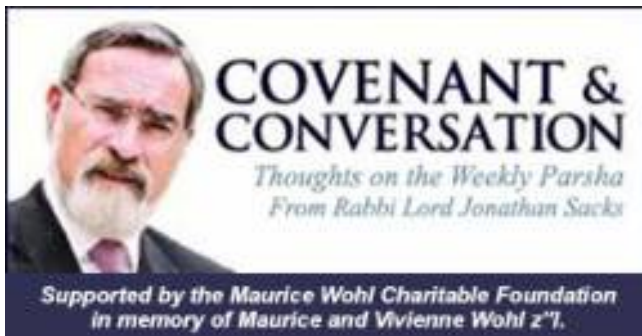


In this Issue

- **Covenant and Conversation** by *Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks*
- **M'oray Ha'Aish** by *Rabbi Ari Kahn*
- **Mayanot** by *Rabbi Noson Weisz*
- **Rabbi Frand On the Weekly Torah Portion** by *Rabbi Yissocher Frand*



Light in Dark Times

What is it that made Jacob – not Abraham or Isaac or Moses – the true father of the Jewish people? We are called the “congregation of Jacob,” “the Children of Israel.” Jacob/Israel is the man whose name we bear. Yet Jacob did not begin the Jewish journey; Abraham did. Jacob faced no trial like that of Isaac at the Binding. He did not lead the people out of Egypt or bring them the Torah. To be sure, all his children stayed within the faith, unlike Abraham or Isaac. But that simply pushes the question back one level. Why did he succeed where Abraham and Isaac failed?

It seems that the answer lies in parshat Vayetze and parshat Vayishlach. Jacob was the man whose greatest visions came to him when he was alone at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next. In parshat Vayetze, escaping from Esau, he stops and rests for the night with only stones to lie on, and he has an epiphany:

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.... When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” (Gen. 28:12–17)

In parshat Vayishlach, fleeing from Laban and terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau again, he wrestles alone at night with an unnamed stranger.

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”... So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.” (Gen. 32:29–31)

These are the decisive spiritual encounters of Jacob’s life, yet they happen in liminal space (the space between, neither a starting point nor a destination), at a time when Jacob is at risk in both directions – where he comes from and where he is going to. Yet it is at these points of maximal vulnerability that he encounters God and finds the

courage to continue despite all the hazards of the journey.

That is the strength Jacob bequeathed to the Jewish people. What is remarkable is not merely that this one tiny people survived tragedies that would have spelled the end of any other people: the destruction of two Temples; the Babylonian and Roman conquests; the expulsions, persecutions, and pogroms of the Middle Ages; the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth-century Europe; and the Holocaust. What is remarkable is that after each cataclysm, Judaism renewed itself, scaling new heights of achievement.

During the Babylonian exile Judaism deepened its engagement with the Torah. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem it produced the great literary monuments of the Oral Torah: Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara. During the Middle Ages it produced masterpieces of law and Torah commentary, poetry, and philosophy. A mere three years after the Holocaust it proclaimed the State of Israel, the Jewish return to history after the darkest night of exile.

When I first became Chief Rabbi I had to undergo a medical examination. The doctor had me walking at a very brisk pace on a treadmill. “What are you testing?” I asked him. “How fast I can go, or how long?” “Neither,” he replied. “I will be observing how long it takes for your pulse to return to normal, after you come off the treadmill.” That is when I discovered that health is measured by the power of recovery. That is true for everyone, but doubly so for leaders and for the Jewish people, a nation of leaders. (This, I

believe, is what the phrase “a kingdom of Priests” [Ex. 19:6] means).

Leaders suffer crises. That is a given of leadership. When Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of Britain between 1957 and 1963, was asked what the most difficult aspect of his time in office was, he famously replied, “Events, dear boy, events.” Bad things happen, and when they do, the leader must take the strain so that others can sleep easily in their beds.

Leadership, especially in matters of the spirit, is deeply stressful. Four figures in Tanach – Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Jonah – actually prayed to die rather than continue. This was not only true in the distant past. Abraham Lincoln suffered deep bouts of depression. So did Winston Churchill, who called it his “black dog.” Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. both attempted suicide in adolescence and experienced depressive illness in adult life. The same was true of many great creative artists, among them Michelangelo, Beethoven, and Van Gogh.

Is it greatness that leads to moments of despair, or moments of despair that lead to greatness? Do those who lead internalise the stresses and tensions of their time? Or is it that those who are used to stress in their emotional lives find release in leading exceptional lives? There is no convincing answer to this in the literature thus far. But Jacob was a more emotionally volatile individual than either Abraham, who was often serene even in the face of great trials, or Isaac, who was particularly withdrawn. Jacob feared; Jacob loved; Jacob spent more of his time in exile than the other patriarchs. But Jacob endured and

persisted. Of all the figures in Genesis, he was the great survivor.

