

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

It seems that the answer lies in this week's parsha and the next. Jacob was the man whose greatest visions came to him when he was alone at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next. In this week's parsha, escaping from Esau, he stops and rests for the night with only stones to lie on and has an epiphany:

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it ... When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of G-d; this is the gate of heaven." (Gen. 28: 12-17)

In next week's parsha, fleeing from Laban and terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau again, he wrestles alone at night with an unnamed stranger.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with G-d and with humans and have overcome" ... So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw G-d face to face, and yet my life was spared." (Gen. 32: 29-31)

These are the decisive spiritual encounters of Jacob's life, yet they happen in liminal space (the space between that is neither starting point nor destination), at a time when Jacob was at risk in both directions, where

he came from and where he was going to. Yet it was at these points of maximal vulnerability that he encountered G-d and found the courage to continue despite all the hazards of the journey.

That is the strength Jacob bequeathed the Jewish people. What is remarkable is not merely that this one tiny people survived tragedies that would have spelled the end of any other people: the destruction of two temples, the Babylonian and Roman conquests, the expulsions, persecutions and pogroms of the Middle Ages, the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth century Europe and the Holocaust. After each cataclysm, it renewed itself, scaling new heights of achievement.

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

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

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

Leadership, especially in matters of the spirit, is deeply stressful. Four figures in Tanakh - Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah - actually pray to die rather than continue. Nor was this true only in the distant past. Abraham Lincoln suffered deep bouts of depression. So did Churchill, who called it his "black dog." Gandhi and Martin Luther King both attempted suicide in adolescence and experienced depressive illness in adult life. The same was true of many great creative

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ר' שבתי בר' יצחק
on his yartzeit חשוון
May his neshama have an aliya!

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artists, among them Michelangelo, Beethoven and Van Gogh.

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

The ability to survive and to recover is part of what it takes to be a leader. It is the willingness to live a life of risks that makes such individuals different from others. So said Theodor Roosevelt in one of the greatest speeches ever made on the subject:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.¹

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

¹ Theodor Roosevelt, Speech at the Sorbonne, April 23, 1910.

To try, to fall, to fear, and yet to keep going: that is what it takes to be a leader. That was Jacob, the man who at the lowest ebbs of his life had his greatest visions of heaven. ©2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our father Yaakov leaves his home, he who is accustomed to study, tranquility, and to "dwelling in tents," and immediately finds himself alone and endangered in a hostile world. A rock is his pillow and he must erect barriers at night to protect himself from wild animals (both four and two footed) as he sleeps on the ground. Though he is reassured by Heaven and by his grand dream and vision it is clear to him that his future is still uncertain and fraught with dangers, peril and challenges.

When he finally arrives close to his destination he encounters the neighbors and daughters of Lavan who are unable to water their flocks because of the great rock that seals the opening to the well of water. The Torah then describes for us in great detail how Yaakov greets the people and the family of Lavan and in a selfless gesture of help and compassion to others - who he has just met - singlehandedly removes the rock from the mouth of the well.

It is interesting to note that the Torah lavishes a great deal of space and detail to this incident at the well while the Torah tells us nothing about the fourteen years of Yaakov's life that passed between his leaving home and arriving at the house of Lavan.

Rashi, quoting Midrash, tells us that Yaakov spent these fourteen years in spiritual study and personal growth at the yeshiva academy of Shem and Ever. So, if this is in fact the case, why does the Torah not tell us of this great feat of spiritual challenge and self-improvement - fourteen years of sleepless study - while it does seem to go into mystifying detail regarding the incident at the well of water? Certainly, it would seem that the years of study would have a greater impact on the life and persona of Yaakov than rolling a rock off of the mouth of a well would have had.

As we see throughout the book of Bereshith, if not indeed regarding all of the Torah generally, the Torah places utmost emphasis on the behavior that one exhibits towards other human beings. Not everyone can study for fourteen years in a yeshiva day and night. Yet everyone has the ability to care about others, to demand justice for the defenseless and to provide to the best of one's abilities help to those who so obviously need it.

