

Likutei Divrei Torah

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Character of Jacob

What kind of man was Jacob? This is the question that cries out to us in episode after episode of his life.

The first time we hear a description of him he is called *ish tam*: a simple, quiet, plain, straightforward man. But that is exactly what he seems not to be. We see him taking Esau's birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup. We see him taking Esau's blessing, in borrowed clothes, taking advantage of their father's blindness.

These are troubling episodes. We can read them midrashically. The Midrash makes Jacob all-good and Esau all-bad. It rereads the biblical text to make it consistent with the highest standards of the moral life. There is much to be said for this approach.

Alternatively, we could say that in these cases the end justifies the means. In the case of the birthright, Jacob might have been testing Esau to see if he really cared about it. Since he gave it away so readily, Jacob might be right in concluding that it should go to one who valued it. In the case of the blessing, Jacob was obeying his mother, who had received a Divine oracle saying that "the older shall serve the younger."

Yet the text remains disturbing. Isaac says to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing." Esau says, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob [supplanter]? He has supplanted me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" Such accusations are not levelled against any other biblical hero.

Nor does the story end there. In this week's parsha a similar deceit is practiced on him. After his wedding night, he discovers that he has married Leah, not, as he thought, his beloved Rachel. He complains to Laban: "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?" Gen. 29:25

Laban replies: "It is not done in our place to give the younger before the firstborn." Gen. 29:26

It's hard not to see this as precise measure-for-measure retribution. The younger Jacob pretended to be the older Esau. Now the elder

Leah has been disguised as the younger Rachel. A fundamental principle of biblical morality is at work here: As you do, so shall be done to you.

Yet the web of deception continues. After Rachel has given birth to Joseph, Jacob wants to return home. He has been with Laban long enough. Laban urges him to stay and tells him to name his price. Jacob then embarks on an extraordinary course of action. He tells Laban he wants no wages at all. Let Laban remove every spotted or streaked lamb from the flock, and every streaked or spotted goat. Jacob will then keep, as his hire, any new born spotted or streaked animals.

It is an offer that speaks simultaneously to Laban's greed and his ignorance. He seems to be getting Jacob's labour for almost nothing. He is demanding no wages. And the chance of unspotted animals giving birth to spotted offspring seems remote.

Jacob knows better. In charge of the flocks, he goes through an elaborate procedure involving peeled branches of poplar, almond, and plane trees, which he places with their drinking water. The result is that they do in fact produce streaked and spotted offspring.

How this happened has intrigued not only the commentators (who mostly assume that it was a miracle, God's way of assuring Jacob's welfare) but also scientists. Some argue that Jacob must have had an understanding of genetics. Two unspotted sheep can produce spotted offspring. Jacob had doubtless noticed this in his many years of tending Laban's flocks.

Others have suggested that prenatal nutrition can have an epigenetic effect – that is, it can cause a certain gene to be expressed which might not have been otherwise. Had the peeled branches of poplar, almond, and plane trees been added to the water the sheep drank, they might have affected the Agouti gene that determines the colour of fur in sheep and mice. [1]

However it happened, the result was dramatic. Jacob became rich:

In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys. Gen. 30:43

Inevitably, Laban and his sons felt cheated. Jacob sensed their displeasure, and – having taken counsel with his wives and being advised to leave by God Himself – departs

while Laban is away sheep-shearing. Laban eventually discovers that Jacob has left, and pursues him for seven days, catching up with him in the mountains of Gilead.

The text is fraught with accusation and counteraccusation. Laban and Jacob both feel cheated. They both believe that the flocks and herds are rightfully theirs. They both regard themselves as the victim of the other's deceitfulness. The end result is that Jacob finds himself forced to run away from Laban as he was earlier forced to run away from Esau, in both cases in fear of his life.

So the question returns. What kind of man was Jacob? He seems anything but an *ish tam*, a straightforward man. And surely this is not the way for a religious role model to behave – in such a way that first his father, then his brother, then his father-in-law, accuse him of deceit. What kind of story is the Torah telling us in the way it narrates the life of Jacob?

One way of approaching an answer is to look at a specific character – often a hare, or in African-American tradition, "Brer Rabbit" – in the folktales of oppressed people. Henry Louis Gates, the American literary critic, has argued that such figures represent "the creative way the slave community responded to the oppressor's failure to address them as human beings created in the image of God." They have "a fragile body but a deceptively strong mind." Using their intelligence to outwit their stronger opponents, they are able to deconstruct and subvert, in small ways, the hierarchy of dominance favouring the rich and the strong. They represent the momentary freedom of the unfree, a protest against the random injustices of the world.[2]

That, it seems to me, is what Jacob represents in this, the early phase of his life. He enters the world as the younger of two twins. His brother is strong, ruddy, hairy, a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, whereas Jacob is quiet, a scholar. Then he must confront the fact that his father loves his brother more than him. Then he finds himself at the mercy of Laban, a possessive, exploitative, and deceptive figure who takes advantage of his vulnerability. Jacob

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is the man who – as almost all of us do at some time or other – finds that life is unfair.

