too, crestfallen that Yitzchak gave the berachot to Yaakov. He implored Yitzchak: Did you not leave me any berachah? At first, Yitzchak said that he gave all the berachot to Yaakov, but after Eisav cried, the pasuk (Bereishit 27:40) says that

Yitzchak did indeed bless him. What were these blessings? He would dwell “of the fatness of the earth,” he would live “by his sword,” and if Yaakov were to falter in serving Hashem, Eisav would “throw off his (Yaakov’s) yoke.” The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 67:6) explains that the words “of the fatness of the earth,” allude to Italy, the seat of the Roman Empire. What is puzzling is what was left from Yaakov’s berachot to give to Eisav? Didn’t his berachot include everything worthwhile and beneficial?

The Nodah b’Yehudah answers that Italy was only settled and populated in a later century, and was therefore not included in Yaakov’s berachot. This is what Yitzchak gave to Eisav. Still, we understand that the berachot weren’t just for the era that Yaakov lived in. It consisted of whatever berachah would come into this world, even at some later date. If so, Italy should have belonged rightfully to Yaakov, as part of the berachot.

I suggest that Yitzchak specifically left Italy out of the berachot that he gave to Yaakov. This is because Italy symbolizes the brawn of power and the pursuit of pleasure that Eisav lived for. This hub of civilization, which centered itself on enjoying the “fat of the land” and living by the “might of its sword,” was given to Eisav.

Hashem let Eisav build his Empire and form a civilization only in a later era. He knew that such a world force would prevent Yaakov from growing into a nation of Torah. Had the Roman Empire existed earlier, the Yetzer Hara’s sway would have been one of total dominion.

Thus Eisav’s blessing was actualized only later on in history. According to the Gemara (Shabbat 56b), Italy was first settled when Am Yisrael began to sin. The Angel Gavriel went and planted a stick in the Mediterranean Sea, on the day that Shlomo Hamelech married the daughter of Pharaoh. From this mass of land developed the

Italian Peninsula. This was part of the berachah; Eisav would ascend to power only after Yaakov faltered and abandoned the Torah's way of life. This gave Yaakov the opportunity to develop, in the interim, into a nation which would serve Hashem. Hashem also made a provision, that if Yaakov were to keep the Torah, Eisav and his mighty regime would become subservient to Yaakov once more.



### Yaakov's Journey to Charan

*“So Yitzchak sent away Yaakov and he went toward Paddan-aram, to Lavan the son of Betuel the Aramean, brother of Rivka, mother of Yaakov and Eisav... and [when Eisav saw] that Yaakov obeyed his father and mother and went to Paddan-aram”*

*(Bereishit 28:5,7)*

The whole subject of Yaakov going to find a wife leaves us puzzled. Why did he spend so many years by Lavan? It is very detrimental to be in the company of a rasha (see Sukkah 56b). Why didn't Rivka send a messenger to bring back a wife for Yaakov, instead of making Yaakov go himself?

I suggest the following answer. Rivka saw with Divine inspiration that Yaakov would eventually marry both of Lavan's daughters. This being the case, had she sent a messenger to her brother Lavan, he would certainly have sent only Rachel. Even more, she was concerned that Eisav would be enticed to go to Charan and take

Leah as his wife. With Yaakov being sent far away, Eisav did not even contemplate marrying Leah. Out of sight is out of mind.

Eisav heard his father tell Yaakov to go to Charan, and not to marry a girl from Canaan. Why didn't he also go? Wasn't it public knowledge that Lavan had two daughters, the older one being eligible for him? Didn't he profess to excel in kibbud av v'em? The answer is that Eisav thought to himself, if my father sent Yaakov to Lavan, it is obvious that his daughters must be tzidkaniot. This is not what Eisav had in mind. He did not want his wives telling him right from wrong or reprimanding him for his evil ways. This is why he did not travel to Charan.

The pasuk (Mishlei 18:22) says, "One who has found a wife has found goodness." This only applies, though, for the one who is looking for good. One has to search before he can find.



## Vayeitzei



### The Virtue of Learning Torah

*“Yaakov departed from Be’er Sheva and went towards Charan”*

*(Bereishit 28:10)*

Rashi explains why the Torah mentions Yaakov’s departure from Be’er Sheva. Writes Rashi, the Torah could have just told us that Yaakov went to Charan. The extra words, “Yaakov departed from Be’er Sheva” teach us that a tzaddik’s departure makes an impact on the city’s residents. When a tzaddik dwells in a city, he is the glory, splendor, and beauty of the city. When he leaves, his departure leaves its mark. That glory, splendor, and beauty departs from the city.

I was once asked the following question. How was Yaakov’s absence felt if Yitzchak Avinu was still living there? How did his departure make an impression on the people?

I think that the answer can be best expressed by relating a story involving Maran Harav Shach zt”l. Once, a wealthy and generous Jew from Marseille approached Rav Shach with his question of where to

donate a contribution. He explained that he had two options. One was to help build an extension onto an already existing yeshiva. The other was to help build a local Beit Hakeneset from scratch. This generous man could not determine which one of these options was the more worthy cause, and asked Harav Shach to help him resolve his quandary.

Maran Harav Shach told him to donate his money to the yeshiva's extension, and explained his reasoning as follows. Learning Torah is greater than praying. One can pray anywhere. It doesn't matter if one prays in a rented room, on the road, or in a Beit Hakeneset situated farther away from home. Hashem hears our tefillot equally. However, Torah needs its edifices of learning. It is the Torah which distinguishes us from the nations of the world, and gives us the ability to survive. We need the voice of Torah resonating from that yeshiva, as well as from the yeshivot all over the world, in order to keep the world spinning in place.

When I heard this story, I knew that I had found the answer to my question. The same reasoning applies to the departure of Yaakov Avinu from his home town. We are taught in Pirkei Avot (1:2). "The world rests on three things: on Torah study, on Avodah, and on *gemilut chassadim*." Tefillah is included in the pillar of Avodah, and Yitzchak represented the pillar of Avodah by his devotion and prayer. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 24:63) describes how Yitzchak went to "supplicate in the field," which Chazal (*Berachot* 26b) say refers to tefillah.

Yaakov, on the other hand, embodied the attribute of Torah. And as we demonstrated with the story of Harav Shach, the pillar of Torah supersedes that of tefillah. This does not minimize the importance of prayer, as the world depends on the continued

practice of all of these three pillars. It just raises the importance of Torah to a higher level.

The residents of Be'er Sheva felt the glory, splendor, and beauty departing from the city, as represented by Yaakov's Torah, when he left its environs. Such a void could not have been filled by Yitzchak, as the attribute of tefillah does not compare to the attribute of Torah. This is why they registered a loss upon Yaakov's departure and why his absence was felt by all.

### **In Summary**

- ◆ Rashi writes that a tzaddik's departure makes an impact on the city's residents. When he leaves, their glory, splendor, and beauty departs as well. How was Yaakov's absence felt if Yitzchak Avinu was still living there?
- ◆ Learning Torah is greater than praying. It is the Torah which distinguishes us from the nations of the world. This is why Harav Shach zt"l advised one Jew to help extend a yeshiva building rather than build a Beit Hakeneset.
- ◆ Yitzchak Avinu personified the attribute of tefillah, while Yaakov embodied that of Torah. This is why Yaakov's absence was felt by all.



## **The Pride of Be'er Sheva**

*“Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went towards Charan. He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place which*

*he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place. And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of Hashem were ascending and descending on it”*

*(Bereishit 28:10-12)*

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:6) say that when a tzaddik dwells in a city, he is its glory, splendor, and beauty. The people took pride in him, more than in any historical monument or landmark. When he leaves, that glory, splendor, and beauty departs from the city as well. The Midrash applies this concept to Yaakov’s departure from Be’er Sheva. What puzzles us, though, is that Yitzchak still continued to live there. Why then was Yaakov’s absence felt by all?

One answer is because of his diametrically opposite twin brother, Eisav. When both sons of Yitzchak were little, no one was able to tell the difference between the two. Eisav fooled everyone. Any show of bad character was taken as a momentary lapse of virtue, a childish slip into bad behavior. It was only after (*Bereishit* 25:27) “the lads grew up” that people saw his evil side. There was no hiding his lack of attendance in the yeshiva. He was always found on the street or hunting in the fields. Then, everyone could see that those two boys were markedly different. This is why Yaakov’s departure created a void. The splendor and glory that his presence conferred onto Be’er Sheva, especially when contrasted with his brother’s presence, faded away with his departure to Charan.

Perhaps another answer is because Yitzchak Avinu no longer had the vigor of youth. His eyesight had dimmed, and he did not learn Torah with the same exuberant voice as Yaakov did. When Yaakov left Be’er Sheva, his voice of Torah was replaced only by the sound

of Eisav's sword clinking and jingling at his side. The voice of Yaakov, the pride and glory of Be'er Sheva, was no longer heard.

Another reason has to do with the difference between Yitzchak and Yaakov. Yitzchak personified the pillar of tefillah. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 24:63) describes how Yitzchak went to "supplicate in the field," which Chazal (*Berachot* 26b) say refers to prayer. Yaakov, on the other hand, embodied the attribute of Torah. The pasuk describes him as "a dweller of tents." And we know that the pillar of Torah supersedes that of tefillah. This is borne out by the order of the three pillars mentioned in *Pirkei Avot* (1:2) where Torah is listed first. "The world rests on three things; on Torah study, on Avodah, and on *gemilut chassadim*." This is why Yaakov's departure left its mark on the residents of Be'er Sheva.

### **A parting of ways**

The pasuk continues with Yaakov's journey, "So Yaakov lifted his feet and went" (*Bereishit* 29:1). These words seem extra. It should simply say that Yaakov went to the land of Charan. Why does the Torah describe how Yaakov walked? Even more, ordinarily, only someone who has a serious ailment or paralysis *chas v'shalom* needs to 'lift their feet' in order to walk. Why does it use this terminology regarding Yaakov?

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 69:7) point out that when it says (*Bereishit* 28:16), וַיִּקֶץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ, "and Yaakov awoke from his sleep," the word משנתו is related to the word ממשנתו (his memorization of learned material). His sleep was punctuated with learning. Actually, Yaakov Avinu never really tasted sleep until this point. Hashem specifically detained him and induced sleep in order to reveal Himself to Yaakov. (The concept of sleep, which is the cessation of all feelings and functions, is akin to death. Yaakov, we

are taught [*Ta'anit* 5b], did not die. Thus it is no wonder that he did not sleep).

When he awoke, Yaakov exclaimed, "This is none other than the abode of Hashem and this is the gate of the heavens." He felt the awesome fearfulness of that spot, as he had merited a Divine revelation. Additionally, in those few hours of sleep, Yaakov was able to mentally review everything he had learned. Once he realized that he was at the very gates of Heaven, Yaakov did not want to go on his way. He went only because of *kibbud av v'em*, to fulfill his parents' wishes. Hashem also promised to protect him. And so, Yaakov ordered his feet to pick themselves up and start walking. This is why the pasuk says, "So Yaakov lifted his feet and went."

We find a similar idea concerning the last day of Sukkot. Hashem says to Am Yisrael (see Rashi on *Vayikra* 23:37) that it is hard to part ways. This is why He commands us to celebrate one last day, Shemini Atzeret, before ending the festival season. Similarly, it was difficult for Yaakov to take his leave and go to Charan.

### **Keeping the spiritual gains**

What puzzles us is something Yaakov did before he left. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 28:22) says, "And the stone which I set as an altar (lit. a pillar) will become a house for Hashem." Why did Yaakov make an altar? To point out its significance, Chazal (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 35) say that a small flask of oil miraculously appeared, which Yaakov used to anoint and consecrate the altar. What does this inanimate stone represent?

It would seem that Yaakov was trying to save a mental impression of his Divine encounter and commemorate his spiritual gains. After experiencing the holiness of that place, he created a tangible memento, one which would allow him to make a spiritual 'rendezvous' at a later date.

This would also explain why Hashem says that it is difficult to part ways from us on the last day of Sukkot. Our response is mutual. Our inner longing is to remain with Hashem, and so, we express it in a tangible way. This is why we celebrate one last day, *Shemini Atzeret*. Similarly, Yaakov knew that he had a long journey ahead of him. He wanted to return one day to that spot without losing all that he gained.

This stone altar helped him to stay on a high spiritual level throughout his sojourn by Lavan. When Yaakov returned to Canaan, he described his spiritual yield to Eisav, “I dwelled with Lavan and kept all 613 mitzvot” (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 32:5). Similarly, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 33:12) says, ויבא יעקב שלם (literally; and Yaakov came to Shalem). Chazal (*Shabbat* 33b) explain that Yaakov returned שלם (complete) in body and spirit, with his material and spiritual acquisitions intact. Despite the length of his trip and the *nisayon* of Lavan’s house, the inanimate stone altar did its job of keeping Yaakov in touch with his ultimate goal.

In a similar vein, we can explain the symbolism of Yaakov’s anointing the stone with oil. The word השמן (oil) has the same letters as the word נשמה (soul). What is the correlation between the two? Yaakov’s stone altar (מצבה) symbolizes the human body, which is marked by the placement of a stone (מצבה) upon one’s grave. Yaakov wanted to protect his whole self, body and soul, from the travails of his trip. By placing a stone altar, Yaakov remembered man’s frailty and eventual interment. Yet, even more than death, Yaakov feared the spiritual dangers headed his way. While placing a stone altar, Yaakov asked Hashem to guard his soul from the spiritual pitfalls of life. Hashem responded and reassured Yaakov by miraculously sending a flask of oil, hinting that he would watch over his נשמה as well. From here we can learn how much Yaakov feared his trip to Lavan, despite preparing for it for so many years.

### The pleasure of learning Torah

I once heard a deeper explanation of the words, “And Yaakov lifted up his feet.” In general, most peoples’ body movements are reactions to physical stimuli. They act or react based on their physical needs or desires. With tzaddikim however, their impetus comes from their נשמה. Yaakov went because of his soul’s yearning to do Hashem’s will. This is why it says that he lifted up his feet. Were it not for that, Yaakov would have stayed put. His feet were reluctant to begin their trek, preferring to stay near the holy area where Hashem revealed Himself to him.

This can even be learned from the description of Yaakov’s onward journey. The word וישא (and he lifted) can be split into two words: וי (which has the numerical value of טוב – good) and שא (which has the numerical value of שב – sit, after including one for the word itself). This refers to Yaakov’s innermost desire to stay put and learn Torah (which is also alluded to by the word טוב), and how it took concentrated effort on his part to go on with his trip.

I remember how difficult it was for my Rebbe, Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian zt”l, to close his Gemara at the end of a *shiur*. I would like to recount a similar experience. On a flight that was about to land in New York, Hashem opened my eyes and helped me to understand a certain Torah topic that had puzzled me. I immediately took out pen and paper and began to write down the solution. I had tremendous anguish though, that my flight was about to land and I would need to stop in the middle. Suddenly, the plane rose in altitude and circled the runway for the next half hour. The pilot explained that he was unable to land because of a near collision with another plane. I was astounded. This had never happened to me before. I perceived that Hashem was giving me the chance to continue writing, after seeing my great anguish, and caused this chain of events for my sake. This is the power of

learning Torah, which warms our hearts and delights us with its words of wisdom.

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (4:17) states, “Better one hour of spiritual bliss in the World to Come, than all of the pleasures of this world.” The Mishnah emphasizes the type of reward which awaits us in the next world. It is a spiritual pleasure, one that can only be had by those that learn Torah or do mitzvot. Such activities hone our sense of pleasure and point it in the direction of spiritual gratification. Eventually, we experience pleasure whenever we do Hashem’s will. However, one who is incognizant of anything outside of his bodily functions and physical sensations, is by default, unable to appreciate spiritual bliss. He lacks the faculty to experience true, eternal pleasure. Only those who learn Torah have the correct apparatus to receive such spiritual reward.

Yaakov had many *berachot* bestowed upon him. Wealth, children, and honor all found their way into his life. But his true and overriding pleasure and satisfaction came from the Torah that he learned. Thus we can understand why he found it difficult to part ways and leave the place where Hashem spoke to him. However, once he was Divinely commanded to continue on his journey, he instructed his feet to pick themselves up and go on. This is why the pasuk describes his continuation on to Lavan’s house.

### **What’s cooking**

I noticed an unusual thing by those who enjoy a hot bowl of soup. Unlike meat or salad, where connoisseurs can continue to carry on conversations or observe others while savoring their tasty dish, when it comes to soup, they concentrate on their bowl to the exclusion of all else. There is what to be learned from such behavior, beyond its culinary deportment. We first need to understand why they act this way. The answer is, such people

display their zealousness in not sully their clothing. They also keep a watchful eye from being scalded. Similarly, we need to be zealous in our mitzvah observance, and not dirty ourselves with immoral behavior. By concentrating on our Torah responsibilities and being diligent in our studies, we can prevent ‘mishaps’ from occurring.

We may need to eat in order to live, but it does not have to become an obsession or be one’s sole justification for living. Animals eat and focus on their food because that is what they perceive gives them life. We, on the other hand, know that Torah contains the deep-rooted, soul-nourishing properties that really keep us alive. It is the elixir of life, as basic and necessary to our daily existence as bread and water, and it helps us to remain Torah Jews by guarding us from sin. Without it, we are vulnerable to all sorts of spiritual ‘viruses’ and destructive ‘parasites.’

### **Nothing greater**

The Admor from Alexander, author of the sefer *Yismach Yisrael*, writes that only one who takes a close look at himself, and sees how little he is, can really see how great Hashem is. However, if he only sees how great he is, he will never be able to see the greatness of Hashem.

Perhaps this is what Yaakov was referring to when he said, (*Bereishit* 32:5) “I have sojourned with Lavan.” Chazal (see Rashi, *ibid.*) rearrange the letters of the Hebrew word גרתי (to dwell) to spell תריג (referring to the 613 commandments). Yaakov declares that he kept all of the commandments, despite living for so many years in the house of Lavan. By focusing on keeping mitzvot, Yaakov distanced himself from self-aggrandizement or bloated feelings of self-worth. Thus his message to Eisav was the important lesson that he learned by Lavan’s house. He recognized in Charan quite clearly

that the only worthwhile acquisition or status is that of doing mitzvot.

The Gemara (*Avodah Zara* 11a) tells us that Rebbe (Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi) was an extremely wealthy man. If so, how could Rebbe exclaim (*Ketubot* 104a) before he died, that he didn't derive any enjoyment from this world, even from his little pinky? Wasn't his position as *Nasi* one of eminence and grandeur, with his every wish fulfilled and every whim satisfied? The answer is, that Rebbe was so attached to Torah, that he didn't have any pleasure from his material acquisitions. He didn't feel any need to enjoy this world for pleasure's sake. This was also Yaakov's reaction to his situation. Instead of using his wealth for personal enjoyment, Yaakov used it to serve Hashem. He did not feel any need to rise to power or assert his position. He had the power of Torah, which raises us high above the vain and egocentric world of extravagance and pageantry.

I once heard how some Chassidim would make a *hilula* for the Maggid of Mezeritch zt"l (on the anniversary of his passing). They would take the spoon with which he ate, and dance in jubilation, saying – this is the spoon which the Maggid ate with. I thought about their practice and had the following insight.

Chazal (*Avot D'Rebbe Natan*, 28) relate how Rabbi Yehoshua once passed by a stone, bent down, and kissed it. When asked why, he said, this stone is where Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkinos sat and taught Torah. And so, this spot is akin to Har Sinai, where the Torah was given. The Chassidim who danced with the spoon had a similar contention. They reasoned that if an inert stone can have such distinction and be invested with holiness, how much more so the spoon of the Maggid. They cherished his spoon because it helped their revered Rebbe gain the strength he needed to serve Hashem. This is the right approach to our material acquisitions. Their whole value lies in how we use them to serve Hashem better.

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**In Summary**


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- ◆ The Midrash says concerning Yaakov's departure from Be'er Sheva, that when a tzaddik leaves a city, its glory, splendor, and beauty departs. Why did Yaakov's departure create a void if Yitzchak still continued to live there? There are several answers.
- ◆ 1. The splendor and glory that Yaakov's presence conferred onto Be'er Sheva was in contrast to his brother's presence.
- ◆ 2. Yitzchak Avinu no longer had the vigor of youth and did not learn Torah with the same exuberant voice as Yaakov did. When Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, his voice of Torah was replaced only by the sound of Eisav's sword jingling at his side.
- ◆ 3. Yitzchak personified the pillar of tefillah. Yaakov, on the other hand, embodied the attribute of Torah. Because the pillar of Torah supersedes that of tefillah, Yaakov's departure left its mark on the residents of Be'er Sheva.
- ◆ Ordinarily, only someone who has a serious ailment or paralysis, *chas v'shalom*, needs to lift their feet in order to walk. Why does the Torah describe how Yaakov walked? Once he realized that he was at the very gates of Heaven, Yaakov did not want to part ways. Yaakov had to order his feet to pick themselves up and start walking. This is why the pasuk says, "So Yaakov lifted his feet and went."
- ◆ Yaakov made an altar because he wanted to save a memento of his Divine encounter and commemorate his spiritual gains. A small flask of oil miraculously appeared, which Yaakov used to anoint and consecrate this altar. The word **השמן** has the same letters as the word **נשמה**. Yaakov's **מצבה** symbolizes the human body, which is marked by the placement of a **מצבה** upon one's grave. By placing a stone altar, Yaakov remembered man's frailty and eventual interment. Hashem reassured Yaakov by miraculously sending a flask of oil, hinting that He would watch over his **נשמה** as well.

- ◆ When Yaakov returned to Canaan, he said, “I dwelled with Lavan and kept all 613 mitzvot.” Similarly, the pasuk says, **ויבא יעקב שלם**, which refers to his returning **שלם** (complete) in body and spirit. Despite the length of his trip and the *nisayon* of Lavan’s house, the inanimate stone altar did its job of keeping Yaakov in touch with his ultimate goal.
- ◆ The word **וישא** can be split into two words: **וי** (which has the numerical value of **טוב**) and **שא** (which has the numerical value of **שב**, after including one for the word itself). This refers to Yaakov’s desire to stay put and learn Torah. His true and overriding pleasure and satisfaction came from the Torah that he learned.
- ◆ The type of reward which awaits us in the next world is a spiritual pleasure. Torah learning hones our sense of pleasure and points it in the direction of spiritual gratification, giving us the faculty to appreciate spiritual bliss. The Torah also contains the soul-nourishing properties that really keep us alive. It helps us to remain Torah Jews by guarding us from sin.
- ◆ Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi was an extremely wealthy man. Yet he didn’t derive any enjoyment from this world, despite his position as *Nasi*. He was so attached to Torah that he didn’t have any pleasure from his material acquisitions or feel any need to enjoy this world for pleasure’s sake. Similarly, Yaakov used his wealth to serve Hashem. He had the power of Torah, which raises us up high above the vain and egocentric world of extravagance and pageantry.



## The Power of Torah

*“Yaakov departed from Be’er Sheva and went towards Charan. He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place”*

*(Bereishit 28:10-11)*

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 68:11) infers a remarkable revelation about Yaakov Avinu from this pasuk. The Torah indicates that Yaakov rested “in that place.” Says the Midrash, in the fourteen years that Yaakov learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, he did not rest. He pushed himself to the limits of human endurance without taking a good night’s sleep, only first lying down for the night in “that place.”

On the way to Charan, Yaakov was met by Elifaz, the son of Eisav. This was no chance occurrence. Elifaz was told by his father Eisav to chase after Yaakov and kill him. This put Elifaz in a bind, as he had no personal interest in killing Yaakov. He actually benefitted from his uncle, who taught him Torah. And yet he felt obligated to comply with his father’s command. Thus he asked Yaakov what he should do, without reneging on his father’s wishes. Yaakov told Elifaz to take his money, as a pauper is figuratively considered deceased. Elifaz listened to Yaakov’s sage advice and took away all of his possessions, but did not kill him. This demonstrates the power of Torah, as Elifaz was swayed to contravene his father’s wishes, out of respect for Yaakov and in appreciation of his Torah knowledge.

Later on in the parashah, we find that Yaakov was blessed with unusual strength. When he reached Charan and saw Rachel coming with the sheep, he rolled a heavy stone off the town well. Rashi describes his effort as similar to one removing a bottle stopper. He retained his youthful strength, due to his purity from sin.

This incident begs the question. Why did Yaakov let Elifaz get away with ‘murder’ and take away everything he owned? He could have beaten him singlehandedly. Chazal (*Chulin* 91a) also tell us that a tzaddik attaches significance to his possessions, tantamount to the value he ascribes to his own body. All of a tzaddik’s material acquisitions are important, as he understands their true value – assets in serving Hashem. Why then did Yaakov give all of his possessions to Elifaz?

Perhaps he could have killed Elifaz. But it would seem that Yaakov was concerned about one point. He realized that Elifaz had a merit to protect him. Whatever Torah Elifaz learned from his grandfather or uncle stood by him on this fateful mission. There was also Elifaz’s mitzvah of *kibbud av v’em* to contend with. This is why Yaakov was wary of starting up with Elifaz and refrained from fighting back.

Whoever wants to avail himself of the gift of Torah is welcome. Even Elifaz, the son of Eisav Harasha, imbibed Torah on Yitzchak’s lap and was affected by Yaakov’s words. No one is denied access from learning Torah. There are no entrance fees or password codes required before one can enter the portal of truth. Chazal (*Makot* 10b) say, “A person is led in the way he wishes to go.” The availability of Torah, though, brings with it a greater obligation. “Torah waits in the corner; whoever wants, can come and learn” (*Yoma* 72b).

### Wellspring of determination

What was Eisav's reaction when he heard that Elifaz did not do as he was told? Was Eisav satisfied with the fact that Yaakov was not killed, just robbed of all his money? I suggest that Eisav wasn't overly concerned that Yaakov was still alive. Elifaz's highway robbery served Eisav's main purpose, to prevent Yaakov from serving Hashem. By depriving Yaakov of all of his money, Eisav figured that Yaakov would be hindered from learning Torah. This reduction of study would then lead to a deterioration in character. And so, Eisav rejoiced at Yaakov's spiritual recession and eventual slump.

Yaakov, though, was unperturbed. He collected himself and went to learn in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, despite his setback. This event even set a precedent for the future. We know that, "The actions of the Avot are a portent for their children." In this case, Yaakov's actions bequeathed us with a wellspring of resolve and determination. We inherited from the Avot their strength of character to withstand *nisyonot*. Through their self-sacrifice, Am Yisrael draws the strength to serve Hashem, despite the machinations of the *Yetzer Hara* to hinder our progress.

We should learn from Yaakov Avinu not to allow periodic setbacks to discourage us from doing what we have to do. On the contrary, when we learn Torah despite difficulty, Hashem helps us to surmount our obstacles. Hashem would not test us if He knew that we would be unable to live up to the test. This is how we grow. By standing up to the *nisyonot* of life, we follow in the footsteps of Yaakov Avinu as he trekked on to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, despite his dramatic encounter with Elifaz.

Similarly, Avraham Avinu was tested with many *nisyonot*. After leaving home and exchanging countries, he came to Eretz Yisrael,

only to experience a raging famine. Avraham stood up to his test and went down to Mitzrayim, without any complaints or criticism of Hashem. At the end of his sojourn, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 13:1) says, “So Avraham went up.” The Zohar (*Chelek* I 83a) comments that the Hebrew word *יָעַל* signifies a spiritual ascent as well. Avraham ascended in his Divine service and grew closer to Hashem through his *nisayon*. So too, when we withstand our *nisyonot*, Hashem lifts us one step higher in our climb up the ladder towards perfection.

Eisav was also aware of the power of learning Torah when done amidst difficulty. This is why he did not seek to kill Yaakov after he traveled to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. He knew that he was powerless in the face of Yaakov’s rigorous study and self-sacrifice. It was only after Yaakov left Lavan’s home that Eisav came to kill Yaakov. He reasoned that Yaakov must have surely descended from his spiritual level. His fraternization with Lavan, coupled with the paucity of learning he may have experienced there, was sure (in Eisav’s eyes) to drag him down.

### **A resemblance to Hashem**

What puzzles us, though, is Yaakov’s words when he met Eisav face to face. Yaakov exclaimed, “Inasmuch as I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of a Divine being” (*Bereishit* 33:10). How did Eisav resemble a Divine being? Did Eisav have a *tzelem Elokim* (a Divine soul created in the image of G-d)? A rasha loses all resemblance to G-d. He debases himself to the point where that *tzelem Elokim* becomes snuffed out, leaving behind an animalistic caricature of man. It is only the observance of mitzvot and fulfillment of the Divine will which helps to distinguish us from animals. So what did Yaakov mean?

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 75:10) points out that Yaakov really meant to scare Eisav. He was hinting to Eisav that he had

experienced a prophetic revelation. Still, the very comparison of Eisav's visage to a Heavenly angel requires some explanation.

I suggest that when Eisav heard of Yaakov's success in keeping all of the mitzvot in Lavan's house, Eisav had a change of heart. Despite Lavan's influence, and in spite of his amassed wealth, Yaakov voiced to Eisav only his spiritual gains. He declared, "I dwelled with Lavan and kept all 613 mitzvot" (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 32:5). When Eisav saw that one could actually serve Hashem, learn Torah, and still be prosperous, a fleeting thought passed through his mind. He too could serve Hashem. He saw from Yaakov's financial situation that one doesn't have to give up this world in order to serve Hashem. This is why the *tzelem Elokim* displayed itself on Eisav's face, and what Yaakov suddenly perceived. Chazal (*Berachot* 34b) say that in the place where *ba'alei teshuvah* stand, even complete tzaddikim cannot stand. And so Yaakov compared Eisav to a Heavenly angel.

We are taught that even animals can perceive the Divine image of one who walks in the ways of Hashem and keeps himself pure from sin. There is a famous story regarding the *Ohr Hachaim*, Rabbi Chaim ben Attar. Once, the authorities wanted to punish him in a fiendish way. They placed him in a lion's den, filled with hungry lions that were ravenously licking their chops. And yet, the lions did not touch him. Instead they honored him, as they could see that he was a holy man who displayed a *tzelem Elokim*.

Eisav's thoughts of reformation, however, did not last very long. When one has pangs of conscience and is overcome with feelings of remorse, a real change is the only recourse. And to effectuate such change, one must bolster himself with a Torah-based plan of action. It is the Torah which provides us with the outlook and determination we need to bring our inspiration to its true destination – that of coming closer to Hashem. Without Torah though, it 'de-fizzes' and becomes stale and defunct. This is why

Yaakov did not have any faith in Eisav's change of heart. His momentary inspiration soon dissipated and he went back to 'business' as usual. Yaakov saw beneath Eisav's façade, which is why he refused Eisav's offer to accompany him home.

### **The resonance of Torah**

Before his death, Yaakov gave a *berachah* to Yosef's two sons, Menashe and Ephraim. Yaakov placed his right hand (signifying a greater degree of merit) on the younger Ephraim, and his left hand on the elder Menashe, despite Yosef's vocal objection. Yaakov told Yosef that he had not erred, as he prophetically saw that the great leader and sage, Yehoshua ben Nun, would be born into the tribe of Ephraim. Yehoshua's strength lay in his total subservience to his master, Moshe Rabbeinu, and in his dedication to transmitting the Torah he learned. The pasuk (*Shemot* 33:11) describes his overriding quality, as one who "would not depart from within the tent (of Torah)." This is why Yaakov placed his right hand on Ephraim's head. Yehoshua's demonstration of the Torah's supremacy deserved Ephraim's blessing being given with Yaakov's right hand.

Perhaps this can also explain Yitzchak's startled expression, "The voice is Yaakov's voice but the hands are Eisav's hands" (*Bereishit* 27:22). Yitzchak mentions the attribute of 'voice' before that of 'hands.' There is a deep reason for this. Hands can create objects, but their creative activity ceases with their cessation of movement. Our sound waves, however, continue to travel on, even after our mouths finish speaking. This is the power of Torah. Even when we take a break to eat or sleep, Hashem still hears the resonance of our voices learning and delights in our words – as if we were still speaking (so to speak).

The pasuk (*Yirmeyahu* 33:25) tells us that even if only one Jew is sitting and learning Torah, the world continues to exist in his merit, as it says, “If not for my covenant day and night, I would not have placed the Heavens and Earth upon their course.” This ‘covenant’ refers to the learning of Torah (*Nedarim* 32a). Our job is to continue to learn Torah, under all circumstances, despite our *nisyonot*. When we face the challenges of life with determination, Hashem will help us to succeed.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Yaakov was met by Elifaz, who was told by his father to chase after Yaakov and kill him. Yaakov told him to take his money, as a pauper is figuratively considered dead. Elifaz took away all of his possessions, but did not kill him. This demonstrates the power of Torah, as Elifaz was swayed to contravene his father’s wishes, out of respect for Yaakov and appreciation of his Torah knowledge.
- ◆ Why did Yaakov let Elifaz get away with ‘murder’ and take away everything he owned? We know that Yaakov was blessed with unusual strength. Yaakov was concerned because he realized that Elifaz had a merit. The Torah Elifaz learned, aside from his mitzvah of *kibbud av v’em*, was something to contend with.
- ◆ Whoever wants to avail himself of the gift of Torah is welcome. Even Elifaz, the son of Eisav Harasha, was affected by words of Torah. No one is denied access from Torah learning. “A person is led in the way he wishes to go.”
- ◆ Eisav wasn’t overly concerned that Yaakov was still alive. Elifaz’s highway robbery served Eisav’s main purpose, to prevent Yaakov from serving Hashem. By depriving Yaakov of all of his money, Eisav figured that Yaakov would be hindered from learning Torah, which in turn would lead to his deterioration.

- ◆ Yaakov's actions set a precedent for the future. His wellspring of resolve and determination bequeathed us with the strength of character to withstand *nisyonot*. We should learn from Yaakov Avinu not to allow periodic setbacks to discourage us from doing what we have to do.
- ◆ Why did Yaakov express how Eisav resembled a Divine angel? Did Eisav have a *tzelem Elokim*? When Eisav heard of Yaakov's success in keeping all of the mitzvot in Lavan's house, Eisav had a change of heart. He saw from Yaakov's financial situation that one doesn't have to give up this world in order to serve Hashem.
- ◆ Eisav's thoughts of reformation, however, did not last. When one has pangs of conscience, a real change is the only recourse. It is the Torah which provides us with the outlook and determination we need to bring our inspiration to its true destination. Yaakov did not have any faith in Eisav's change of heart. His momentary inspiration soon dissipated and he went back to 'business' as usual.
- ◆ Yitzchak said, "The voice is Yaakov's voice but the hands are Eisav's hands." Hands can create objects, but their creative activity ceases with their cessation of movement. Our sound waves, however, continue to travel on, even after our mouths finish speaking. This is the power of Torah. Even when we take a break to eat or sleep, Hashem still hears the resonance of our voices learning and delights in our words.
- ◆ When we learn Torah despite difficulty, Hashem helps us to surmount our obstacles and climb up the ladder towards perfection. This is how we grow. By standing up to the *nisyonot* of life, we follow in the footsteps of Yaakov Avinu as he trekked on to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, despite his dramatic encounter with Elifaz.



## The Evening Prayer

*“He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place”*

*(Bereishit 28:11)*

Rashi explains that the word ויפגע (he encountered) has a double connotation. This Hebrew word can also be translated as prayer, as we find Hashem instructing Yirmeyahu Hanavi (*Yirmeyahu* 7:17) “ואל תפגע בי – Do not even approach Me.” Chazal teach us that it was here that Yaakov Avinu instituted tefillat Arvit. He encountered that place and prayed before he lay down, after the sun had already set.

Chazal (see *Berachot* 27b) tell us that the morning and afternoon prayers were also instituted by the Avot; Shacharit by Avraham Avinu and Minchah by Yitzchak Avinu. But there is a difference between them and tefillat Arvit. During the daytime, our prayers have the status of ‘obligation.’ We are required to thank Hashem for giving us life and keeping us in existence. The evening prayer, though, was originally unobligated. This has its ramification in halachah. One who forgets to add the *Ya’aleh v’Yavo* in his evening prayer is not obligated to repeat Arvit, for this reason. At a later date in history though, tefillat Arvit was universally accepted, and as such, it is a required part of our daily schedule.

Yaakov’s short prayer was actually said with great self-sacrifice, as he had not slept for over fourteen years (as explained previously). Despite the effort involved, Yaakov did not lie down until he thanked Hashem for all of His kindness that he experienced until that point in time.

## Depending on Hashem

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 28:11) then describes how Yaakov bedded down for the night, “He took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head.” Rashi explains that Yaakov placed the rocks like a drainpipe, protecting his head on all sides, as he was wary of wild animals. I was always bothered by this. Did Yaakov Avinu think that a pile of rocks would really protect him from being eaten by bloodthirsty animals? How could he have lain down without protecting himself better? And why did he put the rocks only around his head?

To strengthen my question, I would add the following. We are held Divinely responsible for watching over our lives, just as a *shomer* is responsible for guarding an object entrusted into his care. If we do not take care of ourselves, to the point of negligence, we are even punished. If so, how could Yaakov have relied on some rocks to protect him from harm while sleeping out in the wild?

There is obviously something deeper to this story. The Torah wants us to learn some lesson, for as we know, “the actions of the Avot are a portent for their children.”

There are many people nowadays who lack identity and feel insecure. This often leads to feelings of hopelessness and inadequacy. From where does this stem? Contrary to popular belief, one who learns to put his trust in the Creator actually gains a new lease on life. By relying on Hashem, one can achieve a sense of stability and have some identity. Just like a wet garment needs to be dried out in the sun, so too, every person needs to depend on the One Above, Who shines His rays of prosperity and blessing upon the world, before they can understand life.

A person who thinks that every event in life is haphazard and not pre-ordained can easily sink into depression. He may begin to

attribute any loss or failure to his own inability, to the forces of 'bad luck' and the whims of misfortune. He may soon withdraw into his own shell, as his feelings of guilt and inadequacy begin to overwhelm him with their clamor. And unfortunately he can even descend into melancholy, which robs him of any hope or joy of life.

On the other hand, one who puts his trust in Hashem only anticipates good. By putting himself in the Hands of the Al-mighty, even if some misfortune does occur, he knows better than to attribute it to his own failure. There is a One Above Who guides the destiny of man, Who supports and feeds His creations. His complete faith prevents feelings of guilt or of indiscriminate exploitation. He knows that everything comes from Hashem, and even if he doesn't see the immediate good, it is certainly there beneath the surface.

Imagine someone who rents a car for a short period of time. After a few days he sees some flaw or broken part. Does he sink into depression? Certainly not. He knows that the car is not his, and the broken part not his responsibility. On the other hand, someone who owns his own car becomes visibly upset at any little damage. It eats him up and gives him no rest. After all, who has to pay for it? With whose money? These are the thoughts of one who relies solely on his own abilities and assets.

Life in this world is like a 'rented' car. We are given a short-term rental, with the option of extending it to eternity. By recognizing how limited our lifespan is, and how much we depend on our Father in Heaven, we can take advantage of that 'option.' True security and freedom from worry can only be found by those who have learned that "everything comes from Heaven." Such people constantly express their feelings how everything that Hashem does is for the good. They take advantage of the greatest insurance policy in the world, Hashem's total protection and care plan, with premium

coverage. Because they claim total dependency on the One Above, they lead the most tranquil and serene lives.

We find many people nowadays who are lured to yoga and meditation. They try to train their bodies by disciplining it. They seek to gain a deeper understanding of themselves by doing physical and mental exercises. They hope that through this they will be able to control their lives and make sense of it all. This is all *hevel*. As a nation of believers, we know that He is still there, behind the scenes, writing the script of life. Our trust in Him helps us to realize that only He can decide what is for our good; only He can dictate how we should live our lives. We do not have ‘merely’ another way of reaching the ‘good life.’ It is the only way. “Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem, then Hashem will be his security” (*Yirmeyahu* 17:7).

### **The fortitude of prayer**

The Avot recognized how every day is divided into three parts: morning, afternoon, and night. Each part brings with it its own set of opportunities – as well as its obstacles. This is why they instituted daily prayer, three times a day. Thrice daily, we need to muster our strength anew in order to face the challenges of life, in order for us to succeed. Prayer puts our focus on the most important ingredient of success. As we say our prayers, we put ourselves into His Hands, and contemplate the One Above Whose influence reaches every creature below.

Specifically at night, the *kelippah* gains strength and the forces of *tumah* coalesce to wield their power. The word לילה (night) is related to the word לילית (a female demon with great power of *tumah*). For this reason, Chazal (*Berachot* 43b) say that a *talmid chacham* should not walk alone at night, as the forces of *tumah* reign and he is liable to be hurt. The *Yetzer Hara* takes advantage of the

nighttime and draws energy from these forces which are at work. He preys on man and entices him to sin. This takes extra energy on our part, not to spiritually stumble or fall.

This is why Yaakov Avinu placed rocks around his head. They weren't there to protect him from actual beasts of prey. They were a symbol of the vigilance we need over our thoughts, what we muse over and dream about. Yaakov turned to Hashem to shield him from sinful thoughts. He prayed that he should be saved from the *Yetzer Hara*, which lies at the entrance to our hearts, like a wild lion waiting to tear apart its prey. Especially at night, the forces of *tumah* linger about. This is why he instituted tefillat Arvit, despite his extreme fatigue. Every person needs the spiritual fortitude of prayer in order to withstand the *nisyonot* which abound with the onset of night.

The *Ben Ish Chai* shows how this concept is alluded to by the Hebrew word for night. The word לילה is a contraction of the first letters of the following statement; הבא להורגך ישכים להורגו (one who comes to kill you, take the initiative to kill him first). The *Yetzer Hara* sneaks up behind us and tries his best to topple us; our job is to initiate an offensive foray by praying tefillat Arvit.

### **Putting in our effort**

Perhaps we can compare this to a devoted servant of the king who does much more than his appointed household duties. The king takes great pride in his dedication, and it finds favor in his eyes. This prompts the king to reward him for his zealotness.

Similarly, our alacrity to pray the evening prayer, despite its nonobligatory status, affords us premium protection. We should especially focus on our need for His shield of 'rocks' from the denizens of the night who prowl for prey. Hashem will then see our efforts, and reward us with *Siyata di'Shemaya* in achieving purity of thought.

We should remember that the Torah stresses the input of *kavanah* in our prayers. Think of tefillah as the way man connects to his Creator. There is no comparison between Judaism and other religions in this area. Even their priests do not pray with any great devotion or concentration. We, on the other hand, strive to connect ourselves to Hashem by focusing on our words of prayer and probing their inner meaning. This is what brings us closer to Hashem.

What is the definition of the word ויפגוע (our encounter with Hashem during prayer)? I suggest that this word relates specifically to tefillat Arvit, which is a non-compulsory prayer. It is an encounter, a fortuitous opportunity to take advantage of, a time where a Jew can approach Hashem willingly and show his great interest in keeping that connection. One who puts effort into this voluntary tefillah is assured that his thoughts the following day will also be shielded from sin.

### **At night**

Chazal (*Berachot* 19a) say that if one sees a *talmid chacham* who sinned at night, he should not suspect him in the day, since he has surely done teshuvah. We are certain that he didn't go to sleep without first repenting. The sefer *Ruach Yaakov* by Rabbi Yaakov ben Shabbat (a talmid of Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt"l) explains this idea homiletically. A *talmid chacham* may never have a chance to do teshuvah, as he is always busy guarding himself from sin, and does not necessarily fall prey to temptation. This would leave him without the opportunity to do this great mitzvah of repentance. Perhaps the *talmid chacham* you saw who sinned, really only 'fell' in order to rectify and repent, in order to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah.

The nighttime is well suited for doing teshuvah, as it affords the respite we need to reflect on our deeds. Even more, Hashem made 'good' parallel with 'evil.' The powers of *taharah* were created to

offset the powers of *tumah*. If the evening gives rise to denizens of the night, it also can become the harbinger of good. We can take advantage of that *taharah* by doing teshuvah. This is also why we say a short *viduy* before we retire at night, to show our desire to repent from all sinful activities.

Chazal (*Eiruv* 65a) say that the night was created for the study of Torah. This would indicate that learning Torah at night has a semi-compulsory status. I suggest that there is a correlation between the Torah we learn at night and tefillat Arvit. We know that Torah has the ability to protect and shield us from harm. Yaakov Avinu, the embodiment of Torah learning, still saw, though, a need to institute Arvit. Because there are those who do not merit learning Torah at night, Yaakov instituted its counterpart, tefillat Arvit. In this way, such people will have a merit to protect them. In some sense, their tefillah becomes obligatory, as they need that protection so much more. By standing before Hashem in prayer, they can also merit being shielded from the *Yetzer Hara* and the forces of *tumah*. Imagine, then, how powerful it is when we have both Torah and tefillah.

This would explain why Chazal did not (initially) require Arvit and obligate us to pray at night. Ideally we should spend our time learning, which would not leave us with any time for tefillah. However, Yaakov saw the necessity for instituting Arvit so that all could avail themselves of Hashem's protection during the night hours as well.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Rashi explains that the word ויפגע can also be translated as prayer. Yaakov Avinu instituted tefillat Arvit. He encountered that place and prayed before he lay down, after the sun had already set. The evening prayer is different from the others in that it was originally unobligated.

- ◆ Yaakov took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head, as he was wary of wild animals. Did Yaakov Avinu think that a pile of rocks would really protect him from being eaten by bloodthirsty animals? How could Yaakov have relied on some rocks to protect him from harm, while sleeping out in the wild?
- ◆ A person who thinks that every event in life is haphazard can easily sink into depression. On the other hand, one who puts his trust in Hashem only anticipates good. By putting himself in the Hands of the Al-mighty, even if some misfortune does occur, he knows better than to attribute it to his own failure. There is a One Above Who guides the destiny of man. Because he claims total dependency on the One Above, he leads a tranquil and serene life.
- ◆ The Avot instituted daily prayer, three times a day. Thrice daily, we need to muster our strength anew in order to face the challenges of life. Prayer puts our focus on the most important ingredient of success. As we pray, we put ourselves into His Hands, and contemplate on the One Above Whose influence reaches every creature below.
- ◆ Specifically at night, the *kelippah* gains strength and the forces of *tumah* coalesce to wield their power. The *Yetzer Hara* takes advantage of the nighttime. He preys on man and entices him to sin. This takes extra energy on our part not to spiritually stumble or fall. The rocks Yaakov Avinu placed around his head symbolize the vigilance we need over our thoughts, what we muse over and dream about. Yaakov turned to Hashem to shield him from sinful thoughts and instituted tefillat Arvit, despite his extreme fatigue. Every person needs the spiritual fortitude of prayer in order to withstand the *nisyonot* which abound with the onset of night.
- ◆ The word **ויפגע** relates specifically to tefillat Arvit, as it is a non-compulsory prayer. It is a fortuitous opportunity to take advantage of, a time where a Jew can approach Hashem and show his great interest in keeping that connection. One who puts effort into this voluntary tefillah is assured *Siyata di' Shemaya*.

- ◆ Chazal say that the night was created for the study of Torah. This would indicate that learning Torah at night has a semi-compulsory status. Yaakov Avinu saw a need to institute Arvit. Those who do not merit learning Torah at night have its counterpart, tefillat Arvit, to protect them.



### Preparing for the Adversary

*“And behold! Hashem was standing over him, and He said, ‘I am Hashem, G-d of Avraham your father and G-d of Yitzchak; the ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants’”*

*(Bereishit 28:13)*

Rashi explains that Hashem was “standing over him,” guarding Yaakov from harm.

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 65:5) say that Yaakov stopped on the way to Charan to learn Torah in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, where he spent the next fourteen years learning. Only after such intense learning did he feel firm and fortified in his spiritual standing, ready to brave the pernicious environment of Lavan Harasha. Because of his desire to live righteously and remain holy, Yaakov prepared for his encounter with Lavan accordingly. He armored himself with the shield of Torah and steeled himself for battle.

This is quite puzzling. When Yaakov originally left home to find a wife, he was no youngster. Even so, he felt the need to prepare

himself further by learning in a yeshiva. Yet we know that Yaakov is described as (*Bereishit* 25:27) “a wholesome man, abiding in [the] tents [of Torah]” He already had many years of learning behind him. Why, then, did he find it so necessary to travel to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever and spend another fourteen years learning?

Perhaps we can divide the years that Yaakov learned into two categories; those while living at home, and those while in yeshiva. Both served a specific purpose. Yaakov’s main adversary at home was Eisav Harasha, who in the end, showed his true colors, even wanting to kill him. Thus his initial years of learning helped him towards that end, saving him from the detrimental influence of Eisav and his strong arm.

Faced with entering the lion’s den, though, Yaakov faced a different adversary. In Charan he would not be on home ground. He would have to weather the sinful environment, singlehandedly. How could he fight the pressure not to spiritually capitulate to his evil uncle, Lavan? From where would he draw the strength and wisdom to push aside the *tumah* which lingered about Lavan’s home, which emanated from his idolatry and immorality? He needed a different syllabus, a primer on dealing with his new life-challenges. That he gained from the yeshiva.

As long as Yaakov was in yeshiva, Eisav did not entertain any possibility of harming him. Learning Torah has the power to protect us from all harm. When Yaakov left, though, what prevented Eisav from traveling to Charan and asking for Yaakov’s head? Did Eisav forget his hatred for Yaakov? This is why Hashem promised Yaakov in his dream to protect him. Hashem saw Yaakov’s superhuman efforts in learning Torah and preparing for his encounter with Lavan. And so, Hashem came to Yaakov in a dream and promised His protection, to guard Yaakov both physically and spiritually. This is why Eisav did not contemplate harming Yaakov there, either.

This should impress upon us the need to learn Torah. It is our bastion of strength and weapon of warfare to battle the enticements of our era. Our lives are constantly inundated with foreign influences – the modern day *Yetzer Hara's* which flood the market, drowning us with their 'torrent' of open promiscuity. This is the *kelippah* of *tumah* which threatens to overwhelm our senses with its base physicality and pleasure-seeking character. Only by learning Torah can we break free from its grasp and prevent ourselves from sinking into the morass of materialism.

Hashem's promise held Yaakov in good stead. After twenty-two years of sojourning in Charan, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 33:18) says, "Yaakov came to Shalem (שלם)." Rashi explains that this signifies how Yaakov returned home complete (שלם), both in body and in spirit. Just as Yaakov was pure and righteous at the outset of his trip to Charan, so too was he when he returned home.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Yaakov stopped on the way to Charan, to learn Torah in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. He spent fourteen years in intense learning, preparing for his encounter with Lavan. Why did he find it so necessary to add another fourteen years of learning?
- ◆ We can divide the years that Yaakov learned into two categories. His initial years of learning saved him from the detrimental influence of Eisav and his strong arm. In Charan though, Yaakov would have to push aside the *tumah* which lingered about Lavan's home and weather the sinful environment. He needed a primer on dealing with his new life-challenges. That he gained from the yeshiva.
- ◆ When Yaakov left the yeshiva, what prevented Eisav from traveling to Charan and killing Yaakov? Hashem promised Yaakov in his dream to protect him. Hashem saw Yaakov's extraordinary efforts in learning Torah and preparing for his encounter with Lavan.

- ◆ Our lives are constantly inundated with foreign influences. This is the *kelippah* of *tumah* which threatens to overwhelm our senses with its base physicality and pleasure-seeking character. Only by learning Torah can we break free from its grasp and prevent ourselves from sinking into the morass of materialism.



## Yaakov's Reprimand

*“Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely Hashem is present in this place and I did not know!’”*

*(Bereishit 25:16)*

Yaakov Avinu had an extraordinary dream. He saw a ladder that stretched to the very Heavens. He witnessed a procession of Heavenly angels ascending and descending. And he heard Hashem promise him protection and assure him of inheriting Eretz Yisrael. After he awoke, Yaakov exclaimed, “Surely Hashem is present in this place, and I did not know.”

This should raise our eyebrows in surprise. Did Yaakov not know that Hashem can be found in every corner of the globe? The pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 6:3) states, “The whole world is filled with His glory.” How could he have said, “And I did not know”?

Let me explain with a parable. Imagine a budding scholar who is puzzled with a difficulty. After learning the Gemara and pondering over its words, he is still baffled by his question. And so he spends a few days looking into the *sugya*. After the fourth day, he finally

discovers the correct approach. He realizes that his premise had been wrong all along. This might indicate that he did not put enough effort into his studies from the very beginning. He may even reprimand himself. Had he really tried harder, he would have arrived at the solution so much quicker. As proof, he could point to the solution and show how his extra, final push rewarded him with the correct answer.

This could explain Yaakov's feelings when he woke up. He realized that there was something lacking in his perception of Hashem's existence, as proven from his dream. He 'woke up' to the fact that Hashem truly does exist everywhere, something he only knew on a logical level until then. Had he tried harder to understand Torah, he would have merited appreciating this concept on a much deeper level of understanding. This is why he said, "And I did not know."

Yaakov even woke up distraught. His feelings of how inadequate his learning had been filled him with worry. Perhaps he should have realized the significance of the place he chose to rest, before bedding down for the night. Even more, he had just prayed the evening prayer, without realizing where he was really standing, at the foot of a mountainous site of holiness. And so Yaakov reprimanded himself for being ignorant, for his laxity of effort and paucity of understanding.

I once encountered a difficult Gemara and grappled with it for two weeks. I could not fathom its explanation. Then I decided that I had to get to the bottom of it, and went into the Beit Hamidrash to pore over its intricacies. With Hashem's help, after I put some thought into it, I was finally able to understand what had been puzzling me all along. This led me to reprimand myself. Had I exerted myself more, I would have understood it right away. It was due to my lack of effort that I did not understand. This actually led to many wasted hours, hours I could have spent more productively.

Maran Harav Shach zt”l once remarked the following. Many people think that they give honor to the Torah by learning it. But the exact opposite is true. The Torah bestows honor on those who delve into its words and pore over its tomes of Divine wisdom. Our dedication to Torah learning raises us above the mundane and base character of the world. If we apply ourselves to Torah and circumvent those who descend into the vortex of materialism, the Torah will elevate us above and beyond all expectation.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Yaakov dreamed and awoke to the realization that “surely Hashem is present in this place, and I did not know.” Did Yaakov not know that Hashem can be found in every corner of the globe?
- ◆ Often, people spend time poring over a *sugya*, only to arrive at a solution several days later. Had they tried harder from the beginning, perhaps they would have had their answer right away. Yaakov reprimanded himself for being ignorant, for his laxity of effort and paucity of understanding. He was distraught that he did not realize the significance of that place, before he prayed and bedded down for the night.
- ◆ The Torah bestows honor on those who delve into its words. If we apply ourselves to Torah, the Torah will elevate us above and beyond all expectation.



## A Temporary Residence

*“And he became frightened and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of Hashem and this is the gate of the heavens!’”*

*(Bereishit 28:17)*

*“So Yaakov lifted his feet, and went towards the land of the easterners”*

*(ibid. 29:1)*

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 29:1) says that Yaakov had to lift his feet in order to walk. Apparently there was some resistance in continuing his journey. What was it that prevented him from going? I suggest that his inner desire was to stay put. Yaakov wanted to be in the place where he had experienced closeness to Hashem. This may be compared to a businessman who is constantly looking to increase his wealth, and has to pull himself away from business in order to attend to other things. So too, Yaakov was drawn to a Divine revelation, and found it exceedingly difficult to leave.

