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THE ART OF THE PLEDGE

The reason there is a custom to say Vayevarech David and Az Yashir every day in prayer of Pesukei Dzimrah is because all the 15 terminologies of praise found in Yishtabach, are sourced in those two, Vayevarech and Az Yashir. שיר ושְׁבָחָה, הלל וְזִמְרָה, עז ומְמִשְׁלָה, נְצִחָה, גְּדִלָה וּגְבוּרָה, תְּהִלָּה, וְתַפְאֲרָת, קִדְשָׁה, וּמַלְכוּת בְּרִכּוֹת וְהוֹדָאוֹת (Abudraham)

What is the Vayevarech David prayer about, anyway? After David Hamelech and the Jewish People donated all that was needed for building the Beit Hamikdash: the silver, gold, copper, and iron, and all the precious stones... David Hamelech said, Baruch Atah Hashem Elokey Yisrael Avinu. Blessed are You Hashem the G-d of Yisrael our Father.

Yisrael, of course, is Yaakov Avinu. David blessed the G-d of Yaakov... Why did David mention the G-d of specifically Yaakov our Father, any more than mentioning the G-d of Avraham or Yitzhak?

The answer is, because Yaakov was the first one to make a Neder, a pledge. As it says in the passuk, at the begging of this week's parasha, וַיִּנָּדֶר יַעֲקֹב נֶדֶר, לֵאמֹר and Yaakov vowed, saying,... If G-d will take care of me, the stone that I erected as monument will be a House of G-d. וְהָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת יְהִי בַיִת אֱלֹקִים Yaakov was then, on Mt. Moriah.

When David said Vayevarech David, thanking G-d that he was to begin the building of the Temple, he was standing in that very place, that Yaakov made

this vow, almost a thousand years prior! Yaakov pledged, that this place, where he put a monumental stone, will become a House of G-d. King David therefore said, Blessed are You, Hashem, G-d of Yisrael, our father Yaakov! The pledge is finally being fulfilled!

Our Rabbis ask, what does it mean, when it says, that Yaakov vowed saying? What is the extra word, "saying"?

Saying means, Yaakov taught this to his children, that when one is in a צרה, a difficult time, he should make a pledge to G-d. Whether it is Tzedaka, a good deed, some more Mitzvoth, or even better, some more Torah learning. King David said, we are building the Beth Hamikdash on Mt. Moriah, and we followed Yaakov's command to us, to pledge tzedakah. In this way, he is ישראל אבינו! Yaakov, our father, as he taught us this behavior!

This is why we give Tzedaka when we say Vayevarech David, before our prayers. We learnt to do so, from Yaakov Avinu, that when we want to pray, we first pay. This is why we stand up during Vayevarech David. It is because, the friendly shul gabay, who is pacing around with his tzedakah box. We stand up in Vayevarech David, because we are standing up out of respect for the one who is collecting, the original standing ovation, for our beloved fundraiser!

Even if you feel you don't have it in you to pledge, even if your short on cash, even if your spiritual battery is running low, even if you feel like you are



all alone. Remember, the motto of Yaakov Avinu. Pray now, pay later... as long as you pledge before your pray. Just make sure you don't overextend yourself. You don't want to play with G-d, and not keep your pledges.

Focus on what you can commit to, not what's out of your control. A little pledge of time, effort, or money can make all the difference. Set realistic goals, small and meaningful steps. Not overwhelming yourself with grandiose promises. Even a promise of thanks, of saying Mimzor LaTodah or Nishmat Kol Chai, can be more than enough!

If you are in pain, and you don't pray for your pain, it is a sin. If your friend is in pain, and you don't pray for your friend, it is also a sin. Prayer for your pain, is the ultimate prayer, a mitzvah from the Torah.

Chana was deeply troubled by her childlessness. Each year, during their pilgrimage to the Mishkan in Shiloh, Chana would pray fervently to Hashem for a child. When Chana wanted a son, she did not just pray. She made a pledge. In her heartfelt prayer, Chana made a vow:

וְהָיָא מֵרַת נַפְשׁ, וְנִתְחַפְּלֵל עַל-יְקֹוֹק וּבִכְלָה תִּבְכֶּה. וַתְּדַר גְּדֵר, " וַתֹּאמֶר: יְקֹוֹק צְבָאוֹת, אִם-רָאוּ תִרְצֶה בְּעַנֵּי אִמְתֶּךָ, וּנְכַרְתִּנִּי וְלֹא-תִשְׁפַח אֶת-אִמְתֶּךָ, וְנִתְחַפְּלֵי לְאִמְתֶּךָ זָרַע אֲנֹשִׁים, וְנִתְחַיֵּי לִיקֹוֹק כָּל-יְמֵי חַיָּו, וּמִזֶּכֶר לֹא-יִשְׁכַּח עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ "

“Hashem, Master of Legions, if You take notice of the suffering of Your maidservant and give Your

maidservant a child, I will dedicate him to Hashem all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.” Hashem granted her request, and she gave birth to Shmuel. True to her vow, she brought him to the Mishkan as a young boy, dedicating him to a life of service to Hashem. Shmuel HaNavi grew to become one of the greatest prophets and leaders in Jewish history, anointing both King Shaul and King David. When we combine heartfelt prayer with genuine commitment, we can unlock incredible blessings.

We should not make pledges if we don't have to. It is better not to pledge if you are not in a time of difficulty. But if you are in a place of difficulty, it is recommended to pledge. This is the reason why it is so important to give Tzedakah during the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The scales of life are out, the books are being inscribed, for life, or otherwise. It is a time we need a salvation. So it is a time to give Tzedakah.

Whether it's donating, volunteering, or dedicating time to personal growth, let your pledge take your prayer to the next level. When the Gabbay goes around and gives you “the gabbay look”, you know the one — the “I-see-you're-trying-to-avoid-eye-contact-but-I-have-all-day” look, give him respect. Your pledges are the fuel to your prayers. When you promise to Hashem, He promises back. Tzedaka is the insurance that always pays off in the end.

THE ART OF BEING DEPENDENT ON G-D

Is it safe to leave my house with all the antisemitism in the atmosphere? Can I use public transportation? Can I wear a Kippah? Should my children walk in the streets? Is my mezuzah a red flag?

G-d answered these questions, אַל-תִּירָאֵל תּוֹלַעַת יִשְׁעָב, (Yeshayahu 41; 14) Don't fear, worm of Yaakov! G-d calls us a worm! And He does not want us to be afraid! If I were a lion, I would not fear! But if I am a worm (?), why should I not fear?

Everything we relied on for safety fell apart! State of Israel? Uncle Sam? IDF? Now we have Turkey, who is the second most powerful army in NATO after the USA saying that Netanyahu is like Hitler, saying that Israel's end is near, and that we are on our way out! Iran, Hizballah, Russia, South America... and the list doesn't end! The world is buying into the craziness and stupidity of Abu Mazen, that the Palestinians were the same Canaanites who lived in Israel before the Jews



conquered the Land under the leadership of Yehoshua Ben Nun, after the Exodus from Egyptian slavery. And that the Jewish Nation that conquered the Land became extinct, and the Zionists and the Jewish People of today are just a “British-Holland Colony”, and we have nothing to do with the original Jewish People. And that the Zionists partnered with the Nazis during the Holocaust to get the Jews to leave Europe to come to Israel, and that even though the Holocaust did happen, there were “just” a few hundred thousand Jews who died, and not 6 million, a number that the Zionists made up. And that in the gas chambers the Germans did not kill Jews, but they just burnt dead bodies, so that diseases wouldn’t spread. And that the Jews are guilty for the Holocaust, and that Hitler killed the Jews not because he was an antisemite, but because the Jews lend money to one another without charging interest, but to their fellow Germans, they lend only **with** interest. And that antisemitism does not exist; it is just a national response over the generations by the neighbors of the Jews, because the Jews make all the money. And that the people at the party who were shot on Oct. 7, were shot because they were “settlers”, or they were shot by IDF helicopters.

The world is believing these lies of Abu Mazen, and many believe that he should take over Gaza after the war, despite the fact that he fully supports the attacks of Oct. 7. In his eyes, the attacks were totally legitimate! He sides with Hamas, even though Hamas cut off his finger and kicked him and the PLO out of Gaza! But anyone who is an enemy of Israel is Abu Mazen’s friend!

Even though we have the best – and most dedicated - soldiers in the world, G-d keeps showing us that we can never actually win - we can’t feel safe and calm and serene until Mashiach, without relying on Him, and only Him! We are just a little worm! And G-d is telling His little worm, “Yaakov, don’t fear!”

The worm can’t run away with its legs. It can’t fight with its hands. All it can do is one thing! Nibble! Yaakov, use your mouth, not your hands! Daven! Pray! Learn Torah! And keep nibbling till

you break through the Evil Decrees! Through the Galut! A lion can’t take down a cedar tree... but a worm can nibble its way through it!

