



Parashat Vayetze



English version

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A JEW OF ANOTHER LEVEL

Rachel gave her sister, Leah, the Simanim. She taught her the laws of family purity, of challah and of lighting candles. She could not bear to see her sister go through the embarrassment of Yaakov's discovering that it was Leah, not Rachel, under the chuppa.

We see later in the parasha, in the Dudaim episode, ותאמר לה המעט קחתך את-אישׁי ולקחת גַם את-דודאי בגי ותאמר רחל לכו ישׁכב עמך הלילה תחת דודאי (30; 15) Reuven brought home "dudaim", mandrakes, a plant whose root resembles the form of a child. (see Ibn Ezra. I saw a picture of it. It's actually very cool.) It is a Segulah for having children. Rachel asked Leah for this Segulah, and Leah said to her sister Rachel, the sister who gave her the signs that Yaakov was waiting for, *"Not only did you take **my husband**, you also want to take my son's dudaim? And Rachel said, That is why Yaakov will sleep with you tonight, in exchange for your son's dudaim/mandrakes.* Why didn't Rachel answer back - Excuse me!!! **I took YOUR husband?!!?**

R. Shwadron explains that at the wedding, Rachel never told Leah that she had already agreed on giving certain signs - simanim - to Yaakov to assure him of her identity, and that these laws were the simanim. She just told her, if you are marrying him, you have to know these Jewish laws. For all the years they were married together, Rachel never let Leah feel,

even for a minute, that she, herself, was Yaakov's first choice!!!

This explains why, at that point, *G-d remembered Rachel's good deed for her sister, and G-d opened her womb.* What? What happened now? What about the last 6 years of Rachel's self sacrifice? The answer is that only now, Rachel's self sacrifice and G-dliness reached a new level: not only did she give her sister her intended, not only did she hide her relationship with him from her, but even when her sister Leah told her, *Not only do you want to take **my husband**....* She just accepted what Leah was saying and went along with the conversation!!!

After learning this explanation of the story, Rachel Imenu, in my eyes, is a totally different Rachel. A whole new perspective of our Matriarch. Her self sacrifice was not a one timer, a one off. Her Avodah was a constant. We can learn from this, perfecting the good deeds we do, and taking them to a new level of serving G-d. And ultimately become the Jew we want to be.

We are all here to serve G-d in some way or another. And we all need merits. And so much goodness that is in store for us, is dependent on those good things that we do. And sometimes, it is just a drop more effort, a drop more perfection of serving G-d, that tips the scales in



our favor. It is sometimes just that one thing that makes the whole difference.

Sometimes when attempting to take my service to G-d to a new level, I get this feeling. "Yosef, you gave up so much already! How much more self sacrifice do you need?" The answer is, that what we think we are sacrificing is actually not so much of a sacrifice. When we do the right thing, we are not really giving anything up, losing out on anything, or sacrificing. Allow me to explain.

Rav Zev Getzel points to something mindboggling. Imagine that Rachel would not have told Leah the simanim. Yaakov would discover Lavan's scam at the wedding, and tell her that this is obviously some sort of misunderstanding, and take Rachel instead. And then what? Then, Rachel would not have the merit of self sacrifice, the merit for which G-d would open her womb!!! Now, fast forward. So, they would stay married for 10 years, and then Yaakov would see that they are not having children. He would end up divorcing Rachel and marrying Leah!!! And then, *Rachel* would end up marrying Esav!

It turns out that Rachel's self sacrifice was actually her saving grace. This is so powerful, so transforming, in so many ways!

The everlasting, ironic, and sometimes annoying truth is, that the only choice we have in life is between doing the right or the wrong thing. Whatever is going to happen, is going to happen anyway. So we are not sacrificing those things that are important to us when we

give them up for doing the right thing, because whatever our destiny is, is going to be our destiny anyway. We can only make our destiny better, when we do the right thing.

The Chafetz Chaim says that it can't be, that a person who sits in Kollel, or another year or two in Yeshiva, trusting G-d and lasting as long as his Rabbis recommend him to stay in learning, will end up losing out because he did the right thing. This is because, we are so dependent on G-d's Plan. And when G-d sees that we are moser nefesh, that we give up things that are important to us for His sake, He "gives up" things for us. He is, so to speak, moser nefesh for us. And when we are moser nefesh, we will find that not only did we not lose, but the very thing that we thought we lost, what we thought we sacrificed, turned out to be our greatest asset!

In the area of coaching, this is of key importance. The 6 P rule, Proper prior planning prevents poor performance, is only true for performance, not for destiny. All we can plan for in life is personal performance, aiming to be the best people we can be. But our destiny, the outcome, is entirely in G-d's Hands. All we have to do in this world is to ask ourselves what it is that G-d wants from us, according to His Torah. Not to live with long term plans, unless they are plans for our own performance. Planning is good for me when I use it to clarify what my expectations are from myself. It is not effective when it builds inside me expectations of G-d. This is a fine line, and a very important one to remember.

