

Peninim On The Torah

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parashat Vayetze

He met the place and stayed there. How awe-inspiring is this place! (28:11)

Rashi explains the word va'yifga, "he met," as a reference to Yaakov Avinu praying there. This unusual use of the word va'yifga, to denote praying, teaches us, shekaftza lo ha'aretz, "the earth jumped towards him," the point towards which he was journeying came to meet him. When Yaakov realized that this was a remarkable place, he exclaimed, "How awe-inspiring is this place!" When we view these incidents in context, we note that Yaakov attributed the revelation which he had experienced to the place, while, in truth, it was Hashem Who "brought the earth closer to him." Therefore, although the place was awe-inspiring, it was "brought there" because of Yaakov.

The Sefas Emes elaborates that, on one hand, Yaakov attributed his dream to the inherent sanctity of the place, thereby bestowing honor on the location. On the other hand, however, since Chazal inform us that the place actually moved towards him, thus demonstrating its deference and subordination to him, the honor should really be accorded to him, not the place. In order to resolve the apparent question concerning who paid homage to whom, he explains that Hashem protects His devotees from falling prey to the trap of arrogance. Hashem, therefore, permitted Yaakov to feel that the dream was a result of the place, so that he might not attribute it to his own spiritual stature and become haughty. In this way, Yaakov demonstrated his humility, and Hashem helped him to retain this unique quality intact.

This is a powerful statement. Hashem caused the kefitzas haderech, the shortening of the earth, only so that Yaakov's middah, character trait, of anavah, humility, not be challenged. Chazal tell us that Yaakov's exclamation, mah nora, "how awe-inspiring (is this place)," is what distinguished the mountain as the future makom ha'Mikdash, site of the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem said, "The Heavens are My throne, the earth, My footstool. How can you build Me a house? Where can I rest?... with a poor person and one of a lowly spirit?" (Yeshayah 66:1,2). Yaakov's self-abnegation was the quality required to enable the Bais Hamikdash to be built at that site. Prerequisites for the very existence of the Bais Hamikdash are humility and negation of one's self. It is only when we sacrifice our pride and selfish desires that we allow the Shechinah, Divine Presence, to enter. Hashem dwells within us when we provide Him with a place created by our humility. Hashem gave Yaakov the opportunity to demonstrate his humility. Yaakov grasped the opportunity, because humility was an integral aspect of his psyche.

Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, cites the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, who underscores the extreme spiritual damage caused by receiving even a small amount of honor. The Gaon explains that honor is a spiritual pleasure which is experienced by the soul, thus diminishing one's eternal reward much more so than physical indulgence, which by its very nature is limited. The body can sustain only so much because of its limitations. Not so the soul, which is eternal. It has no constraints. It is for this reason that ennobling oneself in the eyes of others produces such disastrous consequences.

Rav Dessler posits that Rachel Imeinu's inability to conceive was a dire consequence of having been the recipient of an extra vestige of honor. The pasuk (Bereishis 29:31) says: "Hashem saw that Leah was hated, so He opened up her womb, while Rachel remained infertile." Previously, (29:30) the Torah writes that, "and he (Yaakov) also loved Rachel." This implies that Yaakov certainly loved Leah. It is just that he had a greater affinity towards Rachel. He loved them both, but Rachel received slightly more honor - an honor which she deserved, but, it was still more than Leah had received.

We must remember that Rachel neither asked for nor sought this honor. She did everything possible to see to it that her sister, Leah, would not be humiliated on her wedding night. She remained concealed in the room in order to assist Leah. She sacrificed her role in life as the propagator of the Jewish nation, so that her sister would not be humiliated. Chazal tell us that it was in the merit of this act of selflessness that Klal Yisrael was later spared. Clearly, whatever honor was later bestowed upon her was neither sought nor desired. Yet, the mere fact that she sustained this added honor disqualified her from bringing into the world Levi, who was the ancestor of Shevet Levi and Moshe Rabbeinu, as well as Yehudah from whom Moshiach would descend. All this was because of a little unrequested, but well-deserved, glory! Instead, it was all transferred to her sister, Leah. What a lesson for all of us as to what a moment of glory can mean, and how much we have to lose. The flip side is, of course, the tremendous merit that Leah had of becoming the Matriarch of Shevet Levi, the Kehunah, Moshe Rabbeinu and Moshiach Tzidkeinu. All this occurred because she was the "unloved" one, the one who had received a little less honor.

Incredible! For every moment of glory in which we bask, we pay a price. Likewise, every time we think that we have lost out on something, or we feel that we did not receive the appropriate honor due to us, we should think twice. This quite possibly may be a hidden blessing.

Avoiding honor has been the hallmark of our gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants, of each generation. They understood that honor is fleeting, but its consequences are eternal. By fleeing from honor, they ensured that their eternal reward would remain intact and preserved in its entirety.

*And he (Yaakov) dreamed, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached to the Heavens.
(28:12)*

Rashi says that the legs of the ladder which Yaakov Avinu envisioned were situated in Be'er Sheva, with its tip reaching Bais El and its middle over Yerushalayim. The Ramban disputes this, contending that it is unreasonable to place Yerushalayim in middle of the ladder. Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash are either a point of embarkation or the point of achievement of a goal. Thus, it either belongs at the bottom of the ladder or at the top. He, therefore, feels that the ladder was either standing in Yerushalayim with its top in Beis El or it was stationary in Be'er Sheva with its top in Yerushalayim. It is the place where holiness and blessing enter the world, the culmination of spiritual achievement. The significance of Yerushalayim is lost if it is placed under the middle of the ladder.

Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita, explains Rashi in the following manner. Taking upon oneself to ascend to the lofty perch of holiness and spirituality is an auspicious undertaking. Yet, as momentous as it is, it is not uncommon. People do it all the time. We resolve to start over, to begin anew with the finest, most lofty intentions, only to get sidetracked, overcome by challenge or overwhelmed with disappointment. It is not unusual to hear of the individual who possessed tremendous potential, yet succumbed to the pitfalls of life. The path of life is filled with shattered dreams and unfinished, unrealized potential. Surely, Yerushalayim cannot signify the bottom of the ladder, the commencement of what - a fall, failure, broken dreams?

Yet, on the other hand, there are those few who do make it to the top. They triumph over adversity, succeed against all odds, and rise above challenge. These are the gifted few, the unique elite, who, with righteousness and fortitude, scale the mountain of spirituality and holiness to reach its summit. To say that Yerushalayim is only for them, however, would be a difficult statement to make. Hashem did not create the world only for the few elite, for the totally righteous, for the spiritually invincible. Yerushalayim is for everyone. It, therefore, cannot be at the top of the ladder.

Rashi is of the opinion that Yerushalayim's position corresponds to the middle of the ladder. Holiness is not only an achievement, it is a goal. It is the reflection of a person's striving to excel, to attain a greater and more elevated level of kedushah, holiness. Any Jew who has broken the shackles that restrain him from growing is already on the road to kedushah. If he has moved beyond the pitfalls, the obstacles and disappointments, then he is already, in a sense, kadosh. It is not necessary to achieve the goal, to reach the summit - only to continue striving, to persevere and keep on going. Yerushalayim signifies this. It is in the middle of the ladder, because that position indicates forward movement.

A Jew's avodah, service to the Almighty, is to never lose sight of his goal, never to give up in defeat, to persevere over the challenges that confront him. Indeed, these obstacles give him the greatest opportunity for spiritual ascension, by bringing to the fore his deeper strengths, abilities and potentials - opportunities that, under normal circumstances, would elude us.

It is expressly at these difficult moments, when the "going gets rough," when the barriers which confront us seem insurmountable - and we are about to despair of ever achieving success in our spiritual climb - that we have the fortuity to make significant strides. When a person feels that he is up against a wall with nowhere to go, he now stands at the verge of achieving unprecedented success. Hashem avails us of these unique moments in life. It is up to us to withstand the test and ascend like never before. When we consider the alternative, there is really no other option. It is not only about winning; it is about not giving up. One's attitude makes the difference between success and failure. When we lose the will and determination to persevere in our quest, we have lost, perhaps, the single most important ingredient for success. There is no failure, except in no longer trying. There is no defeat greater than the defeat from within: the defeat of giving up.

Then Yaakov kissed Rachel; and he raised his voice and wept. (29:11)

Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu wept for either of two reasons. First, he saw through Divine Inspiration that Rachel would not be buried with him in the MeOras Ha'Machpeilah. Second, he wept because he came empty-handed. He thought, "Eliezer, my grandfather's servant, came for my mother with great wealth. I am coming to Rachel penniless, with nothing to offer." It is not that Yitzchak Avinu sent Yaakov on his way with nothing. Yaakov had been amply supplied before he left. On the way, he

was pursued by Elifaz, Eisav's son, who was sent by his father to kill Yaakov. When he caught up with Yaakov, he realized that, as a result of his being raised by Yitzchak, he could not bring himself to take a human life. Nonetheless, he was disturbed about not carrying out his father's command. When he posed this question to Yaakov, he was told that if he were to take away Yaakov's money, thereby leaving him destitute, he would be in compliance with his father's command. Our sages teach us that *ani chushuv k'meis*, "A poor man is considered like a dead man." Elifaz complied, and Yaakov was left penniless.

Elifaz sat next to Yitzchak. He grew up in his proximity. The Steipler Rav, zl, derives an important lesson from this incident. The only reason that Elifaz did not kill Yaakov was the inspiration with which he was imbued by Yitzchak. According to the Midrash, he was "raised in his bosom." Elifaz did not just "pop" into seder when he felt like it, leaving when he found something more important to do. - No! He remained there - glued to Yitzchak. It was in this merit that he did not kill Yaakov.

Imagine, had Elifaz not had such an upbringing; there is no question that he would have fulfilled his father's command to kill Yaakov. After all, one must respect his father! Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, expands on this idea. Let us consider the average student of Torah. The *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, whispers in his ear, "Why bother? Is there really any hope for you to make it as a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar? You are not destined to be one of the few, one of the elite. Give it up. How does one respond to this compelling assault? One cannot ignore the element of realism involved in this disparagement.

The response must be that, while becoming a *talmid chacham* is certainly everyone's lofty goal, the ideal, the end result of years of total perseverance, it is true that only a select few make it to the top. The rest will become *bonei Torah*, observant, knowledgeable, committed Jews, whose lifeblood will be Torah and mitzvos, whose day be filled with Torah, *avodah*, service to the Almighty, and *gemillas chasadim*, carrying out acts of loving-kindness.

Rav Galinsky relates an incident that occurred concerning him and Horav Chaim Kreisworth, zl. The venerable rav of Antwerp commented about a recent *din Torah*, litigation, that was presented to him. It concerned a dispute regarding the broker's percentage on the sale of a diamond. The owner claimed that he had promised five percent to the broker, while the broker contended they had agreed on six percent. One might think that this entire dispute was foolish. What is one percent? When one takes into consideration that the principle was valued at fifteen million dollars, the one percent was quite a huge sum of money.

A similar idea applies to Torah and Jewish living. When one computes the value of the principle of Torah and mitzvos, then every percentage point is of infinite significance. Whatever one achieves in Torah is an incredible accomplishment. Every step that he ascends on the ladder of Torah achievement is beyond our ability to gauge. Every little bit matters - both in a positive light and from a negative perspective.

In the Talmud Sanhedrin 46, Chazal say that those executed by *Bais Din* were buried in different cemeteries. There was a cemetery designated for those who were killed by the sword and those who were strangled. There was another cemetery for those who were stoned or who died by hot lead. Just as the condemned sinners were not immediately buried in the general community cemetery, so were the different levels of sinners not buried together. Just as a wicked man is not buried next to a righteous person, so, too, is a high-level sinner not buried next to one whose sin is considered to be less grievous. Since those who are condemned to die by stoning or fire are guilty of a greater, more deleterious sin, they are not buried next to others who, although were executed, had not sinned to as great an extent.

Let us analyze an example of this halachah. A married woman commits an act of infidelity; her punishment is chenek, strangling. If this same woman had not yet entered into full matrimony, if she is only an arussa, betrothed, without chuppah, and still in her parents' home, she is to receive the ultimate punishment of sekillah, stoning. She is, thus, buried in the cemetery reserved for the most miscreant sinners. Why? One would think that a woman who is not married, who has not destroyed the sanctity of a Jewish home, would receive some form of dispensation and leniency - surely not a greater punishment.

Horav Elya Lopian, zl, explains that precisely because the woman is married and has a family her punishment is mitigated. When she leaves the stability of her home and her husband, to whom she was to have remained committed, in order to act immorally, her heart gives a shudder. She feels "bad" about what she is doing. It is this "bad" feeling that diminishes her sentence. The other woman, who has yet no family ties, acts with impudence and with no conscience. She enjoyed her sin more. Therefore, her punishment is greater. It is all dependent on the heart's thumping. When one sins, and he does not feel good about it, if his heart gives a beat of remorse, it palliates his sin. It all depends upon the percentage. One percent of an enormous sin is a large amount in respect to the sin and will concomitantly deduct from his punishment. Everything that we do - however miniscule - both positive and negative - must be measured in context of the big picture. It suddenly takes on new weight and greater proportion.

Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Yaakov, so Rachel became envious of her sister; she said to Yaakov, "Give me children..." Yaakov's anger flared up at Rachel, and he said, "Am I instead of G-d who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?" (30:1,2)

Rachel complained to Yaakov Avinu that he should do something about her lack of children. His response was terse and seemingly out of nature, "Hashem has held children back from you, but not from me!" Yaakov was apparently saying that he had children from Leah. It was now up to her to daven to Hashem, for herself. The Midrash wonders how Yaakov could have responded in what seems a heartless manner to his wife, who was clearly brokenhearted. Is this the way one speaks to an aggrieved woman? Indeed, it was for this reason that Yaakov's children from Leah would one day bow down humbly before Yosef, Rachel's son. While Yaakov certainly did not want to hurt Rachel, he was criticized for the manner in which he spoke to her. We wonder if Yaakov had another reason for speaking to Rachel this way.

Horav Chaim Kamil, zl, feels that Yaakov was intimating a profound idea to Rachel. If the situation had become so grave that Rachel still was not blessed with a child, it must be because Hashem wanted to hear her prayers. This is why Yaakov told her - "From you, Hashem has withheld children - not from me." He wants to hear your tefillos, prayers - not mine. It is not that Yaakov refused to daven, pray, for Rachel. It is just that her lack of children was due to her lack of prayer. His prayer would not have catalyzed the blessing that she sought.