The ability to survive and to recover is part of what it takes to be a leader. It is the willingness to live a life of risks that makes such individuals different from others. So said Theodore Roosevelt in one of the greatest speeches ever made on the subject:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.¹

Jacob endured the rivalry of Esau, the resentment of Laban, the tension between his wives and children, the early death of his beloved Rachel, and the loss – for twenty-two years – of his favourite son, Joseph. He said to Pharaoh, “Few and evil have been the days of my life” (Gen. 47:9). Yet, on the way he “encountered” angels, and whether they were wrestling with him or climbing the ladder to heaven, they lit the night with the aura of transcendence.

To try, to fall, to fear, and yet to keep going: that is what it takes to be a leader. That was Jacob, the man who at the lowest ebbs of his life had his greatest visions of heaven.

Shabbat Shalom

QUESTIONS (AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE)

1. Do you think greatness leads to moments of despair? Do you think moments of despair can lead to greatness?
2. How can we apply this message to our lives today?
3. With all the stories in the Torah, what is unique about the story of Jacob?

NOTES

1. Theodore Roosevelt, “Citizenship in a Republic”, speech given at the Sorbonne, Paris, 23 April 1910.



Healing and Repairing

On the run from a vengeful and possibly murderous brother, Yaakov runs out of daylight and is forced to stop for the night, with no shelter. Using rocks as a pillow, he is overcome by sleep. Like so much of Yaakov’s life, even running away was complicated.

Yaakov had received two independent sets of instructions from his parents; in a sense, he was on a dual journey. He was following the directives of his mother to escape Esav's fury,¹ and the instructions of his father² to find a suitable wife in the home of Lavan, his maternal uncle.³ Perhaps he allowed himself a moment to savor the irony: finally, both parents had instructed him to do the same thing, even if their motivations were different.⁴

(10) Yaakov went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. (11) He came to a certain place, and stayed there all night because the sun had set. He took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep. (Bereishit 28:10,11)

Years earlier, his grandfather's servant – probably Eliezer⁵ – was sent on this same trip, but that earlier journey was described quite differently. While the servant was accompanied by an entourage, carrying precious gifts and jewels – a showy caravan designed to impress upon the prospective bride's family that the marriage was advantageous, Yaakov has nothing.⁶ Perhaps the speed of his departure prevented him from taking appropriate provisions; for whatever reason, he is forced to lie on the ground, like a vagabond, heading out of the land that would one day be known as Israel, a land that would one day be his.

On the other hand, although Yaakov leaves with nothing in hand, he holds something intangible. He has the blessings, and a promise that the future will look very different than the present. His father had given him two blessings: the first,

intended for Esav, was a blessing of wealth, of financial security and material bounty; the second, always and exclusively intended for Yaakov, was the blessing of Avraham, which included the inheritance of the Land of Israel. But for now, he was leaving the “promised land,” and despite these blessings, he was empty-handed.

Sleep overcomes him and he has an epiphany. He sees a vision of a ladder, he sees angels dancing up and down the ladder,⁷ and he sees a vision of God.

(12) He dreamed. Behold, a stairway set upon the earth, and its top reached to heaven. Behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. (13) Behold, Hashem stood above it, and said, “I am Hashem, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon you lie, to you, will I give it, and to your seed. (14) Your seed will be as the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your seed will all the families of the earth be blessed. (15) Behold, I am with you and will keep you, wherever you go and will bring you again into this land. For I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken of to you.” (Bereishit 28:12-15)

We know little of Yaakov's inner spiritual world up to this point. His entire reputation is based on one phrase, half of one verse.

When the boys grew up, Esav became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Yaakov was a mild



Vayetzei (Genesis 28:10-32:3) *advanced compendium*

(innocent) (unblemished) man- (*tam*)
a dweller of the tents. (Bereishit
25:27)

Yaakov is described as *tam*, but this description is unclear: Does it mean that he is innocent, lacking guile or even lacking depth of perception? “Does it perhaps imply that he is a complete or unblemished personality? Should this description be seen as a contrast to the description of Esav?⁸ Aside from being *tam*, Yaakov is described as a man who “dwells in tents.” Rashi cites the rabbinic tradition that delineates a vast distance between the two brothers: Esav is a murderous hunter, while in the rabbinic reading, Yaakov is a yeshiva student:

AND THEY GREW ... – ESAV WAS
– So long as they were young they could not be distinguished by what they did and no one paid much attention to their characters, but when they reached the age of thirteen, one went his way to the houses of learning and the other went his way to the idolatrous temples.

