

# PARSHAS VAYEITZEI

תשפ"א

This week's parsha begins with Yaakov leaving Be'er Sheva for Choron – which immediately follows Yitzchok's instructions at the end of last week's parsha to find a wife from Rivka's family. Superficially, it would seem that there is a seamless transition between the parshiyos with nothing happening in between. But Rashi tells us that 14 years actually passed between the two parshiyos. Before Yaakov went to Lovon's house to get a wife, he stopped in Yeshivas Shem V'Ever and learned there for 14 years.

This is quite puzzling. After all, Yaakov isn't a young man. He is 63 and hasn't yet started a family. Furthermore, what has Yaakov been doing all these years if not learning Torah from his father Yitzchok? So why does he have to now go to another yeshiva and delay fulfilling his father's instructions for 14 years?

This isn't the first time one of the Ovos went to this yeshiva. At the end of Parshas Vayeiroh, after the Akeidoh, we are told by Chazal that Yitzchok went to Yeshivas Shem V'Ever.

When Yaakov went to sleep on Har HaMoriyah, he placed a number of stones around his head. In the morning, the posuk says he picked up a single stone. How many stones did Yaakov originally take? One opinion in the midrash says two stones, one says three stones, and one says 12 stones. Before Yaakov left, he received a brocho from Yitzchok. He would merit the brocho of Avrohom that there will be a nation of Klal Yisroel and he would found it. But Yaakov wanted to be reassured that he would indeed be successful in producing Klal Yisroel.

Yaakov Ovinu is on his way to get married and start a family. But this is not going to be an ordinary family. He knows that this family is supposed to be the foundation of the entire nation of Klal Yisroel that Hashem promised to Avrohom Ovinu. There was a mesorah that the nation of Klal Yisroel will start off as a family of 12 shevotim – but only if all the shevotim remain faithful to the mesorah of Avrohom Ovinu.

The opinion which says he took two stones holds that Yaakov recognized that Avrohom was the middoh of chesed. But Avrohom wasn't zocheh to found Klal Yisroel. He went too far with his chesed and therefore he had Yishmoel. He recognized that Yitzchok was the middoh of gevuroh. But Yitzchok wasn't zocheh to found Klal Yisroel. He went too far with gevuroh and he produced an Eisov. By taking these two stones which represented the two middos of chesed and gevuroh, Yaakov was saying that if these two stones will combine into one by the morning, it means Yaakov can take these two middos of the Ovos and blend them and balance them properly to produce offspring that will be fitting to build Klal Yisroel.

The other opinion says he took 12 stones. Each shevet represents a separate path in avodas Hashem. Yaakov Ovinu is emes, Torah, and tiferes. His goal is to encompass all the paths of avodas Hashem within himself. If these 12 stones will merge into one, it is a sign he will be successful in raising Klal Yisroel and that each one of his 12 sons will take a separate derech avodoh from him.

Yaakov is nervous that he won't succeed in his mission. Hashem came to him in a dream and confirmed the bircas Avrohom that Yitzchok gave Yaakov. Klal Yisroel will come out of him. He will be guarded and protected. When Yaakov woke up, he saw all the stones have merged into one.

When he finished working for Lovon for 7 years, Yaakov becomes impatient. He needed to marry and have children to start Klal Yisroel.

Yaakov's whole life's ambition was to bring Klal Yisroel into the world. This was a tremendous undertaking. It required achieving a level of human perfection of an unbelievably high degree. When the malochim went up and down the ladder in Yaakov's dream, Rashi says they were going up to the kissei hakavod and going down to Yaakov Ovinu. There are four faces on this kissei and one of them is that of a person. There is no anonymous person. It had to look like someone specific. The malochim knew that the image of the person on the kissei was the exact image of Yaakov Ovinu on Earth. He succeeded in merging the middos of Avrohom and Yitzchok and incorporating all the different darchei avodoh within him. He achieved the perfect balance which is emes, Torah and tiferes.

Yaakov is a man on a mission. He knew he needed to reach a certain level that the Ovos before him weren't zocheh to reach. Of course, Yaakov had a pure neshomo and inborn talents and traits which inclined him towards ruchniyus. But he knew that he needed to build and refine those qualities if he is going to succeed. He needed to prepare himself before he got married to start a family that he hoped would develop into Klal Yisroel. This is why he went off to a secluded environment – Yeshivas Shem V'Ever for 14 years before going to Lovon's house.