A person must delve into every nisayon, challenge, in life and ask himself, "What is Hashem asking of me? What does He want from me?" The challenge is there to elevate us. We must rise to the occasion as our Patriarch Avraham did throughout his life. Every challenge made him a greater person. Every challenge elevated him spiritually. Every challenge fulfilled the ratzon Hashem, will of the

Almighty.

And he became frightened and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d." (28:17)

When Yaakov Avinu first walked by (the place that would be) the Bais HaMikdash, G-d did not halt him there. Why? Rashi explains that since he did not take the initiative to pray in the place in which his ancestors before him had prayed, Heaven was not going to halt him. It was only when he traveled as far as Charan that he realized, "Is it possible that I passed by a place where my ancestors prayed, and I did not pray there?" He then set his mind to return and went as far as Beth-El, and at that point, the earth contracted for him and the Bais HaMikdash came toward him. Interestingly, it was only after Yaakov "set his mind" and began to return that he merited the miracle of kefitzas ha'derech, the earth contracted for him. Why did there have to be a miracle; he should have been halted at Har HaMoriah when he passed it by. Why did he have to "return" to it?

Horav Moshe Shapiro, Shlita, derives from here that although he was in the place most propitious for prayer, since he did not set his mind and heart on his own, Hashem was not going to assist him. It was only after he took the initiative, set his mind to return, and began the return trip, that Hashem caused a miracle. Siyata d'Shmaya, Divine assistance, is granted to us only after we have taken the first steps, after we have taken the initiative to go forward and undertake the endeavor.

We find support for this idea in Daniel 1: 8-15 when the wicked king decreed that in order to fatten up the Jewish youths, to make them appear healthy and strong, they should be fed unkosher meat and wine. The pasuk says, "Daniel set [the resolve] in his heart not to be defiled by the king's food." We find soon afterward that "G-d granted Daniel favor and mercy before the chief officer," until finally, "their appearance seemed better and they (Daniel, Chananyah, Michael, and Azaryah) were of healthier flesh than all the youths eating the king's food." At the moment that Daniel took the initiative and resolved in his heart not to be led astray, Hashem came to his assistance.

Likewise, the Rosh Yeshivah noted that bachurim in yeshivos become overwhelmed, or they are mistapek b'muat, satisfied with a little accomplishment. They do not shoot for the stars. When one sets his mind and resolves within his heart to become a great talmid chacham, Torah scholar, Hashem will grant him siyata d'Shmaya. If one does not try, he will never know if he could have achieved the goal.

Leah's eyes were tender, while Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. (29:17)

Rashi explains that Leah's eyes were tender from constant weeping in prayer. She feared that since she was the elder daughter, she would have to marry Eisav. What an incredible sacrifice! What an exalted spiritual position she must have reached. To cry so much that her physical appearance was actually transformed was truly an unprecedented achievement. Bearing this in mind, why did Rachel merit Yaakov as her husband? She did not cry for him, her sister Leah did. Yet, Rachel eventually became the akera ha'bais, the foundation and principle of the home.

Harav Tuviah Lisitzin, zl, a student of the Alter of Slabodka, and founder of Yeshivas Heichal

HaTalmud, gives an insightful explanation. Leah cried so that she would not fall into Eisav's grip. The mere thought of falling into this evil man's grasp brought about a torrent of tears and supplication. Rachel, on the other hand, exhibited a tremendous inner peace and joy with the knowledge that she would marry Yaakov. The inherent joy of marrying this great tzaddik, righteous man, brought about a physical change, transforming her into a remarkably beautiful woman. Her external physical appearance was a manifestation of her inner joy. Rachel's transformation came about as a result of a positive desire to marry Yaakov, who is considered part of Hashem's Merkavah, Holy Chariot. Thus, in her outward appearance, one could perceive the aura of the Shechinah. A beauty that is the result of a desire for closeness to the Shechinah will undoubtedly reflect the Shechinah in its countenance.

We now have some idea of who were the Matriarchs that gave birth to the Shivtei Kah, Twelve Tribes of Hashem. One cried so much not to fall into Eisav's grasp that her facial appearance changed and her eyes became tender. The other Matriarch exhibited such inner joy in her desire to marry Yaakov, it was manifest in extraordinary physical beauty that glowed of the Shechinah. This is the power of a Jewish woman who, with holiness and purity, seeks to be wed to a talmid chacham and build a Jewish home that is loyal to the verities of Torah.

*She (Leah) declared, "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem"; therefore she called his name Judah.
(29:35)*

The translation of the word, odeh, is to gratefully praise. Leah was especially grateful now, because as the mother of four sons she had been granted a privilege whereby she had a predominant share in building the twelve tribes which comprise Klal Yisrael. Gratitude is an inherent Jewish character trait. Indeed, the Chidushei HaRim posits that this is the reason the Jewish People are called Yehudim. We understand that we must always be grateful to the Almighty for granting us even more than we deserve.

The word todah, thanks/thank you, is the acknowledgment of gratitude and appreciation to the one who has performed a specific act. The word todah has another connotation. It is a derivative from the word modeh, to confess/concede. Todah is thus an act of admission and concession. Veritably, when one confesses to another, he is in fact conveying a message of agreement with the other party's opposing view.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, explains that the parallel between these two definitions-- todah as an expression of gratitude, or as an act of admission -- lies in the depths of man's natural instincts. By his innate nature, man seeks independence, aspiring and eager to demonstrate his ability to fend for himself without requiring the services of another individual. Thus, when one expresses his gratitude to his benefactor, he is actually acknowledging and conceding that he really does need the assistance of others. This conceptú which applies to every individual in his interpersonal relationships with others, manifests itself in one's attitude towards Hashem.

Ingrained in the human mind, as part of the human psyche, is the foolish notion that it is my strength and the power of my hand which has wrought this greatness. The ludicrous belief that man has his own power, without acknowledging Hashem as the Source of all power, has misled and been the ultimate downfall of many. Yehudim, by their very characterú should reflect and understand the futility of this belief. At every juncture one must acknowledge and give gratitude to his benefactor and to the One Who is the Source of all power. Hashem wants us to maintain this sense of appreciation and to

always feel that we are in debt. In fact, He assists us in doing so, as evidenced in the following story.

I was recently at a wedding on the east coast and met someone who shared an incredible story with me. I have since spoken to, and verified the facts with, the primary source of the incident. It was 1984 and Rabbi Aaron Paperman, zl, the executive vice-president of Telshe Yeshiva, and later the director of Chinuch Atzmai, was the keynote speaker at Yeshiva Shaarei Torah's annual dinner. The Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Berel Wein, sent one of the older bachurim, students, to meet Rabbi Paperman at the airport. The bachur who was selected, Yonasan Hirtz, is today Rabbi Yonasan Hirtz, a distinguished rav in Queens, New York.

When Rabbi Paperman arrived, Yonasan introduced himself as his chauffeur. Rabbi Paperman asked him, "Why were you sent?" Yonasan replied that his Rosh HaYeshiva had sent him. "But, why you - specifically?" Rabbi Paperman reiterated. "I have no idea," replied Yonasan, "I guess I was available, so Rabbi Wein asked me to go."

"Impossible," Rabbi Paperman countered. "There must be a reason that you were sent - and not someone else. Tell me about yourself. Perhaps I can figure out some reason why you were the one that was sent to fetch me."

Yonasan began to relate his background to Rabbi Paperman - who his parents and family members were, where he had studied in yeshiva. Suddenly, Rabbi Paperman's face broke into a large smile as he exclaimed, "I know why you were sent. It was to avail me the opportunity to finally show my appreciation and convey my gratitude to the man who is in a large part responsible for my Torah education. You are the great-grandson of Philip/Uri Shraga Gundersheimer of Baltimore. Do you know who this man was? He was a simple grocer who, despite the financial pressure of the times, refused to open his store on Shabbos. Even during the difficult years of the Depression, he observed Shabbos.

"There were three of us, three aspiring yeshivah bachurim who wanted to go to Europe to learn Torah. America had very little to offer us. Two of us were accepted in Telz and the third wanted to go to Slabodka. There was one major problem: money. Who could afford to go to Europe to learn Torah? Your great-grandfather undertook the responsibility to pay for our tuition. He covered all of our expenses. When I returned from Europe, I went to your great-grandfather's house to offer my profound gratitude. It was too late. He had passed away shortly before my return. I was devastated and during the last forty-three years it has troubled me greatly that I could not thank my benefactor. Today Hashem has finally availed me this opportunity. Thank you! Now you know why you were chosen to meet me at the airport. It was not by chance - it was by Heavenly design."

As a postscript, Rabbi Hirtz related to me that the other two bachurim became gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders. In fact, one was my rebbe. Interestingly, similar episodes occurred with other members of Philip Gundersheimer's family, yehi zichro baruch.

She (Rachel) said to Yaakov, "Give me children..." He (Yaakov) said, "Am I instead of G-d?" ... She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, consort with her that she may bear upon my knees." (30:1-3)

Chazal teach us that there was a little more to their dialogue than what we read in the pesukim. Rachel asked Yaakov why he did not pray for her as his father had prayed for his mother? Yaakov replied that his father did not yet have children, while he already had children. Consequently, he was not certain that his prayer would be successful. She then said that his grandfather, Avraham, already had fathered Yishmael, yet, he still entreated Hashem on Sarah's behalf. Yaakov then queried Rachel, "Are you prepared to do what my grandmother did? Are you willing to take a co-wife into your tent as Sarah took in Hagar?" Rachel responded in the affirmative and instructed Yaakov to take Bilhah for a

wife.

When we analyze the dialogue, we wonder what Yaakov wanted from Rachel. Undoubtedly, he had already poured out his heart supplicating Hashem in her behalf.

Apparently, she was destined to be barren. She needed a special zechus, merit, to alter the course of nature and bring about a change in her physical status. Prayer had until this juncture been to no avail. Yaakov then came up with an idea. Perhaps, Rachel would be willing to sacrifice as Sarah had done. Would she be inclined to take a co-wife? He was asking this of the woman who had once given up her rightful place as his wife, only so that her sister not be humiliated. Was not that act of selflessness sufficient to merit a child? This is a compelling question. What greater act of magnanimity is there than giving up her right to marriage - out of sensitivity to her sister?

The question was asked by Horav Avraham Yoffen, zl, in a shmuess, ethical discourse. What more could Yaakov have demanded of his fragile wife? The Novardoker Rosh HaYeshiva offered a penetrating insight into Yaakov's advice to his brokenhearted wife. The Patriarch saw that Rachel's chances to achieve motherhood were bleak. Prayer did not create an impact. The gates of tears seemed to be closed. Rachel was regrettably destined to be barren. There seemed to be no eitzah, strategy, left to bring about a change. But wait, there was something that could be done. Yaakov realized that he could implement the attribute of middah k'neged middah, measure for measure, by which Hashem administers the world. Chazal teach us that by the same measure that one conducts his own personal affairs and relationships, so, too, will Hashem conduct Himself with him. Therefore, Sarah, who was barren, took in Hagar as a co-wife and in this merit was blessed with her own child. Yaakov told Rachel, "We have tried everything. You have certainly gone beyond the call of duty with your prayers and outstanding chesed to your sister. I know of only one last resort which my grandmother employed. She gave her maidservant to my grandfather and, in that merit, she was blessed with a child. The Almighty responds to middah k'neged middah." The rest is history.

What a powerful lesson for us. We need parnassah, livelihood, pray for your friend to achieve parnassah. We need a shidduch, suitable match, for a child, pray for your friend. We need a refuah, cure, pray for someone else. When Hashem sees us acting on behalf of others - He will act on our behalf.

Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's dudaim." But she (Leah) said to her, "Was your taking my husband insignificant? And now to take even my son's dudaim!" (30:14,15)

The deep, cryptic meaning of the episode of the dudaim aside, we must endeavor to understand Leah's reaction to Rachel's request. If not for Rachel giving over the simanim, secret signals, to her sister, Leah never would have been Yaakov's wife. Lavan's ruse would not have been discovered. How could Leah speak this way to Rachel? Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl, offers a novel approach toward understanding the entire episode that took place on Leah's wedding night. He cites the Daas Zekeinim who explain that the secret signals were none other than the three halachos, laws, in which every Jewish woman should be proficient: niddah, challah and hadlokas ha'neir family purity, the laws of challah separation, and candle-lighting. Yaakov taught these laws to Rachel and the plan was that he would question her proficiency, to confirm that it was truly Rachel that he was marrying.

Rachel not only went to great lengths so her sister would not be humiliated, but also so that her dignity would be maintained. Therefore, she did not share with her the fact that she and Yaakov had predetermined signals between them. Instead, she simply taught her sister the laws that every Jewish

woman should know when she marries. Rachel never revealed, nor even indicated, to Leah that there were simanim. Instead she "gave over" the simanim unpretentiously, by teaching them to her. Thus, Leah was never aware of the great sacrifice her sister had made in her behalf. She did not realize how Rachel selflessly gave her the opportunity to wed Yaakov.

We now have a new insight into the remarkable act of chesed, kindness, that Rachel performed for her sister. The most notable aspect of the chesed is that she did not divulge that it was a chesed.

Then Yaakov became angered and took up his grievance with Lavan...and he said to Lavan, "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?" (31:36)

Twenty years Yaakov Avinu lived in Lavan's home. Twenty years of being cheated and persecuted. Not once did Yaakov complain; not once did they argue. Yaakov accepted his lot and went along with equanimity. Now, after Yaakov is finally rid of Lavan, and after being pursued by Lavan and searched for contraband, does Yaakov at last take issue and argue. After twenty years of misery, Yaakov tells it like it is. Why did it take so long?

The Ben Avraham explains that Lavan pursued Yaakov with the claim that Yaakov was a thief for stealing his idols. Yaakov feared that because of Lavan's maligning him, a chilul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name would result. Therefore, in order to mitigate whatever rumors might ensue as a result of Lavan's spurious claims, Yaakov argued with Lavan and publicly denied being a party to any wrongdoing. He also recounted each and every time Lavan cheated him in the past twenty years, so that word would get out that Lavan was a liar and a cheat. Thus, the chilul Hashem would be ameliorated.