What Jacob shows, by his sheer quick-wittedness, is that the strength of the strong can also be their weakness. So it is when Esau comes in exhausted from the hunt, famished, that he is willing to impulsively trade his birthright for some soup. So it is when the blind Isaac is prepared to bless the son who will bring him venison to eat. So it is when Laban hears the prospect of getting Jacob's labour for free. Every strength has its Achilles' heel, its weakness, and this can be used by the weak to gain victory over the strong.

Jacob represents the refusal of the weak to accept the hierarchy created by the strong. His acts are a form of defiance, an insistence on the dignity of the weak (*vis-a-vis* Esau), the less loved (by Isaac), and the refugee (in Laban's house). In this sense he is one element of what, historically, it has been like to be a Jew.

But the Jacob we see in these chapters is not the figure whom, ultimately, we are called on to emulate. We can see why. Jacob wins his battles with Esau and Laban but at the cost of eventually having to flee in fear of his life. Quick-wittedness is merely a temporary solution.

It is only later, after his wrestling match with the angel, that he receives a new name – that is, a new identity – as Israel, “because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.” As Israel he is unafraid to contend with people face-to-face. He no longer needs to outwit them by clever but ultimately futile stratagems. His children will eventually become the people whose dignity lies in the unbreakable covenant they make with God.

Yet we can see something of Jacob's early life in one of the most remarkable features of Jewish history. For almost two thousand years Jews were looked down on as pariahs, yet they refused to internalise that image, just as Jacob refused to accept the hierarchies of power or affection that condemned him to be a mere second-best. Jews throughout history, like Jacob, have relied not on physical strength or material wealth but on qualities of the mind.

In the end, though, Jacob must become Israel. For it is not the quick-witted victor but the hero of moral courage who stands tall in the eyes of humanity and God.

[1] Joshua Backon, “Jacob and the Spotted Sheep: The Role of Prenatal Nutrition on Epigenetics of Fur Colour,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2008.

[2] Henry Louis Gates, *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, New York, Methuen, 1984, pp. 81-104.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The First Monument to Life and Eternity

“And Jacob rose up early in the morning and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a monument and poured oil on

the top of it.” [Genesis 27:18] Vayetze opens with Jacob's journey into exile. He is leaving his Israeli parental home and setting out for his mother's familial home in Haran. His first stop, as the sun is setting, forces him to sleep outdoors in the fields outside Luz – the last site in Israel he will occupy before he begins his exile. He dreams of a ladder standing (*mutzav* – *matzeva*) on land with its top reaching heavenwards, ‘and behold, angels of God are ascending and descending on it’ [Gen. 28:12]. God is standing (*nitzav*) above the ladder, and promises Jacob that he will return to Israel and that this land will belong to him and his descendants eternally. Upon awakening, the patriarch declares the place to be ‘the House of God and the gate of heaven’ [Gen. 28:17]. He then builds a monument from the stones he has used as a pillow and pours oil over it.

This monument – (Hebrew, *matzeva*) is the first one in Jewish history. Until this point, the great biblical personalities have erected altars (*mizbahot*, sing. *mizbeah*), to God: Noah when he exited from the ark, Abraham when he first came to Israel, Isaac when he dedicated the city of Be'er Sheva, and Jacob on two significant occasions. An altar is clearly a sacred place dedicated for ritual sacrifice. But what is a monument? An understanding of the first monument in Jewish history will help us understand the biblical attitude towards life and death – and even the true significance of the land of Israel.

Jacob's experience leaves us in no doubt: a monument is a symbol of an eternal relationship. It is the physical expression of a ladder linking heaven and earth, the land of Israel and the Holy Temple of Jerusalem (House of God) which connects the descendants of Jacob to the divine forever. A monument is a gateway to heaven, a House of God on earth. The land of Israel, with its laws of tithes, Sabbatical years and Jubilee, magnificently expresses the link between humanity and the Almighty, and the promise of Jacob's return from exile bears testimony to the eternity of the relationship between the people and the land of Israel.

