

# *Parshas Vayeitzei*

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## *1. Understanding the Specialness of Yaakov*

The Portion begins, “**Yaakov departed from Beersheva and went toward Charan.**” Rashi in his commentary cites Chazal who ask- since the Torah had already informed us previously that Yaakov was located in Beersheva, why must the verse tell us that he departed from Beersheva? It would have been sufficient to say that Yaakov went to Charan. The Midrash answers that the Torah is teaching us that when a tzaddik (righteous person) leaves his community it loses its radiance, beauty and glory. It seems from the Midrash that whenever **any** tzaddik leaves his community it is diminished. If so, then why does the Torah choose to communicate this concept regarding Yaakov’s departure from Beersheva and not previously regarding Yitzchak or Avraham? One could say that the Torah chose this particular departure to tell us that although Yitzchak and Rivka (our Patriarch and Matriarch) remained in Beersheva, the city’s radiance and glory would not have been diminished. However, despite their presence, the Torah is teaching us that the community was diminished by Yaakov’s departure.

We find that each of our Patriarchs represented one of the characteristics of Hashem. For example Avraham emulated G-d through Chesed (Kindness), which was indiscriminate selfless kindness. Yitzchak emulated Hashem through the Attribute of Judgment, which is self-perfection and serving G-d in the most perfect and undistracted manner. Yaakov, who is referred to by Chazal as the most perfect of the Patriarchs, emulated G-d through the characteristic of Mercy, which is a synthesis of the Attribute of Judgment and the Attribute of Kindness. Meaning that Yaakov’s approach to the world was through discriminating Chesed. Only if ultimately a person had some deservingness would he be a beneficiary of Yaakov’s involvement. This evaluation (whether one was worthy or not) was only possible because Yaakov was the total Torah personality as he is referred to in the Torah as “The person who dwelt in the tent (the tent of Torah).”

We find that Hashem is referred to as *The Makom* (The Location). The Midrash asks – why is G-d referred to as *The Makom* (The Location)? The Midrash answers, “The world is not G-d’s *Makom* (location) but rather He is the *Makom* (location) of the world.” The Maharal of Prague explains that the concept of “location” is that it “contains.” For example, if one places an object on a table the basis for the object to be held up is due to the table on which it lies. Identically, the world does not contain Hashem but rather Hashem is the basis for the existence of the world because He Willows every moment of existence. Therefore, Hashem is referred to as “The Makom – The Location”.

Chesed (Avraham) and Self-Perfection/Exacting (Yitzchak) are attributes that are part of existence. However Torah is something that supercedes all existence and is the basis for all existence. This is the concept of *Talmud Torah keneged kulom* (*The Study of Torah is the equivalent of all the mitzvos combined*). Yaakov, who was the embodiment of Torah, possessed a radiance and beauty that was unparalleled by his father and grandfather. Therefore Yaakov’s departure from Beersheva impacted negatively to a greater degree than any other tzaddik’s departure.

The Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that Reb Yochanon went to pay a visit to Rebbe Elazar who was ill. When Reb Yochanon entered the room where Rebbe Elazar was lying, he saw that it was completely dark. Reb Yochanon lifted up his shirtsleeve and exposed his arm, which illuminated the room. He radiated holiness, beauty, and a light that was one of a kind. Reb Yochanon noticed that Rebbe Elazar was crying. He asked him, “Why are you crying? Is it because you feel that you did not study a sufficient amount of Torah?...” Rebbe Elazar answered, “I am crying because this beauty (referring to the beauty of Reb Yochanon) will decompose in the earth.” Upon hearing this Reb Yochanon began to cry also. What is the significance of Reb Yochanon’s

beauty (that will decompose) that caused them to cry?

The Gemara in Tractate *Bava Metzia* tells us that the radiance of Reb Yochanon was a semblance of Yaakov's (Our Patriarch's) radiance. Yaakov's radiance was a semblance of Adam – who was the handiwork of G-d. When Reb Yochanon would eventually pass away, the representation of that level of holiness would no longer be in existence. If anyone would want to have an inkling of who Yaakov was and would want to aspire to something of that dimension, he would look at the radiance that was possessed by Reb Yochanon. However, when Reb Yochanon would pass away that representation of holiness would no longer be in existence to aspire to. It would be the end of an era. This is the reason Reb Yochanon and Rebbe Elazar cried over the beauty that will decompose in the earth.

It is interesting to note that the special radiance of Adam, who was created in the Garden of Eden (which was a spiritual/physical existence), was manifested by Yaakov and not by his father and grandfather. Adam's radiance emanated from a source that was outside of this existence. Yaakov who was the Patriarch who is the embodiment of Torah radiated that same holiness because Torah encompasses existence.

