

פרשת ויצא Parshat Vayeitzei

אשרינו Ashreinu

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion



Consistent Growth

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Yaakov's life is certainly one filled with struggle, challenges, and adjustment. He begins this week's parsha as a man on the run, escaping the death threats

of his older brother. His journey takes him to the house of his Uncle Lavan, where he finds and marries his multiple wives and gives birth to eleven children.

The Torah (Bereishit 30:25) specifically tells us that after the birth of Yosef, Yaakov is finally ready to leave Lavan and return home. Why? What is it about the birth of Yosef that seems to lead to Yaakov immediately declaring his readiness to go

home? Rashi answers that Yosef was the antidote to Esav. The birth of Yosef would prove to be the answer to the challenge of Esav.

Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain, the second Sochatchover Rebbe, in his commentary on the Torah (Shem Mishmuel) explains that the essence of Esav is complacency and a sense of feeling whole. Esav was born already full of hair, and his name (Hebrew root עֵשָׂה) expresses the idea of being already complete.

Yosef, on the other hand, was someone constantly seeking growth, as his name itself suggests (from the Hebrew root יָצַא): he was constantly adding. The antidote to Esav, explains Rabbi Bornsztain, is constantly striving to be greater and better. Yosef was a dreamer, a seeker. That is the antithesis of Esav. Yaakov knew that when this child was born, he finally had the potential to overcome the spiritual dangers of a brother like Esav.

Esav, in many statements of Chazal, represents the evil inclination, the *yetzer hara*. Our evil inclination makes us feel complete and takes away our drive to strive for more. We must always channel our inner Yosef and strive to grow, change, and never remain stagnant.

Stone Strong

Caleb Berman ('23)

This week's parsha, Parshat Vayeitzei, begins with the pasuk, "וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאָר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ קָרְנָה" which means, "Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva and went toward Charan" (Bereishit 28:10) Simple. However, the next pasuk has something to talk about. The pasuk states:

וַיַּגְעַ בְּמָקוֹם וַיְלֹא שָׁם כִּי בָּא הַשְׁמָשָׁה וַיַּקְרֹחַ מִבְּנֵי הַמִּקְדָּשׁ
וַיִּשְׁם מְרַאשְׁתִּי וַיַּשְׁכַּב בְּמָקוֹם הַהוּא

"He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place" (Bereishit 28:11). The word **וַיַּגְעַ** usually means encountered, but the Sages interpret the term with the less-common meaning, "and he prayed". Because the pasuk states that this took place before he retired for the night, the Rabbis credit Yaakov with instituting **ערבית**, the evening prayer. The pasuk continues with,

וַיַּקְרֹחַ מִבְּנֵי הַמִּקְדָּשׁ
"and he took from the stones"

The midrash suggests that he took several stones and that they began quarreling, each wanting to be the rock that Yaakov's head rested upon. Therefore, Hashem combined them all into one stone, which is why the pasuk reads, "and he took the stone," in the singular, according to Rashi.

The story of the quarreling stones is a moral lesson to humanity, for in the same situation, human beings would surely vie for the honor of serving such a great person. The Rabbis teach that the stones symbolize the nation that Yaakov would

soon begin to establish. There were 12 stones which combined into one, which represented the 12 tribes -- each unique and with its own separate mission -- who united and became Am Yisrael. This week, let's try to be like the rocks and work together with our friends, because when we are united we are able to accomplish so much more than when we are alone.

Never Alone

Rivka Reich ('24)

In this week's parsha, Yaakov left his home in Beer Sheva to travel to Charan. On his way there, he stopped to sleep and had a very unusual dream of a ladder that stretched from heaven to earth, with angels climbing up and down it. Yaakov is also told by Hashem that the land on which he sleeps will be promised to his descendants.

Many people wonder about this dream, as it seems quite unusual. Why would angels be climbing up and down the ladder? What is their destination? What is their goal?

This is not just some dream. These are not fake angels approaching and leaving Yaakov. These are Yaakov's real, legitimate, and personal angels that are coming and going. The angels designated to stay in Israel left, and new ones for outside of Israel came. Yaakov is leaving his home and going somewhere new. Yet Hashem did not forget about him; he was always being protected, no matter which angels came along, no matter what they were designated for.