Furthermore, a monument is made of stone – the Hebrew word for stone is even, comprised of the letters *aleph-bet-nun*. This is also a contraction of parent-child (Hebrew, *av-ben*) which also uses the letters *aleph-bet-nun* symbolizing the eternity of family continuity. And the monument is consecrated with oil, just as the Redeemer will be consecrated with oil – and herald eternal peace and redemption for Israel and the world.*

Jacob then spends two decades with his uncle Laban, who does his utmost to assimilate his bright and capable nephew-cum-son-in-law into a life of comfort and business in exile. Jacob resists, escaping Laban's blandishments and eventually secretly absconds with his wives, children and livestock to return to Israel. Laban pursues them, and they agree to a covenant-monument: ‘And Jacob took a stone,

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and set it up for a monument’ [Gen. 31:44]. Here again, we have the expression of an eternal promise: Abraham's descendants will never completely assimilate – not even into the most enticing Diaspora. The text continues:

“And Jacob said to his brethren, gather stone, and they took stones and made a heap.... And Laban called it [the monument] *Yegar-Sahaduta*, but Jacob called it *Gal-Ed*.” [Gen. 31:44–47]

The wily Laban wants the monument to bear an Aramean name, a symbol of the gentile part of Jacob's ancestry while Jacob firmly insists upon the purely Hebrew inscription of *Gal-Ed* – the eternal, Israelite language. When they take their respective oaths at the site of the monument, the deceptive Laban still endeavors to manipulate: ‘The God of Abraham and the god of Nahor, the gods of their fathers, judge between us’ [Gen. 31:53]. Jacob refuses to give an inch; this monument must give testimony to the eternity of his commitment to Israel, the faith and the land: ‘But Jacob swore to the fear of his father Isaac’ [Gen. 31:53]. Jacob's response is a polite – but emphatic – rejection of Laban's attempt at assimilation.

Although this monument is erected with Laban after Jacob leaves his home, it is nevertheless still established in exile; therefore, it is not anointed with oil. Whatever important role the Diaspora may have played in the history of Israel – as long as we maintained our unique values and lifestyle – the oil of redemption will only emerge in the land of Israel. When Jacob returns to Bet-El, the House of God, he will erect another stone monument in order to fulfill his oath. Understandably, that monument – erected to God in Israel – will be anointed with oil.

In the next sequence, tragedy befalls Jacob's family when the beloved Rachel dies while giving birth to Benjamin. ‘And Rachel died, and she was buried on the road to Efrat which is Bethlehem. And Jacob erected a monument on her grave; it is the monument of the grave of Rachel until this day’.**

Many of our commentaries question why Jacob didn't continue the relatively short distance – perhaps twenty miles – to bury his beloved wife in the *Ma'arat HaMakhpele* in Hebron, the ancestral burial place.

The Midrashic response, cited by Rashi, is that when the Jews would be carted off to their first exile in Babylon, they would pass by the monument at Rachel's tomb and pray that the matriarch's spirit intercede on their behalf before the Almighty. God hears her prayers, and promises Jewish return:

“...Rachel weeps for her children, thus does God say: ‘Stop your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears. There is a reward for your deeds... a hope for your future: the children shall come back to their border.’” [Jer. 31:15–16]

Rachel's grave is a truly fitting place for a monument, a link between heaven and earth. It represents the eternity of the Jewish spirit and our eternal relationship to the land of Israel.

* * *

Max Nordau became the world leader of Zionism after the death of Theodore Herzl. He was a Viennese physician who was not an observant Jew and had no previous connection to the Zionist movement. What made him a committed believer in Jewish return? He writes in his memoirs that a Hassidic family whose young daughter had been stricken with a mysterious disease came to him for a diagnosis. He diagnosed the malady and prescribed the cure. The grateful family returned, promising – despite their poverty – to pay whatever they owed him because he had saved their daughter's life. He smiled and suggested that she kiss him on the cheek as a fitting payment. The young girl, who had just reached the age of twelve, blushed as she explained that she could not kiss a grown man. He then suggested that she tell him the Torah lesson she had learned that morning as substitute payment. She cited the midrash I have just written about Rachel's grave site. Max Nordau writes in his diary that if, after close to two thousand years of exile, Jewish children still learn about and believe in a Jewish return to Israel, then the Jews will certainly return. At that moment, Max Nordau became a committed Zionist.

* In Hebrew, Messiah literally means 'the one anointed with oil.'

** Incidentally, this explains the origin of ceremoniously erecting a monument over the graves of our loved ones; obviously it reflects the desire to link the world of the present to the world of eternity.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Giving Thanks to Hashem for His Past Kindness Is Not Sufficient

After Leah had her fourth son (Yehudah), she said "... This time I will thank (o'deh) Hashem, therefore she called his name Yehudah. And she stopped having children." (Bereshis 29:35) The Perush haTur ha'Aruch al haTorah (not to be confused the shorter commentary by the same author known as the Baal HaTurim) says an amazing thing: Leah recognized that she received her fair allotment of shvatim (tribes) and asked for nothing more, therefore she stopped giving birth. If a person does not ask for more, they will not get more.