Torah is the basis for existence. It is the equivalent of *The Makom* (The Place).

## ***2. How Does One Make Spirituality a Reality in One's Life?***

When Yaakov arrived at *Har Ha'Moriah* (Mt. Moriah), the Torah states, **“He took from the stones of the place (*avnei Ha'Makom*) which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place.”** The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh in his commentary cites the Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*, which tells us that one should never tolerate his *Yeitzer Ha'Rah* (Evil Inclination) even for a moment. If one feels that he is succumbing to his Negative Inclination, he should immediately engage in Torah study. If the Torah study does not diffuse the Inclination, then one should recite the Shema (which is one's declaration of the unity of Hashem). If even reciting the Shema is not sufficient to take control of his life and dispel the Inclination, then he should contemplate the day of death. We read in *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of Our Fathers) that if one considers three things one would never come to sin: “From where you come (from a putrid droplet of semen), to where you are going (a location of dirt, maggots, and worms), and before Whom you will stand for a day of reckoning (before Hashem the King of Kings)”.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that we see from the verse, that Yaakov followed the prescribed measures of the Gemara to dispel the influences of the Evil Inclination. The Torah tells us that **“Yaakov...took from the stones of the place (*avnei Ha'Makom*)”**. *Avnei Ha'Makom* is referring to the Torah because it is the building block of existence. The Ohr HaChaim continues to explain that the Torah in which Yaakov engaged disabled the Evil Inclination. In addition Yaakov recited the Shema, which is alluded to in the verse **“and (Yaakov) lay down in that place”** – because the Shema is recited while lying down. Thirdly, “lying down” on the earth also alludes to the day of one's death. Yaakov understood that he was in spiritual jeopardy when he left his father's house to flee to Charan- the community of Lavan. Therefore he took every precaution to deal with the Evil Inclination.

The Vilna Gaon z'tl asks why does the Gemara recommend first studying Torah, then reciting the Shema, and then as a last resort contemplating one's death to combat the Evil Inclination? Why not immediately contemplate the day of one's death if that is the ultimate weapon against the *Yeitzer Ha'Rah*?

The Gemara in *Tractate Taanis* cites a verse that says that there are those who say, “Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you shall die.” How is it possible that if one acknowledges the day of his death and is encouraged to indulge to a greater degree rather than become more sensitive to spirituality (and having a sense of accountability)? The answer is that although one understands that one's life will come to an end, one does not have the capacity to comprehend and relate to the consequence of that moment vis-à-vis accountability. One can only have a sense of conscience

regarding Hashem if he engages in the spiritual process – which is the study of Torah.

The study of Torah gives a person a capacity to internalize concepts, which becomes a reality in one's life. Therefore the Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if one feels overwhelmed by his Evil Inclination, the first line of defense to give oneself the upper hand over the *Yeitzer Ha'Rah* is the study of Torah. However, if the study of Torah is not sufficient one must say the Shema, which is a declaration of one's belief that one is able to internalize only because it follows the study of Torah. If one still feels that he is succumbing to temptation then he should remember the day of death, which at that moment (after the study of Torah and internalizing one's belief of Hashem) he is able to relate to and fully understand the meaning of accountability.

The Gemara in Tractate *Huryos* states that when a child begins speaking, his father has an obligation to teach his son the verse, "**Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehilas Yaakov – The Torah was commanded to us by Moshe which is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov.**" The second pasuk (verse) a father is obligated to teach his child is the *Shema Yisroel* - "**Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our G-d, Hashem, the One and Only.**" – Which asserts our belief in the unity of Hashem.

One would think that since monotheism is the most fundamental aspect of Judaism, the *Shema* would be the first pasuk that a father teaches his child followed with the pasuk, "**The Torah was commanded to us by Moshe...**" However the Gemara states the order differently. Rambam in *Hilchos Talmid Torah* (The Laws of Learning Torah) rules that the father is obligated to teach his child the psukim in the sequence as stated in the Gemara.

With our understanding that Torah gives one the capacity to internalize concepts and gives one a sense of perspective, we are able to understand why the order must be as stated in the Gemara. The child must first be taught "**The Torah was commanded to us by Moshe...**" because the person who studies Torah has a spiritual orientation which enables him to internalize spirituality. Therefore the second verse taught to the child is the *Shema Yisroel* because only then one is able to appreciate and comprehend the meaning of the Unity of Hashem and the relationship, which we as Jews have with Him.