Though Yaakov, like all of the great figures and founders of our people that appear here in Bereshith, is unique in spiritual stature and blessed with Divine visions and revelation, he is also essentially everyman. His actions are meant to be a template of attitude and

behavior for his descendants and the people who bear his name.

The Torah, while making it clear that we can never personally be the equal of our ancestors in their exalted spiritual state and accomplishments, we can and should attempt to emulate their values and behavior. We can all help those in need to roll the rock off of their wells and thereby to nurture an environment where the Yaakov within all of us can grow and expand.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd he confronted the place and lodged there because the sun had set...” (Genesis 28:11) Jacob, the last of the patriarchs, is forced by his brother, Esau, to leave his ancestral home for exile.

The Talmud (B.T. Brachot 26b) interprets our opening verse as follows: "Jacob enacted the evening prayer, as it is written, 'And he confronted the place and lodged there;' the term 'confrontation' [Hebrew: *pegiya*] refers to prayer, as it is written, 'And you are not to pray on behalf of this nation and you are not to raise songs and prayers on their behalf and you are not to confront Me' (Jeremiah 7:16)."

This Talmudic passage ascribes our three daily statutory prayers respectively to each of our patriarchs. In addition to the reference to Jacob above: "Abraham enacted the morning prayer, as it is written, 'And Abraham arose early in the morning toward the place where he had stood.' (Genesis 19:27); the term 'standing' (Hebrew: *amida*) refers to prayer, as it is written 'And Phinehas stood and he prayed' (Psalms 106: 30)."

"Isaac enacted the afternoon prayer, as it is written 'Isaac went out to converse with the Divine in the field before sunset' (Genesis 24:63); the term 'conversation' refers to prayer, as it is written, 'A prayer of the afflicted when he faints and pours out his meditation' (Psalms 102:1)."

I believe that our Sages are purposefully identifying each of these three prayers with the unique personality of one of the patriarchs. Abraham is identified with the early morning prayer; our first communication with G-d at the beginning of the day, with the rising of the sun. Abraham emerged at the dawn of Jewish history.

He was the great path-breaker who discovered ethical monotheism and began to teach it to the world. He raised multitudes of adherents to his newfound faith and his teaching of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. He was immensely successful in all that he did; a wealthy shepherd and an internationally famed military commander. It makes sense that his prayer

comes at the dawn of a new day, when each of us is most optimistic regarding the possibilities that lie ahead.

Isaac is the most passive of the patriarchs. He is taken by his father to the akeida (binding), his wife is chosen for him and the blessings are wrested from him through subterfuge. He is great in continuing what he inherited, the consummate follower who represents the masses of descendants to faithfully follow Abraham's path. It is understandable that Isaac's prayer comes as the sun is beginning to set, at a time of day when much has already occurred, and it is up to the individual to react more than to initiate action.

Jacob's life is more tragic than the lives of his two forebears. He spends many years in exile because his brother, Esau, has threatened to kill him. After working for 14 years to win the hand of his beloved Rachel, he mourns her premature death in childbirth. He then spends more than two decades mourning the loss of Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery and told Jacob that he had been killed by a wild beast. His life is identified with the darkness and the fear symbolic of night.

My revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, suggested another way of looking at these three prayers.

The morning prayer, *Shaharit*, is a young man's prayer. After all, it is only after the morning prayer that one may eat, that one may partake and declare ownership of the world around us. Youths believe that the entire world is at their fingertips.

The afternoon prayer, *Mincha*, comes in the midst of the day, in the midst of what is often frenzied activity, and so *Mincha* is the prayer of the individual at midlife.

The evening prayer, *Ma'ariv*, is the prayer of the person at the end of his life, the prayer that asks for survival more than for success. This prayer is made at a time of anxiety and uncertainty, when one feels one's powers waning. *Ma'ariv* is the prayer of the brave, because "Old age is not at all for cowards" (told to me by Mira Koschitzky, in the name of her mother).