From Yaakov’s reaction we can learn a tremendous lesson, one that can help us in times of distress. David Hamelech said (*Tehillim* 73:28), “But as for me, Hashem’s nearness is my (only) good.” This is what helped Yaakov weather the storm of events which continued to befall him throughout his life. Complementarily to his being close to Hashem, Yaakov felt His guiding hand, wherever he went.

All the Avot experienced difficulty giving birth and raising children. Some had children who left the fold. Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni Iyov*, 904) say that when Yaakov finally wanted to rest and

have some tranquility in his life, along came the travail of Yosef's abduction. Despite everything, Yaakov accepted his *nisyonot* and found solace in their Divine Providence, a sign of Heavenly intervention at work. And it was here, at the outset of his journey, that Yaakov experienced the closeness that would accompany him the rest of his life. Hashem appeared to Yaakov and "stood over him."

Later on, we find that Yaakov expressed the difficulties of his journey. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 32:11) says, "For with my staff I crossed this Yarden." In the natural order of events, one cannot get married, or even propose a *shidduch*, without making some monetary proposal. Yet, Yaakov went to Lavan with but clothing on his back and a stick in his hand. It was Yaakov's strong belief and clear perception of Hashem's Providence that helped him find a wife. He merited Divine intervention because of his deep feelings that everything comes from Hashem.

Once, a Rav came to me with a complaint. He said that his father abandoned him, leaving him to struggle and face life alone without any financial help. His father did not even help him to find a wife. Even though according to the laws of statistics and the rules of probability he could not have succeeded, with *Siyata di'Shemaya*, he was able to overcome his obstacles. I told the Rav that he should not be overly perturbed. His father actually was the instrument in teaching him two very basic principles of life, *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem. Even ordinary setbacks or suffering can help us to gain these *middot*. When difficult situations befall us, and we ascribe their occurrence to Divine Providence, our reaction mirrors that of Yaakov Avinu. We can grow in *bitachon* by approaching Hashem and praying for His assistance.

Shlomo Hamelech said (*Shir Hashirim* 1:8), "Go and follow in the footsteps of the sheep." Chazal (see Rashi *ibid.*) compare man to a

lost sheep, who finds his way by retracing the footprints in the dirt. So too, Am Yisrael follow the footsteps of their great ancestors, the Avot Hakedoshim, who blazed the path of righteousness and urged us to come closer to Hashem. By staying on their trail, we know that we will one day arrive at the same destination.

There is no question that the Torah wants us to learn proper *middot* from the Avot. If the Torah details their lives and records them for posterity, it automatically becomes part and parcel of the Law which was given to us on Har Sinai, instructing us on how to live life. We also find reference in the Zohar to the important lessons that can be learned from every word of Torah (*Zohar, Chelek II 97b*). We are taught that the Torah is a repository of Divine wisdom, providing guidance and council for all those who seek truth.

### **Temporary needs and permanent structures**

There is another lesson to be learned from our parashah. After Yaakov returns from his sojourn with Lavan, it says (*Bereishit 33:17*), “But Yaakov journeyed to Sukkot, and he built himself a house there, and for his livestock he made sukkot; he therefore called the name of the place ‘Sukkot.’” Why does the Torah call Sukkot after the name of the shelter which housed Yaakov’s sheep and cattle? Normally, one calls a name of a building or a location after a person, not after animals. What is the significance of this designation?

My grandfather, Rabbi Yeshayahu Pinto zt”l, in his sefer *Kesef Mezukak*, answers this question. Yaakov Avinu was giving us a lesson on material acquisitions. A person should always remember that his materialistic possessions are only temporary assets, similar to a thatched shelter which serves a simple and momentary purpose. Every year, we build a sukkah for seven days, and inherently understand that it has but a short-lived purpose.

Similarly, our possessions are here for us to use for just a brief time span, and have no everlasting value of their own.

However, when it comes to spiritual acquisitions, we should try to appreciate their eternal existence. This is why Yaakov built a house for himself and his family (as the word 'house' denotes a lasting edifice). It was a house of Torah and tefillah, a permanent edifice with eternal 'equity.' Such a house helps its occupants come closer to Hashem, just as a house's physical quarters provides shelter and warmth. However, for Yaakov's animals, which represented his worldly possessions, a sukkah was enough; temporary quarters to house transient possessions.

This contrasts greatly with Yaakov's brother, Eisav. His dwelling place was called שְׂעִיר, which contains the letters that spell the word רשע. Eisav's home embodied his hedonistic world-view. He built himself a house, desiring it to be a lasting edifice. But a rasha, in his obsession with worldly possessions, does not take note that evil has no permanence. He fails to see just how illusive physical pleasures are. The only thing that has any enduring properties is Torah.

A man once came to me with his philosophical quandary. He explained that he certainly believed that the Torah should be our sole focus in life. Yet he was unsure of the status of our material possessions. After all, we need money and possessions in order to live. Without them, a person could very well stoop to improper behavior in his attempt to support himself.

I answered with a parable. Imagine someone who is invited over for dinner. The accepted practice would be to bring along some sort of gift. Even if he would only have limited means, it would still be embarrassing for him to come empty-handed. Wouldn't he want to show how much he appreciates his friend's invitation? As hard as it may be, he would still come up with something nice. How much

more so would he exert effort in finding the right gift for an extended invitation!

Analogously, our entrance into the next world is an invitation from the Al-mighty to join Him at 'home.' It is the eternal home, our permanent place of residence. What can we bring as a gift? How can we show our appreciation? Money cannot buy an entry visa, nor can we take our material possessions with us. Torah is the best merchandise. The only thing that can cross the 'Great Divide' is good deeds, the manufactured 'goods' of Torah. As the Gemara (*Pesachim* 50a) says, "Fortunate is the one who arrives here with his Torah learning in hand."

It is true that man needs material possessions in order to live. But in comparison to true and eternal acquisitions, they are counterfeits of the real thing. Money and objects have no intrinsic value, and spending effort in acquiring what we do not really need in the long run is a fruitless endeavor. The only thing we can take 'possession' of and bring with us up Above is Torah.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ What helped Yaakov to weather the storm of events throughout his life was the feeling of closeness to Hashem. Yaakov felt His guiding hand wherever he went, and found solace in his Divine Providence, a sign of Heavenly intervention at work. It was here, at the outset of his journey, that Yaakov experienced the closeness that would accompany him the rest of his life.
- ◆ The Torah details the lives of the Avot to teach us how to live life. Am Yisrael follows the footsteps of their great ancestors, the Avot Hakedoshim, who blazed the path of righteousness and urged us to come closer to Hashem. By staying on their trail, we know that we will one day arrive at the same destination.

- ◆ Why does the Torah call ‘Sukkot’ after the shelter which housed Yaakov’s sheep and cattle? A person should always remember that his materialistic possessions are temporary assets, similar to a thatched shelter which serves a simple and momentary purpose. Our possessions are here for us to use for just a brief amount of time, and have no everlasting value of their own.
- ◆ When it comes to spiritual acquisitions, we should try to appreciate their eternal existence. This is why Yaakov built a house for himself and his family (as the word ‘house’ denotes a lasting edifice). For his animals, a sukkah was enough. This contrasts greatly with Yaakov’s brother, Eisav. He also built himself a house, desiring it to be a lasting edifice. But a rasha does not realize that evil has no permanence. The only thing that has any enduring properties is Torah.
- ◆ Our entrance into the next world is an invitation from the Al-mighty to join Him at ‘home.’ It is our permanent place of residence. Money cannot buy an entry visa, nor can we take our material possessions with us. The only thing that we can take ‘possession’ of and cross the ‘Great Divide’ with, is good deeds.



## The Vitality of Torah

*“Then Yaakov kissed Rachel; and he raised his voice and wept”*

*(Bereishit 29:11)*

What caused Yaakov to weep? Rashi explains that Yaakov was distraught that he had nothing to offer Rachel. Said Yaakov, “My grandfather’s servant, Eliezer, came to Charan bearing jewelry and gifts, whereas I arrived here empty-handed.”

Rashi also elaborates on what happened to Yaakov's gifts. Elifaz, the son of Eisav, chased after Yaakov, as his father told him to kill Yaakov. However, Elifaz couldn't bring himself to obey his father's command, as he grew up as a child in Yitzchak's home. He asked Yaakov what he should do, and Yaakov told him that a pauper is figuratively considered dead. "Take my money," he said, "and say that I died."

Why did Yaakov give everything he had to Elifaz? The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 72a) says that if someone comes to kill you, you should take the initiative to kill him first. If so, Yaakov should have killed Elifaz as soon as he recognized his intent. Why didn't Yaakov abide by this rule?

I suggest that Yaakov was wary of the Torah that Elifaz gleaned from Yitzchak's home. He saw that Elifaz had some connection to learning Torah, and thus did not kill him. This is borne out by Elifaz's response. He accepted Yaakov's comparison of poverty to death, based on his respect for Yaakov's understanding of Torah. Otherwise, why would Elifaz have agreed to renege on his father's command? This merit of Torah is what saved Elifaz's life.

There is one account in the Gemara that always gives me the chills. It is the story of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva left home for twenty-four years, and did not return to see his family or to say hello, even once during that time. He was totally immersed in Torah. Where did he draw such strength from? I feel that Rabbi Akiva was inspired by Yaakov Avinu, who went to learn in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever for fourteen years without interruption. Despite its proximity, Yaakov did not venture home during all of those years.

Why did Eisav not track Yaakov down and kill him? The simple explanation is that Eisav knew the power of Torah, which protects its learners from harm. Eisav knew that he could not even touch

Yaakov while he was learning Torah. I would like, though, to suggest yet another answer.

The pasuk (*Shmuel I*, 19:18) tells us that at one point, Shaul sent messengers to kill David. David ran away, and entered the Beit Hamidrash of Shmuel, his master and teacher. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Shmuel*, 129) says that during the night that David stayed by Shmuel, he learned from him more than what a seasoned *talmid chacham* could learn in a hundred years. The next morning, though, when Shaul came around looking for David, he forgot his private crusade and joined the ranks of Shmuel's talmidim, totally ignoring David's presence (see *Shmuel I*, 19:18-22). This comes from the vitality of Torah, which draws us in its wake of exuberant discussions and inspiring revelations.

Similarly, Eisav feared being drawn into the circle of devoted students studying the Divine Law. He didn't even want to enter the yeshiva's environs. He was afraid that he would be influenced to refrain from enjoying physical pleasures. He would rather not pursue Yaakov and have to enter the Torah's portal of truth and feel its pulse of energy. This is why Eisav left Yaakov alone.

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 28:10) says, "And Yaakov left Be'er Sheva." Rashi points out that Yaakov's departure from the city made an impact on the city's residents. When a tzaddik dwells in a city, he is the glory, splendor, and beauty of the city. When he leaves, his departure leaves its mark. What was it about Yaakov's presence that impressed the town's residents? The 'voice' of Yaakov, his Torah learning, which was heard by all. When Yaakov left, the silence was unbearable. That glory, splendor, and beauty of Yaakov's 'voice' of Torah faded away.

On a deeper level, Yaakov's departure created a void. The splendor and glory that a tzaddik's presence confers, comes from

his deep relationship with Hashem. He enlightens his surroundings with a spiritual aura that emanates from Above. By accepting Hashem's authority and Kingship, he becomes associated with these Divine qualities, tapping into the power of the Torah which is composed of the Names of Hashem. When Yaakov left Be'er Sheva, the inhabitants lost that connection. Without realizing why, they felt the absence of spirituality and the loss of Divine communication.

Perhaps we can find an allusion to this from the pasuk. The word  $\text{אֲנִי}$  can be split into two,  $\text{אֵי}$  and  $\text{אָנִי}$ . The letters  $\text{אֵי}$  denote anguish and distress, referring to the reaction of the residents. The letters  $\text{אָנִי}$  has the same numerical value as the two Names of Hashem ( $\text{אֵל-אֱלֹהִים}$ ,  $\text{אֱלֹהֵינוּ}$ ) when added together. This alludes to the anguish caused by the departure of the Torah of Yaakov and its words which contain the Names of Hashem.

The Gemara in *Megillah* (3a) tells us how Eretz Yisrael was conquered. When Am Yisrael entered the Land, under the leadership of Yehoshua ben Nun, they prepared themselves for battle. Suddenly, Yehoshua looked up and saw a Heavenly angel looming over him, whose very presence generated fear. Yehoshua asked the angel if he had come to help the Jews or to fight against them. The angel answered that originally he was sent to help them, but was stymied by their lack of Torah learning. However, if Am Yisrael would accept upon themselves to come closer to Hashem and learn His Torah, they would merit his assistance. Whereupon Yehoshua stayed up all night to learn Torah, and the next day's battle was turned in their favor. We see from here just how vital Torah is.

I was once asked why it is not enough just to learn Torah, without going into the details and intricacies of halachah. I answered that any Torah which brings us to action takes precedence in our learning. This is because it affects our lives so much more. Even our

level of learning goes up a notch when we further the practice of what we learn. It makes our learning come alive with the vibrancy of life. Besides which, the Torah is known as the 'Law' of Moshe, as it is the underlying force behind the laws of nature and the rules of physics. Even before Hashem created the world, the Torah was deemed a 'delight' that Hashem reveled in (*Avot D'Rebbe Natan* 31) and it became the blueprint for Creation.

Yaakov's sleep was actually punctuated with learning, as Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 69:7) point out. The word (*Bereishit* 28:16) וַיִּקַּץ, "and Yaakov awoke from his sleep," is related to the word מִמְשַׁנְתּוֹ (his memorization of learned material). The Avot needed sleep for their physical bodies, but their minds were always active and vibrant with Torah learning. This is why Yaakov merited his extraordinary dream.

The *Chida* writes that the Avot learned together for a period of fifteen years. When Avraham Avinu passed away, Yaakov was but fifteen years old. This seems to imply that Yaakov was already learning Torah from day one. This brings to mind the Gemara (*Yerushalmi Yevamot* 8b) about the famous *Tanna*, Rabbi Yehoshua. When he was but an infant, his mother brought his crib and placed it inside the Beit Hamidrash, in order that his ears should pick up the strains and vibrations of Torah study from his earliest days. And so Rivka brought Yaakov to hear his father and grandfather learning together. This would explain why the *Chida* counts the infant years of Yaakov in his calculation.

Yaakov is described in the Torah (*Bereishit* 27:11) as אִישׁ חֲלָק (smooth-skinned). If we rearrange these letters, we spell לִקְחָ (an acquisition or merchandise). The Torah is considered the best merchandise one can buy (*Mishlei* 4:2). It becomes part and parcel of our lives, penetrating into the very fiber of our being. It fills us with the vibrancy of life. Yaakov Avinu personified involvement in

Torah, and it was this *middah* that afforded him protection from any adversary and merited his Divine revelation.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Yaakov told Elifaz to take his possessions and thereby obey his father, as a pauper is considered dead. Why did Yaakov not fulfill the rule, “If someone comes to kill you, take the initiative to kill him first”? Elifaz gleaned Torah from Yitzchak, and it was this merit which saved his life.
- ◆ Rabbi Akiva went to learn Torah and did not return home for twenty-four years. He drew his strength from Yaakov Avinu who went to learn in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever for fourteen years without interruption.
- ◆ When David ran for his life, he entered the Beit Hamidrash of Shmuel Hanavi and sat down to learn. He learned more on that night than what a seasoned *talmid chacham* could learn in one hundred years. Shaul came looking for David, but forgot his private crusade. He joined the ranks of Shmuel’s talmidim and ignored David’s presence. This comes from the vitality of Torah, which draws us in its wake of exuberant discussions and inspiring revelations.
- ◆ Similarly, Eisav feared being influenced by the yeshiva’s environs. He didn’t want to refrain from enjoying physical pleasures and preferred not to pursue Yaakov.
- ◆ The glory, splendor, and beauty of Yaakov’s ‘voice’ of Torah faded away upon his departure. A tzaddik’s presence confers splendor, which comes from his deep relationship with Hashem. He learns Torah, which is composed of the Names of Hashem. The word **אצ"ו** can be split into two: **ו"ו** which denotes anguish and distress, and **אצ** which has the same numerical value as the two Names of Hashem (**ה-ו-ה-ו** and **ו-ו-ו-ו**). This alludes to the anguish caused by the departure of the Torah of Yaakov.

- ◆ When Am Yisrael entered the Land, Yehoshua saw a Heavenly angel looming over him. The angel said that originally he was sent to help the Jews, but was stymied by their lack of Torah learning. Yehoshua stayed up all night to learn Torah, and the next day's battle was turned in their favor.
- ◆ Torah learning which brings us to action takes precedence over tefillah, because it affects our lives so much more. Our level of learning also goes up a notch and our learning come alive with the vibrancy of life. The Torah is known as the 'Law' of Moshe, and is the underlying force behind the laws of physics.
- ◆ The *Chida* writes that the Avot learned together for a period of fifteen years. When Avraham Avinu passed away, Yaakov was but fifteen years old. This implies that Rivka brought Yaakov in his crib to hear his father and grandfather learning together, to pick up the strains and vibrations of Torah from his earliest days.



## A Rasha like Eisav

*“Then Yaakov kissed Rachel; and he raised his voice and wept”*

*(Bereishit 29:11)*

Rashi explains that Yaakov was distraught that he arrived empty-handed with nothing to offer Rachel. Elifaz, the son of Eisav, had chased after Yaakov to kill him, as his father had commanded him to. However, Elifaz, who grew up as a child in Yitzchak's home, couldn't bring himself to obey his father's command. He asked Yaakov what he should do, and Yaakov told him, "Take my money

and say that I died, as a poor person is figuratively considered dead.”

These words should start us thinking. Why did Eisav Harasha send his son Elifaz to do the dirty work? Why not chase after Yaakov himself? Perhaps the answer lies in the only mitzvah that Eisav kept – *kibbud av v'em*. Eisav knew that if he were to kill Yaakov, it would cause great anguish to Yitzchak. This is why he couldn't bring himself to kill Yaakov. Another possibility is that Eisav was afraid that his father's love would be abruptly ended, had he found out who did the dastardly deed and spilled his brother's blood.

But before we start to find some merit in Eisav's thinking, let us examine his actions once more. Why did Eisav send Elifaz and not hire some mercenaries to assassinate Yaakov? Wasn't Eisav worried that Yaakov would defend himself? Not only was Yaakov extremely strong, the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 72a) says that if someone comes to kill you, you should take the initiative to kill him first. Thus Eisav put Elifaz in great danger by sending him on his mission.

What becomes apparent is that when a rasha like Eisav falls into a state of evil intent, he doesn't even care about his own children. There is no room in a rasha's evil thoughts for anyone else, only himself. In his hatred for Yaakov, Eisav wanted to wipe him off the face of the earth, even if it meant putting his own son's life in mortal danger. His frenzy of anger made him also overlook the anguish his father would have felt over Yaakov's death (even if he himself did not kill Yaakov).

In order to make sure the job was done, Eisav sent Elifaz and commanded him to kill Yaakov. Had he sent hired mercenaries, they could easily have given up when the going got rough. In this way, Eisav was assured that his son would do everything humanly possible to expedite his father's wishes and fulfill the mitzvah of

*kibbud av v'em*. This only shows how far one can stray when one is detached from his spiritual moorings. He becomes privy to the worst *middot* possible, even spurning his closest kin and throwing them to the dogs.

**In Summary**

- ◆ Why did Eisav Harasha send his son Elifaz to kill Yaakov? Why not chase after Yaakov himself? Eisav knew that if he were to kill Yaakov, it would cause great anguish to Yitzchak. This would go against his mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em*.
- ◆ Why did Eisav send Elifaz and not hire some mercenaries to assassinate Yaakov? Wasn't Eisav worried that Yaakov would defend himself? Eisav put Elifaz in great danger by sending him on his mission.
- ◆ In his hatred for Yaakov, Eisav wanted to kill him even if it meant putting his son's life in mortal danger. He also overlooked the anguish his father would have felt over Yaakov's death. Eisav was assured that his son would do everything humanly possible to expedite his father's wishes and fulfill the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em*.



## The Scent of Mandrakes

*“Reuven went out in the days of the wheat harvest; he found dudaim (mandrakes) in the field and brought them to Leah his mother; Rachel said to Leah, ‘Please give me some of your son’s dudaim’”*

*(Bereishit 30:14)*

The mandrakes that Reuven brought his mother Leah remind us of another instance where this plant is mentioned. The pasuk says (*Shir Hashirim* 7:14), “The mandrakes yield fragrance.” To what smell does the pasuk refer? And why didn’t Reuven take those flowers and fruits for himself?

Our answer sheds light on the beautiful home of Yaakov Avinu. Normally, parents urge their children to give them *nachat*, to fill them with satisfaction on their spiritual accomplishments. Here, Reuven followed suit even before he was prompted. Reuven knew that his mother’s tefillot were saturated with tears for his growth in Torah, not to be a simple farmer or cattle rancher. To show that her tefillot were not said in vain, he brought her mandrakes. They signify fine deeds, and reflect on the concern and hopes of Leah.

Perhaps he was young and still acted boyishly, but Reuven could express his aspirations of how he wanted to grow by bringing these flowers. He controlled his desire to take from other people’s property (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 72:2) and only took from *hefker*. He didn’t even take them for himself. Just like a child who abstains from eating candy, despite its tempting sweetness, so too Reuven alluded to his ability to overcome his natural tendencies due to his advancement in Torah.

This is the ‘fragrance’ of the mandrakes that lingers around those who do beautiful deeds. The Torah itself is compared to a beautiful smell, and so the world was filled with a strong, sweet fragrance at the giving of the Torah (*Shabbat* 88b). The sense of smell is a higher from of pleasure, greatly detached from our base physical pleasures. It satisfies us with its aromatic scent, without filling our bodies with corporeal grub. Similarly, controlling one’s base desires gives off a fragrant ‘smell,’ one which wafts all the way up to the Heavenly Throne. Reuven brought mandrakes, representing the subduing of his *Yetzer Hara*, and they were the finest gift that he could have given his mother Leah.

Rashi stresses Reuven’s abstinence from stealing. We are all aware of the severity of the sin of stealing. The Generation of the Flood sealed their doom by their flagrant robbery. Stealing, though, goes much deeper than just taking from others. The presupposition of the thief actually denies Hashem’s providential intervention in our lives. He thinks that by stealing he will become rich, in spite of Hashem’s decree to the contrary. In doing so, he refuses to recognize that Hashem is the One Who holds the keys to prosperity, and his subterfuge of thievery only undermines the basis of belief in a Creator. In some sefarim it is written that one who steals will not develop into a *talmid chacham*. Instead of putting his trust in Hashem, he will rely on his own stratagem, and eventually flounder in despair.

Rachel asked Leah for the mandrakes, as she yearned to have a son like Reuven, one who would produce beautiful deeds with a pleasant fragrance. What was Leah’s reaction? Leah told Rachel that she merited a far greater ‘catch.’ Her closeness with Yaakov was a prize in and of itself. This is similar to Elkanah’s answer to his wife’s bitter tears over her childless marriage. Elkanah said, “Am I not better to you than ten children?” (*Shmuel* I 1:8). Leah also mentioned

her lack of closeness with Yaakov, and claimed that Rachel wanted to take away the only satisfaction that she had, her precious children.

Rachel answered that she would let Leah have the night that was designated for her, in lieu of the mandrakes. Notice that Rachel did not offer more than a one-time deal. She appreciated her husband's companionship and was not willing to part with anything more than the minimum. Yet the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 72:3) finds fault with her answer. Perhaps the way she said it showed some sign of disrespect. Thus she did not merit to be buried next to Yaakov in the Me'arat Hamachpelah.

Hashem rewarded Leah for sharing her son's mandrakes with her sister. Instead of enjoying her son's accomplishments for herself, she gave – and received – another son in return. The study of Torah and the development of fine *middot* in children reflects on the greatness of their parents. Because her whole goal was to see her children grow and develop in Torah, she gave birth to Yissachar, who was known for his dedication to Torah study. The Hebrew name יששכר can be divided into two words, יש שכר (there is reward). This teaches us that every good deed has its reward. Even more, the Mishnah (*Uktzin* 3:12) says that Hashem will reward every tzaddik with 310 worlds, which is the numerical value of יש. Leah deserved reward for her desire to raise devoted servants of Hashem and because of her esteem and love for her husband.

Here we see the inner dynamics of this exalted family. The Torah describes how the Matriarchs concerned themselves over their children's character, and how their children looked to give them *nachat*. We see how much the Matriarchs valued the righteousness of their husband, looked forward to his company, and wanted to bring forth devoted servants of Hashem. These are all offshoots of

a home founded on Torah, one which sends off its beautiful ‘fragrance of mandrakes’ for all to enjoy.

**In Summary**

- ◆ Why did Reuven bring his mother the mandrakes he found, and not take them for himself? Reuven expressed his aspirations of how he wanted to grow. He controlled his desire to take from other people’s property and didn’t even take them for himself, hinting at his ability to overcome his natural tendencies due to his advancement in Torah.
- ◆ The fragrant smell of the mandrakes signifies fine deeds, and reflects on the concern and hopes of Leah. The sense of smell satisfies us with its aromatic scent, without filling our bodies with corporeal grub. Similarly, controlling one’s base desires gives off a fragrant ‘smell’ which wafts all the way up to the Heavenly Throne.
- ◆ Rachel asked for the mandrakes as she yearned to have a son like Reuven. Leah told Rachel that she merited being close to Yaakov, which was a prize of its own accord. Rachel’s answer, despite not offering more than a one-time deal, showed some sign of disrespect. Thus she did not merit to be buried next to Yaakov in the Me’arat Hamachpelah.
- ◆ Hashem rewarded Leah by receiving another son in return. The study of Torah and development of fine *middot* in children reflects on the greatness of their parents. The Hebrew name **יששכר** can be divided into two words, **יש-שכר** (there is reward). This teaches us that every good deed has its reward, and that Hashem will reward every tzaddik with 310 worlds, the numerical value of **יש**.



## The Pact Which Set Them Apart

*“Then Yaakov took a stone and raised it up as a monument. And Yaakov said to his brethren, ‘Gather stones!’ So they took stones and made a mound... Lavan called it Yagar Sehaduta, but Yaakov called it Galed... ‘This mound shall be witness and the monument shall be witness that I may not cross over to you past this mound, nor may you cross over to me past this mound and this monument for evil’”*

*(Bereishit 31:45-52)*

This parashah describes an unusual *brit* between Yaakov and Lavan. After Lavan chased after Yaakov to kill him, on the pretense that he stole his idols, Lavan asked to make a peace treaty with Yaakov. And so the pasuk (*Bereishit* 31:44) says, “So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and it shall be a witness between me and you.”

What were Lavan’s hidden intentions? We know that Lavan was a sly character. This is alluded to by his name Lavan Ha’arami (literally, from Aram). The Hebrew word ארמי can be rearranged to spell the word רמאי (swindler). He obviously had something up his sleeve. Yet Yaakov wholeheartedly agreed to this treaty, and even set up a testimonial ceremony. Shouldn’t Yaakov have been wary of Lavan’s tricks?

Even stranger, we find that Yaakov and Lavan gave different names to the site of their agreement. The Torah (*ibid.* 31:47) points this out, “And Lavan called (the pile of stones that were placed as testimony) *Yagar Sehadutah* but Yaakov called it *Galed*.” Although

Lavan's mother tongue was Aramaic, and so he called that spot after its Aramaic rendition, there is obviously some deeper significance to his name-calling which begs for an explanation. Similarly, Yaakov must have had a reason why he chose to use the Hebrew equivalent, especially in light of Lavan's strange behavior. What does this all mean?

From Lavan's response, we can glean what was on his mind. "This mound shall be my witness and the monument shall be witness that I may not cross over to you past this mound, nor may you cross over to me past this mound and this monument for evil" (*Bereishit* 31:52). Lavan stressed the separation and disengagement between him and Yaakov. He didn't want to maintain a relationship with his own family. And Yaakov and his children sought to distance themselves from Lavan as well.

It would seem that there are two types of 'pacts.' There are 'peace accords' and there are 'disengagements.' The first type seeks to foster friendly relations and forge a bond. The second type is an agreement that suspends all hostilities, but divides the two parties and builds some 'wall' or 'iron curtain' between them. We find a marriage being called a *brit*, as each couple creates the bond which brings them together. In this instance, the husband gives his wife a *ketubah*. However, if the couple does not want to continue this bond, they use the vehicle of a *get* to part ways. They make a pact of separation. Similarly, we find such a concept by a *brit milah*. We remove the *orlah* which represents the *kelippah* of *tumah*. By doing so, we confer upon ourselves holiness and attach ourselves to Hashem.

This is the 'pact' that Yaakov wanted. He set up some stones to bear witness to the mutual desire of both sides to go their own way without being disturbed by the other. Yaakov included his sons in this special 'pact' and they helped by collecting stones. They clung

to Yaakov, after seeing the wickedness of their grandfather Lavan, and built a testimonial 'wall' which would protect them from Lavan's influence.

Perhaps Lavan wanted to create a bond at first, but his intentions were sinister and selfish. He wanted to influence his grandchildren to follow in his lead and propagate *tumah*. But when he saw that they rejected his overtures, he agreed to the disengagement. Lavan proposed a total break because he did not want to be influenced by Yaakov or his sons for the good. The forces of *tumah* are not passive bystanders, indifferent or slow to change. They are the perpetrators of evil, and aggressively resist any reformation.

I once met the father of a *ba'al teshuvah*, whose son was inspired to enter a yeshiva. After doing well there and advancing in Torah, he began to influence other family members to adopt a Torah lifestyle. This made the father very upset. Because of his son, he could no longer spend as much time at his job, he claimed. His head was not in his business. He wanted me to convince his son to leave the yeshiva and return to work. From here I learned one thing. The *kelippah* which surrounds a person rebuffs all attempts to lessen its influence. It fights tooth and nail against the forces of *kedushah* and tries to pull us out from the Beit Hamidrash. This is why Lavan wanted nothing to do with Yaakov or the Shevatim. Lavan wanted to uproot everything.

We say in the Haggadah, "Lavan wanted to uproot everything (i.e. the whole of the Jewish nation)." This refers to this episode with Yaakov, and alludes to his attempt to strike at the root of Am Yisrael's eternal existence. Lavan tried to destroy the very foundations of Judaism by making a barrier between him and Yaakov. How is this?

Lavan's homeland was Charan, which is modern day Iraq. In earlier generations it was known as Bavel, where a great portion of

Am Yisrael settled. It was there that the saintly *Amora'im* had yeshivot and wrote the Talmud Bavli, consolidating the Torah that was handed down to us from Har Sinai and putting it into writing. This is what Lavan wanted to uproot. By building a stone 'wall' and making a separation between him and his own grandchildren, he hoped that Yaakov's descendants would lack the ability to spread Torah while in *galut* in Bavel. Lavan had supernatural powers, and would have succeeded in his endeavor, had it not been for Hashem's protective hand.

It is mentioned in sefarim (*Zohar, Chelek I 78a; Eitz Chaim Sha'ar 28:5*) that it was no coincidence that Avraham Avinu was born in Charan, or that Yaakov journeyed there to find a wife and raise a family. Hashem arranged their place of habitat in order to lessen the *kelippah* of *tumah*, and to pull out the sparks of *kedushah* that lay dormant there. This is why these Avot were not born and raised in Eretz Yisrael, the land where holiness has sway. It was only because of the *kedushah* of the Avot that their descendants were able to weather the tempestuous winds of *galut* and prevail over the forces of *tumah*.

### **Yagar Sehadutah – Galed**

Immediately following Lavan's name-calling, the pasuk (*Bereishit 31:52*) says, "This mound shall be my witness." Why does the Torah make a major issue of Lavan's Aramaic appellation, if he himself referred to it by its Hebrew designation? The Gemara (*Yerushalmi Sotah 7:7*) even derives from here the suitability of the Aramaic language. "Said Rav Shmuel bar Nachmeni in the name of Rabbi Yonatan, 'Do not take the language of Aramaic lightly (i.e. do not think that it does not contain any deep Torah concepts or allusions), as it is even written in the Torah. Where is that? *Yagar Sehadutah*.'"

The Torah is almost completely written in *Lashon Hakodesh*, which Hashem used to create the world. And yet here the Torah finds some qualification of the Aramaic language because of its resemblance to Hebrew. We also find that the ‘Talmud Bavli’ is written in Aramaic. The word **בבלי** alludes to the pre-eminence of the Talmud as a repository of the Oral Torah, as it is **בלול** (mixed) with every branch of Torah knowledge: Scripture, Mishnah, and Gemara (Tosafot *Kiddushin* 30a in the name of Rabbeinu Tam). What is the significance of this?

It would seem that Lavan had an ulterior motive. He wanted the Aramaic language to retain its mundane rhetoric, without any admixture of holiness. He was determined to call his testimonial ‘wall’ by its Aramaic designation, in order to retain Aramaic as his language, complete with its vulgar expressions and coarse parlance. The *kelippah* of Lavan determinately tried to resist Yaakov and prevent his using the Aramaic language for spiritual means.

But Hashem had other plans. The Jewish nation would one day live in Bavel and spiritually prosper. They would speak the language of the land and still grow in Torah. Hashem saw that Lavan wanted to uproot everything by profaning the very element that would insure their survival in *galut*. And so Hashem wrote these words in the Torah, investing the Aramaic language with the quality it needed to sustain its holiness. This helped prepare it for Am Yisrael’s eventual usage. Yaakov even expressed Hashem’s guarantee to protect us from Lavan when he called that place ‘Galed.’ It was in this merit that we have Talmud Bavli, as well as Targum Onkelos (the Aramaic translation of the Torah).

From Yaakov’s struggles with Lavan we see how difficult the *kelippah* in Charan was, and how encased in it were its inhabitants. The Zohar (*Chelek* III 111b) even equates Lavan with the primeval *nachash*, who instigated the sin of Adam and Chava eating from the

Tree of Knowledge. Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 24a) describe the learning of Gemara by quoting the pasuk (*Eichah* 3:6) “He has placed me in darkness.” This refers to Talmud Bavli, whose words are often cryptic and require effort to decipher their intent. It was only Hashem’s providential intervention that helped us to withstand Lavan and his pernicious influence.

Yaakov’s valiant efforts helped to rectify Lavan’s venomous influence. This can be learned from a different episode in Yaakov’s life, his struggle with the Angel of Eisav. After the Angel struck at his hip and made him lame, Yaakov sought to remove the influence of the Angel and thus prohibited the *gid hanasheh*. The Zohar (*Chelek* I 171a) likens this event to the *Yetzer Hara’s* hindering our going to learn Torah. By refraining from eating the *gid hanasheh*, we prevent the *kelippah* from affecting us. (The *minhag* of the Ashkenazim is actually to remove the entire hind leg and not to eat it at all.) Similarly, Yaakov’s disengagement helped to remove Lavan’s influential impact on the future of Am Yisrael.

### **Government money**

Even nowadays, we find the *kelippah* at work, trying to prevent the spread of Torah and its phenomenal growth. The Zohar (*Chelek* I 171a) explains that the story of the displacement of Yaakov’s hip also alludes to the power that the *kelippah* often wields over the support of Torah. By making it difficult to collect funds, he tries to prevent the dissemination of Torah. Certainly, Torah institutions need to be wary of the sources from which they derive their funding. When building a Torah institution, one needs a spiritually solid foundation, which can only come from worthy donors and ‘kosher’ money.

I once had a discussion with a Rosh Hayeshiva about the Satmar Rebbe zt”l’s refusal to take money from the Israeli Government. The

Rebbe felt that using money from the government for supporting a yeshiva was prohibited. This Rabbi though, was of the opinion that there was nothing sacrilegious about it. But I beg to differ. In my humble opinion, even if some of the sources of the Israeli Government are okay, there are still many which are in violation of halachah. Unfortunately, the taxes which are collected from stores which sell non-kosher food, are open on Shabbat, or sell obscene material, are all part of the revenues which funds these institutions. This gives the *kelippah* a 'foot in the door,' even if it is *batel b'shishim*. This is akin to Yaakov who did not want Lavan to have any influence over him. Without question, it would be best to refrain from taking such money if one could manage without it, just as we refrain from eating even the minutest amount of *chametz* during Pesach.

### Finishing the weekly parashah

We are expected every week to finish the *parashat hashevuah* in conjunction with its reading in the Beit Hakeneset. This is a requirement of halachah (*Orach Chaim*, 285). This includes reading the pesukim twice and the Targum once.

This indicates the Targum's pre-eminence as the accepted translation of the Torah. We cannot even begin to appreciate the Targum's exalted status or its true depth of understanding. Who was this Onkelos? He was a Roman *ger* who succeeded in ascending from the clutches of the *kelippah* and entering into the realm of *kedushah*. Through his dedication to learning Torah, he was able to transmit the authentic explanation of the Written Torah, and so merited having his Targum become 'required reading.'

Chazal (*Berachot* 9b) say that one who reads the weekly parashah will merit longevity. It is also a *segulah* for *yirat Shamayim*, for livelihood, children, *shalom bayit*, and many other things as well.

Practically speaking, it is also helpful to read the Targum as it can aid us in understanding the Gemara, which is also written in Aramaic. It is thus well worth our while to strengthen ourselves in this area and finish the parashah in conjunction with the weekly Torah reading. By doing so, we foil the last attempt of Lavan to eradicate the Jewish people.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Yaakov and Lavan forged a *brit*, and set up a pile of stones as a witness to their agreement. There are two forms of ‘pacts.’ There are ‘peace accords’ and there are ‘disengagements.’ The first type seeks to foster friendly relations and forge a bond. The second is an agreement that divides the two parties and builds some wall between them. A marriage is called a *brit*, and the *ketubah* binds the two parties together, whereas a *get* makes them part ways. At first Lavan wanted to befriend his grandchildren and influence them. But when he realized that they were not interested, he looked to separate himself from them.
- ◆ Lavan was determined to call his testimonial pile of stones by its Aramaic title, *Yagar Sehadutah*, in order to retain Aramaic as his language. The *kelippah* of Lavan determinately tried to prevent Yaakov from using the Aramaic language for spiritual means. He hoped that Yaakov’s descendants would lack the ability to spread Torah while in *galut* in Bavel.
- ◆ Hashem wrote *Yagar Sehadutah* in the Torah, investing the Aramaic language with the quality it needed to sustain its holiness. Yaakov expressed Hashem’s guarantee to protect us from Lavan by calling that place ‘Galed.’ It was in this merit that we have Talmud Bavli and Targum Onkelos.
- ◆ We finish the *parashat hashevuah* in conjunction with its reading in the Beit Hakeneset, which includes reading the Targum. Onkelos ascended from the clutches of the *kelippah* and entered into the realm of *kedushah*. Through his dedication to Torah, he was able to transmit

the authentic explanation of the Written Torah, and merited having his Targum become 'required reading.'

- ◆ Even nowadays, we find the *kelippah* at work, trying to prevent the spread of Torah and its growth. The story of the displacement of Yaakov's hip alludes to the power that the *kelippah* often wields over the support of Torah. By making it difficult to collect funds, or hindering our going to learn Torah, he tries to prevent its dissemination. Yaakov prohibited the *gid hanasheh*, which symbolizes the influence of the *Yetzer Hara*.
- ◆ The Israeli Government has many sources of revenue which are in violation of halachah. Stores which sell non-kosher food, are open on Shabbat, or sell obscene material, give the *kelippah* a 'foot in the door,' if we use that money to fund a yeshiva. Without question, it would be best to refrain from taking such money, if one could manage without. This is akin to Yaakov, who did not want Lavan to have any influence over him.



## Gems on Parashat Vayeitzei



### Heavenly Protection

*“And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of Hashem were ascending and descending on it”*

*(Bereishit 28:12)*

The Torah’s account of Yaakov’s dream leads us to question: Does a Heavenly angel need a ladder? As spiritual beings, equipped with their own method of levitation, a ladder seems superfluous. Perhaps we can suggest an answer, after we understand a bit more about angels in general.

As human beings, we cannot even fathom what angels looks like. Their visage is fiery and sublime, striking fear, sparking dread, and provoking reverence. Were a person to catch even a glimpse of one, he would either faint or expire from fear. This is why Hashem made it that we cannot see angels. Chazal (Yalkut Shimoni Devarim, 933) say that when a person’s end is imminent, Hashem allows him to see the Angel of Death and his Heavenly sword, and the neshamah

leaves his body from the traumatic experience. Regarding a righteous individual however, Hashem comes with the Angel to greet him, causing him to die in a more uplifting manner, as the neshamah is drawn after Hashem and pulled away peacefully.

We are all aware that when a person sins, he creates an angel with evil characteristics and a prosecuting demeanor. Conversely, when a person does a righteous deed, the angel that is created shines in virtuousness and beams with good character. These angels even spur the person who created them to continue his line of activity, as they thrive on good deeds, almost like a person who is nurtured by consuming food. And so we feel an inner impulse towards good, which is actually a by-product of our former behavior. As these good angels are closely associated with the person who created them, they also watch carefully over him, until they ascend on High.

Perhaps we can now understand the purpose of the ladder in Yaakov's dream. The Heavenly angels that were created by Yaakov's good deeds elevated slowly to the Heavenly realm, casting their watchful glance at Yaakov who lay sleeping below. Their ascent was marked by graduated steps, hence the ladder in Yaakov's dream. Even though their time in this world was drawing to a close, they still wanted to watch over Yaakov as long as they could. Their climbing by means of a ladder alludes to the protective measures such angels provide for their creator.

I saw a similar idea in the sefer Eitz Erez, on the pasuk (Bereishit 28:13) "And behold! Hashem was standing over him." He explains that Hashem stands guard over a person, so to speak, between the performance of one mitzvah and the next. Since the angel that is created by our good deeds eventually ascends on High, Hashem

watches over us Himself, until we do the next mitzvah. This is why Hashem appeared in Yaakov's dream.



## Ascending the Ladder

*“And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of Hashem were ascending and descending on it”*

*(Bereishit 28:12)*

Symbolically, a person is like a ladder. His two feet rest on the ground, while his head is pointed up towards the sky. This is also true in a figurative sense, as we base ourselves on our corporeal existence, grounding ourselves by achieving materialistic goals, while more importantly, raising our focus towards spiritual attainments.

A ladder is very crucial in reaching high places. Without a ladder (or some other form of steps) we would not be able to ascend and reach where we need to. Similarly, our climb up the spiritual ladder requires graduated steps, modest achievements in Torah and mitzvot, before we can see concrete spiritual results.

Unfortunately, many people turn their ladder on its head and climb into the morass of materialism, head first. They don't distinguish between temporary pleasures and everlasting bliss, and forget where they are really headed after all. After one hundred and twenty years, a person's body is 'grounded' six feet under, and it is

too late to point their ladder of achievement in the upward direction. This is why we should take advantage of the time we have here on earth to grow in Torah and good deeds, so that we can enter the Heavenly portal of eternal ascent.



## Righteous Progeny

*“Bilhah conceived and bore Yaakov a son”*

*(Bereishit 30:5)*

Why does the Torah stress that she “bore Yaakov” instead of simply stating that Bilhah gave birth? Obviously there is something the Torah wants to teach us.

We find a similar idea by Tamar. The pasuk (Bereishit 38:18) says, “And she conceived by him.” There, Rashi gives us a better insight into the underlying premise of these words. Rashi explains that Tamar bore for Yehudah two children, both of whom were as righteous and physically powerful as he. This is why it stresses who was the father of the children, and lists Yehudah as their progenitor, as his middot became the forerunner of theirs. And this also explains why it says a similar wording by Yaakov. Bilhah’s children had a worthy and righteous father to bequeath them traits of virtue.

In a homiletical vein, the numerical value of the word בְּלֵהָה equals the same as the word בָּם. This refers us to the pasuk (Devarim 6:7) וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם, “And you shall speak of them (i.e. words of Torah).” One who learns Torah and constantly goes over his studies, creates ‘progeny’ of a spiritual caliber. Torah novella and original thoughts

are products of focusing on one's learning, and originate from well-articulated thoughts. And such 'progeny' carry the stamp of their 'father' quite clearly. This is another concept which is 'borne out' by our parashah.

In a later parashah (Devarim 3:26), Moshe Rabbeinu describes Hashem's reaction to Am Yisrael's behavior in the desert, "But Hashem became angry with me because of you." The Hebrew word וַיִּתְעַבֵּר (to overflow with anger) can also be translated as becoming pregnant. Moshe was pointing out how Hashem expected him to carry the burdens of Am Yisrael, similar to a woman carrying a pregnancy and bearing children. Just as she lovingly cares for her progeny, so too, a leader should lead his flock with the same deep understanding, even as he bears their burdens.

If, chas v'shalom, Am Yisrael should sin and leave the Torah way of life, Hashem would consider their defection as rejecting their spiritual predecessors. When the Jews made a golden calf, the pasuk (Shemot 32:7) says, "Go descend – for your people... has become corrupt." Hashem called them 'your' people, for they had turned their back on Him. This in turn caused Moshe Rabbeinu to lose his standing in Hashem's eyes, almost as an unworthy progenitor would.





## Vayishlach



### Fraternizing with Eisav

*“Then Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to Eisav his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom”*

*(Bereishit 32:4)*

At first glance, Yaakov’s proposed meeting with Eisav was simply to promote peace. Yaakov arranged this meeting seemingly to find a resolution to their conflict. He even sent presents and messengers to Eisav, also indicating his eagerness for peace. We would surmise then that Yaakov wanted to solidify their relationship, and only prepared for war as a last result. Yet after their encounter, Yaakov turned down Eisav’s offer to (*Bereishit* 33:12) “let us go and I will proceed alongside you.” Yaakov replied to Eisav’s gesture of goodwill by saying (*ibid.* 33:14), “Let my lord go ahead of his servant; I will make my way at my slow pace according to the gait of the drove before me.” This is a far cry from looking to build a peaceful relationship. What made Yaakov change his approach?

It would seem that Yaakov had deeper considerations in mind.

Yaakov's contact with Eisav was actually a preparation for similar conflicts in future generations. He wanted to demonstrate to his children his guiding policy on how to deal with Eisav. This is borne out by Yaakov's actions. Chazal (*Pesachim* 56a) say that Yaakov wanted to reveal to his children his prophecies regarding the End of Days, but Hashem restrained him and concealed its revelation. Here too, Yaakov acted out of concern to provide his children with an overview of the struggle with Eisav until the end of time.

Later, we read that Yaakov expressed his displeasure when he found out that his children destroyed the city of Shechem and its inhabitants. The pasuk writes (*Bereishit* 49:5) by the *berachot* of Yaakov Avinu, "Shimon and Levi are comrades, their weaponry is a stolen craft." This leads us to ask, why did Yaakov chastise his children for doing the same thing that he was prepared to do? Didn't Yaakov also prepare for war with Eisav?

Perhaps we can find a difference between the two. The conflict between Yaakov and Eisav was of a spiritual nature. They were diametrically opposed concerning the value and goal of this world vs. the next. Eisav's contention that this world was meant to be lived up and enjoyed for its own sake, flew in the face of everything that he was brought up on. In the homes of Yitzchak and Yaakov, belief in Hashem and the World to Come was a given, and Torah was the accepted guide to life. Thus Eisav's hedonism was an impudent affront that clashed with his Torah upbringing. Faced with such a conflicting ideology, Yaakov felt the need to stress to his children the correct approach to life. This is why he met his brother, and used every means at his disposal to prepare for their encounter.

The war in Shechem, though, was of a different nature. Shimon and Levi zealously fought to protect their own personal honor. It

wasn't a campaign waged for the sake of Heaven or to uphold the tenets of Torah. In that situation, Yaakov chastised his sons for their rash act of vengeance, one that could possibly have been avoided. When it comes to personal battles, one should strive to find a peaceful solution and stay far away from conflict.

When Eisav sought to continue their journey together, Yaakov rejected his overture of peace. Although Eisav had learned Torah as a youth and had been influenced by Yitzchak, Yaakov saw that his evil desires of wanton behavior still lingered and festered within. Eisav could not bring himself to give up physical pleasures in order to acquire a portion in the World to Come. Perhaps Eisav had a fleeting change of heart when he saw that Yaakov did not lack material acquisitions, but it did not ignite a spark of remorse or effect a change of character.

This can be inferred from Eisav's words, "Let us go." Eisav viewed himself on equal footing with Yaakov. He sported an attitude that would have merely initiated a joint effort, without consenting to the inferiority of this world's 'goods' or to the supremacy of the Torah's 'good.'

Unfortunately, we find even today, those who display a Chanukah candle, and *l'havdil* set up a Xmas tree, thinking that they can combine the best of 'both worlds' and benefit from their unification. Such people are sadly mistaken. Each religion has a very distinct and different approach to life. They are incongruent in their basic tenets of belief and practice. Only one who accepts the supremacy of Torah without any reservations can truly possess the light of Torah.

Similarly, Eisav wanted to achieve parity with Yaakov; sometimes Yaakov would lead the show, and at other times he would take charge himself. He was unwilling to submit to Hashem's authority or accept the supremacy of Torah. Obviously, such an approach is

untenable, something to be shunned and rebuffed. And so, Yaakov journeyed on alone.

This is the message that Yaakov gave over to his children. We should avail ourselves of our spiritual heritage and be enlightened by its words of Torah. We shouldn't seek to fraternize with Eisav or the other nations of the world. If we will acknowledge Torah as the sole guiding force of life and the ultimate goal, we will be able to enter its portal of truth and receive our just reward.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Yaakov arranged a meeting with Eisav and sent presents and messengers, indicating his eagerness for peace. We would surmise then that Yaakov wanted to solidify their relationship, and only prepared for war as a last resort. Yet after their encounter, Yaakov turned down Eisav's gesture of goodwill and rejected his offer to accompany him. What made Yaakov change his approach?
- ◆ Yaakov prepared for similar conflicts in future generations. The conflict between Yaakov and Eisav was of a spiritual nature. Eisav's contention that this world was meant to be enjoyed for its own sake runs contrary to our belief in Hashem and the World to Come. Faced with such a conflicting ideology, Yaakov felt the need to stress the correct approach to life.
- ◆ When Eisav sought to continue their journey together, Yaakov saw that his evil desires of wanton behavior still lingered and festered within. He could not bring himself to give up physical pleasures in order to acquire a spiritual portion in the World to Come. Eisav did not consent to the inferiority of this world's 'goods' or to the supremacy of the Torah's 'good.'
- ◆ Why did Yaakov chastise his children for destroying the city of Shechem, when he had been prepared to wage war against Eisav?

Shimon and Levi zealously fought to protect their own personal honor. It wasn't a campaign waged for the sake of Heaven or to uphold the tenets of the Torah. When it comes to personal battles, one should strive to find a peaceful solution and stay far away from conflict.



### Keeping the Mitzvot

*“Then Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to Eisav his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He charged them, saying, ‘Thus shall you say: To my lord, to Eisav, so said your servant Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now. I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, servants, and maidservants and I am sending to tell my lord to find favor in your eyes’”*

*(Bereishit 32:4-6)*

Yaakov had merely finished with Lavan, and immediately had to deal with Eisav. A tzaddik has no time to rest in this world. There is always more to do. Yaakov wanted to show his children how to deal with Eisav. Sometimes one has to disassociate with one's own kin in order not to be influenced by their bad behavior.

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 75:4) disagree if the messengers that Yaakov sent to Eisav were human mortals or Heavenly angels. Either way, there was an important message that Yaakov wanted Eisav to hear. Rashi notes that the word גרתי (I dwelled by Lavan) can be rearranged to spell תריג, referring to the 613 mitzvot. Yaakov told

Eisav that he lived by Lavan and kept all 613 mitzvot. What was the import of this message?

I suggest that Yaakov was demonstrating his commitment to doing Hashem's will, even in the face of opposition. He did not stand for Lavan's evil behavior, nor would he yield to Eisav. When it came to doing mitzvot, he adamantly refused to capitulate or have it any other way, demanding from himself full Torah observance and detailed religious practice in every situation.

There are other indications of this in the pasuk, as well. Yaakov mentions his flocks and cattle, which the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 75:12) says allude to his spiritual acquisitions. The words, "and I acquired cattle (lit. an ox)" hint to Yosef (as Yosef is symbolized by the ox, see *Bereishit* 49:6). Yosef was a product of Yaakov's tutelage, a righteous successor to carry on the tradition. Additionally, the numerical value of the last letters of the words **עַם לְבֵן גֵרְתִּי** equals one hundred, referring to Yaakov's determination to say one hundred *berachot* every day, or alternatively, hints to his constant repetition of learning (see *Chagigah* 9b). By stressing his spiritual perseverance, Yaakov was warning Eisav that he would not lessen his opposition to evil. Despite Eisav being his own brother, Yaakov was willing to sever all contact if necessary, were Eisav to try to sway him from doing good.

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 76:9) does, however, mention one shortcoming in Yaakov's attitude. The Midrash analyzes why Yaakov was punished by having his daughter Dina ravished by Shechem. The reason given is that Yaakov disassociated completely from Eisav and did not try to influence him in the opposite direction, to good. This indicates the need to influence our 'brethren' to Torah and towards a more spiritual way of life.

## The proliferation of Torah

I heard an amazing insight in the name of Maran Harav Shach zt”l. Many people think that they give honor to the Torah by learning it. They think that they are doing Hashem a ‘favor.’ But the exact opposite is true. The Torah bestows honor upon those who pore over its words. Our dedication to Torah learning is what raises us, as well as our surroundings, to higher levels.

Harav Shach added an afterthought. If you take a look at the world at large, you will discover that wherever Jews were adamant about their religious observance, their host countries prospered. One can point to the shores of America for validation. Once Jewry became established and started to flourish, America became a super power. Today, one can find yeshivot and kollelim all over the world. Even Alaska, Russia, and China have citadels of learning. It is in the merit of Torah that such countries develop their resources and ascend to international repute.

I remember in Lyon, France, well over thirty years ago, when there were maybe sixty children and one day school. There was one *mikveh* and two butcher shops, and almost no one of affluence. Today, the situation is very different. *Bli ayin hara*, the community has blossomed. There are ten *mikvaot*, dozens of butcher shops, not to mention the schools, yeshivot, and kollelim which abound. One can feel the thirst for Torah within the burgeoning population. Financially as well, the community is thriving. This blessing is an offshoot of a Torah commitment, which showers its surroundings with its abundance of *berachah*.

This should motivate us all to commit ourselves to Torah. We should value the influence our learning has on the society around us. One who diligently learns Torah *lishmah*, without vested interests or personal jealousy, can bring *berachah* to his community,

as well as for himself. If only more people were aware of the tremendous impact that Torah makes! There is no greater honor or virtue than to learn Torah.

In this vein, I express my innermost longing. How I wish that I could spend all of my time learning in the Beit Hamidrash, and that someone else would take over all of my obligations. I would even relinquish my distinction of being the descendant of the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt”l. But what can I do? I have already been told by my spiritual mentors that this is my purpose in life. Each person is given a specific task to accomplish, their purpose of coming down into this world.

