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New York, New York

B”H  
2005

## Parshas Vayetzei

Presented by

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### 1. Yaakov, the Embodiment of Torah

The Torah states, “**He (Yaakov) encountered the place...**” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that when Yaakov, our Patriarch, came upon Mt. Moriah he prayed. The Gemara in Tractate Chulin explains that Yaakov had intended to pray at Mt. Moriah (the Temple Mount); however, he had inadvertently passed it on his way to Charan. When he realized that he had passed it, miraculously he was returned to Mt. Moriah. This is why the Torah uses the term, “**He encountered the place...**” The prayer that Yaakov had established at this location was arvis (evening prayer service).

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that prior to Yaakov’s departure from the Land of Canaan, he had spent 14 additional years studying Torah in the Yeshivah of Shem v’Aver. Yaakov had dedicated his entire life to Torah study – as he is quantified by the verse, “The perfect man who sits in the tent (the tent of Torah).” Yaakov at the time of receiving the blessings from his father was 63 years old. What was the value and necessity of the additional 14 years of Torah study that Yaakov had invested?

Yitzchak, who is identified as “the unblemished offering” was not permitted to leave the Land of Canaan to go to Egypt. Chazal tell us that just as an offering is invalidated if it is taken out of the Sanctuary, so too Yitzchak would be diminished if he were to leave the confines of the Land of Canaan. Yaakov, believed, after being mentored in a home which was the equivalent of the Holy of Holies, that he would never leave the Land of Canaan (the Holy Land). Thus, all the Torah that he had studied until the age of 63 was directed to his spiritual development within the confines of the Holy Land. When he needed to flee to Charan, the community of Lavan, he understood that the moral and ethical fabric of that community was the antithesis of what he valued and represented. The fare of the day in Charan was the three cardinal sins (murder, idolatry, and adultery). Yaakov understood that without preparing to enter into that

negative spiritual environment, he would be diminished. He thus had to spend an additional 14 years in the yeshivah of Shem v’Aver to gain the Torah that was necessary for him to confront all of the spiritual challenges that may present themselves in the future.

Yaakov, is the Patriarch who represents golus (exile). None of the other Patriarchs suffered or were displaced to the degree of Yaakov. The Gemara tells us in a number of locations that exile is analogous to the nighttime period. During the period of darkness/nighttime one’s perception of reality is very often distorted. Because of the lack of illumination one lacks clarity. Thus, the nighttime period is fraught with confusion. Similarly when one is in a state of exile, one is subject to confusion, distraction, and unanswered questions. Therefore Yaakov, the Patriarch of golus(exile) is the one to establish arvis, which is the nighttime prayer service.

Yaakov, despite being exposed for many to the overwhelming negative influences of Charan, he immersed spiritually unscathed. He fathered 12 sons who were worthy to be classified as “the Tribes of G’d.” They were individuals who were spiritually attuned and had a capacity for unlimited growth. How was Yaakov able to accomplish this impossible feat? It was only because he is the Patriarch who epitomizes and personifies Torah study. It is only through Torah study that one is able to ward-off and dispel all negative influences. Yaakov was able to create an insular environment for his family to develop and blossom as spiritual giants.

The Gemara states in a number of locations, “I (G’d) have created the evil inclination and the Torah is its antidote.” Thus, the only way to achieve clarity, despite one’s being engulfed in darkness/confusion, is through the Torah.

Yaakov chose to enact the nighttime service (arvis) when he came upon Mt. Moriah. Why did Yaakov not establish this prayer service earlier in his life? It is not because he could only enact this service when he assumed the role of “Patriarch” because when he did establish arvis, both of his parents were still alive. Why was it only after

being investing 14 years at the yeshivah of Shem v'Aver that Yaakov was ready to establish the tefillah (prayer) of arvis?

In order to enact the prayer of the nighttime period, Yaakov needed to appreciate and understand all the issues and nuances that one must face while in exile. Prior to his Torah study in Shem v'Aver, Yaakov had not yet fully understood how to confront the negativity of exile. It was only after 14 years of studying the Torah that was necessary to approach the challenges of exile, did Yaakov come upon Mt. Moriah to establish arvis. The evening service encompasses and addresses all the conceivable issues that the Jewish people will be confronted with throughout their existence in exile.