### **3. Understanding the Validity of Yaakov's Marriage to Leah**

The Torah tells us that Yaakov worked seven years in the service of Lavan for the hand of Rachel in marriage. However, after Yaakov completed his seven years of work, Lavan deceived Yaakov by switching his older daughter Leah for Rachel. Yaakov only realized that he was fooled the next morning after his marriage. Yaakov agreed to work an additional seven years for his father-in-law Lavan, in order to marry Rachel. Although he was deceived with Leah, Yaakov retained her as his wife.

The question is- when Yaakov discovered that he had been deceived by Lavan, why did Yaakov retain Leah as a wife and not dissolve the marriage? There is a principle in Jewish law called "*mekach taus – an acquisition based on false pretenses*". The law dictates that under these circumstances that the transaction (or a marriage) is considered null and void. If this is the case then why did Yaakov retain Leah as his wife? This question is even more difficult when we read that in fact Yaakov "disliked" Leah. The Torah states, "**Hashem saw that Leah was unloved, so He opened her womb; but Rachel remained barren.**"

The Torah in the Portion of *Vayichi* (before Yaakov passed away) tells us that he blessed his children. Yaakov said to Reuven, his eldest son from Leah, "**You are the first of my strength.**" Rashi in his commentary explains that although Yaakov was 84 years old when he was first married to Leah, he never wasted even a droplet of his seed. Therefore regarding his son Reuven Yaakov said, "**You are the first of my strength.**"

Despite Yaakov discovering that he had mistakenly married Leah, he retained her as a wife because he understood that a man such as he (who had never wasted seed) could not have been pu

in such a situation where he would be intimate with a woman who was not meant to be his wife. Hashem would not have allowed Yaakov's seed be expended for anything other than fathering the Twelve Tribes. Therefore Yaakov did not nullify the marriage with Leah because he understood that this was the Will of Hashem.

Regardless of Yaakov's understanding that his marriage to Leah was pre-destined, he nevertheless was displeased with Leah because she was agreeable to be part of the deceit of her father. Yaakov being the "*ish Emmes* – man who personified Truth," had an aversion to anything that was not truthful.

The Chasam Sofer z'tl was the leading Torah Sage and Decisor of his generation and was the main disciple of the great Reb Nossan Adler z'tl (of Frankfurt) who was a world renowned Torah Sage and Kabbalist. The Chasam Sofer consulted with his rebbe before he made any significant decision in his life. He referred to his revered rebbe as "*Kohen HaGadol* – the High Priest (Rabbi Adler was a Kohen)". Before he entered into a marriage contract to become engaged, his rebbe Nossan attempted to contact him to tell him not to obligate himself to this woman. However, due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, Reb Nossan was unable to contact the Chasam Sofer with his reason for not entering into engagement. The Chasam Sofer received the correspondence after he became engaged. Although legally the Chasam Sofer had a right to break the engagement because it was considered "*mekach taus*" with the information that he received, he nevertheless entered into marriage. He understood that if it was not meant for his rebbe to communicate this information before his engagement, then it was a sign from heaven that it was pre-destined that he should marry this woman. This is similar to the situation with Yaakov and his marriage to Leah.

The Torah tells us that Nadav and Avihu, the most special sons of Aaron, were struck down by the Hand of G-d because they had made certain mistakes. Under normal circumstances, Hashem gives clarity to tzaddikim so that they should not fail and be culpable to Him. However, since Aaron participated in the gathering of the gold to make the Golden Calf, he was not worthy to have his children given that clarity to protect them from their fatal mistake.

Often in life we make mistakes and we agonize over them. The question is – why do we agonize? The Gemara in Tractate *Chulin* states that when a person stubs his toe or finger in this world it is only because it was ordained in heaven at that moment. The problem is not what actually happened to the person but rather why it happened. One must understand why Hashem ordained that we should experience difficulties such as losses. The only way we could attempt to understand this is to introspect and take an inventory of one's behavior. Having clarity in life to protect us from mistakes is a gift from Heaven.