I would have thought, on the contrary, someone receives, and then thanks, and should not be greedy by always asking for more. And yet, the Tur says that when a person thanks and does not include asking for more, then he does not deserve more.

The truth is that we see the same idea from the language used by the Rambam (Hilchos Brochos 10:26). The Rambam beautifully writes: "The general principle is that a person should always cry out for the future, asking for

mercy, and giving thanks for the past." The Rambam is saying that when you express gratitude to Hashem, you not only need to give thanks for what you have already received, but you should simultaneously pray intensely for what will be coming your way in the future.

We see several examples of this in our siddur: In "Modim d'Rabanan" we say... "We gratefully thank You... who have given us life and sustained us. So may You continue to give us life and sustain us..." In the middle of Hallel, we say... "Please Hashem, save us! Please Hashem bring us success!" What is the essence of Hallel? Thanksgiving! Why are we inserting a request for salvation and future success in the middle? We include in our thanksgiving a request for the future.

Likewise, when we recite the "Hadran" that we say when concluding a tractate of Talmud, we first say "Modim anachnu lach..." (We express gratitude before You...) and then we say "... k'shem she'azartani l'sayem Maseches X, ken te'azreinee..." (May it be Your will... that just as You have helped me complete Tractate X, so may You help me to begin and complete other tractates and books...)

We see a principle: When we thank Hashem, it is not sufficient to merely thank Him for what we have received, but we must ask for the future as well. What is the reason for this? At first glance, it seems counterintuitive. Our first thought might be that we should be thankful for what we received and not be greedy by asking for more.

I saw an interesting explanation in the sefer Abir Yakov. Let's say a person wins \$25,000,000 in a lottery. What is his reaction? "Wow! I am set for life! No more job. No more boss. No more anything. I have my 25 million bucks. I can do whatever I want!" A Jew must know that he is never "set for life." Every single day and every single moment our lives are dependent on the Almighty with whom our souls are deposited. Every single minute of life is a gift. There is no such thing in Judaism as "I have arrived. I am set for life."

Therefore, when a person gives thanks for the past, he needs to bear in mind "Thank you Hashem for giving me this, but I recognize and am aware that I am not set, and unless You continuously shower me with Your Blessings, I could be gone in a minute!"

As we have said many times, the Hebrew word "Ho'da'ah" has two meanings. It means to thank and it means to admit. When we thank we also admit, confessing that we are totally dependent on the ongoing assistance and support of "Yotzreinu, Yotzer Bereshis" (our Molder, the Molder of the Universe). That is what we learn from Leah, and that is what the Tur ha'Aruch says.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

We should be positive and never despair. That's the message emerging from Parshat Vayeitzei.

Yaakov has his famous dream of the ladder, and, in the midst of this prophecy, Hashem declares to him 'Ha'aretz asher attah shochev aleiha lecha ettenannah uleazar'echa' – 'this land upon which you are sleeping is given to you and to your future descendants, the Jewish people'.

'Vehayah zar'acha ka'afar ha'aretz' – 'and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth'.

'Ufaratzta' – 'and they shall be spread out'.

'Yammah vakedemah vetzafonah vanegbah' – 'to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south'.

Seforno comments on the fact that these directions are neither clockwise nor anti clockwise, indicating the unpredictable haphazard life of the Jewish nation. Just when we think things are marvellous, in an instant, suddenly our lives can, God-forbid, be overturned.

And sometimes when things are terrible, in an instant, things can become marvellous.

This is further amplified by the Kli Yakar, who says that the directions are from the west to the east, to the north to the south, indicating from one extreme to the other.

Showing, we should indeed, never despair.

Just when life for the Jewish people is intolerable, that's when Hashem can bring our Yeshua, he can bring our salvation.

Taking us, just as the swing of a pendulum, from one extreme to the other, to bring about salvation, and redemption.

At this very moment when there is a tragic war in Israel, our prayer indeed is that Hashem will bless the Jewish people, and he will transform our darkness into light, and may this happen speedily and instantly.

And let's not forget the continuation of the same prophecy for Hashem concludes by saying, 'venivrachu vecha kol-mishpechot ha'adamah uvezar'echa'.

And may all families on earth be blessed through you and your descendants.

Whether people realise it or not, whether they're willing to acknowledge it or not, the Jewish people is an extraordinary blessing for our entire civilisation. And that is why Hashem will guarantee that Am Yisrael Chai, the Jewish people will live on forever.