This does not diminish the tremendous merit of those who sit and learn. The Gemara (*Pesachim* 68b) brings a statement to substantiate this. Said Rav Yosef, “Were it not for this day (of the giving of the Torah) I would be just another ‘Yosef’ in the marketplace.” Rav Yosef felt the driving force of the Torah and its push for character refinement and spiritual elevation. This is what elevated him and produced a ‘Rav’ Yosef. Each one of us can feel that elevation and revel in the joy of understanding another bit of Torah.

Unfortunately, many people have family members who try to wean them away from Torah, luring them with all sorts of enticements. We should learn from Yaakov Avinu. He did not let Eisav prevent his spiritual climb. We, too, should not listen to their words or become sidetracked from our goal. Even Eisav’s four hundred men did not deter Yaakov from doing what he knew to be Hashem’s will.

When Eisav finally met Yaakov, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 33:4) says, “And he kissed him.” Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 78:9) disagree over Eisav’s true intentions. Some say that Eisav really wanted to bite

Yaakov's neck, but miraculously, some of his teeth chipped and broke. Others say that Eisav was overcome with brotherly affection and kissed him wholeheartedly. Eisav even made a gesture of goodwill by offering to accompany Yaakov on his journey home. Yet Yaakov rejected his offer, preferring to travel alone. He didn't even turn in Eisav's direction, as he had his own destination in mind. He just told Eisav (*Bereishit* 33:14), "I will make my way at my slow pace."

This can also refer to our 'pace' in learning Torah. We continue on our 'journey,' slowly covering ground and reviewing our studies, without stop. Despite those who taunt us or jeer at our progress or goals, we should persevere in our commitment to learn Torah and doing review.

Eisav had no patience or desire for Yaakov's way of life, and left him alone. He had a life of evil to lead, and wasn't about to stop because of Yaakov. This is hinted at by the destination of Eisav, שְׂעִיר, which contains the letters רשע. And so Eisav went on his merry way.

The Mishnah (*Avot* 1:7) says, "Stay far from an evil neighbor and do not join a rasha." We reiterate this in our daily morning prayer, "Save us from an evil neighbor and an evil companion." Often, those who do teshuvah find themselves befriended and pulled by their not-yet religious family members, away from their new-found faith. They may be lured by their media portals, with unlimited access to uncensored content. This can affect them quite negatively. Even the manner of speech of the non-religious can sometimes be coarse and detrimental. We should learn from Yaakov Avinu not to fraternize with such relatives. This can apply even to a grandfather or uncle who tries to prevent our spiritual growth.

Perhaps with this, we can explain the juxtaposition of these two

parshiyot, *Vayeitzei* and *Vayishlach*. The first parashah tells us how Yaakov made a 'separation' pact with Lavan. The second parashah tells us how Yaakov dealt with Eisav. Yaakov made a pact with Lavan and a break with Eisav in order to protect his family from harm. He wisely charted a path that would steer them away from any evil influence. Yaakov did not want to have any connection with them or be influenced by their evil ways, in the spirit of the Mishnah in *Avot*.

We can also use this to answer the question of the *Ben Ish Chai* (*Vayeitzei, Shana Rishona*). The pasuk (*Bereishit* 31:44) says, "So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and it shall be a witness between me and you." Yaakov made a pact with Lavan, not in order to foster friendly relations and forge a bond, but to divide them and build a wall between them. Their *brit* differs from all other types of *brit* by its very nature. Why was it done this way?

The answer is that Lavan wanted to befriend his grandchildren and influence them. Yaakov made a 'pact' to break that bond. He set up stones to bear witness that each one could go their own way without being disturbed by the other. Yaakov included his sons in this special 'pact,' as they had common ancestry with Lavan and Yaakov. They helped by collecting stones and building a testimonial 'wall,' and this act protected them from Lavan's influence.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ We learn from Yaakov how to distance ourselves from negative influences, those who try to wean us away from Torah or prevent our spiritual growth. Sometimes one has to disassociate from one's own kin in order not to be influenced by their behavior. This is what it means by, "Stay far from an evil neighbor and do not join a rasha." And so Yaakov made a pact with Lavan and broke off from Eisav.

- ◆ Yaakov mentioned to Eisav the mitzvot that he kept while living at Lavan's house. By stressing his spiritual perseverance, Yaakov was warning Eisav that he would not lessen his opposition to evil. Despite Eisav being his own brother, Yaakov was willing to sever all contact if necessary, were Eisav to try to sway him from doing good.
- ◆ Yaakov rejected Eisav's offer, preferring to travel alone. He didn't even turn in Eisav's direction. Instead, Yaakov hid Dina from Eisav. Chazal say, though, that Yaakov should have tried to influence Eisav for the good. This indicates our need to influence our 'brethren' to Torah and towards a more spiritual way of life.



### The Worthlessness of Money

*“Then Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to Eisav his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He charged them, saying, ‘Thus shall you say: To my lord, to Eisav, so said your servant Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now. I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, servants, and maidservants and I am sending to tell my lord to find favor in your eyes’”*

*(Bereishit 32:4-6)*

Rashi writes that the word גרתי (I dwelled) contains a reference to Yaakov's activities. Yaakov was apprising Eisav of his status and told Eisav the following message: I did not become a distinguished person or nobleman, but remained a גר (sojourner). It is not worth

your while to hate me for taking the *berachot* of your father Yitzchak, who said that I would be, “a lord to your kinsmen,” as it did not materialize. Rashi adds another Midrash which equates the word גרתי with the word תריג, referring to the 613 commandments. Said Yaakov, “I dwelled with Lavan Harasha and kept the 613 mitzvot, not learning from Lavan’s evil behavior.”

Amidst the preparations of meeting Eisav and appeasing him with many herds of animals, Yaakov took the time to compose a message for Eisav. What was this message? Despite his evil surroundings, he had remained steadfastly religious. He did not learn from Lavan’s fetish of idolatry or his abhorrent practices and aberrant behavior. He kept the mitzvot and withstood his *nisayon*.

This only sparks our curiosity. Is this the type of message that one writes to a murderer intent on killing his prey? A rasha such as Eisav isn’t very concerned about the spiritual level of his victim. His whole life centers on the three cardinal sins: idolatry, immorality and murder. For the rasha, vice becomes a virtue and sin becomes in vogue. Eisav even despised his religious upbringing and cast scorn upon the birthright. So what did Yaakov think he would accomplish by delivering such a message?

Let us probe a bit further. Yaakov explained to Eisav that he was a mere sojourner, not worthy of any distinction. Yet this can easily be refuted by a cursory inspection of Yaakov’s possessions. The pasuk describes how Yaakov left Lavan with two large camps containing oxen and sheep, servants and maidservants. According to the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 73:11), Yaakov had 60,000 dogs, one for each herd of sheep. How could Yaakov even pretend not to be a wealthy man?

We have other questions regarding Yaakov’s words. What did he mean that it was not worth Eisav’s while to hate him? Chazal say

that there is a halachah which states that Eisav hates Yaakov. In truth, this hatred has benefited Am Yisrael. It pushed Jews from all walks of life, to cling to their faith and not be blinded by the lure of social 'emancipation' and 'freedom' of religion. Were it not for Anti-Semitism, the Jewish nation would long ago have disappeared in the melting pot of world culture, leaving no trace behind.

I suggest that Yaakov had a plan up his sleeve. Aware of Eisav's low spiritual status, Yaakov was seriously concerned over his future. He wanted to give Eisav spiritual 'resuscitation' and help him return to his religious roots. It disturbed him tremendously that the son and grandson of such great tzaddikim could stoop so low. He felt that Eisav still had the potential to do teshuvah.

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 84a) brings a story about a famous *ba'al teshuvah*. Once, Rabbi Yochanan was bathing in the waters of the Jordan River. The head of a band of gangsters, Raish Lakish, saw him from the other side of the river and mistakenly took him for a woman. He lustfully bounded across the river in a single jump, only to realize his mistake and find Rabbi Yochanan there. Witnessing such unusual strength, Rabbi Yochanan told Raish Lakish, "Your strength should be used for Torah." Physical strength is a gift from heaven and can be channeled towards holy endeavors. Rabbi Yochanan, who was tremendously handsome, even promised Raish Lakish that if he were to leave his gang of ruffians and do teshuvah, he would give his even more beautiful sister to be his wife.

In a similar vein, Yaakov had high hopes for Eisav. Eisav's worthy ancestry could have easily paved the way for him to use his physical prowess for more spiritual pursuits. Yaakov hesitated though, when it came to giving his own daughter's hand in marriage to Eisav. Perhaps he thought that Eisav could do teshuvah without any lure or incentive. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 76:9), however, say that Hashem held Yaakov accountable, as the added incentive of

marrying Dina could have been the catalyst for Eisav to mend his ways and turn over a new leaf.

### **True wealth**

This is what Yaakov meant when he said that it was not worth Eisav's while to hate him. All of his wealth was secondary to him, and obtained only in the merit of learning Torah. It did not promote Yaakov to stardom and worldly acclaim, nor add prestige to his name. And so, he was not really Eisav's rival. Yaakov sought to point Eisav in the right direction by stressing the real source of his wealth. By keeping the mitzvot of Hashem and being steadfast in one's religiosity, one can be worthy of Divine *berachah*.

Some mistakenly think that money is the sole measuring-rod of success. One who has money is considered to be fortunate. He has 'made it' in life. I once met a well-known, fabulously wealthy individual, who owned his own private jet. When I came to visit him he was wearing torn jeans and had bad breath, as if he hadn't eaten for some time. I asked him when he had recently eaten, and he said that he just didn't have time. I told him that one usually earns money in order to ease financial strain and provide a more easy-going lifestyle, not to burden himself with constant worry and become overwhelmed with responsibility. "Not only do you not benefit from your money," I said, "it has only added to your strain. You don't have time to eat or sleep, and seemingly, even to get dressed."

After a person dies, he leaves all of his possessions behind. The world has yet to see the first one to succeed in taking his money with him into the world Above. What purpose, then, is the endless 'treadmill' of work or the enslaved pursuit of money? Only the Torah that a person learns can ascend Above and speak on his behalf. This is mentioned by the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 58:8) who said, "Your

righteous deed will precede you.” The Torah is the righteous merit which goes before a person and escorts him on High. As the Gemara (*Pesachim* 50a) says, “Fortunate is the one who arrives here with his Torah learning in hand.”

My saintly great-grandfather, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto zt”l, explained why he called his sefarim by names which signify money, such as *Kesef Nivchar* or *Kesef Mezuakak*. Our ingrained nature is to treasure and hoard money. Rare is the individual who depreciates its value or looks on it askew. Everyone needs money in order to support himself. This is why he chose to title his *derashot* with money-related themes. He wanted to instill the need to treasure Torah and hoard it just as we pursue money. It should be no less a pillar of our lives, without which we cannot survive.

This is the message that Yaakov sent to Eisav. This can also explain why Yaakov described Yitzchak as ‘your father’ and not ‘our father.’ By turning his back on religion and Torah learning, Eisav, in effect, dissolved their brotherhood. They now had two disparate paths in life. Yaakov, who chose to walk in his forefather’s path, despite the *nisyonot* of Lavan’s home, was not the real object of Eisav’s hatred. He did not aspire to preeminence or attach value to money. Any wealth he had was only in the merit of his Torah, and should not have been a source of contention to Eisav.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ Yaakov sent messengers to Eisav with a message. Despite his evil surroundings, he remained steadfastly religious. He did not learn from Lavan’s abhorrent practices and aberrant behavior. He kept the mitzvot and withstood his *nisayon*.

- ◆ What did Yaakov think he would accomplish by delivering such a message? Eisav wasn't very concerned about Yaakov's spiritual level. How could Yaakov even pretend not to be a wealthy man? And what did he mean that it was not worth Eisav's while to hate him? Isn't there is a halachah which states that Eisav hates Yaakov?
- ◆ Yaakov wanted to give Eisav spiritual 'resuscitation.' He felt that that the son and grandson of such great tzaddikim had the potential to do teshuvah. Eisav's worthy ancestry could easily have paved the way for him to use his physical prowess for more spiritual pursuits.
- ◆ Yaakov sought to point Eisav in the right direction by stressing the real source of his wealth. Any wealth he had obtained was only in the merit of his Torah, and should not have been a source of contention to Eisav. It did not promote Yaakov to preeminence or add prestige to his name. By keeping the mitzvot of Hashem and being steadfast in one's religiosity, one can be worthy of Divine *berachah*.
- ◆ Some mistakenly think that money is the sole measuring-rod of success. One who has money is considered to be fortunate. After a person dies, though, he leaves all of his possessions behind. What purpose then is the endless 'treadmill' of work or the enslaved pursuit of money? Only the Torah that a person learns can ascend Above and speak on his behalf.
- ◆ We should treasure Torah and hoard it just as we pursue money. It should be no less a pillar of our lives, without which we cannot survive.



## The Portal of the World to Come

*“Then Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to Eisav his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He charged them, saying ‘Thus shall you say: To my lord, to Eisav, so said your servant Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now. I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, servants, and maidservants and I am sending to tell my lord to find favor in your eyes’”*

*(Bereishit 32:4-6)*

Rashi explains that Yaakov told Eisav, “I dwelled with Lavan and kept the mitzvot, and did not learn from his evil behavior.”

Yaakov prepared for his encounter with Eisav with a three-pronged approach. He prepared gifts to appease him, weapons to oppose him, and offered up a tefillah for Divine assistance (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 32:8). And yet, when he wanted to describe to Eisav his progress in Lavan’s home, he didn’t ‘dwell’ on his wealth or extensive possessions. Instead, he chose to focus on his spiritual accomplishments. Despite being in close proximity to a rasha like Lavan, he still remained righteous, not forfeiting the observance of even one mitzvah. As a sign of his righteousness, Yaakov displayed to Eisav his Heavenly retinue (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 32:5).

This message leaves us puzzled. Did Eisav Harasha really care about Yaakov’s spiritual progress? A rasha’s lust for pleasure and greed for wealth fill his consciousness with coarse thoughts. His attention is riveted on corporeal objects and attracted to vain

endeavors, not on spiritual attainments. Why, then, did Yaakov feel the need to dwell on this point?

I suggest that Yaakov was giving Eisav a lecture on worldly possessions. True, Yaakov was blessed with enormous wealth, with herds of animals and hordes of servants. But the source of this abundance was his merit of continuing in his father's ways, not his financial genius. True wealth is not expressed in financial holdings or measured by dollars and cents. After one hundred and twenty, a person leaves it all behind. Material possessions cannot pave our entry into the world Above. Only the Torah we learn and the mitzvot we do can provide us with a Heavenly escort and present a legal defense on our behalf. Thus money, without Torah, is a bad investment. The real worth of a person is determined by how he sticks to his faith and clings to his religion, despite all obstacles.

Yaakov also countered Eisav's claim that he did not keep the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em* during all those years. Yaakov said, "And I have lingered until now," meaning, that he was commanded to go to Charan and was thus absolved from practicing that mitzvah on a daily basis. In a broader sense, Chazal (*Menachot* 110a) tell us that one who learns the laws of the sacrifices is credited with those mitzvot. Similarly, one who is happily married may never observe the laws of a Jewish divorce, but he does not lack the potential reward of this mitzvah, as he can study its particulars and be accredited with its performance. Thus Yaakov's learning accredited him all 613 mitzvot, including the mitzvah of *kibbud av v'em*.

### **Continuing on**

The parashah (*Bereishit* 33:17) continues with Yaakov's journey. "But Yaakov journeyed to Sukkot, and he built himself a house there, and for his livestock he made sukkot; he therefore called the

name of the place *Sukkot*.” My great-grandfather, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto zt”l, in his sefer *Kesef Mezuakak*, explains this pasuk at length. Yaakov Avinu’s actions demonstrate our response to material acquisitions. Yaakov was the choicest of the Avot and his countenance is engraved on the Heavenly throne (*Bereishit Rabbah* 78:3). His influence permeates every generation in history, as Yaakov did not die (*Ta’anit* 5b). Yaakov taught us, by example, a perspective on life in this world and its portal to eternity.

A person should always remember that his materialistic possessions are only temporary assets, similar to a thatched shelter which serves a simple and momentary purpose. When we are on the road, away from home, we build a temporary house and understand that it has but a short-lived purpose. Similarly, our possessions are here to use for just a brief time span, and have no everlasting value of their own. In the next world we will build our ‘permanent’ abode.

I would add to my great-grandfather’s words the following comment. The Chafetz Chaim compares life to a tourist visiting a foreign country. How does a tourist travel? He packs his bags, the lighter the better. It would be foolish for him to take all of his possessions, as he stays in one place for a limited amount of time. As soon as he sets up camp, he is already making arrangements for the next leg of his journey. Similarly, we are temporary residents of this world, awaiting our entry into the World to Come.

Why did Yaakov teach this lesson specifically at this juncture of time? I suggest that he wanted to offset the impression that he thought Eisav would walk away with. The Shevatim had to see that Torah is life’s guiding force. Without Torah, all of their wealth was fleeting and insignificant. Only by making Torah the primary goal, does money have any importance or purpose. Even when Yaakov told Eisav, “I have acquired oxen and donkeys,” he was figuratively referring to two of his prize children, Yosef and Yissachar (who are

compared to these animals because of their prowess in serving Hashem).

Most people minimize the extent of their possessions, in order to acquire more. It is not enough what we have, as the one who has one hundred, wants two hundred (*Kohelet Rabbah* 1:32). The desire to acquire only increases with each acquisition. This is why it is so important for us to ‘dwell’ on this topic and integrate its message. Without strengthening the value and position of Torah in our lives, we will find ourselves lost in the endless rat race of material procurement and be drawn into its whirling vortex of consumerism. Money can never buy satisfaction or bring deep fulfillment. Only one who can assimilate this concept can truly achieve financial ‘independence’ and ‘success.’

This is why Yaakov built his house in ‘Sukkot.’ He emphasized to his children the lack of permanence of the home that they built and the transient gains that our world has to offer. What may look, on the outside, as durable and enduring, is actually temporary. Even the sturdiest home cannot weather the tempestuous vicissitudes of life throughout the vast eternity of existence.

This could also explain why the pasuk first recounts how Yaakov went to Sukkot, and then writes that Yaakov called it Sukkot. If it was already called Sukkot before Yaakov arrived, what did Yaakov add to it by calling it by that very same name? The answer is that even before Yaakov arrived, he knew that he was only making a stopover. When Yaakov set up camp, his temporary stopover identified that place with his own makeshift shelter, thereby corroborating that it was indeed ‘Sukkot.’

Similarly, this would explain why the word סכת is spelled at first without a ך, and only later spelled with a ך – סכות. This signifies the difference between one who lacks conviction when ascribing our

world with temporary qualities, and one who believes this wholeheartedly. The word *Sukkot*, when written in a more complete form, signifies one whose ideology is not just mere lip service. It signifies one who expresses his deepest convictions when he ascribes our world with temporality, and lives his life accordingly.

In a similar fashion, we can explain the juxtaposition of parashat *Vayishlach* to parashat *Vayeishev*. The beginning of the next parashah mentions how Yaakov wanted to rest from his *nisyonot*, and was immediately beset with Yosef's abduction. This indicates that Yaakov's desire was not looked upon favorably in the Heavenly realm. The reason may be as we just explained. As one who spearheaded the Jewish perspective on life and its transient nature, it was unbecoming of Yaakov to want a rest, and so he was presented with another situation to master and from which to derive everlasting spiritual benefit. Thus this eternal message was only strengthened and divinely confirmed. Our world is but a portal, the antechamber before the Grand Hall of the World to Come (*Avot* 4:16).

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Yaakov Avinu sent gifts to Eisav, along with a message that he kept the mitzvot despite living in Lavan's house. Yaakov even accounted for *kibbud av v'em* by learning its laws. Was Eisav really interested in Yaakov's spiritual progress or practice of mitzvot?
- ◆ Yaakov felt responsibility towards his brother and gave Eisav a lecture on worldly possessions. True, Yaakov was blessed with enormous wealth. But the source of this abundance was his merit of continuing in his father's ways. Torah is the source of *berachah*. Money, without Torah, is a bad investment. The real worth of a person is determined by how he sticks to his faith and clings to his religion despite all obstacles.

- ◆ After his meeting with Eisav, Yaakov continued on to a place called Sukkot, where he built a house. This signifies how our homes in this world are similar to a sukkah, temporary places of residence. This reiterated his message and added a deeper thought. Despite his immense wealth, Yaakov did not attach any importance to materialistic possessions. Even his home was considered a transient edifice, like a tourist setting up camp for the night.
- ◆ The pasuk recounts how Yaakov went to a place called Sukkot, and then writes that Yaakov called it Sukkot. What did Yaakov add by calling it by that very same name? Additionally, why is the word סִכּוֹת spelled at first without a ך, and only later spelled with a ך – סִכּוֹת?
- ◆ At first, the name *Sukkot* was just a term. It is like someone who says he believes, but lacks conviction. When Yaakov set up camp, though, his temporary stopover identified that place with his own makeshift designation. The word Sukkot, when spelled out in full (with a ך), signifies one whose ideology is not just mere lip service. It represents someone who expresses his deepest convictions when he ascribes our world with temporality.



## The Hasmonean Connection

*“He charged them, saying, ‘Thus shall you say: To my lord, to Eisav, so said your servant, Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now’”*

*(Bereishit 32:5)*

Rashi explains that Yaakov told Eisav, “I dwelled with Lavan and kept the mitzvot, and I did not learn from his evil behavior.” Based

on this Rashi, we can perhaps explain the connection between the parshiyot of *Vayishlach* and *Vayeishev* and Chanukah, which always falls out during these weeks.

It is written (*Maggid Meisharim, Vayakheil*) that the festivals of Chanukah and Purim will never be eliminated from the Jewish calendar (even after the advent of the Mashiach). Although other festivals such as Pesach and Sukkot may become obsolete (as the miracles preceding the coming of the Mashiach will be vastly greater than anything experienced before), Chanukah and Purim will still retain their miraculous import. What is it that distinguishes Chanukah from all other festivals?

If we take a close look at the difference in how we celebrate these festivals, we may have our answer. The obligation of celebrating the Scriptural festivals is to feast and rejoice with the festival. On Chanukah, though, we are commanded to celebrate by expressing our thanks and praise. There is no requirement to feast and dine. The obvious reason for this is the nature of Chanukah. Chanukah celebrates our spiritual salvation more than our deliverance from physical destruction.

The Greeks wanted to eradicate every vestige of Torah. Such important mitzvot such as Shabbat, *brit milah*, and family purity came under attack. The Greeks also attempted to defile everything that was holy and pure. They spread their depraved culture the world over, capturing millions in their net of paganism. Unfortunately, many Jews succumbed to their influence, and became known as *Mityavanim*. They rejected the faith of their forefathers, and were eventually lost to the Jewish people.

The Jews who rebelled against the tyranny of the Greeks had to do mitzvot in secrecy or while hiding out in caves. They could no longer express their religiosity openly. The Chashmonaim, however,

stood up in open defiance and waged a war against the mighty Greek Empire. Their battle cry was, “Whoever is for Hashem, come with me.” This displayed tremendous self-sacrifice on their part, as they had to fight whole armies of well-trained soldiers. They were pitifully few against the largest military force in the world.

Hashem performed a miracle, and the ‘few were victorious over the many’. This gave the Jews of that time the confidence and dignity to be Jewish. And ever since then, we do mitzvot and wear clothing that distinguishes us as Jews with our heads held high. This is why we are told to praise and thank Hashem on Chanukah. It has given us the ability to display our Jewishness with pride, not with eyes cast down in shame. We also demonstrate our happy fortune of being Jews each and every morning, when we thank Hashem for not creating us gentiles. Obviously, it requires us to act the part and not play fiddle to the alluring tunes of apostasy or ‘gentilization.’

This idea finds its expression in the menorah, as the number of candles we light contain a reference to the true battle which transpired. The letters of the Hebrew word שמנה (eight) can be rearranged to spell the word נשמה (soul). This signifies the battle for the Jewish soul. That Jewish spark was never extinguished, and still continues to burn brightly even today. Similarly, the שמן (oil) we use to kindle our lights has the same letters as נשמה. We also know that the light of the menorah represents the light of Torah. This alludes to restoration of the Torah to its supreme glory through the miracle of Chanukah.

There is another hint from the lighting of the menorah that we should mention. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 21b) tells us that we follow the opinion of *Beit Hillel*, who said that we light one candle on the first night, and continue adding for the duration of Chanukah. The reasoning is based on the principle that we ‘ascend’ in all holy

endeavors. Thus every night we add another candle, until we finish the festival with eight candles. This alludes to the status of the *ba'al teshuvah*, who continues adding to his repertoire of mitzvot until he reaches complete Torah observance. And so, after the miracle of Chanukah, Am Yisrael experienced a reawakening and many did complete teshuvah.

This brings us back to the question why Chanukah is different from all other festivals. The strength of conviction which the Kohen Gadol, Mattityahu, and his five sons displayed, gave the self-esteem and backbone for Am Yisrael to withstand the events of history until the end of time. And until today, the Chanukah candles symbolize the pride that every Jew has in his religion and observance of Torah. Despite anti-Semitism, one can see Chanukah candles on every point on the globe. Even when gentiles taunt us about our demeanor or our particular Jewish features and clothing, we can be proud to be a Jew.

The happiness a Jew feels when he is made fun of for being Jewish isn't overlooked. The Heavenly reward will become apparent when Hashem will reveal his Kingship on Earth. He will pride in us, so to speak, for standing tall and not giving in or being influenced by the nations of the world. Throughout the dark ages of *galut*, Hashem witnessed and recorded our steadfast triumph over the degenerate elements of society and our subdual of the forces of *tumah*. He rejoices over our being proud to be His people.

### **Chanukah and Vayishlach**

We can now explain the connection between Chanukah and our parshiyot. The same boldness of spirit and staunch belief that the Chashmonaim displayed was exhibited by Yaakov in his sojourn by Charan. To stand up to the utter wickedness of Lavan, the king of deceit, required firm belief in Hashem and the tenacity to keep mitzvot under all circumstances. Lavan tried to shortchange

Yaakov's wages one hundred times, and wanted to uproot all that he built up. Yaakov, though, did not flinch from all of the abuse and treachery that he suffered from Lavan, and was happy to be a Jew. He wanted no part of Lavan's devilry or his gang. This is the message that Yaakov gave over to Eisav: I dwelled with Lavan, and remained Jewish, and I am proud of it, too.

In a deeper vein, Yaakov was hinting to Eisav the events of the future. When Am Yisrael will go into *galut*, the descendants of Eisav will cajole and entice Jews, trying to wean them away from their Judaism. "You should know," hinted Yaakov, "That I already laid down the foundations for my children to withstand all of your blandishments. My twenty-two years of *nisyonot* in keeping the mitzvot in Lavan's house, gave my children the strength to ward off any of your deprecation and humiliation. Although this may cause you to be angry, it is more important to me that my children should see my attitude and learn how to stand up to persecution without losing their self-esteem in being Jews." This spirit of opposition is what led the Chashmonaim to defy the winds of change and revolt against the *tumah* of Greece.

### **Chanukah and Vayeishev**

Following these parshiyot we find the story of Yosef Hatzaddik. There, the Torah relates his *nisyonot* of living in Egypt, an alien culture that was steeped in idolatry and immorality. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 98:18) describes how the Egyptian women would watch his steps from on top of the wall, in their desire to woo his attention. Yosef, though, opposed their attempts and paid no heed. Even when his own master's wife tried to seduce him, he overcame the impulse to sin and ran away. This was done where no one could see the strength of his conviction. Yosef recognized that Hashem is everywhere and sees everything, even that which goes on behind closed doors and in the privacy of one's bedroom.

I once gave an analogy to describe this. Zoologists have developed a way to study the behavior of animals that live in the expanse of the jungle. They attach a mini-camera to an animal and watch everything that goes on while it roams about in its natural habitat. Similarly, Hashem watches every movement of ours throughout the day. Even more, a person's soul is attached to Hashem every second of the day. This is how we receive our life-force from the Upper Realms. Thus the soul is constantly transmitting signals showing how we are faring and where we are holding. Chazal (*Tanchuma Vayeishev*, 9) also say that Yosef saw a vision of his father which gave him the fortitude not to sin. This alludes to our Father in Heaven. Yosef felt Hashem's presence, even in the dark of night or when no one else was watching.

Yaakov Avinu thanked Hashem for having a son like Yosef. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 47:31) says, "Then Yisrael prostrated himself towards the head of the bed." Rashi explains that he was expressing gratitude that all of his sons were righteous. Even Yosef, who rose to power and lived amongst gentiles, still remained righteous. When Yaakov first heard that Yosef was still alive, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 42:6) describes his rule in Egypt, "Now Yosef, he was the viceroy." This alludes to the hardest rule of all, that of one's impulses and urges. By standing up to the tests of life, Yosef was found worthy of becoming the ruler in Egypt. Similarly, the Chashmonaim stood up to their tests and were awarded victory over the Greeks.

### **In Greece**

To this day, I can never forget one of my flights to Eretz Yisrael. There was no room left on the direct flight from Lyon, and I had to suffice with a stopover. My two options were via Italy or Greece, both of which brought to mind the mighty Empires which tried to wipe out the Jewish people. I couldn't decide which was worse, the seat of the Roman Empire, which destroyed the Beit Hamikdash, or the city of

Athens, which gave birth to the wicked Antiochus, who cast his dark shadow upon Israel. I eventually chose to fly through Athens, as the Chashmonaim eventually triumphed over the Greeks.

During my stopover, I remembered that I still had to pray Minchah. I searched for a secluded corner where I could pray undisturbed, and found a quiet area in the airport. I said my Amidah with my eyes closed, and was surprised when I finished, finding myself the object of attention. I was surrounded by Greek Orthodox priests, who were unceremoniously staring at my silent prayer. I explained that I had just finished my afternoon prayers, whereupon they nodded and honorably exited. I pondered over the strange scene. What would the Greek rulers have said about the undisturbed prayer of a Jew in the middle of their own capital? They killed Jews for praying. This episode only points out the reversal of history and the fruits of the actions of our righteous ancestors.

Back on board, a stewardess handed me a meal with a *hechsher*. I was surprised, and said that I was not convinced of the *kashrut* of the meal. I asked where the meal originated, and when I was told Greece, my reluctance to believe her only grew. The flight attendant didn't know what to do, so she asked her superior to come and handle the situation. When the head steward approached me, I asked him how it came about that a Greek airline should hand out kosher meals, when their own founding fathers tried to prevent Jews from keeping the laws of *kashrut*. To the bewilderment of the flight attendants, I displayed pride in my Jewishness, and they turned and looked at each other, baffled at my reaction.

Since then, I have always marveled at the turn of events and Hashem's guiding Hand in the history of the world. This only demonstrates Am Yisrael's continuous existence, in contrast to the mighty empires which have long since vanished from the scene of history. This is undoubtedly due to the self-sacrifice of the Chashmonaim and the miracle of Chanukah.

One who displays his Jewishness with pride is similar to the one who lights the Chanukah candles and watches as they miraculously burn longer than expected. Our actions done in the face of gentile antagonism has the same spirit of yore which fired the Hasmonean revolution and led to the miracle of Chanukah. This is the meaning of the blessing we say when lighting the menorah, “In those days, at this time.” The miracle of Chanukah continues even today, as we ignite our souls with the fervor and devotion of serving Hashem and doing His mitzvot. May we merit to stand up to our tests and see the fulfillment of the words of the pasuk (*Devarim* 28:10), “Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you.”

#### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ What is the connection between the parshiyot of *Vayishlach* and *Vayeishev* and Chanukah? Why is Chanukah different from other festivals, not requiring us to feast and dine but to praise and thank Hashem? What distinguishes Chanukah, that even when other festivals will be abolished, it will still be observed?
- ◆ The Chashmonaim had tremendous self-sacrifice to keep mitzvot. This led to their victory over the Greek army. The strength of conviction which they displayed gave Am Yisrael the self-esteem to withstand the events of history until the end of time.
- ◆ The Chanukah candles allude to several things. שמן and שמנה contain the same letters as נשמה, which hints at the battle for the Jewish soul. The word נר also refers to the Torah, which we keep and proudly observe. Every day, we add another candle, hinting at those who return to Judaism and add to their repertoire of mitzvot one by one, until they reach complete Torah observance.
- ◆ Yaakov Avinu stayed religious despite the influence of Lavan. He taught his children how to stand up to persecution without losing their self-esteem in being Jews. This spirit of opposition is what led the Chashmonaim to defy and revolt against Greece.

- ◆ Yosef opposed any attempts at being enticed to sin. Even when his own master's wife tried to seduce him, he overcame the *nisayon*. He saw the image of his father, which alludes to Hashem Who is everywhere and sees everything that goes on, even behind closed doors and in the privacy of one's bedroom.
- ◆ The Chanukah candles symbolize the pride that every Jew has in his religion and observance of Torah. Despite anti-Semitism, one can see Chanukah candles on every point on the globe. Even when gentiles taunt or jeer at us, we can be proud to be a Jew. Throughout the dark ages of *galut*, Hashem recorded our steadfast commitment. He rejoices over our being proud to be His people.



### Those Who Dwell Alone

*“He charged them, saying, ‘Thus shall you say: To my lord, to Eisav, so said your servant, Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now’”*

*(Bereishit 32:5)*

Chazal explain that Yaakov sent Eisav a message that he dwelt in Lavan's house and kept all 613 mitzvot. He also told Eisav that he was blessed with two special children, Yissachar and Yosef, one who symbolized Torah learning, and the other who symbolized religious commitment. What did Yaakov hope to gain from such revelations to Eisav? As one who despised the birthright (*Bereishit* 25:34), Eisav presumably had no interest in Yaakov's spiritual gains or his lofty conquests. It only served to antagonize him.

Perhaps Yaakov should have remained silent. In response to his

message, Eisav immediately came marching with four hundred men, ready to spoil and plunder. We can infer, then, that Eisav understood Yaakov as taunting his irreligiosity and lording it over him. Had Yaakov kept quiet, perhaps Eisav would not have wanted to show him 'who's boss.' It would seem that Yaakov brought on his brother's anger for no reason.

I suggest that Yaakov had a deeper reason for sending Eisav this message. It was an official statement directed at Eisav, as well as every enemy of the Jews, on the status of the Jews and their role in world events. Yaakov wanted Eisav to know that Am Yisrael is founded on the principle of segregation. They keep their distinction and refuse to mingle or intermarry with the nations of the world. Although they may dwell within their midst, Am Yisrael uphold the words of the pasuk (*Bamidbar 23:9*), "A nation that will dwell in solitude, and not be reckoned among the nations." Through learning and commitment to Torah, they remain impervious to the influence of the nations and their decadent culture. They don't exchange their heritage for any price, despite their relatively small numbers within the general population.

This is why Yaakov gave Eisav a detailed list of his spiritual accomplishments. He remained true to his religious beliefs, despite being in close proximity to a rasha like Lavan. Even more, Yaakov hinted to Eisav that his children had tremendous potential. They would one day become learned scholars and devout tzaddikim. Not only would they not mingle with other nations, they would even advance spiritually and become distinguished by their religious conduct.

On a broader scale, Yaakov was teaching us what it means to be a Jew. While we are in *galut*, we need to realize what we are up against. There are the 'Eisavs' who hate us and try to destroy us. They cannot tolerate a nation which has their own way of life and lives in full compliance with the Torah. The Torah's standard of

virtue raises man above the animal. This is too much for them to commit to, and only sparks their jealousy and anger.

An example of this is Balak, King of Moab. He started up with the Jews, despite Am Yisrael's Divine restraint from making war on them. Out of blind hatred, he even hired Bilaam to curse the Jews.

This comes to teach us an important lesson. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 49:10) expresses the hope of all Jews when it says, "Until Shiloh arrives (referring to the Mashiach)." Until then, we will not have true rest or tranquility. Only after Hashem will reveal His Majesty and Sovereignty, will the nations begin to appreciate what Torah is all about and allow us to live in peace.

Today, the sword of Eisav has been exchanged for the rights of freedom and unrestricted self-gratification. The media spews forth a deluge of materialistic and hedonistic programs and presentations, wooing innocent spectators to indulge in lewd or coarse behavior. The temptation to reject one's religion is greater than ever. Nevertheless, we have our founding constitution of morality from Yaakov Avinu. As the Chosen Nation, we have the responsibility to protect ourselves and stick to our standards of virtue without acquiescing to the decadence and depravity of the general public. So Yaakov exhorted Eisav, and so he entrusted us to do. Whether the nations come at us like the strong-armed Eisav or the smooth-tongued Lavan, we can repel their advances by clinging to the Torah.

### **Like father, like son**

There is another hero in this parashah. When Eisav and his men reached Yaakov's camp, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 33:7) says, "And afterwards, Yosef and Rachel came forward and bowed down." Yosef stood in front of his mother in order to shield her from Eisav's covetous eyes (*Bereishit Rabbah* 78:10). We can learn two tactics from Yosef on how to win the battle against the *Yetzer Hara*.

If we take note, we see that Yosef's actions were not foolproof. Eisav could have easily gotten a good look at Rachel, if he wished. This is especially true being that Yosef was shorter than his mother. Yet Yosef did what he could do to protect his mother, and relied on Hashem to do the rest. This is lesson number one: not to be disheartened at (what may seem as) our meager measures of defense. We need to do our job and turn to Hashem for help. Sometimes, just the desire to do good is the merit we need to tip the Heavenly scales in our favor. Even Jews in Paris or Hollywood shouldn't throw up their hands in defeat. It is the *Yetzer Hara* who wants us to surrender all hope of remaining religious. By learning Torah in a Beit Midrash on a daily basis, one can find refuge from the influences of the society at large. Perhaps it was Yosef's inner desire to protect his mother that accorded her Divine protection from Eisav's gaze.

The second lesson is from Yosef's anticipation of the risks involved. His prudence and foresight is what pushed him ahead of his mother and saved the day. We need to see the dangers which flirt about and lurk ahead, and prepare our defenses accordingly. We shouldn't wait idly for the situation to present itself. There are many spiritual hazards that can be avoided with foresight and the willingness to take a stand. This is even alluded to by Yosef's actions. His stance before his mother is an analogy to guarding our souls from impurity. Our souls are akin to the purity of our Mother Rachel. By being cautious and taking preventive measures, we can assure ourselves the best protection against the influence of Eisav and his clan.

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### In Summary

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- ◆ Yaakov antagonized Eisav by sending a message regarding his spiritual holdings. He wasn't taunting Eisav about his irreligiosity. He was a

making a statement about the status of the Jew. Am Yisrael is founded on the principle of segregation. They keep their distinction and refuse to mingle with the nations of the world.

- ◆ The Torah's standard of virtue raises man above the animal. Yaakov taught us not to be influenced by the decadence and depravity of the general public. Until Mashiach comes, we will not be able to truly rest, just as Yaakov was not afforded tranquility.
- ◆ We learn two things from Yosef. We learn not to be disheartened at (what may seem as) our meager measures of defense. We need to do our job and turn to Hashem for help. Sometimes, just the desire to do good is the merit we need to tip the Heavenly scales in our favor. We also learn to plan ahead and take preventive measures. Spiritual hazards can be avoided with foresight and the willingness to take a stand.



### Doing Mitzvot in their Entirety

*“He charged them, saying, ‘Thus shall you say, To my lord, to Eisav, so said your servant, Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now’”*

*(Bereishit 32:5)*

The Midrash records an unusual statement. Says the Midrash, Yaakov Avinu lived in Lavan's house and kept the mitzvah of Shabbat. This is difficult for us to understand. Chazal say that Yaakov told Eisav that he kept all 613 mitzvot. Why does this Midrash single out Shabbat over all the other mitzvot?

Another question we have has to do with Yaakov's learning. Yaakov personified the study of Torah, as he (*Bereishit* 25:27), "dwelled in tents (of Torah)." Yaakov also became a symbol of the *middah* of truth (see *Michah* 7:20). One may ask, how did Yaakov manage to learn Torah at Lavan's house? Yaakov described his exhausting work schedule (*Bereishit* 31:40), "This is how I was: By day scorching heat consumed me, and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes." For twenty years, Yaakov worked day and night. When did he have time to learn?

One thing is certain. Yaakov did not sneak away or take time off from watching Lavan's flocks. He faithfully kept the mitzvah not to steal. He stressed this to Rachel and Leah (*ibid.* 31:6) when he said, "Now you have known that it was with all my might that I served your father." Similarly, he told Lavan (*ibid.* 31:37), "What did you find of all your household objects," indicating his zealousness in not taking anything from Lavan without his consent.

We are enjoined not to steal even from a non-Jew. This is mentioned in the *Ben Ish Chai* (*Ki Teitzei, Shana Rishona*). One who steals from a non-Jew creates a Heavenly prosecuting angel that pleads before the Heavenly Court and demands some form of compensation. He asks to take something from the Jew in return for what he took. And if they accede to his request, he takes mitzvot away from the Jew. We see, then, that it is not a simple thing to steal from a non-Jew.

As far as when Yaakov found time to learn, it would seem that Yaakov Avinu learned while he was watching Lavan's sheep. Amongst Torah giants, this is a simple and daily feat. There are numerous stories of scholars who learned Torah even as they carried on conversations or did menial labor. Certainly Yaakov Avinu had the ability to concentrate on learning Torah in spite of his work.

However, when it came to Shabbat, the picture changed. Yaakov kept Shabbat and did not do any work for Lavan. This gave him ample time to delve deeper into his learning and advance in his studies. Yaakov referred to this when he said (*Bereishit* 32:5), “And I have lingered until now.” Yaakov learned on Shabbat what he wasn’t able to during the week and lingered over it, making up his missed curriculum.

This helps us to explain the Midrash that we started with. The reason why the Midrash stresses Yaakov’s Shabbat observance is because it was done in its entirety. Yaakov was able to focus on his religious obligations on Shabbat more than on any other day. He was able to learn and make up whatever he couldn’t do during the other six days of the week. A mitzvah well done is a mitzvah to chronicle and eternalize. This is why the Midrash says that Yaakov kept Shabbat at Lavan’s house.

The lesson we can glean from here is the importance of doing a mitzvah in its entirety. Because Yaakov was able to take full advantage of Shabbat, the Midrash specifies Shabbat from all other mitzvot. It wasn’t necessary to mention the other mitzvot, as a complete mitzvah contains the essence of all religious observance.

To illustrate this, some sefarim (*Menorat Hamaor*, 213) bring down the following story. Once, a man who spent his whole life reviewing one *masechta* of Gemara passed away. A woman appeared and entreated the people of the town to eulogize him and bury him with honor. When someone asked her name, she replied, “Chagigah.” After he was buried, she disappeared. It was then that the townspeople realized who she really was. The *masechta* that this man had learned was also called *Chagigah*. Out of appreciation of his lifetime dedication to learning *Chagigah*, he was rewarded with a proper eulogy. This emphasizes the virtue of any mitzvah that is done in its entirety.

Another reason why the Midrash says that Yaakov kept Shabbat may have to do with the shared significance of these two mitzvot. Both Shabbat and Torah are unique in one aspect: they are considered gifts. Hashem wanted to give his prized nation gifts, and presented them with Shabbat and offered them the Torah. Each gift has its own distinctive character. Shabbat is similar to the next world, where we rest and enjoy the bounty of our labors. Yaakov certainly savored its ‘flavor’ and basked in its spiritual delight. Torah is acquired through toil, and Yaakov had to toil to review his studies and concentrate on learning while doing physical labor. Thus Yaakov merited both gifts while staying with Lavan.

While on the subject of learning Torah on Shabbat, the following statement is mentioned in the name of the Chafetz Chaim. One hour of learning Torah on Shabbat is worth one thousand hours of learning done during the week. Why is this so?

Perhaps we can explain as follows. We know that a thousand years is considered like one day in Hashem’s eyes. This is recorded in Tehillim (90:4) where it says, “For even one thousand years in Your eyes are like a day gone by.” Similarly, one thousand hours for us, are considered as one hour by Hashem. Shabbat is akin to the World to Come, where the world will be on a much higher spiritual plane of existence. Thus on Shabbat, Hashem measures the magnitude of our hour of our learning Torah according to His yardstick, which is one thousand-fold. This is why one hour of learning on Shabbat is worth a thousand hours of learning done during the week.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ The Midrash tells us that Yaakov kept Shabbat while at Lavan’s house. This is difficult to understand, as we know that Yaakov kept the whole Torah. Another question is when Yaakov had time to learn. For twenty

years, Yaakov worked day and night, and he certainly did not steal time from Lavan.

- ◆ Yaakov was able to concentrate and review while he worked. On Shabbat, Yaakov was afforded a day of rest and delved deeper in his learning, making up what his weekdays lacked. His complete observance of Shabbat is what the Midrash chronicles and eternalizes for posterity.
- ◆ Hashem gave the Jewish people two gifts, Shabbat and Torah, each with its own distinctive flavor. Yaakov merited both gifts while he stayed with Lavan.
- ◆ On Shabbat, Hashem measures the magnitude of one hour of our learning according to His yardstick, which is a thousand-fold. This is why one hour of learning Torah on Shabbat is worth a thousand hours of learning done during the week.



## Flasks of Oil

*“Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn”*

*(Bereishit 32:25)*

Why was Yaakov Avinu all alone? Rashi explains that he forgot some small flasks. When Yaakov left Charan, he was laden with possessions and blessed with family. Concerned over his encounter with Eisav, he transferred everything he had over the river, and realized that he had forgotten some small flasks. He thus turned back and crossed over the river alone in order to fetch them (*Chulin* 91a).

There are several points that many raise on Yaakov's actions. We know that *talmidei chachamim* are warned not to go outside at night alone (*Berachot* 43b). The night is a time where the forces of *tumah* have sway, and those outside are subject to harm or retribution. Why did Yaakov take a risk in order to fetch some insignificant flasks? Certainly Yaakov would not have put himself in danger if he did not have some important reason.

The question is magnified when we consider that Yaakov was a man of means. He left Lavan's home only after he had amassed a large fortune. Normally, a wealthy man does not concern himself over petty objects. Imagine a rich person who moves into his new house, only to discover that he left behind a small, inexpensive article. Would he go back to retrieve it? What value could such an object have when compared to the rest of his fortune?

The Gemara (*Chulin* 91a) learns the following rule from Yaakov: Tzaddikim value their possessions. This is because they acquire them without any trace of theft. However, this would not explain the need for Yaakov to fetch flasks if it involved any danger to life.

Perhaps we can learn a timely message from this parashah. The nighttime represents a period of darkness, where the future looks bleak and difficulties abound. Every person goes through difficult circumstances in life. A person may feel all alone in their misery. Yaakov Avinu taught us not to forget the 'small' things, the mitzvot that people often overlook. Especially when things look black, we should make the effort to keep our religious responsibilities, even those which may appear 'trivial.'

We can even find a reference to this from Yaakov's actions. The word פֶּה (flask) has the numerical value of one hundred, referring to the one hundred *berachot* we are enjoined to say every day. Yaakov went to retrieve the small פְּתִימִים because he realized that if we give

up on small mitzvot, we will eventually leave the larger ones behind as well. On the other hand, by paying attention to the small mitzvot, we can merit salvation. One who shows self-sacrifice for something minor or insignificant, will pay even greater attention to that which is fundamental and plays a major role in his life. Yaakov showed us the key to survival, and was helped by Heaven to be victorious over the Angel of Eisav.

Another connection to this story with Yaakov is the flask of oil found in the days of the Chashmonaim. Following their battle with the Greeks, the Chashmonaim searched for pure olive oil in order to light the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash. After a detailed search, they found a flask with pure oil which still had the seal of the Kohen Gadol. This represents the efforts we need to make when serving Hashem.

Picture a jumbo jet, worth millions of dollars. Despite its overall cost, sometimes the lack of one little part can prevent its ascent, or even worse, bring it crashing down. The monetary value of this little part may be wholly insignificant when compared to the overall plane, but its 'part' in the airplane's functioning is inestimable. Similarly, sometimes a small mitzvah plays a major role in our ability to function or live.

Some explain, that for this reason, we are not told the reward for mitzvot in the next world (see *Pirkei Avot* 2:1). Had Hashem revealed to us the specific reward for each and every single mitzvah, many people would 'pick and choose,' depending on which 'reward' they wanted to earn. This is not the way we serve Hashem. Hashem wants us to do all of His mitzvot, not just the 'major' ones. It is not for us to decide which ones are major or mandatory. All mitzvot are obligatory and take 'part' in the Torah's 'prescription' for life. This is another important message that we learn from Yaakov and the flasks of oil.

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**In Summary**


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- ◆ Yaakov Avinu crossed back over the river in order to retrieve some small flasks. Chazal say that a *talmid chacham* should not go out alone at night. Yaakov was also tremendously wealthy. Even though tzaddikim value their possessions, Yaakov would not have risked his life for them. Why did Yaakov Avinu go back for the flasks he left behind?
- ◆ The message we learn from here is that even small mitzvot have value. One who gives up on small mitzvot, will eventually leave the larger ones behind as well. On the other hand, by paying attention to small mitzvot, we can merit salvation.
- ◆ The word פַּר has the numerical value of one hundred, hinting to the one hundred *berachot* a Jew should say every day. Sometimes a small mitzvah plays a major role in our ability to function or live.



## A Nation Who Dwells Alone

***“Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled  
with him until the break of dawn”***

*(Bereishit 32:25)*

Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu, while preparing for his encounter with Eisav, transferred everything he had over the river and forgot some small flasks. He turned back and crossed the river alone in order to fetch them, and fought with the Angel of Eisav.

This seems a bit perplexing. We know that Yaakov was quite wealthy. What reason could there be to go back for some small

insignificant flasks and put himself into danger? They were not articles of religious nature. He did not have to worry that they might be mishandled or disgraced. Imagine a king who transfers his possessions to his new palace, only to find that a few small objects were left behind. Certainly the king would not bother himself to retrieve them.

Although tzaddikim value their possessions, because they have been acquired without any trace of theft (*Chulin* 91a), this would still not explain the need for Yaakov to retrieve his flasks, if it involved any danger to life. This would also not explain why the Angel of Eisav felt it was his 'duty' to start up with Yaakov. There must be some deeper meaning behind all of this.

Perhaps we can understand Yaakov's actions as follows. Yaakov was alone because every Jew is valued in his being alone, as the pasuk (*Bamidbar* 23:9) says, "A nation that will dwell in solitude, and not be reckoned among the nations." Am Yisrael has the distinct virtue of not mingling amongst the nations of the world. They are praised for keeping their Jewish lineage and unique character free from foreign alloys. This may be difficult at times. Many non-Jews may be jealous of Jews and covet their position or possessions. They may try to use force or coercion to 'see the light.' In this regard, they attempt to copy the Angel of Eisav, but will ultimately fail, just as the Angel could not destroy Yaakov. In the end, the Angel had to agree to Yaakov's superiority and was forced to give him a *berachah*. This signifies the nations of the worlds' ultimate acceptance of Am Yisrael, despite their centuries of antagonism. And it is a symbol of Am Yisrael's tenaciousness in keeping the distinction which separates Jew from non-Jew.

Another possible reason why Yaakov went to bring back the flasks is that they were consecrated flasks of oil. Yaakov put this oil aside to anoint the monument that he would later set up (see *Bereishit*

35:14). Yaakov had promised to show his gratitude to Hashem for helping him withstand the many obstacles and *nisyonot* which lay in his path, by setting up an altar. This is also contains a message for us. The flasks contained oil (שמן) which is similar to the Hebrew word for soul (נשמה). We need to create the vessel which can house the spiritual entity of our soul and keep its spirituality intact. By fashioning ourselves in the image of Hashem, and sealing ourselves off from the impurities of the world, we can create the receptacle to keep our Torah pure.

When I was once in Argentina, an older woman flew in especially to see me. She was already ninety-eight years old, and had a request. She wanted me to say Kriyat Shema with her, as she wanted to end her life. I was taken aback, and I asked her why she wanted to do such a thing. She said that most of her family had perished in the Holocaust, and those who were left alive had unfortunately intermarried and lost any semblance of Judaism. They didn't even observe Pesach or Yom Kippur. In despair, she felt that there was nothing left to live for.

I attempted to calm her and help her have a more positive perspective. Where does the rejection of Judaism come from? It starts with breaking down the wall which separates the Jew from the non-Jew. We have distinguishing features which are meant to build a barrier and protect our identity as Am Yisrael. This is what we learn from Yaakov, who was alone and fought with the Angel of Eisav. When we fulfill the mitzvot and live up to the standard set for us, we can reach a position of honor, just as the Angel blessed Yaakov (*Bereishit* 32:29), "For you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome."

A similar battle was waged in the days of the Chashmonaim. The Chashmonaim kept their heritage and traditions alive without diluting them with Greek culture or foreign values. They too

retrieved a flask of oil, one that was sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol and assured of its purity. This signifies the 'sealed' mindset of the Jew and his aversion to cultural cross-breeding. We do not seek to cultivate ties between Jew and non-Jew or bridge the vast canyon that splits us apart. We need to close our eyes from seeing their debauchery and ears from hearing the beat and rhythm of their music. Once we are removed from the pursuits of the outside world, we can ignite the spark of Judaism, assured that the flame of our soul will flicker bright and pure.

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 32:25) describes the fight between Yaakov and the Angel as, "A man wrestled (ויאבק) with him." The word ויאבק is related to the word אבק (dust). This refers to the 'dust' that the 'Eisav's' of the world shower us with, the blanket of thick materialism which dissipates with the passage of time. We are smothered by the 'global climate' of worldly preoccupation and the amassment of riches. We are scorched by the 'global warming' towards material objects and pleasures. Money and material objects are like dust; a single puff of air can blow them all away. Unfortunately, we have seen many wealthy individuals who were 'blown away' by a turn on the wheel of fortune, who no longer have a penny to their name.

I remember when I once visited a rich man who had bad breath. I asked him when was the last time that he had had a bite to eat. He said that he hadn't eaten already for twenty-four hours, as he was busy with business. If this state of affairs weren't so sad, it would almost be ridiculously funny. See how people run after money. Instead of money serving our needs, we serve its needs, catering to its pursuit and attainment with gusto and relish.

A Rav once saw a man panting away, and asked him to where he was running. He answered that he was rushing to work. The Rav then asked him why he had to go to work. The man answered that

he has to work in order to have money. Without money he couldn't live. Whereupon the Rav pointed out a fallacy in his logic. You work hard in order to live comfortably, and this occupies a central role in your life. You need to put the same thought and effort into acquiring something that you can die with, something to take with you into the next world. Everything you work towards will eventually stay behind, leaving you devoid of spiritual assets and empty of virtue. If your whole goal here is to make it in this world and be financially successful, what will you present in your defense when you go Upstairs?

We face a two-pronged battle. The *Yetzer Hara* entices us to reject our birthright. He urges us to dive head first into the murky waters of self-gratification and drown in the sea of indulgence. Similarly, the endless pursuit of money blinds us from seeing our true purpose in life. The tide of materialism threatens to wash us overboard. What should be our response? How can we fight the tide?