Our Sages expressed the varying moods of our prayers by citing the verse: "One must declare G-d's lovingkindness in the morning and His faithfulness in the evening" (Psalms 92:2). It is comparatively easy to praise G-d in the midst of one's success and optimism - although many tend to think that they themselves are responsible for their own good fortune. During times of darkness, uncertainty and anxiety, it is necessary to grasp onto G-d, but sometimes most difficult.

What does the psalmist mean when he speaks of faithfulness? The Hebrew word *emuna* is usually translated as faith; but what it really means is steadiness (Exodus 17:12). Faith does not mean that we must believe everything will work out well in the end as long as we pray strongly enough and live good enough lives.

Faith means faithfulness: we must be faithful in carrying out what G-d asks of us - with as much sincerity and good cheer as we can muster - no matter what difficulties and trials He may send our way. It was this ability that made Jacob the most chosen of our Patriarchs. © 2013 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

How is it possible that Yaakov (Jacob) didn't know that he spent his wedding night with Leah rather than Rachel? The text says, "and it came to pass in the morning and behold it was Leah." (Genesis 29:25)

Some commentators suggest that this reveals the extraordinary modesty of Yaakov and Leah-all through the night, they did not see or even speak to each other. (Radak)

The Talmud explains that Yaakov could have been fooled in another way. Suspecting that Lavan (Laban, Leah and Rachel's father) would switch Leah for Rachel, Yaakov gave Rachel signs through which she could identify herself to him. When at the last moment, Lavan exchanged Leah for Rachel, Rachel feared Leah would be embarrassed, and gave her sister the special signs. (Megillah 13b)

But all this leads to another question. If in fact Yaakov didn't know it was Leah, how could the marriage have been legitimate? Isn't this a classic case of an agreement which is considered null and void because of faulty assumptions, known as mekah ta'ut?

Perhaps it can be said that Yaakov's surprise came that evening, yet he still accepted Leah as his wife. When the text indicates that on the next morning "behold, it was Leah," it is the community that learned of the switch.

Outside of these attempts to understand Yaakov being fooled, there is a kabbalistic approach. This approach teaches something fundamental about love. Rachel represents the woman Yaakov wished to marry. But it is often the case that once married, we find elements in our spouse's personality of which we were previously unaware. These unknown factors are represented by Leah. In any relationship, there will be pieces of our partner's personality that take us by surprise.

These elements may be distasteful. In such a case, the challenge is to make peace with that side of our beloved and realize that love means accepting the whole person. But, it can be that this hidden side is a positive one that never formerly surfaced. These traits have the capacity to add vibrancy and a new excitement to the relationship. At times, these new qualities can even turn out to be exactly what was always needed. In the words of Rabbi David Aaron, "Leah was not Jacob's bride of choice, but she was actually a great source of blessing to him..." (Endless Light, p. 38).

"Ve-hineh hi Leah" teaches that in every relationship there will always be an element of surprise, the element that we don't consciously choose, the element represented by Leah. © 2012 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And Yaakov took moist stick[s] of cedar, and of almond and of plane and he peeled them [making] white peelings" (B'reishis 30:37). Although there are different translations given for the types of trees Yaakov used, the bottom line is that he peeled away parts of the bark so that the branches were now multi-colored, in order to increase the number of multi-colored animals born to the flocks he was tending. Much has been written about how putting peeled branches in the watering troughs affected the number of multi-colored animals born; I have not seen much written about why it matters how Yaakov tried to increase those numbers. I would think that all we need to know is that the "wages" Yaakov would receive from Lavan were the multi-colored animals born from then on, that Lavan tried to minimize how many there would be by changing the terms of the agreement (see 31:7-8 and 31:41), and that G-d made sure there were many, many multi-colored animals born despite Lavan's dishonesty. Before discussing why the Torah spends several verses describing how Yaakov tried to increase the number of multi-colored animals born, let's take a closer look at how putting partially peeled branches in the watering troughs could make a difference.