All this brings us to an important philosophical question on the whole concept of prayer: We all have difficulties that we wish we did not have! We are told that everything that G-d does is for the highest good, and the very best for us! So why pray?

It’s simple. I have a lot of Taavot, a lot of desires. I am sure you do, too. But G-d has one desire! Not steak! Not a fancy car or home! Not even a korban! All G-d desires, all He has a Taava for is for our prayers! מפני שהקב"ה מתאוה לתפלתן של צדיקים (Yevamot 64a) That is why G-d gives pain and suffering, because He desires that we pray out to Him! Even though the pain and suffering were all for the highest good, but there is no higher good than prayer! Once you pray, G-d will do magic and give you a sweeter, higher good! It is hard to explain, because G-d is hard to explain, because of our limited understanding. For example. We all agree, that G-d can stick an elephant through a pin hole. The question is, just, how He will do it. Will He shrink the elephant, or will He enlarge the pinhole! But those two options are what humans think, from their limited perception of G-d’s abilities. For G-d, He can just as easily keep the elephant at its size, and the pinhole at its size, and put the elephant through the pinhole!! Just as He can take a Nation through the sea, and put our Patriarch through the fires of Ur Kasdim! For G-d, 2+2, does not equal 4, as He can put an Aron Hakodesh in the Holy of Holies, and it won’t take up any space!

So why does G-d make us go through hard times? On a personal level, or on a national level?

The only way to explain this is - imagine a carpenter, who cuts wood to size for kitchens, bookshelves, frames, closets. You take away his saw, that costs him 25 dollars, and you give him, instead, a diamond saw, that is used by gem cutters, that costs much more than that. He starts to complain, telling you, that he needs his carpenter’s



saw, because that is the only way he can do what **his** job requires of him!

Your Neshama was sent here for a reason. Our Nation is on a journey, on a mission. The only thing that will help your Neshama reach its purpose in this world, the only thing that will bring us further on our journey as a nation is the suffering that you have in your life, and the pain our Nation goes through!

We can try surviving by hiding in America, or by relying on the State of Israel. That is all relying on the “Hands” of Esav! But G-d wants us to stop that now! He wants us to rely on our Nibbling, on the “Kol” Yaakov, on prayers! The faster we get this, the faster we will be safe! We have been using the wrong tools; we have been using our “hands”, something that is Esav’s tools! Yaakov’s tools, his sword and bow and arrow, are his prayers! (Onkelos Bereshit 48; 22) All the countries, the wealth, the serenity, the beautiful luscious green lands of Esav that he has until now, he received from G-d from the merit of just two tears, that he shed when he prayed! He prayed that he also receive some sort of blessings from his father Yitzhak! (Tanhuma Kedoshim 15; Yalkut Shimoni 76; Midrash Sechel Tov Bereshit 27) וַיִּצְחָק וַיֹּאמֶר ... וְלָקַח אֶפְרָיִם מִהָאֵשֶׁת בְּנֵי וַיֹּאמֶר עָשׂוֹ אֵלֵי אָבִיו הַבְּרָכָה אֲחַת הוּא־לָךְ אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר עָשׂוֹ אֵלֵי אָבִיו הַבְּרָכָה אֲחַת הוּא־לָךְ אָבִי *And Yitzhak answered, and he said to Esav, ... to you, Esav, what can I do, my son? I gave all the blessings to your brother Yaakov! And Esav said to his father, There is only one blessing you have, my father? And Esav lifted his voice, and he cried!!!* וַיַּעַן וַיִּצְחָק אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲבֵנָה מִשְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶזֶל יִהְיֶה מִשְׁבֹּד וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲבֵנָה מִשְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶזֶל יִהְיֶה מִשְׁבֹּד *And Yitzhak his father answered him and said to him: From the fat of the land, will be your dwelling place, and from the dew of the heavens from above!*

If that is how powerful prayer is, that it can give Esav so, so much, then why do we, Yaakov, keep falling back on our hands!? Everyone is supporting the IDF, and they should; *but who is supporting today during the war, the Yeshivot, the Kollelim, the Bet Yaakov?!* Those are not any less our heroes!!!! All we have to do is start believing in

G-d and calling out to Him; then, הקדוש ברוך הוא מצלינו מידם. Hashem will save us from their hands!

The problem is that we don’t call out to G-d, recognizing and admitting that we have nothing to rely on, except Him! קָרוֹב יִקְרָא לְכָל־קֹרְאָיו לְכָל־אִשֶּׁר Hashem is close to all that call Him! To all that call Him in truth! What does it mean, to call G-d in truth? It means, that you have nothing else to rely on, on a national level, or on a personal level! Not on the IDF, State of Israel, Uncle Sam, or the community you are a part of. Not on the healthcare systems, not your financial anchor, not your schools to educate your children, not your army or police force to protect you! For He is העונה לעמו ישראל-ל בעת שועם אליו, He answers His nation Yisrael’s prayer, when they cry out to Him!

The problem is that we think that we don’t have enough merit to pray! We think that G-d only answers the prayers of the Tzaddikim! King David tells us No! Hashem is close to all those who call out to Him! Even the wicked! Even those who don’t have merit! לְכָל־קֹרְאָיו !

אמר דוד רבונו של עולם אפילו רשע שבשיראל, כשיבא לקרוא לפניך, ענה אותו מיד, שלא יאמרו אומות העולם כל הפנים שוות, אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא חייך עד שלא יקראני עניתיו King David told G-d, “Answer all those who pray to you, even the prayers of the wicked! So that the gentiles don’t say, Look! We pray to our gods and we are not answered, and this Jew prays to his G-d, and his G-d doesn’t answer him! What a Hillul Hashem! G-d! Answer anyone and everyone’s prayer! And G-d said, *Let them call me, and I will answer!!!*(Midrash Tehillim Mizmor 4) G-d even answered the prayer of Esav, to have some part of the blessings of Avraham and Yitzhak!

Here is a crazy story I heard from R’ Yaakov Shemesh, a story he heard from the manager of an Ultra-Orthodox funeral home in New Jersey. It all started when the Goldman family received a phone call from their mother’s nursing home. “Hi! You finally answer the phone! For a week we have been trying to reach one of the members of your family, but no one has answered! Sorry to break you the



news! Your mother passed away a week ago, and she is here, waiting to be buried!

The Goldmans felt horrible! Exactly ten days ago, they visited their mother and she was fine! Now they needed to bury the mother they loved so much, and they were a week late! They quickly arranged for a fast but respectable funeral. The whole ceremony was an hour, they rushed it as fast as they could, and Goldman family went on to the Shiva, with their ripped shirts.

At the end of the Shiva, Tzippy gets a phone call... She picks up her phone, and she sees its her mother's phone calling her!? She answers the phone, and it's her mother!!! "Tzippy! You forgot about me? It's your mother!" White as a ghost, Tzippy hangs up the phone, wondering how the Angel of Death called from her mother's phone with her mother's voice!

A minute later, Mindi's phone rang! "Mindi! No one is answering my phone! I am here in the nursing home for ten days, and no one is coming to visit me! All my kids forgot me?" The whole family, in their ripped shirts, went running to their mother's room in the old age home, and she was right there! Sitting in her chair, like they saw her last!

They said to her, "Mommy! We thought you are dead!" She laughed and said, "I didn't die! My roommate died!" They could not believe the mistake! They buried and mourned their mother's roommate! Now, they needed to explain this to the deceased roommate's children!

They called the children of the roommate, and the woman's daughter answered. They said, "We are calling from the Nursing Home of your mom!" The woman answered on the other end of the line.

"Didn't I tell you to stop calling me!! I know my mother wants an ultra-orthodox burial! I know that she has been praying for this from this Tehillim that she wants a Jewish burial, and that she should be mourned and that they should say Kaddish for her! Well, guess what! We, her children, are not interested! We don't believe in the whole religion thing, in the World to Come, in burial, in shiva, in ripping shirts, or in saying Kaddish! We told her a million times, we will burn her body and put her ashes in a jar and put it on top of the television! Her prayer, her Tehillim, her prayers will never help her!

Oh, my Gosh! G-d answered her prayers!!!! She had the funeral, the ripped shirts, the kosher burial, the kaddish and lots of Mishnayot learned, to top it off, for her Neshama! She knew that no one can bury her, no one can help her, except G-d!

There comes a time, when we are powerless. The greatest fear of Man, is who will take care of him, when he can't take care of himself! But G-d is **never** powerless! He never runs on low! **אתה גבור** ! גבור לנצח . לעולם ה'

When Yaaov had no material gifts to offer to Rachel in marriage, because Elifaz his nephew took all of his possessions and left him only with his walking-stick(כִּי בְמַקְלֵי עֲבָרְתִּי אֶת־הַיָּרְדֵן הֵנָּה), he made a prayer! **אֲשָׁא עֵינַי אֶל־הַהַרִּים מֵאֵן יָבֵא עֲזָרִי**!