We have to emulate the property of the flask of oil used to light the Menorah. There are many prosperous businessmen who have succeeded in making Torah their priority, setting aside time for daily study. There are many who are sure to learn their Daf Hayomi every day. Only by guarding our souls from vain and extraneous activities and applying ourselves to Torah will we assure ourselves of the purity of our souls.

I know of a wealthy tycoon who has tremendous success at whatever he does. Even businesses that have failed in other people's hands turn for him into financial windfalls. Unfortunately, at seventy-five and never married, he does not have much prospect of raising a family. He is all alone. When I asked him if he had ever thought about life and what he wants to accomplish in this world, he said he just doesn't have time. And in the same breath he continued, "Rabbi David, what do you say about this (possible

business) venture?” This is in opposition to the way of the Torah, which praises the one who raises a family and concerns himself over the continuation of our heritage. Often, a warm, vibrant home is the bulwark which protects us from the inroads of society and the influence of the nations. This man, though, followed Yaakov Avinu by being alone, in the wrong sense of the term.

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 32:25) tells us that Yaakov Avinu fought with the Angel “until the break of dawn.” This would insinuate that our battle with the *Yetzer Hara* and the tide of materialism will continue unabated, until the dawn of *Mashiach*. And so we battle these forces in every generation. Sometimes Am Yisrael face physical extermination, and at other times the threat of spiritual annihilation raises its head. Sometimes the Angel of Eisav wants to destroy our bodies, and sometimes, our souls. When Hashem sees our true desire to stay pure, like the sealed flask of oil, He sends us *Siyata di'Shemaya* and saves us.

After hours of fighting, the pasuk (*ibid.* 32:26) says, “He perceived that he could not overcome him.” This, too, alludes to our situation. When the nations of the world try to obliterate us or alter our national image, they wind up frustrated by defeat. They do not succeed in wiping out the Jewish people, and eventually leave us alone. This only shows the Jews’ ‘Upper Hand,’ and strengthens our position as the Chosen Nation, as well as our resolve to live up to that responsibility. Hashem elevates those who follow in the footsteps of Yaakov Avinu and keep their spiritual identity intact.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Why did Yaakov go back to get the flasks of oil? He was tremendously wealthy and should not have put himself into danger for simple monetary reasons.

- ◆ Yaakov taught us that we remain Jews when we dwell ‘alone’ and do not mingle with non-Jews, as it says, “A nation that will dwell in solitude.” The nations of the world try to harm us or influence us, but Hashem gives us the ‘Upper Hand.’
- ◆ Yaakov kept flasks of oil to anoint the altar he planned on building. We need to keep our souls pure by securing them from the impurities of the world. The flasks contained oil (שמן) which alludes to the soul (נשמה). We need to create the vessel which can house the spiritual entity of the soul and keep its spirituality intact.
- ◆ The dust from the fight with the Angel represents the dust of materialism which darkens our vision. This is a continuous battle, just as the Angel fought until daybreak.
- ◆ When the nations of the world see that we are strong in our determination to be ‘alone,’ they eventually leave us be.



## A Heavenly Struggle

*“Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn”*

*(Bereishit 32:25)*

We are taught that Yaakov Avinu fought with the Angel of Eisav. This was no ordinary scuffle. It had a spiritual undercurrent, and their struggle for domination and supremacy reverberated and echoed all the way up into the Heavenly realms. Chazal (*Zohar, Chelek I 170a*) say that the ‘dust’ from their fight reached the Heavenly Throne. How can we bring this concept down to our level of understanding? What is the message here for us?

The angel's purpose in fighting with Yaakov was, short of wiping him off the face of the earth, to cause his descendants to be injured or maimed. By harming Yaakov, he hoped that its spiritual repercussion would affect Yaakov's progeny. If he had maimed Yaakov's eyes, his children would be deficient in understanding Torah. Had he damaged his feet, Yaakov's descendants would have insufficient mobility to go learn Torah in the Beit Hamidrash. Yaakov, though, shielded himself from the angel's assault. He was powerfully strong, and ably withstood bodily harm. This continued until daybreak, whereupon the Angel pulled Yaakov's hip out of its socket, injured his *gid hanasheh* and caused him to limp.

The Zohar (*Chelek I*, 171a) interprets this blow to Yaakov as referring to the supporters of Torah, those who provide sustenance for the Rabbanim and their needs. This means that even those who would support Torah were meant to be poor. Yaakov beseeched Hashem that the angel's damage should not last, and prohibited eating the *gid hanasheh* to counteract that detrimental influence.

What needs explanation is how the Angel was able to affect Yaakov and why the Torah instituted a mitzvah to remember this episode in Yaakov's life. The Avot had many *nisyonot* in their lives, and nowhere do we find a similar occurrence or prohibition. There was no commemoration made of their struggles or vicissitudes. Why does the wrenching of Yaakov's thigh deserve such recognition?

In order to better understand this, let us take a deep look at the purpose of Creation. Learning Torah is one of the fundamental mitzvot of Judaism. The world rests on the pillar of Torah, and needs its continuous study to keep it on its course. Without the learning of Torah, the world would revert back to nothingness. Towards this end, Hashem gave us the Torah and commanded us to learn day and night. This requires the joint efforts of those who learn Torah, as well as those who provide for them. There are the

‘Yissachar’s’ who devote themselves to full-time learning, and the ‘Zevulun’s’ who provide for their needs, so that they can accomplish that goal. This is why the Torah prohibits the *gid hanasheh*. It is to remind us of the purpose of Creation and to stress the importance of Zevulun’s role is in keeping the world spinning on its axis.

Putting this aside, we can also learn from here the general predicament of the supporters of Torah. Had the situation not been rectified, Am Yisrael would have remained penniless. The Angel of Eisav weakened us in this area. It was only because of the need of those devoted to full-time learning that we merited having this damage undone. This puts things in a different perspective. It is the merit of Torah and its students that gives their supporters continued prosperity. Were they to cease learning, *chas v’shalom*, the wealth of the rich would vanish without a trace.

I remember when the Jewish community in France was in its infancy. There were no wealthy Jews then. Since then, Torah institutions have sprung up, and Batei Kenesiot, Batei Midrashot, and *mikvaot* abound. And with the spiritual resurgence has come a higher materialistic standard of living. The Torah spreads its blessing of prosperity. Many men have benefited from the general climate and the community’s renewed commitment to Torah by becoming wealthy.

I once read in the name of Maran Harav Shach zt”l, that the situation in America at the turn of the twentieth century was also beset with great difficulties. Making a living was hard and often fraught with the desecration of Shabbat. Nowadays, this dilemma has become almost nonexistent. It is widely accepted to take off from work on one’s day of rest, and freedom of religion is upheld in most of today’s civilized world. This is in the merit of those who adhered to Torah and established their homes and institutions

based on its guiding principles. Those countries which developed Torah institutions were especially blessed.

Perhaps Yaakov was injured for this reason. Being affected by the Angel of Eisav was really a boon to Am Yisrael, as it paved the way for true Torah support, one that developed and prospered based strictly on the actualization of Torah learning. Yaakov perhaps even gave the Angel sway, in order to bring home this point. This should make it clear to us where the source of wealth really comes from. Supporters of Torah shouldn't claim that they are the ones who uphold the students of Torah. And conversely, those who learn full-time should realize that they jeopardize everyone if they falter in their studies.

#### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Yaakov protected himself from the angel's assault. He was powerfully strong and ably withstood bodily harm. How did the Angel succeed in wrenching Yaakov's hip out of place and injuring his *gid hanasheh*?
- ◆ Additionally, why did the Torah institute a mitzvah to remember this episode in Yaakov's life? The Avot had many *nisyonot* in their lives, and nowhere do we find a similar commemoration or prohibition.
- ◆ Those who are wealthy should realize that their riches are granted them only in the merit of those who learn Torah. The prohibition of *gid hanasheh* teaches us this concept. Had Yaakov not prevailed in the end, Am Yisrael would have lacked fiscal stability.



## The Gid Hanasheh

*“Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn”*

*(Bereishit 32:25)*

*“Therefore the Children of Israel are not to eat the displaced sinew on the hip-socket to this day, because he struck Yaakov’s hip-socket on the displaced sinew”*

*(ibid. 32:33)*

After reading these pesukim, we are puzzled by the turn of events. Why did the Angel of Eisav attack Yaakov? Normally, destroying angels only have sway over those who sin. Yaakov, though, kept all of the mitzvot. He sat and learned Torah for fourteen years in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, and continued learning in Lavan’s house. Why then was Yaakov assaulted? Additionally, we can ask why the Angel injured Yaakov’s *gid hanasheh*, over any other limb or organ. Obviously there must be some deeper significance to this than what meets the eye.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai explains in the Zohar that every story in the Torah is written to teach us a lesson. They are not simple stories, myths, or fables that happened ‘once upon a time.’ Hashem recorded the life of the Avot and included only those stories which provide a message and enlighten future generations with their instructions on how to live. Thus these stories have the same footing as halachot. Our job is to peer into each story and glean a lesson on life.

As an example, let us look at the *Akeidah*. The Torah records how Avraham Avinu took wood and put it on Yitzchak's back. Why did Avraham not pile it up on the donkey instead? I saw a beautiful answer to this question. Avraham Avinu did not want to startle Yitzchak with the *Akeidah*. Doing actions when one is caught off guard or taken by surprise does not reflect the full scope of one's determination to do Hashem's will. This is why Avraham placed the wood on Yitzchak's back. He wanted the concept to sink into Yitzchak's consciousness, to give Yitzchak enough time to digest the information and appreciate what he was about to do. In this manner, Yitzchak could go to the *Akeidah* willingly and happily, fully conscious of his actions and rewarded for every step. By writing this in the Torah, the Torah is teaching us a lesson on how we should empower ourselves when doing Hashem's will, knowingly and deliberately, not unexpectedly or with a sudden start.

Perhaps we can understand the fight between the Angel and Yaakov with the following preface. There are many things that people consider 'good.' One who drinks fine wine may consider wine to be good. Nevertheless, drinking excessively can turn into intoxication and lead to alcoholic abuse, what we would consider bad. Similarly, healthy and nutritious meals can give us the vitamins and minerals we need to function. However, overeating can give us indigestion and cause illness, forfeiting all of the 'good' contained in the food. Even money can become more of a liability than an asset, depending on how it is spent and how it preoccupies one's life. Every materialistic thing is limited in its 'good,' finite and fixed by earthly constraints. If we compare this to Torah, we get a better picture of what true 'good' is all about.

The pasuk (*Mishlei* 4:2) says, "For I have given you good merchandise (or: a good teaching), do not forsake my Torah." Torah does not have earthly limitations. It makes us wise and raises us

above corporeality. Whoever partakes of Torah and delves into its words only finds more and more 'good,' both in this world and in the World to Come. In its merit, we inherit a portion up Above and derive pleasure from the splendor of the *Shechinah*. It is the single commodity and merchandise that we can take with us when we pass away. It even speaks up on our behalf, as the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 58:8) says, "Your righteous deed will precede you."

The word גִּיד has the same numerical value as the word טוֹב. This indicates that one who keeps the mitzvah of not eating the *gid hanasheh* benefits from his observance. Yaakov Avinu, though, did not keep this one mitzvah, and was bereft of achieving complete Torah observance. He thus lacked its full measure of 'good.' This is why Hashem sent the Angel to wrestle with Yaakov, despite his preoccupation with Torah. He wanted Yaakov to acquire this last mitzvah and receive full reward.

As far as why the Angel harmed Yaakov's *gid hanasheh*, I suggest that the word נִשָּׂה (displaced) has the same letters as נִשְׁמָה, without the letter נ. The letter נ represents the forty days in which Am Yisrael received the Torah. By refraining from eating this *gid hanasheh*, Yaakov completed his Torah observance and rectified his spiritual source of good. Thus we find immediately after this episode that "Yaakov arrived intact" (*Bereishit* 33:18). Rashi explains that he came whole in body and complete in spirit, with both his material possessions and Torah learning intact.

One may ask the following question. It would seem from a cursory reading of the parashah that the mitzvah of *gid hanasheh* only began after these events transpired. Only after Yaakov fought the Angel of Eisav were we commanded not to eat the *gid hanasheh*. Yet we know that the Avot kept the whole Torah, even before it was given. How can we reconcile these two concepts?

Perhaps we can understand this in light of the nature of this mitzvah. At first, this mitzvah was deemed a *chok* and was kept without reason. This is similar to the mitzvah of *parah adumah* whose performance is classified as a *chok*. However, with the assault of the angel, it became a mitzvah whose reason is understood. Although Yaakov already kept this mitzvah, it was only done within the definition and under the classification of a *chok*. Thus the angel's actions brought this mitzvah to a new level and gave Yaakov the opportunity to observe it in a more complete manner.

According to this explanation, the purpose of the Angel was to raise Yaakov's mitzvah observance to a higher level. By doing what he knew already to be true, but with more understanding and appreciation, Yaakov's performance of the Divine commandment was elevated to new heights. Hashem sends messengers to man in order that he should serve Him with greater understanding. We should take from this story the need to deepen our understanding of the mitzvot.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ Destructive angels attack those who sin, not those who learn Torah. Why did the Angel start up with Yaakov? Also, why did he harm Yaakov's *gid hanasheh* rather than any other limb or organ?
- ◆ Yaakov lacked complete observance of all the mitzvot, as he did not have yet the mitzvah of not eating the *gid hanasheh*. The word גיד has the same numerical value as the word טוב. This indicates that one who keeps this mitzvah benefits from his observance. This is why Hashem sent the Angel to wrestle with Yaakov. He wanted Yaakov to acquire this last mitzvah and receive full reward.
- ◆ The word נשה (displaced) has the same letters as נשמה, without the letter נ. The letter נ represents the forty days in which Am Yisrael

received the Torah. This is why the Angel harmed Yaakov's *gid hanasheh*. By refraining from eating the *gid hanasheh*, Yaakov completed his Torah observance and rectified his spiritual source of good.

- ◆ The Avot kept the Torah even before it was given. At first, this mitzvah was deemed a *chok* and was kept without reason. However, with the assault of the angel, it became a mitzvah whose reason is understood. The angel's actions brought this mitzvah to a new level and gave Yaakov the opportunity to observe it completely.
- ◆ Hashem sends messengers to man in order that we should serve Him with greater understanding. We should deepen our understanding of all the mitzvot.



## Torah Support

*“Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn”*

*(Bereishit 32:25)*

*“Therefore the Children of Israel are not to eat the displaced sinew on the hip-socket to this day, because he struck Yaakov's hip-socket on the displaced sinew”*

*(ibid. 32:33)*

The Angel of Eisav's assault on Yaakov is interpreted by the Zohar (*Chelek I*, 171a) as referring to an attack on the support of Torah. The Angel wanted that the 'Torah World' should lack a steady foot

to stand on. This is usually explained to mean those who support and donate money to yeshivot. I would like to suggest another possible explanation, albeit a figurative one.

The role talmidim play in boosting their Rabbeim's learning can also be described as support. Very often, a teacher will review and analyze the material he teaches after hearing a talmid's question. It sparks his interest and fuels his search to find a solution. Such learning helps a Rav to increase his Torah output and propels him to develop his capabilities.

How often did I benefit from one of my children's question on the parashah! Many a shiur developed from a simple query and evolved into a whole edifice of thought. A good question demands a good answer, and so the search begins. When one starts to leaf through sefarim and peer at sources, new horizons suddenly open up. Soon the Rebbe is involved in learning, and the Torah that he generates is also attributed to his questioner.

The pasuk describes how the Angel affected the thigh (ירך) of Yaakov. The word ירך is similar to the word רך, something soft and tender. His bout with Yaakov caused damage to the *gid hanasheh* which is a small, yet vital nerve in the thigh. This is another reference to young children, who give their teachers vitality, vim and vigor by their questions.

I remember how my master and teacher, Rabbi Chaim Shmuel Lopian zt"l, would prepare his *shiur* with Rabbi Nissim Ravivo zt"l, then a talmid in the yeshiva. He explained that learning together with a talmid brings out the best in one's learning. Similarly, my Rebbe, Rabbi Zev Kaufman, would prepare his weekly *chaburah* with this same talmid, despite the vast difference in age.

There is a famous saying, "If there are no kid goats, there will be no adult goats." One has to raise them when they are young, in

order to produce the next generation. The Gemara praises the learning of schoolchildren and says that the world rests on the intonation of children learning Torah with their Rebbe. Were they to desist from learning, the world would lack that support. This is another reason why the Angel of Eisav wanted to attack Yaakov. He wanted to wrest away the support of Am Yisrael and silence the voice of children learning Torah.

Yaakov sought to rectify the spiritual injury that he sustained. This is why the Torah forbids eating the *gid hanasheh*. The mitzvah of *gid hanasheh* protects us from the spiritual influence of the Angel of Eisav and removes his impure grip on the Torah learned by the children of Am Yisrael.

This may not be the conventional explanation of the Zohar. However, it would seem to me that financial support is not the only pillar upon which the Torah world rests. It is quite possible to learn Torah without money. The Gemara (*Nedarim* 81a) says, “Be watchful over the children of the poor as Torah will spring forth from them.”

We can now understand the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Shemot*, 226) that says, “The Torah was only given to those who ate manna” in a similar fashion. The generation of the Exodus from Egypt merited manna from Heaven on a daily basis. While this may sound like utopia, it required no small feat on the part of the recipients. One could not save the manna from day to day, as it would spoil. For those who lacked faith, being surrounded by a desert on all sides, with no apparent source of food, gave rise to a feeling of helplessness. Only one who believed wholeheartedly in Hashem felt assured that there would be a steady supply of manna. This is why the Torah was given to that generation. They realized that Torah learning does not necessarily require financial stability or economic prosperity.

My saintly grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt"l, had unshakable faith in Hashem. He fully believed that Hashem sends our sustenance every day. He never worried about what he would have for the day after. Once, my grandmother saved some money on the side for the following day. My grandfather could not lie down to rest. He asked her to give the money away to those in need. He explained that a Jew should believe in Hashem, to the point where he internalizes how Hashem sends us what we need every day, without having to rely on his own reserves or resources. Only after she distributed the money did he feel at ease.

See the difference between them and us. Such giants of spirit were reassured only after they removed all money from their possession. To sleep, they needed to feel completely in the hands of Hashem and under His providence. We, on the other hand, sleep peacefully only after we know that we have saved money on the side. We lack that internalization of Hashem's daily provision. Tzaddikim in every generation, who learned Torah amidst dire poverty, developed this greatness of spirit and had pure faith.

This is why I prefer to explain the Zohar as referring to a different form of Torah support, one that does not include money or some other materialistic prop. The world does not rest on money. It is only in the merit of Torah that we have any continued existence. This is something we should constantly dwell on, reiterate, and underscore. The Angel of Eisav would not have sufficed in merely attacking the financial support of Torah, as Torah can continue to exist even when money is scarce. The reward for learning under such conditions is even greater. This is why it makes more sense to explain the Zohar which uses the metaphor of support as referring to the children who learn Torah.

There is a famous story of an extremely wealthy man who was found dead one day, locked in his safe. He had died of hunger, and

wrote a small note before he died. The note read: How did all of my money save me? Money alone cannot give life or nourish our bodies. One who learns Torah, though, merits reward in this world, with the principle intact in the World to Come. Similarly, we find that during the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, women would toss away their jewelry (*Gittin* 56a). They were starving and had no need for gold. In one story, a wealthy and dignified matron went foraging for food, only to come across a dried fig, one which Rabbi Tzaddok (who had fasted for forty years to delay the destruction) had sucked out all of the juice. She passed away from hunger and disgust.

Going back to the generation that left Egypt, Am Yisrael were quite wealthy when they were in the desert. They were laden with the riches they had received from their Egyptian neighbors and burdened with the spoils they had amassed by the Sea. Their wealth however did not nourish them. They had to rely on Hashem's providence in order to survive. This should teach us a lesson about monetary value. Gold and silver are temporary assets and have at best, dubious dependability. The only thing we can rely on is Hashem.

The *Chessed l'Avraham* explains how Hashem sends His blessing. Man is situated at the conceptual center of Creation, and Hashem sends His bounty and blessing through the intermediary of man. He is like some giant conduit that reaches into the Heavens and channels the blessing into this world. This, however, refers specifically to those who learn Torah and scale the Heavens by their righteous deeds. Only such men are worthy of channeling Divine blessing. Those who dwell in materialistic stupor and are blind to the purpose of life are not fit to channel any Divine blessing.

It is mentioned in the name of the Arizal that the outpouring of *berachah* from Hashem is like the sun at midday. We can't look directly at the sun or derive any straightforward pleasure. The only

way that we can benefit is by indirect reflection. This is why Hashem created the ten *sefirot* of light. They filter the rays of the *Ohr Ein Sof* of Hashem so that we can derive benefit from them. One who learns Torah merits enjoying that light.

I know of one individual who makes me very nervous when I see him. When he shakes my hand, I feel revolted by his touch. I finally made a little inquiry and asked if he keeps the laws of washing one's hands properly. These laws are meant to remove the impurity of the *kelippah* from our hands. His response pointed to a deficiency in that area. I mention this because many people do not realize the stringencies involved or the undesirable side-effects of one who does not adhere to the letter of the law.

The Angel of Eisav wanted to remove the basis of Yaakov's support, be it fiscally or conceptually. Just as the generous supporters of Torah provide sound financial backing and help spread Torah, so too, the children of Am Yisrael help develop their teachers' learning and propel them to greatness. When there is a chink in these pillars, the whole house of Israel is liable to come tumbling down.

When Eisav asked Yaakov if he would like an escort, Yaakov answered (*Bereishit* 33:13), "The children are tender." This needs some explanation. Eisav knew that Yaakov had children and certainly didn't expect Yaakov to go very fast. What did Yaakov mean? Based on what we have explained until now, we can understand what Yaakov was alluding to. The Torah of the children is precious beyond words. Yaakov valued their growth in Torah and desired to be on top of their *chinuch*. Yaakov based the future of Am Yisrael on their education and did not want Eisav to provide an escort or have any part in their trek towards adulthood or their religious upbringing.

**In Summary**

- ◆ The Zohar explains that the Angel of Eisav's assault on Yaakov Avinu refers to an attack on the support of Torah. I understood this to mean not just the physical sustenance of Am Yisrael but also their future development. This refers to the Torah learning of the children. They make their teachers wise by their stimulating inquiries and are the future adults of Am Yisrael.
- ◆ The Angel thus attacked Yaakov on a small but vital nerve, referring to the youthful vitality of these children. This is why the Torah forbids the *gid hanasheh*, in order to rectify that harm.
- ◆ Torah can be learned even amidst poverty. We need to remember that Hashem is our sole provider. Hashem gave the Torah to the generation who relied fully on Him for their daily manna.



## Gems on Parashat Vayishlach



### One Hundred Berachot

*“I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done for Your servant; for with my staff I crossed this Jordan and now I have become two camps”*

*(Bereishit 32:11)*

Yaakov Avinu prayed to Hashem to save him from Eisav’s hands, and added how much he was indebted to Him. He came to Charan with nothing more than some clothing on his back and a stick in his hand, and left Charan a wealthy man. This he attributed to Hashem’s berachah. And so he asked for Hashem’s continued help.

The word במקלי (my staff) could give us a deeper insight into Yaakov’s plea. We can split this word into three parts; במ, ק, and לי. The letters במ refer to the learning of Torah, as it says (Devarim 6:7), “You shall speak of them (בם).” The letter ק refers to the one hundred berachot we are enjoined to say every day. And the letters לי refer to Yaakov’s promise that he made at the outset of his journey to Charan (Bereishit 28:21), “Hashem will be a G-d to me

(ל').” This puts Yaakov’s tefillah in a different perspective. Yaakov pointed out what he had accomplished while in Charan. He expressed how he had merited learning Torah and praising Hashem daily, accepting His Sovereignty over all of his actions. It was in this merit that he begged for Hashem’s salvation from Eisav.

The Ben Ish Chai (Balak, Shana Rishona) stresses the importance of blessing Hashem every day. The pasuk (Bamidbar 24:5) says, “How goodly are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Yisrael.” The word *מה* (how) can be read also as *מאה* (one hundred). This teaches us that the tents of Yaakov are ‘good’ when there is constant praise of Hashem. This is why the Chachamim instituted the requirement to say one hundred berachot every day.

The Ben Ish Chai adds, that this is in addition to our learning Torah, which is done in the ‘tents’ of Yaakov. Our berachot, when said consciously and with concentration, help us put ourselves under Hashem’s authority. We accept His Sovereignty in our daily life when we thank Him for His bounty. This has the ability to bring Divine compassion in its wake, just as Yaakov beseeched Hashem in its merit.



## The Strength of Life

*“Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn”*

*(Bereishit 32:25)*

According to the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 77:3), Yaakov Avinu fought with the Angel of Eisav. Yet the pasuk (Bereishit 32:25) says, “And a man (יִשְׂרָאֵל) fought with him.” Why does the Torah not write clearly the identity of this ‘man’? Additionally, we can ask, where did Yaakov derive the strength to wrestle with the angel, who is blessed with supernatural powers, and win?

Perhaps we can point to an inner strength that Yaakov was endowed with, one that surpasses the mighty powers of angels. The word יִשְׂרָאֵל denotes a man with a singular ability or one who has distinguishing characteristics. Yaakov was an יִשְׂרָאֵל who personified Torah and was distinguished by deed. He translated his learning into action and integrated principle and theory with practice. This is something an angel can never match. An angel only knows and absorbs information but cannot use it to raise himself to higher levels or elevate his status.

The Torah describes the Angel as an יִשְׂרָאֵל in order to bring out this point. The Angel disguised himself as a man, hoping that this would discourage Yaakov. He tried to make Yaakov think that he was no better than any angel. But in truth, Yaakov had the power of an יִשְׂרָאֵל and was able to overcome his adversary.

This could perhaps also explain why we do not find any reference to Avimelech in Yaakov’s life. Avimelech, king of the Palestinians,

started up with both Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu. Yet we do not find any mention of Avimelech by Yaakov. The reason for this is because Avimelech saw the unusual strength of Yaakov and was afraid to start up. He saw that he was an **שׂוֹרֵר**, full of the vigor of Torah and worthy of its protective powers.



### True Greatness

*“When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip; so Yaakov’s hip-socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him”*

*(Bereishit 32:26)*

*“Therefore the Children of Israel are not to eat the displaced sinew on the hip-socket to this day, because he struck Yaakov’s hip-socket on the displaced sinew”*

*(ibid. 32:33)*

Chazal (Yoma 28b) say that the Avot Hakedoshim kept the whole Torah even before it was given. The question is asked, how did they keep the mitzvah of not eating from the gid hanasheh? Wasn’t this mitzvah given on the heels of Yaakov’s fight with the Heavenly angel?

The answer is that the Avot kept even those mitzvot which are seemingly related to external events, such as eating matzah on

Pesach. We eat matzot, as the Torah relates (Shemot 12:17), “For on this very day I will have taken your legions out of the land of Egypt.” Yet Avraham Avinu observed the laws of Pesach even before his children went down to Egypt. This can be surmised from Avraham’s nephew, Lot. When two wayfarers showed up in Sodom, Lot offered them matzot (Bereishit 19:3). Rashi explains that this was because they arrived on Pesach. Obviously if Lot kept Pesach, he must have learned this from his illustrious uncle, Avraham.

This only points to the lofty middot of the Avot. Despite the fact that they had not yet received the Torah, and certain mitzvot were thus classified as a chok, they still kept these mitzvot. Similarly, they kept the mitzvah of gid hanasheh before it was given on Har Sinai. Yaakov Avinu merited that this mitzvah should be given through him, by an incident that touched him personally. Through Yaakov, another mitzvah was given in the Torah and provided with its explanation.

This can be compared to someone who makes a festive meal in honor of a miracle which has not yet happened to him. This defies logic and human reason. And yet, the Avot were in a similar situation. They were observing mitzvot whose rationale only became revealed in later generations. This required tremendous willpower and determination on their part to do Hashem’s will.

Chazal (Berachot 60b) say, “Everything that Hashem does is for our good.” This aptly applies to Yaakov. Despite the risk involved, Yaakov crossed back over the river, only to meet up with the Angel of Eisav. Yet this event ended with a berachah for Yaakov, and a mitzvah for Am Yisrael. We can thus apply the words of the pasuk (Shoftim 14:14), “From the strong came forth sweetness.” Perhaps it was a difficult encounter and required some ‘manhandling,’ but Yaakov was rewarded with the sweetness of understanding another mitzvah in the Torah.

We find that Shlomo Hamelech tried to understand the rationale behind all of the mitzvot of the Torah. Yet he had to admit defeat, as it says (Kohelet 7:23), “I said that I would discern it but it has eluded me.” The Gemara (Yoma 14a) says that this specifically refers to the mitzvah of the parah adumah, an example of the quintessential chok. He merited understanding all of the others, yet this one eluded his full understanding. In the next world, we are told, we will merit to understand the reasons for all of the mitzvot.



## Being Careful

*“So Eisav started back that day on his way towards Seir. But Yaakov journeyed to Sukkot, and he built himself a house there, and for his livestock he made sukkot (thatched shelters); he therefore called the name of the place ‘Sukkot’”*

*(Bereishit 33:16-17)*

These two pesukim demonstrate the vast chasm between Yaakov and Eisav. They lived in two very different worlds. Eisav went to dwell in שעיר, which contains the letters רשע. It was a country of vice and sin. This was in direct contrast to Yaakov, who went to Sukkot, which connotes a temporary dwelling place. What is the significance of Yaakov’s location?

My great-grandfather, Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto zt”l, in his sefer Kesef Mezukak, explains why Yaakov built sukkot. Yaakov taught us,

by example, a perspective on materialistic possessions and life in general, by comparing them to thatched shelters which serve a simple and momentary purpose. So too, our lives in this world are temporary 'stopovers' before we return to our true, permanent abode.

Yet Yaakov also took the time to build a house. This refers to the house of Torah, a Beit Hamidrash, where one can settle himself down and learn. Such an edifice should be established properly, to provide its recipients with the right atmosphere in which to learn. Yaakov gave his house of Torah a firm foundation, made it accessible, and established it as a priority in his life.

At the beginning of the next parashah, Rashi explains that Yaakov sought to sit and rest in tranquility, whereupon Hashem sent upon him the abduction of Yosef. This requires a bit of explanation. What was wrong with Yaakov's desire to rest? Even more, we have a rule; Hashem doesn't penalize for the intent to do something wrong unless it was carried out. If so, even if Yaakov's desire was inappropriate, why did Hashem punish him just for contemplating it, before it ever came to fruition? And most difficult of all, how can we classify the desire to rest as an evil aspiration?

Perhaps we can connect this to the pesukim we are discussing here. When Yaakov saw his brother go off and leave him alone, he breathed a sigh of relief. He felt complacent in knowing that Eisav was off doing his own thing. This way Eisav would not be able to influence or deter him from serving Hashem.

Yet Hashem wanted to show Yaakov that the overall situation hadn't changed. Despite Eisav's departure, the threat of future deterioration still existed. This is why He sent the tribulation of Yosef, to teach Yaakov that his work was not done. Even with Eisav out of sight, there was still what to worry about and plan against.

We need to be constantly on guard from alien influences and ‘parasitical’ infiltration. The Yetzer Hara is like a malevolent program or virus. Once he finds a way to enter our heart, he carries out his work behind the scenes, spreading his venom of sin. When Am Yisrael fail to filter out such sinister influences, they are susceptible prey for the Yetzer Hara. They can easily cruise the express ‘luxury liner’ of vice, surf through crass, licentious sites and slide straight down into the lower worlds of She’ol.

This is why tzaddikim have no rest in this world. They are responsible for their generation and must be in the forefront, battling the dangers which loom overhead. And this is what we learn from Yosef’s abduction. Only with adequate filtration and constant watchfulness can we weather the tempestuous influences of our modern society.





## Vayeishev



### Relaxing One's Efforts

*“Yaakov settled in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan”*

*(Bereishit 37:1)*

Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni Iyov*, 904) tell us that Yaakov wanted to dwell in peace and tranquility, and was given the tribulation of Yosef. This statement requires some explanation. After all, Yaakov did not actually rest. This should bring the rule that, “Hashem doesn’t punish the contemplation of sin” (see *Kiddushin* 40a) to the fore. Divine judgment takes evil intentions into account only after they are perpetrated. The reason for this is because it is quite possible that the one who ponders doing evil may change his mind. If so, why was Yaakov punished?

Perhaps we need to explain what Yaakov was resting from. We see that Yaakov and Eisav settled down, each one in his respective country. However, as my great-grandfather Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto zt”l points out in his sefer, *Kesef Mezukak*, while Eisav was busy in Seir, pursuing vanities, and preoccupied with worldly endeavors, Yaakov built sukkot to shelter his possessions. These sukkot

symbolized the transitivity of his possessions and were a reminder of the impermanence of this world.

The Ramban (*Bereishit* 33:17) writes that Yaakov Avinu actually built a tower in Sukkot. From this tower, he was able to monitor and protect himself from Eisav. This taught his children a golden rule: always keep an eye out for Eisav. Be wary of Eisav's furtive advances. Watch out, not only from Eisav's pilfering or coercion, but also from his insinuating influence. Yaakov had to protect himself and his family from becoming preoccupied with empty worldly pursuits, the same way that Eisav was.

Now we can better understand Yaakov's rest. Yaakov thought that there was no longer a need to worry about Eisav's influence. After all, his children were settled in the Beit Hamidrash, learning. The danger of fraternizing with Eisav had already passed. And so, Hashem sent him a message. In this world, danger lurks around the corner, waiting to pounce upon those who slacken in their Avodat Hashem. Tranquility merely masks the danger which lies beneath the surface. Hashem demanded and insisted that Yaakov not relax his efforts or rest from achieving more. We must always climb the watchtower of foresight and scan the terrain of human endeavor. By spying out our weak points and building an adequate defense, we can prevent our entrenchment in materialism.

### **In days of yore**

This can also help us to understand a difficult period in Jewish history. Chazal say that in the days of the Chashmonaim, many Jews became Hellenized, submitting to Greek philosophy and adopting their way of life. They started to appreciate Greek culture, which immortalizes beauty and glorifies the physical aspects of our world.

This, though, is hard to understand. There were great tzaddikim living then, including the Kohen Gadol, Yochanan, and his son,

Mattityahu. The Beit Hamikdash stood in all its glorious splendor. How did this happen?

Let us begin by noting the name of the festival. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 21b) says that we celebrate Chanukah on the day that the Kohanim rested from their battles and lit the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash. The name *Chanukah* (חנוכה) comes from the resting (חנו) which took place on that day (the 25th day of Kislev, which in Hebrew is כה). Still, why didn't Chazal call the festival by the name of the candelabrum we light, the menorah? The name *menorah* can easily remind us of the miracle which took place. Another point to ponder is that the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash had seven lamps of oil, whereas we light eight.

The answer has to do with why we rest, or more importantly, what we do while we rest. We find a story in the Gemara of one who chose to rest from learning Torah. There was a *Tanna* by the name of Rabbi Eliezer ben Aruch, who was attracted to the fine wine and hot springs of a certain vacation resort. His wife convinced him to stay and study by himself, and he forgot his learning as a result (see *Shabbat* 147b, *Yalkut Shimoni Kohelet*, 973). The Jews in the days of the Greeks also wanted to relax their efforts. We can draw a comparison to their rest from the rest of Yaakov Avinu as well. They enjoyed peace and tranquility, one without the advancement of learning and with a more relaxed guard against evil. This is why Hashem sent the Greeks to shake them up.

The *Yetzer Hara* knows just how to approach us. He doesn't present his wares up front with their evil laid bare. No one would ever listen to him like that. Instead he dresses up sin in the frills of glamor and lavishes it with aesthetic appeal. Chazal (*Shabbat* 105b) say that the *Yetzer Hara* starts by telling us to do just a little sin, hooking us with his alluring bait. The next time around, he entices us with a slightly bigger sin. Before you know it, a person is ready

to sell his soul, so ensnared is he in pleasure and self-gratification. This is the danger inherent in tranquility. By resting from achieving more, we become victim to the ills of deterioration and degeneration. Each day, the *Yetzer Hara* prods us to waste a bit more time from our learning, until he barbs us with sin. While it is true that we may need, at times, to rest up from our schedule of learning, it does not mean that we should squander our time away.

The best way to rest up is to take advantage of one's vacation time by pursuing other venues of learning. I read stories of how Harav Aharon Kotler zt"l, as well as other tzaddikim, would spend their vacation breaks learning, and felt uplifted by their change of locale. They said that they gained more from these breaks than from their regular schedule of learning. Maran Harav Shach zt"l explained why this is so. The one who learns while others rest is sure to encounter difficulties, as he is going against the tide, and is rewarded accordingly. This is similar to Avraham Avinu, about whom the Mishnah (*Pirkei Avot* 5:2) says that he received the reward of all of the generations from the days of Noach until his time. Despite the lawless multitudes and their intimidating opposition, Avraham blazed the trail of righteousness, and rightfully deserved his (and their) reward.

### **Lighting the candles**

The Gemara (*Shabbat* 21b) brings an argument between *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel*. *Beit Shammai* holds that we begin Chanukah by lighting eight candles on the first night, every day lighting one less. *Beit Hillel*, on the other hand, holds that we light one candle the first night and add another on each following night, until we light eight on the last day of Chanukah. The obvious question is: Why don't we light eight candles every night, just as they lit in the Beit Hamikdash. The answer is connected to what we

said before. The increase or decrease of candles represents the influence of the *Yetzer Hara*. According to *Beit Hillel*, we need to remember how the *Yetzer Hara* works. Just as he adds a little every day to his repertoire of sin, so too, we need to combat his advance into our spiritual territory by adding another candle every night of Chanukah. We need to dispel his darkness with the light of the menorah, which allegorically refers to the light of Torah.

*Beit Shammai*, on the other hand, disagrees. According to them, we should remember the effects of the *Yetzer Hara's* influence. Am Yisrael declined in their spiritual level as a result of the influence of the Greeks. By lighting one candle less every day, we focus on the influence of the *Yetzer Hara*, which lowered us to paganism and apostasy, one level at a time. Both *Beit Shammai* and *Beit Hillel* agree on the general message, and “these and those are both words of the Living G-d.”

We are taught (see *Taz on Orach Chaim*, 670) that the Greeks were worse than Haman. Haman tried to wipe out the Jews in the days of Mordechai and Esther. He wanted to destroy their physical, ‘this-world’ existence. The Greeks, however, aimed to adulterate the purity of their souls and make them lose their portion in the World to Come. This is hinted at by the number of candles we light. The Hebrew word for the number eight is *שמנה*, and contains the same letters as the word *נשמה* (soul). The word *שמנה* also contains the letters *שמן*, referring to the miracle of the pure oil, which burned for eight days. By lighting oil candles for eight days, we remember our deliverance from the Greeks, who tried to taint the purity of our souls.

The word *שמנה* can also be rearranged to form the name *מנשה*, one of the twelve Tribes. It is not by coincidence that the Nasi who brought offerings on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan was from the tribe of Menashe. Here we have another

occurrence of the number eight. Perhaps Moshe Rabbeinu was hinting to us what would take place in the days of the Chashmonaim.

### Little by little

The *Ben Ish Chai* (*Vayeishev, Shana Rishona*) writes in the name of the Arizal that our souls consist of four parts: the *nefesh*, the *ruach*, the *neshamah*, and a higher, transcendental facet of that *neshamah*. This final facet is deeply affected by our actions. It is elevated when we do mitzvot or learn Torah. The pasuk (*Tehillim* 68:35) says, “Give glory to Hashem.” This refers to the glory of that facet of our soul, and comes as a result of learning Torah (which is also referred to as ‘glory’). The pasuk (*ibid.*) continues, “Upon Israel is his pride.” This alludes to Hashem’s pride in our choice of action. When we see the power of the *kelippah* increase and begin to propagate its *tumah*, we need to counteract that evil and subdue its force by learning Torah.

In a later generation, we find a recurrence of the influence of the Greeks. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 33b) records a conversation of the *Chachamim* on the influence of Roman culture. Rabbi Yehudah said that the Romans did good work. They built marketplaces, bathhouses, and bridges. Wherever they conquered, they built structures for the benefit of the general populace. Rabbi Yossi said nothing. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, though, said that everything the Romans built was for their personal benefit. They built roads and bridges to raise taxes, marketplaces to house harlots, and bathhouses for self-gratification. It was also an expression of their desire to dominate the world and make society at large conform to their hedonistic way of life. Little by little, they made inroads into Jewish life. After all, what could be wrong with buying one’s groceries in a marketplace, or eyeing the merchandise there? The

Romans relied on the underlying current of promiscuity and idolatry in the marketplace to needle itself into our way of life. They hoped that the Jews would eventually adopt Roman culture.

This is why *Beit Hillel* said to light an additional candle every night. The *Chachamim* wanted us to remember the insidious influence of the Greeks, and the gradual, steady push towards Hellenism that took place. This came through the relaxation of the Jews and their lack of keeping guard. By adding another candle every night, we remember how the Greeks ultimately failed in their attempt, and Am Yisrael lived to tell the tale. This is perhaps another explanation of the letters חנו (to rest) in the word חנוכה. The semblance of tranquility that the Jews desired led to a rest from learning Torah and their eventual defection from Judaism. On the 25th day of Kislev, the Chashmonaim halted the tide. It was then that they were victorious over the Greeks and began to spread the light of Torah.

This should give us some food for thought. We should learn from the Chashmonaim to increase our Torah learning and be wary of slackening our efforts. Rest can easily degenerate into laxity or non-observance. This is the message of the festival of lights.

The law follows *Beit Hillel*, and so we continue adding candles for the duration of Chanukah. The reasoning is based on the principle that we inherently ‘ascend’ in all holy endeavors. We should constantly ascend, little by little, using Chanukah as a springboard for our advancement in Torah. In this way, we take the tool of the *Yetzer Hara* and use it for good. We shouldn’t be discouraged by our failings or failures. Instead, we should pray each day to increase our efforts and become greater, more righteous individuals.

This can also explain why Chanukah always falls out during the parashah of *Vayeishev*. Yaakov Avinu personified the pillar of Torah

and the perfection of character. And yet, Hashem sent him the tribulation of Yosef. Specifically because of his exalted level, he was punished for desiring tranquility and relaxing his efforts. This is despite the fact that he only thought about it but did not actually rest, and notwithstanding Hashem's judgment, which does not ordinarily accord an inappropriate thought the status of deed.

### **Taking it with us**

I saw a story about the Alter from Novardok zt"l, the author of *Madreigat Ha'adam*, which sent chills up my spine. Once, the Alter saw a man running to work. He stopped him to ask if he learns Torah every day, and the man answered, "A bit." The Alter was surprised by his answer. The man explained, that were he to quit his job and sit and learn, how would he be able to live? The Alter, however, was not happy with his answer. He said, "You worry how you will live, but don't worry how you will die. What will you take with you when you die? How will you live in the next world?"

This should prod us to think about our own situation. Our lives are so harried by our thoughts on making a 'living' and earning our 'keep' that we fail to see how much our lives center on this goal. Even rest and sleep are evaluated according to their place in our hierarchy of livelihood allotment. We don't consider eternal life a priority or value its Heavenly wages.

This is in stark contrast to the words of the Alter. There, in the Heavenly realm, they will point to the eternity of tomorrow and the temporality of today. They will claim that we failed to take advantage of our time. They will say, "Why didn't you learn from Yaakov Avinu who built sukkot for his possessions and was wary of Eisav's influence?" These are thoughts for us to ponder.

## Chanukah reflections

Several years ago, I had quite an experience on my way to Eretz Yisrael. There was no room left on any direct flight to Israel, due to the holiday season, and I had to suffice with a stopover in Greece. This triggered my emotions, as it brought to mind the mighty Empire which tried to wipe out the Jewish people. I would have to set foot on the homeland of the wicked Antiochus.

During my stopover, I remembered that I still had to pray Minchah. I searched for a secluded corner where I could pray undisturbed. I found a quiet area in the airport and said my Amidah with my eyes closed. Suddenly, I found myself the object of attention. I was surrounded by many local residents, including some Greek Orthodox priests, who were unceremoniously staring at my silent prayer. I explained that I had just finished my afternoon prayers, whereupon they nodded and said, “Good, good.”

Back on board, I pondered over the strange scene. What would Antiochus have said? Here I was, David Pinto, exhibiting beard and *payot*, and praying in the middle of the capital of Greece. No doubt Antiochus would have killed me, and all those standing by, were he alive today. This episode only points out the greatness of Hashem in determining history and deciding the fate of man. “How abundant are Your works, Hashem! (*Tehillim* 104:24).”

At mealtime, a steward approached me and said, “Rabbi Pinto, we have a kosher meal for you.” I was surprised, and said that I didn’t believe my ears. He went and brought me a sumptuous meal with a *hechsher*. I said again that I don’t believe it. The stewards on board didn’t understand to what I was referring. I asked them in wonder if they were from Greece, and they said yes. I wasn’t trying to make fun of them, *chas v’shalom*, or belittle them in any way. I was merely drawing *chizuk* for myself.

This brought to mind the story I heard about the Alter from Novardok. The Alter once traveled by train, dressed in the simple clothes that Jews wore in that era. At the same time, some high general officers were on board, sitting in the first class section and smoking profusely. They pointed to the Alter and said jeeringly, “See the difference between you and us. We are important, distinguished people, and you, a Jew. What did your G-d give you?” The Alter went over to them and said, “What did G-d give us? He made us the Chosen People.” The Alter said this without any fanfare or flourish. He said later to his talmidim, that he was not reciprocating their taunt. His only intention was to bolster his self-image and internalize how ‘rich’ he was, blessed with an appreciation of eternity and a ‘first class’ ticket of admission.

This is how I felt on the plane. I told them, “Let me explain. Many years ago, your ancestors came to Israel, headed by King Antiochus. He killed Jews for keeping Shabbat, for refusing to eat non-kosher food, for keeping the laws of family purity, *brit milah*, and other mitzvot. Yet you, his descendants, bring me kosher food! If he would see you now, he would turn over in his grave!”

This is true *pirsumei nisa*. Am Yisrael’s continued existence, despite the nations of the world crusades to destroy us, points to a Divine Creator. They have weapons of mass destruction at their disposal, yet they do not wipe us out. This is, in part, due to our learning Torah, as well as the merit of the ‘burning’ self-sacrifice of the Chashmonaim and the miracle of the oil which burned for eight days.

### **Purity of heart**

While we gaze at the lights of the Chanukah candles, we should also remember the words of the Chasam Sofer (*Derashot, Chanukah* 5592). He asked: Why did the Jews light the Menorah in the

courtyard of the Beit Hamikdash? The correct place to light is inside the Sanctuary, not outside. The Chasam Sofer answered that they could not light within, as the Greeks had profaned the Temple by bringing idols within its walls.

This should strike a responsive chord within us. How can we enter the halls of the Beit Hamidrash if we harbor foreign concepts or secular ideals? Avodat Hashem requires first cleansing our inner character from impurities before we can enter the gate of Avodah and serve Hashem from within.

Someone once asked me how we should pray. I answered the following. We need to say our prayers with intent. In order to do that, we need to know why we come to the Beit Hakeneset in the first place. If we truly come to pray, we need to prepare ourselves properly. How? By consecrating ourselves, by purifying our minds from foreign thoughts and our hearts from evil desires. Just as we pray only in a place that is clean (see *Orach Chaim*, 75-77), so too should we pray with the cleanliness of mind, one that does not hanker after corporeality or crave sin. This is why the Chashmonaim lit the Menorah outside, in order to instill in us this principle.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Chazal say that Yaakov desired tranquility and was given the tribulation of Yosef. Why was he punished before he actually rested? Hashem doesn't accord an inappropriate thought the status of deed.
- ◆ Eisav was busy in Seir pursuing vanities and preoccupied with worldly endeavors, while Yaakov built sukkot to shelter his possessions, symbolizing the transitivity of his possessions and reminding him of the impermanence of this world.

- ◆ We need to keep an eye out for Eisav and be wary of his furtive advances. This refers to Eisav's insinuating influence, besides his pilfering and coercion. Yaakov had to protect himself from being preoccupied with empty, worldly pursuits, in the same way that Eisav was.
- ◆ Later on, Yaakov thought that there was no longer a need to worry about Eisav's influence. And so, Hashem sent him a message. Tranquility merely masks the danger which lies beneath the surface. Hashem demanded and insisted from Yaakov not to relax his efforts or rest from achieving more.
- ◆ The *Yetzer Hara* knows just how to approach us. He doesn't present his wares up front with their evil laid bare. Instead he dresses up sin in the frills of glamor and lavishes it with aesthetic appeal. This is the danger inherent in tranquility. By relaxing our efforts, we become victim to the ills of deterioration and degeneration.
- ◆ According to *Beit Hillel*, we need to remember how the *Yetzer Hara* works. Just as he adds a little bit every day to his repertoire of sin, so too, we need to combat his advances by adding another candle every night of Chanukah.
- ◆ The Chashmonaim halted the tide and began to spread the light of Torah. We should constantly ascend, little by little, using Chanukah as a springboard for our advancement in Torah.



## Created to Work

*“Yaakov settled in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan”*

*(Bereishit 37:1)*

Rashi writes that Yaakov sought to rest and lead a tranquil life, and was thus afflicted with the tribulation of Yosef. Similarly, tzaddikim seek to rest, and Hashem says, “Is it not enough what is set aside for them in the next world – they want tranquility in this world, too?” What was the rest that Yaakov wanted? Is there something wrong with resting?

The Gemara (*Berachot* 5a) explains this concept by quoting the pasuk (*Iyov* 5:7), “For man is born to toil.” The Gemara specifies three things which man acquires with toil and no small measure of suffering. They are: Torah, Eretz Yisrael, and *Olam Haba*. Yet in truth, all good things require effort and are achieved only by hard work.

Toil and exertion are part of life. We live off the sweat of our brow and were born to toil. It is part of the preamble to life, the rules of our existence and the constitution of Divine service. We were sent down in this world to accomplish great things, to weather difficult circumstances and climb the mount of spiritual achievement. How does one get to the top? Only by striving for the top and working hard.

In one sense, toil and effort are the tools we need to acquire. Yet, at the same time, they are acquisitions in their own right. One who works hard, acquires a healthy attitude and a positive perspective on life. Those who fail to learn this lesson, however, often find

themselves in bad company. By praising inactivity and valuing empty pastimes, they escape reality and degenerate into loafers. Their indolence only leads to indulgence, and eventually, spiritual atrophy.

The Gemara (see *Kiddushin* 30b, 82a) describes this atrophy by saying, “Idleness leads to boredom and (then) to sin.” We are responsible to educate our children in this area, as well. A child who is not capable of sitting and learning should be taught a trade, for this purpose. We wouldn’t want him to end up in bad company.

Yaakov Avinu suffered many tribulations. Starting with Eisav’s hatred at home, it continued with Lavan’s treachery and culminated with a chase and a fight with the Angel of Eisav. After so many years of difficulties, he sought to relax his efforts and learn Torah undisturbed. Perhaps he compared himself to Eisav, and desired a similar existence, one free from financial worry and open to leisure or relaxation. He thought that he could serve Hashem better without the trials of life. But Hashem decided otherwise.

It is written (*Pri Eitz Chaim Hanhagot Halimud*, 1) about the Arizal, that when he would learn Torah, rivulets of sweat would run down his face. He put all of his efforts into learning, as Torah is only acquired through toil. We mustn’t sit idly in the Beit Hamidrash, enjoying our tranquility. We should enter the Beit Hamidrash intent on learning and expecting to work on understanding what we learn.

The Gemara relates (*Shabbat* 33b) that when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai left the cave he was hiding in, he saw people tilling the fields. He was baffled. Why were they busy doing mundane labor and not studying Torah? We can now understand his bewilderment. Their toil wasn’t in Torah, and their choice of livelihood didn’t offer any

eternal promise of reward. If so, why were they wasting their time, toiling for something which lacked everlasting benefit?

This is why Yaakov was not given the chance to rest. This world was given for us to work; to strive for greater accomplishments, understand more Torah and broaden our knowledge. By desiring tranquility, Yaakov crossed the border from activity and entered into a relaxed state of being. The pillar of Torah demands our continuous efforts. Only by putting in effort can we uphold that pillar and serve Hashem as He created us to do.

#### **In Summary**

- ◆ What was the rest that Yaakov wanted? Is there something wrong with resting? A man is born to toil. He was sent down into this world to achieve spiritual accomplishments. This is done only by putting in effort, by striving and working hard.
- ◆ One who praises inactivity and values empty pastimes, eventually degenerates. Such indolence only leads to indulgence, and eventually, spiritual atrophy.
- ◆ Yaakov saw Eisav enjoying life and relaxing from effort. He hoped to do the same and still serve Hashem. Hashem gave us life to toil and left our reward for the next world.



## Torah of the Humble

*“These are the chronicles of Yaakov: Yosef, at the age of seventeen years, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock, but he was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Yosef would bring evil reports about them to their father”*

*(Bereishit 37:2)*

These words present us with several questions. First, the Torah lists Yosef, from all of Yaakov’s children, as his descendant. Why were the names of the other Shevatim omitted? Rashi quotes a Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 140) which mentions the Torah that Yaakov taught Yosef. Whatever Torah Yaakov learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, he gave over to Yosef. Still, this raises the same question. Why did Yosef receive more than his fair share? Did he absorb more Torah than his oldest brother, Reuven? Second, Yosef is widely known as ‘Yosef Hatzaddik’ (see *Yoma* 35b). Why was Yosef titled so honorably, more so than any of his righteous brothers?

I suggest that there is one *middah* which Yosef excelled in, above the rest. This *middah* is what generated this turn of events. At the outset of the parashah, Yosef is described as shepherding “the children of Bilhah and Zilpah.” He cared about the needs of the children of the concubines, without any pretentious airs. His concern went so far as to be termed נער (lit. a lad; denoting one who befriends and shares interests as would a peer). This indicates that Yosef did not lord his status over them, as his older brothers did. He overlooked his superiority as the son of his father’s ‘first lady,’

in order to give his brothers attention and show his concern. Elsewhere, we find that Yosef was quite handsome. This, too, could have been a bone of contention or a source of arrogance. Even more, Yaakov had a special garment sewn for him, the *ketonet passim*. Despite this, Yosef remained simple and humble, attending to his half-brothers with love and care. It was this *middah* which set Yosef apart and elevated him to greatness.

Similarly, we find Yosef deferring to his ‘boss,’ Pharaoh. When raised to power, Yosef had the opportunity to topple him from the throne. One of the laws of Egypt required the ruler of the land to know every language. Yosef outdid Pharaoh in this regard (see *Sotah* 36b). Yet Yosef did not take advantage of his superior knowledge. He felt gratitude to Pharaoh for bringing him to power, and covered up Pharaoh’s deficiency.