There is an important lesson to be derived from Yaakov's behavior. He could handle anything. We have no idea how many times Lavan cheated and denied Yaakov what was rightfully his. Yet, Yaakov kept quiet; he did not complain. He did not take issue with Lavan, nor did he argue. It was only after it touched upon kavod Shomayim, the honor of Heaven, that Yaakov took a stand. Yaakov remained at Lavan's for twenty years. Only after he heard Lavan's sons speaking among themselves, claiming that Yaakov had stolen "everything" that had belonged to their father, did he decide that it was time to move on. Why? What took so long?

True, Yaakov could handle suffering and tolerate the lies and the constant cheating. He would not, however, allow Hashem's Name to be defamed by Lavan's ilk. Once word started to spread that Yaakov was a thief, then his G-d, Hashem's Name, would accordingly be tainted. This could not be allowed to occur. The time had come for Yaakov to leave.

Behold, I am with you; I will guard you wherever you go...For I will not forsake you. (28:15)

The Midrash comments, "On everything (that Yaakov asked for) Hashem replied in the affirmative, except for his request concerning parnasah, a livelihood, for which He did not reply." Hashem said that He would protect Yaakov Avinu from adversity and from those who would challenge him. Yet, regarding his request that Hashem grant him "bread to eat and clothes to wear," we find no indication of a reply. The Midrash concludes that Hashem did indeed issue His reply when He said, "Ki

lo e'svacha," "I will not forsake you," which is a reference to parnasah, as David haMelelech says in Tehillim, "V'lo ra'isi tzaddik ne'ezav," "but I have not seen a righteous man forsaken."

The Dubno Maggid explains this Midrash in his inimitable manner with a mashal, analogy, that is profound and insightful. A young boy was about to set out on a long journey. His mother, concerned that he have enough necessities with him, personally oversaw the packing process. She made sure that he had sufficient clothing for all types of situations and food and treats to satisfy his needs. His father prepared a bag with enough money to cover the various expenses that would arise during the course of the trip. As he was preparing to leave, word got back to the father that along the route there were a number of warring factions that might endanger his son. The father decided that he had no recourse but to accompany his son on his journey, to protect him. While on the road, the son noticed that he did not have a penny to his name. Looking at his father with worried eyes he said, "Father, I have no money for the trip."

His father returned his gaze and said, "Why do you worry? I am with you to protect you and take care of your every need. You do not have to worry about money as long as I am with you."

This is what Chazal are telling us. When Hashem told Yaakov that He would not forsake him, it was tantamount to implying, "I am here to take care of all your worries." What is there to worry about if Hashem is taking care of everything?

*(If Hashem) will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear...and Hashem will be a G-d to me.
(28:20,21)*

At the wedding of Horav Mordechai zl m'Chernobyl's son with Horav Dov Ber m'Lubavitch's daughter, the Chernobler was handing out l'chayim's, shot glasses with whiskey, to his chasidim. As he gave them a l'chaim, he would bless them, saying "You should be blessed with everything good both in ruchniyus, spirituality, and in gashmiyus, material needs." The Lubavitcher Rebbe, however, rendered his blessing to his chasidim in the Nusach Chabad, vernacular consistent with Chabad chasidus, of b'gashmiyus, u'b'ruchniyus, emphasizing material blessing in precedence to spiritual blessing. The Chernobler was taken aback that the Rebbe was placing greater emphasis on the material and he posed this question to Rav Dov Ber.

"But did not Yaakov Avinu do the same thing when he first asked for bread and clothes prior to asking Hashem to be his G-d?" asked Rav Dov Ber.

To this the Chernobler replied, "Do you think that Yaakov's gashmiyus was materialistic?" In other words, Yaakov's request for food and clothing was not materialistic in nature. It was only for the bare necessities so that he could have the strength and ability to apply himself totally to developing his spiritual dimension.

And I will return in peace to my father's home and Hashem will be a G-d to me. (28:21)

As Yaakov Avinu is about to enter Lavan's world, he asks Hashem to protect him, that his spiritual plateau will not falter during the encounter. The commentators wonder why, when Avraham went to Egypt and when Yitzchak went to Plishtim, they did not render a similar prayer for Hashem to

protect them? The Agra D'Kalla explains that the yetzer hora, evil inclination, has a duel approach for ensnaring a person to sin. He is either straightforward, not shying away from the fact that the person is about to blatantly commit a sin. A little encouragement coupled with subtle disdain goes a long way towards breaking down the barriers against sin. The second approach takes some guile on the part of the yetzer hora. He explains to the person that the sin is really a mitzvah and compels him to perform the "mitzvah." In such a circumstance the person may not be convinced that it is a mitzvah, but his sensitivity towards the sin has been neutralized. He no longer views the action as being absolutely of a negative nature.

Yaakov is about to confront Lavan, the consummate swindler, a man who has the ability to paint the most evil deed as an act of great virtue. This type of yetzer hora was something to which Yaakov was not accustomed. He could handle evil incarnate. After all, living with Eisav, he had been subject to seeing a man who embraced evil and was notorious for flaunting his baneful activities. Yes, Yaakov could handle Eisav. But Lavan was a different type of evil. It was evil concealed under a cloak of piety. An evil of such a chameleon nature was a new hurdle over which Yaakov had to triumph. He turned to Hashem and asked for His protection.

I think we can gather a meaningful lesson from Yaakov's supplication. We are not infallible. Everybody makes mistakes and needs Divine assistance to succeed in our never-ending, all-consuming war with the yetzer hora. The sooner we turn to Hashem for assistance in staying the course of positive service to Hashem, the sooner we will triumph over evil within and without.

Look, the day is still long; it is not yet time to bring the livestock in. (29:7)

Time seemed to have little effect on the shepherds. If they could take advantage of a little extra time, they would. This is not a Torah-oriented outlook. Time is valuable. Time is life. Time is an eternity. Every person is created with a limited amount of time set aside by Hashem for him. This amount of time is called a lifespan. Every person is allotted a different lifespan. How we use the time given to us determines the quality of our lives. For instance, a person who was allotted a long lifespan, but does not use it properly, wasting the precious moments that he has been granted, does not really make the most of his gift. On the other hand, one who unfortunately was not granted longevity, but nevertheless does not waste a minute, making sure to use every moment wisely and judiciously, elevates the quality of his life.

We must understand that everything Hashem gives us is for a purpose. All material gifts are granted to us so that we are able to serve Hashem better. Hashem's material gifts are there to enable us to earn eternal reward in the World To Come. Thus, we consecrate and elevate the material and mundane by using them in the service of Hashem. When Yaakov Avinu asked Hashem for "bread to eat and clothes to wear," (ibid. 28:22) he was implying that he only wanted clothes for the purpose of clothing himself and food to sustain himself. He did not seek luxuries or food with which to gorge himself. He wanted enough sustenance so that he could serve Hashem. The same idea applies to the gift of time. We are given a gift which many of us waste needlessly. We take precious time that could be used to earn merit in the Eternal World and use it for frivolity and foolishness. When we waste time, we are party to one of the greatest tragedies of life, because we are exchanging the eternal for the temporal. Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl, cited by Rabbi Boruch Leff in "Forever His Students," explains that one of the greatest punishments Hashem can mete out to the righteous is to deprive them of the ability to earn rewards in the World To Come. By causing us pain and suffering during our lifespan on this world, He

takes away from us the chance to perform mitzvos and study Torah. When we are incapacitated from pain or suffering, we are relegated to wasting precious moments - moments that could have been used for earning nitzchiyus, eternity. Thus, our earthly pain is more than corporeal pain, it causes eternal damage in our quest for a greater portion in Olam Habah.

Time is life - eternal life. When we waste our time we are wasting life. Furthermore, when we waste someone else's time, we are doing him far greater damage than we think. We are killing his opportunity for eternity! This is a form of iniquity that can hardly be rectified.

The Gerrer Rebbe, zl, the Imrei Emes, never went anywhere without his trusted timepiece. He was so meticulous about every moment, that he once gave his watch to repair because it was off by a few minutes. He was wont to say, "Why is there a custom to give a gold watch to a chassan? It implies to him that, as he begins a new life, he should learn to value every minute even more than gold." A young man about to get married came to him requesting advice on what mussar sefer, ethical work, he should study. The Rebbe pointed to his watch and said, "This is the greatest mussar sefer. Every minute that is wasted is lost forever, and it never returns."

Regrettably, we use the phrase "wasting time" too casually, not realizing the true and irreplaceable value of the commodity we call time.

Lavan had two daughters. The name of the older one was Leah and the name of the younger one was Rachel. Leah's eyes were tender, while Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. (29:16,17)

From reading the text, one would almost seem to envy Rachel; being that she seemed to sort of "have it made." When we read the parsha and note their diverging life stories, we note, however, that this was not so. In fact, both Rachel and Leah, each in their own way, were compelled to deal throughout their lives with adversity and challenge. Rachel's life, despite her physical appearance, seems to be confronted with challenge after challenge. It is a long chain of pain and suffering which culminates in her tragic death in childbirth, followed by her burial "on the road," instead of in the Me'oras Ha'Machpeilah as her sister, Leah. Let us peruse her life story as related by the Torah. In the beginning, the sun seems to shine upon her. She is physically attractive and held in great esteem. Yaakov Avinu meets her and immediately asks for her hand in marriage. Lavan, her father, agrees to the match and what seems to be a fairy-tale ending is about to occur.

But, as we all are aware, Lavan, the swindler, exchanged his daughters and Rachel, because of her incredible concern for her sister Leah's feelings, agreed to the ruse and did not reveal the switch to Yaakov. Instead, she helped it along so that Leah would not be humiliated. Finally, the day arrives, and she marries Yaakov, only to be barren. She is relegated to watching how her sister, who was originally shunned, is now the proud mother playing with her children. The yearning for a child, and even the envy, got to her. Yaakov's devotion to her was wonderful and meaningful, but it did not grant her motherhood. When she complained to Yaakov, he responded in a manner that inspired her to pray more fervently, until she was finally answered with a child. When we note the names that Rachel gave to her maidservant Bilhah's children, Dan and Naftali, we see that the pain had taken its toll. "G-d has judged me, He has also heard my voice. So, therefore, she called his name Dan." This was followed by, "Sacred schemes have I maneuvered to equal my sister, and she called him Naftali." (ibid.30:6,8). When she finally gave birth to Yosef she reiterated her pain, as she said, "G-d has taken away my

disgrace. And she called his name Yosef." (ibid.30:23,24) Her second son, Binyamin, was her expression of ben tzaari, son of my anguish. Rachel gave her life to be a Matriarch and when she died in childbirth, she still was not buried in the matriarchal plot, the Me'oras HaMachpeilah. Leah, her sister who had originally been ignored, was buried with Yaakov and the other matriarchs. So it seems that Rachel, who appeared to be destined to have a life of joy - did not.

Let us now look at Leah. Did she fare any better than her sister? Leah was Yaakov Avinu's first wife, his akeres habayis, mainstay of his home, mother of the greater part of his family. She had every reason to be on top of the world. But, was she? If we peruse the parsha, we see a different picture. Leah senses that she is secondary in the house, "the other wife", who is not favored by Yaakov as a result of the surreptitious nature of their marriage. She tries everything to win Yaakov over, to vindicate herself for not telling him the truth - that she was the "other" sister, she was not Rachel. It seems as if this feeling hung like a heavy stone over her head. Every name she gave her sons and those of her maidservant, Zilpah, declared her pain and anguish. Reuven, "because Hashem has discerned my humiliation," Shimon, "because Hashem has heard that I am unloved," Levi, "because this time my husband will become attached to me," Yehudah, "this time let me gratefully praise Hashem," Gad, "good luck has come," Asher, "in my good fortune." (ibid. 27: 32,33,34,35) Leah felt that despite her enviable position as Matriarch, she was still second-fiddle in a home where her sister was the object of greater fondness from Yaakov.

Despite the external facade that the average person saw, both of these women had issues that made them unhappy. Yet, we never find any discord in the family. Regardless of their positions vis-à-vis Yaakov, love and harmony reigned between them. Rachel helped Leah get married. Leah, upon conceiving her seventh child, prayed that the child be a girl, so that Rachel not have less sons than the maidservants. Thus, Dinah was born. The most important lesson to be derived herein is that suffering, pain, vicissitudes are all a part of life. There is always another side to the coin. With good fortune there goes suffering as an accompaniment, and together with the anguish there goes joy. One must never give up, but wait - until the coin of life is turned to the other side.

I recently read a meaningful story cited by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in "Touched by a Story." My Rebbe, Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, co-founder and Rosh Hayeshiva of Telshe in America, was about to speak at his first son's bar mitzvah. It was an emotionally charged and epic moment. The Rosh Hayeshivah had tragically lost his first wife and ten children to the European Holocaust. He came to these shores with a commitment to rebuild the glory of Telz. Finally, he was seeing some personal nachas. He was escorting his son into the ol, yoke, of mitzvos. The assembly waited eagerly for Rav Mottel to speak. A brilliant, profound thinker and prolific speaker; they wondered what he would say at this most unique moment. He ascended the podium, gazed upon the crowd and began to speak.

"When the Shaagas Arye assumed the position of Rav in the large city of Metz, the leaders of the community brought him to his new house. While it might not have been the largest, most impressive home in Metz, to the Shaagas Arye it was a veritable mansion. Having been poverty stricken, living in small, uncomfortable hovels for many years, this was truly a significant change. He was led from room to room on a tour of the house. One of the townspeople who accompanied him noticed that he seemed to be mumbling something quietly.

"Rebbe, what are you saying?" the man asked the Shaagas Arye. The rav stopped his murmuring and said, "David haMelech says in Sefer Tehillim ((90:15), "Samcheinu k'yemos inisanu, shenos ra'inu raah," which I interpret to mean, "Please Hashem grant me happiness consistent with the anguish which I have sustained." I, too, am asking the Almighty to permit me to enjoy my new home, my new

position, in accord with the pain and suffering that I have endured."

The Rosh Hayeshivah continued, with tears streaming down his face, "My friends, during the war I sustained great losses. My wife and ten children were torn from me. Now I ask the Ribono Shel Olam - Please, samcheinu k'yemos inisanu. Please grant me happiness and joy, nachas and simchah, through this child who is now bar mitzvah, proportionate with the suffering and sorrow which we have experienced."

I guess all of us should take this sage advice and hope that when it is our turn to be "reimbursed" for our pain, that our joy will be accordant with our suffering.