I lifted my eyes to my parents (הורים), thinking how Eliezer came with great wealth to get Rivka for Yitzhak, and I have nothing for Rachel! Where will my **עֵזֶר** כִּנְגְדִי, my wife, come from?! How will I start the Jewish Nation, with the twelve tribes?!? But then he said, **עֲזָרִי מֵעַם יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה שְׂמִיךְ וְאָרֶץ**, My help is from Hashem!!! I don't need anything else to save me, but G-d, Himself!!!

THE ART OF BEING ANGELIC

I just got back from walking the streets of Manhattan for an entire week, helping my father-in-law fundraise for his Yeshiva, Yeshivat Beer Yitzhak, in Telshestone. When I got back to my

apartment in Jerusalem, I asked myself, what is the difference between the gentile, who walks the streets in Manhattan, and the Jew?



A Jew is living in this world, while he is accompanied by spiritual worlds. A gentile is a human being that has no connection between the physical universe and the spiritual universe. השמים השמים: The gentile believes that G-d made the Heavens for the angels, and He kept spirituality up there. He created Earth, and He kept its physicality down here. He gave us a life to enjoy, and make merry. And there is no connection between Heaven and Earth. The Jew is a being that makes the physical, spiritual.

How does a Jew connect the physical nature of Earth to the spiritual essence of the Heavens? Through Torah and prayer, of course! The beginning of every block of text in the Sefer Torah, the very first letter of each block, is the letter Vav (except in five places). The Sofrim refer to this as Vavei HaAmudim. The letter Vav is the letter that means “and”; it is the letter that connects. This is because the Torah connects the physical world to the spiritual heaven. And it connects the Jew to His Creator. Every blessing we make, every prayer, when we say Baruch, we don’t *ble*ss G-d, for He does not need us to bless Him. He is already blessed enough, and He does not lack any blessing that we can offer. The word Baruch, means that He *is* blessed, but more correctly, that He, in Heaven, is the source of the goodness we have here, down on Earth. Whenever there is a lack of Parnassah, health, tranquility, or anything else, it is because there is a disconnect between Heaven and Earth. The word Baruch is the same root as the word הברכה, which means grafting, and the word בריכה which means pool. The concept is to connect things to their source, to connect Earth with Heaven. (Zohar 2; 131 B)

At the end of the Parasha, Yaakov sees a camp of angels, and he calls them Machanayim. Camps. The Ramban is bothered by a law in Dikduk. It is common knowledge that the plural male version of a word is the addition of ים at the end. סוס means horse, and סוסים SUSSIM means horses, plural male. Now what about plural eyes? One eye, is עין, AYIN. Two eyes, though, are עיניים, ENAYIM, and NOT EINIM! Two legs are רגליים RAGLAYIM,

and not רגלים REGALIM. A bicycle is אופניים OFANAYIM and not OFANIM. Why?? There seems to be no reason for this ostensibly insignificant difference! But, our Rabbis tells us differently. Two things that are unconnected, unrelated, are just IM. שירים, גמלים, חמורים, סוסים, אנשים, נשים מלכים. But plural things that work together and correlate, collaborate, or are fused together, are AYIM. עיניים, שפתיים, שיניים, אזניים, ידיים, רגליים, כנפיים, אופניים. If so, why is the word used here מהנניים, MACHANAYIM, and not MACHANIM, or even better, MACHANOT? The “ayim” ending implies camps that work together. What does this mean, the camps that Yaakov saw, that work together?

The Ramban explains that the two camps that work together are the angels and the Bnei Yisrael. That both, the angels and the Bnei Yisrael, together, praise and sanctify G-d’s Name. Yaakov saw that in the house of Lavan, he grew so much spiritually, that he was on the level of angels! He saw that he bestowed to all of his descendants, to you and me, the power of being angelic, through the learning of Torah that Yaakov personified. As long as he was in Lavan’s house, he did not recognize how holy he and his family were. Only now, after separating from the materialistic world of Lavan, did he realize how holy he had been, all along, specifically from dealing with the big world, building a family, all within a Torah lifestyle. (Or Gedalyah) Yaakov realized that he was not only angelic, but that the angels were accompanying him all along, and the upper worlds are dependent on the Jewish people, and how they sanctify G-d, in the physical world.

Every day, we remind ourselves of this when we say Kedusha. The intro to Kedusha is that we will sanctify G-d down here, *just like* the angels on high sanctify G-d’s Name. The angels will not be able to say Kedusha, until we say Kedusha down here. כְּתָר יִתְנוּ לָהּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְאָכִים הַמוֹנִי מֵעֵלָה עִם עַמּוּד יִשְׂרָאֵל They can only join us; they can’t say Kedusha without us.

Probably the best Chinuch you can give your kids is to let them know and feel that *we* know and feel



that we are surrounded by angels. We come home Friday night, accompanied by angels, and we sing to them Shalom Aleichem. They bless us each Friday night, if we are ready for Shabbat, and the opposite, if we were not ready. (Shabbat 119b) We go to the restroom, and our angels wait for us to finish using the facilities to continue accompanying us. (Berachot 60b) We say Alenu Leshabeach, and G-d and all His angels stop and listen to us; and after we finish, they say, אשרי העם שככה לו, fortunate is this nation... (Mateh Moshe) And that when desire to do good, or desire to do bad, we create angels that will help us fulfill our desires. (Maharsha Makkot 10b) If a person would just meditate on this a few minutes a day, he would faint. That angels are accompanying him everywhere, to protect him from harm, when he keeps G-d's Mitzvoth, and to testify against him, when he transgresses His word.

When we pray, when we say Kedusha, we are to stand with our feet together, as if we are angels. When we say Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh, one is to uplift himself, as the angels do. When we say Baruch in Kedusha, we are connecting Earth with the Heavens. When we say Kedusha, we are supposed to look upward, toward Heaven, and uplift ourselves. When we look upward, G-d says, I look into their eyes, I make "eye contact", and I have no greater pleasure in the entire world than that moment! At that moment G-d holds on to His Throne, on the part of it that bears Yaakov's image, and He hugs it, and He kisses it, and He mentions the merit of the Jews, and He hurries their Redemption. (Mishna Berura 125; 5) This is Halacha, not just Minhag. Yaakov realized all of this, and that the angels in the Heavens are static. They are dependent, and even G-d, Himself, depends on the action and passion of the Jewish People. (Nefesh Hachaim) Machanayim.

There is nothing more precious to G-s than our making the physical into the spiritual. When Moshe was commanded by G-d to make a Kior, a washing basin to purify the hands and feet of the Kohanim in the Mishkan, the women that had just left Egypt came running with the copper mirrors

they had used in Egypt. Moshe was skeptical as to whether he could use these mirrors that had been used by women to beautify themselves, something so mundane and physical, something that was used for the Y. Hara. Especially for the Kior that gave the waters to check the Sotah. But G-d said, these mirrors, are most precious! אלו חביבין עלי מן הכל (Tanchuma Pekudei 9) They were used by these women to beautify themselves for their husbands, to make their husbands interested in them, despite the brutal slavery, to have more children in Egypt.

How is this the most precious thing? Taking the most mundane thing, the Earthly, and making it Heavenly! The reason why Rachel was punished, not to be buried with Yaakov in Maarat Hamachpela, was because she gave up a night with her husband, Yaakov, to her sister Leah, for a few mandrakes! (Rashi) Why such a strict punishment for giving up just one night? Because these are the most precious!

At the outset of the Parasha, G-d promised Yaakov that He would never leave him. G-d also promises every soul before coming down to Earth, I will not leave you, as long as you don't leave Me. When I came back to Israel, someone asked me if I had bought anything in America for my wife. "Anything that you buy for your wife and kids, you are showing, that you were thinking about them." When the soul comes down to this world, G-d wants to know that we are always thinking about Him, no matter how Earthly and materialistic this world we are living in is. Just like the child is going to ask his Abba when he comes back home, "How could it be that my Abba went all the way to America, and he came back with nothing for me?" G-d, also, is waiting for us to bring back to Him a changed person, a person who has worked on Himself and thought about G-d, no matter where he is.

This is the power of Levi. It is so interesting how the dikduk can tell us so much, from just one letter change. When Levi was born, it does not say that she, Leah, called him, Levi. ותקרא or ותאמר. Rather, it says, על־בן קרא־שמו לוי, **He called him Levi.** Rashi explains, because of this small,



seemingly insignificant *Diduk* change, we learn that the angel Gavriel took this child from Leah and brought him in front of G-d, and G-d called him Levi. The reason why Leah wanted this name was because she was hoping that now that she had a third son, she would be finally *accompanied* by her husband, Yaakov. She did not want to feel alone anymore, in her relationship with her husband. If so, what does it mean that G-d also called this child Levi, if Leah, herself, had enough of a reason to call him Levi??

R' Wolbe explains that the name Levi is given to the ones who are the connection with G-d, who, wherever they go, they bring G-d with them, and He accompanies them. Living with G-d, serving Him, connected to Him. Never alone in the relationship, always thinking about G-d.