Nor did Yosef flaunt his dream-interpretation skills, which exceeded that of the finest soothsayers and astrologists of his time. Instead of feeling conceit, Yosef remained the same ‘lad’ who befriended everyone and came to their aid. The word נער in Hebrew also denotes shaking. Yosef ‘shook off’ the evil traits of arrogance and conceit in whatever capacity he functioned, and attended to his duties with true humility.

This is what propelled Yosef to greatness. He learned Torah from Yaakov, everything that Yaakov gleaned from the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, in the merit of being humble. We, too, can benefit from such behavior. Learning Torah refines our character. Torah is acquired through the medium of comradeship and the honing of interpersonal relationships, one which displays the virtue of unpretentious assistance, as well as sharing the burdens of others.

Perhaps we can now explain the words of the Gemara (*Berachot* 63b), “Torah exists only by those who sacrifice themselves (lit. kill

themselves) over it.” One who wants to excel in Torah, needs to act in an unpretentious manner, one which displays the overriding *middah* of humility. Such behavior is akin to death, as it requires subjugating the impulse of self-centeredness and deflating one’s ego.

### Shmuel Hanavi

Once, a woman came to me with her tale of woe. She cried bitter tears about her wayward son, Shmuel, who did not act or attempt to emulate the ‘original’ Shmuel. She asked me, “Why doesn’t my son follow in the footsteps of his namesake, Shmuel Hanavi? Why does he make my life so bitter?” I attempted to explain to her the tremendous *middot* of Shmuel and how he arrived at such exemplary conduct.

The Midrash (*Midrash Shmuel* 3) tells us that before Shmuel Hanavi was born, a *Bat Kol* rang out. Every day, the *Bat Kol* said that a tzaddik would soon be born, whose name would be Shmuel. The Midrash relates that whoever gave birth that year called their son Shmuel, hoping that their son would wear the mantle of fame. Why was Channah blessed by having the ‘right’ one?

The answer is that when Channah gave her son the name Shmuel, she understood the depth of reason behind the name. The name שמואל can be split into two, שמו and א-ל (which roughly translates as: his name is akin to G-d’s). Channah prayed with all her heart that her son should not just be called ‘Shmuel,’ but that he should be truly righteous, imitating Hashem and acting accordingly. Channah also showed her inner hopes for her son by sending him to the Beit Hamikdash at a tender age. She wanted him to learn from Eli Hakohen and serve Hashem.

I once read in the name of Maran Harav Shach zt”l, that many people choose names for their children without paying attention to

their meaning or knowing their source. This is what I told that woman whose son's name was Shmuel. When choosing his name, she should have realized its deeper meaning, and put more effort into his education. She should have followed in the footsteps of Channah and raised her son with more self-sacrifice. It is our deep aspirations for our children, coupled with careful attention to their upbringing, which make an impact on their future conduct.

The pasuk (*Shmuel* I, 3) describes Shmuel's rise to greatness. One night, when Shmuel was sleeping not far from Eli, he heard a voice call for him by name. At first he thought that Eli was calling him, and he asked Eli what he wanted. Eli answered that he hadn't called for him. Shmuel lay down, and again he heard a voice calling for him. Once again Eli said that it wasn't him. When it happened a third time, Eli told Shmuel that perhaps Hashem had a message for him. This time Shmuel answered to the voice, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

What seems puzzling is why Shmuel did not answer as Eli told him to: "Speak Hashem, for your servant is listening." The answer is that Shmuel still thought that it was Eli. He did not think that he was worthy of receiving a Divine revelation. He was humble and modest, and didn't believe that he had reached the level of prophecy. This is why he did not answer as his master told him to, and came running to attend to Eli's needs. It was this *middah* of humility which he cultivated that led to his greatness of character. David Hamelech (see *Tehillim* 99:6) compared Shmuel's level of closeness to Hashem with Moshe and Aharon's, as they were answered immediately whenever they called upon Him. Shmuel also refrained from taking any benefit from others or having them provide him with his needs, just as Moshe did (see *Midrash Shmuel* 14). This is another indication of Shmuel's modesty.

Hashem then gave Shmuel a frightening prophecy. He let Shmuel know that the two sons of Eli, Chafni and Pinchat, would soon be killed in battle. Shmuel, though, was in no rush to let his master know of his revelation. Only after Eli persuaded him, did he reveal the extent of his prophecy. Shmuel did not act as some people would, running to tell others of what had just happened to him or what he had just accomplished. He did not show symptoms of conceit, having received a prophecy that Eli was not privileged to hear himself. This could have led Shmuel to pride. Shmuel did not behave this way, as he was humble in all of his ways.

In the end, Chafni and Pinchat did die in battle. They did not take Shmuel's words to heart and repent. Similarly, Yeravam and Achav (both kings of Israel) heard Hashem's call for teshuvah and did nothing. This came from their excessive pride, and ultimately led to their downfall.

In contrast, Shmuel went from place to place, attending to the needs of the people. He didn't sit back and have them come to him (see *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:10). We find such behavior by Moshe and Aharon as well. Aharon loved and pursued peace, and would go out of his way to bring harmony between people. Similarly, Moshe did not worry over his personal honor when it came to making peace. Despite being the leader of Am Yisrael, he approached Datan and Aviram and tried to bring their dispute to a happy conclusion.

This points us in one direction. In order to succeed in spiritual endeavors, we need to acquire the *middah* of humility. We should not be pretentious or act in a conceited manner. These great tzaddikim of yore have shown us, through personal example, the proper attitude and behavior we should strive to cultivate. By subjugating our egoistic impulses, we will have the tools we need to grow in Torah and perfect our character.

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**In Summary**

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- ◆ The Torah lists Yosef as the sole descendant of Yaakov. Why were the names of the other Shevatim omitted? Why did Yaakov only teach Yosef the Torah he learned by the yeshiva of Shem and Ever? And why is Yosef known as ‘Yosef Hatzaddik’?
- ◆ Yosef did not act in a pretentious manner, despite his handsome appearance and *ketonet passim*. He cared about the needs of his half-brothers, the sons of the concubines, even though they considered him superior. Yosef did not lord his status over them, as his older brothers did. Yosef excelled in this *middah* and it elevated him to greatness. He ‘shook off’ the evil traits of arrogance and conceit in whatever capacity he functioned, and attended to his duties with humility.
- ◆ Channah gave her son the name Shmuel, as she understood the depth behind the name. The name שמואל can be split into two, שמו and א-ל. Channah prayed with all her heart that her son should not just be called ‘Shmuel,’ but that he should be truly righteous, imitating Hashem and acting accordingly.
- ◆ Shmuel Hanavi heard a voice calling for him and answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” Why didn’t Shmuel answer as Eli told him to: “Speak Hashem, for your servant is listening”?
- ◆ Shmuel did not think that he was worthy of receiving a Divine revelation. He didn’t believe that he had reached the level of prophecy, nor did he run to tell others what happened to him. He received a prophecy that Eli was not privileged to hear, and yet remained humble. It was this *middah* of humility that led to his greatness of character, a level of closeness to Hashem comparable to that of Moshe and Aharon.
- ◆ We too can benefit from such behavior, not to be pretentious or act in a conceited manner. Torah is acquired through subjugating our egoistic impulses. These great tzaddikim of yore have shown us, through personal example, the proper attitude and behavior we need to cultivate.



## Auspicious Dreams

*“Yosef dreamt a dream which he told to his brothers, and they hated him even more”*

*(Bereishit 37:5)*

*“He dreamt another dream, and related it to his brothers. And he said, ‘Look, I dreamt another dream: Behold! the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me”*

*(ibid. 37: 9)*

Yosef’s dreams stirred up a great deal of animosity. His second dream, that his brothers, along with their father and mother, would one day bow down to him, only reinforced the first. This truly irked his brothers and increased their antagonism.

It would seem that Yaakov did not assent to Yosef’s dream, as it says (*Bereishit 37:10*), “His father scolded him.” Yet immediately afterwards it says, “But his father kept the matter in mind,” indicating that Yaakov hoped that it would one day transpire. How can we reconcile these two pesukim? I suggest that the scolding was merely pretense. Yaakov saw the hatred of the Shevatim and rebuked Yosef in front of them, in order to ward off their antagonism. Inside, though, Yaakov looked forward to its actualization.

There are more surface difficulties to explain. In his dream, Yosef saw the moon bowing down to him. This represented his mother, but contradicted reality, as his mother Rachel had already passed away. Rashi explains that this really referred to Bilhah, who became

his surrogate mother after Rachel passed away, as she was Rachel's maidservant.

Another difficulty is why Yosef envisioned eleven stalks bowing down to him in the first dream, and no reference is made to his father or mother. In fact, why did Yaakov assent to the concept of bowing down to his son at all? Did Yaakov envision the turn of events which would one day put Yosef on the Egyptian throne? What did he think would transpire?

I suggest that Yaakov had a different premonition about Yosef's future. We know that one who masters his impulses actually 'rules' himself. He is the king of his own domain. Yaakov saw the righteousness of Yosef and accredited him with the title of *tzaddik*, which is designated by the *middah* of *yesod*. This quality is eventually what promoted Yosef to rule Egypt. But it started from within. Yosef developed an inner mastery of his urges and drives, those which lay at the foundation of our existence.

This *middah* also finds its expression in Torah learning. We refer to *talmidei chachamim* as 'kings,' as it says (*Gittin* 62a), "Who are the kings? The Rabbanim." Yaakov Avinu taught Yosef all the Torah he learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 37:3), a vast compendium of knowledge. How did Yosef manage to absorb so much information? He was obviously blessed with tremendous capabilities. This is what led Yaakov to believe Yosef's dream. He hoped that Yosef would one day become a 'king' of Torah, a *talmid chacham* of great caliber.

The pasuk (*Tehillim* 113:9) describes the tremendous joy that parents have over the spiritual growth of their children as, "a glad mother of children." Yaakov and Bilhah were ecstatic over Yosef's achievements in Torah. They hoped that he would develop his capabilities and surpass them in righteousness. This is what the

dream referred to when it portrayed Yaakov and Bilhah bowing down to Yosef. It was their figurative deference to his righteous character and knowledge of Torah, one filled with pride, as all parents feel.

Perhaps this is the explanation of Yaakov's words when he saw the carriages intended for him. Yosef sent a royal escort to bring Yaakov to Egypt, and Yaakov exclaimed (*Bereishit* 45:28), "How great (עוד), my son Yosef still lives." The word עוד connotes Yaakov's astonishment. Not only was he surprised that Yosef was alive, he was further surprised that Yosef became the viceroy of Egypt. Chazal explain that these carriages symbolized Yosef's learning of Torah. Even in the *galut* of Egypt, Yosef studied the Torah he learned from Yaakov. Yaakov was greatly astonished that Yosef remained the same righteous Yosef, the true 'governor,' and did not forget his learning, even after all those years.

Perhaps we can now also understand why the first dream did not depict his parents bowing down to him. Hashem showed Yosef two dreams. The double message only confirmed its veracity, similar to the dreams of Pharaoh where the second dream served to confirm his Divine revelation. Had Hashem shown the same exact scene in both dreams, it would have greatly disturbed Yaakov. He would have been aghast to know that his son would become a viceroy in Egypt. Yaakov had no desire to see his son as a ruler of a gentile country or a powerful figure in world affairs. This is why Hashem only showed his brothers bowing down to him in the first dream. He led Yaakov to believe that Yosef would become great in Torah (which he did) but did not stress his ascendancy to power, in order to lessen Yaakov's anguish. We learn from here how much Hashem takes care of tzaddikim and their feelings.

This can also explain the following episode that took place when Yosef was abducted. When Yaakov saw Yosef's garment covered

with blood, he exclaimed (*Bereishit* 37:33), “Yosef has surely been torn to bits (טרורף טורף).” Hashem hid the truth from Yaakov, as it would have only brought him more anguish. Better to be eaten alive, than to be sold as a slave and live amongst gentiles in a foreign country.

The double words טורף טורף allude to two of Yosef’s predicaments, being sold as a slave and set upon by the wife of Potiphar. They also allude to the double loss of the interpretations of his dreams; his rise to power and his growth in Torah. Later on (*Bereishit* 44:28) the Torah repeats the words of Yaakov, adding the word אך (but). The word אך has the numerical value of twenty one, the same as the word אהיה (one of the Names of Hashem, see *Shemot* 3:14). This refers to the preordained protection which Yosef encountered on his descent to Egypt. Hashem was watching over Yaakov and his progeny even in the darkest hours.

Perhaps the simplest answer why Hashem only showed his brothers bowing down to him in the first dream, is because the stalks of wheat represented the famine which would take place. The brothers went down to Egypt without their father. This is why it only pictured eleven stalks bowing down to Yosef. Yaakov had no objections to such a possibility. The second dream however, which represented the emigration of Yaakov, and depicted the presence of Yaakov and Bilhah, elicited his reservations and rebuke.

### **Bilhah’s status**

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 37:2) says that Yosef was, “but a lad,” shepherding the children of Bilhah and Zilpah. Additionally, we find that the brothers treated the children of the maidservants with a lesser degree of respect. This would indicate that they were, indeed, maidservants. However, the whole idea of Yaakov marrying simple maidservants requires elucidation. What is the difference between

Yaakov marrying Bilhah and Zilpah, and Avraham Avinu marrying Hagar? What was their true status?

In the Haggadah we read that Lavan wanted to uproot everything. He was sinister, more diabolical than Eisav, who just wanted Yaakov out of the way. He tried to shortchange Yaakov and lower the status of his progeny. This is why he took two of his daughters, Bilhah and Zilpah, and made them into maidservants. He wanted Yaakov's children to be spiritually defective.

Yaakov, though, knew that this was a sham. In reality, they were worthy to be the Matriarchs of Am Yisrael. As proof, when Rachel died, Bilhah merited the same Divine presence and spiritual closeness that Rachel had. The same thing happened by Zilpah, after Leah died. This indicates their real, elevated status, and shows us how Hashem was undoing Lavan's intended blemish on the house of Yaakov.

When we give a *berachah* to our daughters, we say, "May you be like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah." Why do we leave out Bilhah and Zilpah? Perhaps for this very reason. The same spirit which existed by Rachel and Leah was transferred over to their siblings Bilhah and Zilpah after they passed away.

This is very different from the situation of Avraham Avinu and Hagar. Hagar was merely a foreign helpmate, lacking the quality of a Matriarch. Sarah suggested to Avraham that she would build a family through her, but in the end, it did not materialize. Hagar was sent away with Yishmael, a sign of rejection. He was not worthy being called a descendant of Avraham Avinu.

By making Bilhah and Zilpah into maidservants, Lavan wanted Yaakov to lose four Shevatim from Am Yisrael. This was to strike down the prophecy that Yaakov had regarding his future. He was

told that if he would father twelve Shevatim, he would be worthy of *Olam Haba*. Perhaps Yaakov Avinu wisely went along with Lavan's ruse. By pretending to marry them as maidservants, he gave the forces of *tumah* cause to be smugly complacent with their gain. In this way, he would be left alone to raise his children without their continued influence.

The same way that Yaakov also fought with the Angel of Eisav, we, too, face battle with the spiritual forces of *tumah*. We inherited Yaakov's strength of character and are fortified by his spiritual accomplishments.

We are taught that the visage of Yaakov Avinu is engraved on the Heavenly throne (*Bereishit Rabbah* 78:3). This shows us what Yaakov attained by his actions, and it gives us a 'foothold' in spiritual areas. Moshe Rabbeinu took advantage of this, when he ascended on High to receive the Torah and won the arguments with the angels. Hashem told him to grab hold of the Heavenly throne (*Shabbat* 88b). He drew strength from Yaakov and answered them back. The angels also realized that they were dealing with a descendant of the righteous tzaddik whom Hashem cherished, one who also fought with an angel and won.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ Yaakov thought that Yosef would be greater than his brothers in the realm of Torah. He hoped that Yosef would become a 'king' of Torah, a *talmid chacham* of great caliber. This is how Yaakov interpreted Yosef's dreams.
- ◆ Lavan wanted to cause Yaakov and his progeny spiritual harm by making him marry maidservants. Yaakov knew that it was a ruse. The Divine presence and spiritual closeness that Rachel and Leah had, were transferred over to Bilhah and Zilpah after they passed away.

- ◆ Similarly, the spiritual accomplishments of Yaakov and his victory over the Angel of Eisav, was inherited by his children. This is what gives us the strength to conquer the *Yetzer Hara*.



### Reuven's Fragrant Actions

*“Reuven heard and rescued him from their hand; he said, ‘We will not strike him mortally!’ And Reuven said to them, ‘Shed no blood! Throw him into this pit in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him!’ – intending to rescue him from their hand, to return him to his father”*

*(Bereishit 37:21-22)*

The pasuk says (*Shir Hashirim* 7:14), “The mandrakes yield fragrance, and at our doorstep lies every delight.” This, the Midrash says, refers to Reuven. Reuven saved Yosef from being killed, and his action is compared to the fragrant scent of mandrakes. The Midrash continues, “And on our doorstep lies every delight,” refers to the lights of Chanukah, which we put at our doorstep. This Midrash requires a bit of explanation. What is the connection between these two seemingly unrelated ideas?

Reuven displayed a large measure of self-restraint when he found the mandrakes and brought them to his mother Leah. He took only what he knew to be *hefker*. Even though many children do not show such understanding, Reuven understood that he was not allowed to take that which belonged to others. He also exercised self-control

by not savoring them for himself, saving them instead for his mother. As the first-born, his action became an example for all of his brothers to emulate. These mandrakes, then, were a source of great pride for Leah. Perhaps she wanted to retain them in her possession. And yet, instead of enjoying them for herself, she gave them to her sister Rachel. The import of his mother's righteous deed and noble spirit was not lost on Reuven, as we shall see shortly.

Reuven's action displayed restraint, and is characterized by the mandrakes, which have a pleasant fragrance. Controlling one's base desires gives off a fragrant 'smell,' as it represents subduing the *Yetzer Hara* and bringing *nachat* to Hashem. Later on, though, after Rachel passed away, Reuven removed Yaakov's couch from the tent of Bilhah and placed it in the tent of his mother Leah. Yaakov radiated displeasure at Reuven's inappropriate behavior. He rebuked Reuven on his rash action, and the failure to exercise the same *middah* of self-control as he had once shown with the mandrakes.

"And on our doorstep lies every delight" is a reference to mitzvot in general. They are symbolized by the Chanukah lights, which we use to surround our doorways with mitzvot (as the mezuzah is placed to the right and the menorah on the left). Every Jew is surrounded with the opportunity to do mitzvot on a daily basis. This is why Hashem gave us so many mitzvot. "Hakadosh Boruch Hu wanted to give merit to Am Yisrael and He therefore gave Torah and mitzvot in an abundant measure" (*Makot* 23b). Through the fulfillment of mitzvot we attain a refined character and become attached to Hashem.

Even after we learn self-control, we are admonished to continue to add to our repertoire of mitzvot and surround ourselves with

their good deeds. This is another connection between the pasuk, “And on our doorstep lies every delight,” and the Chanukah lights. We add a candle every day of Chanukah, to fulfill the principle that we ‘ascend’ in all holy endeavors, and so we light eight candles on the last night of Chanukah. Similarly, we are commanded to continue in our observance of the mitzvot. Thus the menorah signifies our mitzvah performance which increases with time and perseverance.

This is what Yaakov told Reuven. It is not enough that you once showed restraint of your impulses. We need to be persistent and continue to control our baser nature, under all situations. We need to give ‘fragrant’ *nachat* to Hashem, at all times. This is what is expected from each and every Jew, to continue doing mitzvot without fail.

Later, after Yosef was born, the opportunity to fulfill Yaakov’s words came up. Yaakov showed an extra measure of fondness for Yosef, almost as a first-born son. And yet, when Yosef was thrown into the pit, Reuven stepped forward to save his life. He had no resentment over the fact that Rachel, Yosef’s mother, took the mandrakes that he so lovingly brought his mother Leah. Nor did he show jealousy over Yosef’s position in his father’s eyes. He took Yaakov’s words to heart and persevered in exercising self-control, saving Yosef from his brother’s machinations. In truth, he saved the brothers, too, from their own undoing. By holding onto the harness of self-control, and drawing in their reins, he was able to steer them in the right direction.

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:19) say that Reuven was not around when the brothers sold Yosef, as he was doing teshuvah for moving his father’s linens. Even so, there still remained some form of stain from his sin. This we learn from when Yaakov gave the *berachot* to

his children. He told Reuven (*Bereishit* 49:4) that he had, “water-like impetuosity.” Because of his impetuousness, Chazal say that he lost the birthright to Yosef, the priesthood to Levi, and the kingship to Yehudah.

Perhaps another lesson we can learn from this Midrash is the virtue of *achdut*. When Reuven gave the mandrakes to his mother, he set into motion a train of events which brought the family together and solidified them as a unit. Through his actions, both Leah and Rachel were blessed with children. (Leah gave the mandrakes to Rachel in lieu of Yaakov’s companionship for one night, and these mandrakes were used by Rachel as a remedy for fertility. Thus both Yissachar and Yosef were born to Yaakov as a consequence of this episode.) In the wake of these mandrakes, Reuven felt a responsibility towards his brothers, and to Yosef in particular. Thus its repercussions echoed years later when Reuven saved Yosef from certain death.

We can now make another connection to Chanukah. On Chanukah, we read every morning from the Torah about the inauguration of the Mishkan. For the first twelve days, each Shevet brought an offering in the Mishkan. This unified the Shevatim. They all felt joy in being able to take part in the inauguration, and were happy for each other as well.

We should learn from here the importance of unity. When we all do our part in serving Hashem, it raises our individual status to being part of a collective whole, one nation serving G-d. Our individual sacrifices become a fitting offering, one whose fragrant scent of *achdut* wafts all the way up to the Heavenly throne.

Conversely, when we tear that *achdut* apart, we cause the Beit Hamikdash to be destroyed. As we know, the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed as a result of *sinat chinam*. In order to reach complete

mitzvah observance, we must have unconditional *achdut*. Every Jew is spiritually attached to the other, and it is only when we are together that we secure our future as Am Yisrael. It is a unity which defies corporeality, which links us as a people at our essence and to the future.

We can show more references between the Shevatim and Chanukah. The Zohar (*Chelek* III, 73a) writes, “Yisrael, the Torah, and Hashem are one.” The lights of Chanukah symbolize the Torah, which casts its supernal light upon the dense earth. Am Yisrael are compared to oil. Just as oil and water do not mix, no matter how hard one may try, so too, the Jewish people and the nations of the world do not blend into any homogeneous mixture. Am Yisrael must always remain distinct from the gentiles and remain at the pinnacle of proper behavior.

Another aspect of oil is that it is produced by squeezing olives. Similarly, the nations may try to crush us, but it only serves to bring out our best, fueling us to produce our ‘light.’ The number of candles we light is שמנה, which has the same letters as the word נשמה. Thus the candles hint to the spark of Divine which we treasure, and urge us to bring out its inner glow. Lit together, the eight lights represent the unity of Am Yisrael, the Torah, and Hashem.

Before lighting the candles, we say the blessing, “Who made miracles in those days at this time.” This teaches us that our commitment to mitzvot should be equal in every generation.

The word חנוכה can be split into two, חנו (rested) and כה (twenty-five). The Chashmonaim rested on the 25th of Kislev, and began the spiritual work of rejoining the nation with their Father in Heaven and rebuilding the Beit Hamikdash. The word חנוכה comes from the word חינוך (education or upbringing). Part of the message

of Chanukah is the inauguration that was brought about by the miracle of Chanukah and our 'education' towards *achdut*, a major factor in the rebuilding that ensued.

The Hasmonean victory helped Am Yisrael to return to their roots. It was the valiant efforts of the Chashmonaim which educated the nation and removed the influence of the Greeks, so that they could inaugurate their service of Hashem once again. This was a corollary of their miracle, and an echo of the original inauguration of the Mishkan, where all of Am Yisrael united under the banner of Divine service and where love and harmony prevailed. How fitting is it, then, that the name of the Shevet who brought their offerings on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan was Menashe. The name מנשה contains the same letters as the word שמנה and the word נשמה, hinting at the essence of the festival of Chanukah.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ The Midrash explains that the pasuk “The mandrakes yield fragrance, and on our doorstep lies every delight” refers to Reuven who saved Yosef, as well as the Chanukah candles. What is the connection between these two seemingly unrelated ideas?
- ◆ Reuven displayed restraint by giving his mother the mandrakes. Later on, though, Reuven removed Yaakov’s couch from the tent of Bilhah and placed it in the tent of his mother Leah. Yaakov rebuked Reuven for his rash action and the failure to exercise the same *middah* of self-control as he had shown previously.
- ◆ “And on our doorstep lies every delight” is a reference to mitzvot in general. They are symbolized by the Chanukah lights, which we use to surround our doorways with mitzvot, and fulfill the principle that we ‘ascend’ in all holy endeavors. The menorah thus signifies our mitzvah performance which increases with time and perseverance.

- ◆ Every Jew is surrounded with opportunities to do mitzvot on a daily basis. Even after we learn self-control, we are admonished to continue to add to our repertoire of mitzvot and surround ourselves with their good deeds.
- ◆ This is what Yaakov told Reuven. It is not enough that you once showed restraint over your impulses. We need to be persistent, and continue to control our baser nature, under all situations.
- ◆ When Yosef was thrown into the pit, Reuven stepped forward to save his life. He had no resentment over the fact that Rachel, Yosef's mother, took the mandrakes that he so lovingly brought his mother Leah. Nor did he show jealousy over Yosef's position in his father's eyes. Reuven also set into motion a train of events which brought the family together and solidified them as a unit. Through his actions, both Leah and Rachel were blessed with children.
- ◆ On Chanukah, we read about the inauguration of the Mishkan. For the first twelve days, each Shevet brought an offering in the Mishkan. This unified the Shevatim. When we all do our part in serving Hashem, it raises our individual status to being part of a collective whole, one nation serving G-d. In order to reach complete mitzvah observance, we must have unconditional *achdut*.
- ◆ The Hasmonean victory helped Am Yisrael to return to their roots. Am Yisrael united under the banner of Divine service, and love and harmony prevailed.



## The Selling of Yosef

*“And so it was, when Yosef came to his brothers they stripped Yosef of his tunic, the fine woolen tunic that was on him. Then they took him, and cast him into the pit; the pit was empty, no water was in it”*

*(Bereishit 37:23-24)*

The act of throwing Yosef into the pit always elicits some basic questions. How could the Shevatim, as righteous individuals, act in such a mean, coarse manner? At first they wanted to kill him, and only afterwards condescendingly agreed to sell him as a slave. Their action defies comprehension.

Chazal (*Midrash Mishlei*, 1) say that the ten righteous martyrs who died at the hands of the Romans were reincarnations of the ten Shevatim who took part in the sale of Yosef. Their deaths atoned for the sin which was perpetuated. This only adds wonder to our inquiry. If the ten Shevatim were guiltless, why were they punished? And if they were indeed to blame, why did Hashem agree to be silent over the sale? Why did He accept the brothers' excommunication of the one who would tell Yaakov what really happened (see *Tanchuma Vayeishev*, 2)? This would indicate that Hashem condoned Yosef's servitude.

Even more perplexing is why Yosef did not tell his captors to bring him home. His father would have paid a nice sum of money for his release. It would seem that Yosef accepted his servitude and agreed to the validity of his brother's actions. This too requires explanation.

I suggest that the brothers actually convened a court. They judicially ruled that Yosef deserved capital punishment. This could be for several reasons. Perhaps they evaluated his dreams, which had his parents bowing down to him, and determined that they were a gross violation of *kibbud av v'em*. His older brothers also bowed down to him in the dreams, infringing on the sovereignty and kingship of Yehudah. They also judged the evil reports that Yosef brought their father, as libeling them as reshaim and transgressing the sin of *lashon hara*. For someone of Yosef's stature, these were grave sins, worthy of death. A tzaddik has a greater degree of accountability. Hashem judges His righteous ones with a stricter, more demanding measuring-rod.

When Yosef heard his brother's claims, he fell silent. He knew that they were right, and accepted his verdict. His soul-searching led him to realize that his words had been said without deliberation. This is why he did not breathe a word to his father about his abduction. It was an acknowledgement of his guilt and an acceptance of the Divine judgment.

Chazal (*Seder Hadorot*) say that Yosef asked his captors to stop along the way, so he could pray at his mother's grave. There, he heard his mother's voice telling him to accept the Heavenly decree without any reservations. Yosef did so, and Hashem silently acquiesced to the brothers' verdict as well. This is why Hashem took part in the excommunication of the brothers and did not tell Yaakov where Yosef was.

What still remains to be explained is why the Shevatim were meted out punishment for selling Yosef. Perhaps we can use an analogy to show where their fault lay. When a child does something very improper, his father may discipline him in a physical way,

making sure that he understands what he did wrong. The child may cry at his 'sentence' of punishment, asking for mercy. In response, the father may reduce the intensity of the punishment. Although the child may have deserved to feel the full brunt of the 'law,' his pleas do not go unanswered. Similarly, Yosef cried over his bitter fate, and the Shevatim should have paid heed and muted its severity.

Others explain that the brothers did not do the right thing by dipping Yosef's garment in blood and sending it to their father (*Bereishit* 37:31-33). This caused a great deal of anguish to Yaakov. It compounded Yaakov's grief with worry, as there was no way of finding out what had really happened to Yosef. Yaakov's grief lingered on as a result of their ploy, and he refused to be consoled. It would have been better for the Shevatim to do nothing and leave matters be.

Additionally, some commentators point to the brothers' actions after the sale. The pasuk (*ibid.* 37:25) says that the brothers "sat to eat food." Even if they were right in their verdict, the very act of eating after pronouncing judgment runs counter to our innate *middah* of compassion. Am Yisrael is distinguished by the trait of compassion. It runs in our blood. Eating gladdens the heart and lightens the mood, in contrast to the seriousness a judge should have when administering punishment. This is why the Shevatim were punished. They should have acted with more compassion, even if Yosef deserved to be punished. An observer would mistakenly assume that they were happy at their brother's sentence, and we are taught (*Mishlei* 24:17), "When your foe falls, be not glad." For tzaddikim such as they, such behavior was found wanting.

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**In Summary**

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- ◆ Why did the brothers want to kill Yosef? Why did Hashem silently acquiesce to the sale? Why didn't Yosef ask his captives to have his father redeem him?
- ◆ Yosef was worthy of being punished. His dreams violated *kibbud av v'em*, and the sovereignty of Yehudah's kingship. Additionally, he spoke evil of his brothers. Yosef accepted his verdict, and Hashem kept quiet about the sale.
- ◆ The brothers should have responded to Yosef's cries with compassion, even if he deserved to be punished. They shouldn't have caused Yaakov more anguish by dipping Yosef's garment in blood before sending it to him. Moreover, they shouldn't have sat down to eat after pronouncing judgment.



## Gems on Parashat Vayeishev



### Doing More

*“Yaakov settled in the land of his father’s sojournings, in the land of Canaan”*

*(Bereishit 37:1)*

Rashi writes that when Yaakov sought to rest, he was given the tribulation of Yosef. As long as we live in this world, we have to realize what life is all about. We are here to work. When someone looks to relax his efforts and enjoy tranquility, he is asking for trouble. By placing the ‘do not disturb’ sign on his door, he is practicing what is antithetical to our purpose in life.

Chazal (*Berachot* 5a) say that one who experiences suffering should do some introspection. If, after searching his actions, he did not find a sin to attribute his suffering to, he should ascribe it to a lack of Torah study. Yaakov most certainly reflected on why he deserved to be punished with the loss of Yosef. Perhaps he attributed it to a lessening of Torah learning. The name **יקוסף** connotes adding. Yosef’s disappearance hinted at the root of his misfortune, not adding to his Avodat Hashem. We must always try to add to our repertoire of mitzvot and delve deeper into Torah.

Similarly, the Greeks set upon Am Yisrael only after the Jews faltered in their service of Hashem. The name חנוכה alludes to this. It contains the letters חנו which mean to rest. The Jews rested and weakened in learning Torah. The letters כה come from the word מכה (a blow), after we add a מ. The letter מ refers to the Torah which was given in forty days. By resting from Torah and not doing more, they received a tremendous blow, the decrees of the Greeks.



### Yosef with His Brothers

*“These are the chronicles of Yaakov: Yosef, at the age of seventeen years, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock, but he was a lad with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Yosef would bring evil reports about them to their father”*

*(Bereishit 37:2)*

Why does the Torah list Yosef as the sole progeny of Yaakov?

The name יעקב can be split into two: עקב (the heel), and the letter י. The heel is a part of the human body which is rarely seen, at the extremity of our feet. Yet it plays an indispensable role in keeping us balanced and upright. Similarly, the letter י is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, yet its position at the height of a Hebrew line of typeface demonstrates its importance. This signifies Yaakov Avinu, who made himself insignificant, yet was instrumental in deciding the course of the Jewish people. This is why his visage is engraved on the Heavenly throne.

Yosef acted in a similar fashion. He acted with humility towards his brothers, even after they acted wrongly towards him. Yosef learned this *middah* from Yaakov. Despite his rise to power, he still remained the same Yosef, and did not lord his position over his brothers.

Before his brothers set out for home, he told them (*Bereishit* 45:5), “And now, be not distressed.” The *Shechinah* cannot rest on one who is sad. We can only experience Divine inspiration when we are truly happy. Yosef urged his brothers to journey home in a joyous frame of mind, one worthy of understanding Divine Providence and its predetermination of events. He wanted them to see for themselves how they had erred in their assessment of him, by faulting him with speaking *lashon hara*.

He asked to them to note (*ibid.* 45:12), “For my mouth has spoken to you.” This refers to the *kedushah* of the *brit milah*, which was not defiled by immorality. Had Yosef spoken *lashon hara*, he would not have been able to merit the same level of *kedushah*. This is why the Torah singles out Yosef as Yaakov’s sole progeny, as he was a worthy descendant of Yaakov.





# Mikeitz



## Shortening the Galut

*“It happened at the end of two years to the day: Pharaoh was dreaming that behold! – he was standing over the River”*

*(Bereishit 41:1)*

The Midrash (*Midrash Rabbah* 89:1) quotes the pasuk (*Iyov* 28:3), “He sets a limit to the darkness,” and says, “Hashem set a date for Yosef, how many years he would be in darkness. Once that time came, immediately afterwards (*Bereishit* 41:1), “and Pharaoh dreamt.” To what darkness does this refer?

Shlomo Hamelech said (*Kohelet* 3:1), “Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything.” This teaches us that everything has its time and place. Hashem set boundaries and assigned time slots for every occurrence. For example, Hashem limited the time we have to do certain mitzvot. Some mitzvot can only be done during the daytime, and others, only once a year. We have to do them at their predetermined time and not miss our window of opportunity and forfeit their performance. Similarly, Hashem set the clock for each event to occur in our lives, when it will transpire and for how

long. He gives us suffering only according to the Divine scheme of events, and when their purpose has been fulfilled, He immediately removes that suffering.

Yosef Hatzaddik lingered in an Egyptian prison for many years. He suffered degradation and experienced gloom. Yet, when Hashem determined that the time had come to remove him from that dark, dreary dungeon, He immediately sent Pharaoh a dream which detailed future events. This dream became the catalyst for Yosef's rise to power, as we find later (*Bereishit* 42:6) that, "Now Yosef – he was the viceroy over the land, he was the provider to all the people." This is the end of the 'darkness' referred to by the above Midrash. Yosef's darkness was predetermined, calculated to the last detail and played out until the final second of the Divine decree. Once that point was reached, Pharaoh envisioned a dream and sought its interpretation. Seeing Yosef's wisdom, Pharaoh appointed him as Viceroy of Egypt.

In a similar vein, Chazal (*Berachot* 10a) say, "Even if a sharp sword lies on a person's neck, he should still not despair of Divine mercy." The reason for this is that there is always the possibility that his measure of suffering has reached its fill. His salvation could arrive at any point in time. This also applies to our situation in *galut*. We are surrounded by millions of enemies, all plotting our end. Suffering finds us at every corner. Even so, we should not fall into despair. Every *galut* has its end. And even if Mashiach tarries in coming, we still resolutely await his arrival, at any time.

There is one thing that can help us achieve this equilibrium of faith and spiritual fortitude. By internalizing that Hashem is behind the scenes, waiting to bring the bitter *galut* to an end, we can weather its tempestuous storms to a greater degree. Learning Torah can also aid us in forgetting the prick of *galut* and help assuage its open wound. We build our reservoir of faith by delving into the Sea

of the Talmud and revealing the hope and Divine assurance contained therein. Chazal (*Tanchuma Vayigash*, 11) say that Yosef did not forget his learning, even in Egypt. He obviously reviewed what he learned with his father, for how else could he have remembered everything? This is what gave him the fortitude to live through his own private *galut*.

One who loses all hope and falls into despair is actually caught in a 'double' *galut*. Besides having to live through the yoke of suffering, he also lacks the tools which can help him buoy by. If we want to merit redemption and mitigate our suffering, we need to cleave to the Torah, the ultimate cure-all for all spiritual ailments. Only by sticking to faith and holding onto the 'Tree of Life' can we safely pass through the waves of *galut* which wash over us and threaten our very existence.

It is a well-known medical fact that one who is seriously ill can greatly increase their recuperation by fostering a feeling of hope and anticipating their recovery. Conversely, those who sink into depression over their state of being, actually become sicker. Often, only a miracle can help them return from the pit into which they have fallen. This is also an analogy to one who throws off the yoke of Torah in order to alleviate his suffering of *galut*. Such a person is farther than ever from witnessing the end to his tribulations. By turning his back on Hashem, he falls deeper into his 'spiritual' ailment and enters a *galut* within a *galut*.

Yosef Hatzaddik did not lose hope. Even though he was made an outcast by his brothers and was forced to live far away from home, he clung to his faith. The tribulations he weathered could certainly have driven him to despair. Thrown into a pit, sold as a slave, cast into a dungeon – these are all possible ingredients that could lead the faint of heart to lose all hope of being redeemed. Yosef paid no heed to the *Yetzer Hara's* lament of gloom. He stayed far away from

being imprisoned in a *galut* within a *galut*. He girded himself with strength and believed that all that transpired was the work of G-d and would one day pass. Hashem would see to his release.

### **The galut of Greece**

This parashah is always read during the week of Chanukah. What is the connection between the two? The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 82:4) says that the pasuk (*Bereishit* 1:2), “With darkness upon the surface of the deep,” refers to the *galut* of Greece. The Greeks tried to estrange Jews from their religion. They tried to darken the spirit of the Jewish people. Unlike other enemies who wanted to eradicate the physical existence of the Jews, the Greeks wooed the people away from Hashem, tainting their souls with false hopes and misplaced faith. This is why they brought idols into the Sanctuary (Yerushalmi *Ta’anit* 4:5), desecrated the Beit Hamikdash, and defiled every drop of oil (*Shabbat* 21b). They realized that all Jews looked to the Beit Hamikdash for spiritual direction, as their fountain of holiness and a symbol of their connection with G-d.

The Chasam Sofer (*Derashot, Chanukah* 5592) explains why the Kohanim lit the candles “in Your holy courtyard” (as mentioned in the *Al Hanissim* prayer) and not in its regular place in the Sanctuary. When the Jews were finally able to enter the Beit Hamikdash, they discovered that the Greeks had wreaked havoc and defiled all of the vessels. The inside sanctuary still had to be purified from its desecration. Thus they had no choice but to light the Menorah in the courtyard of the Temple.

During this time, many Jews had lost their feelings for religion. They were in a *galut* within a *galut*. Lacking faith, estranged from Hashem and His Torah, their salvation remained distant and all hope seemed lost. This was the ‘darkness’ of Greece.

Out of Hashem's kindness, a handful of tzaddikim kept the Jewish spark from being extinguished. These were the Chashmonaim. They fought a spiritual battle, waging war on the influence of Greek culture and its stranglehold on Jewish life. Hashem gave them victory after victory, until they pushed the Greeks out of Eretz Yisrael and lit up the darkness of *galut* with the light of Torah. This is symbolized by the light of the menorah, and is why Hashem made a miracle specifically with it, rather than any other vessel or object. Similarly, the finding of one small jug of pure oil represents the purity of the Jewish soul, as the letters הַשֶּׁמֶן can be rearranged to spell the word נֶשְׁמָה.

Perhaps we can trace the courage and resolve of the Chashmonaim back to our parashah. Wherever Yosef went, he proclaimed with pride, "I am a Jew and I fear G-d" (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 87:5). Those near him could see that Hashem was with him and part of his life. His whole presence spoke of his Jewish origins, as both the Chief Butler and the wife of Potiphar described him as a "Jewish lad" (*Bereishit* 39:17; 41:12). Yosef's struggle to keep his Jewish identity amongst gentiles and not defile his spark of glory is what gave the Chashmonaim their strength to ward off the alien Greek culture.

We should learn from these heroes of yore how to battle the winds of *galut* and not fall prey to their blandishments. As terrible as it is to be in *galut*, it is much harder to live through a double *galut*, as those who forsake Torah and mitzvot experience. The pasuk (*Tehillim* 19:9) says, "The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart." Torah contains the necessary ingredient we need. It gladdens our heart by its truth and by the justice of its laws. When one's heart is full with joy, he can overlook the bitterness of his situation. It becomes distant and insignificant.

On Chanukah we remember the culture that the Greeks tried to foster upon us. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 82:4) describes it as “darkness upon the surface of the deep” (*Bereishit* 1:2). In such a situation, we need the, “Divine presence which hovered upon the surface of the waters” (ibid.) to guide us. This refers to the Torah. On a deeper level, this refers to the powers of *kedushah* which we can use to fight the powers of *tumah*.

As is well known, there are ten *sefirot* of *kedushah*, corresponding to the ten *sefirot* of *tumah*, known as the ten lower ‘crowns’ (see *Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Vayigash* and *Likutim Bereishit*, 3). These *sefirot* oppose each other’s existence. Hashem gave *kedushah* the power to vanquish and nullify the powers of *tumah*. This is how the Chashmonaim were able to overcome the Greeks, despite their vast difference in numbers. ‘The many were given over to the few’ (*Al Hanissim*), and the victory of the Chashmonaim was won through the ‘hovering spirit of Hashem,’ the power of holiness invested in them.

The words **וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם** (darkness upon the surface of the deep) alludes to this concept. The first and last letter of the word **וְחֹשֶׁךְ** spells out **מת**, referring to the power of *tumah* (which also brings about death). Additionally, the numerical value of the middle letters equals eleven, another reference to the powers of *tumah* (as brought down in *Eitz Chaim, Sha’ar* 42:2). The Chashmonaim wrestled with these powers and brought Am Yisrael out of the depths of *tumah* in which they found themselves.

The pasuk (*Shmuel* I, 2:9) says, “He guards the steps of His devout ones.” Hashem carefully watches over His righteous and pious servants. Yosef merited this providential ‘watching’ in Egypt. Hashem did not forsake him, even in the depths of his personal *galut*. He even caused Pharaoh Harasha to choose him to be the Viceroy. This was in the merit of Yosef’s tenacity in keeping

Hashem's will. When we serve Hashem with tenacity and resolve, we merit Hashem's promise: "For Hashem will not cast off His people nor will He forsake His heritage" (*Tehillim* 94:14).

### — In Summary —

- ◆ When the time came for Yosef to be set free from prison, Hashem sent Pharaoh a dream detailing future events. Seeking its interpretation, Pharaoh released Yosef from the prison and made him Viceroy of Egypt.
- ◆ Just as Hashem set the date for Yosef's release down to the last second, so too, Hashem sets the time for our *galut* to end. When one learns Torah, he can forget the prick of *galut*. Torah gladdens the heart and can help us achieve the equilibrium of faith and spiritual fortitude we need to weather its tempestuous storms.
- ◆ One who throws off the yoke of Torah in order to alleviate his suffering is farther than ever from witnessing the end to his tribulations. By turning his back on Hashem, he falls deeper into his 'spiritual' ailment and experiences a *galut* within a *galut*.
- ◆ Even though Yosef Hatzaddik was made an outcast and forced to live far away from home, he clung to his faith. Thrown into a pit, sold as a slave, cast into a dungeon –Yosef paid no heed to the *Yetzer Hara's* lament of gloom and stayed far away from being imprisoned in a *galut* within a *galut*. He clung to Hashem and reviewed the Torah he learned from home.
- ◆ What is the connection between this parashah and Chanukah? The Midrash says that the words, "darkness upon the surface of the deep," refers to the *galut* of Greece. The Greeks tried to estrange Jews from their religion. They tried to darken the spirit of the Jewish people and woo them away from Hashem. These Jews were in a *galut* within a *galut*. Lacking faith, estranged from Hashem and His Torah, their salvation remained distant and all hope seemed lost. This was the 'darkness' of Greece.

- ◆ The Chashmonaim fought a spiritual battle, waging war on the influence of Greek culture and its stranglehold on Jewish life. They lit up the darkness of *galut* with the light of Torah, representing the “Divine presence which hovered upon the surface of the waters.”
- ◆ Hashem gave *kedushah* the power to vanquish and nullify the powers of *tumah*. This is how the Chashmonaim were able to overcome the Greeks, despite their vast difference in numbers. They wrestled with these powers and brought Am Yisrael out of the depths of *tumah*.



## Pharaoh's Dream

*“It happened at the end of two years to the day: Pharaoh was dreaming that behold – he was standing over the River”*

*(Bereishit 41:1)*

*“Then the seven thin ears swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears; Pharaoh awoke and behold! – it had been a dream”*

*(ibid. 41:7)*

Pharaoh was distraught. He called for the finest sorcerers and soothsayers of Egypt to interpret his dream, but to no avail. He just could not accept their interpretations (see *Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 147). Then, his Chief Butler suggested Yosef, who had once correctly interpreted his dream, and immediately (*Bereishit* 41:14) “they rushed him from the dungeon. He shaved and changed his clothes, and came to Pharaoh.” We all are familiar with the rest of

the story, how Pharaoh was amazed at Yosef's interpretation and wise council, gave him the royal ring, and appointed him Viceroy of Egypt.

Why was Pharaoh so convinced that Yosef's interpretation was correct? Skeptics are generally hard to be convinced of anything. Faced with a riddle which the wisest men could not explain, Pharaoh should have doubted Yosef even more. Certainly a king would want to be assured that any new personnel to his ministry would be worthy of bearing his royal title. How, then, did Yosef, a lowly servant in the Egyptian hierarchy, convicted of assaulting his master's wife, succeed in rising in rank above the greatest in the land?

### **Yosef the Tzaddik**

At the beginning of the Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 1:1) we are taught the basic creed of a tzaddik. "It is a general principle of the Torah, and the tzaddikim who walk with Hashem, to constantly place Hashem at the forefront of their consciousness. The way a person sits, acts, or speaks when he is alone at home, is never the same as when he sits or speaks before a great king. How much more so should we realize that the King of Kings, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Whose very presence fills the earth, stands over us, watching our every move. This should immediately fill us with fear and humility, and we should be in awe of Hashem and self-conscious as to how we act before Him."

Often, we may experience this feeling when in the Beit Hamidrash or standing before a tzaddik. It is like one who enters the palace of the king and stands before 'His Royal Majesty.' Similarly, although the whole world is filled with His glory, we can feel this even more wherever Hashem's *Shechinah* rests. We should try to draw from

such experiences and enrich our lives with this feeling of Hashem's Presence.

Yosef Hatzaddik fulfilled this maxim completely. Wherever he went, he felt Hashem's Presence watching over him. Certainly after he was abducted and sold as a slave, Yosef placed Hashem at the forefront of his consciousness. This became his guiding code of behavior and at the same time, his source of strength. He absorbed it from observing his father's actions, and it helped him to endure his Egyptian servitude.

### The test

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 39:11) says, "He entered the house to do his work." There is a discussion in the Midrash (see Rashi) if this 'work' refers to doing an immoral deed, and Yosef actually contemplated sinning with his master's wife, or not. Rashi adds that Yosef suddenly beheld the countenance of his father, Yaakov Avinu, and it gave him the strength of character to withstand his *nisayon*. In a figurative interpretation, the words 'his father' can refer to our Father in Heaven. Hashem revealed himself to Yosef, and this encouraged Yosef to overcome the tremendous desire and passion that rose up inside of him.

If we think a bit, we may find ourselves perplexed. Unfortunately, there are many people who succumb to temptation. Why do they not merit the same type of revelation as Yosef did? Perhaps we can point to the creed of belief that Yosef spent years absorbing to provide our answer. From the beginning, Yosef constantly filled his consciousness with thoughts of Hashem's presence. This is why he merited that fateful revelation which literally saved his skin.

This can serve as a tremendous lesson for us. If we find ourselves failing and succumbing to temptation, we should realize that we are

lacking in this area. Hashem does not come to our rescue if we don't first try to recognize His presence and internalize His existence. This can also help us to understand the saying (*Yoma* 86b), "He who sins and sins again, regards sin as acceptable (lit. permissible)." By overlooking the 'blasphemy' of sin, we dull our sense of right and wrong, *rachmana litzlan* and teach ourselves to tolerate it, even accepting it as permissible behavior.

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 67:7, *Sotah* 36b) tells us that Yosef merited another miraculous occurrence. The *Yetzer Hara* incited him to sin with the wife of Potiphar. At the height of passion, Yosef dug his nails into the ground, breaking the grip of the *Yetzer Hara*. Hashem channeled his emission to exit via his hands, protecting Yosef from spiritually blemishing the *middah* of *yesod* (which refers to the abstinence from all forbidden relations).

Yosef did not know ahead of time that he would be saved in this way. This was another occurrence of Divine intervention, also merited by years of ingraining the belief in Hashem's watchful eyes and constant presence in himself. Yosef worked on, and was rewarded with, actualizing the principles of behavior of a tzaddik. We should learn from this to stay far away from temptation, as we have no assurance that Hashem will protect us in the same way that He did for Yosef.

### **Interpreting dreams**

When one keeps the Torah amidst difficult situations or despite temptation, his facial features bear witness. The Gemara (*Yoma* 66a) says that one who acts with kindness and benevolence displays the 'mark' of *chessed* on his forehead. Similarly, the pasuk (*Kohelet* 8:1) says, "The wisdom of man enlightens ones features." Our countenance displays the inner beauty of the soul, and the face of one who walks with Hashem shines with a certain glow. This is a

fulfillment of the pasuk (*Shemot* 25:8), “And I will dwell in their midst.” By making ourselves worthy, Hashem leaves a ‘mark’ and shows His contentment with our actions.

The first thing Yosef told Pharaoh was (*Bereishit* 41:16), “This is beyond me, it is Hashem Who will respond with Pharaoh’s welfare.” He told Pharaoh quite clearly that he was merely an intermediary to convey Hashem’s master plan. Hashem is the one in control, and we simply fulfill His decree. Pharaoh saw that this was no mere lip service. Yosef believed – and lived with his belief – and it was apparent, even visible, on his face. Every tzaddik shows some visible manifestation of Hashem’s presence, as the pasuk (*Devarim* 28:10) says, “Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you.” Their level of righteousness reflects their high state of perfection, and many great tzaddikim of yore received respect and awe from the populace at large due to their fear of Heaven etched on their face.

This is why Pharaoh listened to Yosef. It was a natural reaction to seeing a revered and holy individual, a true tzaddik. The numerical value of the name  $\text{יִסְי}$  is equal to the Name of Hashem ( $\text{י-ו-ה}$  when multiplied by six). It was an integral part of his character, and it gave evidence of the quality of his being. So the *Navi* (*Yeshayahu* 58:8) describes the presence of the tzaddik, “Your righteous deed will precede you.” Even one far removed from holiness and righteousness can sense the spirit of righteousness of the tzaddik. Pharaoh intuitively sensed the truth of Yosef’s words and felt assured that he was relaying the correct interpretation, the one which the ‘Giver’ of the dream intended.

As reward for his service, Pharaoh proclaimed Yosef ‘Avrech’ (father or mentor to the king, a title of distinction). This teaches us that the term *avrech* given nowadays to those learning in kollel is no mere title. It reflects the position and aspiration of those striving for

perfection, similar to Yosef. Such a title deserves befitting behavior, actions which reflect the creed of the tzaddik. Those who learn in kollel should take care to grow in *yirat Shamayim* and bring honor to Hashem's Name, to the point that those who see them say, "How pleasant are their deeds!"

### **Present-day tzaddikim**

I once participated in a fund-raising dinner for a certain organization. Thank G-d we were able to help out a Torah institution, and it was quite successful, despite the general economic slump. I even had the privilege of meeting Maran Harav Aharon Leib Steinman, and I kissed his hand (as is the custom by Sephardic *gedolim*). One of those standing by asked me the following questions. Why did I kiss his hand? And why did I attend this function and help out another organization, when our (i.e. Peninei David) Torah institutions are floundering?

I answered that I have one answer for both questions. We strive to attach ourselves to truth and cleave to righteousness, wherever that may be. If I see a great *talmid chacham*, I instinctively show him reverence, just as I was taught to by my teachers in Morocco, by kissing his hand. This is also why I attended the dinner and joined in the fundraising. Torah is the most worthy goal and the greatest truth, and any institution which builds Torah carries its emblem.

Similarly, I had the privilege of meeting Maran Harav Shach zt"l, and I kissed his hand. He looked at me with wonder, questioning my actions. I explained that this is how we are taught to respect *Gedolei Yisrael* in Morocco, and so my family has done for hundreds of years. At a later point in time, the grandson of Harav Shach gave me a garment that Harav Shach wore. Every erev Shabbat I take it out and look at it, telling myself how this article of clothing once belonged to a great tzaddik, a truly righteous man.

## Yochanan Kohen Gadol

The Gemara (*Berachot* 29a) records that Yochanan served for eighty years as the Kohen Gadol, only to break rank and become a Sadducee at the end of his life. How did this happen?

Chazal (*Avot* 2:4) say, “Do not believe in yourself until your dying day.” The *Yetzer Hara* works overtime to ensnare us in his net, and doesn’t give up. Some sources (*Toldot Yaakov Yosef Emor*, 11 in the name of the Arizal) explain that Yochanan did not eat with the right *kavanah*. Still, the question remains. How did he descend to such a low level?

Perhaps the enigma of the *parah adumah* can provide us with an answer. Many have questioned why the same ashes of the *parah adumah* which purify the impure, also bring *tumah* on the one who is involved in its production or administers its purification (see *Yoma* 14a). I suggest that the one who is involved with the ashes is often overcome with feelings of pride on his influence to change the state of *tumah* of so many Jews. This is not a worthy thought, and causes the ‘purifier’ to become *tamei* himself.

Similarly, Yochanan had undesirable *kavanot*. Being from the Chashmonaim who were victorious over the Greeks, and a figure of great stature, Yochanan was tainted with pride. Pride can often cause one’s service of Hashem to deteriorate. Perhaps this is what the Arizal meant when he said that Yochanan did not have the right intentions when he ate. He failed to live up to his true position and eat the *korbanot* with the *kedushah* one would expect from such a tzaddik.

This could also explain the saying in Pirkei Avot, “Do not believe in yourself until your dying day.” This refers to one who believes in himself and thinks he’s great. We are taught to focus on the day of death, as it clearly spells out the frailty of man. I have been

privileged to see many *gedolim*, and each one displayed humility and considered himself unimportant. Whatever they had or did was negligible in their eyes. Everything they ascribed to Hashem.