#### ***4. Leah Understanding Her Own Predicament***

The Torah tells us that Leah initially had difficulty conceiving. The Torah states, **"Hashem saw that Leah was unloved, so He opened her womb; but Rachel remained barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and declared his name Reuven, as she had declared, Because Hashem has discerned my affliction..."** The Torah tells us that Leah conceived and bore another son, **"Because Hashem has heard that I am unloved."** She called her second son Shimon. After Shimon, Leah again conceived and declared, **"This time my husband will become attached to me for I have borne him three sons; therefore He called his name Levi."** Leah conceived again after the birth of Levi and she declared, **"This time let me gratefully praise Hashem; therefore she called his name Yehudah; then she stopped giving birth."**

It is interesting to note that the Torah tells us that Hashem allowed Leah to conceive her first son because He saw that she was "unloved". However, after Leah gave birth she called her son Reuven because Hashem saw her "affliction". Only after Leah gave birth to her second son who she called Shimon that "Hashem heard I was unloved." It would seem that her first son should have been called Shimon because the Torah tells us that Hashem only gave her the ability to conceive because she was "unloved". If this is the case then why does Leah say that G-d saw her

“affliction” if she was actually “unloved”?

Leah was initially unloved by Yaakov because he did not chose her for a wife; but rather, it all came about as a result of the deception of Lavan (who switched Leah for Rachel). Since Leah was not taken by Yaakov by choice and subsequently had difficulty conceiving, she was concerned that in fact she was not meant to be the Matriarch to bring forth the Jewish people. Alternatively, since Leah was a tzaddekes (righteous woman) and was worthy of being a Matriarch, she had difficulty conceiving because of the principle that Hashem desires the tefillos (prayers) of the devout and righteous. Leah was in a quandary – was she not able to conceive because she was the devout women? Or was she not able to conceive because she was not worthy of being the Matriarch of the Jewish people? This quandary was the “affliction” that Leah was experiencing.

Although Hashem allowed her to conceive her first son because He saw she was “unloved”, Leah was relieved when she understood that she was worthy of being the Matriarch of the Jewish people. The fact that she was “unloved” by Yaakov was a secondary concern to her “affliction” of questioning her own worthiness. This is the reason Leah’s “affliction” is resolved first. Her being “unloved” is resolved second with the birth of Shimon.

After Leah gave birth to Shimon, she was no loner “unloved” by Yaakov because she had mothered two of the Tribes of Israel. Although Leah was no longer in an “unloved” state, the positive feeling towards Leah had not yet been established until the birth of her third son, Levi. This is when she declares, **“This time my husband will become attached to me for I have borne him three sons.”** Chazal tell us that it was known that Yaakov would have twelve sons and that the Jewish people would emanate from the four wives of Yaakov. If Yaakov was going to have four wives, that implied that each of the wives would give birth to three sons. Therefore after giving birth to Levi, Leah understood that she had mothered her full share of Tribes. When Leah gave birth to a fourth son, Yehudah, she declared, “This time let me gratefully praise Hashem” because she received more than her portion by giving birth to four sons.

After giving birth to Yehudah, her fourth son, Leah took on a new dimension of value in Yaakov’s eyes because he understood that she had greater worthiness than the ordinary Matriarch because she had taken more than her share. At this moment, Yaakov saw her in a new light and perhaps she would mother the majority of the Tribes. With this explanation, we can understand the incident of the *dudaim* (mandrakes).

The Torah tells us that Reuvin went out into the field at the time of the harvest season and brought some dudaim (mandrakes) for his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, **“Please give me some of your son’s dudaim.”** Leah responded, **“was your taking my husband insignificant – And now to take even my son’s dudaim!”** Rachel said to Leah, **“Therefore, he shall lie with you tonight in return for your son’s dudaim.”** When Yaakov came from the field, the Torah states, **“So he lay with her (Leah) that night. G-d hearkened to Leah and she gave birth to a fifth son.”** Leah declared, **“G-d has granted me my reward...”** We see the verses that Leah spoke strongly with Rachel. Initially when Rachel requested the dudaim, Leah chastised her for taking Yaakov’s heart. Some may ask – is this the proper way for Leah to address her barren sister? Perhaps Leah’s words were too “harsh”? Especially after Rachel had allowed the initial deception to take place by giving the code word to Leah so that it should not be known to Yaakov that they had switch places.

The answer is that at this point Leah had given birth to four sons (that was more than her share of Tribes); therefore, Leah understood that it was possible that it may be destined for her to mother the majority of the Tribes of Israel. By giving the dudaim to Rachel, who had not yet conceived, it would have been the wrong thing to do if giving the dudaim would have allowed Leah to conceive more quickly. It is clear from the Torah that Leah’s seemingly harsh words to Rachel was not a sin since we see that because of her desire to mother more Tribes that night (when she cohabited with Yaakov) she conceived her fifth child, Yissachar.