Despite Lavan removing all the multi-colored animals (30:35), genetics (heterozygosis) still dictates that some of the newborn animals would be multi-colored; if two sheep (or goats) having a recessive "colored" gene mated, one of every four sheep born to them would have both recessive genes, and would therefore be multi-colored. By the next mating season, those multi-colored animals that mated with each other would have multi-colored offspring, as would half of those that mated with animals that only had one recessive gene. Lavan likely knew this, as did Yaakov, as otherwise no multi-colored offspring could be expected, and there would be no reason for Yaakov to stay. The question is not how any multi-colored animals were born, but how the peeled branches affected how many were born.

Rashi, quoting B'reishis Rabbah, brings two approaches. The first, that the branches startled the females, making it easier for the males to impregnate them, seems to work within the laws of nature (increasing the mating opportunities) while implying that the females being taken aback by seeing the peeled branches caused them to give birth to animals with an

appearance similar to what startled them. Increasing the number of mating opportunities alone would increase the number of multi-colored animals born, although it would also increase the number of monochromatic animals born. Dr. David Neustadter (<http://www.vbm-torah.org/alei/13-08sheep-neustadter.rtf>) makes a similar suggestion, referencing the verse (30:38) saying that when the sheep came to drink, they "became hot," thereby increasing the fertility rate of the sheep. Aside from the implication that the peeled branches only affected how many multi-colored animals were born, if Yaakov knew that such visual stimulation increased the fertility rate, we would have expected him to have done so well before he started working for himself.

Dr. Neustadter adds another possibility, suggesting that being visually stimulated by peeled branches made it more likely that the females would prefer to mate with males having a similar appearance, thereby increasing the number of multi-colored offspring. (If this were the case, Yaakov must have waited until the second mating season to peel the branches, as initially there were no multi-colored males to prefer.) Rashi doesn't explain why or how the offspring would look like the peeled branches, but it would be fair to apply the reason most prevalent in the traditional literature, that seeing something during conception (or shortly beforehand) affects the physical characteristics of the fetus (see Midrash HaGadol on 30:39). Although this has no known basis in scientific fact, it was apparently a widely held notion. If Yaakov thought it would help, we can understand why he would try it. However, it makes the question of why the Torah included it in the narrative that much stronger.

Rashi's second approach, or perhaps an added facet to his original approach (as he does not say it is a new thought, just quotes Rav Hoshiya, who might be adding on to what was said until now), is that the water the females were drinking turned into "seed," obviating the need for a male. It can be assumed that the "characteristics" that the male would have contributed now came from the water, within which the peeled branches were sitting, causing the offspring to resemble the branches (multi-colored). This approach is obviously not working within the laws of nature (see Mizrachi and Gur Aryeh). It is doubtful that Yaakov expected the water to turn into "seed" by placing the peeled branches within it; if that was necessary for the peeled branches to have any real affect, it would seem that the females merely seeing the multi-colored peeled branches was not enough to cause the ratio of multi-colored offspring to increase.

Another possibility has recently been put forth (see <http://tinyurl.com/k4k5d9t>) based on the concept of epigenetics (see <http://tinyurl.com/k5mnxxu>). To quote Dr. Joshua Backon, "Epigenetics is the study of heritable changes in gene expression that occur without a change in DNA sequence...What is most relevant to

the biblical story of Jacob and the sheep is the research on early nutritional influences on the Agouti gene affecting coat color of fur in sheep and mice." In other words (and Dr. Backon provides more detail), placing these three kinds of branches in the troughs, specifically after exposing the inside of the bark through the peeling process, may have released certain fungi containing specific amino acids into the water that could affect the color of the fur of the offspring of the animals that drank it. This could explain why Yaakov used three different types of trees rather than just one, although the Midrash (Lekach Tov and Seichel Tov) attributes his choice of trees to their names (representing the city where G-d appeared to Yaakov, possibly to remind himself of G-d's promise to him or as a reminder that all he had asked for was "clothing to wear and bread to eat" (28:20) so as not to get too forlorn over Lavan trying to trick him out of any real income; representing Lavan himself; and representing Lavan's deceitfulness). It is also possible that Yaakov thought the animals seeing the peeled branches would be enough and chose those specific branches for symbolic reasons, with divine providence making sure that he did things in a way that worked within the laws of nature. Either way, epigenetics could explain how Yaakov putting peeled branches of wood in the animals drinking water caused a much higher rate of multi-colored offspring.