### **Yosef and Yehudah**

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 44:18) describes the phenomenal strength of Yehudah. His mighty roar made the whole land of Egypt tremble. Each Shevet displayed their unique strengths as well. This leads us to question why the brothers did not show their true powers until Yosef took away Binyamin.

It would seem that the brothers recognized Yosef's quality of truth. They saw standing before them a man of stature, one who merely acted as an agent of Hashem. He had tremendous perfection of character. The brothers thus attributed their grave situation to Hashem and said (*Bereishit* 44:16), "G-d has uncovered the sin of your servants." This led them to blame themselves for their heartless reaction when Yosef cried as he was being sold.

At this point in time, though, Yosef faltered. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 151) says that Yosef's passive acceptance of the brothers' description of their father as, "your servant," was a sign of disrespect. He should have shown some sign of protest, as if to say that he did not recognize their father or treat him as his servant. This is why the brothers unknowingly began to show their true strength, and Yehudah began his tirade for Binyamin's freedom. Once Yosef faltered, Yehudah said, "For you are like Pharaoh," designating Yosef as easy prey.

### **A true tzaddik**

This shows us how Yosef's presence commanded respect and why Pharaoh was influenced to accept his interpretation of his

dream. Everyone around him understood that he spoke only truth and conveyed the word of Hashem. He radiated self-negation, recognizing Hashem as the prime cause of events.

Yosef gained this from his own personal dreams. They were not mere visions of youthful aspirations. They delineated his future ascendancy to power and the turn of events that put him on the throne and had his brothers bowing down to him. Yosef felt Hashem's guiding hand and witnessed the Divine causation of events. Wherever he went, he knew Hashem was with him.

Rashi's comments take us one step further. Rashi (*Bereishit* 45:4) tells us that Yosef verified himself as their long-lost brother by showing them his *brit milah*. What was the proof in that? Couldn't he have been born circumcised? The answer is that Yosef showed them his spiritual level, how he still retained the mark of a Jew without blemish.

When we perform a *brit*, we make a covenant with Hashem and remove the foreskin, which represents the forces of *tumah*. One who acts immorally or displays conceit damages this sign of faithfulness with Hashem. Hashem declares that he cannot tolerate those who act arrogantly (see *Sotah* 5a). Had Yosef acted in such a manner, the supernal light associated with the *brit* would have been dimmed, and a spirit of *tumah* would have hovered over him.

This could also explain the pasuk (*ibid.* 45:13) which says, "All my glory in Egypt." Yosef asked his brothers to convey his spiritual status and testify to his righteousness. They saw with their own eyes that Yosef still lived and believed with perfect faith.

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:3) say that this also why Yosef sent the wagons to bring Yaakov to Egypt. The Hebrew word for wagon is עגלה, and these wagons hinted to the laws of the ערופה (a

calf killed in atonement for finding a dead body), which Yaakov and Yosef studied together, prior to his abduction. This was another sign of Yosef's steadfast attachment to Hashem and the Torah. Similarly, we can find a reference in the names of Yosef's children as well. The name אפרים (Ephraim) has a similarity to the word פרו ורבו, indicating his desire to grow and produce Torah novella. The name מנשה (Menashe) has the same letters as the word נשמה (soul), showing how much Yosef valued the purity of his soul and safeguarded it from evil.

This is why Yaakov declared (*Bereishit* 45:28) עוד יוסף בני חי, "How great, my son Yosef still lives." Yaakov now understood that his son still lived, and continued to live by his beliefs. The word חי refers to the Tree of Life, an expression describing the Torah, as it says (*Mishlei* 8:35), "For one who finds me finds life." This is why Yaakov was so happy. He was overjoyed in knowing that Yosef had weathered the trials of *galut* and was worthy of the true status of honor.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Why was Yosef's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams accepted over the interpretations of the Egyptian scholars and sorcerers? Yosef personified the tzaddik who consistently walks with Hashem. He lived with his beliefs and did not ascribe the events of his life to happenstance or coincidence.
- ◆ What was the secret of keeping faith in Hashem? Why did he merit seeing the countenance of his father, on the day that he almost failed in his trial with the wife of Potiphar?
- ◆ We are taught in the Shulchan Aruch to place Hashem at the forefront of our consciousness. Even when Yosef was in Egypt, he still walked with Hashem and felt His guiding hand. This is what stood by him when he was put to the test, and what convinced Pharaoh of the

validity of Yosef's interpretations.

- ◆ How did Yochanan the Kohen Gadol turn into a Sadducee after serving in his office for eighty years? Just as the ashes of the *parah adumah* purify the impure, it also defiles the one who administers its purification. This is to prevent the Kohen from feelings of conceit. Similarly, one should ascribe everything to Hashem and not to his own machinations. Such feelings of self-worth pervaded the thoughts of Yochanan until he became a Sadducee.
- ◆ At first, the brothers of Yosef retrained themselves from acting brazenly towards Yosef and taking Egypt by force. Only after Yosef faltered in showing respect for Yaakov Avinu did Yehudah approach Yosef with harsh words.
- ◆ This explains the sign of the *brit milah* that Yosef showed his brothers. They recognized his spiritual level which reflected itself by a supernal light, caused by his faithfulness to keeping his covenant with Hashem.



## True Humility

*“Then the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers spoke up before Pharaoh, saying, ‘My transgressions do I mention today. Pharaoh had become incensed at the servants and placed me in the ward of the house of the Chamberlain of the Butchers – me and the Chamberlain of the Bakers. We dreamt a dream on the same night, he and I; each one according to the interpretation of his dream did we dream. And there, with us, was a*

*Hebrew youth, a slave of the Chamberlain of the Butchers; we related it to him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; he interpreted for each in accordance with his dream”*

*(Bereishit 41:9-12)*

The dreams of Pharaoh (and his servants in prison) tell us a great deal on the inner thoughts of reshaim, as well as the true humility of tzaddikim.

The Torah (*Bereishit* 41:9) narrates the Chief Butler’s words to Pharaoh. The Hebrew word וידבר connotes some difficulty or hindrance to his speech (see *Makot* 11a). It would seem that the butler did not want to speak up on Yosef’s behalf. Even though he was freed from the prison on Yosef’s say, he still found it hard to praise Yosef. The only reason why he did so was because had Pharaoh found out that he had withheld this information from him, he would have lost his head. Having no choice, he told Pharaoh about a Hebrew lad serving time in prison, who once predicted the future based on his dream. It was a blow to his pride to concede that there were people more capable than him, and a lowly Jewish servant to boot.

Rashi points out that each additional word that the butler said was another indication of his desire to besmirch Yosef’s name. He called Yosef a ‘lad,’ indicating his inferiority, someone who wasn’t worthy to rise to power. He mentioned his Jewish ancestry, casting derision on his foreign tongue and culture. And he pointed out his status a lowly servant, hinting to an Egyptian edict which prohibited servants from ascending to power or wearing the vestments of office. Rashi summarizes the butler’s attempts to disparage Yosef by saying, “Cursed are the reshaim, for their show of gratitude is

defective and their speech derogatory.” He couldn’t bring himself to praise Yosef, despite all that Yosef did for him.

Perhaps we can now understand another statement of the butler, based on Rashi’s incisive comments. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 41:10) says, “And placed me in the ward of the house of the Chamberlain of the Butchers – me and the Chamberlain of the Bakers.” Why did the butler refer to the baker separately? He should have said in the plural, “and we were placed in the prison.” This only shows the conceit which reshaim foster. The butler wanted to place himself on a higher footing than the baker, and so he described him as a separate individual, a lower class citizen who happened to be put into prison at the same time that he was.

Pharaoh immediately sent for Yosef. He didn’t ask the butler to bring him, as he was upset at his delay in suggesting Yosef to interpret his dreams. Had the butler had Pharaoh’s best interest at heart and not his own honor, he wouldn’t have kept such information to himself.

In contrast, the words of Yosef speak volumes of praise about his humility. When Yosef appeared before Pharaoh and was asked to interpret the dreams, his reaction was (*ibid.* 41:16), “This is beyond me, it is Hashem Who will respond with Pharaoh’s welfare.” Rashi explains that Yosef belittled his own input. “My wisdom is not mine, it is up to Hashem to provide me with insight and articulate the answer concerning the welfare of Pharaoh.” How great are the ways of the righteous! They do not ascribe to themselves rank, power or wisdom. Instead, they lift their eyes to Heaven for success and attribute Hashem with the results.

From where did Yosef learn this *middah* of humility? From Hashem. Hashem is described in sefarim as being humble. How is this so? Although the sinner may rebel and defy His authority,

Hashem is slow to anger. A tzaddik reacts in a similar manner. This is not due to a lack of assertiveness or a weakness of spirit. It is due to his self-effacing spirit which belittles the self and overlooks the affront to one's honor. The truly humble ignore offensive remarks or actions because they walk in Hashem's ways, just as He remains silent at the disrespectful actions of the rasha. He patiently awaits the day when the rasha, or his children, will do teshuvah.

We find the same *middah* by Moshe Rabbeinu. The pasuk (*Bamidbar* 12:3) says, "The man Moshe was exceedingly humble." It was humility which stood by his side as he led the flock of Israel for forty years through the desert.

Another indication of Yosef's righteousness was the rest of his address to Pharaoh. Yosef did not suffice himself with giving just the interpretation. He gave counsel on how to best prepare for the seven years of famine. Why did he offer this advice? Yosef felt that his job was not done. This can be compared to a doctor who diagnoses the sick and prescribes medicine but does not provide any additional information. The lack of instruction can, at best, be considered negligence. Similarly, Yosef provided detailed instructions on how to best prepare for the terrible famine that would soon occur.

Pharaoh appointed Yosef as Viceroy of Egypt in reward for his interpretation and wise counsel. He was given the title of אבֶרֶךְ (father or mentor to the king), denoting his new rank. The first half of this word (אב) reflects his fatherly figure, similar to Avraham Avinu whom Hashem called the father of all the nations. The second half (רֶךְ) points to his soft nature, one which radiated humility and reserve at offenses to his honor.

We can also rearrange the letters to spell רב כב (adding one for the word as a unit). He was רב (great) in the wisdom of the Torah

(which is often referred to by the כב or twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet). This did not detract from his *middah* of humility, though. Despite his high position and great wisdom, he was the same self-effacing and unpretentious Yosef who befriended the children of the concubines when he was still in his father's home.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ The story about Pharaoh's dreams exposes the evil side of the reshaim and the righteousness of the tzaddikim. The Chief Butler had only derogatory things to say about Yosef, calling him a lad, a Jew, and a lowly servant. He mentioned Yosef only as a last resort, afraid he would be punished for withholding information from Pharaoh.
- ◆ Yosef displayed tremendous humility. He did not attribute the interpretation to his own sagacity, nor did he take a quick offense at personal affronts. This he learned from Hashem. He also offered counsel on how to deal with the famine.



## Yosef and His Brothers

*“Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him”*

*(Bereishit 42:8)*

Rashi clues us in as to why Yosef recognized his brothers whereas they did not recognize him. When Yosef left Canaan, he was still a young man. His brothers, though, were older, and already sported a beard. Years later, when his brothers found him in Egypt, Yosef

face was framed with a beard, and thus the brothers did not recognize him.

This is difficult to understand. Although the brothers came to Egypt for the alleged reason of buying food to feed their hungry families, they were really on the lookout for Yosef. They thought that he was still alive. Why, then, did they not recognize him? Usually, one can identify a brother miles away, even after many years of separation. Every child has a similar physiognomy to the parents and grandparents, and is easily recognized as 'family,' despite the furrowed brow or wrinkled complexion of their elderly ancestors. Yosef was no exception the rule. How did his beard prevent him from being recognized?

Perhaps even more difficult to explain is why the brothers did not recognize Menashe and Ephraim. They were certainly not older than Yosef was, when he was sold into slavery. According to one Midrash (*Yalkut Shimon Bereishit*, 134), Yosef even married Asnat, the brother's niece, the daughter of Dina. This only adds to our query. It would seem that there is more here than meets the eye.

At first glance, we can point to Yosef's position as the perfect cover-up for his real identity. No one would have ever thought that Yosef would become the Viceroy of Egypt. The brothers originally despised Yosef for his dreams of grandeur. They refused to accept the dreams as a Heavenly indication of his rise to power and their eventual subordination. To accept the reversal of fortune would have led them to challenge their basic premise of his abduction. This is why they did not recognize him. A person sees only what he wants to see, even after all the highlighted evidence and pointed arrows staring him in his face.

### A higher source

On a more mystical note, I read in the sefer of Harav Yaakov Abuchatzerah, the *Pituchei Chosem*, that the numerical value of Yosef's name equals six times the Four-Letter Name of Hashem. What is the significance of this?

The name Yosef (יֹסֵף) refers to man's job of continually adding (להוסיף) to his repertoire of good deeds. We find a similar idea regarding Chanukah, where we continue to add another candle every day to the previous day's count (see *Shabbat* 21a). This is based on the principle that in all matters pertaining to *kedushah* we are told to increase our efforts and ascend ever higher. In this way, man emulates Hashem. Hashem, too, increases His goodness every day, by 'recreating' the world and breathing new life into all of Creation. We describe this act of renewal in our daily morning prayers, when we say, "In His goodness, He renews daily, and consistently, the work of Creation." Without that renewal, the world would turn back into nothingness.

Am Yisrael have a special relationship with Hashem. They are called the "children" of Hashem (see *Devarim* 14:1) and are also referred to as "brethren" (see *Tehillim* 122:8). As long as our souls were basking in the spiritual delight in their place of origin, they enjoyed that relationship and recognized Hashem as the source of all good. After the soul descends to earth, though, it loses that awareness. It no longer recognizes Hashem. We need to (re-)attach ourselves to Hashem and renew that special bond. By means of our souls, which originated from Above, we can receive His good with which He showers our world and be worthy of that special relationship.

This is the message of the story with Yosef and his brothers, and also explains why Yosef's name contains a reference to Hashem. Far

away from one's source of origin, one can easily be disoriented and not 'recognize' Hashem. Just as the brothers did not recognize Yosef, so too, the descent into the physical world can cause the soul to lose this awareness, despite its previous understanding and relationship.

The 'beard' of Yosef, which prevented Yosef's brothers from recognizing him, represents the barrier which is built-up between Hashem and us. The letters of the word  $\text{יָקַד}$  (beard) can be rearranged to spell the word  $\text{נֶזֶק}$  (damage), and describes the essence of sin. Our ultimate goal in life is to renew our former relationship with Hashem. Sin leads the soul in the opposite direction, and builds the barrier which prevents us from recognizing the true good.

After a man passes on, his soul ascends to the Heavenly realm Above. Hashem appears and declares, as Yosef did to his brothers, "I am Hashem." Those who are entrapped in sin cannot answer back. They are too overcome with remorse and humiliation at their lack of recognizing their 'family' connection. This is in line with the reaction of the brothers, whom the pasuk (*Bereishit* 45:3) says "could not answer him for they were exceedingly disconcerted before him." Similarly, if the purity of our souls becomes clouded by sin, it becomes a source of extreme humiliation.

Yehudah's words also contain a portent of the soul's Upwards migration and eventual Divine reunion. Yehudah told Yosef that he could not bring himself to return home without Binyamin. He said (*Bereishit* 44:26), "For we cannot not see the man's face if our youngest brother is not with us." We, too, should constantly worry how we can face our Father in Heaven without the accompaniment of Torah and mitzvot. We can't retrace our steps and return after we leave this world, to do what we failed to accomplish in life. This

is why it is so important to take advantage of the opportunity to acquire Torah and mitzvot while we still have the chance. Only by staying far from sin can we appear before the Ultimate 'Yosef' without being embarrassed into complete silence.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Rashi explains that Yosef recognized his brothers, as they had beards before he left home, whereas they did not recognize him. Why did the lack of a beard prevent his brothers from recognizing him? Even more, why didn't they see the family resemblance in Menashe and Ephraim?
- ◆ Yosef's position was the perfect cover-up for his real identity. No one would ever have thought that Yosef would become the Viceroy of Egypt. The brothers originally despised Yosef and refused to accept the dreams. To accept the reversal of fortune would have led them to challenge their basic premise of his abduction. A person sees only what he wants to see.
- ◆ The name Yosef represents Hashem, as its numerical value equals six times the numerical value of Hashem's Four-Letter Name. Just as the brothers didn't recognize Yosef, so too, many Jews do not recognize Hashem. The word **יָקַץ** describes the essence of sin. Our ultimate goal of life is to renew our former relationship with Hashem.
- ◆ After a man dies, his soul ascends to the Heavenly realm Above. Hashem appears and declares, as Yosef did to his brothers, "I am Hashem." Those who are entrapped in sin cannot answer back. They are too overcome with remorse and humiliation at their lack of recognizing their 'family' connection. Only by staying far from sin can we appear before the Ultimate 'Yosef' without being embarrassed into complete silence.



## Without Compunction

*“Yosef said to them on the third day, ‘Do this and live; I fear G-d’”*

*(Bereishit 42:18)*

The selling of Yosef is one of the most difficult parshiyot in the Torah to understand. How could the Shevatim, known for their righteous behavior and sterling character, stoop to do such a dastardly deed? Even towards a total stranger, such an action would be deemed reprehensible – how much more so towards one’s own brother.

The more we peer into the events surrounding his sale, the more difficult it becomes. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 84:16) says that the brothers saw how Yosef was unaffected by the snakes and scorpions in the pit. And yet, they wanted to stone him to death, until Yehudah came to his rescue and convinced them to sell Yosef to the passing Yishmaelim. Hadn’t they just seen the tremendous miracle done on his behalf? Wasn’t it a sign from Heaven of Yosef’s righteousness?

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Vayigash*, 9) relates yet another portent. Yaakov was told that if all of his children would remain alive, it would be a sign of the reward in store for him in the World to Come. He was promised that he wouldn’t even see the portals of Gehinnom. Had Yosef been killed, Yaakov would have been bereft of this as well. Why did the brothers ignore this omen and proceed to ruin Yaakov’s chances? Didn’t they consider Yaakov’s feelings or care about his anguish at losing a son?

The brothers were not evil people. They were, in fact, righteous tzaddikim of tremendous caliber. These questions thus point to one

conclusion. The brothers, despite all of the above mentioned reasons, thought that Yosef was deserving of punishment. According to the information they had, Yosef deserved to be killed.

Chazal say that Yehudah was singled out to be the progenitor of royalty. From him would one day descend the Davidic line of kings. This is borne out by an episode later, when Yaakov sent Yehudah ahead to Egypt (see *Bereishit* 46:28). He was asked to wield his authority by being the one to establish their settlement.

When Yosef began to tell his brothers about his dreams, their reaction was (ibid. 37:8), “Would you then reign over us?” They determined that Yosef’s dreams revealed his innermost desire to take over the monarchy of Yehudah. This, in their eyes, was a serious breach of authority. They judged Yosef as a usurper of royalty and a defier of the Divine will. The punishment for one who rebels against a king is death. This is why they judged Yosef so harshly.

Once convinced of the truth of their convictions, the brothers did not see the killing of Yosef as evil. In fact, the unanimous verdict was based on the dictates of the Torah and was done to fulfill the will of Hashem. In such a situation, the words of the pasuk (*Mishlei* 21:30) apply: “There is neither wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Hashem.” Similarly, the Gemara (*Berachot* 19b) states that in order to prevent the desecration of Hashem’s Name, when one encounters *chillul* Hashem, one doesn’t defer or abstain out of respect to one’s elders.

When the brothers saw Yosef was unscathed by his venture into the pit of death, they sought to take matters into their own hands. This is why they tried to stone him. In their wish to administer judicial punishment and effect Divine retribution, they didn’t take

into consideration the pain and suffering of Yosef, or even that of their father. When it comes to Hashem's honor, we are adjured to stand in the breach and push all other considerations aside.

The Arizal often said (see *Pri Eitz Chaim, Tefillah*) that there are twelve Heavenly 'gates' through which our tefillot pass. Each gate represents the approach of its designated Shevet. Had Yosef been killed, one of those gates would have been missing. It would seem that the Shevatim, in their quest for truth and justice, overrode even the loss of one of the Heavenly gateways of prayer.

This now explains why the brothers attempted to attack Yosef after he finally revealed his identity (see *Tanchuma Vayigash*, 5). They were still under the assumption that Yosef deserved capital punishment. It required the intervention of the Angel Gavriel to prevent bodily harm. Only after witnessing the Divine Providence which put Yosef on the throne and seeing Gavriel's validation of his authority did they acknowledge their mistake.

We also can now understand why Hashem acceded to the brothers' vow of secrecy (see *Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 142). During all of the years that Yosef was in Egypt, He kept the brothers' vow of secrecy that they placed on Yosef's sale. Why didn't Hashem reveal any hint to Yaakov about Yosef's whereabouts? The reason is that He saw their earnest desire to act righteously and fulfill His will. Even Yitzchak Avinu did not reveal any information to Yaakov (see *Bereishit Rabbah* 84:21). He knew that the brothers' intentions were solely for Hashem's honor and not motivated by personal considerations. Nonetheless, Hashem was behind the scenes, pushing Yosef up front and ultimately awarding him by being installed as the Viceroy of Egypt.

This could also explain why Yosef himself did not send a

messenger to Yaakov telling him that he was alive. Seeing that Hashem Himself took a silent part in his sale, Yosef accepted the Divine decree. “I fear G-d” (*Bereishit* 42:18) was Yosef’s motto and lifelong directive.

Perhaps this can also explain the words of Yehudah. Yehudah said (*Bereishit* 44:18), בִּי אֲדֹנָי, “If you please, my lord.” The word בִּי can also be translated as ‘in me.’ Yehudah hinted to Yosef that his dreams, and (presumed) desire for power, were an affront to his (Yehudah’s) sovereignty and Hashem’s monarchical selection. “In me was invested royalty, and your claim to authority runs counter to Hashem’s will.” Additionally, the word בִּי represents the יב (twelve) Shevatim. Yehudah addressed Yosef as ‘My lord’ and pointed out that Yosef’s claim to be part of the twelve Shevatim conflicted with his (alleged) visions of grandeur.

### Similar instances

We find another instance where the decision to execute justice was carried out without compunction. The *Nasi* of Shevet Shimon, Zimri ben Salu, consorted with the daughter of the king of Moav. His promiscuous behavior, as well as that of his tribe, elicited the anger of Hashem. Pinchas exhibited courage and proceeded to kill Zimri, as the law prescribed (see *Bamidbar* 25). This display of courage defied common sense, as he made himself susceptible to the antagonism and vengeance of the tribe of Shimon for killing Zimri. Had he taken these factors into consideration, Pinchas would probably have refrained from fulfilling the will of Hashem. It was his complete and sincere desire to exact Divine justice that motivated Pinchas to kill Zimri.

Chazal (see *Hagahot HaBach* to *Berachot* 10a) tell us that King Chizkiyahu had two sons, Menashe and Revashke. At one point,

Chizkiyahu carried his two children to the Beit Hamidrash to learn Torah. The two children whispered amongst themselves, describing how their father's head would make a worthy tribute for an idol. Immediately, Chizkiyahu threw them down, killing Revashke. The very thought of idolatry was so abhorrent and sacrilegious, that it provoked Chizkiyahu's angry outburst. The consideration of protecting Hashem's honor took overriding precedence, justifying even the death of his son.

Moshe Rabbeinu praised the Shevet of Levi for exercising such alacrity. The pasuk (*Devarim* 33:9) says, "The one who said of his father and mother, 'I have not favored him'; his brothers he did not give recognition, and his children he did not know; for they have observed Your word and Your covenant they preserved." After Am Yisrael sinned by bowing down to the Golden Calf, the tribe of Levi took their swords in hand and killed the idolaters, not distinguishing between friend or foe. Their righteous indignation and vengeance to do Hashem's will gave them the ability to wipe out the enemies of Hashem, despite any family relationship.

### **All's well that ends well**

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 93:8) say that Yosef told his brothers to see for themselves how he had the mark of a Jew, the *brit milah*. This symbolizes the *middah* of *malchut*, as the *brit* is a crowning feature of our bodies' total compliance with Hashem's will. The 'crown' of the *brit* attests to this (*Pri Eitz Chaim, Lulav*). Yosef alluded to his divinely awarded kingship, which was not intended to oppose or infringe on Yehudah's rule.

There was an important reason for Yosef's rise to power. The Gemara (*Shabbat* 89b) says that Yosef's abduction led to his family's descent to Egypt, and subsequent provision of their needs. Had

Yosef not been sold, the whole family would have been taken into captivity, chained with iron chains, and driven into Egypt against their will. It was the Heavenly decree which brought them there, and it was the hand of Hashem which led the way by sending Yosef first.

Seeing this sudden twist of events, the brothers acknowledged their mistake and accepted Yosef's Divine vindication. They saw his righteousness for what it was and accepted his authority in Egypt. This is also what originally led Yehudah to prevent Yosef's stoning. When one acts in accordance with Hashem's will, without mixing in personal motivations, he readily acknowledges his shortsightedness, and merits seeing the hand of Hashem in hindsight.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Why did the brothers act so cruelly towards Yosef, even wanting to stone him in the pit? Why didn't they concern themselves over Yaakov's anguish and the promise he had received were he not to lose any of his sons?
- ◆ The brothers thought that Yosef aspired to usurp Yehudah's authority and defy his G-d given monarchy. Such an act is punishable with death. Their motivations were sincere and overrode all other considerations.
- ◆ Hashem acceded to their decision and participated in their vow of silence. He did not tell Yaakov that Yosef was alive, nor did Yitzchak Avinu. Even Yosef did not send messengers to Yaakov, out of deference to his brothers' judgment.
- ◆ Pinchas killed Zimri without considering his own safety. King Chizkiyahu was abhorred at his own children's desire to serve idolatry. Similarly, Shevet Levi exacted vengeance for the sin of the Golden Calf, not differentiating between friend and foe.

- ◆ Yosef displayed his complete subservience to Hashem's will by showing his brothers the *brit milah*. This also demonstrates the *middah* of *malchut*. Through Yosef's descent to Egypt, Am Yisrael were provided for, and their descent was made easier.



## Reaching Great Heights

***“Yosef saw Binyamin with them; so he said to the one in charge of his house, ‘Bring the men into the house. Have meat slaughtered, and prepare it, for with me will these men dine at noon’”***

*(Bereishit 43:16)*

Every year, parashat *Mikeitz* is read during the festival of Chanukah. There is even an allusion to this in this pasuk. The words (*Bereishit* 43:16) וטבח טבח והכין (Have meat slaughtered, and prepare it) contain the same letters as the word חנוכה. Perhaps we can find yet another connection in this parashah to Chanukah as well.

The Gemara (*Shabbat* 21b) explains why *Beit Hillel* said that we should add another candle to our menorah on every night of Chanukah. According to *Beit Hillel*, this follows the rule that in all matters pertaining to *kedushah* we are told to increase our efforts and ascend ever higher. When doing Avodat Hashem, we shouldn't expect to change our character overnight. All towering summits can be conquered by taking one step at a time. This is the message of the Chanukah candles. Every new venture begins with small steps. Our focus should be to plod ahead, constantly adding to our

previous day's accomplishments. We should look for new horizons of *avodah* without giving up what we did already. By applying this approach of constant ascent, we can reach tremendous heights in our Avodat Hashem.

### **Withstanding nisyonot**

Before Yosef rose to power, he was faced with terrible *nisyonot*. Far away from home, a stranger in a foreign land, Yosef had to deal with the wife of Potiphar and her lecherous advances. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 98:18) say that Yosef was extremely handsome. When he would walk through the streets, the women of Egypt would stop to gaze at him. Once, when they were in middle of cutting fruits, they were so taken aback by his sudden appearance and good looks that they accidentally cut themselves (see *Tanchuma Vayeishev*, 5). Yet Yosef withstood his *nisayon*. He stood strong against the itch of pleasure and the tide of sin. Even more, he publicly displayed his belief and fear of Hashem, as he said, "I fear G-d" (*Bereishit* 42:18). From where did he draw his strength?

Rashi provides us with our answer. The pasuk (*ibid.* 37:3) says that Yosef was Yaakov's, "child of his old age." Based on the Targum's understanding, Rashi explains that Yosef learned from Yaakov Avinu everything that Yaakov learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. Armed with Torah, Yosef was able to deal with the hardest situations of life.

The Rambam (*Hilchot De'ot* 6:1) tells us that a person is influenced by his surroundings. How often do we see people drawn towards the culture of modern society and affected by its permissive atmosphere. This applies to anyone estranged from Torah. One who fills his thoughts with Torah concepts and aspirations, though, is protected from the onslaught of the media and its alluring attractions. He has a strong measure of defense (see *Sotah* 21a) to

protect him from sin. This is what gave Yosef the power to withstand all of Egypt's temptations.

Torah, on its own, though, is not enough. This we learn from the Chanukah candles. We need to add constantly to our treasure-house of Torah and increase our Avodat Hashem. Yosef was not satisfied with what he learned as a youth in Canaan under the aegis of his father and within the lofty confines of the Beit Hamidrash. He saw with tremendous foresight that to rest on the laurels of the Torah he had gained as a youth would seal his spiritual doom. Unfortunately, nowadays, this is a common occurrence. Yosef exerted himself in Egypt to add to his repertoire of good deeds and advance in Torah learning. This is the only way to continue the chain of *mesorah* and remain stalwart servants of Hashem.

This is why Yosef sent his father wagons to bring him to Egypt. Why did Yosef have to send them? His father was wealthy and had no lack of transportation. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:3) say that Yosef really wanted to show his father a sign of his spiritual status. Remembering the topic they had last learned before he was torn away from home, Yosef devised a plan. They had discussed the laws of the ערופה עגלה and so Yosef sent עגלות (wagons) to jog Yaakov's memory. This only proved that Yosef valued his learning and didn't forget what he already gained. Such an accomplishment is a sign of one who stays on top of his spiritual holdings and doesn't let himself deteriorate or stagnate into spiritual oblivion.

### **Fighting the battle**

The words (*Bereishit* 43:16) טבח וטבח טבח והכן mentioned before, allude to our unending spiritual battle against the *Yetzer Hara*. In order to remove the grip of the *Yetzer Hara*, we need a two-pronged approach. The first step is to 'slaughter' him by exercising our free will, time after time. This is hinted at by the double expression of

the word טבח (to slaughter). Don't give in on the fifth time around, just as you didn't give in on the first. Realize that it is a constant battle, not just a one-time deal. And draw strength from your daily learning towards this goal.

I was inspired by a personal story to discover yet another weapon we have in our arsenal against the *Yetzer Hara*. One day, I was accepting people seeking my guidance, when a woman entered to receive a *berachah*. A look of mischievous delight appeared on her face, and I became concerned. Her behavior and movements spoke of shallowness and frivolity. She sat down on the chair facing me and tried to drag it closer to my desk, but to no avail. Several days earlier, I had bolted down the chair to the floor, for this very reason. When she realized that the chair wasn't just stuck, her flippancy turned to distress, and she abandoned any plan that she had up her 'sleeve.' This orchestrated event of *hashgachah pratit* set me thinking on another tool we have in our arsenal against the *Yetzer Hara*.

Part of vanquishing the *Yetzer Hara* is to prepare for his anticipated enticements before they appear on the scene. This is alluded to by the word והכן (and prepare it) in our parashah. Only by making our preparations and doing our part can we hope for *Siyata di'Shemaya* to overcome the obstacles the *Yetzer Hara* throws our way.

### **Chanukah and Purim**

There is an inherent difference between Chanukah and Purim, one that becomes apparent when these festivals fall out on Shabbat. We celebrate Chanukah even on Shabbat, whereas Purim is pushed off to a weekday. Why is this so?

The *Mishnah Berurah* (670:6) explains that Chanukah celebrates our deliverance from the Greeks and their desire to destroy the

spark of our *neshamot*. Purim, on the other hand, celebrates the deliverance from Haman and his threat of physical annihilation. This is why these festivals differ in the way they are celebrated. On Chanukah we joyfully sing the praises of Hashem and express our thanks in a more spiritual form of expression, lighting candles to publicize the great miracle. On Purim, though, we enjoy a festive meal and share food with others, to demonstrate our thanks in a more physical way.

This can also explain why we celebrate Chanukah even on Shabbat. Shabbat in itself creates a spiritual oasis. Our *neshamot* derive tremendous pleasure from its very essence, a portent of the spiritual bliss in the World to Come. Even the food we eat on Shabbat benefits the extra *neshamah* that we have on Shabbat. Similarly, one who learns Torah on Shabbat merits a reward one thousand-fold greater than that of learning Torah during the week. Thus the celebration Chanukah only enhances our experience of Shabbat, as they both share a similar goal. Together, they can boost our Avodat Hashem to higher levels.

The festivities of Purim, on the other hand, can detract from the essence of Shabbat instead of adding to it. Its focus on the more physical aspects of celebration can deter us from inhaling the spiritual atmosphere of Shabbat and diminish its status. It would be sacrilegious for us to become drunk on Shabbat, as this is the opposite of why Hashem gave us the gift of Shabbat. This is why Purim is postponed and rescheduled for a weekday.

### **Eating right**

It is well-known that the Admor of Sanz zt"l would wear special garments every Friday afternoon while preparing a dish of eggs and onion in honor of Shabbat. One could almost picture the Kohen Gadol doing his Avodah on Yom Kippur by watching the Rebbe

prepare this dish so reverently and enthusiastically. Once, a piece of onion slipped from his hands and fell to the floor. His son, the tzaddik from Shinova zt"l, was standing nearby and bent down to pick it up. His father, though, refused his help. Despite his old age, the Admor from Sanz bent down himself, and explained to his puzzled son why he exerted so much effort. He greatly valued his mitzvah of honoring the Shabbat, and compared his preparations for Shabbat to the Avodah in the Beit Hamikdash, and the food to the *korbanot* that were brought on the Altar.

My saintly father, Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto zt"l, ate solely for the sake of Heaven. I remember once when my father saw a certain type of aromatic plant that had become in season, one used to spice meat. As he was wont to thank Hashem for every new fruit, he asked to be served that dish. Yet when it was brought before him, he took a bite to savor the flavor, and then pushed the dish away. He explained that his sole reason for tasting it was to thank Hashem for the delicacy and utter a *berachah* over it. Once he accomplished that, he felt no need to indulge in a sumptuous meal. Despite our imploring him to continue eating, he refused to finish his dish.

These stories show how such great tzaddikim ate their meals without indulging themselves or eating for pleasure's sake. How far we are from such levels of holiness! How many times do we participate in a *siyum* celebrating the completion of a tractate of Gemara without even knowing who is celebrating, or what tractate they finished. Perhaps the food is all we care about, and the *siyum* is just an excuse to enjoy a tasty meal.

We should take the message of Chanukah to heart and learn how to slaughter our 'friendly' foe and prepare in advance for his temptations. Yosef Hatzaddik showed us the way. The more he advanced in rank and wielded authority, the more he diminished his own honor in acknowledgment of Hashem's presence. By applying

himself to Torah and fearing Hashem, he became a worthy receptacle for the *Shechinah* (see *Zevachim* 118b).

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ The words **טבח טובח וטבח** contain the letters of **חננוכה**. The reason we light an additional candle every night of Chanukah is because we try to ascend in all spiritual matters. Our Avodat Hashem should always be constantly advancing, step by step.
- ◆ Yosef kept his faith and preserved the sanctity of his *brit milah* by continuing to advance in the Torah he learned with his father, even in the foreign land of Egypt. To prove his level of spirituality, Yosef sent wagons to Canaan, to remind Yaakov of the topic they had learned together before his abduction.
- ◆ The words **טבח טובח וטבח** also contain two approaches for dealing with the *Yetzer Hara*. The first is to constantly ‘slaughter’ our foe, by choosing good over evil and ascending gradually. The second is to prepare for his temptations and advances from beforehand.
- ◆ Chanukah is celebrated on Shabbat, whereas Purim is not. This has to do with the essence of the festivals. Chanukah celebrates the triumph of the spirit. The Greeks tried to destroy the Jewish soul, and our celebration is demonstrated by giving praise and thanks to Hashem, in a more spiritual manner. Shabbat also stresses ascending in Avodat Hashem and together they can boost us to higher levels.
- ◆ Purim celebrates the failed attempt of Haman to annihilate the physical existence of Am Yisrael, and is celebrated with eating and drinking, which could interfere with the spirit of Shabbat.



## The Power of Unity

*“Then he instructed the one in charge of his house, saying, ‘Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry and put each man’s money in the mouth of his sack. And my goblet – the silver goblet – place in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack along with the money of his purchase.’ And he followed Yosef’s word exactly”*

*(Bereishit 44:1-2)*

Yosef’s instruction to his servant to return the money to the brothers in such a furtive manner deserves some explanation. Even more puzzling is why Yosef had his servant plant his goblet in the sack of Binyamin. Weren’t there more expensive articles available to hide? What was the significance of this cup?

Earlier, Yosef invited all of the brothers to come and join him for a meal. He placed each one in their place, sorting them according to age. Rashi (*Bereishit* 43:33) explains that he took his ‘magic’ cup and struck it, pretending to listen to its instructions of where to seat each brother, and called out their names, one by one. What was so special about his cup that warranted such distinction?

If we pay attention to the world at large, we find that all natural objects have a circular design. Celestial objects, such as the sun and the planets, are round. Trees, animals, and man are composed of parts whose circumference is circular in shape as well. This is true also in a spiritual sense. Hashem created the world in ten spheres of holiness, and constricted His presence within one such sphere. What does this concept of roundness represent?

I read in the name of the Admor from Sanz zt"l, that a circle represents unity. A circle doesn't have any corners to veer away from its center. There are no hidden or divergent points that face any other direction. Every point on a circle's circumference is equally distant from the center.

This is the symbolism behind the round, hand-baked matzot we eat on Pesach. Am Yisrael did not leave Egypt until they were assembled together as one unit, all serving Hashem. This is also why Hashem created the world with round 'angles,' to remind us of the basis of Creation. By pointing to its inner unity, Hashem gave us a message and stressed our role in its preservation. When people turn their backs on, or embarrass each other, Hashem removes Himself, so to speak, from the scene, leaving a hapless society to flounder in disorder.

Similarly, on Sukkot, we have a mitzvah to symbolize the importance of unity. We are commanded to leave our homes and enter into a temporary dwelling. For seven days, rich and poor are told to celebrate Hashem's clouds of protection in the desert by building thatched huts. This creates a spirit of unity, as all feel equal in caliber and rank.

The Clouds of Glory which surrounded them on all sides also demonstrated how all of Am Yisrael are one, surrounded on all sides (equally) by the presence of the Al-mighty, just as the points on the circumference of the circle 'point' to the center. Hashem's Providence also does not overlook any creature, great or small. The Gemara (*Avodah Zara* 3b) stresses this when it states that Hashem provides food for every creature, from the tiny eggs of lice to the mighty *re'amim* (a towering form of deer). This brings home my 'point' about creating and maintaining unity.

If we look further, we will find that every *galut* was instigated by a lack of unity on the part of Am Yisrael. Moshe Rabbeinu, as a

young prince in Egypt, declared (*Shemot* 2:14), “Indeed, the matter is known.” He discovered the reason why Hashem did not set the Jews free from Egypt. He watched as one Jew raised his hand to strike another, and understood that they were undeserving of redemption.

Before their redemption from Egypt, Hashem gave them the mitzvah of the Passover sacrifice. This was to unite them as one nation. He commanded them to eat the sacrifice without leaving any leftovers, in order that they should form themselves into groups and join together families. It was only after they rectified their failing that they merited to receive the Torah. When they reached the Sinai Desert, the pasuk (*Shemot* 19:2) says, “And Yisrael encamped there, opposite the mountain.” The singular form of the name ‘Yisrael’ alludes to their complete unity. They were like one person in their desire to receive the Torah (*Yalkut Shimoni Shemot*, 275).

This can now help us understand Yosef’s words as well. Yosef pointed to his cup, hinting at the *middah* of *achdut* which holds Am Yisrael together. The cup’s round nature symbolized Hashem’s all-encompassing presence and protection. The brothers had perhaps dishonorable intentions in selling Yosef, but Hashem was already preparing for Am Yisrael’s preservation by sending Yosef to Egypt. By grasping at *achdut*, they would be worthy of Hashem’s continued protection. Yosef even hinted at his own aspirations by pointing to the cup. He related his dreams to his brothers, not to antagonize them, but to share his Divinely inspired vision of the future with them.

The word גביע can be split into two, עג and יב. The letters עג represent the word עיגול (round) and the letters יב, the twelve Shevatim. This points again to the message behind Yosef’s actions. Only by becoming one united family could they face the future as ‘Am Echad.’

Yehudah alluded to this concept when he said (*Bereishit* 44:18), **בִּי אֲדֹנָי**, “Please my master.” The word **בִּי** also refers to the twelve Shevatim. Yehudah answered Yosef by accepting the spirit of unity, even for their long-lost brother, and admitted their mistake in selling him. Even the **עגלות** hint at the brothers turning ‘full circle’ in their attitude towards Yosef.

Chazal (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 46:19, *Ruth Rabbah* 8:13) tell us that Rachel was Yaakov’s first and principle wife. The question then is, why did Yaakov marry four wives; why weren’t the twelve Shevatim born only from Rachel? The answer is that Hashem arranged this to encourage the *middah* of unity and make it an integral part of Am Yisrael. Had we all been born from one mother, there would not have been any struggle or greatness in being part of one family. By blending the diversity of backgrounds of the children from different mothers into one unit, Am Yisrael became the (*Tehillim* 122:4), “Shevatim of Hashem, a testimony to (the greatness of) Israel.”

This can also answer another question we had regarding Am Yisrael’s encampment in the desert. Am Yisrael formed themselves into twelve camps, each tribe with their own flag and separate encampment. Why didn’t they all dwell in one large camp, without differentiating between themselves? They even had their own stone to represent them on the *Choshen* of the Kohen Gadol. Wouldn’t it be better to gloss over their differences?

I think that the greatest show of unity comes from bringing together different people from different backgrounds and having them live in harmony. Rich and poor, great and small – all find themselves equal in Hashem’s eyes – and so they should view each other. The pasuk (*Shir Hashirim* 2:4) says, **וְדִיגְלוֹ עָלַי אַהֲבָה**, “And His banner upon me is love.” The word **דִּיגְלוֹ** comes from the word **דָּגַל** (banner or flag). This demonstrates how love and respect for one

other can become our national sign of honor. Despite each Shevet having their own individual personality and flag, together they form the nation of Am Yisrael.

Going further back in time, Yaakov Avinu placed twelve stones around him when he lay down to sleep on his way to Charan. Chazal (*Chulin* 91b) say that these twelve stones, which represented the future twelve tribes, formed one large rock. Another miraculous event that happened on that night was that Hashem brought Har Hamoriah (the present day Temple Mount) to Yaakov. These two events signify the unity of Am Yisrael and their proximity in serving Hashem. Even more, it represents the basis for the Temple's existence. Only when we become one can the Beit Hamikdash stand in all its glory. Divided, not only do we fall, but also destroy the foundations of our nation. This explains why the sin of baseless hatred led to the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash.

The pasuk (*Tehillim* 122:2) says, "Our feet stood firm within your gates, O Jerusalem." When Am Yisrael would ascend to Yerushalayim of Old for the festivals, the spirit of unity which prevailed became the scene for miraculous occurrences. They entered en masse, stood in dense, tightly-packed crowds, and yet had ample space for each one to prostrate without encroaching on each other's privacy. Similarly, no one ever complained that he felt overwhelmed in Yerushalayim by the limitations of his accommodations (*Pirkei Avot* 5:5).

The tzaddikim in every generation are held responsible for the spiritual level of Am Yisrael. It is their job to raise the public's awareness of the importance of this *middah* of *achdut*. *Gedolei* Yisrael often become the focal point for rallying and unifying the various factions and divisions of Am Yisrael.

The Rashash zt"l once asked why tzaddikim need to confess every

year on such sins such as theft or adultery. Is it possible that they actually committed such despicable acts? He answered that, in truth, all Jews are responsible for one another. Our *neshamot* were hewn from the same Divine source. Being part of each other's existence, on a spiritual level, requires us to confess the actions of others. This is why tzaddikim need to confess for such terrible sins.

I once heard that the word ציבור (public at large) represents the different levels of people found in Am Yisrael. The general public is comprised of צדיקים (righteous), בינונים (average), ורשעים (and evil doers). We are all in the same boat together. This is why the tzaddikim try to arouse those around them to teshuvah and pray on their behalf. We should learn from their selflessness. We should note how they do all they can for their fellow Jew. They care about their dire straits, even confessing sins that they did, besides praying and rectifying the damage that was caused by their actions.

Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 98a) say that the Mashiach will come in the merit of charity, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 1:27), "Zion will be redeemed through justice, and those who return to her through righteousness." The overriding characteristic of charity is the unity it generates. If we will strengthen ourselves in the *middah* of unity, we will be worthy of the Final redemption.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Yosef had a 'magic' cup, which he used to name each one of the brothers. He had this cup hidden in the sack of Binyamin. What is its significance?
- ◆ The circle is a common feature of nature. Even the spiritual world was created in spheres. The circle represents unity, as the points on the circumference of a circle face in the same direction and are equally

distant from the center. Hashem's Providence watches over all creatures equally. This shows us how the basis of our existence rests on unity.

- ◆ Yosef's round cup symbolized the unity he so desired. Despite the brother's evil intentions, Yosef accepted his exile in Egypt as part of Hashem's plan in preserving Am Yisrael.
- ◆ The word **עגביע** can be split into two, **עג** and **יב**. The letters **עג** represent the word **עיגול** (round) and the letters **יב** the twelve Shevatim. Only by becoming one united family could they face the future. Yehudah also recognized and acknowledged the need for unity when he said **בי אדני** (referring to the twelve Shevatim). Even the **עגלות** that Yosef sent home hint at the brothers turning 'full circle' in their attitude towards Yosef.
- ◆ The Shevatim were born from four Matriarchs in order to bring out the *middah* of unity. Despite their different backgrounds, they still lived in harmony. In the desert, Am Yisrael had different encampments and each Shevet displayed its own flag. This demonstrates how love and respect for one other can become our national sign of honor.
- ◆ Hashem brought Mount Moriah to Yaakov and combined the twelve stones around his head into one rock. This symbolizes the *middah* of *achdut*, which is the foundation for establishing the Temple.
- ◆ Tzaddikim confess even terrible sins, as they are held responsible for others. They selflessly care for the needs of all Jews and attempt to rectify the shortcomings of others.



## Yosef's True Identity

*“And my goblet – the silver goblet – place in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack along with the money of his purchase.’ And he followed Yosef’s word exactly”*

*(Bereishit 44:2)*

*“But he replied, ‘It would be sacrilegious for me to do this. The man in whose possession the goblet was found, only he shall be my slave, and as for you – go up in peace to your father”*

*(ibid. 44:17)*

A central object in this parashah is the special cup that Yosef owned. Yosef placed the cup in Binyamin’s sack and framed him for stealing it. It was used as a pretense for placing Binyamin into captivity. Why did Yosef specifically use this cup?

Earlier, we find Yosef using this cup for a different purpose. When Yosef made a seating arrangement for the brothers (see *Bereishit* 43:33), he pretended to envision their ages by peering into the cup. Is there a deeper connection this cup has to Yosef and his brothers?

One of the catalysts which caused the brothers to sell Yosef was his spoken words. Yosef would tell his father (for complete altruistic reasons) what his brothers were up to. This fanned their hatred and set them plotting against him. When Yosef later retold his dreams, his mouth again served to aggravate the situation. The word גביע (cup) has the numerical value of eighty-five, the same number as the word פה (mouth). Thus the cup signified the cause of Yosef’s

tribulations. This is why Yosef used it to vilify the brothers. It became an emblem of their mistaken supposition of iniquity. Just as Binyamin was not really at fault, so too, Yosef was not deserving of his brothers' hatred.

Yosef did not harbor resentment at his mishandling. He recognized Hashem's hand at work. The brothers also realized that Yosef was truly innocent, and Hashem had reserved him for a position in Egypt's viziership in order to provide for their resettlement there.

Additionally, Yosef attempted to rectify their sin of selling him by blaming them for stealing the cup. Unfortunately, this did not completely absolve them. Many years later, the Ten Martyrs were chosen by Heaven to exonerate the brothers for their sin (see *Sefer Halikutim, Vayeishev*). They were reincarnations of the ten brothers involved in Yosef's abduction. From Yosef we learn to overlook the wrong that others do us. Not only did Yosef not take revenge, he forgave them and sought Divine exoneration as well.

The pasuk (*Mishlei 27:19*) says, "As water reflects a face back to a face, so one's heart is reflected back to him by another." This teaches us that one reacts to his friend according to the feelings his friend harbors in his heart. The brothers sensed Yosef's accepting heart and reacted accordingly. This is why Yehudah answered Yosef by saying (*Bereishit 44:18*), "Then Yehudah approached him." Yehudah's pleas for mercy mirrored Yosef's deep-seated desire for reconciliation with his brothers. Yehudah could feel that Yosef was 'on their side'. This demonstrated itself again when Yosef revealed himself to them. The pasuk (*ibid. 45:2*) says, "He cried in a loud voice, Egypt heard, and Pharaoh's household heard." Why did Yosef cry? Even more, it says (*ibid. 45:15*), "He then kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; afterwards his brothers conversed with him."

Because Yosef identified with them and felt affection as their brother, they were able to reciprocate.

Yosef wanted to show his father a sign of his status. The pasuk (ibid. 45:27) says, “He saw the wagons that Yosef sent to transport him, then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived.” Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 94:3) say that this is why Yosef sent the wagons to bring Yaakov to Egypt. The Hebrew word for wagon is עגלה. This hinted to the laws of the ערופה עגלה, the topic they had last learned together before Yosef was torn away from home. This was a sign of Yosef’s steadfast attachment to the Torah.

Yosef told his brothers to tell their father of the honor displayed for him in Egypt (see *Bereishit* 45:13). What was the purpose in this? Did Yaakov really care how much honor and respect the Egyptians had for him? I suggest that Yosef was really referring to the true honor, that of *Kavod haTorah* (*Pirkei Avot* 6:3). Hashem is the King of Honor, and those who learn His Torah are deserving of the mantle of respect. They are His emissaries and fulfill His will. Yosef was pointing out to Yaakov the true honor given him, as a result of delving into Torah and learning its laws.

### **Traveling to Egypt**

When Yaakov saw the wagons and heard the brothers’ description of Yosef, the Divine spirit returned upon him. Powered by this revelation, Yaakov went to Be’er Sheva and brought sacrifices to thank Hashem for the wonderful news. Hashem appeared to Yaakov in a vision. “Hashem spoke to Yisrael in night visions and He said, ‘Yaakov Yaakov.’ And he said, ‘Here I am’. And he said, ‘I am the G-d – G-d of your father. Have no fear of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there’” (*Bereishit* 46:2-3).

Why did Hashem appear to Yaakov at night and not during the day? Moreover, why did Yaakov fear going down to Egypt? Didn't he want to see Yosef? Why did Yaakov need Hashem's assurance?

Egypt was no ordinary country. It was the center of the world's basest and most promiscuous culture. Idolatry and immorality ran rampant. Yaakov greatly feared the spiritual repercussions. Despite his desire to see his son, the consideration of bringing his family to such an environment overwhelmed him with its adverse influence. Only after being promised by Hashem that his family would survive did he agree to go. This is why Hashem appeared to Yaakov at night. It was a hint that even in the dark night of *galut*, Hashem would still be there for his children.

Yosef told his brothers (ibid. 45:9), "Hurry – go up to my father and say to him, 'So said your son Yosef: Hashem has made me master of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not delay.'" The final letters of the words **לכל מצרים רדה אלי** spell the word **מילה** (*milah*). Yosef alluded to Yaakov how he kept the mitzvah of *brit milah* and didn't defile himself with immorality. The first two letters of the words **שמני אלהים** transposed spell **אש**, and the last letters equal the number fifty. This refers to the Torah which was given amidst fire and helped the Jews from descending to the lowest, fiftieth level of *tumah* in Egypt.

Why did Yosef ask his father to come? True, Yosef was unable to leave the country. But did that warrant Yaakov's journey? Yaakov didn't even want to come. Had it not been for Hashem's promise, Yaakov would have stayed in Canaan. It would seem that Yosef wanted to bring the Divine vision he had as a youth, to its finalization. His brothers had already bowed down to him, just as was prophesized in his dream. All that remained was for his father to present himself. Not that Yosef expected his father to bow down

to him. That would have been disrespectful. The mere presence of Yaakov was enough to accomplish Yosef's fervent wish to bring the Divine will to fruition.

One recurring theme throughout these parshiyot is the *middah* of *emet*. Despite their hatred, the brothers did not lie or conceal their dislike. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 37:4) expresses this when it says, "They hated him; and they could not speak to him peaceably." As Rashi explains, they did not speak glibly, pretending to be his friend while plotting against him in secret. They displayed their enmity openly. Yosef also was not double-faced. When Yaakov sent him to report on his brothers' welfare, he did so without reservations. He had nothing against them. His young heart was innocent of deceit and ignorant of betrayal. Years later, when his brothers came to Egypt, he was still the same Yosef. He loved them as brothers and cried when he revealed himself. The truth came out, and all could see that Yosef was their true brother after all these years.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Why did the cup of Yosef play a central role in the evidence against the brothers? Why was it used to determine their age and seating arrangement earlier on?
- ◆ The numerical value of the word **גביע** equals that of the word **פה**. Speech is what instigated the chain of events which led to Yosef's abduction. Yosef pointed this out by using the cup. It was a symbol of the supposed iniquity that the brothers thought Yosef had. Yosef hoped to absolve them of their sin by vilifying them.
- ◆ Deep inside, Yosef had no hard feelings against his brothers. Yehudah sensed this and reacted by approaching Yosef and trying to appease him.

- ◆ Yosef sent wagons to Yaakov to show his spiritual status, how he still remembered the Torah they had learned together. He also told the brothers to describe the true honor shown him in Egypt, that of Torah.
- ◆ Yaakov did not want to descend to Egypt as it was home to idolatry and immorality. Hashem promised Yaakov to protect him, hinting that He would be with them in the dark *galut*.
- ◆ Wanting to bring the dreams he had as a youth to their finalization, Yosef asked his father to come down to Egypt. It wasn't a sign of disrespect.
- ◆ When his brothers came to Egypt, he was still the same Yosef. He loved them as brothers and cried when he revealed himself. The truth came out, and all could see that Yosef was their true brother after all these years. Because Yosef identified with them and felt affection as their brother, they were able to reciprocate.



## Gems on Parashat Mikeitz



### Time for Redemption

*“It happened at the end of two years to the day: Pharaoh was dreaming that behold! – he was standing over the River”*

*(Bereishit 41:1)*

The word מקץ (at the end) contains an allusion to our Final redemption.