A Torah Jew, who needs to walk the streets of Manhattan, has G-d with him in his mind and heart. At the end of time, G-d will bring the *Leviyatan*, the big fish, for all the Tzaddikim to eat, for them always having G-d accompanied with them, wherever they were. (B Batra 75a)

READY TO MAKE ALIYAH?

To move to Israel, to make Aliyah or not to, is presently a hot topic. "I'm not ready; I can't live in an apartment, and I can't afford to buy a house. No Amazon *Prime*, no Costco... Can't we just create America, in Israel? Can't we just buy a hilltop and make America there??"

The challenge for a *family with children* to make Aliyah is not about giving up physical stuff and comfort, alone. The challenge is, are you willing to give up on your Americanness, Western culture, life perspectives, career-gearred mindset, community life? Israel is a country with a religious "system", with its own Rabbis, who don't care what Rabbis in America allow and accept. If you want to make it work, you need to be willing to adapt to the place and the system, that, for the most part, does not make sense to Americans. In America, the religious systems are accommodating, with large margins. In Israel, the systems are not. If you want your family to fit into the systems here, you have to fit into the "box" that you choose to fit into. If you want to bring your Americanness with you to Israel, better just come for a visit. Even to come to places like Beit Shemesh, where you can get along without Hebrew, you are still just one step away from the inevitable, of blending with the Israeli system. It is not that the American system is right or wrong, or that the Israeli system is right or wrong. It just is. Each system is the system that "works" in the space it's in. If you do not want to conform, you are not ready for Aliyah yet. Stay

home. Stay safe. As insecure as USA is as a polarized nation, it is not nearly as "seemingly" insecure as Israel, with fear of war with Iran. As corrupt as voting in USA is and was, it is not as corrupt as the Israeli government and the Supreme Court here. As hard as it is to finance a family in USA, it is not as hard as it is for an American to make even just a few bucks in the Holy Land, a land he did not grow up in. The joke here is, if you want to make money, you need to be *המוציא להם מהרץ לארץ*.

So, why did I do it- why did I give it all up? My mother tongue, social life, culture, opportunities - all the networking of the people I grew up with, the awesome community I was a part of, and start on my own, in a distant land? There is something else that is an element of success. I call it the psychology of space, although I have difficulty in explaining it. Success in life is more than being calm, having social and financial stability and all that those things imply. It is also about the *where*. In real estate, there are three most important factors. Location. Location. Location. Why? Why do people connect emotionally with certain places? Believe it or not, this is actually a psychology of its own.

The spirituality of space and time exists, even though it is hard to explain. *G-d is not limited by space or time, so how could it be that certain places or times are holier than others? Why can't I connect to G-d how, when, and where I want to?*



Why do we pray, three times a day, that G-d bring back His Shechina to Tzion, and why do we face Jerusalem? Why can't we just pray to G-d that we serve Him, wherever we are? Isn't G-d referred to as Makom, Place, because the whole world is enveloped in Him, and His "Place" is unfathomable? כְּרוּדָה כְּבוֹדֵי יְקוֹנָה מִמְקוֹמָהּ In many ways, our Rabbis learn Shabbat laws from the Beit Hamikdash and Beit Hamikdash from Shabbat. I.e., just as Shabbat never ends, the holiness of the Beit Hamikdash never ends, even after its destruction. The 39 forbidden acts of Shabbat are learned from the acts that were needed to build the Mishkan. Why are they connected? What do they have in common? The answer seems to be this unique spirituality of a holy time and a holy space. G-d is מקדש שבת וזמנים, He sanctifies Shabbat and "times". And He sanctifies places.

When Rachel was jealous of the merits of her sister Leah in mothering the Tribes, she said, "Give me children, and if not, I am dead!" Rashi explains that Rachel was asking Yaakov to pray for her, just like Yitzhak prayed that Rivka have children. Yaakov answered her, *אִם אֶלְקִים אֵלַי*, Am I [literally, in the Hebrew, 'under'] in place of G-d?

How could Yaakov respond to Rachel like that? Where was the empathy?! And why did he not actually pray for Rachel, or at least explain why he was not willing to do so, like his father Yitzhak?

Anyone who lives outside of Israel, it is as if he does not have a G-d. (Ketubot 110b) G-d designated each nation in its land, a "star", a Mazal, an angel, who is responsible for running that nation. But, G-d did not let any angel run Israel; He runs Israel alone. He is directly above it. *כִּי תֵלֵק יְקוֹנָה עִמּוֹ*, and one who lives in Israel has G-d running his life, without a designated angel in between. This is what Yaakov answered to Rachel: Am I *under* G-d? How could you compare the prayers of my fathers, Avraham and Yitzhak, to mine, as I am praying here in Haran, outside Israel? When we get to Israel, I can pray for you, and G-d will answer my prayers!

Whoever makes a set place for prayer, the G-d of Avraham will help him. (Berachot 6b) Avraham was careful to pray in the same place every day, *וַיִּשְׁכֶם אַבְרָהָם בְּבָקָר אֶל־הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָמַד שָׁם אֶת־פְּנֵי יְקוֹנָה*. The Tzlach (Berachot 6b) writes that the reason you should pray in the same place is because the first time you prayed there, it acquired holiness, and each additional time, the holiness there helps the prayers to be answered. This is why even if a person prays at home, he/she should pray in the same place. On his way to Haran, Yaakov realized that he needed to pray that G-d protect his spirituality. He went all the way back to Har Hamoriah, the place where Avraham and Yitzhak prayed. But why all the trouble, Yaakov? Because "this is the place of the Gateway to Heaven". This is why a person should pray in the place that he learns. (Berachot 6b) Because learning Torah makes the place holy.

Of course, G-d listens to our prayers wherever we are, and at all times. But there are times and places where it is more opportune to pray because the connection is better! It all depends on how well we prepare ourselves for prayer. (Daat Tvunot 177)

I had this crazy idea about the magnetic force Israel has to each and every Jew. I read just a week ago in the news that a Belgian racing-pigeon was bought by a Chinese fan for 1.9 million US dollars! What is a racing-pigeon, anyway? Racing pigeons, and homing pigeons, have an innate ability to find their way home from long distances in a remarkably short period of time, even from distances of 1,100 miles away! (It's just 290 miles from the north to the south of Israel!) Racing-pigeons are bred for competitive sport; the speed of these pigeons can go from 50 to 100 miles an hour! Scientists are still scratching their heads, trying to explain how the bird knows how to find their way home?!? Imagine I dropped you off, 1,000 miles away from home, and you needed to find your way back, with no GPS, map or smartphone?!

Maybe, just maybe, the Jewish Nation is compared to a *יונה* a pigeon, in the Song of Songs, the story of the Jewish Nation throughout the Ages, because of this concept, that somehow, we keep finding our



way back home! (see Shabbat 49a) Did any non-Jew, ever come over to you and ask if you know which way is east? Wherever we are in the world, the direction of Jerusalem is always on our minds!

Of course, it is not always easy for me to live in Israel. But that is where He reveals Himself most, and He wants us to make an effort and make ourselves ready to connect with Him. I constantly remind myself, *every second one is living in Israel, it is equal to keeping all 613 Mitzvot.* (Avodah Zara 5 Tosefta, Yalkut Shimoni, Sifri) This is why the simplest men of Israel have more merit than the greatest Rabbis who live outside Israel. This greatness of Israel is only a merit for the one who connects with the spirituality of the Land. (R Dessler 3, 194) As our Rabbis teach, *Anyone who lives in Israel, recites the Shema morning and night, and speaks Lashon Hakodesh, is a Ben Olam Haba.* (Sifri Haazinu; Yerushalami Shabbat 1;3) The air here makes you smarter, and Torah here is

Torah of a higher status. (B. Batra 158b; Bereshit Rabah 16;4)

Someone who lives in Israel has all of his sins forgiven. (Ketubot 111a) Why? R Yitzhak Farhi, z"l, (1782-1853) writes the reason according to the Kadmonim. (Tiv Yerushalayim page 190) Just like the angels outside Israel do not enter Israel, so too, when a person comes to Israel, his Chutz LaAretz Neshama does not come with him. The first night that he is here, while he is asleep, G-d switches his Chutz LaAretz soul to a soul of Eretz Yisrael. נִתְּן נְשָׁמָה לְעַם עֲלֵיָהּ (Yeshayah 42,5) This is why a person's sins are cleansed when he moves.

Jews would be better Jews, if we would be more pigeon-like, and understand the spirituality of space, of coming home. Not because of logical reasons. But because of spatial reasons. Yaakov Avinu was the first Jew to make an issue out of Spiritual Space. (See Gur Aryeh 35;13) Let us try to open our eyes to what he taught us.

HOW TO CONTROL YOUR EGO

A Jew once said to his Rebbe, "I want happiness". The Rebbe said, First remove "I", that's Ego. And then remove "Want", that's Desire. See, now all your left with is Happiness!