Rambam writes in *The Laws of Torah Study* that the optimum time for one to study Torah is during the nighttime period. He quotes a verse from Eicha which are the words of Yirmiyahu the Prophet (who had witnessed the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews to Babylon), "Rise and sing out in the night." Rambam explains that the word "sing" refers to Torah study because the song of the Jew is the Torah itself. Yirmiyahu the Prophet was saying that after the Jews had experienced destruction and upheaval in their lives, the only way one is able to gain clarity is through the study of Torah. It is fitting that Yaakov is the Patriarch who represents exile, because it was only he (who is the embodiment of Torah) had the ability to navigate through the confusion and darkness of golus/exile. King Solomon encapsulates this reality by stating, "The candle is the mitzvah, and the Torah is the illuminator."

## ***2. The Jewish People, A People Who were Destined To Exile***

The Torah tells us that Yaakov, our Patriarch experienced a prophetic dream on Mt. Moriah in which G'd showed him angels ascending and descending a ladder that extended into heaven.

The Midrash states, "G'd showed Yaakov the archangel of Babylon, Madai, the Greeks, and the Edomites ascending and descending. G'd said to Yaakov, 'Why do you not ascend?' Yaakov was frightened and responded, 'I am concerned that if I ascend I will also descend.' G'd said, 'Do not be concerned, if you ascend you will not descend.' Yaakov did not believe and he did not ascend. Because he did not believe, it was considered a failing. G'd said, 'If you would have ascended and

believed, you would have never had a decline from that special level; however since you did not believe, your children will be enslaved and subject to the four kingdoms with their taxes and other levels of oppression.'"

It is interesting to note that the Midrash states that Yaakov "was afraid" and "he did not believe," thus, "he did not ascend." Yaakov is identified by Chazal as "the most special of the Patriarchs." How could he not believe in G'd's reassurance?

Eitz Yosef, a commentator on the Midrash explains, "Yaakov did not appreciate the Attribute of kindness of G'd that dictates that despite the spiritual failings (sins) of the Jewish people, they would not descend (be punished through exile)." The Torah tells us that when G'd told Avraham that he would have a son, "He believed" and it was considered a "righteousness." Ramban explains that when Avraham was told that he would have a son, he understood that it was not based on his own worthiness, but rather it emanated from the Kindness (Chesed) of G'd." Despite Avraham's lack of perfection, he believed the miracle of a child would occur. Why was Avraham able to believe in the unmitigated Kindness of G'd and Yaakov could not?

Each of the three Patriarchs chose to emulate one of the Attributes (characteristics) of G'd. Avraham emulated G'd's Attribute of Kindness. His entire approach to life and spirituality was based on performing acts of kindness. Chesed is defined as being indiscriminate kindness. Meaning, regardless of one's worthiness, kindness can be bestowed upon him. Avraham internalized this concept and Attribute to the core of his being – appreciating that although one is unworthy, he can still be a beneficiary of G'd's Chesed. Thus, when G'd told him that he would have a son at the age of 100, he was able to accept this without any doubt – despite his own lack of worthiness.

Yaakov's attribute was "Truth (Emmes)." The Attribute of Truth dictates that in order for one to be deserving of G'd's blessing, he must be worthy. If there is any deviation from the path of Torah/Truth one is not deserving of blessing. Therefore if there is sufficient spiritual deficiency one will not receive blessing. Yaakov, being the Patriarch of Torah/Truth was conditioned to see life based on worthiness. He had difficulty internalizing the fact that despite one's unworthiness G'd would bestow upon him blessing. The Midrash concludes that had Yaakov believed, the Jewish people would have been

spared the four difficult exiles. Why are the four exiles a direct outgrowth of Yaakov's failing?

Since Yaakov's perception of worthiness was based upon one's personal merit, the Jewish people would only be beneficiaries of G'd's blessing if they were free of sin. If however they would fail, they would need to be punished and purged through exile. Had Yaakov believed in the Kindness of G'd – that despite the lack of worthiness one would receive blessing - then even if the Jewish people had failed, they would not have been deserving of exile. This would have been an application of measure for measure.

The Torah tells us that despite the fact that G'd promised the Land of Canaan to Avraham and his offspring, he questioned and asked, **“Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it?”** Avraham was concerned that perhaps G'd's promise was contingent on the worthiness of his children. What would happen if his children were to sin? Would they be exiled from the Land? This question was considered a lack of faith. In this instance Avraham did not believe in the kindness of G'd. As a result of Avraham's failing, the Jewish people were destined to be enslaved in Egypt. Had Avraham not questioned G'd's Kindness, the Jewish people would have not needed to experience the exile of Egypt because despite their lack of perfection, G'd would have seen them as deserving (Chesed).