When it came time for Yosef to be sent free from prison, Hashem caused Pharaoh to have a dream. Similarly, when the time will come for the Final redemption, we will ‘awaken’ from the long *galut* as one who awakens from a dream. We will look back at all of the past events of history and mentally review our experiences as one would a dream. David Hamelech expressed this feeling when he said (*Tehillim* 126:1), “We will be like dreamers.”



## The Joy of Torah

*“Yaakov perceived that there were provisions in Egypt; so Yaakov said to his sons, ‘Why do you make yourselves conspicuous?’ And he said, ‘Behold, I have heard that there are provisions in Egypt; go down there and purchase for us from there, that we may live and not die’”*

*(Bereishit 42:1-2)*

Why did Yaakov send his sons to Egypt to buy food? He was extremely wealthy and certainly didn't lack the means to provide his family with bread. This can be seen from the gift that the brothers brought with them to Egypt. They gave to Yosef a tribute containing delicacies from Eretz Yisrael.

Perhaps Yaakov was teaching his children a lesson. Riches and plenty are not given to us to flaunt. Hashem gave us wealth, and we need to take care not to display it in a way which would arouse jealousy. This can be inferred from the words למה תתראו (*Bereishit* 42:1), which can also be translated as, ‘do not show off’ (*Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit*, 148). A rich man should not pride himself on his wealth or think that it makes him better than the poor. On the contrary, he should shoulder the burden of the poor, feeling and filling their needs.

The brothers went to Egypt, not so much to buy food as to show their understanding of the world's famine and suffering. They also went in order to forestall any jealousy from the nations of the world.

The word שבר (provisions) can be rearranged to spell בשר (lit. flesh, family). This refers to Yosef. Without realizing it, Yaakov was asking if they had any family in Egypt.

This raises the following question. Chazal say that one is inspired to prophecy only when one is in a jubilant mood. Yaakov, on the other hand, was in mourning for Yosef. He lost inspiration as a result (see *Tanchuma Vayeishev* 2). If so, how did Yaakov receive prophecy or prophesize that Yosef was in Egypt?

Perhaps we can answer based on what we wrote previously. Yaakov exhorted his sons not to show off their wealth. Teaching proper conduct and good *middot* can elevate a person and fill him with great joy. Thus Yaakov merited having Divine inspiration.

Even someone beset with suffering and overcome with worry can still set aside time for learning Torah. This can raise his spirits and help him forget his lot in life. Torah gladdens the heart.

I remember that when I merited learning the reasons behind bringing sacrifices, which contain a large amount of depth and esoteric thought, a smile played on my lips. One who would have seen me then may have thought something was amiss. In truth, everything was fine, I was merely ecstatic at my new understanding and enlightened by its discovery. Torah can bring us tremendous happiness and elevate our spirits to great heights.



## The Importance of a Beard

*“Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him”*

*(Bereishit 42:8)*

Rashi explains that Yosef left home before he had a beard. This is why the brothers did not recognize him. They, however, had beards already, and so Yosef was able to recognize them.

Scholars of Kabbalah tell us that Hashem has thirteen *middot* of compassion. These *middot* manifest themselves and reach us via our symbol of dignity, our beards. Many Rabbonim are careful not to cut their beards at all. It is certainly praiseworthy for every Jew to have a beard.

The Hebrew word נזק can also be rearranged to spell the word נזק (damage). Our beards can serve as indication of the damage and loss caused by our actions. The changing color of our hair also stresses the frailty of man and his limited time here on Earth. This should urge us to do teshuvah and good deeds. Thus our beards can serve as a ‘device’ to indicate our spiritual status and help us find compassion in Hashem’s eyes.

Women, though, do not have beards. This is because they do not need that indication to urge them forward. They have their own mitzvah of *tzeniut* to help them achieve perfection.



## Vayigash



### The Meeting of the Kings

*“Then Yehudah approached him and said, ‘If you please, my lord, may your servant speak a word in my lord’s ears and let not your anger flare up at your servant – for you are like Pharaoh’”*

*(Bereishit 44:18)*

The dialogue between Yosef and Yehudah was actually an encounter between two kings (*Bereishit Rabbah* 93:2). Yehudah was designated for royalty. Hashem had already picked him to be the progenitor of David Hamelech. Yosef also was elevated to authority. He was made second-in-command to Pharaoh.

It was on account of Yehudah’s royalty that Yosef was sold as a slave in the first place. The brothers judged Yosef guilty of defying Yehudah’s position, and he was tried and convicted of rebellion. They did not know that Hashem had other plans for Yosef.

This raises a question. If the brothers had no way of knowing Yosef’s future status, why were they punished? We are told that the

Ten Martyrs in the days of the *Tanna'im* were reincarnations of the ten brothers involved in Yosef's sale. From here, though, it would seem that they acted with righteous intentions and did not deserve such harsh punishment.

I suggest that the brothers should have looked to Yaakov for guidance. They saw their father listening to Yosef and accepting the import of his dreams. This should have guided them to put their feelings on the side and desist from passing judgment. Even more, they had already tasted Yaakov's rebuke. Shimon and Levi had killed out the entire city of Shechem, and received Yaakov's admonition in return. Thus the Shevatim should have proceeded with caution when it came to Yosef. Yaakov personified the pillar of Torah, and if he did not speak out against Yosef, neither should they have. This is why they were punished for selling Yosef.

As a result of Yosef's abduction, Yehudah's stature in the eyes of the brothers was diminished. The brothers lowered him from his status (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 38:1). They pointed to Yehudah as the one in charge, who could have stopped them from selling Yosef, just as he prevented them from killing him (see *Bereishit* 37:26). We also find later on, how Yehudah was in charge of directing Am Yisrael's steps, as Yaakov sent him ahead to Egypt to establish their residency and open a yeshiva (see *ibid.* 46:28). Here, too, the Shevatim looked up to Yehudah for guidance and direction.

In Binyamin's case, Yehudah did take charge. He approached Yosef and asked for Binyamin's release. This time, he fulfilled his destined role and wielded his Divinely invested power.

Yehudah asked Yosef (*ibid.* 44:34), "For how can I go up to my father if the youth is not with me?" We can explain these words on two levels.

On a simple level, Yehudah pleaded, “I already came one time to my father without my younger brother in tow. When Yosef was abducted, my father sat in mourning over his demise. How can I go again? He already accuses me for that episode.”

On a deeper level, these words refer to our plea before the King of Kings. After a person passes away, he comes before the Heavenly Court and is asked to answer for all of his actions. Before we get there, we should ask ourselves – how can we approach Hashem without Torah in tow? We were given the Torah to learn and do, just as Yehudah was put in charge of Binyamin. To come empty-handed before the Court of Supreme Justice would then be a source of extreme embarrassment.

Chazal (*Pesachim* 50a) say, “Fortunate is the one who comes here with his learning in hand.” We are placed in the midst of a fierce struggle. The *Yetzer Hatov* urges us to do good, while the *Yetzer Hara* entices us to evil. They are like two kings facing each other in battle. Learning Torah strengthens the *Yetzer Hatov*. This is something the *Yetzer Hara* does not want. Every person should say to himself, “How can I return to Hashem without the Torah and mitzvot under my wing? How can I face my Father in Heaven when the youth is not with me?”

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ The dialogue between Yosef and Yehudah was like an encounter between two kings. Yehudah was put in charge of his brothers and designated for royalty, whereas Yosef was appointed by Pharaoh as Viceroy of Egypt.
- ◆ The brothers did not ask Yaakov about what to do with Yosef or look to him for guidance. This is why they were punished for selling him. As a result of Yosef’s abduction, Yehudah was diminished in stature.

Yehudah could have prevented them from selling him. In Binyamin's case, Yehudah did take charge. He approached Yosef and asked for Binyamin's release.

- ◆ Yehudah asked Yosef, "For how can I go up to my father if the youth is not with me." We can explain these words on two levels. On a simple level, Yehudah pleaded, "I already came one time to my father without my younger brother in tow. How can I go again?"
- ◆ On a deeper level, these words refer to our plea before the King of Kings. Before we get to the Heavenly Court, we should ask ourselves – how can we approach Hashem without our Torah learning in tow?



## The Cure before the Illness

*"Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept"*

*(Bereishit 45:14)*

Rashi explains that Yosef cried on Binyamin's shoulder for a much deeper reason than we think. Yosef saw with Divine inspiration that Binyamin's property in Eretz Yisrael would eventually lodge the two Temples. Yosef cried because he saw that they both would one day be destroyed. Binyamin likewise cried for the destruction of the Mishkan that would find lodging in Yosef's tribal property.

Rashi's explanation leads us to question why Yosef and Binyamin cried over suffering and destruction which had not yet taken place. Normally we expect people to cry over what happened to them in the past, not what will happen in the future. Why cry over spilled milk before it was ever poured into the cup? Moreover, the Shevatim

were standing on the threshold of *galut* Mitzrayim, and should have focused on the immediate difficulties which lay ahead, not events of the distant future.

We can also ask why they cried over something which should have been considered a mere possibility. Man is given the freedom of choice. What he chooses in the future cannot be determined today. Certainly he cannot be held accountable for something which did not yet happen. The sin of the spies in the desert, which led to the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, had not yet happened, and maybe never would. Even if Am Yisrael would sin, they would still have the opportunity to do teshuvah. Why, then, did Yosef and Binyamin cry over the destruction of the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash?

When Yaakov blessed his children, he wanted to tell them the date of the final redemption. Hashem immediately concealed this from him (see *Pesachim* 56a). This was for a purpose. True, Hashem has the date for the redemption already set. But we await the coming of the Mashiach on a daily basis. If Hashem deems us worthy, he can bring the Mashiach before this time. The time of redemption is actually dependant on our actions, and will be hastened accordingly (see *Sanhedrin* 98a). By concealing the date from us, Hashem gave us hope for our immediate future, as well as a push to do our best.

This only makes our question stronger. If the whole time-period of *galut* is dependent on our actions, and we have the ability to hasten the redemption, why cry over its supposed extension?

I suggest that Yosef and Binyamin gave us a message by their shedding of tears. The fact that such an event could take place should give us something to think about. We need to do teshuvah before the worst happens, not to wait and cry after the fact.

Realizing the destruction which one day might come true, should 'cry out' to us to prevent it from happening in the first place. This is why Yosef and Binyamin cried.

Chazal (*Yoma* 9b) say that the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash was caused by the sin of baseless hatred. As Am Yisrael stood ready to enter the *galut* of Egypt, Yosef and Binyamin looked already to their departure. They hoped that just as they would leave Egypt and head to Har Sinai amidst unity and harmony, so, too, should they continue down the path of history. Without such unity, Hashem removes His presence from our midst and leaves us as prey to the wild 'boors' of mankind. Unfortunately, Am Yisrael did not learn this lesson well enough. They threw harmony out the window when they complained about the Land of Israel in the desert, and years later, before the destruction of the Temple, trampled on their unity and smashed it to pieces.

The following story illustrates this point very well. An older woman passed away, leaving behind a small fortune. After the shivah, the family opened her will and discovered a puzzling discrepancy. All of this woman's descendants received an equal share in her fortune, save one girl who received the equivalent of all of them put together. Baffled, the family turned to the Beit Din to validate her will and decide if there was some oversight on her part.

The Beit Din carefully scrutinized her papers to find some indication why this girl was allotted more than her fair share. After searching her personal diary, they came across the following episode. At one point, this woman told her family her harrowing experiences during the Second World War. She wrote how they all paid attention and nodded their heads, but one girl in particular identified with her grandmother's account. She wept as her grandmother described the terrible persecutions. In her diary, the

grandmother wrote how she was certain that this granddaughter would give over to her children the right message, what really happened during the Holocaust. The Beit Din then understood why this same granddaughter received such a large inheritance. By identifying with her grandmother's suffering, she proved herself a worthy continuation of her grandmother's legacy.

Similarly, Yosef and Binyamin overlooked their own precarious situation and felt the future suffering of Am Yisrael. They hoped that their tears would alert their descendants to the dangers looming overhead. By stressing their own *middah* of unity, they showed future generations the 'preventive medicine' for averting the breakup of Am Yisrael.

Perhaps we can also learn from these two brothers how to cry over the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. If they cried profusely over its 'possible' eventuality, how much more so should we cry over its actualization. If they pointed to its cure before it came about, how much more should we try to rectify its cause after the fact. By identifying and striving to remedy the causes of destruction, we should merit seeing the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash in our days.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ When Yosef and Binyamin finally met, they cried on each other's shoulder. Rashi explains that they cried because they saw with Divine inspiration the future destruction of the Mishkan and the Temples.
- ◆ Why did they cry over something in the distant future, when the *galut* of Egypt was an immediate reality? We are told that the final redemption is dependent on our actions. If so, our suffering was only a 'possible' eventuality, and should not have merited their tears.

- ◆ Yosef and Binyamin taught future generations the message of averting destruction before it ever happens. By seeing their unity and identifying the causes of destruction, we can take our ‘preventive medicine’ and avert its materialization.
- ◆ If they cried profusely over its ‘possible’ eventuality, how much more so should we cry over its actualization and rectify the causes of the destruction.



## The Dream of Pharaoh

*“Then he fell upon his brother Binyamin’s neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck”*

*(Bereishit 45:14)*

*“Yosef harnessed his chariot and went up to meet Yisrael his father in Goshen. He appeared before him, fell on his neck, and he wept”*

*(ibid. 46:29)*

Parashat *Vayigash* describes two similar encounters, that of Yosef with Binyamin, and Yosef with Yaakov Avinu.

When Yosef and Binyamin first met, they each cried on each other’s shoulder. Rashi explains that they actually saw, with prophetic inspiration, what the future beheld. Yosef saw that the two Temples which would be built in the portion of Binyamin would be destroyed. Whereas Binyamin saw that the Mishkan which would

stand in Yosef's portion would be destroyed. It was over these destructions that they cried.

Why did Yosef and Binyamin cry over events in the distant future at this juncture in time? They hadn't seen each other for many years. What was so opportune about this meeting?

Similarly, we can ask why Yosef cried when he met his father. Even more, Rashi explains that only Yosef cried. According to tradition, Yaakov Avinu was in the middle of reciting the Kriyat Shema, and thus did not cry. This makes our question even stronger. After so many years of mourning his lost son, Yaakov finally met Yosef. The Midrash (*Tanchuma Vayeishev*, 2) says that during all of these years, the Divine presence did not rest on Yaakov as a result of Yosef's 'absence' and Yaakov's state of mourning. At perhaps Yaakov's greatest moment in his life, reunited with his son, he remained silent while Yosef went on to cry. How do we understand these actions?

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 93:8, *Tanchuma Vayigash*, 5) describes the meeting of Yosef and his brothers, as well. At first, when the brothers realized that Yosef was Viceroy of Egypt, they wanted to kill him. Only after the Angel Gavriel pushed them away did they have a change of heart. This also requires explanation. The main reason they went to Egypt was to find their lost brother. If so, why weren't they overjoyed when they found him?

I suggest that the brothers thought that they would finally locate Yosef as a slave. They never envisioned that he would make it to the top. This aroused their dormant jealousy, which had caused Yosef's abduction in the first place. It overpowered their desire to find Yosef safe from harm, and should serve as a lesson concerning the terrible effects of jealousy.

When the Angel Gavriel interfered, they realized that Yosef's position of authority was Heavenly orchestrated. Thus they were able to approach Yosef and accept him as their long-lost brother. This peace and unity triggered Divine inspiration, as prophecy only descends on those who are in a state of joy. Thus Yosef and Binyamin were elevated by their reunion to reach levels of prophecy, and even caught a glimpse of the future breakdown of that unity. This is why they cried. It was a reaction to the events that they foresaw.

When Yaakov Avinu met Yosef, he restrained his emotions. True, for years he had cried over the demise of his son. He rent his clothing and lost all Divine inspiration as a result. However, at the height of his joy, he wanted to express his appreciation of Hashem's kindness and acknowledge Hashem's full control of events. This is why he chose to recite the Kriyat Shema, as it contains the acceptance of Hashem's Majesty, as well as expressing our love of Him.

Yosef, though, could not contain himself as well as Yaakov. His cry thus reflected his inner yearning and realization that he did not merit to reach the level of his righteous father. This is why Yosef cried when meeting Yaakov. He tried to learn from his father and held himself to task for not succeeding.

This should provide us with food for thought. Many people ask for berachot or advice from great Rabbonim. Unfortunately, they do not take advantage of their golden opportunity. The few moments they may have to witness the grandeur of spirit or perfection of character is lost on them. Besides berachot, we should strive to acquire lessons on life from these righteous men during those rare moments.

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**In Summary**

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- ◆ This parashah describes the meeting between Yosef and Binyamin as well as Yosef and his father Yaakov. Why did Yosef and Binyamin cry at this juncture over the destruction of the Temple and the Mishkan? Why did Yaakov not cry when he met Yosef?
- ◆ The brothers wanted to kill Yosef when they first met him. Hadn't they come to Egypt to find out if he was still alive? They thought they would find him serving as a slave. When they saw him as king, they were extremely jealous, until they realized that it was Hashem's master plan.
- ◆ Once reunited and unified, the Divine presence rested on Yosef and Binyamin. They even caught a glimpse of the future destruction, caused by a breakdown of that unity. That is why Yosef and Binyamin cried.
- ◆ Yaakov wanted to show his thanks to Hashem for finding Yosef. He restrained himself and said Kriyat Shema to acknowledge Hashem's hand and express his love of Hashem. Yosef did not reach his father's level of perfection, and cried over his lack.



## Gratefulness

*“So Yisrael set out with all that he had and he came to Beer-Sheva where he slaughtered sacrifices to the G-d of his father Yitzchak”*

*(Bereishit 46:1)*

When Yaakov brought sacrifices to Hashem in Be'er Sheva, he called Him, “The G-d of Yitzchak.” Why did he describe Hashem so?

Rashi explains that a person is required to show more gratitude to his father than to his grandfather (as his father was more involved in his care and upbringing). Thus Yaakov designated Hashem as being the “G-d of Yitzchak,” as opposed to the “G-d of Avraham.”

Perhaps we can better appreciate Yaakov’s sacrifices after noting the events which preceded it. Yaakov was overjoyed to hear that Yosef was still alive. What really made his joy complete, though, was that Yosef remained true to his upbringing and did not forgo his Torah observance. Yaakov heard that Yosef was a ruler in Egypt, but marveled not at his rank of royalty but at his sovereignty of the spirit. Only one who can control his baser impulses and gains ascendancy over his *Yetzer Hara* is considered to be mighty strong (see *Pirkei Avot* 4:1).

Yosef told his brothers (*Bereishit* 45:13), “Tell my father of all my glory.” This refers to his Torah learning, not to his personal honor, as the Torah is described as the greatest honor and ‘glory’ (see *Pirkei Avot* 6:2). Despite his sojourn in Egypt, Yosef retained the ‘honor’ he acquired from home and did not forget his learning. Similarly, he did not blemish the mark of honor of a Jew, the *brit milah*, by acting immorally.

Thus it would seem that Yaakov joyfully brought sacrifices to show his appreciation for Hashem’s guidance and protection. Yet this does not explain the connection between the sacrifices and calling Hashem “The G-d of Yitzchak.” What is the significance of this designation, particularly at this juncture in time?

I saw several commentaries that answer this question. When Yaakov Avinu understood that he would have to go to Egypt, he was overcome with trepidation. Perhaps the Divine presence and the spirit of prophecy would leave him upon his entry to Egypt. For many years, he had been bereft of any Divine spirit, as a result of

his mourning over Yosef. Leaving Canaan, he would be surrounded by the idolatry and promiscuity of the Egyptian culture. Yet he could not refuse the invitation of his son, the Viceroy of Egypt. Out of distress, Yaakov brought sacrifices. This is why Yaakov mentions his father's name. Yitzchak merited staying in Canaan despite a raging famine. Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 64:3) say that Yitzchak became sanctified when he was brought on the altar at *Akeidat Yitzchak*. He was thus detained by Heaven from descending to Egypt. Similarly, Yaakov wished to stay in Canaan, and he prayed to be spared any physical or spiritual descent, in the merit of his father (see *Kedushat Levi, Vayigash*).

This would also explain why Yaakov did not invoke the merit of his grandfather Avraham. Aren't the merits of two better than one? Why didn't Yaakov also pray in the merit of Avraham Avinu to stay behind in Canaan? The answer is that Avraham was not granted that privilege. He was forced to descend to Egypt when a famine ravaged the Land.

Even more, when Avraham sojourned in Egypt, Pharaoh took Sarah Imeinu captive. Out of appeasement, Pharaoh gave them the land of Goshen as a present (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*, 26). Yaakov, though, did not want to end up in Goshen. This is why Yaakov did not mention his grandfather Avraham in his plea to Hashem.

Perhaps we can also now explain why the Torah saw fit to bring this concept here, that the honor due one's father is greater than due one's grandfather. Yitzhak was still alive when Yosef was abducted. He knew the truth, that Yosef was not killed, merely sold as a slave. Yet he shared in the pain and suffering of Yaakov, shedding tears and offering prayers on his behalf. No doubt, this was instrumental in protecting Yosef from greater harm. Thus Yaakov's sacrifices to Hashem contain a reference to Yitzchak, as a

sign of gratefulness for his prayers and tears. And so Yaakov refers to Hashem as “the G-d of Yitzchak.”

We can learn from this story about the importance of the *middah* of *hakarot hatov*. One who learns how to appreciate what others do for him, will begin to appreciate what Hashem does for us. By learning how to show our appreciation to others, we can use that *middah* to boost our mitzvah productivity and try to reciprocate for all the good that Hashem constantly does.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ When Yaakov heard that Yosef was still alive, he was overjoyed, not by Yosef’s rank but by his spiritual standing and honor. True honor is remaining true to one’s upbringing, and true strength is the mastery of one’s baser impulses. Yosef retained his learning and did not act immorally, despite his descent to Egypt.
- ◆ Yaakov brought sacrifices to “the G-d of Yitzchak.” Rashi writes that a person is required to show more gratitude to his father than to his grandfather. Why does the Torah teach us this concept at this particular juncture of time? Why did Yaakov designate Hashem as being the “G-d of Yitzchak” as opposed to the “G-d of Avraham”?
- ◆ Just as Yitzchak did not descend to Egypt, Yaakov did not want to, either. Avraham Avinu was forced to leave Canaan. Pharaoh even gave Avraham and Sarah the land of Goshen as a present. This is why Yaakov did not want to invoke the merit of Avraham in his plea.
- ◆ When Yosef was abducted, Yitzchak shared in the pain and suffering of Yaakov, shedding tears and offering prayers on his behalf. As a sign of his gratefulness, Yaakov’s sacrifices to Hashem contained a reference to Yitzchak.



## Hashem's Reassurance

*“G-d spoke to Yisrael in night visions and He said, ‘Yaakov, Yaakov.’ And he said, ‘Here I am’”*

*(Bereishit 46:2)*

The *Ben Ish Chai (Vayigash, Shana Rishona)* points out a discrepancy in this pasuk. At first, Hashem refers to Yaakov Avinu by his title ‘Yisrael,’ but then immediately reverts to calling him by his name Yaakov. Another question he asks is why Hashem repeated Yaakov’s name. I would like to add my own question. Why did Hashem speak to Yaakov specifically at night? Hashem could have spoken to Yaakov during the day, just as He had done with the other Avot.

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Vayeishev, 2*) tells us that Yaakov mourned for Yosef for a period of twenty-two years. During this time, Yaakov did not merit prophecy, as only one who is in a joyous state can experience prophecy. This actually gave Yaakov reason to be concerned. Perhaps Hashem would take him to task for his lack of joy. Joy and happiness are an integral part of serving Hashem. The pasuk (*Devarim 28:47*) chastises those who do not serve Hashem with a glad heart, “Because you did not serve Hashem your G-d amidst gladness and goodness of heart.” It can even be a cause for retribution. As we know, the actions of the Forefathers are a portent for their descendants. Thus, Yaakov had good reason to be worried.

These thoughts plagued Yaakov as he went on his way down to Egypt. He felt forced by Yosef’s invitation to join him there, and dismayed at the possible repercussions. Besides his own potential

loss of Divine inspiration, there was also the possible backlash of Divine wrath towards him and his children for missing those years of joyous Divine service. Many years before, Hashem had even given Yaakov a new name, Yisrael. This name **ישראל** (which denotes **שׂררה**, elevation and superiority; see Rashi on *Bereishit* 35:10) reflected his elevated status, as one who fought with man and angels and emerged victorious. It was a name which denoted honor and prestige. Perhaps Hashem would strip him of this honor because of his lack of joy.

Hashem thus called Yaakov by his name Yisrael, to reassure him that he had not lost out. There was no Divine accusation for the years he languished in sorrow, far removed from prophetic inspiration. It was part of Hashem's decree that Yosef should be torn away from home without advance knowledge or forewarning. There was nothing more that Yaakov could have done to alleviate his situation or change the Divine plan. Hashem also appeared to Yaakov at night, reassuring him that He would be with him even in the dark bitter *galut* of Egypt. Such is the *middah* of Hashem, as it states (*Tehillim* 91:15), "I am with him in distress."

The pasuk continues by describing how Hashem showed His love to Yaakov. He did this by doubling his name. This was a message that he was still held in the same Divine grace and would continue to enjoy Heavenly favor, even in Egypt. Actually, Hashem set aside the land of Goshen for Yaakov and his children, as it was empty of idolatry. There, Yaakov would be able to continue learning undisturbed, and could receive further Divine inspiration.

The word **חיבה** (love) can be split into two, **חי** and **בה**. This hints to the love Hashem had for Yaakov, one which was caused by living (**חי**) a life of Torah (**בה** – in it). Torah gives us vitality and energy, helping us to live life the way it was meant to be lived. This is the explanation behind the words of the pasuk (*Vayikra* 18:5), "You shall

live by them.” Similarly, the name Yaakov contains a reference to the mitzvot (see Rashi on *Devarim* 7:12) as well as the *middah* of submission and humility, prerequisites to acquiring Torah knowledge. Yaakov excelled in this area, achieving mastery of himself and proficiency in Torah, symbolized by his name Yisrael. These traits are what earned him Hashem’s love.

Upon hearing Hashem’s ‘call,’ Yaakov felt reassured. “Then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived” (*Bereishit* 45:27). He recognized Hashem as the Ultimate Cause of events and Writer of destiny. Hashem’s revelation to Yaakov helped him to go down to Egypt with the proper frame of mind.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ The *Ben Ish Chai* asks why Hashem refers to Yaakov Avinu by his title ‘Yisrael,’ and then immediately reverts to calling him by his name Yaakov. Why did Hashem repeat Yaakov’s name? And why did Hashem speak to Yaakov specifically at night?
- ◆ Yaakov mourned for Yosef for a period of twenty-two years. During this time, Yaakov did not merit prophecy, and was concerned that Hashem would take him to task. Perhaps he would forfeit his elevated status, represented by the name **ישראל**, which Hashem gave him years earlier. This is why Hashem called him Yisrael. Hashem also appeared to Yaakov at night, reassuring him that He would be with him even in the dark, bitter *galut* of Egypt.
- ◆ Hashem showed His love to Yaakov by doubling his name. He would continue to enjoy Heavenly favor, even in Egypt, and would be able to receive further Divine inspiration.
- ◆ The word **חיבה** can be split into two, **חי** and **בה**. By living a life of Torah one gains vitality, living life the way it was meant to be lived. Similarly, the name **יעקב** contains a reference to the prerequisites to acquiring Torah. Yaakov excelled in this area, achieving mastery of

himself and proficiency in Torah, symbolized by his name Yisrael. These traits are what earned him Hashem's love.

- ◆ It was part of Hashem's decree that Yosef should be torn away from home without advance knowledge or forewarning. There was nothing more that Yaakov could have done to alleviate his situation or change the Divine plan.



## Torah's True Strength

*“And it shall be, when Pharaoh summons you, and says: What is your occupation? Then you are to say: Your servants have been cattlemen from our youth till now, both we and our forefathers – so that you may be able to settle in the region of Goshen, since all shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians”*

*(Bereishit 46:33-34)*

Yosef was in a quandary. Pharaoh would no doubt wish to see his brothers upon their arrival in Egypt. He had already appointed Yosef as his viceroy, well aware of his unique strengths and abilities. With the arrival of Yosef's brothers, he now had a greater opportunity to add to his personal retinue and increase the sovereignty of his reign. Were he to see their true strength, he would certainly request their employment. What could Yosef do to prevent this?

Even before Pharaoh requested their presence, Yosef had already chosen the 'weakest' ones to 'represent' the whole lot of them and

discourage Pharaoh from his grand plan. He also instructed them on what to say. Knowing how the Egyptians despised the usage and consumption of animals, he told them to state their profession as cattle-ranchers. He also warned them not to display any sign of strength or say anything about their expertise in combat and warfare. Thus the pasuk (*Bereishit* 47:2) describes how the brothers appeared before Pharaoh. “From the least of his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh.” Rashi explains that these were the weaker ones; Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yissachar, and Binyamin.

Part of Yosef’s concerns was to allow his brothers the freedom to learn Torah. Had they been drafted into Pharaoh’s employment, when would they have had time to learn? We find that Yaakov also worried over this, and sent Yehudah ahead of the family to establish a yeshiva in Egypt (*Tanchuma Vayigash*, 11). They needed that study of Torah to help them weather the *galut* of Egypt.

Although Yosef was able to maintain his spiritual status and not forget his learning despite his inscription into Pharaoh’s service, that was more of an exception than the rule. He had a Divine ‘dispensation’ to serve Pharaoh. Hashem had His master plan, using Yosef’s position as a catalyst to bring his whole family to Egypt, make them serve the Egyptians, and ultimately be let free, leading Am Yisrael to the pinnacle of Mount Sinai and *Kabbalat HaTorah*. But for the general public, induction into Pharaoh’s service would not have been beneficial. We find with Mordechai, after he became part of the Ministry (on behalf of Am Yisrael), that some of the members of the Sanhedrin distanced themselves from him (*Megillah* 16b).

The baffling question is why Yosef thought that he could deceive Pharaoh. It was well-known that Shimon and Levi had wiped out the city of Shechem for ravishing their sister Dina. The whole land of Canaan trembled before them. The Midrash relates stories of

ensuing battles, how the brothers emerged victorious and displayed tremendous strength. When the brothers came to Egypt and tried to save Binyamin, they almost destroyed the city (see *Tanchuma Vayigash*, 5). Did Yosef really think that he could fool Pharaoh?

We can add another point to ponder. The pasuk (*Bereishit* 46:34) writes that Yosef told his brothers to say to Pharaoh, גַּם אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם אֲבוֹתֵינוּ (also us and also our forefathers raised cattle). In general, the word גַּם connotes some inclusion. Yosef's double use of the word גַּם thus requires some explanation.

In order to answer our questions, we first need to dwell on the purpose of the *galut* in Egypt. The descent to a strange land, one filled with idolatry and promiscuity, was to prepare Am Yisrael to receive the Torah. It was the crucible to refine them and make them worthy.

Only the Torah has the ability to help us survive through *galut*. As David Hamelech said (*Tehillim* 119:92), "Had Your Torah not been my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction." Torah can even help us remove pain and suffering from our hearts. This is borne out by the numerous stories of *Gedolei Yisrael* who suffered physical suffering, and yet forgot their pain when they applied themselves to their learning.

The land of Goshen was chosen by Yaakov for this very purpose. The word גּוֹשֶׁן is similar to the word גּוֹשֶׁשׁ (struggle), and refers to the struggle and debate of those learning Torah. Yaakov had Goshen settled by Yehudah, in order to establish a yeshiva there. He sent Yehudah on ahead, preparing the groundwork for Am Yisrael's continued existence.

The Torah serves as a beacon of light for those faced with adversity. It can even help prevent suffering. An example of this is

the men of the tribe of Levi, who were exempt from serving Pharaoh and being put to 'task,' as they were involved in learning Torah (see *Shemot Rabbah* 5:16). The other tribes did not involve themselves in learning, and were forced into hard labor.

I suggest that Yosef told his brothers to stress to Pharaoh their involvement in Torah. The words אנשי מקנה (lit. cattlemen) also refer to the acquisition (קנה) of Torah. Perhaps they were strong and capable in other areas, but this was their main focus of life. At the forefront of all their endeavors lay the drive to acquire more and more Torah. This was the message they were to give over to Pharaoh.

In addition, Yosef told them to say that this wasn't a new vocation for them. Not only did they and their forefathers strive in Torah, even (גם) before their *neshamot* descended into this world, they enjoyed the bliss of learning Torah together with Hashem. This was the sole justification for their descent into this world, to acquire Torah and fulfill the purpose of Creation.

This can also explain why Yosef presented the weakest brothers before Pharaoh. It wasn't physical strength which characterized their family. It was their prowess in Torah. Thus, Yosef wasn't trying to fool Pharaoh. He was stressing the focal point of their lives. Part of their request from Pharaoh to remain independent and not be drafted into his work force was to point out that their whole essence was Torah.

This is also what strengthens us in our battle against the *Yetzer Hara*. By adhering to the Torah's precepts and delving into its laws, the Torah can bequeath us with supernatural strength. We display our greatest strength when we conquer the *Yetzer* and subjugate our inner urges and drives to the dictates of the Torah. As the Mishnah states (*Pirkei Avot* 4:1), "Who is strong? One who conquers his *Yetzer*."

This is most apparent from Yosef. Yosef, along with all his brothers, was endowed with great strength. When the brothers discovered Menashe's unusual strength, they exclaimed (*Tanchuma Vayigash*, 4), "This power is akin to that of one of our father's household." Yet, despite his might, Yosef never fought his way out of Egypt. He accepted the Heavenly decree to remain there, wallowing in prison until Hashem raised him up on the throne.

Yosef, though, did display his strength in the incident with the wife of Potiphar. He mustered all his power in order not to sin with her, and was aided with a vision of his father's countenance (see *Sotah* 36b). This 'spiritual' strength of Yosef and his brothers was actually the source of their physical strength.

Perhaps we can now also explain the words of the pasuk (*Bereishit* 46:33), וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא לָכֶם פַּרְעֹה, "And it shall be, when Pharaoh summons you." The word וְהָיָה has the same letters as the Four-Letter Name of Hashem. The name *Pharaoh* alludes to the *Yetzer Hara*. When the *Yetzer Hara* calls for us to do his 'work,' we should remember Hashem, and decline. We do this by learning Torah, as it is a repository of the Names of Hashem.

We can even add the rest of the words of the brothers in our reply to the *Yetzer Hara*. They told Pharaoh אֲנָשֵׁי מִקְנֵה הָיוּ עַבְדֶּיךָ, which can also be translated as, we are already 'bought out' as servants of Hashem and obliged to keep His Torah. We place Hashem at the forefront of our consciousness, as it says (*Tehillim* 16:8), "I have set Hashem before me always." This is what gives us the strength to fight the *Yetzer Hara*.

One who shows where his true allegiance lies and spells out his loyalty to Torah has the tools he needs to ward off the *Yetzer Hara's* overtures. Just as Yosef merited seeing the visage of his father when he struggled to overcome his urge to sin, so too, one who cleaves

to the Torah merits Heavenly intervention and aid in battling his *Yetzer Hara*.

**In Summary**

- ◆ Yosef chose which brothers to present to Pharaoh in order to discourage their induction into his service. Rashi explains that he picked the weakest ones. He also instructed them to describe their profession as cattle-ranchers (אנשי מקנה היו עבדיך), and warned them not to display any sign of strength or say anything about their expertise in combat and warfare.
- ◆ Did Yosef think that he could fool Pharaoh? Wasn't it well known that they had unusual strength? Also, Yosef told his brothers to say to Pharaoh, גם אנחנו גם אבותינו. What can we learn from the double use of the word גם?
- ◆ Yosef wanted Pharaoh to hear how his brothers' whole essence was Torah. It wasn't physical strength which characterized their family; it was their prowess in Torah. This wasn't a new vocation for them, as not only did they and their forefathers strive in Torah, even before their *neshamot* descended into this world, they enjoyed learning Torah, and it was the sole justification for their descent into this world.
- ◆ The words אנשי מקנה also refer to the acquisition (קנה) of Torah. At the forefront of all their endeavors lay the drive to acquire more and more Torah. They told Pharaoh אנשי מקנה היו עבדיך, we are already 'bought out' as servants of Hashem.
- ◆ The pasuk says ויהיה כי יקרא לכם פרעה. The word ויהיה has the same letters as the Four-Letter Name of Hashem. The name *Pharaoh* alludes to the *Yetzer Hara*. When the *Yetzer Hara* calls for us to do his 'work', we should remember Hashem and decline. We do this by learning Torah, as it is a repository of the Names of Hashem. This is what gives us the strength to fight the *Yetzer Hara*.



## The Power of Truth

*“Thus Yosef acquired all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field because the famine had overwhelmed them; and the land became Pharaoh’s. As for the nation, he resettled it by cities, from one end of Egypt’s borders to the other. Only the land of the priests he did not buy, since the priests had a stipend from Pharaoh, and they lived off their stipend that Pharaoh had given them; therefore they did not sell their land”*

*(Bereishit 47:20-23)*

During the years of famine, Yosef bought out everything the Egyptians owned. In their hunger, they sold whatever they had, including their livestock and property. In such a situation, one would expect the nation to rise up and revolt out of indignation at being taken advantage of. It would seem that they were afraid of Yosef. Perhaps they recognized his tremendous wisdom in storing and preserving the grain from spoiling, something they were unable to do. Their fear prevented them from breaking into his storage houses and pilfering the stored produce.

There was one thing that Yosef did not buy. The pasuk says that Yosef did not ask the priests of Egypt to sell their property, nor did they have the need to. Pharaoh saw to their welfare and provided them with food. This should leave us quite perplexed. Yosef wielded tremendous power. He could have forced them to sell their land, had he wanted. Their official status as priests of idolatry should have pressed Yosef to rid the land of their presence. Even non-Jews

are commanded not to serve idolatry. Why didn't he take the opportunity to remove idolatry from Egypt?

I suggest that Yosef knew what he was doing. Had he forced them to sell everything, they would have returned to power when the famine was finished. They would have established new parishes and built new edifices. Yosef found a better way to nullify their influence. He left them in their place. By witnessing the priests in their garb and comparing their aplomb to the dignity and sanctity of the Jewish leaders, any impartial observer would see the difference and appreciate the nobility of the Jews. They would see how helpless the priests were in face of a national misfortune, and recognize Hashem as the true Ruler of nature. We see from here the power of truth, when compared to the emptiness of falsehood. Even a simple person can differentiate between the two.

I once met a very distinguished member of the government. Everyone bowed down to him and hung onto his every word. Yet in my presence, he dared not look me in the face. I asked him why he did not gaze directly at me. He said that he was afraid. In his position, he said, he needs to recognize the difference between truth and falsehood. After witnessing the actions of the Jews, he came to the realization that the truth resides with them.

A similar story happened with my grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt"l. Once, one of his sons struck a non-Jewish child, whose father happened to be the mayor of the city. Within a short span of time, the mayor angrily came looking for him. As soon as he saw my grandfather's solemn face, though, he retraced his steps and not another word was said.

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### **In Summary**

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- ◆ Yosef sold grain to the Egyptians, buying out everything they owned. Why didn't they revolt against his tyranny? Apparently they were

afraid of Yosef. He knew how to preserve grain when no one else could prevent it from spoiling.

- ◆ Yosef did not acquire the land of the priests. Why didn't he take the opportunity to remove idolatry from Egypt?
- ◆ Had Yosef forced them to sell everything, they would have returned to power when the famine was finished. Yosef found a better way to nullify their influence. By leaving them alone, anyone who compared them to true Jewish leaders would see the difference and recognize Hashem as the true Ruler of nature.



## Gems on Parashat Vayigash



### Constant Interest

*“Behold! Your eyes see as do the eyes of my brother Binyamin that it is my mouth that is speaking to you”*

*(Bereishit 45:12)*

Chazal (Bereishit Rabbah 93:10) say that when Yosef revealed his identity to his brothers, he used their ‘mother tongue.’ This is hinted to by the words, “That it is my mouth that is speaking to you,” which refers to his speaking Lashon Hakodesh. There was no better way to prove Yosef’s background than to speak to his brothers in the same tongue that they spoke in their father’s house.

There is also a deeper symbolism here, one referred to by the language that Yosef spoke. The inner content of his speech, the holiness associated with that language, is what guided Yosef in all of his actions. To parrot words, or spout idioms, doesn’t truly reflect on the essence of one’s being. Anyone can learn a foreign language, regardless of his spiritual level. Yosef characterized the integration of the sanctity of Lashon Hakodesh. He implemented it to

preserve his sanctity in a foreign country that stank of immorality, and devoted himself to the Torah that he learned with his father.

David Hamelech said (Tehillim 119:97), “O how I love your Torah! All the day it is my conversation.” This seems difficult to understand. How could David say that this was his main topic of speech? He was a very busy king, running a large country. He was constantly involved in armed conflicts and economic decisions. What did he mean by these words?

Perhaps we can explain using the words of the Gemara (Sukkah 21b) which says that even the ordinary, everyday speech of talmidei chachamim requires analysis. When evaluated by the magnifying glass of Torah, their speech reveals inner depth and reflects the light of Torah. Similarly, David Hamelech spoke about wars and economic growth, but this speech contained eternal lessons of righteous behavior and Torah perspective.

This can explain why David did not suffer the same fate as Mordechai did. When Mordechai was appointed as minister in Haman’s stead, several members of the Sanhedrin distanced themselves from him (see Tanchuma Devarim, 3; Pesikta Rabbah 11; Yalkut Shimoni Shmuel II, 165). They felt that his duties as minister infringed on, and curtailed, his growth in Torah. Yet David enjoyed the full backing of the wisest men, who held him to be wiser than they, appointing him as head of the seventy elders (see Rambam Pirush Hamishnayot, Avot 4:4). Thus it would seem that David did not remove his mind from Torah matters, and all day long he truly spoke words of Torah.

This is what Yosef meant to say. Not only did he ‘speak their language’, he also lived by it. He constantly referred to Torah as his guide in life, and sprinkled every conversation with its words of wisdom. This was also his appeal to his brothers. “See that I am still

the same Yosef. I did not capitulate to the winds of passion or the inroads of Egyptian culture. My whole life has been dedicated to continuing the traditions from our father's house and discussing the same topics of Torah."



## Learning on The Road

*"And he sent off his brothers, and they went. He said to them, 'Do not become agitated on the way'"*

*(Bereishit 45:24)*

Rashi explains that Yosef told his brothers to refrain from delving into laws of the Torah while they were traveling home. He was afraid that they would be 'carried away,' something which could well hinder or even jeopardize their journey. This is difficult for us to understand. Is it possible that Yosef would tell them not to learn Torah? We even have an additional mitzvah to learn Torah while we are traveling, as it says (Devarim 6:7), "While you walk on the way." What did Yosef mean?

I suggest that Yosef knew his brothers quite well. He knew that once they started discussing one topic of halachah, they would digress and debate others as well. The Torah is one large entity, almost like the anatomy of the human body. All of our 248 organs and 365 sinews are intertwined with each other and dependent on the functioning of one another. Similarly, a talmid chacham who discusses a topic in Torah can't limit himself to that one topic, as all of Torah is intertwined and dependent on another part of Torah.

Yosef was worried that if the brothers were to involve themselves in halachah, they would eventually come to discuss their sale of him and its injustice. Arguments would soon ensue as to the righteousness of their deed. Some of the brothers would even take sides, causing friction and antagonism. This was something he wanted to avoid. And so Yosef asked them not to discuss any detailed laws or topics while they journeyed home.



### Every Person's Portion in Torah

*“He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen; and they arrived in the region of Goshen”*

*(Bereishit 46:28)*

In a figurative sense, this pasuk can refer to one who learns Torah. One who transmits Torah and instructs others, receives special treatment. Hashem Himself leads him forward, as the name Yehudah, which contains the Name of Hashem, represents. Hashem will cast His illumination and show him the way.

Chazal teach us that Yaakov Avinu learned Torah in the tents of Shem and Ever. He was called (Bereishit 25:27) “a dweller of tents (of learning)” and an אִישׁ תָּם (lit. a man of simplicity). The word תָּם spells backwards the word תָּמָה, and signifies the degree of effort Yaakov put into his learning. It was wearying and all-inclusive. The Torah that the Avot learned was passed down from generation to generation. Even in Egypt, Yaakov established a yeshiva. The tribe

of Levi headed the yeshiva in Goshen and kept the tradition alive.

If so, we are puzzled by Moshe Rabbeinu and his ascent up Har Sinai. What Torah did Moshe bring down by kabbalat haTorah that Am Yisrael did not yet have? Didn't Moshe learn in this yeshiva and absorb all that Yaakov transmitted?

The answer is that Moshe was taught on Har Sinai everything that will ever be asked and expounded upon. Whatever novel chiddush a future talmid will relate, has already been learned by Moshe Rabbeinu (Yerushalmi Megillah 4:1). Similarly, Moshe Rabbeinu merited learning the secrets of the Torah while he ascended Up High.

The Torah was given for us to uncover the chiddushim that are contained within its terse words. Each person has a designated portion waiting for him. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 90a) says, "Every Jew has a portion in the World to Come." This also refers to that spark of illumination that one can reveal by delving into the Torah. "Fortunate is the one who comes Above with his learning in hand" (Pesachim 50a). This refers to the novella he acquires through toil and effort, those that Moshe Rabbeinu gleaned on Har Sinai.

The Torah is no longer found up Above. It was Moshe who brought down this element of 'chiddush' which we are enjoined to uncover. Every Jew, even the simplest, can discover in Torah and reveal his 'allotted' portion. This also becomes our responsibility and can be held against us if we don't exert ourselves. By toiling in Torah we can merit Hashem illuminating our eyes and guiding our steps, just as Yehudah led the way for Am Yisrael's settlement in Egypt.



## The Light of Torah

*“He sent Yehudah ahead of him to Yosef, to prepare ahead of him in Goshen; and they arrived in the region of Goshen”*

*(Bereishit 46:28)*

Yehudah had an important job to do. Yaakov instructed Yehudah to pave the way, both physically and spiritually, for Am Yisrael's settlement in Egypt.

Egypt was known for its spirit of tumah. They encouraged promiscuity and fostered the kelippah elements of this world. Yaakov Avinu appointed Yehudah in charge of creating a haven in Egypt that would allow Am Yisrael the physical space, and spiritual atmosphere, to grow and develop into the Jewish nation.

The word להורות (to prepare) is related to the word אורות (lights). This refers to Yehudah's spiritual preparations of dealing with the Egyptian culture. Although the true 'light' of Torah did not yet descend into the world until Har Sinai, Yaakov and his sons exerted tremendous effort in distilling the teachings that were passed down and reflecting their light of Torah to the next generation. This is what kept Am Yisrael on the path and led them to Har Sinai.



# Vayechi



## The Pillar of Torah

*“Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Yaakov – the years of his life – were one hundred and forty-seven years”*

*(Bereishit 47:28)*

Ordinarily, a Sefer Torah has some empty space to separate parshiyot from one another. The exception to this rule is our parashah, as the parashah of *Vayechi* follows that of *Vayigash* with no break whatsoever between them. Rashi brings two explanations as to why this is so.

The Hebrew word for a ‘closed’ parashah (one that has no break or empty line between it and the following one) is סתומה. This word can also refer to something which is concealed or suppressed. When Yaakov Avinu passed away, the eyes and hearts of Am Yisrael were ‘closed’ by the enormity of the *galut* which was about to take place. This is one reason why our parashah is ‘closed.’ Secondly, Yaakov Avinu wanted to reveal when the end of *galut* would be, but it was subsequently withheld from him.

The second answer is understandable. Yaakov, out of love and concern for his children, wanted to reveal a secret that was given to him, the date for the End of Days. Yet the Divine Will was that this secret should not be revealed. The first answer of Rashi, though, leaves us a bit intrigued. What is the significance and timing of these pesukim? Yaakov actually lived for quite some years in Egypt, and towards the end of the parashah we find Yaakov blessing his children before he dies. Why does the Torah write the length of Yaakov's life and the forewarning of a difficult *galut* at the onset of the parashah? We are told (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:8) that the *galut* did not even begin as long as the Shevatim were still alive.

Perhaps we can understand the import of these words from Yaakov's overriding concern over their sojourn in Egypt. When the Shevatim and their families were on the way to Egypt, Yaakov sent Yehudah ahead to establish a yeshiva. He realized that this was the only way for Am Yisrael to weather the *galut* of Egypt. Torah inoculates and safeguards Am Yisrael from the influence of materialism and assimilation. Without Torah, a Jew doesn't stand a chance. David Hamelech expressed this best when he said (*Tehillim* 119:92), "Had Your Torah not been my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction." David felt the pressing need for learning Torah, without which he felt empty, almost as a pauper hungering for food.

This pasuk obviously cannot be interpreted literally, as David was quite wealthy. Actually, the Gemara discusses the crown which David Hamelech wore. It was studded with myriads of jewels and was too heavy for David to wear. It required a miraculous intervention to cause it to hover above his head and give him the appearance of wearing it (see Tosafot in *Avodah Zara* 44a).

This brings out the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew. The crown of David represents man's involvement with materialism and

his pursuit of wealth and power. A tzaddik like David is preoccupied with spirituality, and thus finds involvement in the mundane and physical world burdening. This is represented by the 'weight' of the jewel-studded crown. A non-Jewish king though, would have no trouble wearing such a crown. His preoccupation with materialism goes hand in hand with his 'burdening' the mass and weight of all physical matter.

Great tzaddikim never leave the atmosphere of Torah. It is told about the Admor of Satmar zt"l, that even when he would take a vacation, he would be constantly speaking words of Torah. For such righteous people, vacations are not a descent into the quagmire of materialism or an admission ticket for the pursuit of pleasure. They do not need a hands-on approach to the physical world in order to breathe in new life and replenish their batteries. Their very involvement in Torah vitalizes them, as it says (*Yeshayahu* 40:31), "Those whose hope is in Hashem will have renewed strength."

Yaakov worried over the fate of his descendants. He stressed the only hope for their preservation. Am Yisrael and the Torah are bound one to each other. As his energy dwindled, Yaakov's passing loomed overhead as a harbinger of the difficulties in store. His children wondered how they would survive. I, too, have felt this on occasion. I have witnessed how the elders of the previous generation agonized over the future in store. The infirmities of old age wearied them until they could no longer lead others and stem the tide. Those around them could do nothing to alleviate the situation. They stood by, feeling helpless and hopeless.

This is why the beginning of the parashah is 'closed.' Yaakov's energy dwindled, and his remaining years were not as productive as his previous ones. His sons felt this and their eyes, too, were 'closed' from worry over the lack of leadership and the beginning of their descent into the Egyptian bondage.

This could also explain why Yaakov's blessings to his children do not start with the same introductory phrase as Moshe Rabbeinu's did. Regarding Moshe, the pasuk (*Devarim* 33:1) says, "This is the *berachah* that Moshe blessed..." whereas regarding Yaakov, the pasuk proceeds to list the *berachot* without any such introduction.

It would seem that the brothers did not feel that the moment was right for blessing. Yaakov's passing meant for them the end of *berachah*, as he would be taking with him all the Torah he learned, leaving the world bereft of Torah (as the world did not yet merit receiving it). And Torah is the greatest blessing. This is why the Torah does not say, "This is the *berachah* that Yaakov blessed..." However, in the days of Moshe Rabbeinu, the Torah had already been given, and so his passing did not mark the end of Torah.

This teaches us a great lesson. Yaakov merited receiving Torah only because of his tremendous efforts in forgoing the comforts and luxuries of life. Similarly, the Jews who stood at Har Sinai accepted its way of life which negates any other yoke or desire save for Hashem's. This is why the blessings of Torah were given to them, as they made themselves worthy 'vessels.' One who tries to taste Torah, though, without forgoing worldly vanities and physical pleasures, will not succeed. He hasn't yet fashioned the vessel to capture its elusive delight or house its spiritual blessing.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ The parashah of *Vayechi* is a 'closed' parashah. This also refers to something which is concealed or suppressed. When Yaakov Avinu passed away, the eyes and hearts of Am Yisrael were 'closed' by the enormity of the *galut* which was about to take place. Secondly, Yaakov Avinu wanted to reveal when the end of *galut* would be, but it was subsequently withheld from him.

- ◆ If Yaakov was still alive and well, why were their eyes ‘closed’ from the impending servitude? The bondage did not yet officially start until after the last of the Shevatim passed away.
- ◆ Yaakov was the pillar of Torah. With his passing, the Torah he had received would disappear, and this signaled, more than anything else, the start of *galut*.
- ◆ Moshe Rabbeinu’s blessing to Am Yisrael begins with the words, “This is the *berachah*...” Yaakov’s blessing lacked such an introduction as the brothers felt that the moment was too fraught with trepidation. In Moshe’s days, the Torah was already given, and his passing did not mark the end of Torah.



## The One Who is Commanded

***“Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Yaakov – the years of his life – were one hundred and forty-seven years”***

*(Bereishit 47:28)*

Chazal (*Bereishit Rabbah* 86:2) say that the whole train of events surrounding the sale of Yosef was divinely orchestrated. Hashem planned Yosef’s abduction from the very beginning. All of the tribulations of Yosef were only a means to an end, in order to bring Yaakov down to Egypt. His dreams, being thrown into a pit, sold as a slave, and winding up in Egypt were all part of that Master Plan. Even the famine that afflicted the entire known civilized world was really a ploy towards that goal.

This should bring us to ask – why did Hashem want Yaakov so desperately to go down to Egypt? Why not let him finish his life peacefully at home, just as his forefathers did? Hashem could have just as easily allowed Yaakov to stay in the land of his ancestors and have his children burden the *galut*. There is something deeper here, more than what meets the eye.

Let us ask another question. It is well-known that in the future, at the End of Days, all of the festivals will be annulled, except for three – Purim, Chanukah, and Yom Kippur (*Maggid Meisharim, Vayakheil*). What is so special about these festivals? Why will they still be observed, when such meaningful and uplifting festivals such as Pesach or Sukkot will not be given any such exclusion?

Perhaps we can draw a correlation between the situation of the Jewish people in the days of Egypt to that of Chanukah. We find that the Jews in the days of the Greeks were overwhelmingly assimilated. Except for a handful of stalwart individuals, the Chashmonaim, the Jews had become Hellenized. The Greeks made it their goal to cause the Jews to forget the Torah and mingle amongst the nations of the world. Similarly, the Egyptians wanted the Jews to lose their identity as Jews. Yet herein lies the difference. The Egyptians were not successful in eroding the differences between themselves and the Jews. Although many Jews did succumb to idolatry, they still kept their identity as Jews.

Chazal (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:19) tell us that the Jews in Egypt held on dearly to three distinguishing traits: they did not change their mode of dress, their spoken language, or their distinctively Jewish forenames. By keeping these three things, the Jews effectively guarded their national identity and kept themselves far from the deplorable practices and indecent mores of their contemporary society. This served as a merit for their ultimate redemption from Egypt.

Where did the Jews draw the strength to guard this last remnant of their spark of Jewishness? Without the pillar of Torah, it would seem impossible to accomplish such a feat. Even during the days of the Chashmonaim, the effects of the *galut* were catastrophic. Were it not for that valiant family, who knows where Am Yisrael would be today. How did the Jews in Egypt manage to survive?