GLOOM

I've been trying to keep to the Segula of R Chaim Palachi for the month of Kislev. If you don't complain from Rosh Chodesh Kislev

until the 8th day of Chanukah, you are promised to have a miracle happen to you that year. I believe that the reason why the month



of Kislev is the month not to complain is because the essence of the month of Kislev is about being a K'sil, a simpleton. Believing in G-d, accepting that we totally do not understand what is happening in our lives, and why. We are just too simple to understand G-d's unfathomably wise plans. If we complain about our situation, it is because we don't want to accept consciously or subconsciously G-d's ultimate plan over our plan. Recently, a friend pointed out to me that we spend more time in life planning how we want to live than we do enjoying and appreciating the life that G-d has given us. Because we are busy "outsmarting" G-d.

Imagine that you get a tap on your shoulder. You turn around, and no one is there. And then, you hear a booming, Heavenly voice, that says, "It's Me, G-d. Make no mistakes about your life. You will never be rich. You will never be famous. Your life will be full of the regular struggles that the regular people go through." How would you feel? Would you feel calm, knowing that it is not worth trying so hard to change your fate and make more money than you will ever need, or trying to impress other people, to receive their validation?

You see, so many times in life, we want to outsmart G-d, and not accept the life that G-d has given us. We think that the difficulties [sometimes quite ugly] that we have to deal with - the "dirt" - are a result of our life's being "messed up". We don't see the good in the gloom. But the truth is that part of growth is to accept the dirt, because that dirt, that fertilizer, is what we need to grow to become the better person we are meant to be. And the only way we can really grow from the gloom is by accepting that G-d gave us this gloom so that we will be able to grow in some way.

R Yitzchak Fanger told the following parable: There was once a mouse that was being chased by a cat. The mouse shrieked, as he ran for his life. Elephant's big ears picked up the squeal of the mouse, and, with his big heart, he came to the rescue. With his long trunk, He snorted up a big blob of mud and shot the mud over Mouse, burying him, hiding him from sight. Cat ran right over Mouse, not knowing where Mouse disappeared.

Lesson no. 1. When you are covered in mud, many times it's for your best.

Then, Mouse started to move around; he was able to get one foot out, and his tail poked a hole out of the mud that covered his body. He started wiggling, and then... Cat spotted him. Cat came over, pulled Mouse out of the mud and ate him alive.

Lesson 2. Not always when someone pulls you out of the mud is it for your best.

A lot of times in life, we find ourselves covered in darkness. We have a hard time figuring out why things are not going as expected, everything looking confusing. We are similar to that mouse that - all of a sudden - got a blob of mud thrown at him, not knowing where it came from and why. We try to escape the gloom, but things don't get better.

Yaakov's life was a life of hardships. A life of darkness. G-d brought the darkness on Yaakov on that first night after his having learned for fourteen years without sleep. Suddenly. Because the tests a person has in life, the darkness one has to go through, are always a sudden change. We are never really ready for the gloomy days. So, what can we do, instead of complaining? At that moment when darkness came upon Yaakov, he set up the Arvit prayer. Because in the darkness, things that look bad can actually be your greatest



benefit. Arvit, the prayer of Erev, has hidden in the root, the word Arev, or sweet. Because many of the sweet things in life come from the darkest places.

להגיד בבוקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות, *To say over your kindness in the morning, and your faith at night.* Our Rabbis refer to Night time as a time of faith, a time when a staff and a snake can be confused. Why do the Rabbis use staff and snake as an example? Because the staff is something that can help you, something you can lean on, and snake is something that can kill you. The things that look to us like they are great for us, might be the worst things for us, and the things that look like they are the worst things for us, can be our salvation. Night time, when times are bleak, is the opportunity to thank G-d, to display your trust that the dirt that you need to deal with, is (even more than) okay.

Moshe asked G-d the age-old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" **הראני וראית**. And G-d answered him, **נא את דרכך**, "You can see Me from My

back". G-d told Moshe that if he ever wanted to see Him and understand Him, that he should look back, **מאחור** - by looking into the past, one can now understand things that, a few years ago, made no sense. Yaakov's life, as he was going through it, looked so dark. But if we reexamine it from the end to the beginning, he needed to run away from Esav, he needed to be tricked with Leah, he needed to deal with Lavan, and Yosef needed to be kidnapped.

It is interesting how the month of Kislev, the month of being simple and accepting G-d, always comes out during the time of Yaakov's life. Yaakov was the epitome of simplicity. **איש תם יושב אהלים** *A man that was simple, who sat in the tents of Torah and Tefillah.* If one wants to stay in learning, the only way is by mastering simplicity. It does not say that Yaakov was a **תם**, a simpleton. It says that Yaakov was an **איש תם**, a man that controlled his simplicity. He bowed down to Esav, instead of trying to fight him. He accepted his father-in-law as a trickster, and just dealt with the situation, mastering his simplicity.

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