Turning Tefillah into Torah

On his way to the house of Lavan, after a fourteen-year interlude in the Yeshiva of Ever, Yaakov stopped at Har Hamoriah to pray. He subsequently fell asleep and dreamt about a ladder that extended from the earth to the heavens with angels ascending and descending upon it. This vision was followed by a direct and intimate interaction with Hashem. Upon awakening Yaakov exclaimed, "Indeed, Hashem is in this place, and I did not know. How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of Hashem and the gate of heaven" (Breishis 28:16 - 17). The Medrash comments that Yaakov made this observation not only after being aroused from his "sleep" - "mi'shi'naso" but also after emerging from his time "learning" - "mi'mishnaso" in the Yeshiva of Ever. What did Yaakov discover about the accessibility of Hashem that was previously unknown to him during his days in Yeshiva?

The Meor Vashemesh explains that Yaakov was not only astonished by the profound holiness of the location where he slept but also by the experience of davening itself. Heretofore, Yaakov had primarily encountered Hashem through the medium of talmud Torah. From his youth he was known for his commitment to learning Torah, as "one who dwells in tents," an emphasis that he perpetuated during his time in the Yeshiva of Ever where he studied with an uninterrupted focus. However, when Yaakov's prayers precipitated and unlocked sublime insights and revelations, he realized that it is possible to establish an intense connection to Hashem not only by learning Torah but also through davening. His eureka moment reflected a new veneration for the makom Hamikdash as well as a novel appreciation for the role and poignancy of prayer in religious life.

Both tefillah and talmud Torah are opportunities to dialogue with Hashem. When learning Torah, Hashem speaks to man and when praying man converses with God. Initially, Yaakov preferred to internalize the will of Hashem by studying Torah rather than by indulging in a personal monologue of prayer. But after his tefillos triggered a bilateral engagement with Hashem, Yaakov came to the recognition that his own challenges and turmoil were not arbitrary or mundane but indeed a message from heaven. Through the circumstances of his life, Hashem was communicating and directing him towards the fulfillment of his unique mission. The ladder of his dreams accompanied by its itinerant angels demonstrated the dialectic of prayer. Externally, the impetus for tefillah may come from below, but indeed the very struggle itself is an indication from above, guiding man in a manner that is similar to talmud Torah.

Tehillim embodies these two dimensions. On the one hand Tehillim is a book of prayers. Chazal integrated the chapters of Tehillim as

the backbone of the siddur. Each morning the supplications of the day are introduced by the praises of Tehillim, and during times of distress we return to its pages for comfort and relief. At the same time, Tehillim is part of Tanach and studying its verses is an act of talmud Torah. Confusion regarding the precise identity of Tehillim has led to some halachic ambiguities as well. At night, when studying Tanach is discouraged (Ba'er Heitev 238:2), should reciting Tehillim also be curtailed? During aveilus, when learning Torah is prohibited (Shulchan Aruch YD 384) is saying Tehillim proscribed? The answer likely depends on how Tehillim is being utilized, as a vehicle and voice for prayer or as a text of Torah. Nonetheless, the versatility of Tehillim and its inclusion within Tanach underscores that both tefillah and talmud Torah are meant to convey divine instruction.

The Medrash states that Dovid Hamelech beseeched Hashem to equate the recitation of Tehillim with the learning of Maseches Negaim and Ohalos. The Baal Hatanya (Maamarei Admur Hazakein, Shorts, Zemiros of Shabbos) explains that Tehillim represents the private tefillos of Dovid Hamelech that were articulated in response to his own struggles and through which he discerned tailored direction from Hashem. However, Dovid Hamelech asked that Tehillim be considered part of Torah, thus making his payers universally and eternally available to all of Klal Yisrael. As a precedent, he pointed to the tractates of Negaim and Ohalos which deal with highly specialized areas of halacha that are practiced primarily by kohanim, but are nonetheless studied by all Jews. Similarly, Dovid Hamelech aspired that his prayers become a template for all generations to connect with Hashem and receive Divine inspiration.