When Moshe beseeched G'd he asked Him to allow him to enter the Land of Canaan. His supplication was based solely on G'd's Kindness – unrelated to his personal worthiness. The Code of Jewish Law states that one should not recite the Amidah with a sense of worthiness/deservingness. One should pray with a feeling that he is truly unworthy and G'd should respond to him only through His Attribute of Chesed.

### 3. *The Story of the Dudaim*

The Torah tells us that Reuven went out into the field at the time of the harvest season and brought *dudaim* (mandrakes) for his mother Leah. The Commentators explain that *dudaim* is a type of plant which increases one's chances of conception. At this time, Leah had already mothered four sons for Yaakov. Her sister Rachel was barren and thus was not able to conceive. When Rachel saw the *dudaim* she said to Leah her sister, **“Please give me some of your son's dudaim.”** Leah responded,

**“was your taking my husband insignificant – And now to take even my son's dudaim!”**

It is important to note that Leah became the wife of Yaakov only through the sacrifice of Rachel. Initially Yaakov had worked for seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage. However Lavan deceived Yaakov by substituting Leah for her younger sister Rachel. Because Yaakov had suspected that his future father-in-law, whose nature was one of deceit, he had taken every possible precaution to avoid being deceived. He had given Rachel three code words that she would respond with under the Chuppah when she was in a veiled state. The words were, “Challah, niddah, and hadlakas ha'ner (lighting of the candles).” Rachel understood that the deception would take place. Thus, she shared these words with her sister Leah in order to prevent her public humiliation. Therefore, it would seem that Leah should be beholden to her sister Rachel for enabling her to marry Yaakov and thus becoming the Matriarch of the Jewish people. However, Leah responded to Rachel's request in a harsh and seemingly cold-hearted manner- despite the fact that Leah had already mothered four of the tribes. How do we understand Leah's response to Rachel?

When Leah had her second son, Shimon, the Torah states, **“She conceived, and bore a son and declared, ‘Because Hashem has heard that I am despised (by Yaakov).’** How is it possible that Yaakov, a person of such unique spiritual dimension should despise Leah, when she is not evil? Ramban explains that one can defend Leah by saying that she was coerced by her father, Lavan, to stand-in for Rachel under the Chuppah and that she had no choice but to follow his dictate. However, on the wedding night itself, she could have revealed or alluded to Yaakov that in fact she was not Rachel. Why was it only at daybreak that Yaakov realized that it was Leah? Yaakov understood that she was at fault for this deception and thus, he despised her.

Ramban explains however that only G'd knew that Leah's intent was pure in wanting to marry Yaakov because he was devoutly righteous. It was because of that purity within her that Hashem granted her a son. Prior to the first born, Leah had difficulty conceiving and thus required a miracle. Yaakov understood that because she was the mother of his children he could not divorce her. Factually speaking, since Leah gave birth to the future tribes of Israel, it was a clear indication that this was the Will of G'd. She was meant to be the Matriarch of the Jewish people and not Rachel.

Leah acknowledged and was beholden to Rachel for being the intermediary that allowed her to become the wife of Yaakov. As the Gemara states, "There are many agents who act on behalf of G'd." Leah understood that her fortune in becoming the Matriarch was unrelated to Rachel's selfless act of sharing the code words, but rather it was only the Will of Hashem. If Rachel had not chosen to share the secret words and had not been the intermediary, Leah would have become the matriarch anyway – because it was the Will of G'd. To Leah, the confirmation of this reality was that she bore four sons for Yaakov, consecutively.

Her status as Matriarch was an issue of destiny. She was granted her role despite her sister's involvement. Leah mothered more than her share of Yaakov's children. If the 12 tribes had been split between the four women, each would have had three sons. Leah however mothered a fourth son – indicating that she was the true wife of Yaakov. With this we can understand Leah's response to Rachel when she had said, "...was your taking my husband insignificant..."

It is true that Yaakov was attracted to Rachel, and could have married her had it not been for the deception perpetrated by Lavan. However, since it had been revealed that Leah was the destined Matriarch (evidenced by the fact that she had born sons for Yaakov and Rachel did not), it would be a breach of her role as Matriarch to give the dudaim to Rachel. It was not an issue of lacking gratitude. Leah's responsibility was to be the Matriarch and to not allow anything to interfere with that responsibility.

Although being beholden and appreciative is important when one has a debt of gratitude, one should not allow these feelings to interfere with the objective and purpose for his existence.