Everyone goes on their own journeys -- everyone eventually leaves home. Yet there is no reason to fear. When starting in a new place, you may have to leave some familiar and beloved things behind, but you will always have new experiences and find new things to connect to along the way.

I Know

Adina Spodek ('23)

This week's parsha depicts Yaakov's dream of the

ladder that ascended to heaven with angels moving up and down on it, as well as God's promise to him. After leaving his home town of Be'er Sheva, Yaakov stops to sleep on his way to Charan, placing stones around his head. Hashem appears to him through this dream, reiterating the *Brit Bein Habetarim* previously given to Avraham. The parsha then continues to detail Yaakov's arrival to Charan and encounter with his uncle Lavan, eventually leading to him meeting Rachel and Leah. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks focuses on the beginning of the parsha, pinpointing Yaakov's specific word choice when awakening from his dream.

The first phrase Yaakov asserts after his dream is: -- **אַכְּלָנִי בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאַנְכִּי לֹא יִדְעָתִי** “Indeed, Hashem is in this place, and I did not know it” (Bereishit 28:16). However, in the words of Rabbi Sacks, there is a “nuance in the text that is lost in translation.” The word **אַנְכִּי** seems to be extra. If Yaakov was claiming that he did not know Hashem resided in this land, **לֹא יִדְעָתִי** would have been enough to say, as it means “I did not know.” Nevertheless, he adds an additional “I” to this phrase, literally translating as “I, I did not know.” Why this extra “I”?

Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz offers a solution to this seemingly double “I” through the lens of self reflection. In order to fully know God, one must forget the self. The egocentricity of being absorbed in the “I” is what prevents one from truly connecting to the world and to Hashem. Yaakov's assertion of **וְאַנְכִּי לֹא יִדְעָתִי** is therefore not a claim of ignorance of Hashem's presence, but rather a pronouncement of stepping out of his egocentric mindset, declaring “I don't know the I”.

This idea is very applicable to our everyday lives, specifically in our approach to tefillah. Prayer allows for oneself to pause and escape the world engulfed by the “I” for a brief period of time. It forces us to recognize God in our lives and ultimately become attentive to the world around us as bigger than just the “I” through its use of plu-

ral pronouns.

During tefillah, we are constantly using plural pronouns, such as “refaeinu” and “koleinu”, as we are not asking for ourselves, but rather for others -- for the we, for the us, not the “I”. Furthermore, tefillah is not only about noticing the bigger picture, but also is an act of listening. Through tefillah we are attentive to what Hashem wants from us in the present moment. We are able to discover that there is a force greater than us in the world, a Force who gave each of us a unique purpose. This awareness is reached by moving beyond the first person singular, so that just as Yaakov did, we can fully connect with and accept the other as Hashem.

Feeling for Others

Naftali Kieffer ('23)

Last week's parsha tells the story of Yaakov buying Esav's birthright and deceiving his father Yitzchak. In this week's parsha we see the consequences of Yaakov's actions.

This is evident when Lavan switched Rachel for Leah. The midrash teaches that when Yaakov accuses Leah of lying, she replies that she learned from his deceit of Yitzchak.

Another consequence can be seen during the episode of Yaakov and Eliphaz.

Because Yaakov misled Yitzchak into giving him Esav's blessing, Esav sent Eliphaz to chase him. Yaakov convinces Eliphaz not to kill him, but rather to take all his money and property instead. Because Esav wept when he found out about Yaakov's deception, in this week's parsha Yaakov cries because he has nothing to give Rachel when he first meets her.

But why is Yaakov being punished in the first place? We know that Rivka received a prophecy that Yaakov was to receive the blessing, so aren't Yaakov's actions justified?!

The Netziv answers that Yaakov received some

measure of joy during Esav's distress. Deep down, Yaakov was somewhat happy that Esav was in pain and felt he deserved it. This explains why Yaakov was punished; he wasn't punished for deceiving Yitzchak, but rather for being happy at Esav's expense.

Unfortunately, other people's failures sometimes provide us happiness. This parsha teaches that we shouldn't be happy while other people are in despair. The next time we see somebody get a lower score than us on a test, we shouldn't feel better about ourselves, but rather sympathize with the other person, and maybe even offer to help out. May we continue learning Hashem's Torah and becoming better people.

Meshugana Memes

When Jacob finally got to marry Rachel after working for 14 years



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