When Yaakov describes the prophetic dreams he had when the sheep were mating (31:10-12), he says that they were mating with multi-colored sheep that G-d's angels had brought over from Lavan's flocks (see Rashi) in order to compensate for Lavan having oppressed him. The implication is that it was G-d's direct intervention that caused so many multi-colored sheep to be born, not putting peeled branches in the water. This doesn't negate the possibility that the peeled branches helped (but needed G-d's intervention to be as successful as it was), but it does bring us back to the question we posed earlier: If it came down to G-d helping Yaakov be more successful than he would have otherwise been, why is the peeling of the branches described so prominently in the Torah's narrative? Does it really matter how Yaakov tried to achieve success? Were the peeled branches even a substantial part of his success? Is the Torah giving us a science lesson to "try at home"?

Some could suggest that the peeled branches were included in order to introduce us to the concept that the things we see and think about affect us. And this is certainly true on a spiritual level and, to a certain extent, on a physical level as well (as our bodies respond to such stimuli). However, it does not seem to be true at the genetic level, making it hard to accept that "bad science" was purposely included in the Torah in order to teach us this valuable lesson. Granted, science is a moving target; until a couple of decades ago scientists would have laughed at epigenetics. Nevertheless, until there is a strong enough reason to

think otherwise (and Rabbi Akivah saying so to a king in order to promote marital harmony does not prove it really works), it is fair to assume that merely seeing something does not have a genetic affect. There seems to be a more basic message that the Torah is trying to get across by highlighting how Yaakov tried to increase his wages.

The very fact that Yaakov agreed to stay for years with Lavan even after Yosef was born (when he was ready to leave; see 30:25) indicates he was willing to work in order to support his family rather than relying on G-d to provide for him (despite receiving a blessing from Yitzchok that he would be wealthy, see 27:28), or relying on Yitzchok's wealth. Was "getting a job" enough? Did agreeing to work for Lavan, thereby creating a "natural" means for G-d to fulfill Yitzchok's blessing, qualify as appropriate "hishtadlus" (natural effort) without needing to do more? By telling us the lengths to which Yaakov went to increase his wages, the Torah is teaching us that our efforts are not to be kept at a minimum; we should do whatever we can (within reason) to improve the chances of financial success. Much as the Talmud sharing with us (sometimes at length) medical, financial and interpersonal advice teaches us that we should do what we can to maintain our health, attain financial success and build solid relationships, the Torah detailing the lengths Yaakov went to make a good living teaches us that we must "sweat the details" as well. From this perspective, it doesn't really matter whether peeling branches actually worked; the point is that Yaakov thought it would (and it might have), so he peeled branches and put it in the animals' water. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

What is true spirituality? My beloved friend, Rabbi Avraham Goldhar, who has a revolutionary approach to helping kids get better grades with less study time in both secular and Jewish studies (Goldhar.com), came up with the following paradigm of attributes to clarify the definition of spirituality. Put a check mark by one attribute from each pair that you think is more spiritual:

1. Emotion.....Intellect
2. Kindness.....Justice
3. Community.....Solitude
4. G-d.....Nature
5. Serenity.....Challenge

Now, if you want to try something interesting, put an "x" mark by each attribute that you associate with the Jewish people.