Avrohom and Yitzchok had their yeshivos, but it was an open environment where anyone from all over could drop in and leave. Yeshivas Shem V'Ever was a closed environment for yechidei seguloh who wanted to work intensely on the type of Torah they were learning at that point.

After the awesome experience of the Akeidoh, Yitzchok Ovinu wanted to solidify his spiritual achievement. So he went to Yeshivas Shem V'Ever. Learning Torah is the most effective way to concretize any advance in ruchniyus.

Yaakov Ovinu needed to prepare himself to do the impossible – to live with Lovon for 22 years – with all the sheker and avodo zoro that came with it – and come out of it with shevotim who would become Klal Yisroel. He needed to come out of it and be able to say he kept all 613 mitzvos and maintained his level – not getting any negative influence. It is not so simple! Learning Torah is the only way to do it. Because Torah has a tremendous impact on a person.

We need to understand – why do we learn Torah?

While we are learning Torah here in yeshiva, one may not appreciate the effect the Torah is having on him. Every morning we say Talmud Torah outweighs every other mitzvah and we talk about how incredible Torah is in our tefillos. But what is the power of Torah that makes it so unique?

The Rambam at the end of Hilchos Mikva'os tells us clearly what limud Torah is supposed to do to those who learn it. He says if you want to change your personality – change your bad habits and wrong ideas, immerse your mind in the waters of pure knowledge – Torah. It doesn't happen automatically. You have to want the Torah to change you. There has to be total immersion with no chatzitzos. Give your entire being over to Torah and then it will change you.

The gemara in Brochos compares Torah to a nachal. Just as the nachal transforms tumoh into taharoh, so too Torah transforms those who learn it. It is a powerful idea. Why does Torah change you? Let us read the second brocho before kriyas Shema to gain some insights.

We say in shacharis that Hashem taught our ancestors the chukei

chayim.

Avrohom realized that Hashem set down rules for us to live our life by. These are absolute rules. He told Avimelech that he was afraid that he would be murdered because of his wife because there was no yiras Elokim in that place. Without yiras Elokim there cannot be absolute rules for morality. Where there is no absolute morality and everything is relativistic the rules are always changing and one can justify anything one wants. Foolish people think getting rid of absolutes gives us more freedom, more liberty to do what we want. They want to defund the police to get rid of any authority in their lives. If they think this will create a stable society, they are out of their minds.

The Torah is completely against this attitude. There are rules and red lines that have to be enforced. They are chukei chayim – they give us life. Sometimes we don't understand why they are there and why they are necessary. So then we then ask Hashem to teach us and let us understand the chukim and appreciate why they are chukei chayim.

How does Hashem teach us Torah? We try to understand a difficult Tosfos – we don't wait for a little voice in our heads to explain the Tosfos to us. What are we asking for? Hashem should give us the ability to understand Torah and then we will be able to fulfill the mitzvos better. He should open our eyes to perceive the truth.

Through learning – through understanding Torah, not just flipping pages – we want to be changed. We want to understand how to go through this life. Then we say not only will we fulfill the mitzvos properly, we will then be intensely connected to mitzvos. Will be totally attached. How? By getting a clarity in the Torah we learn. Then we will be attached to the mitzvos we learn about and deeply understand.

Then we can unify our hearts in ahavoh and yiroh.

What does yichud halev mean? In this week's parsha we read that Yaakov approached the well in Choron and saw all the shepherds gathered around. He asked why they aren't watering their sheep and moving on? They told him that there is a big rock on the top of the well and they need all the shepherds to gather first in order to remove the rock and water the sheep. So Yaakov went and flipped the rock off by himself without struggle. Where did Yaakov get the strength of thirty men? The answer is in tefillas geshem which we say on Shmini Atzeres.

We daven that Hashem should remember the one who carried his staff and crossed the Yarden, who was meyached his lev and was able to roll the stone off the mouth of the well. We know from many places that with tremendous focus, one can draw incredible power within himself. This is yichud lev – total and complete focus. This is what is needed to get to ahavoh and yiroh. The ability to totally focus on this begins with a deep understanding of Torah – with a total immersion in Torah.