During this difficult time, as our hearts and minds are focused on the war in Eretz Yisrael and the welfare of the soldiers courageously defending the security of the Jewish people, it is appropriate to immerse ourselves in the world of tefillah and invest in the recitation of Tehillim. In doing so, we express not only an unyielding trust in the power and efficacy of prayer but also an acknowledgement that the circumstances of our lives are a Divine call to duty. Hashem is constantly communicating to us and specifically through the challenges that bring us daven. Jews throughout the world have been affected by the current situation and that signal from Hashem obliges us all to respond and contribute to the war effort in whatever way possible. In this spirit, may we be successful as individuals and collectively as a nation in our mission to prevail over our enemy and restore security to our borders.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah-by Rabbi Label Lam
The Reality of Realities

And Yaakov left Beer Sheva, and he went to Charan. (Breishis 28:10) And Yaakov left: Scripture had only to write: "And Yaakov went

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to Charan." Why did it mention his departure? But this tells [us] that the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression, for while the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendor, he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty has departed, its splendor has departed, its majesty has departed. – Rashi

This is a very beautiful testimony to Yaakov whose departure was felt in Beer Sheva. Rabbi Shraga Silverstein wrote a book of personal aphorisms, "It's easy to make your presence felt but it's hard to make your absence felt." So true and certainly applicable to Yaakov Avinu.

I heard such a smart question last year accompanied by a beautiful and wise answer. Why is that same description not mentioned before about either of the two previous Avos – Fathers? They traveled to and from a number of places but the impact of their leaving a place is never explicitly or implicitly worthy of mention. Why not?

Avraham and Yitzchok were people who, in the course of their life, achieved much wealth and fame. They were men of influence and renown. They lived large on the stage of history at various times in their adult life. Of course, their arrivals and departures were felt. It's almost too obvious to be worthy of mention.

Yaakov however, was characterized as a simple man who dwelled in tents. He was a student of Torah and he lived a quiet, humble, and unassuming life. During his days and years in Beer Sheva he might as well have been an invisible man. Who could have and would have known about his scholarship and righteousness. Everything he did was not evident to the eye of society. He was practically hidden in plain sight. His world was an inner world. How could he be recognized as the glory and splendor of the city while he was still there? It was not apparent at all.

However, after his departure the true stature of who it was that they had in their midst became discernable. Then it became clear and palpable. The sun suddenly set on Beer Sheva. Such a shame to wake up after the fact and to be aware when it's already too late. So, what was Yaakov doing for Beer Sheva while living a private life and pursuing Torah scholarship? What was that splendor and glory? How would we know to appreciate today even if it was staring us in the face?

When I heard this beautiful idea, it occurred to me that this is perhaps the reason that Yaakov was shown and we are treated to for all time a vision of the ladder stretching from earth to heaven. Reb Chaim Velozhin explains the ladder in Nefesh HaChaim as a continuum of human potential. This is the paradigm of a human being spanning and bridging large and disparate continents. The angels that are depicted traveling up and down are the results

of what the man is doing down here in the world of action.

His every thought, speech, and deed generate ripples and waves up to the heavenly realm and then their echo reverberates and rains back down on to the earth their profound influence. This is the awesome power of who we really are. That's the good news and the bad news. The good news is that every thought we think and each word we utter and any move we make is shaking the higher and lower worlds. The bad news is that every thought we think and each word we utter and any move we make is shaking the higher and lower worlds.

Now we can understand that Avraham and Yitzchok sent out horizontal waves as well, influencing the world in ways that could be seen and measured. They were also shaking up the world in a vertical direction but that became known to us and the world through Yaakov. That a man can sit alone, remaining undetected, and with his holy thoughts, and utterances, and private deeds be lighting up a city and the world could not have been understood or appreciated until Yaakov left and the ladder revealed the reality of realities.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez: Never Run From, Run Towards

Many Jews left South Africa over the years, for various reasons. One community leader said: "All those who were unhappy in South Africa are unhappy in their new countries. The people who were happy in South Africa are happy in their new country." If you run away from somewhere, you take your unhappiness with you. We should never run away from, we should run towards something else.

Initially Ya'akov was running away – but if the salient sentiment is running away, then you often spend your life running away from your problems. But then we are told that Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan. Rashi famously comments on the seeming superfluous words that Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva – why do we need to know where he left from? He says that because after he left, the place was never the same again. And then we are told that he went to Charan – because when we leave a place, it is not about where we are leaving, but to where we are going.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Israel Belongs Nowhere - An Arab Taunt and Its Ancient History

The Yalkut tells us that the stones that Jacob used as a pillow during his lonely flight from Esau were the very ones upon which his father Isaac was offered up at the Akedah.

How history repeats itself! We today rest on pillows of stone. I did not sleep well this past week or two. What Jew did not experience difficulty in sleeping during this time? We had a hard, cold feeling, under and in our heads--and in our hearts and in our stomachs. Make

no mistake about it. Even as Jacob felt the stones and reminded himself of the near-death of Isaac, we feel today the specter of the Holocaust, the Akedah of the 20th century. It is a reality that lies just beneath the surface of all contemporary Jewish experience. So, like Jacob, we have the dread sensation of כִּי בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, the sun is setting. Darkness is spreading and danger is abroad in the world.