What is fascinating is that most people associate spirituality with emotion, kindness, solitude, nature and serenity... and the Jewish people with intellect, justice, community, G-d and challenge. The

reason is that we have an Eastern notion of spirituality -- an all encompassing emotional bliss connecting with the universe. The Jewish approach to spirituality is based on fulfilling a purpose, to fix the world (tikun olam) -- which requires intellect, justice, community, G-d and challenge.

For the Jew, intellect is to be channeled into emotion -- emotions can't rule you; you must do the right thing. Justice provides for a world of kindness. A society has to be willing to identify rights and wrongs and stand up to evil. If not, one can attempt to do kindness, but end up enabling evil. Community provides you with an understanding of who you are -- a member of a people -- even when you are alone, you are still part of something more. Realizing that there is a Creator and having a relationship with the Creator makes the natural much more profound. This world is a veiled reality with the Creator behind it. People can only receive serenity when they live up to their challenges; otherwise, they are tormented in their pursuit of serenity by not living up to their potential.

There was once a Jewish girl who stopped in Israel on her way to India to seek spirituality. Friends suggested that she go to Neve Yerushalayim to take a class and give Judaism one last shot before seeking other pathways to spirituality. The one class happened to be studying the laws regarding returning a lost item -- when is an item considered lost, what if the person gave up hope of its return, what constitutes a legitimate identifying mark to claim the item, to what extent and cost of time and money are you obligated for returning the item... The girl was furious! This is NOT spirituality. She left in a huff and headed off to India.

Six months later she and her guru were discussing a philosophical matter while walking through the village. They came upon a wallet filled with rupees. The guru picked it up, put it in his pocket and continued on with his point. The girl interrupted him and asked, "Aren't you going to see if there is identification in the wallet to return it?" The guru replied, "No. It was his karma that he lost it; it's my karma that I found it. It's mine." The girl implored, "But, he might have a large family and that might be his monthly earnings... they could starve if you don't return it!" The guru responded, "That is their karma."

The young lady then remembered the class she took in Jerusalem -- and realized that spirituality without justice, kindness and concern for others is just a false spiritual high, corrupt emotion. She returned to Jerusalem and ultimately returned to her Torah heritage.

The Torah gives us great insight on spirituality. The Almighty appears to Avraham on the third day following his Bris Mila (circumcision of the covenant). In the middle of their conversation, Avraham saw three men approaching and wishes to offer hospitality. He says to the Almighty, "My Lord, if I have found favor in Your eyes, do not go away from Your servant" (Genesis

18:3). Avraham is asking the Almighty to "wait on hold" while he goes to take care of three mortals? How can this be? What can be greater spirituality than talking with G-d?

The answer is given in the Talmud (Shevuos 35b, Shabbos 127a), "Hospitality to travelers is greater than receiving the Divine Presence" -- better to be like G-d than to talk with G-d! Better to take responsibility for the world and its inhabitants, than to commune with G-d. That is true spirituality... to be G-d-like -- and that is why one needs intellect, justice, community, G-d and challenge if one truly wants genuine spirituality! © 2013 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Brothers in Scorn

Yaakov's first encounter with his future wife Rachel was significant, encompassing varied emotions, each of which merits lengthy discussion. Upon greeting her at a well, Yaakov feeds her sheep, kisses her, cries, and then identifies himself as the brother of her father. (Genesis 29:11-12)

Such classification needs explanation. Yaakov was not a brother of Rachel's father Lavan: he was a nephew, the son of Lavan's sister, Rivka.

Why, then, did Yaakov refer to himself as a brother of Lavan? The Talmud in Megilah explains that Lavan's notorious reputation preceded him. He was nicknamed Lavan HaArami, or Lavan the charlatan. He was known not only to be avaricious, but to be unscrupulous as well. Yaakov wanted to lay the ground rules with his future bride.

"If your father will act conniving then I am his brother [meaning, I will act conniving as well]. However, if he will act honorably I will respond in kind."

What needs clarification, however, is why begin a marital relationship on such a note. What precedent is Yaakov setting with such a powerful declaration?

Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1887-1933) was a leader of Polish Jewry in the years before World War II. In addition to being the chief Rabbi of Lublin, building and maintaining one of the world's largest and most beautiful yeshivos, Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, he was also one of the first Orthodox members of the Polish parliament, the Sejm. He was a courageous leader whose vision and unwavering commitment to Torah values gained him the respect of Jews and gentiles alike.

During his first weeks as the leader of the Orthodox Jewish delegation, Rabbi Shapiro was approached by a Polish parliamentary deputy, Professor Lutoslawski, a known anti-Semite whose devious legislation constantly deprived minorities of their civil and economic rights.

Standing in front of a group parliamentarians in the halls of the Sejm, the depraved deputy began. "Rabbi," he shouted, a sly smile spreading across his

evil face. "I have a wonderful new way for Jews to make a living -- they can skin dead dogs."

Without missing a beat Rabbi Shapiro shot back. "Impossible, their representatives would never allow it."

The Professor looked puzzled. "Whose representatives? The Jews'?"

"No," smiled Rav Meir, "the dogs' deputies."

Flustered, the vicious bigot tried one more. "Well, my dear Rabbi," he continued sarcastically. "Do you know that on the entrance gate of the city of Schlesien there is an inscription, 'to Jews and dogs entrance forbidden?'"

Rabbi Meir just shrugged his shoulders. "If so, I guess we will never be able to visit that city together."

Needless to say, nary an anti-Semitic word was ever pointed in Rabbi Meir's direction again.

Yaakov knew that to initiate his destiny in the confines of a hostile environment he should proclaim the rules loud and clear. He would not allow himself to be swayed, duped, or connived by even the master of deception and ridicule, Lavan the charlatan. In forging the household that would be the basis for Jewish pride and eternity, Yaakov had to make it clear to his future bride that he too could play hardball. He sent a message of pride and awareness to his descendants. Though this Jew who sat in the tent would enter his new environment with brotherly love, if he needed to, he could just as well be a brother in scorn. © 2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

“Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva in the direction of Charan." (Bereishis 28:10) Ya'akov is on the run. However, not so much away from Eisav as much as toward Lavan and the fulfillment of destiny, his and that of the future Jewish nation.

But that is not the way it felt at the time. There he was, a simple man sitting in the tents of Torah, having the time of his life while dedicating himself to the most meaningful goals a person can achieve, doing what he had been sure was the will of G-d. That ended the moment his mother called Ya'akov in and included him in her plan of deception to usurp the blessings from her eldest son.

True, he stayed for 14 years in the yeshivah of Shem and Eiver on his way to Padan Aram and learned studiously, but there is a difference between learning Torah when you feel no pressure to move on and when you do. It certainly does not help one's concentration to know that one's murderous brother is out to get him, and could at any moment.

And besides, he was a changed man now. The simplicity and purity with which he once learned Torah was a thing of the past, as he indicated to his wife-to-be, Rachel: Ya'akov told Rachel that he was her father's

brother. But, was he her father's brother?! He was her father's nephew! Rather, he said to her, "Marry me." She agreed but said "My father is a deceiver, and you cannot overcome him."

"He answered 'I am his brother in trickery.'" (Megillah 13b) And so he was. Lavan did try to outsmart him by deceiving Ya'akov into marrying his eldest daughter Leah, but Ya'akov had himself covered by arranging with Rachel to use a password when consummating the marriage at night. What he hadn't counted on, though, was Rachel outsmarting him by helping her father to succeed where he himself could not: she gave Leah the password.

Talk about conspiracies! Not only did Rachel's double-cross undermine Ya'akov's plan, it cost him an extra seven years to work for the wife he had truly wanted to marry, even after she betrayed him. To be sure, living and working with Lavan was no party, and even an extra day with him was like an eternity. Now he had to spend an 2,555 days with him, not to mention an extra six years after that just to build up his own fortune.

It must have made him long for the good old days. To make matters worse, it is one thing to have two wives. It is another matter altogether to have two wives that do not get along with each other, even for good reasons. After a day with Lavan and his sons, deceivers and thieves, a person wants to find respite in his own home, which wasn't always so available while Rachel and Leah were building the House of Israel.