We can now better appreciate the influence of Yaakov's presence in Egypt. It was Yaakov who transmitted the traditions he had received, which stretched back to Adam Harishon. He taught his children the Torah he had learned and infused their lives with great light. It was this light that led the Jewish nation for the next two hundred years, while they dwelled amidst an immoral nation and lived in a foreign country. This is why Hashem wanted Yaakov to go down to Egypt with the Shevatim.

We must remember that the Torah had not yet been given to Am Yisrael. For Yaakov to plumb the depths of Torah and uncover its light of brilliance, required unusual strength. Yet Yaakov, the embodiment of Torah learning, knew that this was the only way for his children to survive the dark *galut*. He sent Yehudah, the courageous one from all of the brothers, ahead to Egypt for this purpose, to establish a yeshiva in the land of Goshen. It was the tribe of Levi which continued their dedication to learning and from whom sprang forth the leaders and educators of Am Yisrael. And it was the collective response of Am Yisrael as a whole in keeping their identity, which paved the way for them to receive the Torah on Har Sinai.

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 46:28) describes Yehudah's part in disseminating Torah, ואת יהודה שלח לפניו להורות (He sent Yehudah ahead of him, to prepare ahead of him.) The Hebrew word להורות is phonetically similar to the word אורות, denoting light. In a land darkened by the influence of the *Yetzer Hara* and the power of the

*kelippot*, Yaakov and his sons exerted all their might in learning Torah and bringing forth its light to the world. Hashem cherished this light and prepared Am Yisrael for their ultimate role as the Chosen Nation.

At a later point in history, Am Yisrael was once again beset with alien influences. The festival of Chanukah celebrates the triumph of those who learned Torah over the dark forces of the Greeks. What distinguishes Chanukah over other festivals?

We have a rule: One who is commanded to do, and does his duty, is greater than the one who is not commanded, and does so anyway (*Kiddushin* 31a). For some mysterious reason, when a person fulfills a commandment of the Torah because he is obligated to do so, his deed carries more weight than one who fulfills the same mitzvah without any such obligation. Why is this so? The reason is that once one is obligated to do something, the *Yetzer Hara* tries to put a stop to it. He fights tooth and nail to prevent us from doing Hashem's will, even throwing obstacles in our path. If one can overcome his obstacles and persevere in doing mitzvot, these mitzvot have much greater value in Hashem's eyes. They are significantly more praiseworthy than the mitzvot done by one who is not commanded.

During the period of the Greeks, the Jews were already commanded and obligated in keeping all of the laws of the Torah. The *Yetzer Hara* was working overtime in his battle against their observance. Thus the efforts of the Chashmonaim were so greatly rewarded. Hashem brought about the miracle of Chanukah and will continue to remember the dedication and struggle of the Chashmonaim, even in the era of the future.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ Yaakov's descent to Egypt led to the Jews being placed under the yoke of the Egyptians. Why did Hashem begin the *galut* of Egypt with

Yaakov's entry? Why did He not allow Yaakov to remain in the land of his forefathers and die there peacefully?

- ◆ Yaakov's presence and illumination of Torah gave Am Yisrael the ability to remain distinct in their Jewishness for the next two hundred years. The Jews kept three things which distinguished them as Jews and preserved their identity.
- ◆ In the future, the festival of Chanukah will still be observed, even after the festival of Pesach will be annulled. Why was the triumph of the Chashmonaim given such an exception?
- ◆ One who is obligated to fulfill commandments, is greatly rewarded for his efforts to combat the *Yetzer Hara*, who tries to prevent him from fulfilling his duties. The Jews in the days of the Greeks were under tremendous influence to assimilate. The merit of Torah that the Chashmonaim had was extremely prized by Hashem, much more than the learning done in the *galut* in Egypt.



## Menashe and Ephraim

*“And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine; Ephraim and Menashe shall be mine like Reuven and Shimon”*

*(Bereishit 48:5)*

The two sons of Yosef, Menashe and Ephraim, merited something that none of the other grandchildren of Yaakov merited. They were counted amongst the twelve tribes, being given equal status with

their uncles, Yosef's brothers. Additionally, when dividing up the land of Israel, these two were given their own individual portions. This honor also repeated itself by the encampment of the Jews in the desert and the offerings made upon the consecration of the Mishkan. Why were they so privileged?

Perhaps we need to look at the upbringing of these two brothers for the answer. Growing up in the decadent land of Egypt, amidst immorality and depravity, was not an easy task. And yet, they remained true to their heritage, righteous and markedly different from their gentile neighbors. They kept their Jewish identity and cleaved to the Torah.

Their situation was vastly different from those who grew up under Yaakov's wing in Canaan. The Shevatim were on 'home ground' and had Yaakov Avinu to guide them, whereas Menashe and Ephraim lived in a foreign land. Even so, they absorbed Torah, mastered its intricacies and became fluent in its language, and thus merited being on par with the Shevatim.

Yaakov Avinu knew that the Land of Israel would one day be divided amongst twelve Shevatim. He was also keenly aware that these twelve tribes would not include the tribe of Levi, as his 'inheritance' was destined to be Hashem's service. Realizing that Menashe and Ephraim had acted superbly in their role as Jews and learned what identified them as such, he agreed to give them equal status with the other Shevatim, bringing the number back to twelve.

This explains why Yosef himself was not counted amongst the Shevatim. Yosef accepted Yaakov's decision not to be personally included in his brothers' elevated rank. Instead, he rejoiced in his children's new status. A father never becomes jealous of the successes of his children, and Yosef was no exception. I would suggest, though, that Yosef was rewarded for his relinquishment

with an even greater honor. During the festival of Sukkot we are visited by supernal 'guests,' the *ushpizin*, who come to join in our mitzvah. Yosef is one of these *ushpizin* and merited being counted as one of the exalted leaders of our people, due to his acceptance of Yaakov's decision.

There is one thing which we find puzzling. Yaakov blessed Menashe and Ephraim to be similar to Reuven and Shimon. What is the significance of this? Perhaps we can explain as follows. Reuven was held important in Yaakov's eyes on account of being Yaakov's first issue (see Rashi on *Bereishit* 49:3). Just as Yaakov valued Reuven's entrance into the world, he similarly valued the emergence of Yosef's children and their being classified as Shevatim. The name of Shimon denotes Hashem's hearing of one's prayers (see *Bereishit* 29:33). Yaakov prayed that Hashem would heed his desire that Menashe and Ephraim should be counted amongst the Shevatim.

Yaakov wanted his children to accept Menashe and Ephraim into their midst and consider them as equals. By accepting them as their own, Am Yisrael would be one. This power of unity and harmony would then aid them in their mission of life. When Yaakov sought to bless his children, the pasuk (*Bereishit* 49:1-2) says, "Assemble yourselves...gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Yaakov." This alludes to the strength of Am Yisrael, their *achdut*. When Am Yisrael have unity, the *kelippot* have no sway over them. Specifically when we are in disarray and fractioned into factions, it gains its grip and wreaks havoc amongst us. Yaakov cautioned his children and stressed the key to receiving Divine blessing. Our oneness as Yaakov's offspring rises to the fore when we act accordingly, and girds us with strength to oppose the forces of *tumah*.

Perhaps this can also be derived from the blessing that Yaakov gave to Menashe and Ephraim. We know that Reuven, despite being ousted of the birthright by Yosef, sought to save Yosef from the

hands of his brothers. He convinced them not to take Yosef's life, and secretly wished to return Yosef to his father. Once in Egypt, Reuven also sought the release of Shimon who had been thrown into prison, despite Shimon's aggressive nature. Similarly, Yaakov blessed Menashe and Ephraim that the other Shevatim would accept them as equals, just as Reuven (and eventually Shimon) lovingly did for Yosef.

By accepting Menashe and Ephraim, the brothers would rectify their old hatred of Yosef and merit Hashem's presence dwelling in their midst.

#### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Why did Menashe and Ephraim receive a portion in the Land of Israel and be counted amongst the Shevatim?
- ◆ Menashe and Ephraim grew up in Egypt, which was known for its depravity and immorality. Yet, they remained righteous and markedly different from their gentile neighbors. They kept their Jewish identity and cleaved to the Torah.
- ◆ Additionally, Yaakov knew that the tribe of Levi would not receive a portion in the land.
- ◆ Yaakov blessed Menashe and Ephraim that they should be like Reuven and Shimon. Reuven was the first issue of Yaakov, and the emergence of the children of Yosef as Shevatim was no less important in his eyes. Yaakov also prayed that his decision be blessed from Above.
- ◆ Reuven saved Yosef from his brothers and sought Shimon's release from prison. Thus the blessing of Yaakov promoted unity amongst Am Yisrael and assured them of Divine blessings if they would accept Menashe and Ephraim into their midst.



## The Wars of Yaakov

*“Shimon and Levi are comrades, their weaponry is a stolen craft. Into their conspiracy, may my soul not enter! With their congregation, do not join, O my honor! For in their rage they murdered people and at their whim they hamstringed an ox. Accursed is their rage for it is intense, and their wrath for it is harsh; I will separate them within Yaakov, and I will disperse them in Yisrael”*

*(Bereishit 49:5-7)*

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 34:25) describes how Shimon and Levi banded together to destroy the city of Shechem and all its inhabitants. This was in response to the defilement of their sister Dina. Did Yaakov agree to their actions? In this parashah, Yaakov shows his disapproval by cursing their anger (which had led them to wipe out Shechem) and even distributed them amongst the other Shevatim.

What needs clarification is why Yaakov fought so valiantly against his own brother Eisav. Rashi (*ibid.* 32:8) writes that Yaakov actually prepared for war. And when confronted with the Angel of Eisav (see *ibid.* 32:26), he fought with all his strength. Where was Yaakov's desire for peace then? How do we explain these seemingly contradictory policies of Yaakov and reconcile this apparent inconsistency?

It would seem that when it came to spiritual endeavors, Yaakov sought no compromise. He battled with all his might against any influence that sought to defile his family's spirituality. This is why

he prepared for war when he heard of Eisav's approach. He had no desire that his children should fall prey to Eisav's blandishments or join their 'loving' uncle. The true character of Eisav was demonstrated by his descendants, the people of the Roman Empire, who were known for their licentiousness and immorality. They gloated over their success in wooing Jews away from their heritage. This is what Yaakov attempted to avoid, and is why he battled against Eisav.

Against Shechem, though, Yaakov had no need to battle. Its inhabitants were not out to get Yaakov. After acquiescing to having a *brit milah*, they were on the road to embracing Yaakov's way of life. Thus there was no true need to destroy the city of Shechem, and Yaakov berated Shimon and Levi for their rash actions. Through this, Yaakov gave a message over to his children. A Jew looks for peace. Only when something attempts to affect his spiritual standing and relationship with Hashem does he go out and battle its influence, without making compromises.

At the end of parashat *Vayishlach*, the Torah lists the descendants of Eisav. When we compare that list with the descendants of Yaakov, we notice a glaring difference. The sons of Yaakov all had families, and yet their wives are not mentioned by name. Eisav's children, on the other hand, have their wives prominently listed. Why is this so? Because Eisav and his descendants have one topic with which they find interest. Their heads are filled with the glamor and beauty of their wives (or of other men's wives), and this is how they spend their lives. To this day, the nations of the world are steeped in wanton behavior and flagrant indecency. We see that this is what they constantly have on their mind, often to the negation of all else. The Jewish nation, though, follows the path laid down by Yaakov. Their chastity and morality have no equal. They understand the *middah* of *tzeniut* and strive to conceal that which is meant to

be concealed, protecting the true honor and glory of the Jewish daughter.

When Eisav finally met Yaakov and began to eye his possessions, Yosef Hatzaddik stood in front of his mother Rachel to protect her from Eisav's gaze (*Bereishit Rabbah* 78:10). This action of Yosef was a symbol of the *tzeniut* and *kedushah* that Yaakov fostered in his home, as well as an example of the latent powers that the young Yosef would one day demonstrate in Egypt. Yaakov also hid his daughter Dina in a box, to prevent Eisav's lustful stare. Perhaps Yaakov knew that he would be punished for not giving Eisav the opportunity to wed Dina and repent (see *ibid.* 76:9); even so, he did not want any influence from Eisav seeping into his family.

This is the message that Yaakov bequeathed us. When it came to daily interpersonal behavior and relationships, he expressed the way of peace. He reproached Shimon and Levi for their rash act. But when it came to matters of principle and standards of morality, he made no compromises. He fought against the inroads of Eisav and his decadent 'culture' with all his might.

### ———— In Summary ————

- ◆ Yaakov reproached Shimon and Levi for acting rashly and wiping out the city of Shechem. Why is this different from his own dealings with his brother Eisav? He prepared for war and fought against the Angel of Eisav with all his might. How do we reconcile this apparent inconsistency?
- ◆ Yaakov stressed peace as a way of life, when it came to relationships and interpersonal behavior. The inhabitants of Shechem had already undergone a *brit milah*, and were on the road to embracing his way of life. Eisav, though, was a threat to Yaakov's spirituality.

- ◆ The Torah lists the descendants of Eisav, their wives prominently displayed. Eisav and his descendants have one topic with which they interest themselves. Their heads are filled with the glamor and beauty of their wives. The Jewish nation, though, follows the path laid down by Yaakov. Their chastity and morality have no equal. They understand the *middah* of *tzeniut* and strive to conceal that which is meant to be concealed. That is why the Torah does not list the names of the wives of the Shevatim.



## The Merit of the Forefathers

*“When Yaakov finished instructing his sons, he drew his feet onto the bed; he expired and was gathered to his people”*

*(Bereishit 49:33)*

Rashi explains why the pasuk does not say that Yaakov Avinu actually died. According to tradition (see *Ta’anit* 5b), Yaakov did not die, in the accepted sense of the word. He simply passed from this world to the next, exchanging his temporal ‘life’ with the life of the next world. Perhaps we can compare this to someone who moves to another country and exchanges his citizenship for a different one. Similarly, when we die, we ‘move’ from one land to another, exchanging our present way of life with a different form of existence.

Perhaps we should ask: why then do we cry over the demise of a loved one? Does the one who passed away not have a brighter, happier life? One answer is that we cry at the possibility that the

deceased does not have enough merits to award him entry into the Land of Eternal Life. By crying, we help their soul to be elevated. Our tears and prayers speak up on their behalf in the Heavenly Court.

Once on the subject of arousing Divine Mercy, I would like to dwell on the first blessing we say in Shemoneh Esrei. We say, “The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov.” Why do we start off our prayers by mentioning the three Patriarchs? Wouldn’t it be more fitting to begin with the praises of the Al-mighty? Perhaps if we digress and expound on the Patriarchs, we may gain a deeper understanding of how Hashem values our prayers and where the merit of the forefathers stands in the Upper Regions.

The Torah dedicates the whole of sefer *Bereishit* to portraying the lives and deeds of the Avot. Their *middot* are our guiding light. Avraham Avinu exemplified the trait of *chessed*. Chazal (*Midrash Tehillim*, 110) tell us that characteristically, Avraham’s tent had entrances on all sides, one facing each direction of the compass. This was to facilitate his practice of *chessed*, as every visitor found an ‘open door’ without fail. We are told of his *mesirut nefesh* for *chessed*, how he entertained three foreigners and attended to their needs, even after his painful *brit milah*. From his actions we learn (*Shabbat* 127a), “Hospitality is greater than hosting the *Shechinah*.” He excused himself from Hashem’s presence and attended to his guests.

From Yitzchak Avinu we learn how to serve Hashem whole-heartedly. Yitzchak was willing to be sacrificed upon the altar, if that was Hashem’s will. We need to learn this lesson and translate it into action. In our daily life, we are confronted with many situations which require some form of *mesirut nefesh*. Often we need to negate our own will before the will of Hashem.

Yaakov Avinu personified the effort required in learning Torah. He wearied himself over Torah and became the prime example of Torah learning with *mesirut nefesh*. He taught us by example, how important it is. No excuses can justify deterioration in one's Torah learning. Without Torah, a Jew is empty, and his life is not worthy of being lived. We should constantly strive to boost our level of learning and overcome setbacks or hindrances. As the Gemara (*Pesachim* 50a) says, "Fortunate is he who comes Above with his Torah learning intact."

After recounting some of the grandeur of the Avot, perhaps we can now understand why we begin our Shemoneh Esrei by mentioning the Patriarchs. By saying the names of our illustrious forefathers, we are reminded of their exemplary *middot*, and at the same time, we plead before the Heavenly Throne and ask to be remembered in their merit. This vouches for us and arouses Divine Mercy, similar to our tears shed on the passing of a loved one. It is the desire to perfect our *middot* and live up to the standard set by the Avot which brings forth blessing from Above.

This could also explain why mentioning the names of the Patriarchs precedes the praises we extol Hashem with in Shemoneh Esrei. Our 'remembrance' of the Avot is the greatest praise we can give to the Al-mighty. We call out the names of the greatest servants of Hashem, and affirm our desire to follow in their path. This gives immense satisfaction and pride to Hashem. As the pasuk (*Tehillim* 68:35) says, "Give glory to Hashem, upon Israel is his pride." We give praise to Hashem by wanting to do as they did. Conversely, one who says the names of the forefathers but does not seek to follow in their path can be compared to a friend who says hello and then gives a slap in the face.

As mentioned before, the sefer of *Bereishit* contains the *middot* of

Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. It precedes the sefer of *Shemot* for a good reason. The sefer of *Shemot* depicts the ascent of Am Yisrael from lowly serfdom to a nation chosen by Hashem to receive the Torah. Before we can come to the giving of Torah, though, we first need to perfect our character. By learning about the lives of the Avot, we prepare the groundwork for building the most magnificent edifice.

When trying to influence a Jew who is far removed from Torah, we need to follow the same principle. We must show the joy and depth of mitzvot. The feelings of warmth and appreciation of family members, the care and attention we give to others, the tranquil atmosphere which pervades the Shabbat – these are all basic *middot* that precede the acceptance of binding obligations and responsibilities. Without such preparation, any learning done will quickly be lost.

Similarly, one who daily says Kaddish for a parent while still seeking the pleasures of life and acting without spiritual discretion will not get very far. At the end of the year, he will return to his former way of life without any trace of refinement or alteration of character. Torah can find a home only by one who works on his *middot* and prepares himself to be a worthy receptacle. The best way to commemorate the death of a loved one is to make some change in one's *middot*. By doing so, it will become a permanent fixture of one's behavior and an eternal source of merit for the deceased.

I personally know of great tzaddikim who merited walking in the ways of our forefathers. The tzaddik, Rabbi Rafael Bordugo zt"l, was the Av Beit Din of Essaouira (Mogador, Morocco). He encompassed all three *middot* of *chessed*, Divine service, and Torah. Despite his great righteousness, all cried after his passing. He left us bereft of a

Torah giant, to flounder and drift without a guide. The reason we cry over the demise of a tzaddik is not for his sake. We are not worried about his eternal portion in the Upper Realm. He will surely find reward for his deeds. It is for our own loss.

How empty was the world after the passing of Rabbi Nissim Revivo zt"l! Many women cried bitterly over his demise, as they were left without an answer to the status of their children, whether or not they were considered legitimate. Similarly, we are apprehensive on the passing of every great tzaddik. Who will be our Heavenly advocate? Who will pray for us and worry over our needs? Tzaddikim find rest on High while we find ourselves entangled in worldly trivialities and caught up in materialistic pursuits.

The greatness of Rabbi Rafael Bordugo zt"l was seen clearly when he came to dwell in Eretz Yisrael. He acted with the greatest humility, not disclosing his elevated position as Av Beit Din, nor drawing attention to his contacts with the ministers and royal families of France and Morocco. He acted his entire life in a likewise manner. Materialistic possessions meant nothing to him. These qualities of humility and austerity run like a golden thread throughout the Bordugo family, and his son, the Av Beit Din of Netanyah, is blessed with the same traits. On the demise of this great tzaddik, Rabbi Rafael zt"l, we can also apply what was said before about Yaakov Avinu. He still lives, albeit in a different realm, and still continues worrying over Am Yisrael, just as he did in this world.

When Rabbi Rafael Bordugo would appear before nobility or kings, they would be awed at his actions, which left a tremendous impression upon all those who came into contact with him. We should all take a lesson from all the tzaddikim who grace our world,

and attempt to walk in their ways. By acting in such a manner, the world will see the refinement and virtue of all religious Jews and will bring about a great *kiddush Hashem*.

### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ Yaakov Avinu did not die, in the accepted sense of the word. The Torah does not record his death as it does by others. He simply passed from this world to the next, exchanging his temporal ‘life’ with the life of the next world.
- ◆ Why do we cry at the demise of a tzaddik? He surely is in a much better place. For some, we cry to help their soul be elevated. Our tears and prayers speak up on their behalf in the Heavenly Court.
- ◆ The Torah describes the lives of the Avot in sefer *Bereishit* in order to teach us good *middot*. Avraham Avinu was the paradigm of *chessed*, Yitzchak exemplified *mesirut nefesh*, and Yaakov personified the pillar of Torah.
- ◆ This is why we begin our Shemoneh Esrei by mentioning their names. It is the greatest praise to the Al-mighty. By saying the names of our illustrious forefathers, we are reminded of their exemplary *middot*, and at the same time, we plead before the Heavenly Throne and ask to be remembered in their merit.
- ◆ Sefer *Bereishit* precedes *Shemot* as the refinement of *middot* naturally precedes learning Torah and is the key to redemption.
- ◆ We cry over the death of tzaddikim because of our own loss. Who will be our Heavenly advocate? Who will pray for us and worry over our needs? Tzaddikim find rest on High while we find ourselves entangled in worldly trivialities and caught up in materialistic pursuits. We felt this way specifically by the passing of Rabbi Nissim Revivo zt”l and Rabbi Rafael Bordugo zt”l.



## Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael

*“His forty-day term was completed, for such is the term of the embalmed; and Egypt bewailed him for seventy days”*

*(Bereishit 50:3)*

*“So Yosef went up to bury his father, and with him went up all of Pharaoh’s servants, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt”*

*(ibid. 50:7)*

*“When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning in Goren HaAtad, they said, ‘This is a grievous mourning for Egypt.’ Therefore, it was named Avel Mitzrayim, which is across the Jordan”*

*(ibid. 50:11)*

After Yaakov Avinu passed away, both Am Yisrael and the Egyptian people mourned their loss. This continued for a total of seventy days. The pasuk then describes how they brought Yaakov to the land of Canaan. The brothers carried their father to his final resting place and the elders and wise ones of Egypt tagged along.

What was the reaction of the people of Canaan? The Torah says that they referred to the funeral procession as the “grief of Egypt.” This sounds a bit erroneous. Wasn’t the mourning over the loss of the leader and father of Am Yisrael? Why does the Torah see fit to tell us of their mistaken perception?

Perhaps we can add to our inquiry. Yosef did not come alone. He had the entire armed forces of Egypt at his disposal. His brothers were also known for their great strength. Had he wished, he could have taken over the Land of Canaan and settled down right then and there. Why didn't Am Yisrael take advantage of his position and conquer the Land? Why did they choose to return to Egypt?

Actually, the answer to the second question answers the first.

It would seem that the Canaanites were fully aware of the destiny of Am Yisrael. They were told that at some point in time, the Jewish nation would arrive and conquer the land. Watching the funeral procession of Yaakov Avinu, they had reason to fear. Similarly, the Torah tells us that Avimelech and his general had come to Avraham Avinu to forge a pact (*Bereishit* 26:26-30). He asked Avraham that his descendants not attack the Philistines or harm them in any way. This shows that the nations of the world were attuned to Hashem's Providence over Avraham and his family, and feared the blessings he received. Similarly, when Am Yisrael stood at the outskirts of Canaan, the nation of *Girgashi* (one of the seven nations of Canaan) opted to leave their homeland for the same reason. They had no desire to enter into a lost battle (see *Vayikra Rabbah* 17:6).

Yet by Yaakov's demise, the Canaanites were not afraid. They knew that the time for Am Yisrael's conquest had not yet come. They witnessed how Yosef and his brothers accepted their fate as vassals of the Egyptian Kingdom. They did not attempt a coup or initiate a revolt. They returned to Egypt just as they had come. This indicated their status as Egyptian 'citizens' and not independent foreigners. And so the Canaanites described the public mourning as 'Egypt's grief.'

Am Yisrael knew that the Land would one day be theirs. Hashem had promised Avraham Avinu that his descendants would leave

Egypt with great wealth after many years of servitude, and would return to Canaan. Yet that time had not yet come. Am Yisrael accepted the Divine decree and were not about to force Heaven's hand to expedite their destiny. This is why they returned to Egypt without demurral or complaint.

Am Yisrael's behavior was a *kiddush Hashem*. The nations were impressed at their belief in Hashem and their acceptance of His Will. Despite their strength in might and numbers, they returned to Egypt as expected of them by the Divine plan, submitting to four hundred years of servitude. Their first thoughts were to do Hashem's Will; only afterwards did they think about their national longings for Eretz Yisrael.

#### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ After Yaakov Avinu passed away, the Jews and Egyptians accompanied him on his journey to his final resting place. The Canaanites described the procession as the "grief of Egypt." Wasn't this a mistaken perception?
- ◆ Am Yisrael went to Canaan with Yosef and the Egyptian army. Why didn't they take over the Land of Canaan? Why did they go back to Egypt?
- ◆ The Canaanites knew that the time for Am Yisrael's conquest had not yet come. They saw Am Yisrael accept Hashem's Will to return to Egypt as vassals, submitting to four hundred years of servitude. Thus they were actually Egyptian 'citizens' and that is why their mourning was called 'Egypt's grief.'
- ◆ This was a *kiddush Hashem*. The nations were impressed at their belief. Their first thoughts were to do Hashem's Will; only afterwards, did they think about their national longings for Eretz Yisrael.



## Bitul Torah

*“So Yosef went up to bury his father, and with him went up all of Pharaoh’s servants, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all of Yosef’s household – his brothers, and his father’s household; only their young children, their flocks, and their cattle did they leave in the region of Goshen. And he brought up with him both chariots and horsemen; and the camp was very imposing. They came to Goren HaAtad, which is across the Jordan, and there they held a very great and imposing eulogy; and he ordained a seven-day mourning period for his father”*

*(Bereishit 50:7-10)*

Yaakov Avinu was accorded great honor by his funeral procession. The Egyptian elders accompanied the Jews all the way to Canaan and mourned Yaakov’s loss. He was eulogized and buried amidst a multitude of mourners, and the brothers sat shivah in Canaan. Such a display of grief was unusual, and the Canaanites were impressed by the entire proceedings, calling the place they assembled at “Egypt’s Grief.”

There was one person who was unimpressed by the whole ‘deal.’ Yaakov’s brother, Eisav, was not saddened by Yaakov’s demise. In fact, he had something up his sleeve. As the Shevatim gathered to lay their father to rest, Eisav contested Yaakov’s right to be buried in the Me’arat Hamachpelah (see *Sotah* 13a).

What possessed Eisav to contest this point in front of thousands of mourners? Wasn't he afraid for his life? Eisav was actually killed as a result of his disgraceful challenge. A grandson of Yaakov, Chushim the son of Dan, decapitated him in one swift blow. What was Eisav thinking?

In truth, Eisav knew what he was doing. He understood that as long as Am Yisrael learned Torah, he had no superiority. And so, he waited for when they would interrupt their learning and be busy doing something else. Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah* 65:20) say that when the 'voice of Yaakov' is used in learning Torah, the 'hands of Eisav' have no power over them. However, when the voice of Yaakov is silent, then Eisav can wield his 'arms.'

Eisav thought that this period of mourning was a crack in Am Yisrael's spiritual armor, the one he had been waiting for all of those years. Yet he was grossly mistaken. Mourning is not a 'break' from one's learning. It is a set of circumstances that is 'forced' upon us, one which does not require us to forgo our responsibility to learn Torah. In fact, one is allowed (and should) learn (after shivah) for the elevation of the departed's soul, and the Shevatim most probably did just that.

From the outcome of events we see that Am Yisrael were not held accountable for their preoccupation with Yaakov's burial. The need of the hour demanded their participation, and was not considered *bitul* Torah. Thus they were able to overcome Eisav's interference without undue effort. This shows that they were doing only what they should have been doing, and Eisav's planned contention was doomed from the start. He wanted to take what did not belong to him, and was rejected by Heaven.

There was another point in history where those mourning were held accountable for their laxity in learning Torah. We find that after

Moshe Rabbeinu's passing, Yehoshua was taken to task for forgetting some laws of Torah. Some say that he cried excessively and was told to curtail his mourning (see *Midrash Tanna'im, Devarim* 34:5). Hashem was not satisfied over the excessive mourning and told Yehoshua to arise and begin to move forward.

From this episode with Eisav, we realize the dangers of *bitul* Torah and laxity in mitzvot. If *chas v'chalilah* we are remiss, the nations of the world 'voice' their contention, even resorting to physical violence. It is the power of Torah which stands on our behalf, and precedes our 'court case' in the Upper Realms. The pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 58:8) says, "Your righteousness shall precede you." Similarly, it says "Fortunate is the one who comes here with his learning in hand" (*Pesachim* 50a).

I once saw a story which illustrates this point. The tzaddik, Rabbi Yehoshua Pinto zt"l of Marrakech, Morocco, constantly learned and toiled in Torah. Once, an Arab thief tried to enter his house in middle of the night. He began to climb along the rooftop, when suddenly he fell down the chimney, and was strangled to death by the laundry line strung there at the bottom. I have no doubt that the merit of Torah is what protected Rabbi Yehoshua and his family from larceny. Torah protects its learners from all harm.

My mother told me that since then, Jew and Arab alike treat his abode with great reverence, and come to kiss the place where this miracle occurred. Once she peeked inside the chimney and was surprised to see a round artifact dangling within. She was told later that it was the skull of the Arab thief, left there to 'tell the tale' and provide witness to Hashem's protection. Fortunate are the tzaddikim whom Hashem watches with such care!

One who uses his time for learning properly, even when he takes a 'rest' and lies down, does not really take a 'break.' Before going to

sleep at night, we say the parashah of Kriyat Shema, and thus our sleep is considered up Above as if we were still learning Torah. This is also why we wash our hands when we wake up in the morning. We try to continue this tenor of activity and ‘train of thought’ from our slumber into our wakeful hours. The souls of tzaddikim nightly rise Above and continue their study of Torah. And Hashem gives the appropriate reward for all those who learn Torah day and night.

### — In Summary —

- ◆ At Yaakov’s demise, Jew and Egyptian alike cried. Eisav tried to prevent Yaakov’s burial but was killed by Chushim the son of Dan. What was Eisav thinking?
- ◆ Eisav thought that the voice of ‘Yaakov’ had been silenced, as the Shevatim were preoccupied with Yaakov’s burial. Mourning is not a ‘break’ from one’s learning and does not require us to forgo our responsibility to learn Torah. The Shevatim learned for the elevation of Yaakov’s soul.
- ◆ Yehoshua mourned excessively for Moshe Rabbeinu and was told to stop. The sin of *bitul* Torah is grave and the nations of the world ‘voice’ their contention upon our laxity. It is the power of Torah which stands on our behalf, and precedes our ‘court case’ in the Upper Realms.
- ◆ One who learns Torah properly during the day does not take a ‘break’ from his Torah even when he lies down at night.



## Am Yisrael

*“So Yosef went up to bury his father, and with him went up all of Pharaoh’s servants, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt”*

*(Bereishit 50:7)*

After Yaakov Avinu passed away, he was treated to a funeral the likes of which had never been seen. He was held in such esteem that kings and officers paid him honor. As the premier Patriarch, even the Egyptians felt the loss and mourned his demise. They all accompanied him to his final resting place.

I was perplexed by one thing. Where were all the men that the Avot brought under the wings of the *Shechinah*? The Torah does not tell us that they participated in Yaakov’s funeral. We are taught that the Avot inspired many to return and recognize the Creator (see Rambam, *Avodah Zara* 1:3). Shouldn’t they have also shown honor to Yaakov and joined in the procession? Why do we not find any other mention of the converts that Avraham and Sarah made in Charan?

I suggest that that their change of life was short-lived. As long as the Avot were alive, they held onto the teachings of their new-found leaders. Once the Avot passed away though, there was no live figure to inspire them to perfection. They eventually drifted away and returned to their former idolatrous way of life. This is why we find no more mention in the Torah of their existence.

When Avraham Avinu passed away, the nations of the world paid their last respects. Avimelech, the king of the Philistines, cried out,

“Woe to the ship which has lost its captain!” (*Bava Basra* 91a). Many people were confused by the new stage in world affairs and lacked a guide to lead them through. The question here is the same as before. Why didn’t these people go and learn Torah in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever? It would seem, too, that they lost their way and drifted out of sight. The inspiration they gained from Avraham Avinu waned and dissipated until there was no one left to talk to.

The pasuk (*Bereishit* 35:8) describes how Yaakov mourned the passing of Devorah, the maidservant of his mother Rivka. What is the significance of this? Why does the Torah see fit to record this detail? It seems that Devorah excelled in her desire to persist. She came to religious observance under the guidance of the Avot and remained, watching the beauty of their character and the quality of their lives. She grew and was distinguished by her religious observance. This is in fulfillment of the pasuk (*Yeshayahu* 30:20), “Let your eyes envision your master.” By having a living guide to perfection, one can grow by leaps and bounds. Thus she was mourned after her passing, a fitting recognition for her strides towards greatness.

The Gemara (*Ketubot* 103b) tells of a certain laundryman who could not participate in the funeral of Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi. When he realized his absence, he was so distraught that he went up to the roof and jumped off, killing himself. Whereupon a *Bat Kol* declared that this man was destined for *Olam Haba*. This story is difficult to understand. Under normal circumstances, one who takes his life is held dearly accountable, as if he shed the blood of another human being. Why was this laundryman absolved from sin, even meriting the coveted honor of Gan Eden?

Perhaps we can explain as follows. He realized that his entire religious observance was in jeopardy. With the passing of his

mentor and guide, he felt adrift from his moorings, and visualized himself ending up throwing it all away. Even more, the Gemara relates how all those present at Rabbi Yehudah's funeral were promised eternal life. Feeling that he had nothing left to live for, he asserted that it would be better to die while he was still religious. The Heavenly Court agreed to his appraisal and rewarded him accordingly. Obviously, we cannot take upon ourselves the responsibility for such behavior and attempt to do the same.

The influence of tzaddikim upon their close circle of followers is inspiring and uplifting. Our job is to translate that influence into action and persist in our quest for greatness, even after they pass away.

#### ————— In Summary —————

- ◆ When Yaakov Avinu passed away, he was universally mourned. Why does the Torah not list the followers of the Avot who were drawn close to them as participating in the funeral?
- ◆ Although they were inspired by the lives of the Avot, they did not continue their observance after their demise. Without a guide, they went adrift.
- ◆ Devorah merited being mourned after her passing. She came to religious observance under the guidance of the Avot and had a living guide to perfection.
- ◆ The laundryman who jumped to his death after the passing of Rebbe was awarded *Olam Haba*. The Heavenly Court agreed to his appraisal that without his precious teacher, he would not have remained religious. Our job is to translate the influence of our teachers into action and persist in our quest for greatness, even after they pass away.



## Asking Forgiveness

*“Yosef’s brothers perceived that their father was dead, and they said, ‘Perhaps Yosef will nurse hatred against us and then he will surely repay us all the evil that we did him’”*

*(Bereishit 50:15)*

After Yaakov Avinu’s passing, the Shevatim began to worry. Perhaps Yosef would show his hatred for their selling him so many years before. Perhaps he would take revenge for throwing him into the pit. This, however, seems difficult to understand. Wasn’t Yosef known for his righteousness? Why did they think that he would take revenge?

Even more, the Shevatim knew that Am Yisrael would be under Egyptian rule for many years to come. Avraham Avinu was told that a foreign nation would subjugate them to servitude and affliction for “four hundred years” (*Bereishit 15:13*). Why didn’t they think that Yosef’s authority over them was the beginning of that rule? If true, there was nothing that they could really do to alleviate his dominion.

Perhaps the brothers were afraid of just that – Yosef’s dominion over them. When one is ruled by a sibling or hit by a brother, it hurts so much more. The closer the relationship, the harder the blow. I have witnessed many families where one brother refuses to forgive the other for something he did many years previously. Were the offender not to be related, they would find it easier to feel no resentment, but by their own flesh and blood they can’t bury the hatchet.

This is why they were worried over Yosef's possible retaliation. They thought that it would be so much harder than were the Egyptians in command. His revenge would be meted out with full force. This is what plagued their minds after Yaakov was no longer alive. This should be a lesson for us on the role of the father figure in every family. His presence imparts unity and promotes peace between all the related members of the family. He should do what he can to prevent quarrels and antagonism from poisoning the atmosphere, as the worst fights are those between siblings.

Chazal (*Midrash Mishlei* 1) say that the Shevatim were reincarnated into the Ten Martyrs who died at the hands of the Romans. Why did the Shevatim still deserve punishment? Didn't Hashem silently acquiescence to their plan (*Tanchuma Vayeishev*, 2)? The brothers also asked Yosef for forgiveness when they came to Egypt and he disclosed his identity.

The Rabbeinu Bachai (*Bereishit* 50:17) explains that the brothers never actually heard Yosef proclaim his forgiveness. They should have appeased him until they heard his response. By relying on their appeal and satisfied with pleading for clemency, they were punished generations later with the death of the Ten Martyrs. This should send shudders down our spines. We should make sure to receive full pardon from any person whom we ever wronged.

This also answers our first question. The brothers were not worried that Yosef Hatzaddik would take revenge. They were worried over their lack of hearing an explicit pardon. And they feared the repercussions.

When Am Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu petitioned for Divine Compassion. He didn't desist from praying until he heard Hashem proclaim, "I have forgiven as you requested" (*Bamidbar* 14:20). He wanted to hear for himself those very words

(see *Shemot Rabbah* 29:7). He didn't want to come to the same situation that the Shevatim found themselves in, to be punished for not going that extra mile of appeasement.

This raises the following question. If Moshe Rabbeinu heard Hashem pardon the Jews, why do Chazal say that every generation has some measure of punishment meted out for the sin of the Golden Calf (*Sanhedrin* 102a)? Didn't Hashem say, "I have forgiven as you requested"?

I suggest that the Jews lacked one thing. They relied on Moshe to convey their plea, and were satisfied with his representation. Had they asked Hashem for forgiveness themselves, they would have been spared these future tribulations. But they didn't make that effort. And Hashem responded in kind – He forgave as Moshe requested, but not as Am Yisrael hoped for. This is why the punishment for the Golden Calf continues until today.

From here we learn that asking for forgiveness can't be delegated to an emissary. The one who wronged another must personally step forward and ask to be pardoned. And if the wronged party has already passed away, the following procedure is recorded in Halachah. One should take a quorum of men and ask for forgiveness at the graveside (see *Orach Chaim*, 606). These steps are the necessary measures we take so that one's past shouldn't come back to 'haunt' him later on in life.

Why did the brothers wait until Yaakov passed away to approach Yosef? The answer is because Yaakov spelled out before he died, the one ingredient which would consolidate them and elevate them to the status of שבטי י-ה, tribes worthy of Hashem's presence resting on them. He said (*Bereishit* 49:1), "Assemble yourselves and I will tell you." When Am Yisrael unifies, they are able to overcome all adversary. But if, *chas v'chalilah*, they separate into factions and

quarrel over trifles, then they are prey to the denizens of the world.

Yet, despite their entreaty, they fell short. Although they asked Yosef to pardon them as their father would have wished, they sufficed with Yosef's reply once more and never heard him openly proclaim his forgiveness. This is why the brothers had to suffer by the murder of the Ten Martyrs.

### **In Summary**

- ◆ After Yaakov's death, the brothers worried about Yosef's response to their selling him as a youth. Why would Yosef Hatzaddik take revenge? Why didn't they accept his authority and possible retaliation as the harbinger of the destined Egyptian servitude?
- ◆ Perhaps the brothers worried about being subjugated to the rule of their brother, as the blows of a brother sting more than that of a stranger.
- ◆ The Shevatim sold Yosef with the silent acquiescence of Hashem, and yet were punished by being reincarnated and murdered by the Romans. Although they asked Yosef for forgiveness, they never heard him openly proclaim it.
- ◆ When Am Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, Moshe Rabbeinu pleaded for Divine compassion. Hashem answered, "I have forgiven as you requested." Even so, the Jews should have personally asked for clemency, and not relied on an emissary. This is why the punishment for the Golden Calf continues until today.



## Gems on Parashat Vayechi



### Living by Them

*“Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Yaakov – the years of his life – were one hundred and forty-seven years”*

*(Bereishit 47:28)*

Why was the name of this parashah listed as Vayechi and not ‘Yisrael’ or ‘Yosef’? The word וַיַּחַי means “And he lived.” I think that there is a message contained in this name, one from which we can gain tremendously.

Every person should take stock of his life and contemplate if it is indeed worthy of its title, “life.” The pasuk (Vayikra 18:5) says, “You shall live by them.” This refers to living a life of Torah and mitzvot. Any other lifestyle is meaningless and empty. Our lives are worth much more than what the material world can offer. We should take advantage of life and try to fill it with more than just squalid matter or corporeal mass.

The Torah lists many people who were a jumbled mass of right and wrong. Kayin brought an offering to Hashem and yet killed his

brother. Similarly, the Generation of the Dispersion had the trait of unity, despite their attempt to anger Hashem. Unfortunately, many Jews also do not know how to distinguish between good and bad. They may wake up in the morning and wash their hands, eager to do good. Yet later they may stumble over a prohibition and fall flat.

This can come from a lack of thought. We see how necessary it is to look at where we are going in life. Only through introspection can we overcome the obstacles and desist from evil. This is hinted to at the beginning of the parashah. Yaakov lived in a foreign country, beset with a culture that opposed kedushah and spiritual endeavors. Yet Yaakov lived, and took advantage of life, to grow still more in Torah. And so the pasuk counts up the days of Yaakov's life, all equal in his quest for good and uniform in not wasting his life away.



## The Power of a Berachah

*“Yaakov said to Yosef, ‘Kel Shakkai had appeared to me in Luz in the land of Canaan and He blessed me’”*

*(Bereishit 48:3)*

*“So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you shall Yisrael bless saying, ‘May G-d make you like Ephraim and like Menashe’ – and he put Ephraim before Menashe”*

*(ibid. 48:20)*

Hashem blessed Yaakov Avinu while he rested in Luz. It would seem then that Yaakov did not really need the blessings of Yitzchak.

Perhaps he only took the berachot from Yitzchak in order to fulfill the wishes of his mother, as well as to prevent Eisav Harasha from acquiring them.

If so, why did Yaakov see fit to bless his own children? Why not rely on Hashem to bless them Himself?

Perhaps we can explain by noting the descent in generations. The Avot dwelled in Eretz Yisrael and enjoyed its rarified atmosphere. The kedushah of Eretz Yisrael brings with it tremendous Siyata di'Shemaya, as it is the land where the “eyes of Hashem are constantly upon it” (Devarim 11:12). There is also special Divine Providence apportioned for its inhabitants who merit living there.

The Shevatim found themselves living far away from their homeland with its unique properties. In galut, there was no longer the same Divine protection. This is why they needed the berachot from Yaakov. It would supplement and strengthen them against the tribulations of the Egyptian galut.

Perhaps this is why Moshe Rabbeinu also blessed the Jewish nation before his death. They were about to enter a new set of circumstances, and still had to recover from the sin of the Golden Calf. A berachah imports life and vitality into every new venture.

We cannot fathom the power of a berachah, even from a simple person. The Heavenly workings are usually hidden from our view. But we believe in their effective influence on High. Sometimes darkness covers the Land, and the spiritual situation of the generation can reach an all-time low. In such circumstances, let no berachah be disregarded. Even the berachah of an ordinary person carries weight. Who knows in which merit we might find salvation?

A woman once came to my saintly grandfather, the tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Pinto zt”l, asking for a berachah. He turned to her and asked

for a berachah for himself. Surprised, the woman asked if her blessings had any value. He answered that they did, as she was wont to fast during the winter weeks of Shemot-Mishpatim and this strengthened her control over wanton desires and gastronomic cravings. This was quite meritorious in his eyes, and she acquiesced to his request and gave him a berachah.



## The Berachah of Menashe and Ephraim

*“Then Yisrael saw Yosef’s sons and he said,  
‘Who are these?’”*

*(Bereishit 48:8)*

Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu wanted to bless Menashe and Ephraim, but the Shechinah left him. The reason given is because these Shevatim would one day produce reshaim. From Ephraim would descend Yeravam and Achav, and from Menashe would descend Yehu and his sons.

This begs the question. Were they the only Shevatim who had wicked descendants? From Yehudah came the evil King Menashe, and yet the Shechinah did not depart from Yaakov when he came to bless Yehudah. And if the blemish was so terrible, why did the Shevatim accept Menashe and Ephraim in their midst?

I suggest that this was actually an important turning point in the lives of the Shevatim. As Yosef saw that his father faltered, he prayed for Divine assistance. He prayed that the Shechinah should continue to shower its rays of berachah and inspiration upon

Yaakov, who would then pass it along to his children and grandchildren. Hashem listened to his tefillot and Yaakov's Divine inspiration returned (Midrash Tanchuma Vayechi, 6).

From this point on, the Shechinah continued to rest upon Yaakov until his last day. Even though he saw the future reshim from the rest of the Shevatim, he did not linger or hesitate to give them the berachot. The brothers realized that this was due to Yosef's tefillah, and expressed their gratitude by accepting Menashe and Ephraim into their midst.

This whole episode also became a fitting end to the sale of Yosef by his brothers. It brought the family together and removed any resentment that was still harbored in Yosef's heart. Thus they were worthy of their title as the שבטי י-ה, the tribes worthy of the Divine presence.



## Glossary



Achdut – unity

Ahavah – love

Ahavat – love of...

Ahavat Yisrael – love of one's fellow Jew

Akeidah, Akeidat Yitzchak – the Binding on the Altar of Yitzchak

Amora, Amora'im (pl) – Sage(s) of the Gemara

Arvit – the nighttime prayer

Av Beit Din – the chief judge on the Beit Din

Aveirah, aveirot (pl) – transgression

Avodah – service, in the Temple; or service of Hashem, specifically referring to prayer

Avodat Hashem – service of Hashem

Avot – Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov)

Avot Hakedoshim – our holy forefathers (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov)

Ba'al teshuvah, ba'alei teshuvah (pl) – (lit. master of return) one who has returned to Jewish observance

Ba'alei Mussar – Masters of ethics

Bat Kol – Heavenly Voice

Batel b'shishim – less than one sixtieth, insignificant

Bavel – Babylon

Be'ezrat Hashem – with the help of Hashem

Beit Din – rabbinical court

Beit Hakeneset, Batei Kenesiot (pl) – house of prayer, synagogue

Beit Hamidrash, Batei Midrashot (pl) – house of study

Beit Hamikdash – the Holy Temple

Ben, bnei (pl) – son

Berachah l'vatalah – blessing made in vain

Berachah, berachot (pl) – blessing

Bikur cholim – visiting the sick

Bitachon – trust

Bitul Torah – time wasted from Torah study

Bli ayin hara – without the evil eye (expression)

Bnei Yisrael – the Children of Israel

Brit – covenant, pact

Brit milah – circumcision

Chaburah – treatise

Chachamim – (lit. wise people) – Sages, teachers

Chametz – leavened bread, which is forbidden to be eaten on Pesach

Chas v'shalom – May G-d have mercy

Chashmonaim – Hasmoneans

Chassid – righteous person

Chatan – groom

Chazal – our Sages, may their memory be for blessing

Cheshbon hanefesh – spiritual accounting

Chessed – acts of kindness

Chiddush, chiddushim (pl) – novel thought in Torah learning

Chillul Hashem – desecration of Hashem's Name

Chinuch – education

Chitzonim – negative forces

Chizuk – encouragement

Chok – commandment that cannot be explained according to human reasoning

Choshen – breastplate of the Kohen Gadol

Chuppah – wedding canopy

Chutz La'aretz – Diaspora

Daf Hayomi – page of Gemara learnt daily

Derech erez – proper behavior, character refinement

Derashah, derashot (pl) – sermon

Emet – truth

Eemunah – belief, faith

Eretz Yisrael – the Land of Israel

Erev – the eve of (Shabbat)

Etrog – citrus fruit used in the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot

Gadol – person of stature in Torah

Gadol hador (gedolim, gedolei Yisrael pl) – leader of the generation

Galut – exile

Gan Eden – Garden of Eden; Paradise

Gematria – numerical value

Gemilut chassadim – acts of loving-kindness

Ger – proselyte

Get – bill of divorce

Geulah – redemption

Gevurah – strength

Gid hanasheh – sciatic nerve

Gilgul – reincarnation

- Hachnasat orchim – welcoming guests
- Hadasim – myrtle branches used for the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot
- Hakadosh Baruch Hu – Hashem
- Hakarat hatov – gratitude, appreciation
- Halachah, halachot (pl) – Jewish law; edict
- Halachic – according to Jewish law
- Hefker – ownerless (property or animals)
- Hilchot – the laws of...
- Hilula – celebration conducted on the anniversary of a tzaddik's death
- Hishtadlut – one's own efforts
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- Ikar – principle, main thing
- Issur – prohibition
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- Kabbalah – hidden facets of the Torah
- Kabbalat HaTorah – the receiving of the Torah
- Kallah – bride
- Karet – punishment of being cut off from Hashem
- Kav – measure of capacity, small amount
- Kavanah – intent, concentration
- Kavod – honor
- Kedushah – holiness; also a prayer inserted in the repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei
- Kelippah, kelippot (pl) – force of impurity
- Keri – seminal emission
- Ketonet passim – fine woolen tunic, which was worn by Yosef
- Ketoret – incense
- Ketubah – marriage contract
- Kibbud av v'em – honoring one's father and mother

Kiddush Hashem – sanctification of Hashem’s Name

Kohen – priest

Kohen Gadol – high priest

Korban, korbanot (pl) – offering, sacrifice

Kriyat Shema – the recital of the Shema

Kriyat Yam Suf – the Splitting of the Sea

L’shem Shamayim – for the sake of Heaven

Lashon Hakodesh – Hebrew

Lashon Hara – evil speech, slander

Lishmah – for the sake of Heaven, with no ulterior motives

Luchot – the Tablets

Lulav – palm branch used in the mitzvah of the four species on Sukkot

Malchut – majesty, kingship

Mann – manna

Masechta – tractate

Mashiach – the Messiah

Matan Torah – the giving of the Torah

Meizid – intentional sin

Mekubal – Kabbalist, one who delves into the hidden aspects of the Torah

Menorah – candelabra in the Beit Hamikdash

Mesirut nefesh – self-sacrifice

Mezuzah – parchment containing Torah verses, commanded to be affixed to every doorpost

Middah – trait

Middat Harachamim – Divine attribute of mercy

Midrash – homiletical teachings of the Sages

Mikveh, mikvaot (pl) – body of water for ritual immersion and purification

Minchah – the afternoon prayer

Minhag – custom

Mishkan – the Tabernacle in Shiloh

Mityavnim – Hellenists

Mitzrayim – Egypt

Mitzvah, mitzvot (pl) – good deed; commandment

Mizbeach – altar

Molech – form of idol worship to which people would sacrifice their children

Musaf – additional prayer on Shabbat morning

Nachash – snake

Nachat – joy or pleasure from another's accomplishments

Nasi – prince, leader of the Jewish people

Navi – prophet

Nefesh – soul

Neshamah, neshamot (pl) – soul

Niddah – a woman who became impure due to her menstrual cycle

Niftar – one who has passed away

Nisayon, nisyonot (pl) – test, challenging situation

Nitzotzot – sparks

Ohr Ein Sof – the Infinite Light, referring to Hashem

Olah – burnt offering

Olam Haba – the World to Come

Orlah – foreskin; laws concerning when fruit can be eaten from a tree

Parah adumah – the red heifer

Parashah, parshiyot (pl) – chapter

Parashat hashevuah – weekly Torah portion

Parnasah – livelihood

Pasuk, pesukim (pl) – verse

Pasul – invalid

Pirkei Avot (or Avot) – the Chapters of the Fathers

Pirsumei nisa – publicizing the miracle

Rabbanim – rabbis

Rachmana litzlan – May G-d's mercy be upon them

Rasha, reshaim (pl) – evil person

Ratzon – will

Rosh Hashanah – the first day of the Jewish new year

Ruchniut – spirituality

Sanhedrin – the High Court

Sar of Eisav – Angel of Eisav

Sefarim Hakedoshim – holy books of Torah thought

Sefer, sifrei Torah – book, Torah scroll(s)

Sefirah – behavior by which we perceive Hashem

Segulah – remedy for merit

Shacharit – the morning prayer

Shaliach – representative, messenger

Shamash – sexton

Shamayim – Heaven

Shechinah – Divine presence

Shefa – abundance

Sheker – falsehood

Shel rosh – phylacteries put on the head

Shel yad – phylacteries put on the arm

Sheleimut – completely, to perfection

Shelichut – mission

Shemoneh Esrei – prayer containing eighteen blessings, recited three

times a day

Shevet, Shevatim (pl) – tribe

Shidduch – marriage proposal, marriage partner

Shirah – song, praise

Shiur – Torah lecture

Shlita – may he live many good years, Amen

Shogeg – unintentional transgression

Shomer – guard

Sichah – lecture

Sinat Chinam – baseless hatred

Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim – telling over the story of the Exodus

Sitra Achra – the Satan

Siyata di'Shemaya – help from Heaven

Siyum – completion of a tractate (and celebration thereof)

Sugya – a topic in Gemara

Sukkah – temporary dwelling, which is used on the festival of Sukkot;  
thatched shelter for human or animal use

Tahor – pure

Tallit – prayer shawl

Talmid – disciple, student

Talmid chacham – Torah scholar

Talmud Bavli – Babylonian Talmud

Tamei – defiled, impure

Tanna, Tannai'm (pl) – Sages of the Mishnah

Tefillah – prayer

Tefillin – phylacteries

Teshuvah – repentance

Tikkun – rectification

Treifut – non-kosher food

Tumah – impurity

Tzaddik, tzaddikim (pl) – righteous person

Tzedakah – charity

Tzelem Elokim – image of Hashem

Tzeniut – modesty

Tzidkaniot – righteous women

Tzitzit – four-cornered garment with fringes, worn by men and boys

Ushpizin – seven shepherds of Israel

Viduy – confession

Ya'alei v'Yavo – a short supplication said on Rosh Chodesh and the festivals

Yam Suf – the Sea of Reeds

Yamim Tovim – festivals

Yerushalayim – Jerusalem

Yeshiva – rabbinical college

Yesod – foundation

Yetzer Hara – evil inclination

Yetzer Hatov – good inclination

Yetziat Mitzrayim – Exodus from Egypt

Yirat Shamayim – fear of Heaven

Yom Tov/Yamim Tovim – holiday(s)

Zechut – merit

Zt'l – May the memory of the tzaddik be for a blessing