Leah's eyes were tender, while Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance. (29:17)

Chazal tell us that Leah's eyes were tender because she wept constantly in prayer that she would not have to marry Eisav. People would say that Rivkah had two sons and her brother, Lavan, had two daughters. The elder daughter would marry the elder son, and the younger daughter would marry the younger son. Leah's prayers were answered: Not only did she not marry Eisav, she even was the first to marry Yaakov. In his sefer Simchas HaTorah, Horav Simchah Hakohen Sheps, zl, notes that while Leah was the one who wept profusely because she was concerned about her fate, in the eternal scheme of things it was Rachel who was designated as the one who cries for her children. Her tears leave an impression. Hashem listens to her pleas. Why? Indeed, once she gave up her opportunity to wed Yaakov, she had every reason to fear that Eisav would seek to marry her. What is there about Rachel's tears that render their influence more favorable than those of any of the other Matriarchs?

Rav Sheps explains that the nature of Rachel's tears was different than Leah's because the two women had two distinct personalities. Leah worried; she feared that she would fall into Eisav's clutches. Rachel, by her very nature, was a baalas bitachon; she had incredible trust in Hashem that everything would work out for her. She did not cry; she did not fear. This is the underlying meaning of "Leah's eyes were tender." She did not have the fortitude, the stoicism, to confront challenges, trials and tribulations with tenacity, forbearance and conviction. She wept profusely out of fear and anxiety. Rachel was "beautiful of form and appearance." She never manifests hopelessness. She never gave up hope. One would look at her and see beauty in the way she carried herself - proud, hopeful, and filled with courage and resolution. When she wept, her tears were heard. She was, therefore, selected to serve as Klal Yisrael's advocate par excellence.

Rav Sheps notes that we have turned the tables around. In regard to routine, simple pressures, such as earning a livelihood, instead of being like Rachel and maintaining a sense of bitachon, we act like Leah and worry and cry. We demonstrate everything but bitachon. In regard to the important things, such as our children's education, we are like Rachel: filled with bitachon that everything will work out - eventually.

To expand a bit upon the above thesis, we may cite Chazal who teach us that after the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, all the gates through which prayers travel to Heaven were closed, except for the Shaarei Demaos, Gates of Tears. This means that currently it is much more difficult for our prayers to penetrate the Heavenly Court. There is one set of gates, however, that remains open: the Gates of Tears.

If the Gates of Tears never close, why have gates altogether? The purpose of a gate is to lock someone out. If the gates never close, what purpose is served by them? The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, explains that some tears do not get through - regardless. Tears of desperation and hopelessness do not penetrate the Heavenly Court. These do not represent Jewish tears. The tears of a Jew should reflect the individual's innermost and purest thoughts. These are tears of hope. They have the power to pierce the Heavens. The gates are there to distinguish between tears of hope and tears of hopelessness.

Regardless of how overwhelming and desperate a situation may seem, a Jew cannot give up hope. The Izbitzer Rebbe, zl, explains that we are called Yehudim, after Shevet Yehudah, because when Yosef confronted his brothers with the planted incriminating evidence, all the brothers gave up hope - except Yehudah. He immediately approached Yosef. He drew near to him in order to establish a dialogue. Yehudah never gave up hope. This attitude must epitomize all Jews.

And she declared, "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem. Therefore, she called his name Yehudah." (29:35)

In the Talmud Berachos 7b, Chazal say that no one paid gratitude to Hashem until Leah made this statement. Was Leah really the first to thank Hashem? Does this mean that the Avos, Patriarchs, did not show their appreciation to Hashem? The Kesav Sofer responds after first citing Chazal's maxim, "He who recites Hallel daily scoffs Hashem." Why should someone who praises Hashem be castigated? Apparently, Chazal are teaching us a significant lesson in regard to awareness of Hashem's daily miracles. One who is the beneficiary of a miracle that goes beyond the parameters of Hashem's daily caring for us is motivated to render his gratitude with the lofty praises of Hallel. What about the daily miracles, however, that are cloaked in what we call "nature?" Are they to be ignored? Ostensibly, this person thanks Hashem only for the "miracles," but not for the "nature." One who says Hallel daily, who appreciates the "Hallel type" miracles, but ignores the daily miracles which we take for granted, scoffs Hashem.

Surely, Avraham and Yitzchak thanked and praised Hashem for the miracles which He wrought for them. Indeed, their lives were filled with miracles. Leah, on the other hand, thanked Hashem for giving her a child - a seemingly "natural" gift. She understood the gift of a child. She understood that teva, nature, is really neis, miracle. She taught the world that one must offer gratitude for the natural as well as for the miraculous.

A man once came into shul, bringing with him a l'chaim, bottle of whiskey, to share with the members in honor of the great miracle that occurred in his life. He had been walking down the street, when a car went out of control and hit him. Baruch Hashem, it was a minor injury. In gratitude to Hashem, he was sharing his good fortune with others. The next day, another member came into shul and also brought a "l'chaim" to share with others. Assuming that he was also the beneficiary of a great miracle, they all wanted to know what had happened to him. "Nothing," he said, "absolutely nothing. I walked down the street, and nothing happened to me. Is that not also a miracle?"

Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, in his Michtav M'El'yahu, explains the concept of teva and neis in the following manner. He cites the famous statement made by the Rambam at the end of Parashas Bo that one must be aware and believe that everything that occurs is actually a miracle. Nothing is natural. It is all the result of Hashem's will. If so, how does one distinguish between neis and teva? Rav Dessler explains that while everything that occurs is really miraculous, Hashem has set forth

a process in the world whereby some miraculous occurrences are disguised in the cloak of nature, which means they adhere to the rule of cause and effect. It is only in certain circumstances for unique individuals, that Hashem acts outside of the parameter of cause and effect, causing what we refer to as a miracle, to occur.

Let us give an example of cause and effect. One plants a seed in the ground, and in a few weeks it begins to sprout. The cause is the planting and watering. The effect is the natural result. It seems natural, but is it really so? Does it make sense that when a living seed is buried in the ground, it decays and germinates, producing a living plant? Is this not some form of *tehiyas ha'meisim*, resurrection of the dead? Indeed, it is; if it would happen with a human being, it would be called a miracle, while with a seed, it is called natural and taken for granted. In other words, there is no difference between *neis* and *teva*, other than what we have become accustomed to believing.

In our times, we should be aware of the daily miracles that pursue us. The places that we did not go - and something terrible happened; the places that we did go and - to our good fortune - we "lucked out." It was just a couple of years ago following the 9/11 tragedy, that so many people became aware of the idea of *neis* and *teva*, and how what seemed to be an oversight, or a nuisance, was Hashem's gift of life - for some.

The following story caught my eye as an incident of *neis* which some might casually write off as *teva*. A group of Orthodox Jews prayed daily in a small, makeshift synagogue near the Twin Towers. Rarely was there a problem with a *minyan*, quorum. On September 11th, for some reason, they just could not put together a *minyan*. Perhaps the regular worshippers had opted to stay at their resident shuls for the *Selichos* services. Or, perhaps they were among the two hundred men who worked at the Twin Towers who were late to work that fateful day because they attended a *Shloshim*, one-month anniversary service, for a group of Jews killed in a helicopter crash over the Grand Canyon. Whatever the reason, only nine men were present for the *minyan*. It was getting late, and they all had to be at work at the Towers Trade Center well before 9:00AM. They looked at their watches and the time to leave for work was fast approaching. What would they do? They never missed *minyan*. Especially during *Selichos*, with *Rosh Hashanah* approaching, they had to try to get the proverbial tenth man.

As they were about to give up, an elderly gentleman shuffled in, asking, "Did you daven yet? I have to say *Kaddish*, the memorial prayer, for my father. It is his *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of his passing, and I would like to daven for the *amud*, lead the services."

Under normal circumstances, the members would have questioned the man: Who was he? Where did he come from? Was he observant? By now, however, they were frantic. It was late, and they had to move on - or they would be late for work. The man proved to be anything but a fast davener. He turned the pages and read the words at an agonizingly slow pace. The members were literally climbing the walls. Indeed, it seemed as if every gesture, every movement, every sound the man made was done so deliberately. The worshippers nonetheless respected his slow pace.

Suddenly, during their insistent complaining about being late for work, they heard the first plane explode. They heard the horrible blast that would forever shake their hearts and souls. They ran outside and saw the mass hysteria, the chaos and the thick smoke that lay before them.

"It should have been us," they thought. After the initial shock wore off, they realized that they had been miraculously spared from the jaws of death. Each and every one of them would have been there if not for the *minyan* and the elderly man who appeared from nowhere and who had davened so slowly. By the way, where was that man? They looked around, because they wanted to grab him and shower him with thanks. Where was that elusive mystery man who was probably the reason they were

alive?

They would never know the answer to that question, however, because just as he had suddenly appeared - he disappeared. During the commotion, he must have slipped out of shul. Now is that teva or neis?

Then Lavan spoke up... "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flock is my flock, and all that you see is mine. (31:43)

Lavan's response was to be expected: arrogant and insolent. It did not, however, respond to Yaakov's demand. Lavan pursued Yaakov and threatened him. Yaakov responded from the depths of over twenty years of frustration, describing his dedication and integrity beyond what was expected of him. He cited the many times that he had been mistreated and shortchanged by Lavan. How did Lavan respond to these claims? He said simply, "Your wives are mine; your children are mine; your sheep are mine; whatever you possess is mine." In other words, he did not respond to Yaakov. He ignored him - completely!

A famous incident occurred between the Brisker Rav, zl, and the Chafetz Chaim, zl. This dialogue serves as a portent for future relationships with our non-Jewish neighbors. The Brisker Rav once had a two-hour layover in Warsaw. As he was waiting in the station, he was notified that the Chafetz Chaim was presently in Warsaw. The Brisker Rav immediately ordered a wagon and driver, so that he could visit the Chafetz Chaim. During their conversation, the Chafetz Chaim shared the following incident with him. The Chafetz Chaim yearned to visit Eretz Yisrael. He decided to apply for an exit visa. The ministry for immigration said that he would have to produce a valid birth certificate before they could process his application. He told them that he had been born over ninety years ago, at a time when they were not issuing birth certificates. The only other alternative was to produce two witnesses from the same town who remembered his birth. The Chafetz Chaim looked at the minister incredulously, "The witnesses would have to be over one hundred years old!" To find two such witnesses was impossible.

"Now," continued the Chafetz Chaim, "what was the minister thinking? He certainly understood that his demand was impossible for me to fulfill. Why did he make such an impossible request of me? The answer lies in Parashas Va'Yetzei - and he cited the above pasuk in which Lavan basically dismissed Yaakov, saying, "Everything is mine. You have no claim on anything!" Lavan disregarded Yaakov's reasoning, overriding it with the notion that since everything is mine, you are a nobody with no ability to demand anything of me.

"The same idea applies to our position in Polish society. We are nothing in their eyes. They view us as non-entities with no claim to anything. We are dismissed and ignored. Our feelings and sensitivities are totally meaningless to them."

Lavan did not consider himself arrogant. He viewed Yaakov as a nothing, someone whom he could dismiss without any compunction. This type of anti-Semitism is worse than blatant hatred. Not to be considered a people, to be regarded as a nonentity, to be dismissed without reason, to be relegated to a position of insignificance is worse than hatred. This demeaning view of our People is self-inflicted. We ask for it when we refuse to act like a Torah nation with pride and dignity. When we attempt to act like them, we become like them. What is there about us that is worthy of respect? We are not religious. We are not moral. We are not ethical. We are no different than the nations around us. Our assimilation

indicates our insecurity. No one cares for an insecure person. Why should the nations of the world have regard for an insecure, vacillating nation? The cure for anti-Semitism is simple: act in the manner in which a Jew was created and instructed to act; the hatred will dissipate, and the respect will return.

And I will return to my father's house in peace; and Hashem will be my G-d. (28:21)

Regarding Yaakov Avinu's use of the word v'hayah, "and (Hashem) will be," Chazal comment, "He (Hashem) took the words of the Patriarchs and made them essential to the liberation of their children." Hashem said to Yaakov, "You said, v'hayah Hashem, so too, I will use the same word, v'hayah to announce to your children all the kindnesses, blessings and promises for the future." What is the significance of the word v'hayah, that Hashem will grant our reward using the vernacular of v'hayah? The Ozrover Rebbe, zl, explains that the word v'hayah implies both the past and the future. Hayah, "it was," refers to the past. When placed before the verb hayah, "v", the conversive vav transforms it from "it was," to the future tense, "it will be." He explains that galus, exile, is a necessary preparation for the geulah, redemption. Indeed, we can go as far as to posit that galus is actually a component of and a portent for geulah. In the Talmud Bava Kama 76b, Chazal say, "Whatever stands/is about to be redeemed is considered redeemed already." This supports the idea that the past is the key and harbinger for the future. Yaakov believed in this, and he actually perceived the redemption amidst his tribulation. Therefore, Hashem told him that his descendants should also learn from the v'hayah to realize that all the good that is destined is a consequence of our present exile.

This time I give thanks to Hashem; therefore, she called his name Yehudah. (29:35)

When Rav Avraham Mordechai, the son of the Chidushei Ha'Rim, the first Gerer Rebbe, was thirty years old, he became gravely ill. His illness progressed to the point that he was at death's door. The Chidushei Ha'Rim came in to visit him. He told him, "My son, one is commanded to want to live. The individual must have an overwhelming desire to continue living. It is quite possible that this is the underlying meaning of the pasuk in Devarim 30:19, "I have placed life and death before you...Choose life! We are enjoined to do everything possible to continue living. I am, therefore, certain that you will fulfill this mitzvah. I expect you to arise from this illness in complete health, and you will soon father a son."

The patient remained silent. His father stayed on for a short while, then left. As soon as he left, Rav Avraham Mordechai struggled to get himself to sit up in his bed, whispering, "Ribono Shel Olam! Please listen to me and grant me, this one time, a few more years of life so that I may be blessed with a son. I will name him Yehudah, so that I will fulfill the pasuk, Hapaam odeh es Hashem, "This time I give thanks to Hashem." Slowly, he was nursed back to health. The following year, his wife gave birth to a special child whom he named Yehudah. This was the famous Sefas Emes.