Even after surviving the 20 years with Lavan, and the competition between his wives, Ya'akov still had to confront Eisav on the way home, and then Shechem and the violation of Dinah. That only led to Shimon and Levi taking revenge against Shechem and his entire city, and a near war that would have wiped out the fledgling Jewish nation, had it not been for a last minute miracle.

Did I mention the all night fight with the Angel of Eisav along the way? Thirty-six years later, he was home, though he never got a chance to say good-bye to his mother, who died while he was still on the way home. But that was the least of his troubles, because it was not long after settling down that Yosef was kidnapped and sold into slavery. A happy reunion, at that point, was still 22 years away, but even that was accompanied by a whole new exile to one of the most spiritually decrepit nations of its time. If anyone had a right to complain, it was Ya'akov Avinu. So he did, to Pharaoh when he said: "Ya'akov said to Pharaoh, 'I've wandered for 130 years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, which has not yet reached the years of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.'" (Bereishis 47:9) and was fined by G-d, one year of life for every (Hebrew) word of complaint, 33 years altogether.

Some people get no breaks, which, it turns out, for some people can be the greatest break of all, as the Talmud explains: Rabbah bar Bar Chanah said: When

Rebi Eliezer became sick, his disciples entered [his house] to visit him. He said to them, "There is a fierce wrath in the world." They broke into tears, but Rebi Akiva laughed. "Why do you laugh?" they asked him.

"Why do you cry?" he asked back.

They answered, "Shall the Scroll of the Torah lie in pain, and we not weep?" He replied, "For that very reason I rejoice. As long as I saw that my master's wine did not turn sour, nor was his flax smitten, nor his oil putrefied, nor his honey become rancid, I thought, G-d forbid, that he may have received all his reward in this world. However, now that I see him lying in pain, I rejoice [knowing that his reward has been saved for him in the next world]."

He [Rebi Eliezer] said to him, "Akiba, have I neglected anything of the whole Torah?"

"He replied, 'Master, you have taught us, 'For there is not a just man upon earth, that does good and does not sin' (Kohes 7:20).'" (Sanhedrin 101a)

That was from the Talmud. However, the Midrash concurs countless times, some examples being: "A person has to show appreciation to The Holy One, Blessed is He, when he suffers, because suffering draws a person closer to The Holy One, Blessed is He." (Tanchuma, Saitzai 2) "Suffering is more valuable than sacrifices, since sacrifices involve money but suffering involves the body." (Mechilta, Yisro 10) "Suffering only comes to the Jewish people for their good and because of the love of the Jewish people." (Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Zuta, 11) "Come and see which way brings a person to the World-to-Come: suffering. Suffering is dear to The Holy One, Blessed is He, that the Name of The Holy One, Blessed is He, is attached to one who suffers." (Shochar Tov, Tehillim 94)

Apparently, yesurim, or suffering, is the Cod Liver Oil of the spiritual realm. It tastes terrible, but it is good for you, VERY good for you. This is not to say that one should go out looking for it, and to increase the suffering he may be presently undergoing. It just means that suffering in this world is not necessarily a sign of Divine disapproval, especially, as in the case of Ya'akov Avinu, who was trying hard to be a good person, and an even better servant of G-d.

On the contrary, personal suffering may very well be a sign of Divine approval, something to keep in mind since it also says: "Three portions of suffering were divided amongst the Forefathers and all of their generations, the generation of Shmad (intense persecution), and the generation of Moshiach." (Shochar Tov, Tehillim 2)

The worst, I mean the best, may be yet to come. Isn't that bad, I mean, great news? It may be an easy sell to our souls, but not necessarily to our bodies, which tend to be, and rightly so, anti-suffering. But, if it has to come, we might as well learn to use to our advantage. Its period of impact is small compared to the eternal pleasure it brings us later on, in the next world.

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