Once, someone sent the Lubavitcher Rebbe a letter. "I have no parnassah. I have no shalom bayit. I have no motivation to learn, pray or do kindness. I can't seem to find my life's purpose. I would appreciate if the Rebbe would bless me and let me know what I am doing wrong." When he opened the reply, he saw that the Rebbe had sent him back the same letter, but he circled the first letter – I – of every sentence, in red. *The problem is that "I" is the beginning of every statement in your life.*

Your worst enemy is your ego. How so? The ego is the drive behind perfectionism, and it demands instant success, like expecting that you understand the Gemara 100%, the first time around. It's that voice that says that you'll look silly or that people will think you're strange, if you do something different or new. Ego makes you difficult to deal with in interpersonal relationships and in

business. It makes you overconfident and highly sensitive. It makes you ignore your own flaws, while you focus on the flaws of others. Ego will hold you back from validating others and their opinions. In basketball, your ego tries to make you play like James or Jordan, instead of being realistic with yourself and your team. In Baseball, it makes you go for a homerun, a triple or a double, and not just to do your job and get on base. As a writer, your ego makes it hard for you to erase your darling scribbles, the fat of the content that needs to be trimmed. Ego is what holds you back from letting go of things that don't work. In one sentence, *Ego makes you take up too much space.*

The secret of how to transcend your ego is hidden in this week's Parasha, in a Hassidic twist on the passuk. וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שִׁבְעֵי הַרְגְּבָה: וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמִקְוֹם וַיִּלְךְ. *And Yaakov left Beer Sheva, and he went to Charan...* Rashi mentions the Talmud that tells us that *when Yaakov reached Charan, Yaakov said to himself, Could it be that I passed over a place where my fathers prayed, and I did not pray there? When he decided to return, the land jumped*



ahead, and suddenly נִקְנַע בְּמִקוֹם הַזֶּה. He reached “the place”, the place of the Akedat Yitzhak, Har Hamoriah. HKBH said, This Tzaddik came to My Hotel, and he will leave without sleeping here? Immediately, G-d had the sun set. (Chullin 91b)

Yaakov dreamt of a ladder upon which the angels who represent Yaakov’s enemy rise for the amount of years that they will be in power, and then, how G-d brings them down. וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶבְרָהָם יְשׁוּבָה וַיִּקְרַע בְּמִקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֵנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי And Yaakov awoke from his sleep and he said, behold YKVK is in this place, and I did not know it. Rashi explains these words of Yaakov. Had I known, I would not have slept in this holy place.

Didn’t Yaakov come back from Charan to pray at the place of Akedat Yitzchak? How could he say “I would not have slept here, had I known how holy this place is?” And, another question. Why does it say, וְאֵנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי? And I, I did not know? The words יָדַעְתִּי, alone, mean I did not know. What is the meaning of the seemingly superfluous word וְאֵנֹכִי? The superfluous “I”?

The Panim Yafot writes an angelic answer, an answer we can learn from the angels of Kedusha in Mussaf. When the angels ask the question אַיֵּה מְקוֹם כְּבוֹדוֹ, Where is the place of His Honor? or, Where is G-d, so that we can praise Him? The answer is, אַיֵּה מְקוֹם כְּבוֹדוֹ, מְלֵא כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ, The whole world is full of His Honor. When you look for G-d, you will notice that there is no place that He is not. Only then, you begin to realize אֵנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, that there is no place for אֵנֹכִי, there is no space for ego.

The Midrash Rabba quotes R Yossi Bar Chalafta, that HKBH sits and makes ladders, lifts this one and lowers the other. (Vayikra Rabbah 8) G-d is busy all day, מְשַׁפֵּיל גְּאוּנוֹ וּמְגַבֵּיהַ שְׁפִילִים עַד. After Yaakov saw the ladder prophecy and realized the ladder philosophy of life, and how G-d raises up the humble and humbles the haughty, he realized that there is no place in the world for “I”, because everything is G-d. When you realize how the whole world is בֵּית אֱלֹהִים G-d’s House, then egocentricity vanishes like smoke. וְכָל הַרְשָׁעָה בְּלָהָה כַּעֲשֵׂן תִּבְקָהּ as if it had never been there to begin with.

What happens when we adopt this mindset? What happens when you realize that you have no idea on which "ladder" you are on, where you are on the ladder, and if G-d is going to flip your ladder at any moment? You stop being so defensive. You begin to realize how it’s not about you. You stop taking yourself too seriously. You become someone that everyone wants to work with. You begin to build real relationships.

Once you have reached the emotional plateau of אֵנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, you are in total control of your emotions. Once you recognize כְּבוֹדוֹ, even when you have the right to get angry, you will be in control of how you respond. Our Rabbis tell us that one of the things that was so great about Yaakov was that even when he had the right to get angry, he was totally in control of what he said, felt and did. The first mindboggling incident was when Lavan led Leah to the chuppa instead of Rachel. Yaakov did not even get angry at Lavan! He just asked Lavan why he had tricked him!! He got angry at Lavan for suspecting that he took his idols and for running after him, but instead of getting into a fist fight with him, he only explained his position with logic and conciliation. (See Bereshit Rabbah 74) He got angry at Rachel for cursing herself and for talking in a way as if Yaakov was G-d, and as if he could provide her with children. He got angry at his 13-year-old sons Shimon and Levi for shrewdly killing out the city of Shechem, and putting Yaakov and the rest of the family in danger, but held on to his rebuke until his last day. And he kept his rebuke of Reuven until his last day. One of the hardest moments of Yaakov’s life was holding back his anger at Yosef for carrying out his plan to have Yaakov come to Egypt to bow down to him, so that Yosef can fulfill his prophetic dream. The only way that Yaakov was able to hold on to this anger was by saying Kriat Shema. (See He’Emek Davar) That was how he was able to overcome his אֵנֹכִי.

Fighting your ego is so confusing; it is like trying to think about nothing. The harder you try, the further you get from your goal. Even a desire to be spiritual can be self-centered. Even if you are fighting your ego, it’s still all about you. As long as you are taking yourself too seriously, you are feeding and playing into your ego’s hands. The



only way for us to balance the ego is through stepping up to a higher plateau via prayer and understanding what we are saying. Through prayer,

you realize that the whole world is G-d. And through prayer you realize that there is no room for עִצְּוֹן, for ego, to exist.

Here are the Selfie Steps- the Torah based Self Help steps that will help you control your ego.

- 1- Be grateful for the little things you have, and compliment others for the little things they do.
- 2- Acknowledge and accept all your mistakes.
- 3- See the big picture. We're all on this planet for a purpose, and we all have a different purpose.
- 4- Stop bragging! According to Einstein, "More the knowledge lesser the ego, lesser the knowledge more the ego."
- 5- Look at ego as if it is a voice inside of you, but not you.

Swimming in Silence

Rachel acquired the skill of silence, so that even when her father was giving her shower gifts to Leah, she kept quiet. Therefore, her descendants all mastered silence. Binyamin knew that the tribes sold his only brother as a slave. And he kept his mouth shut. This is why her son Binyamin's stone on the High Priest's breastplate was Yashpeh. Yesh – there is; Peh – a mouth. This is why her descendant Shaul became king, for his modesty in not telling his uncle that he became king. This is where her descendent, Esther, had the power to keep from revealing to Achashverosh that she was a Jewess. Leah, on the other hand, took the skill of praise and admitting. She praised G-d for giving her Yehuda, so her descendants followed. Yehuda admitted his embarrassing act. King David praised G-d in Tehillim. (See Rabenu Bachye)

Silence is referred to as a skill elsewhere. *What skill does a person need to learn? To make himself like a mute.* (Chullin 89a) This brings to mind the four monks. *Four monks decided to meditate, silently, without speaking for two weeks. By nightfall on the first day, the candle began to flicker and then went out. The first monk said, "Oh, no! The candle is out." The second monk said, "Aren't we not supposed to talk?" The third monk said, "Why must you two break the silence?" The fourth monk laughed and said, "Ha! I'm the only one who didn't speak."* Isn't silence a path to pain

and self-affliction? How is it referred to in the Midrash as a skill?

Judaism maintains that when silence is balanced in a healthy way, silence can also be a path to wisdom and self-introspection. As Albert Einstein once said, *I think 99 times and find nothing. I stop thinking, swim in silence, and the truth comes to me.*

Let us replay that. How does one find the truth? By swimming in silence. How does one swim in silence? By stopping to think. How does one stop thinking? By thinking 99 times and finding nothing. Silence is needed when you realize that your speech, your inner dialogue, is not getting you anywhere. When words are not doing their job. Of clarification. Of communication. Of persuasion. Of appreciation. Of praise. That is when it is time to swim in silence.

My best articles come to me when I give up trying to lay down words to direct my train of thought. I swim in silence. The ideas percolate in my mind... And then I realize the real truth of what I wanted to say and how I want to say it. סייג לחכמה שתיקה. *The fence of wisdom is silence.* And when you want the real truth, the underlying truth, it comes only when you stop talking and thinking.