What is Torah? For this we look at the brocho after kriyas Shema. There are many descriptions of Torah. They are words that are alive and faithful and pleasant. Why? Because Torah is emes, yatziv, etc. until... tov ve'yofeh. You only get to the beauty of Torah after 15 steps – and it has to begin with emes.

The braisoh after Pirkei Ovos tells us an interesting thing. When you learn Torah lishmoh, you merit many wonderful attributes. At the end of the list, it says Torah elevates you above all other things. Why? Because Torah is the dvar Hashem. It is the wisdom of Hashem. If I am aware that I am connecting my mind with the wisdom of Hashem, if I can adapt and bend my mind to understand Hashem's mind, then I can become elevated by my learning.

We approach Torah learning with a tremendous sense of submission to a higher will and to a higher wisdom. When we don't understand something in Torah, we don't say 'it makes no sense'. We say there is something wrong with how my mind is grasping the ideas and I have to figure out where I went wrong. I have to put aside my ego and change myself to fit the ideas of the Torah. With that attitude, Torah

can change you and uplift you.

By connecting to Hashem through limud Torah, we become purified. Rabbi Akiva taught that Hashem is the mikvah – when we immerse ourselves in the pure waters of the Torah, it purifies us.

The gemara comments on the words 'mimidbor matono'. When you make yourself like a midbor and remove your own ego and your own ideas and give yourself totally to Torah, Hashem gives you a gift. You absorb the Torah and become a superior human being.

Yaakov was out to do the impossible, to build Klal Yisroel with his emunoh and his middas ho'emes in the house of Lovon which is full of sheker and avodo zoro. To meet that challenge, he needed to seclude himself and focus on Torah completely and exclusively for 14 years. Only then could a person spend 22 years in his father-in-law's house being absolutely honest and come away without a fork or a spoon that wasn't his. Only then could he maintain his middas ho'emes and belief in Hashem even when surrounded by trickery and deception and avodo zoro.

Yaakov was standing with these stones and wondering if he can unify all the middos of the Ovos and all the types of avodoh in the proper balance. He had a dream that he is receiving the brocho of Avrohom Ovinu and he will inherit Eretz Yisroel. Then he woke up and saw the stones had merged into one showing that he had reached the right level to found Klal Yisroel.

Preparing for life, preparing to build a family and engage in parnosoh, first requires immersion in Torah.

We live in a crazy world and it's getting crazier and crazier every day. We aren't immune to the influences that are out there coming in from all sides. How do we keep our focus? How do we make sure that we continue on the right path throughout our lives? The answer is by immersing our lives right now in Torah in a complete and total way. This is what Yaakov Ovinu understood.

People come to Eretz Yisroel for all sorts of reasons. But whether you realize it or not, the degree that you immerse yourself completely and totally in Torah is the degree to which you are going to prepare yourselves to be a ben Torah for the rest of your life. The goal is to function in this world in a totally Torah way and the way to do it is by total immersion with no distractions. Torah has the power to change and transform a person, to uplift you. But it doesn't happen by itself. You have to want it to happen. It requires giving yourself over entirely to Torah. No matter what you will do in life for your parnosoh, to do it in a Torah way requires a deep immersion in Torah until it changes you and transforms you.

The Mechiltoh asks why Hashem kept Klal Yisroel in the midbor for 40 years and didn't take them immediately into Eretz Yisroel. This is strange. The reason why Klal Yisroel spent an extra 38 years in the midbor was because of the cheit hameraglim. But despite this, the midrash gives another answer. It says that if Hashem would have brought Klal Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel right away, then each Jew would have gone to his field and his vineyard to make a parnosoh and they would have been too preoccupied with parnosoh and not connected to Torah. So Hashem kept them in the midbor with no distractions and no need for parnosoh for 40 years in order to immerse them in Torah learning long enough, so that when they finally would enter Eretz Yisroel and start getting occupied with parnosoh, the Torah will already have been absorbed in their bones. They could not be involved in parnosoh as Jews dedicated to Torah without this preparation.

This is what Yaakov needed to do before he went to Lovon and started a family and engaged in parnosoh. This is what every Jew needs to do – especially in our crazy times. The Torah needs to penetrate you and then it can transform you into a human being whose life is the way the Torah.