A CUNNING HUNTER literally, understanding hunting – understanding how to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask him, "Father how should salt and straw be tithed"? Consequently, his father believed him to be very punctilious in observing the divine ordinances.

A MAN OF THE FIELD – Explain it literally: a man without regular

occupation, hunting beasts and birds with his bow.

A PLAIN MAN – not expert in all these things: as his heart was his mouth (his thoughts and his words tallied). One who is not ingenious in deceiving people is called *tam* plain, simple.

DWELLING IN TENTS – the tent of Shem and the tent of Eber.⁹

(Rashi Bereishit 25:27)

Citing the midrash, Rashi makes this determination before the boys are even born:

AND [THE CHILDREN] STRUGGLED – You must admit that this verse calls for a Midrashic interpretation since it leaves unexplained what this struggling was about and it states that she exclaimed "If it be so, wherefore did I desire this" (i.e. she asked whether this was the normal course of child-bearing, feeling that something extraordinary was happening). Our Rabbis explain that the word *vayitroztzu* has the meaning of running, moving quickly: whenever she passed by the doors of Torah (i.e. the Schools of Shem and Eber) Yaakov moved convulsively in his efforts to come to birth, but whenever she passed by the gate of a pagan temple Esav moved convulsively in his efforts to come to birth (Genesis Rabbah 63:6). Another explanation is: they struggled with one another and quarreled as to how they should divide the two worlds as

their inheritance. (Rashi Bereishit 25:22)

Aside from being somewhat anachronistic, the association of “man of the tents” with yeshiva study is not the straightforward reading (*pshat*), according to many commentaries. This phrase is often understood as a reference to Yaakov’s vocation: He was, according to this understanding of the text, a shepherd; he lived in tents and moved from place to place in search of grazing lands for his flock.¹⁰

In rabbinic tradition, shepherds did not always have a reputation for honesty; this description of Yaakov, then, may have been a far cry from indicating spiritual excellence. In fact, it may invite a precisely opposite interpretation: A “man of the tents” is a problematic individual,¹¹ a vagrant who does not respect boundaries and who is often stigmatized as a thief.¹²

The text itself has offered very little information about Yaakov at this point, and his physical and spiritual circumstances are far less understood than we might have expected. Had God spoken to him before? What had he done to merit this epiphany? Shall we assume, on the basis of one (extremely challenging) reference to God that Yaakov was a spiritual person? The only reference to God made by Yaakov thus far was when he was impersonating his brother Esav, and trying to impress and mislead his father.

Yitzchak made no mention of God when he called in Esav.

(1) It happened, that when Yitzchak was old, and his eyes were so dim that

he could not see, he called Esav his elder son, and said to him, “My son?” He said to him, “Here I am.” (2) He said, “See now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. (3) Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and take me venison. (4) Make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat, and that my soul may bless you before I die.” (Bereishit 27:1-4)

Yitzchak’s instructions, if fulfilled, will result in Esav receiving his father’s blessing – not God’s blessing. Yet when Rivka recounts what she heard, she editorializes and brings God, the source of all blessings, into the picture.

(5) Rivkah heard when Yitzchak spoke to Esav his son. Esav went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. (6) Rivkah spoke to Yaakov her son, saying, “Behold, I heard your father speak to Esav your brother, saying, (7) ‘Bring me venison, and make me savory food, that I may eat, and bless you before God before my death.’ (Bereishit 27:5-7)

Yaakov’s exchange with Yitzchak accurately reflects what father had said – without any mention of God.

(18) He came to his father, and said, “My father?” He said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?” (19) Yaakov said to his father, “I am Esav your firstborn. I have done what you asked me to do. Please arise, sit and eat of my venison, that your soul may bless me.” (Bereishit 27:18-19)

Only when Yaakov is questioned by his father does he introduce God into the equation.

Yitzchak said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He said, “Because The Almighty your God gave me success.” (Bereishit 27:20)

Yaakov does not display a finely tuned God consciousness in his words, and the events of his life – the proverbial “body of work” of his actions up to this moment of revelation under the stars – have been complex at least, and perhaps even disturbing. Until this point he has taken advantage of his brother twice. The description of Yaakov as an *ish tam* does not solve this problem; it is a moniker we do not understand. While we may be able to qualify, rationalize, explain or even justify his actions, Yaakov’s behavior hardly speaks for itself as spiritually inspired or inspiring.

As Yaakov lies under the stars and God speaks to him, is he surprised, or has he been waiting for and anticipating this communication?