How shall we respond to these worries? First, let us define the areas of concern. I find three such amongst others: self-doubt, fear of the future, and loneliness.

In these critical moments, Jews both in Israel and in the Diaspora do entertain doubts about the justice and worthwhileness of our cause. Of course, I am not speaking about the New Left and Trotskyite Jews. I unequivocally and unambiguously condemn such Jewish self-haters who are open-minded to Arabs, close-minded to Jews; who can understand sympathetically every nationalism--except that of their own people. I do not refer to Communist Jews who slavishly follow Moscow's party line. They are an instance of psycho-pathology, the most pathetic example of political masochism in our times.

Rather, I refer to those Jews who are fully committed to the Jewish cause, who make their lives in Israel and put their lives on the line--and yet, ask themselves whether we have acted properly all along, whether it is possible to reconcile our claims with Palestinian claims. Of course, every sane person recognizes that there can be no compromise with the PLO. You cannot reconcile the claims of life and death and end up with a condition that is neither one nor the other. But there is some incipient doubt as to whether our claim to all of Palestine is justified theoretically. And there is some nagging self doubt.

Such doubts occurred to Father Jacob. When we met him on that memorable night, he had his famous dream. And Abarbanel, who is the most psychologically oriented of all commentators, reminds us that dreams occur to people because of something that is stirring inside them. What was so disturbing Jacob that caused him to dream? Self-doubt, answers Abarbanel. The dream was a projection of his internal struggles and the divine prophetic response to them. Maybe, thought Jacob, I was wrong in taking away the blessings from Esau. True, he kept them only by deceit. True, had he gotten the blessings--by which is meant the right of his posterity to the land of Israel--it would have been a tragic miscarriage of the divine intent. But maybe I had no right to take it away from him. אולי לא יישר בעיני אלקים. Maybe it was not right in the eyes of God. And maybe it was simply not worthwhile! Here I am, away from my parents, all alone, cold and hungry and frightened. Was it worth it?

And so the divine answer came in a dream, in the form of a vision the ladder placed on earth (which according to the Midrash, held within itself, in concentrated form, all the land of Israel) and its top reaching into the heavens. God was saying to Jacob: Despite all your self-doubt, despite all your questioning of the

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morality of your conduct, you are connected to God. Still your doubts, remove your hesitation, your questions are resolved. In life, one must often make tragic choices--between a greater morality and a lesser morality, between a greater evil and a lesser evil. You chose in this manner--and you were right, painful and tormenting though your deeds were.

I find it hard to understand the thought of a moral justification for the Palestinian claim--especially when such claims are pressed by the likes of the PLO, who are nothing more than common gangsters. Nevertheless, Jews are morally sensitive, and if they are not, they ought to be. Therefore, even in upbuilding Eretz Israel, we know that its function must be to bring blessing to all humankind. No matter how much the majority of humanity seems arrayed against us, we shall never forfeit our function and our role of enhancing life for all men on earth. For so did God tell Jacob in that vision: ונברכו בכך כל משפחות האדמה ובורעך, "and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your children."

The second area of concern is the simple apprehension of the future. We experience fear of the unknown. You will notice this if you visited Israel recently, if you talked to Israelis by phone or by mail or read their literature. We seem to be locked in an inexorable drive towards war. There is depression in Israel and in the Diaspora as well. We do not know how oil will affect our future. So we are caught in fear and in gloom and in anxiety.

We are, indeed, in the position which Jacob anticipated for us: pursued, hated, frightened.

And so, in response, Jacob dreams his dream. According to Ramban, the dream consists primarily of angels to teach Jacob one most important principle: that all that is happening to him is מן השמים, the providential acts of Heaven. Nothing is mere happenstance. He must not feel that God has abandoned him, that he is at the mercy of purely mundane forces. The eye of God never closes. The angels are there.

I would add: the ways of God are mysterious and complex. The help He sends to His children does not come in straight lines, and in unimpeded spurts. There is advance and retreat, progress and pullback, triumph and defeat. The angels are עולים ויורדים, they ascend and descend. First they are עולים, they go up--leaving us here, on earth, with a feeling of being forsaken, abandoned, almost in despair. But eventually יורדים, they descend, and allow us to feel the direction of God's hand in history, the consolation of His presence.

So when we have these fears, when we worry about the future, when we are told by the so-called realists to think the unthinkable thoughts about the bleak future of the State of Israel, we: הארץ אשר אתה שוכב עליה לך אתנה, we hear from across the centuries the comforting voice of God "The land on which you lie, I have given to you."

Eretz Israel will remain ours, We shall prevail!