If we were to make the analogy between communication and driving a car, Silence does not



mean that you are in Park. Silence is a Brake to use, to have safe driving. If you do not have the wisdom of how to use your brakes, your life is in danger. Hence, the words of King David הזי"ם והמוות ביד הלשון (Mishlei 18;21): *Two representatives stood in front of Andrinus, the Ceasar. One was of speech. The other was of silence. The king said to Speech, "Say why you are so important!" He said, "Because without Speech, Kings won't be able to rule. Ships won't be able to sail. Brides won't be able to be praised. Without speech, commerce would be impossible". The king said, "Good points! Now, Silence, it is your turn."*

Before Silence even got a chance to open its mouth to speak, Speech slapped his face... "King, Speech can use speech to praise speech. But how can Silence use speech to praise silence!?! To that, Silence said, "Silence that is praised is not total silence. It is the wisdom of how to be careful when speaking. As King Solomon said, "בְּרַב דְּבָרִים לֹא יְהִדְלֶנָּה וְהַשֵּׁן שֶׁפָּתְיוֹ מִשְׁכָּל" (Mishle 10; 19) (Orchot Tzaddikim).

This balance between speech and silence is something that we see throughout Rachel's life and the life of her descendants. All of Rachel's struggles in life, and the struggles of her children, were related to balancing silence with speech. Between not saying something, to speaking up. Between hiding identity and knowing when to reveal it. Knowing when to admit, or when to rebuke. I would need another whole article just to go through all the cases of Rachel, Binyamin, Yosef, Shaul, Yehonatan, Michal, Mordechai and Esther.

The times that silence is important are listed by the Orchot Tzaddikim. Here are the Stop Signs. 1. *Accepting G-d's Judgement.* 2. *When being degraded by others.* 3. *In Shul during prayers-Silence there is the ultimate modesty, for it brings focus to prayers.* 4. *When sitting amongst wiser people. This way you can learn from them.* 5. *When there is no one around you than can correct you... When in doubt, and you can ask someone wiser than you, do not keep silence.*

It is interesting to see how, in all the episodes that silence was dealt with in the frame of these 5 Golden Silence Rules, the outcome was always very successful. But whenever these rules were broken, the price was too heavy. This is why winning in the game of silence is an art.

The belief of the Rasha is Lavan's belief – *My power lies in my hands* – יְשִׁלְאֵל יְדִי (Rabbenu Bachye.) But Rachel's way, the way to swim in silence, the way to stop thinking, is by believing that any power that I have or don't have is fine, because it is all from G-d. King David said, לָךְ הַמְלִיכָה תְהִלָּה (Tehillim 65;2) *To you, G-d, silence is praise.* How so? There is no greater praise to G-d than accepting Him, even when you cannot comprehend or explain His ways...

It is so interesting how Silence, when accepting G-d's decree, is this art of trust in G-d, this power of humility that is able to make everything turn out for the best. *If this is the father G-d gave me, I accept. If my sister Leah is walking down to the Chuppah with my husband and I cannot do anything about it, I accept. If my husband doesn't understand me the one time I said how much I wanted a child, I accept. And, if my G-dly husband decided to bury me on the road, I won't even ask him to be buried in Maarat Hamachpela. I will give my burial spot to my sister.* Rachel accepted her husband's decision to bury her "on the road" and not next to him in prime location, in Maarat Hamachpela. In the end, in 2018 her grave is the Jewish grave that is most visited in the whole world... Why?

When someone has the power of silence, they just open their mouth to pray, and before they even start praying, G-d answers their prayers. מְנַעֵי קוֹלֶךָ On the way down to Exile, and during the Exile, every second of prayer is precious. We cannot wait for Leah's eyes to fill with tears. So Rachel is in the right place, in an accessible place, so that if she just has a tremble in her voice, G-d says, *Rachel! Stop! I don't need you to pray! I can read your mind! I'll answer your heart's wishes, even before a tear wells up...*



And this is the way we can become true Tzaddikim. As Ralph Mahana once taught me in the name of R' Levi Yitzchak Berdichever – פ ע ס ז. If you want to become a Tzaddik (letter Tzaddik), you need to learn how to close (letter Samech is a closed letter – ס) your eyes (Ayin is also Eye) and your mouth (Peh is also Mouth)...

The greatest communicators were masters of silence, knowing when to use it and for how long.

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, וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמַּעֲטָה קִהְתָּהּ אֶת-אִישִׁי וְלָקַחְתָּ גַם אֶת-דִּוְדָאִי בְּגִי וַתֹּאמֶר רָחֵל לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלַּיְלָה תַּחַת דִּוְדָאִי בְּגִי (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

The greatest comedians, the greatest musicians and performers, were all masters of silence. G-d, Himself, runs the world in silence. The movement of the sun and moon, all of nature, grass, trees, it is all so silent. That is how G-d communicates with us and the way we connect to nature and G-d. Only after we connect through this silence can we pray to Him a focused prayer.

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

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

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.

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 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.

להגייד 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 נא את דרכך*. And G-d answered him, *וראית אחורי לפני לא יראו*, “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.

HOW TO ATTRACT YOUR SOULMATE

Prayer. It can be the most emotionally intense part of your day, or just something that you need to get over in order to get on to the next thing. It all depends on your approach to prayer, how much you believe in it, and your state of mind.

If I would advertise a course, “Lessons from Leah on how to attract your soul mate”, I would have a full crowd. If I would advertise a course, “Lessons from Leah on how to pray your eyes out”, I would have less of a crowd. But that is how you attract your soul mate. By praying your eyes out.

My students asked me, “Rabbi, how will I know that the girl I want to marry is actually my soul mate?” I asked them, “What’s the difference if she is or she is not? If you love her and have the same goals in life, why do you need to know that she is your soul mate?” They have no response. I do not understand how a person will ever know if his soul mate is his soul mate.

The yeshiva guys laugh about Beit Yaakov seminary girls. When you ask a Beit Yaakov girl who she wants to marry, the answer is always ‘Reb Chaim’. “While she is in seminary, all pumped up by her teachers to marry a Torah Scholar on a high level of learning, from the best yeshivah, she wants R’ Chaim Brisker, who learnt in the Brisker Yeshiva. From Shidduchim until the first child, she wants to marry R’ Chaim Na’eh. She wants him to be נאה, good looking for the pictures. And after she has her first child, she wants to be married to R’ Chaim Ozer, the one who knows how to help out (עוזר) when she needs him.”

Life has different stages. Each stage has its needs and desires. And in some way, each stage has its soul mate. If you want your spouse to fit the needs and desires of your present stage, you need to pray that your spouse be your soul mate, today. You need to pray that as of and for today, your spouse will be compatible.

One of the common questions about prayer is, *Why do I need to pray if G-d can read my mind and knows what I want from Him? He knows what we are going to say even before we know what we are going to say!* The answer is the law of Cause and Effect. G-d did not bring rain, or let things grow, until Adam was created and prayed for it. Even though grass and trees were “supposed to” appear, G-d did not bring the rain until the creation of Adam, a creature that was a רוח ממללא, one that could pray to G-d. G-d might not let you enjoy that life that you are “supposed to” have, until you pray for it. True, G-d does not need our prayer, for He knows what we are going to say before we even say it. But we need G-d, we need his generosity, so we need to beg. We need to show appreciation when our prayers are answered. This law of prayer in creation is the law of Cause and Effect. People think that a soul mate is a set thing. But just because you are supposed to get something in life, or you are supposed to get married to a specific person, it does not mean it is going to happen. You need to pray to bring down the Shefa, the abundance, from Above.

But, in this week’s parasha, we find something even more amazing. Yaakov and Esav were twins born to Rivka. Rachel and Leah were both twins born to Rivka’s brother, Lavan. Leah was born a few moments before Rachel. Rachel and Leah were told about their first cousins, and that the first born is destined to the first born, and the younger one destined to the younger one. Leah, who was older than Rachel, sat at the crossroads asking about Esav’s deeds, and was very disturbed about her findings. She cried, she fasted. She would cry so much that, the Torah tells us, her eyes were weary. She prayed so hard that the tears in her eyes made her eyes soft.

There is a Sephardic custom for the grandmothers to make some sort of high pitched “Li Li Li” war



cry at joyous occasions. This cry originates from the cries made by the townsfolk at Yaakov's wedding, when Lavan switched Leah for Rachel while the lights were out. The townsfolk tried to inform Yaakov of Lavan's scheme to exchange the sisters, (Li, Li for Leah) but Yaakov had his Simanim, the laws of Family Purity that he had taught Rachel, on which he would test his Bride the night of the wedding. Rachel taught those laws to Leah, to prevent her older sister from being embarrassed. The morning after the wedding, Yaakov found that he had actually married Leah, not Rachel. What do you think Leah's excuse was?