The verses offer us two separate issues to ponder: First, there is the vision that

Yaakov sees, of a ladder upon which angels are ascending and descending. Second, there is content, a specific message that God communicates.

(13) Behold, Hashem stood above it, and said, “I am Hashem, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed.
(14) Your seed will be as the dust of the earth, and you will spread abroad

to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. In you and in your seed will all the families of the earth be blessed. (15) Behold, I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go, and will bring you again into this land. For I will not leave you, until I have done that which I have spoken of to you.” (Bereishit 28:13-15)

The heart of the communication is a reiteration of the blessings Yitzchak had bestowed upon Yaakov: The Land of Israel would be his, his children would be numerous, and God would protect him. But there was also much that was left unsaid: The blessings which Yitzchak intended to give to Esav, which were surreptitiously taken by Yaakov, were not reiterated; those ill-gotten blessings are not mentioned. For that matter, we remain unsure of the significance of Yaakov buying the birthright; that, too, is never addressed. Undoubtedly, Yaakov hears the thundering silence. There are things which he has done, things that lie in the grey areas of morality, which are not “rubber stamped” or approved after the fact. The blessings for physical bounty and power which he has taken are not necessarily his at all.

This may be a part of the message of the vision, as well: The angels ascend and then descend the ladder, indicating that the heavenly blessings of bounty must first be earned down on earth. This may be a visual representation of the rabbinic teaching that every good deed creates an angel¹³ who then ascends to heaven and reports before the Divine Throne, and then brings the reward for that deed down to earth. Whether or not this

philosophical construct of the mechanics of reward and punishment lie in the subtext of these verses, we cannot help but wonder what the vision of the angels – who unexpectedly begin their circuit on the earth below and then ascend to the heavens – meant to Yaakov, who hears God’s resounding silence regarding the stolen blessing.

Yaakov awakes and expresses his amazement, but the source of his excitement is unclear. Is it the very fact that God has communicated with him, or is it the particular location where he had this vision which elicits his response?

Yaakov makes a vow, and continues on his journey.

(1) Then Yaakov went on his journey and came to the land of the children of the east. (2) He looked, and behold, a well in the field, and, behold, three flocks of sheep lying there by it. For out of that well they watered the flocks. The stone on the well’s mouth was large. (3) There all the flocks were gathered. They rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again on the well’s mouth in its place. (4) Yaakov said to them, “My relatives, where are you from?” They said, “We are from Haran.” (5) He said to them, “Do you know Lavan, the son of Nahor?” They said, “We know him.” (6) He said to them, “Is it well with him?” They said, “It is well. See, Rachel, his daughter, is coming with the sheep.” (7) He said, “Behold, it is still the middle of the day, not time to gather the livestock together. Water the sheep, and go and feed them.” (8)

They said, “We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered together, and they roll the stone from the well’s mouth. Then we water the sheep.” (9) While he was yet speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she kept them. (10) It happened, when Yaakov saw Rachel the daughter of Lavan, his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Lavan, his mother’s brother, that Yaakov went near, and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of Lavan his mother’s brother. (Bereishit 29:1-10)

When he arrives in Lavan’s town Yaakov displays great strength; once again, we are forced to wonder just how different Esav and Yaakov truly are. Yaakov behaves in a manner that conjures up memories of his mother’s behavior as he waters the parched flock. Without a word, Yaakov shows that he is worthy, that he is the son of Rivka. For the first time, Yaakov displays a character trait we have not yet seen in him. Now, Yaakov performs an act of *chesed*.

The text of the verses that follow paint a striking picture, a complex personality profile: Yaakov is destitute; he is both humble and willing to work, and most importantly, his love for Rachel is absolute. Again, the scene must be contrasted with the servant of Avraham. This time there is no jewelry, only seven years of labor to earn the hand of his beloved Rachel in marriage.

(11) Yaakov kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. (12) Yaakov told Rachel that he was her father’s brother, and that he was Rivka’s son.