This time I give thanks to Hashem; then she stopped giving birth. (29:35)

The Chozeh, zl, m'Lublin, derives from this pasuk that one must give thanks to Hashem for the future as well as for the past. Indeed, we find in the Benching, Grace after meals, that we recite the

brachah, blessing, Hatov v'Ha'meitiv, "Who is good and Who does good," which also implies the good which Hashem will do, as the brachah continues, "He did good, He does good, and He will do good." We see clearly how we pay gratitude for the future beneficence as well as for the past. Leah apparently deemed it sufficient to give thanks only for surviving the past ordeal. This is why she did not continue to have children. Hashem's reward coincides with our perception of His favor and the extent to which we express our gratitude to Him.

The Ozrover Rebbe, zl, cites the Talmud in Berachos 54a as the basis for this idea. "He gives thanks for past mercies and supplicates for the future." Chazal seem to imply that one should pray for the future, rather than give thanks. Nonetheless, one who trusts in Hashem has the conviction that his prayers will be fulfilled - as if the fulfillment has already occurred. Prayer for the future is accompanied with the gratitude one should offer for the realization of his request.

David Hamelech says in Sefer Tehillim 18:4, "With praises I call unto Hashem, and I am saved from my enemies." Rashi interprets this pasuk in the following manner: I pray to Hashem constantly. Even before I am saved, I praise Him, because I am secure that He will grant me salvation from my enemies. The Ozrover adds that David Ha'melech was as sure about his future salvation as he was about the past. Hashem's purpose for the world is constantly to act altruistically. We can offer no greater sense of appreciation than the individual who offers his gratitude even before he has received the gift - so sure is he of receiving it. Thus, Friday night in the tefillah, prayer, of Ribon Kol HaOlamim which many recite prior to Kiddush, "I thank You Hashem for all the kindness You have performed with me and that You will perform with me," we thank Hashem for His future kindnesses, because we believe with conviction that they will occur. This is the essence of gratitude.

Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Yaakov, and Rachel became envious of her sister. (30:1)

Rachel Imeinu endured a long series of trials and tribulations which were both painful and dejecting. Yet, her mesiras nefesh for Klal Yisrael, coupled with her unparalleled character refinement, catapulted her to the zenith of spiritual ascendancy. Her devotion and sense of chesed, kindness, set the standard for her descendants. Chazal teach us that the following appeared before the Almighty to intercede on behalf of His people when Hashem was prepared to destroy the Bais Hamikdash and forever ban Klal Yisrael from the land as a result of their iniquity: the Avos, Patriarchs, followed by Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential leader of the Jewish People, Yirmiyahu Ha'Navi; and a host of Heavenly Angels. They each detailed his own incredible merits; they cried, tore their hair, beat their chests and rent their garments in mourning over the upcoming tragedy, all to no avail. They did not succeed in deterring or deflecting the Heavenly decree.

When Rachel observed this, she came before Hashem and said, "Ribono Shel Olam, You know that Yaakov loved me very much. He slaved for seven years to obtain me as his wife. At the designated time, my father sought to exchange my sister Leah for me. I notified Yaakov, and he gave me special signs through which he could recognize whom he was marrying. When I saw how distraught my sister Leah was, I gave her these simanim, signs. I could not tolerate to see her humiliated when Yaakov discovered the ruse, so I lay under their bed, and I spoke instead of Leah so that Yaakov would not recognize the truth. I was kind to her, and I was not jealous of her. Consequently, Hashem, as I constrained my emotions and did not permit envy to consume me, I ask that You not be jealous of the idols that Klal Yisrael are foolishly serving." When Hashem heard her plea, He immediately responded, "Because of you, Rachel, I will return Klal Yisrael to the land."

Rachel's selfless act of kindness saved the Jewish People and forever serves as merit for us to return to our homeland. Let us analyze her act of kindness, so that we have a better understanding of what is ultimately expected of us. She was acutely aware of Yaakov Avinu's eminence and virtue. She knew that he would be the progenitor of the Twelve Tribes from which the Jewish People would descend. Seven years is a long time, especially when one waits for such a mate. Seven years she waited, patiently anticipating her role in the building of Klal Yisrael.

Her father, the evil swindler Lavan, actively sought to undermine her aspirations. She could have offered any of a number of excuses not to permit the exchange. She wanted to be the Matriarch who would establish Klal Yisrael with Yaakov. She wanted justice and truth to prevail - and not to permit an underhanded swindler to have his way. Rachel wanted to marry the tzaddik and spend her life in an atmosphere that epitomized holiness and purity. Yes, she had many reasons for saying no to Leah. However, she did not. She was prepared to relinquish everything, even not honoring Yaakov's desire to marry her and not Leah. What gave her the strength of character and courage to act in the way she did?

Horav Mordechai Kukis explains that after all has been said and done, Rachel understood that a spiritual ascension standing upon the back of another person is a blemished progression. Rachel could have achieved the spiritual advancement of her dreams, marrying Yaakov and becoming the Matriarch of the Jewish People, but at whose expense? If it meant indirectly humiliating her sister, Leah, then it was not worth it. To paraphrase the Alter, zl, m'Novordok, "The test of overcoming the desire for ill-gotten money ceases as soon as one discovers that the money is counterfeit." What value is there to pennies when one can gather diamonds? One whose heart is filled with compassion cannot infringe in any way upon the feelings of another person. It is related that when the Alter z"l, m'Kelm would take a stroll on the city's main thoroughfare, which was paved by the government's prisoners who were subjected to every type of menial and brutal labor, he would always keep their pain in mind. He would wonder, "How could anyone be at ease when walking on a road on which so many people suffered and whose ground is soaked with their sweat and blood?"

One who strives to achieve true purity of heart and soul may not climb the ladder of spiritual advancement if the rungs of the ladder rest upon the suffering of another human being. One does step on his friend in order to reach spiritual heights. Rachel Imeinu understood fully well what she was giving up. An achievement earned at the expense of her sister, Leah, however, was not much of an accomplishment in her eyes. It took super-human strength for Rachel to overcome the battle that raged within her. Should she reveal the signs to Leah and, thereby, lose Yaakov, or was Yaakov more important than Leah's feelings? She was thus rewarded by Hashem with a reward that extends beyond the physical realm. It would be in her merit that Hashem would rescind His decree against the Jewish People.

Overcoming one's "natural" tendency can warrant great merit, as indicated by the following incident: Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, would relate the story of the agunah, woman whose husband had abandoned her for over twenty years. She was a bitter, tormented person who lived next door to the Mirrer Yeshivah. She supported herself and her children from the meager earnings she received as a laundress. When the Six Day War broke out, she, like hundreds of others, crowded into the yeshivah dining room, which also served as the neighborhood's bomb shelter. The shells were whistling overhead, striking dangerously close to the yeshivah. Finally there was a direct hit: an explosion shook the building. People thought this was the end and began to wail, "Shema Yisrael!"

Suddenly, at that moment, the agunah's voice was heard crying out, "My husband discarded me and left me alone for twenty years. Hashem! I have suffered so much, but I forgive him! You, too,

Ribono Shel Olam, forgive the Jewish People for all we have done wrong!" They were saved! When Rav Chaim related this story, he would pause and begin to cry as he described the miserable lot of the pitiful agunah. Then he would say, "Her prayer saved us!" It was the acute awareness that she had been rejected - totally - by the very person who had chosen her to be his life's partner. It was a realization with which she was condemned to live every waking moment for the rest of life. It was her ability to triumph over her emotions, her capacity for forgiveness, despite all she had been through, that gave such import to her act of reprieve. Overcoming a natural inclination earns us a reward that is supernatural.

Give me children - If not, I am dead. (30:1)

What woman does not yearn to have a child? Some are fortunate enough to be blessed with children soon after marriage. Others wait, pray and go for a blessing from a tzaddik, righteous, G-d-fearing Torah scholar, in whose merit they are blessed with a child. At times, even this does not help. Hashem has decided. We may find the decision difficult to accept, but we must believe with conviction that it is the correct decision. At times, the tzaddik's blessing may have a long term effect, as evinced by the following story:

Horav Shlomo, zl, m'Zvehil's blessings were known for their effectiveness. He had a laundress who was a righteous, G-d-fearing woman. She was a special person who was known for her good deeds. She was basically a content person, except, for one thing that kept gnawing at her: she had no children. One day after work, she was determined to speak to the Rebbe. She stood by his door, refusing to go home. The Rebbe looked up and inquired if something was the matter. She immediately responded that she would like a berachah, blessing, to have a child. The Rebbe thought for a few moments, then looked up at her and said, "I am sorry, but I cannot be of help to you." This response tore at her heart. This was her last hope. She was devastated. After a few moments, the Rebbe looked up again and added, "I bless you that in your merit, other women will be blessed with children."

For many years, this woman thought about the Rebbe's promise, but, apparently, nothing had happened. In 1964, she passed away - childless and with no indication that the Rebbe's blessing had been fulfilled. Her passing left no impression on the Yerushalayim community. She died as she lived - quietly. She was buried on Har Hamenuchos in a simple grave. Her monument read: Po Nitman, "Here is buried, Miriam bas Mamon, died 24 Teves, 5724."

Twenty nine years later, in 1993, the time had come for her story to be revealed. One of the laundress's neighbors had a dream during which the laundress appeared and related to her the entire story that had occurred. "During my lifetime, I was not to be blessed with children, nor was the Rebbe's blessing realized. Now, however, the time has come for a number of neshamos, souls, to descend from Heaven. I assure you that those women who come to my grave and pray on behalf of my neshamah will be blessed with children." A number of women followed her advice and were subsequently blessed with children. The Rebbe's blessing had finally reached fruition.

Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva and went to toward Charan. (28:10)

In the previous parsha, Parashas Toldos, the Torah records Yitzchak and Rivkah's instructions to Yaakov to leave Beer Sheva in search of a wife. Yaakov Avinu listened to his parents and proceeded to leave. The last pasuk in the parsha tells us about Eisav's quest for a wife, a search that led him to Yishmael, whose daughter he married. The Torah now reverts to telling us about Yaakov's journey, his initial encounter with Rachel and the travail that ensued prior to and during their eventual marriage. The commentators wonder why Eisav's marriage is placed in the midst of the narrative detailing Yaakov's farewell to his parents and his journey to Charan. Beer Yosef explains that the Torah is teaching us about the greatness of Yaakov. Two brothers were born at the same time: one was righteous, the other was evil - one plundered and killed, the other devoted his life to Torah study: one suffered and was forced to flee his home to protect himself, while the other lived a life of peace, calm and comfort. Yet, Yaakov, the virtuous brother, did not complain - even when his brother, the evil Eisav, found his wife immediately. Never did he question Hashem; never did he complain. He accepted whatever he encountered. This was Yaakov's distinctiveness. His faith never wavered; his commitment never faltered, his devotion to Hashem never waned. The question, concerning why the righteous suffer while the wicked prosper, a question that has plagued and destroyed so many, did not bother Yaakov. He suffered, while his brother prospered. He kept running while his brother lived in peace. He had to overcome great challenges to secure a wife, while his brother found one almost immediately. These occurrences did not bother Yaakov; they did not change his belief one iota. This perspective manifests a remarkable appreciation of Yaakov Avinu's attitude. How do we know that he did not complain or subconsciously question Hashem's manner of dealing with him? Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, derives this idea from the Torah's text describing Yaakov's departure from home. In describing Yaakov's forced departure from home, the Torah says "Va'yetze Yaakov," "Yaakov departed from (Beer Sheva)." In the Haftarah, the Navi says, "Va'yivrach Yaakov," "Yaakov fled." Which accurately reflects the reality? Did he leave peacefully, or did he flee for his life? Horav Solomon posits that both descriptions are correct. Yaakov fled; in his mind, he accepted this necessary course of events as if he were departing of his own free will. Yaakov saw only the will of Hashem. Every situation, every challenge, every trial, represented the will of Hashem. That Eisav found a mate with ease, while he, Yaakov, underwent serious hardship reflected the will of Hashem. Consequently, he accepted it with joy, never feeling pangs of envy or anger. The Navi records the true course of events, while the Torah emphasizes Yaakov's attitude to these events.

This is the way our Torah leaders lived. Everything represented the will of Hashem. Running from city to city, from ghetto to ghetto, from bunker to bunker - it was the will of Hashem. Horav Solomon cites Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, who, together with Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, founded the Telshe Yeshivah in America during World War II, was driven by this force. He came to these shores, a broken firebrand saved from the fires of the Holocaust, with one intent: to rebuild the yeshivah. People wondered how someone who had survived the cataclysmic destruction of European Jewry, a man who had lost his family, could come here with such determination and resolve, almost with "chutzpah," to take upon himself the awesome challenge of building Torah in a strange land. His response was simple, "I have come here as a shliach Hashem, G-d's emissary, to build Torah." Nothing could stand in his way; he was on a mission for Hashem! This was the prevalent attitude of all the Roshei Yeshivah who built Torah in America. They came physically broken, but in mind and spirit they were emotionally charged with a mission. They were Hashem's messengers. The European tragedy facilitated their move. It was the signal that they were needed elsewhere. It is because of their courage and resolve, that today we are the beneficiaries of an unparalleled Torah legacy founded with mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, and committed to the ratzon Hashem, will of G-d.

And he dreamt, and behold! There was a ladder whose foot was on the ground and whose head extended into the heavens. (28:12)

It is interesting to note that the vision of a ladder whose legs are on the ground, while the top reaches the heavens, occurred only to Yaakov and not to the preceding Patriarchs, Avraham and Yitzchak. Horav Shlomo Margolis, Shlita, attributes this phenomenon to the different lives that they lived. Avraham initiated Tefillas Shacharis, the morning prayer. He understood that life has its challenges, its trials and travail. The sun shone for him. He succeeded in life, overcoming whatever challenges may have stood in his way. He was accepted by those around him. Indeed, he was recognized as G-d's emissary, His prince. He was admired and revered. His prayer, the prayer recited when the sun shines, reflects his life's endeavor.

Yitzchak's prayer was Tefillas Minchah, the afternoon prayer, recited as the sun's rays begin to wane. He experienced his share of life's problems. The sun did not shine as brightly for him as it did for his father. Yet, he persevered, serving Hashem no matter the circumstances of his life. His tefillah, recited as the sun begins to set, reflects his life.

Yaakov Avinu's tefillah was Tefillas Arvis, the evening prayer. His life was one of darkness. It started in the womb with his twin brother, Eisav. He suffered from the corrupt Lavan; from of the misfortune of his daughter, Dinah; from the troubles of Yosef, which included the imprisonment of Shimon and near loss of Binyamin. Yaakov did not live a carefree life. The one time he asked for a respite, a change from his daily troubles, Yosef's anguish came upon him. Yaakov's prayer, recited at a time of darkness, reflects the notion that one can and should trust and pray to Hashem, regardless of the overwhelming darkness that envelops him. Yaakov taught us that the "odds" mean nothing to a Jew. He can overcome anything.