If we succumb to despair, we are only satisfying our enemies and carrying out their

plan. Let there be no אִישׁ, no despair. Let there be no divisiveness, no fighting of Jew against Jew. Let there be only hard work--and hope!

Finally, there is the element of loneliness. In every instance in recent weeks, in every international form, we have been outnumbered and outvoted and isolated. We have been silenced and excoriated at the UN.

We are even unsure of the United States--and we certainly ought not take for granted a country whose highest military officer this past week delivered himself of a kind of anti-Semitic tirade which is appropriate for a small-town hick. Our leading soldier seems to be the kind of man who has obtained his philosophy of American society from the scrawlings on walls, and whose level of sophistication does not rise beyond that of the country-club locker-room.

Only a small handful of countries ever votes with us. Many others think that they are virtuous and heroic and pure if they abstain while the Arabs and communists and Third World gang up on us in the diplomatic equivalent of a gang rape.

The nadir was reached yesterday or the day before. It took place after the vote in UNESCO--the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization--which decided that Israel was the only country in the world which had to remain alone, and did not have the right to join with any region or bloc of nations. After this vote, the Lebanese delegate said the following: "Israel is a state which belongs nowhere, because it comes from nowhere."

We belong nowhere because we come from nowhere...

I confess, I was not completely shocked at this obscene taunt, at this cruel gloating. Outraged, yes; but not shocked.

I recognize it. Smell it carefully and you will detect the whiff of an ancient malodorous theory. We belong nowhere--it is the old Christian canard condemning the Jewish people to eternal homelessness as the "Wandering Jew." We have here--remarkably, in the words of a Lebanese Arab who represents a country evenly divided between Christian and Moslem-- the ultimate synthesis of discredited and evil Christian theology with malicious and manipulative Arab politics.

The old anti-Semitism has been resurrected in the half of the UN. And the world fidgets, but does not raise its voice at this international replay of a Kitty Genovese murder.

So, "Israel is a state which belongs nowhere because it comes from nowhere!" How shall we answer that when our non-Jewish ask us whether there is anything to it? What should we say to those pathetically ignorant Jews who may be taken in by a statement of that sort?

Permit to suggest the following answers.

Israel comes from the concentration camps of Western Europe--which bloc it was not permitted to join by UNESCO.

Israel comes from the crematoria of Eastern Europe where the chimneys belched forth the smokey remains of six million men, women, and children--and the government of which today, all Communists, leeringly persecute the

pitiful remainders of that unprecedented massacre.

Israel comes from the horrendous ghettos, where we did not have almost limitless real estate, and endless oil, only to fight for another piece of real estate--but where all we wanted was one place we can call our own, our home.

Israelis come from the mullahs and slums of Arab countries, where they experienced firsthand the blessings of what the Arabs mean by, "a democratic, secular state--a fraternity of Christian, Jew, and Moslem." They learned quite intimately what it means to live in a democratic state--such as Yemen or Syria; or a secular state--like Libya or Saudi Arabia...

Israel comes from the people which created a Talmud, the most marvelous compendium of law and morality and justice and civilized life, while the Arab state still had no name, and were nothing more than pagan savages riding through the desert with knives in their teeth and blood dripping from their fingers.

Modern Israel comes from that nation of prophets who blessed the world with the vision of a united humanity--a vision distorted and profaned, made pornographic and obscene, by that organization which today condemns Israel to be the only country not permitted to participate in that same unity of nations.

Israel comes from and is a people who taught the world pity and compassion, civilization and art and music, morality and law and justice--yes, and Education and Science and Culture--when the so called Third World is still populated by the likes of Amin and gives thunderous ovations to an Arafat.

Israel is descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who taught the world what it needs to deserve survival. And, if, indeed, Israel does not belong to this world, maybe the world just does not deserve to go on.

But we do belong. We belong not to Western Europe and not to the Communist bloc, not the Arabs and not the Afro-Asians. We do belong--to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He is One God--"Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God the Lord is One"--and we are one people--"who is like unto Thy people, one people upon the earth." We are one nation not permitted to join any bloc of peoples. And He is One God who is above all pantheons, and does not belong to any bloc of pagan idols.

And therefore, to us as to our Father Jacob before us, comes the word of God as we feel rejected by the society of nations: וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ, "behold I shall be with thee."

and I will watch over thee in all ways that thou goest, for I will! "וְשָׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ כִּי, וְלֹא אֶעֱזָבְךָ" not forsake thee."

That is where we come from. That is whom we belong to.

The Wandering Jew has come home. Twenty six years ago. That is where he belongs. And he shall not be driven out.

Ever. [November 23, 1974]