Leah responded, "I learnt from you! When your father asked, "Who are you?", you said "I am Esav!" You lied to get the Berachot! So did I! I lied in order to have a chance to be a Mother of the Jewish Nation!" What type of "excuse" was that, for doing such a thing to Yaakov, tricking him the night of the wedding?

When Leah had her firstborn, she called him Reuven. The Torah tells us why. *כי ראה ה' בעניי* *Because G-d saw my suffering.* But our Rabbis tell us another reason why she called him Reuven. *Look at the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law, Esav.* "Esav sold his firstborn rights, and still he stalked Yaakov, intending to kill him. My son Reuven's firstborn rights will be taken from him for something he will do with good intention (for moving his father's bed), and still, he will save his younger brother Yosef's life, despite Yosef's getting a double portion of the inheritance." How do we reconcile this Midrash with the reason the Torah gives us?

The answer is phenomenal. Leah prayed so hard that it says in the Tanhuma, *בדין* – she *deserved* Yaakov. How is that so? Even though her soul mate was Esav, for she and he were both

first born, she prayed so hard that Esav ended up selling his firstborn rights to Yaakov! So, it turns out that now, Yaakov is her soul mate, not Esav! That is why she mentioned Esav's selling his firstborn rights. And this is why she explained her actions, the morning after the wedding, to Yaakov, saying that by having taken the rights of the firstborn, he got the blessings, and he said that he was in Esav's place. If so, explained Leah, I am supposed to be married to you, and now YOU are my soul mate. On the other hand, the Tanhuma teaches that Rachel did not feel a need to pray; she felt that Yaakov was meant to be hers, so her marriage ended up being not such smooth sailing. (See M. Tanchuma)

It all boils down to realizing that without prayer, we have nothing. With it, we have the whole world. I remember a certain bachur that I got to know when I was learning here in Israel as a yeshiva student. This boy had no tact. He made unintelligent comments, got into your life, and did not know how to let people alone. The guys said that "he was like bubble gum stuck in your hair". He ended up realizing what people thought about him and decided to pray for forty days, in a row, at the Kotel and ask G-d "for a brain". After the 40 days, he started learning, for the first time in his life. He finished Massechet Megillah within a month and a half, and his family flew in to join him for the first siyum he ever made in his life. For that matter, it was the first achievement he had ever made in his life. He moved up and up; he got to the top shiur, got a top shidduch and lived happily ever after. From praying at the Kotel forty days for a brain.

G-d wants our prayers. He wants us to pray, so that He can give us what we are "supposed to" have. And prayer is so powerful that it forces things our way in life, not out of mercy, but out of cause and effect! *בדין!*

SULAM TO SUCCESS

Yaakov had a dream. A ladder. Two feet standing sturdily on the ground, with the top touching the sky. Angels climbing up and down. There are different interpretations of this dream. One of them

is that the angels were going up and down *in* Yaakov *עולים ויורדים בו בעקב ולא בסולם*. (Br. Rabbah 62). The ladder was in Yaakov, with the top of the ladder reaching the *כסא הכבוד* – G-



d's Throne. And in each person, as well, there is a "ladder".(Zohar Mishpatim Raayah Mehemnah) Why is the growth process of a person in this world compared to ascending a ladder? Why not to crossing a sea in a rowboat, or to walking a tightrope across a raging river? And why did Yaakov need, specifically at this time, to see such a dream?

Yaakov knew that he was supposed to have 12 tribes. He was now, after having been looted by his nephew, Eliphaz, left without even an article of clothing to wear. He had been in mortal danger from his brother, the world's mightiest warrior, for fourteen years. And now, he had to find a wife that would marry him without his having anything to offer her as dowry. All he owned, all he had with him, was his walking stick. How was he going to grow, to become the next Patriarch? He was already 63, and had not yet begun!

I am sure that Yaakov was not impatient. But G-d was showing him that his journey to becoming the third Patriarch was on its way. G-d was telling him not to fear. Yaakov was not afraid for his life as much as he feared that he might not be successful in fulfilling G-d's wish for bringing the Tribes to the world and having them reach the lofty level of **שבטי י-ה**. Allow me to share with you the message conveyed by the ladder.

To succeed in life, one needs to dream. He needs to envision *how he would want things to be*, and what he wants to do. *Ask yourself the questions:* "What would be the greatest thing that could happen to me? The sky is the limit! (**ראשו מגיע השמימה**) That is the fun part. Now, let us go on to the next step. The next rung.

Many people make the mistake of looking at their ideal life as a "project". "Projects" cause stress. Actions do not. You cannot do a whole project at once. You can do only an action. Being persistent in doing the next action in line that will get you to your goal, will result in a completed "project". The success is not tangible, it is just an "outcome". A specific action is all you can do. If one focuses on doing the outcome and not on the specific action,

then the actions will not be done properly and the goal will not be achieved. For example. Learning Daf Hayomi to finish Shas. To really learn Shas, you need to learn one Daf at a time. Today, there is nothing other than today's Daf. Now, it is important to set goals and to have aspirations. But it is more important to be in the "Now" when learning, just like a person climbing a ladder who needs to focus on the now, not what's far ahead. The "next rung" is not less important than the rung on the top of the ladder. Learning in order to finish is not learning. Each Daf is a goal in and of itself.

There is only one way to realize the dream that you have envisioned. Just as you cannot climb to the top of a ladder at once, so, too, you cannot reach what you really want in life by trying to leap straight to the final goal; the only way to progress is by finding the next rung, the next step on the path, and climbing it. *The way to success is finding the next rung.* Simple. Find it, and climb it. You can't climb more than one rung at a time. And just as in climbing a ladder to success, one needs to have a good footing in the ground, (**מצב ארצה**), one cannot get anywhere until he is "down to earth". He has to be aware of and cognizant of the reality of his needs, emotions, wants, strengths and weaknesses: in short, he must *know himself*. Because the only way to grow is **on your ladder**. You cannot grow trying to be someone else, or by copying their actions. Looking at others is good only in order to envision the result you want at the end. But, in the process, the only thing that counts is *the next rung on your ladder*.

Many people attempted to grow in various areas of life. When they did not achieve what they had wanted, they became despondent, on a lower level than what they had been from the start. (The Rivash, in his **צוואה**, wrote that the yetzer hara works the hardest to get a person depressed. There is nothing more depressing than hearing one's inner voice repeat, again and again, that he has failed.) So I hope that SULAM will help people know how to grow. Before tackling your next rung, run SULAM through your mind.



S specific. Ask yourself, What are the specific things that, realistically, I am capable of doing, that can bring me closer to attaining my goal?

U unique. Be yourself. Life is too short to waste on trying to be someone else. Is your next action custom fit to your life, to *you*, or is it something that you are just copying from someone else?

L loving. In order for you to proceed, you have to be doing something you *can* love. On the first day you may feel somewhat awkward. All change requires adjusting in the beginning. But in order to be a lasting change, it has to be something that you love doing.

A attainable. Is what you have identified as the following level in your reach? Can I really get there from where I am standing right now?

M measurable. Can I express my coming action in terms of a short term goal, to be done by the end of the day or week? Emotions, such as happiness, need to be made somewhat measurable. Establishing a criterion by which to evaluate emotional gain helps you to see if you have,

indeed, made progress. (Am I smiling more, these days?).

And always remember the bamboo. The bamboo is one of the fastest growing plants on Earth, 39 in. in 24 hours. Bamboo grow up to thirty meters, within 6 weeks!!! But that is just how it seems to the onlooker. Ask the one who planted it. He has to water it constantly for 5 years, during which it shows no growth. Only in the fifth year, BOOM! You turn your head, and there it is, 30 meters tall! The first five years, a gigantic root system was developing, making the spectacular growth possible.

In order for a person to see an actual change in himself, a change that becomes second nature, he has to keep it up for at least thirty days. Only then, can he look back to see if he has gotten anywhere. This is learnt from the law of prayers concerning one who is not sure if he said *משיב הרוח ומוריד משיב הגשם* or *הטל*. Only after thirty days of consistently changing to the appropriate version, does one naturally use the new way.

True Love

We find a perplexing *passuk* with regard to Yaakov's love for Rachel. In describing the seven years Yaakov was forced to wait before he could marry Rachel, the Torah tells us: *He felt that they were like just a few days due to his love for her* (*Bereishit 29:20*). Now, isn't just the opposite true!? When a person loves someone or even something, but is temporarily blocked in one way or another, the result is usually a bad case of longing. When a wedding is delayed, for example, this can cause anxiety until the day actually arrives. Time seems to go forward more slowly than a turtle. How, then, can we understand that out of the great love Yaakov had for his future wife Rachel, it felt like "just a few days"?

R' Eliyahu Lopian *zt"l* would explain that most people misunderstand the real meaning of *love*. Love should not be seen as a pleasant experience in the company of a person who is pleasant to be

around. True love is the feeling that a person wants to contribute to and be of assistance to, or please and gratify, the beloved. This is the Hebrew definition of the word *love* (*אהבה*). This word comes from the root *הב*, meaning *to give*. Love is a verb, not an experience or state of being. The concept expressed by the words "*I'm in love*" or "*falling in love*" is not a Jewish one. "*Falling in love*" is not usually a choice one has made. But the love that the Torah refers to *is* a choice.