The ladder also represents this idea. Even when one is on the "earth," on the lowest rung of the spiritual ladder, having sunk to the nadir of depravity, he can still rise up and reach the zenith of spiritual purity. He can either climb the ladder, or stand there and watch as others accomplish what he reneged from doing. Yaakov succeeded, despite the darkness of life's challenges. He was shown that man can overcome anything: be it physical or spiritual darkness. He has to trust in Hashem and be willing to climb the ladder.

And it was in the morning, and behold- it was Leah! (29:25)

Lavan lived up to his reputation as a corrupt, duplicitous miscreant. Yaakov and Rachel were prepared for Lavan's certain deception. They, therefore, arranged a secret signal between them. Upon seeing that her sister, Leah, was about to be substituted for her, Rachel decided to give Leah the pre-determined sign, in order not to cause her embarrassment. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, observes that had it not been Hashem's will that Leah marry Yaakov, then all of Lavan's "shtick," contrivances, would have been futile. One should not think that it was Lavan's dishonesty, and Rachel's magnanimous gesture, that brought about the marriage of Leah to Yaakov Avinu. Rather, it was Hashem Who deemed it so. Leah was to become Yaakov's primary wife, the mother of as many sons as the three other wives combined. Indeed, she was buried with him in the Meoras Ha'machpeilah. As Rav Aharon adds, Yaakov Avinu detected nothing wrong with his marriage to Leah, because his trenchant spiritual perception recognized that, indeed, he was with his predestined partner in life.

Horav Eliyahu E. Dessler, zl, comments about the respective roles of the two sisters. Rachel was to be Yaakov's intended mate for this world, while Leah was to be his partner in the spiritual world of Olam Habah. Yaakov possessed two names: Yaakov, signifying his physical dimension, and Yisrael, designating his spiritual role in the future. Indeed, Rachel produced Yosef, who sustained his family during the great famine. Leah, on the other hand, produced Levi and Yehudah, the progenitors of the Kehunah, Priesthood, and Malchus Beis David, Davidic Messianic sovereignty, respectively. Yaakov's destiny as Yisrael demanded that he marry Leah, an arrangement devised by Hashem.

There is, however, one aspect of the marriage that should be addressed. Suspecting Lavan's deceitful nature, Yaakov gave Rachel a special signal by which he could identify her. Selfless in nature, Rachel gave the sign to her sister, so that Leah would not be embarrassed. This is praiseworthy, but, what about Yaakov? Who gave Rachel the right to share Yaakov's private signal with her sister? True, she did not want to see her sister humiliated, but what about Yaakov? His intention was to marry Rachel - and not Leah!

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, cites a story within a story that gives us an insight into Rachel's action. It occurred with Horav Yehoshua Brim, zl, a distinguished Rosh Yeshivah in Yerushalyim, who had undertaken to see to the welfare of a widow and her children, whose husband and father had passed away a week before Pesach. He had arranged for a bachur, young man from the yeshivah, to lead the Pesach Seder as it should be. On Pesach night, he told his family that he would be home a little bit later than usual, since he was dropping by the widow's home to make sure everything was in order.

After davening, Horav Brim visited the widow and noticed that the bachur who was to "lead" the Seder had not yet arrived. The widow, who was understandably anxious, began to cry, bemoaning her tragic circumstances. No husband, no father, no one to sit at the head of the table and lead the Seder. Horav Brim was not going to permit this widow to suffer any more anguish. He proceeded to begin the Seder - himself. One can only begin to imagine the great joy in that home as the widow and her children realized that the great Rosh Yeshivah was going to lead their Seder personally.

Horav Brim did not rush the proceedings. He took his time in explaining the story of the exodus from Egypt. He carefully and poignantly focused upon the dire situation of the Jews of the generation, how they were liberated from servitude and swept? from misery to joy overnight. So, too, the Exodus should serve as a portent for us all, lending hope and encouragement where it is needed. As soon as the Seder was over, Horav Brim bid the family Gut Yom Tov and immediately ran home. His family, by now thoroughly puzzled by his tardiness, was waiting for an explanation. "I will explain everything soon, but first we must hurry up the Seder, so that we may eat the Afikoman in its proper time," he said. After they had eaten the Afikoman, he told them the reason that he was late. "But what about your family?" his children asked. "It is a mitzvah to help a widow, but not at the expense of your own family," they demanded. "Let me explain to you why I acted the way I did," he responded.

"When I was much younger, I once went with one of my friends to the Chazon Ish, zl, to discuss a certain situation that troubled us. At the end of the conversation, after we received the Chazon Ish's advice, he turned to us and said, 'One of your friends is in need of a shidduch, suitable mate. We must address this issue as soon as possible.' We, of course, immediately looked into the matter, and in a short while the bachur became engaged to a fine young woman. We immediately notified the Chazon Ish, who was overjoyed. He expressed his interest in attending the "vort," engagement celebration, and asked that we notify him when everything was prepared and they were about to read the "tanaim," agreement between the chason and kallah. "At the moment that they were prepared to read the tenaim, we went to call the Chazon Ish. When we came to his home, we found him speaking to an elderly

couple concerning their little store which they managed. He patiently advised them in regard to every aspect of their business. This advice however took over an hour, during which time we waited not so patiently for the Chazon Ish to finish. After all, all the guests were waiting for him to appear, so that the simchah could proceed."

"The Chazon Ish walked the couple to the door and bid them good-night. He immediately took his hat and rushed with us over to the simchah. On the way, he turned to us and said, "You probably are wondering why I took so long with the elderly couple, knowing fully well that everyone at the simchah was waiting for me. You should know that these people are broken Holocaust survivors whose only source of sustenance is their little store. Why they came to me for advice, I do not know. I do know, however, that while I cannot help them financially, I can give them support, hope and encouragement."

"This mitzvah is not only my obligation; it is the collective responsibility of the entire Jewish community - including yourselves and all those who were at the simchah. By waiting for me to join them, they were taking part in the mitzvah of helping another Jew."

"So, too," continued Horav Brim, "it applies to us. Tonight, you could not be of service to the widow, but the obligation to help her still applies. By waiting for me while I led her Seder, you were taking part in the mitzvah!"

What a remarkable perspective on chesed, kindness, and its application from a Torah point of view. The obligation to act kindly with sensitivity and love to a fellow Jew applies not only to the one to whom the mitzvah is availed, but to everyone involved. However remotely one may be affected by this mitzvah, he is obligated to support it. With this in mind, Horav Schwadron comments that Yaakov Avinu also was obliged to protect Leah from humiliation. If that is the case, then Rachel did nothing wrong by giving Leah the sign she received from Yaakov. Indeed, she was doing from a favor by letting him share in the mitzvah of shielding Leah from disgrace. **Vignettes on the Parsha** And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward. (28:12)

Horav Meir, zl, m'Premishlan posits that one's dreams reflect his essence. A person perceives in his dream what he thinks about in his mind. Yaakov Avinu dreamed about a ladder reaching Heavenward. Pharaoh also dreamed. He dreamed about seven cows.

*Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Hashem is present in this place and I did not know."
(28:16)*

Let us look at the situation through the perspective of Yaakov Avinu. Divine Providence ordained that he settle in this "place" for the night. Indeed, Hashem "folded" the entire country beneath Yaakov, so that -- in effect -- he lay on all of the land. The place where he lay was to be the future site of the Kodshei Kodoshim, Holy of Holies, in the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem caused the sun to set prematurely to compel Yaakov to retire early. He dreamed an incredible dream, in which he was privy to the Almighty's prophecy: The land upon which he lay, Eretz Yisrael, would one day belong to his descendants. After all of this, one would think that Yaakov's reaction upon waking up would be euphoric. We see, however, that the Patriarch was as upset with himself as though he had acted inappropriately. How could he have dared to sleep in such a hallowed place? It is not derech erez, good manners and courtesy, to act in such a way -- even in a dream.

Horav Nossan Tzvi Finkel, zl, derives from here that Yaakov Avinu was prepared to forego the lofty prophecy that he had received if attaining it would imply a lack of derech erez. While Torah is essential, derech erez kodmah la'Torah, courtesy and good manners precede Torah. Yaakov Avinu conveys to us the importance of mentchlichkeit in relationship with Torah. He teaches us the Patriarchal standard of values. It serve us well to study this lesson carefully.

*Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Hashem is present in this place and I did not know."
(28:16)*

The word "mishnaso," which is translated here: "from his sleep," can alternately be translated: "from his learning." This prompts the Baal HaTurim to suggest that Yaakov was so engrossed in his Torah, so totally engaged in it, that when he was compelled to sleep, he actually dreamed Torah! Not for one moment did Yaakov lapse from his Torah study. When Yaakov slept, he dreamed Torah. This is consistent with the Talmud in Brachos 55b that says one perceives in his dreams what is subconsciously in his heart. That which occupies one's mind during the day is manifest to him as he sleeps.

Nachlas Tzvi cites a remarkable story with a lesson that is both profound and timely. A maggid, lecturer in ethical discourse, once related during a lecture that he had studied in a small town in Lithuania. In the bais medrash of that town, an elderly man who was at least in his nineties sat and studied Torah literally every waking minute of the day. He was so deeply engrossed in Torah study that he ate his meals where he sat, never leaving his Torah study. He fell as leep in front of his Gemorah, and - upon awakening - he immediately returned to his blatt Gemorah. He was the object of envy throughout the bais medrash.

One day, a group of curious students approached him and asked him for his secret. How is he able to study so diligently for so long? He explained that as a youth, he was blessed with a sharp, astute mind. He was able to grasp the various profundities of Torah with ease. Alas, he had one problem, hasmadah, diligence. His attachment to the "study" part left something to be desired. At the time, he was a student in the famed Volozhiner Yeshivah whose rosh ha'yeshivah was Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl. Rav Chaim approached him more than once to be more diligent, to increase his hasmadah, to no avail. He possessed a great mind, but he was also subject to the powerful allure of the yetzer hora, evil inclination, who presented an overwhelming challenge to his Torah study. He continued to relate the following incident:

"One night, about 2:00 a.m., in the midst of a deep sleep, I heard someone calling my name. First, I stirred, but after the voice persisted, I awoke to see none other than the venerable rosh ha'yeshivah standing over me. You can imagine the awe that permeated me as I saw Rav Chaim standing there with a candle in his hand, motioning me to follow him. Without further ado, I jumped out of bed, quickly dressed, and followed Rav Chaim. He quietly led me through the streets of the city until we had reached its outskirts.

Never once did Rav Chaim say a word. He just led until we reached a large forest.

"We entered the forest and stopped in the middle. Suddenly, the rosh ha'yeshivah turned to me and raised his voice, 'You know that Chazal say, that when one studies Torah, the Shechinah sits opposite him and studies also. My child, if you do not want to learn Torah, why should you prevent Hashem Yisborach from learning?' This heartrending plea, emanating from the innermost recesses of

his heart, moved me beyond control. All night, I tossed and turned. My rebbe's anguished cry rang through my ears. His profound accusation was mind-boggling. How could I impede the learning of the Ribono Shel Olam? From that day on, I decided that I would no longer prevent Hashem's learning. On the contrary, I wanted to learn with Hashem Yisborach. I changed my entire attitude towards Torah learning and became a masmid." This story gives us an entirely new perspective regarding Torah study and the "chavrusa," study partner, with whom we learn.

Yaakov told Rachel that he was her father's relative. (29:12)

The simple meaning is that Yaakov told Rachel that he was no stranger to their family. Indeed, he was her first cousin, as his mother and her father were brother and sister. Alternatively, Rashi cites the Midrash that claims Yaakov was suggesting to Rachel that should Lavan attempt to cheat him, he was also capable of being deceptive. He would defend himself by acting towards Lavan as he deserved. This does not mean that Yaakov would have resorted to any form of underhandedness that crosses the acceptable boundary of halachah. He would simply have to do everything within reason to protect himself from Lavan the swindler.

Let us attempt to rationalize Yaakov's statement. If he was actually "capable" of dealing with Lavan on the ramai's, swindler's, level how was Lavan able to fool him? When Yaakov made this claim to Rachel, he was obviously implying that Lavan could not swindle him out of Rachel. Yet, he did. Furthermore, Yaakov is called the "ish tam yoshev ohalim," "perfect and wholesome man abiding in tents." This means that he was naïve, that he did not know how to swindle, that he did not associate with this breed of human being. How then could Yaakov have made such a statement?

Horav Shalom Schwadron, zl, addresses these questions. He first explains the concept of "ramai" as it applies to Lavan, so that he can demonstrate that this unique form of "ramaus" was not the type that Yaakov could emulate. First, we must understand why Lavan is called a swindler. The man was evil, heartless and ruthless. He certainly was a swindler, but that was not his worst characteristic. The manner in which he humiliated Rachel on her wedding night, at the very last minute forcing her to shed her wedding clothes in order to give them to Leah, indicates heartlessness beyond description. Moreover, the money that paid for this wedding was stolen from the citizens of that community. Was this man a swindler or an evil man? Was Lavan a ramai or a rasha?

When we take note, we observe that Eisav wicked. He also manifests other deficiencies: his desire for money, his lack of morality; his disdain for Hashem's mitzvos. Why is he only called a rasha? Then there is Lot, who is referred to as a "baal taava," one who has an insatiable desire for material and physical gratification. Once again, this description certainly does not do Lot justice. For what purpose did he move to Sodom, the center of immorality and cruelty? He sought to live with people of his ilk, reshaim who thrived on depravity. So, why is he only called a "baal taava"? We can more precisely describe such a sinner!

Horav Schwadron explains that the Torah is focusing upon the origin of their iniquity, the source of their present actions. Eisav ha'rasha's deeds emanated from an evil and wicked heart. He was evil incarnate. True, he scorned mitzvos, stole money, lived licentiously - but, this was all a result of his "rishus." Hence, he is referred to as Eisav ha'rasha. Lot was a baal taava by nature. He was a low-life who was filled with an insatiable desire for material and physical indulgence. While he did perform activities that would certainly be included under the purview of evil, their origin was in his taava, lust.