#### ***4. The Far Reaching Ramifications of Yitzchak's Choice***

Chazal tell us that although G'd does not associate His Name with one who is still living, because he may come to sin before he passes away, G'd did associated His Name with Yitzchak during his lifetime. G'd identifies Himself to Yaakov as "*Elokei Avraham v'Elokei Yitzchak* – G'd of Avraham and G'd of Yitzchak." The Midrash cites two reasons why Yitzchak is the exception. One reason that is given is that because Yitzchak's eyesight had been diminished and he was confined to his house he was no longer subject to the evil inclination. Thus guaranteeing

that he would not sin. Another explanation given by the Midrash is that Yitzchak is identified as a "heap of ash."

At the time of the Akeidah, Avraham had full intent to slaughter his son Yitzchak as an offering. However, after Avraham had met the test by offering his son as a burnt offering, G'd intervened and told Avraham not to slaughter his son. At that time, a ram presented itself in the thicket, indicating that it should be brought in Yitzchak's stead. When Avraham brought the ram as a sacrifice, every ritual that was initially intended for Yitzchak was performed with the ram. Although Yitzchak was not sacrificed, G'd views him as if he were burnt as an offering. Thus Yitzchak is seen by G'd as a "heap of ash." Since Yitzchak was considered as if he were slaughtered and no longer a living being, he was no longer subject to the evil inclination.

It is true that Yitzchak is identified by Chazal as "the unblemished offering" (post Akeidah) and valued by G'd as "a heap of ash"; nevertheless, since in reality he was not slaughtered, he still possessed an evil inclination as a living being. If this is so, then how could G'd associate His name with Yitzchak during his lifetime?

It is clear from the Midrash that Avraham's intent, when sacrificing the ram and having in mind that it was the equivalent of his son Yitzchak, impacted upon Yitzchak to be considered a person who was no longer alive. Thus, after the Akeidah, when he would be sufficiently worthy, G'd would associate His Name with Yitzchak.

Chazal tell us that at the time of the Akeidah, Yitzchak was 37 years old. He lived until the age of 180. If from the time of the Akeidah until his passing, Yitzchak had no evil inclination, why is he deserving of reward for his good deeds if he no longer had free choice? The reason man is deserving of reward or culpable for his evil is only because of his ability to choose between good and evil. If Yitzchak no longer had reason to do evil, because he was no longer subject to his inclination, then what value did his actions have after the Akeidah?

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin states, "Greater is the one who performs when he is commanded, then the one who performs and is not commanded." Tosfos asks, "Seemingly, one would think that the opposite should be true. One would think that if a person performs a mitzvah solely because of his own initiative (without obligation), it should be valued to a greater degree than one who did the mitzvah only because he must do the Will of G'd.

Basically G'd compelled him to do the mitzvah." Tosfos answers, "It is only when one is commanded to perform a mitzvah that the evil inclination to not perform the mitzvah presents itself. One who performs a mitzvah without being commanded, does not need to struggle against his inclination. Therefore, his mitzvah accomplishments do not compare with the one who does the mitzvah because he is obligated." If, Yitzchak did not have an evil inclination for the majority of his life, seemingly the value of his mitzvos should be diminished as one who performs when he is not commanded.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z'tl in the Portion of Shemos poses a query, "After Moshe received the Torah at Sinai directly from G'd, was it possible for him to become a heretic?" He answers, "It was impossible." After the Torah was transmitted to the Jewish people through Moshe, he no longer had the ability to choose in this particular area – to reject G'd (which would be a refutation of the authenticity of Torah). The basis for the divinity of Torah is Moshe's credibility as a prophet of G'd. If he were to become a heretic, then the entire Torah would be in jeopardy. If G'd took away Moshe's evil inclination and he no longer had the ability to choose (in this particular area) one would think that he would be classified as one who performs and is not commanded. Consequently, Moshe's accomplishments would not impact upon existence on the most profound and unique level.

Reb Meir Simcha explains that this is not the case. Moshe was chosen to be the Redeemer of Israel and the conduit through which Torah was to be transmitted because he chose to be a dimension of person who was qualified to receive the Torah on behalf of the Jewish people. Moshe's status as one without an evil inclination was only due to his own choice. Thus, all his accomplishments are valued by G'd as one who had chosen to be a tzaddik (righteous) until the end of his existence. Similarly, Yitzchak chose not to resist his father, Avraham, and agreed to be brought as an offering at the Akeidah. He chose to put himself in a position that he would be valued as a "heap of ash" – the residue of a burnt offering. Therefore, although he no longer possessed an evil inclination, Yitzchak is fully accredited for all of his acts of goodness, which came about through his initial choice.

Yitzchak is the Patriarch who emulated G'd's Attribute of Justice – exacting/perfection. The Attribute of Justice does not to