The seven years that Yaakov worked for Rachel felt like just a few days, because *Yaakov's love for her was for her* – and not for himself. On the other hand, when someone is awaiting pleasure, seven years feels like eternity. When someone is "in love", that is, not the Torah concept of love, each day that passes when the "lovebirds" are not together feels like sitting in jail. Thus, the *passuk* is



telling us that Yaakov's love for Rachel was of a spiritual quality."

How can one know what kind of love one has for another person, if it is "falling in love" or true love? Try this test:

If Eliyahu Hanavi would come to you just before your wedding and tell you that your best friend would be a much better spouse for your "intended" than you, what would you do? Would your love for the person you thought was your spouse-to-be

impel you to reveal to him or her what Eliyahu Hanavi told you?

Yaakov would have revealed the message, because this was the kind of selfless love that he had for Rachel. He wanted only to *give*. He wanted only to grow with his spouse, and build the family that he hoped would fulfill Hashem's Will. This is true love. Jewish love.

DEEP INSIDE KEVER RACHEL

According to one view in the Midrash, Rachel passed away before Leah because she offered an answer ahead of her older sister at a crucial moment in their lives (*Bereishit Rabba* 74). *When Yaakov asked his wives, Rachel and Leah, for permission to leave the home of their father and move the family to the Holy Land, Rachel spoke up and gave her assent first.* The implication of the Midrash is that her death in childbirth on the way back, near Beit Lechem, should be seen as a punishment for not letting her older sister speak first.

But how are we to reconcile this with an entirely different explanation for the time and place of Rachel's death given elsewhere in the Midrash (*Pesikta Rabbati*)? There, we find an elaboration on the Prophet Yirmiyahu's famous description of Rachel, weeping for her children going off to exile after the destruction of the First Temple (Ch. 31):

Why was Rachel buried in Beth Lechem, not in Ma'arat Hamachpelah? G-d commanded Yaakov to bury her there. For in the future, the Temple will be destroyed and the Jews will go into exile...As they walk on the road to exile, they will reach the tombstone of Rachel and pray over her grave. She will then ask mercy from G-d: "Master of the Universe, listen to my cries and have mercy on my children, or give me a reward for the great difficulty I went through in not revealing to Yaakov that he was marrying Leah to save her from

embarrassment." Immediately, G-d listened to her prayers...

This clearly implies that the reason why Rachel died earlier, and could not be buried in the Ma'arat Hamachpelah – but rather in Beth Lechem on the road to exile – was so that she could plead for her children and redeem them in the future. How, then, can we understand the opinion in the Midrash cited at the outset that this was a punishment for not deferring to her older sister and letting her answer first?

I once heard a beautiful answer to this from a Shabbat guest. But first a bit of background: We know that the *Avot* observed all the Mitzvos of the Torah, but only in Eretz Yisrael (*Ramban*). That is why Yaakov allowed himself to marry two sisters after leaving Eretz Yisrael and settling temporarily in Lavan's home in Padan Aram. We can now reconcile the two Midrashim. Yaakov knew that he could not stay married to both sisters and also fulfill G-d's directive that he return to Eretz Yisrael. Thus, when he asked his wives if they were willing to move the family back to his homeland, he was asking much more than if they were willing to pack their bags. *He was asking his wives if they were willing to put their lives on the line.* And Rachel, who spoke up and gave her assent first, essentially sacrificed her life for this holy purpose. This is why she was buried on the side of the road leading to exile. She is the only one of the Patriarchs or Matriarchs who can



approach G-d and say “I gave up my life in order for my spouse to merit being in the Land of Israel.

How, then, can You not allow them (my children) to return?”

Bible Stories

Our Sages teach us that our holy Torah can be understood on four different levels. These levels are represented by the acronym פרד"ס (orchard): the first level is the literal meaning (פּשט); the second level – the meaning which is hinted at or alluded to (רמז); the third, homiletical or interpretive meaning (דרש), and the mystical, or occult meaning (סוד). Unfortunately, some people insist on reading the Torah in a narrower way – and often reach the wrong conclusions. There is a verse in *Tehillim* (32:9) which hints at their narrow-mindedness in not acknowledging all four levels of meaning in the acronym פרד"ס: אַל תהיו כפּרד"ס (“Do not be like a horse or mule without understanding”). There are those who prefer to understand the Torah on the level of פּשט, רמז, and דרש, but they reject mystical explanations (סוד). Such people are compared to ארדמ (mule), because they accept only the mundane or “this world” meanings, and can’t see that the Torah is also talking about very spiritual and mystical matters. Then, there are those who prefer to see only the kabbalistic or mystical level of סוד, but they do not reckon with the Peshat, Remez, and Derush. They are like the סוס (horse), for they can relate only to the “ס” level, which stands for “סוד” (mystical explanation). Both approaches are unacceptable because they preclude a full and proper understanding of the Torah – what the verse calls “אין הבין”, not understanding.

Those who mistakenly limit their understanding to the *peshat*, the literal level, will fall into the trap of seeing the narratives of the Bible as mere stories. In our *parashah*, for example, we find Yaakov giving a kiss to Rachel when he first saw her. But the kiss had absolutely nothing to do with infatuation! We see this in the otherwise inexplicable fact that Yaakov immediately burst into tears. The Midrash says that he cried because

he saw prophetically that she would not be buried together with him in the Ma’arat Hamachpelah. Indeed, if this had really been a kiss of infatuation, then Yaakov would not have been capable of prophetic vision at that moment. Another commentary explains that Yaakov cried because he realized that the shepherds who were watching were disgusted with his behavior, thinking that he was infatuated. He cried at the thought that they looked at him that way. And he cried that in the future, people reading the Torah as “Bible stories” would have the same unfortunately incorrect interpretation as those shepherds.

All this points to the following: We must be cognizant of our Patriarchs’ and Matriarchs’ greatness when we read about their lives in the Torah, and understand actions that seem so similar to our own as being on an entirely different level. Our great ancestors were so different from us – to the extent that they did not even have an Evil Inclination (*Bava Batra* 17a). This is not necessarily because they were born without one, but because they fought so very hard against it that they eventually neutralized it.

The Talmud tells us: “If our ancestors were like angels, then we are like people. If they are like people, then we are like donkeys” (*Shabbat* 112b). How, then, can we learn from their lives and their conduct? Rav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, *zt”l*, explains that even the greatest human beings are still connected to their nature. And thus, we have a lot to learn from them.

For example, the Midrash reveals that another reason for Yaakov’s tears was because he felt terrible about presenting himself empty-handed to his future wife. Now, it is strange for someone of Yaakov’s towering spiritual caliber to get emotional about a material consideration such as this. But that is just the point, R’ Bloch argues. All



the emotions and feelings common to all human beings are alive inside the greatest of men, no matter how great they are. Despite Yaakov's greatness, he still could not separate himself from the emotions that were stirred up at the place where his father's servant came bearing so many gifts for his mother, while he had come with nothing. Although these emotions did not overwhelm him, he was able to feel them and give expression to them – just like any other human being with a pure heart.

R' Bloch continues: Leah's remark to her sister, Rachel, over the mandrakes must be seen in the proper context: "*You not only took my husband from me, but you even want to take the mandrakes my son, Reuven, brought home?*" We must remember that Leah was a Matriarch. Although there was jealousy between the sisters, it was very different from what we mean when we speak about jealousy. Leah was "jealous" of the love and attention she felt that her sister Rachel was getting from her husband Yaakov. But her jealousy stemmed from her anxiety about whether she was going to merit building the Jewish Nation and sanctifying G-d's Name. She and her sister took

this matter to heart, and it ranked highest in their hierarchy of values.

R' Bloch comments that the desire to sanctify G-d's Name and publicize it to the world should not make us feel that we must be the one to accomplish it rather than others. Still, he is not sure if someone will be judged and punished for wanting *to be the one* to sanctify G-d's Name. And this is what the "jealousy" of Leah and Rachel was about. It was nothing personal, nothing to do with the "self" that we relate to. R' Shach, *zt"l*, once gently reprimanded a childless father for commenting that his difficulty over having no children was similar to the difficulty of Rachel, when she said to her husband: "*Give me children, otherwise I will die.*" R' Shach asked him: "Did Rachel cry for children as we would cry over being childless – or was it out of her deep desire for being a Mother of the Jewish Nation?"

Although such a lofty conception of "self" is foreign to us, we can draw inspiration from it. And, as we have explained, we must be very cautious not to relate to the *Avot* and *Imahot* as if they were just like us.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H

AND

Yosef Meir Ben Avraham Simcha Bunim A"H

And by Alina and Phil Rutstein-Hacco as a ze'hut for our soldiers, and the safe return of our captives and shalom for Am Israel.