Thus, he is called Lot, the baal taava. Lavan represented a unique form of humanity. He reached his nadir as a result of his proclivity towards "ramaus," fraud and deception. He acted reprehensibly, in a manner becoming a rasha merusha, but its origin lay in his swindling activity.

Lavan was no ordinary ramai. His deceit was unique. He is referred to as "Lavan ha'arami," a reference to more than his geographical status. Chazal say he deceived himself. Hence his name is linked with the word "Arami," which is a noun denoting self-deception -- as opposed to "ramai," a verb which implies deceiving others.

This is where Lavan's duplicity distinguished itself from your average fraud. Lavan believed in himself; he justified everything that he did. Only a person who deludes himself that his actions are sanctioned can act as reprehensibly as Lavan acted. Only one who validates his evil as necessary and proper can be as heartless and ruthless as Lavan. Such a nefarious person has no qualms about humiliating his daughter during the most important moment of her life. After all, he justified his actions; he deceived himself - at the expense of others.

One cannot "compete" with a self-righteous "ramai," a moralizing fraud, since he sees nothing wrong with what he is doing -- he has no scruples. If Yaakov were to rival Lavan's "ramaus," he would have had to relinquish every vestige of integrity that he possessed. He would also have had to vindicate his deception - something a man of honor could never do. Lavan bested Yaakov in his ability to misrepresent and swindle, because, in his own eyes, he was performing an honorable deed. Yaakov could not do that. He was an "ish tam," wholesome and scrupulous man, who would combat a swindler on his own turf, but would never for one minute denigrate himself to believe that what he was doing was honorable. He was acting in self-defense, warding off the tentacles of Lavan's duplicity. This is why he was not successful.

Hashem saw that Leah was unloved, so He opened her womb; but Rachel remained barren. (29:31)

Yaakov cared deeply for Rachel. She was his first choice for a wife. Indeed, when he referred to his wives, he always mentioned Rachel's name first. Why does the Torah emphasize the fact that Rachel was an akarah, barren? It is obvious that if Leah was the only one to have had children, then Rachel had remained childless. Horav Simcha Zissel, zl, M'kelm says that there is a correlation between Leah's being the "senuah," less favored, and Rachel being the "ahuvah," beloved and eminent. It affected Rachel's ability to bear a child. That little extra kavod, honor/favoritism, worked against her!

Look at what a little "kavod" can do. Rachel did not seek it. In fact, was she not the one that gave her sister, Leah, the simanim, special signs, upon which she and Yaakov had agreed? She remained present during the evening, supporting Leah's completion of the ruse. Why? Only to prevent her sister's humiliation. Yet, she had a little kavod. She was the favorite; she was the beloved. This reality influences an individual whether or not she had pursued the honor. Regrettably, Rachel was compelled to "pay" for the kavod she received. We might want to consider this when we pursue that little bit of honor.

Hashem has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will make his permanent home with me for I have borne him six sons. (30:19)

Leah was blessed with as many sons as Yaakov's other wives collectively. Indeed, Leah merited that the primary foundations upon which Klal Yisrael rests originate from her sons. She merited the three crowns; Keser Kehunah, Crown of Priesthood, from Levi; Keser Malchus, Crown of Royalty, from Yehudah; and Keser Torah, Crown of Torah, from Yisachar. After giving birth to her sixth son, she offered gratitude to the Almighty for bestowing this great honor upon her. She alone, in accomplishment, corresponds to the other three wives of Yaakov combined.

The Meshech Chochmah, feels that her gratitude after Zevulun's birth intimated a deeper meaning. Leah understood that Klal Yisrael's sheleimus, perfection, could only be achieved if there is a "Zevulun" to sustain the other three crowns. The Kohanim and Leviim are supported by the Yisrael; the King's treasury, and all of the kingdom's affairs, are sustained by the taxes paid by the community. Zevulun is clearly an integral and indispensable part of Leah's family. The three kesarim - crowns - representing the primary aspects of Klal Yisrael are maintained only by Zevulun. Leah, therefore, understood that with Zevulun's birth she had completed her role as Yaakov's wife.

We still must address the origin of the name Zevulun. Leah noted, "Zevadani Elokim zaved tov," "Hashem has endowed me with a good endowment." Since Leah was referring to the unique endowment she had received from Hashem, it would seem appropriate for Leah to name her son "Zavdi," from the word "zaved." How was this transformed into "Zevulun"? If, in fact, the name Zevulun is a derivative of "ha'paam yizbeleini ishi," "Now my husband will make his permanent home with me," it should be noted that the word "yizbeleini" is translated as if it were to say "yisavleini," a derivative of the word "savlanus," tolerance. His name should therefore have been "Sevulun."

With the Meshech Chochmah's exposition on the function of Zevulun, we have established that Zevulun was responsible for preparing and maintaining the other tribes. We can, thus, attribute the name Zevulun to "zevel," fertilizer, which prepares and nurtures the earth and its vegetation. In his sefer, Simchas HaTorah, Horav Simcha Shtetner, Shlita, cites this definition in the name of Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl. He adds that fertilizer actually has both positive and negative traits. On the one hand, it prepares and improves the earth so that vegetation and crops will have a better quality. On the other hand, fertilizer is noxious, giving off an odor that impedes the individual from coming in close contact with it. Indeed, one may not make a brachah, blessing, in its presence. This idea is applicable to Zevulun. He sustains Torah, malchus and Kehunah. He serves as a support system without whom these three would have limited chance of survival. He must remember, however, that in his own right, if his financial strength is utilized for personal use, he is of no value. The material dimension functions only in conjunction with the spiritual dimension. The spirit gives life and meaning to Zevulun's material assets. It is all up to man to choose either the positive or negative approach to this asset.

He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set. (28:11)

Chazal credit Yaakov Avinu with introducing Tefillas Arvis. Thus, the word "vayifga," which is usually translated as "he encountered," means, "and he prayed." Prayer is, in essence, an encounter with the Almighty. The Patriarchs initiated each of the daily tefillos. Regarding Avraham Avinu, who originated Tefillas Shacharis, the Torah says, "Avraham rose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem" (Bereishis 19:27). The Torah uses the word, "amidah," standing, regarding Avraham. In contrast, pegiah, encounter, is used in regard to Yaakov. Finally, the word, "sichah," - "Yitzchak went out to supplicate (lasuach) in the field," (Bereishis, 24:63) is used to describe Yitzchak's introduction of Tefillas Minchah. Why does the Torah characterize the individual tefillos of the Avos in

such disparate terms?

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, explains that each tefillah represents the unique form of avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty, manifest by the individual Patriarch who instituted it. Avraham Avinu's major goal in life was to disseminate to the world a monotheistic concept of belief in the Almighty. He accepted every challenge that came his way, overcoming enormous odds and trials. He succeeded as a result of one specific attribute, his ability to stand firm, stalwart and unyielding in his commitment. He synchronized every talent and ability he possessed toward reaching that goal. He was immovable and resolute. His standing to pray reflected his unique form of avodas Hashem.

Yitzchak, the heir to Avraham's outreach efforts, was mired in a predicament. Although he certainly was following in his father's footsteps, he needed to differentiate between his own conviction and his imitation of his father's approach. In order to make this distinction, he had to delve into the innermost recesses of his psyche. To enable this introspection, he went away from the activity of the city to a quiet field where he could concentrate on an intimate prayer between himself and his Creator. Yitzchak's tefillah represented the "kol demamah dakoh", a still, thin sound, through which only the soul of a person is able to understand his true intention.

Yaakov's tefillah was an encounter with Hashem. This was in contrast to the tefillah of his grandfather, Avraham, who sacrificed himself to bring others close to Hashem, who devoted his life to performing acts of chesed. He also was different from his father, Yitzchak, who set the standard for mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice. Yaakov stood between an Eisav, who sought to destroy him physically, and a Lavan - whose goal it was to prevent his spiritual development. He was not like Avraham or Yitzchak. What could he do? How could his prayer make a difference? What could he add to the concept of tefillah which his father and grandfather had developed? He was so absorbed in his predicament that he "fell" asleep. Hashem showed him a ladder that reached from earth to Heaven. Yaakov woke up and declared, "This is the House of G-d and the gateway to Heaven." He now understood that it was not necessary to offer sacrifices, especially since he could not offer anything that his ancestors had not already offered. Yaakov perceived that he, through his demeanor and service to Hashem, could concretize this ladder that traversed from earth to Heaven. He was to consecrate his physical dimension through Torah study and avodas Hashem. He could pray wherever he was. His prayer was not introducing something new. Rather, it was an encounter with the past. It demonstrated to the world that wherever we are, in whatever area of endeavor we are involved, we can reach out and encounter Hashem through prayer, through Torah, through mitzvos. Our purpose is to sanctify our lives - wherever we are, under whatever conditions we find ourselves.

Yaakov Avinu instituted Tefillas Arvis, the prayer recited after dark, the prayer that coincides with the darkness of galus, exile. Our mission throughout the long galus is to encounter Hashem and be that ladder/bridge that reaches between Heaven and earth.

He took from the stones of the place, which he arranged around his head. (28:11)

In the Midrash, Chazal render this pasuk to mean that Yaakov Avinu took several stones, which began "quarrelling," each one vying for the tzaddik to rest his head on it. "Alai yaniach tzaddik es rosho," "Upon me shall this tzaddik rest his head." Noticing this argument, Hashem combined them all into one stone upon which Yaakov would rest. Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, derives a profound lesson from here. Jewish tradition disapproves of machlokes, conflict, regardless of its goal, even if the

dispute is about upon which stone the tzaddik should rest his head. As long as the "alai", "me", is the initial focus, if the goal is that it should be "me" and not the other person, it is wrong. Whenever a disagreement divides two people - regardless of the reason - Hashem will not condone it.

What did Hashem do? He transformed all of the stones into one stone. Once they became one equal unit, there was no longer any room for the "alai," me. Even though Yaakov would rest his head on one specific part of the stone, all had an equal share throughout the one unified stone. The only way one can protect himself from the tragic effect of machlokes is through harmony, in which the individual feels that he and his friend are one. He must share with him in life's happy and sad moments, celebrating his joy and lamenting his sorrow, as if they were his own. Unity is the only antidote for discord.

And he lay down in that place. (28:11)

Rashi cites the Midrash that emphasizes that Yaakov Avinu lay down now - for the first time in fourteen years. His Torah study was so diligent that he had not laid down at night since he had left his parents' home fourteen years earlier. Let us examine this statement. Certainly, Yaakov studied at the yeshivah of Shem and Eivar prior to his untimely departure from home. The Torah does not mention his lack of sleep there. What was so unique about these fourteen years that he never laid his head down?

Horav Yechiel M'Ostrovitz, zl, explains that these were two distinct forms of Torah study, with different purposes in mind. When Yaakov originally studied Torah at home, he was in an environment that was conducive to Jewish living. He resided among Jews, in a family that represented the benchmark of Torah for that generation. His focus of Torah study was to learn how a Jew lives among Jews. Conversely, as he was about to leave this utopian environment to go into exile in the atmosphere of Lavan ha'rasha, he prepared himself for life among pagans. Learning how to live as a devout Jew in an environment that is hostile to Torah is a distinct lesson in itself.

Interestingly, we note that Yaakov seemed to have been able to lay down previously. When he was studying how to live among the "Lavans," he could not risk laying down. This serves as a lesson for us that, when we are exposed to an atmosphere that is not conducive to the Torah way of life, we cannot relax our guard.

Then Yaakov took a vow, saying, "If Hashem will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going; will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear. (28:20)

The Midrash Tanchuma notes that Hashem responded to all of Yaakov's requests, with the exception of his request for parnassah, livelihood. Hashem said that He would be with him, protect him from his enemies, and guarantee his safe return home. He did not acquiesce to Yaakov's simple request for bread and clothes, explaining, "If I guarantee his food, what will he pray for?" In other words, Hashem "held back" His assurance regarding Yaakov's livelihood, to ensure that Yaakov would continue to supplicate Him for it.

This is an incredible statement when you consider that Yaakov Avinu was not requesting

luxuries. He simply desired basic sustenance so that he could devote himself completely to spiritual pursuits. Hashem, however, desires that His servants constantly trust in Him to provide for subsistence. Once one is assured of his daily bread, he will not readily turn to Hashem. Necessity motivates prayer. This idea applies to the b'chir ha'Avos, select of the Patriarchs, as well. Mussar HaTorah infers a valuable lesson from Chazal. When we are lacking something, it is because Hashem desires that we pray for it. One should never say, "I have enough; I need no more." Hashem waits for our prayers. By turning to Him, we circumvent those times when we need to be reminded of the Source of our good fortune.

And will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear... and Hashem will be a G-d to me. (28:20, 21)

The Baal HaTanya and the Kedushas Levi, Horav Levi Yitzchak M'berditchev, were mechutanim, relatives by marriage, through the marriage of their grandchildren. At the wedding, which these two tzaddikim graced by their presence, the Baal HaTanya offered a "l'chayim" to his mechutan: "L'Chayim, mechutan! Hashem Yisborach should help us with gashmius and ruchnius, material and spiritual needs," said the Baal HaTanya. The Berditchever quickly asked, "How is it that you ask for material needs prior to spiritual needs?" "Is it any different than Yaakov Avinu, who first asked for bread and then asked that Hashem be a G-d to him?" responded the Baal HaTanya. The Berditchever asked, "How can you compare Yaakov Avinu's gashmius to ours. Certainly his material needs were not of the same nature as ours." "You may be right," said the Baal HaTanya, "but how do you compare our ruchnius to his?"

While this story may be anecdotal, why did Yaakov Avinu really prioritize his material needs over his spiritual ones? In truth, Yaakov's material request was spiritual in nature, since his material needs were entirely sublimated towards serving Hashem. Whatever he had, and whatever he needed, were oriented towards one goal - to serve Hashem. Having bread to eat and clothes to wear facilitated Yaakov's spiritual growth.

And Yaakov kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. (29:11)

Rashi cites various reasons which Chazal mention for Yaakov's weeping upon meeting Rachel. One reason is that Yaakov lamented the fact that when Eliezer came to Rivkah, at Avraham Avinu's behest to seek a wife for Yitzchak, he came with jewelry and precious stones. In contrast he was coming with nothing. Rashi explains that Yaakov gave all of his possessions to Elifaz, Eisav's son, who at his father's command had chased after him to kill him. At the last minute, however, Elifaz just could not do it. He was overcome with doubt, confused by a life of error and misconception. On the one hand, his father had commanded him to slay his uncle. On the other hand, he did not feel he could kill Yaakov, as he had been raised under Yitzchak's supervision, visiting and spending time with his sainted grandfather. Sensing his confusion, Yaakov advised him to take away his possessions. This caused him to become poor. We are taught that "ani chashuv k'meis," a poor man is like dead man. Hence, Yaakov could be declared dead, absolving Elifaz from his father's directive.