Although some may perceive Leah’s reaction to Rachel’s request for the dudaim as too “harsh”,

nevertheless we see that this response was appropriate as explained. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if a Jew realizes that he is wearing *shatnez* (a combination of wool and linen that is forbidden by the Torah) he must immediately remove the garment that contains the shatnez although he will be naked in a public setting. One may ask – how could this be, what about the issue of human dignity? The Gemara answers that human dignity has no relevance when it is an issue of following the instructions of the Torah. If the Torah Commands us to remove our clothing because of the prohibition of wearing shatnez (regardless of the setting), then this becomes appropriate behavior. Human dignity means to live as Hashem wants the human being to live and not what we believe what “dignity” may be. The Gemara cites a verse from Mishlei (Proverbs) which says that one’s own dignity has no place when it concerns Chilul Hashem (desecration of G-d’s Name).

We see that Leah did what she needed to do vis-à-vis Rachel – regardless of how one may perceive her behavior. The fact is that her behavior was correct because correct behavior is defined doing what one is obligated to do.

### ***5. Yaakov the Person of Un-compromised Truth (from the Portion of Toldos).***

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov Aveinu (Our Patriarch) fled from his parents home, he went to learn in the yeshiva of Shem V’Aver for a period of fourteen years. Only after studying these fourteen years was Yaakov able to go to the house of Lavan. The question is Yaakov himself is referred to as the “perfect person who dwelled in the tent (the tent of Torah)”. Until the age of 63 when Yaakov had taken the blessings that were rightfully his, he had been studying Torah all of his life. If this is the case, why was it necessary for Yaakov to spend an additional fourteen years of Torah study before going to the house of Lavan?

The Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin* tells us that Navos, after he had passed away, as a spirit was given permission by Hashem to mislead Achov (to cause him to be killed). Although the falsehood that was communicated by Navos to the false prophets of Baal was meant to be positive (to bring about the death of Achov who was evil), nevertheless Hashem told Navos that since he had communicated a falsehood he could no longer remain within the proximity of Hashem. Hashem is Emmes (Truth) – as it says, “The signet of G-d is Truth.” Therefore, no falsehood can remain in the proximity of G-d. Thus, Navos was expelled from the Presence of Hashem.

Yaakov justifiably impersonated his brother Esav in order to receive the blessing from his father Yitzchak. Yaakov’s behavior was justified because the entire future of the Jewish people was at stake. Had Yaakov not taken the blessing (which was rightfully his), the Jewish people would not have been able to come into existence – consequently there would be no Sinai and no purpose for existence. The difficulty is – Yaakov is referred to as “*ishe emmes* – the person of truth”. Yaakov was an embodiment of Torah, which is un-compromised truth. If this is the case, Yaakov’s impersonation of his brother, which was associated with falsehood (despite its justification), was a breach of that perfect standard of truth.

Yaakov understood that he was going to Charan to the home of his uncle Lavan, which was an environment of evil. He needed to be insulated and protected in a way that he would not be influenced under any circumstance by that evil. He needed to have a level of clarity that was second to none. That clarity can only come about as a result of Yaakov being the embodiment of Torah, which is Emmes. Yaakov felt that that his standard of Emmes was compromised with the experience of taking the blessing and therefore he needed to re-instate that perfect level from which he had fallen. Yaakov understood that this can only be accomplished by an investment of fourteen years of un-interrupted Torah study in the yeshiva of Shem V’Aver. Only then would Yaakov feel that he was sufficiently fortified to deal with all the evil that he was going to be exposed to in the house of Lavan.

Rambam in *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (The laws of Studying Torah) states that the primary time for studying Torah should be at night. He quotes a verse in Eichah which are the words of Yirmeyah

Ha'Navie (Jeremiah the Prophet), "Rise and sing out in the night." Rambam explains that the word "sing" refers to Torah because the song of the Jew is the Torah itself. We find in the Gemara that "night" always symbolizes the exile. Yirmeyahu the Prophet witnessed the Jews going into exile and said that the only way one is able to survive the "night" and darkness of exile and the time of confusion that can undermine one's faith in Hashem, is by engaging in the song of the Jew which is the Torah. One only has clarity through the eyes of the Torah.

In his work *Mesilas Yisharim*, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato cites the Gemara that says that the physical world is compared to "night". Just as in the night one visualizes one thing and it turns out to be something else, identically the physical world contains many distortions of reality. Something may seem to be proper and permitted (or even a mitzvah); but when analyzed, it is actually classified as sinful. The only way one can see things clearly in this world is through the study of Torah.

The Talmud tells us in a number of locations, "I created the Evil Inclination and the Torah as its antidote." When a Jew cleaves to Hashem through the Torah, then he attaches himself to Truth. In the context of Truth there is no distortion.