The lessons to be inferred from Chazal are captivating. Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, notes the yetzer hora's incredible capacity for confusing and misguiding a person. Elifaz was prepared to kill Yaakov, to murder his rebbe, in order to fulfill his father's command. He refrained from taking action only because he had grown up in Yitzchak's home. Yet, the mitzvah of Kibbud Av V'eim, honoring one's parents, had a compelling effect upon him, leaving him no recourse. Certainly, he was not driven by fear of Eisav. Had this been the case, he would not have accepted Yaakov's halachic alternative. Eisav did not want alternatives; he wanted Yaakov completely out of the picture!

Thus, we must conclude that because Elifaz had been raised in Eisav's home, where he was taught by Eisav's example to appreciate the mitzvah of Kibud Av, he was acutely sensitive to this mitzvah. At the same time, he also saw, and was influenced by, a father whose life revolved around murder. Human life had no value to Eisav. He lived by the sword. Is it any wonder that Elifaz was confused? He had no concept of murder and its evil! He also spent time with his grandfather, which left an impression to the point that he did not know what to do. The evil of murder, which was not as clearly defined for him as a result of his exposure to Eisav, coupled with his sensitivity to Kibud Av left him with a strong argument for carrying out his father's command. The impression that was imprinted upon him as a child of his grandfather have prevented him from committing murder.

The lessons are compelling. First, we see that impressions leave an indelible imprint upon a child's psyche. Growing up in an environment hostile to Torah leaves an indelible impression. On the other hand, those moments with Yitzchak saved Elifaz. Thus, we never know the powerful impact that a visit with a tzaddik can have on a young person. It may take years to surface - but, it is there! We also see how the evil inclination can color a sin as heinous as murder and present it as a mitzvah. Elifaz viewed killing Yaakov as the fulfillment of the mitzvah of Kibud Av! Do we need to say more?

And Lavan came up with Yaakov. And Yaakov pitched his tent on the mountain and Lavan with his brethren pitched in the mountain of Gilaad. (31:25)

Lavan was intent on destroying Yaakov. What prevented him from executing his diabolical plan? Chazal tell us that Lavan feared two things: First, Hashem told Lavan to stay away from Yaakov. Second, Lavan was aware that Eisav was coming toward Yaakov with an army of four hundred men. If Lavan had killed Yaakov, his brother Eisav would have sought revenge. Lavan was not prepared to risk his life to kill Yaakov. What an incredible statement! The four hundred men who were apparently viewed as the enemy were, ironically, actually his savior in disguise. Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, takes this lesson a bit farther. We are plagued with pain, affliction, and illness, periods of anguish that to the human eye are nothing more than what they seem. We do not understand the ways of Hashem. We cry, moan and hope that the suffering will soon go away.

Do we ever think that perhaps that suffering might be helping us? If we could view this painful occurrence through Heavenly vision, we would see an entirely different picture. We would see good, not bad; happiness, not sorrow; joy, not pain. Who would ever imagine that an army of four hundred armed soldiers, prepared for war, could be a source of deliverance? While the human eye sees trouble, the Heavenly perspective presents a picture of salvation. Lavan realized this. Perhaps we should also open our eyes.

And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward. (28:12)

Yaakov saw a ladder in his well-known dream. According to Chazal, the ladder was standing on a slant, the bottom resting in Be'er Sheva with the top parallel to Beis El. The middle of the ladder coincided with the site of the Bais Hamikdash. The Maharal wonders why the ladder stood slanted. The message of the angels ascending and descending would have been equally effective if the ladder had stood straight. While various reasons are suggested for the ladder's specific position, the Maharal makes a compelling observation which presents a profound lesson. We view each subsequent rung on the ladder as a higher level in Torah erudition and spiritual development. When the rungs are straight, each one directly above its predecessor, it reflects a higher level, not a distinct one. Since they are all in the same line, on the same plane, they are not different from one another--only higher, loftier.

When a ladder is on a slant, each rung is in its own plane. Each is distinct from the preceding rung, not only in height, but also in position. It is as if each rung has its own unique position/character. Likewise, as one grows in Torah/spirituality, he becomes a totally new individual. He is not the same person as he was previously. He distinguishes himself from others who are not on his level. He cannot be compared to any individual who is not on his level of Torah and mitzvos.

Chazal tell us that if the previous generation can be likened to angels, then we are like humans. If we view them as humans, then we are no more than donkeys. As one grows spiritually, he becomes a new being. As one grows above his peers, he becomes a new personality, one totally distinct from his previous self. With this idea in mind, Horav Eliyakim Schlesinger, Shlita, explains why someone who is not yet privileged to be a ben Torah cannot fathom the qualities that distinguish a Torah scholar from everybody else. They might think that it is simply a matter of quantity--the talmid chacham just happens to know more, he has a greater and more profound knowledge of Torah. Chazal maintain that it is much more than that. The scholar is on a totally different plane than his counterpart, a position that the common man does not comprehend.

Furthermore, when a ladder is standing straight, each rung "sees" the rung above it. It will therefore, perceive a distinction between the two--one is on a higher level than the other. When a ladder is on a slant, however, the lower rung cannot see anything above it. Consequently, it does not recognize that anything is higher than it. Similarly, the common Jew who has not yet had the opportunity to study and appreciate the beauty and profundity of Torah, does not ascribe any distinction to those who have mastered and excelled in Torah. As one ascends the ladder of Torah and mitzvos, he undergoes a transformation with each step.

And he became frightened and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d." (28:17)

In his second interpretation of this pasuk, Rashi cites the Talmud in Chullin 91, which relates that Yaakov traveled to Charan to find a wife, according to his parents' request. After a long journey, he reached Charan. When he arrived, he realized that he had passed by Har Ha'Moriah without having stopped to pray there. He was shocked at his oversight. How could he have passed the place where his father and grandfather used to say their tefillos and not take advantage of the opportunity to do the same?

He immediately turned around and began the journey all the way back to Har Ha'Moriah. As reward for his good intention, Hashem performed a miracle and Har Ha'Moriah came traveling towards him. We wonder why Hashem performed the miracle only after Yaakov had reached Charan and realized his error? What prevented Hashem from performing this at the more convenient time--when Yaakov was traveling towards Har Ha'Moriah?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, cites Yalkut Lekach Tov on Parashas Toldos which applies an anecdote to explain how Yaakov could have bought the birthright from Eisav for only a bowl of lentils. Certainly the bechorah is valued at much more than a bowl of soup! The story is related that a Jew, who was in dire need of a large sum of money with which to arrange his daughter's marriage, went to his Rebbe for a blessing that he somehow obtain the necessary funds. The Rebbe blessed him and said, "Invest in the first business deal that you encounter." The chasid left for home with a happy heart, secure in the feeling that Hashem would answer his prayers.

Along the way he stopped at an inn, where he met a group of businessmen. These were a group of highly successful power brokers who viewed the chasid with disdain. One of them, seeing an opportunity to have some fun, asked the chasid if he was interested in a business opportunity. Remembering the Rebbe's advice, the chasid quickly responded in the affirmative. The businessman said he was willing to sell his portion in Olam Habah, the World-to-Come, for one ruble. The chasid quickly took out the money and paid for the fellow's "share" in Olam Habah.

When the businessman returned home and related to his wife that he had he sold his Olam Habah to a foolish passerby for one ruble, she became hysterical. "How could you do such a foolish thing?" she screamed at him. "Quickly, buy back your Olam Habah--regardless of the price!" I will not live one more minute with a man who would sell his Olam Habah."

With no other recourse, the fellow went back in search of the chasid to demand that the sale be nullified. He found him and began negotiating for his Olam Habah. He was shocked that the chasid would not budge. He refused to "return" the Olam Habah, regardless of the price. The only option left for the businessman was to go to the Rebbe of the chasid and beg him to talk some sense into his disciple. The Rebbe listened to both sides of the story and said, "In truth, my disciple is justified in not returning your Olam Habah. He bought it fairly. I think I can convince him to relinquish his title to your Olam Habah, however, if you pay him a specific amount of money." "How much?" asked the businessman. "I will pay any amount, just get me back my Olam Habah!" The Rebbe said, "My disciple needs a specific amount of money for his daughter's wedding. If you supply the necessary funds, I will see to it that your Olam Habah is returned to you." The businessman agreed to the sale, and everything was settled amicably; he received his Olam Habah in return for providing the necessary funds for the chasid's daughter's wedding.

As the businessman was leaving, he turned to the Rebbe and asked, "While I followed the Rebbe's instructions and furnished the funds that were asked of me, I still have a question. Yesterday this man paid one ruble for my Olam Habah. Today this same 'merchandise' is valued at thousands of rubles. Is that right?" The Rebbe countered, "Yes, my friend. The price is set according to the value of the merchandise. Yesterday, you were willing to 'give' it away for a mere ruble. This indicated that it had very little value to you. Today, when you realize that your marriage and your happiness are dependent upon this same merchandise, the price increases. Now it is worth much, much more to you!"

The same idea applies to the birthright. Originally, Eisav scoffed at the bechorah. It was worthless. A bowl of soup had more value than it. When Eisav later realized the blessings that the bechorah entailed, he screamed bitterly over his loss. At that moment, the value of the birthright

increased commensurate with Eisav's appreciation of his forfeiture.

Let us return to our original question. When Yaakov passed by Har Ha'Moriah without pausing to pray, he demonstrated a lack of appreciation for the sanctity of the place. Thus, he decreased its "value." If the place did not have sufficient meaning for Yaakov, then it was not worth performing a miracle there. Afterwards, when Yaakov realized what he had missed, when he reflected upon the lost opportunity to pray at the holiest site, the prestige of Har Ha'Moriah increased. If the site was now so valuable that Yaakov was prepared to return to it, then Hashem would perform a miracle. The mountain would move towards him. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and so is its value.

She conceived again, and bore a son and declared, "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem; therefore she called his name Yehudah, then she stopped giving birth. (29:35)

In his commentary on this pasuk, Ibn Ezra makes a compelling statement. He interprets Leah's "gratitude" as if she were saying, "I have had four sons. I, therefore, thank Hashem, for I want no more." It is as if she were saying, "I have enough; Hashem has been very kind. I am now grateful for everything that He has given me." Therefore she stopped giving birth. Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, infers from Ibn Ezra that Leah caused her own inability to bear additional children. She claimed that she had had enough. Thus, she stopped conceiving and giving birth. Whether it is to be perceived as a punishment or reprimand -- or simply an educative lesson -- there seems to be a relationship between Leah's expression of gratitude and her ceasing to give birth.

Horav Ezrachi explains that Leah's offer of gratitude to Hashem was deficient and can, therefore, be viewed as sinful. In areas of the spirit, one never has enough. One should never be satisfied with what he has attained. Leah said she had had enough. Hashem responded: Enough. She had forgotten that it was not that long ago that she had prayed for a child. She had forgotten the elevated esteem she had experienced when she was blessed with a child. One never says to Hashem, "I have had enough of Your favors." For, Hashem might just agree!

This explanation is not meant to denigrate Leah's sense of hakoras ha'tov, appreciation. Certainly she had a remarkable sense of appreciation to the Almighty. The manner in which she expressed her gratitude, however, was lacking. Indeed, later on when she gave her maidservant, Zilpah, to Yaakov, she was blessed with more children. She realized that something was amiss, and she sought to correct it. Our overwhelming responsibility to grow spiritually demands that we are never satisfied with what we have already attained.

And Rachel took the teraphim and put them into the camel's pack-saddle and sat upon them. (31:34)

Rachel sat upon Lavan's idols, which she had stolen, in an attempt to hide them. Lavan did not ask her to rise when she explained to him that the way of women was upon her. The Zohar Ha'kadosh, however, reveals to us an entirely new explanation for Rachel's actions. She sat upon the idols because of her utter contempt for them. The teraphim were like many of the other idols which also had the

ability to serve as mediums for divining the future. Rachel stole the teraphim, so that Lavan could not use them to find out where Yaakov had gone. In order to ensure that there would no longer be any supernatural powers of impurity left in the teraphim, Rachel sat upon them, thereby humiliating and degrading them. Why did she do this? Was it not sufficient merely to remove them from the house and bury them in the ground? Their entire power is founded in the respect and dignity that one accords them. Attributing power to them bestows power upon them. Thus, the Zohar explains, by degrading the teraphim, Rachel rendered them powerless.

Horav Avigdor Nebentzhal, Shlita, observes that this idea applies similarly to various other "forces" which control our lives. They have an effect on us only as long as we ascribe significance to them. Probably the greatest of these forces is the yetzer hora, evil inclination, whose goal it is to ensnare us in its clutches. Chazal tell us that the yetzer hora is compared to the se'or she'b'issa, yeast/rising agent of dough; it provokes a person to "rise" in arrogance and defiance to sin in the same manner that yeast causes dough to swell and rise up. The Chachmei Ha'kaballah state that the nullification of chametz prior to Pesach symbolizes -- and thus encourages -- our nullification of the yetzer hora within us. Indeed, according to Biblical law, it is sufficient to be "mevatel," nullify, one's chametz, so that he will no longer transgress the prohibition of having chametz in his possession on Pesach. Rabbinic law added the prerequisite of burning the chametz as an additional precaution in the event one were to find chametz in his possession.

Why is this? Why is nullification considered a sufficient form of purging chametz from our midst? Horav Nebentzhal suggests that it is consistent with the nature of chametz. Dough becomes chametz as a result of its being "blown up," just as misplaced arrogance causes one to inflate himself out of realistic proportion. By nullifying the chametz, the Jew negates any significance it may have. Thus, the reason for its prohibition has been undermined. One's lack of recognition of the chametz removes its power; the se'or she'b'issa no longer has any effect; it is no longer "chametz." This parallels the yetzer hora which has an effect only as long as one ascribes chashivus, importance/eminence, to it. When we attribute power to a force of impurity such as the yetzer hora, we are granting it the capacity to influence us. The evil inclination can sway only those who are inclined to heed it.