She ran and told her father. (13) It happened, when Lavan heard the news of Yaakov, his sister's son, that he ran to meet Yakkov, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Yaakov told Lavan all these things. (14) Lavan said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." He lived with him for a month. (15) Lavan said to Yaakov, "Because you are my brother, should you, therefore, serve me for nothing? Tell me, what will your wages be?" (16) Lavan had two daughters. The name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. (17) Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and attractive. (18) Yaakov loved Rachel. He said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter." (19) Lavan said, "It is better that I give her to you, than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me." (20) Yaakov served seven years for Rachel. They seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had for her. (Bereishit 29:11-20)

The days and years fly by; at last, Yaakov the earnest, honest, hard worker, reminds his boss that the time for his marriage has arrived:

(21) Yaakov said to Lavan, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her." (22) Lavan gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. (23) It happened in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him. He went in to her. (24) Lavan gave Zilpah his handmaid to his

daughter Leah for a handmaid. (25) It happened in the morning that, behold, it was Leah. He said to Lavan, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" (26) Lavan said, "It is not done so in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn. (27) Fulfill the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you will serve with me yet seven other years." (Bereishit 29:21-27)

In the morning Yaakov is shocked to discover that he has been played for a fool. Lavan had deceived him; the woman he found in his bed was Leah, the elder sister of his beloved Rachel. Yaakov is outraged; he confronts his father in law, and demands that Lavan explain his audacity and duplicity. Lavan's response is a slap in the face:

(26) Lavan said, "It is not done so in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn. (27) Fulfill the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you will serve with me yet seven other years." (Bereishit 29:26,27)

Lavan snaps back at Yaakov: Here, we maintain the proper order between siblings, we protect the natural rights of the elder before the younger.

Although Yaakov knows that he shouldn't be shocked by deceit when dealing with a person like Lavan,¹⁴ it is not Lavan who is on his mind. Yaakov intuits that this is a punishment from God for his **own** act of deception.¹⁵ In the darkness of the night, he was blind to the true identity of his

companion. He had been unable to distinguish between the two sisters, just as his father had been blind to Yaakov's true identity when he impersonated his brother Esav.

The unlikely marriage of Yaakov and Leah began with a strange point of commonality: each of them had impersonated a sibling to fool an unsuspecting victim. Perhaps he and Leah could somehow make their marriage work, for Yaakov could not judge her without judging himself.

Yaakov invested seven more years of work to earn the hand of Rachel in marriage. Yaakov, who perhaps more than anything desired an uncomplicated life, suddenly found himself entangled in incessant complexity and intrigue. Being married to two sisters would be quite a challenge. Especially when we realize that each sister wanted what the other had.

(28) Yaakov did so and fulfilled her week. He gave him Rachel his daughter as a wife. (29) Lavan gave Bilhah his handmaid, to his daughter Rachel, to be her handmaid. (30) He went in also to Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah and served with him yet seven other years. (31) Hashem saw that Leah was hated, and he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. (Bereishit 29:28-31)

Rachel desperately wanted a child,¹⁶ and Leah, who had many children, pined for her husband's love and affection.¹⁷

The tension reaches a crescendo on what appears to be a completely ordinary day, which differs in

only one small detail: On this day, Leah's eldest son Reuven finds a particular plant, and brings them to his forlorn mother¹⁸:

(14) Reuven went, in the days of wheat harvest, and found *duda'im* in the field, and brought them to his mother, Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's *duda'im*." (15) She said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you also take away my son's *duda'im*?" Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's *duda'im*." (16) Yaakov came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, "You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son's *duda'im*;" and he lay with her that night. (Bereishit 30:14-16)

These *dudaim*,¹⁹ which have been associated with mandrakes, have been reputed to possess several qualities:²⁰ they are an aphrodisiac²¹ and enhance fertility,²² but they are also reportedly a hallucinogenic substance.²³

Apparently, Leah wants the aphrodisiac to attract her husband who loves another more than he loves her. Her sister, the "competition," wants the *duda'im* to resolve her infertility.²⁴ One wonders, what Reuven was doing with them himself – other than helping his mother? Could the other properties of the *duda'im*²⁵ shed light on the episode between Reuven and Bilhah, explaining Reuven's clouded judgment and enflamed passions?²⁶

The two sisters barter between them, and a deal is struck; Yaakov is moved like chattel (or worse) and perhaps not for the first time, the sisters decide among themselves with whom Yaakov will sleep.²⁷ As a result of the deal they strike, each gets what they she was seeking: Leah is given quality time with Yaakov,²⁸ while Rachel gets the cure that she believes will help her achieve her goal of motherhood.²⁹

We wonder if the act of being bartered reminded Yaakov of his own bartering, when he exchanged some beans for his brother’s birthright? There is at least one linguistic clue that points us in this direction:

Yaakov **came from the field** in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, “You must come in to me; for I have surely hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” He lay with her that night. (Bereishit 30:16)

Yaakov cooked a stew and Esav **came from the field**, and he was exhausted. (Bereishit 25:29)

In both of these instances it seems that the object that was “sold” in exchange for produce was not the sort of thing that can be bought.

(30) Esav said to Yaakov, “Please feed me with that very red stew, for I am exhausted.” Therefore, his name was called Edom. (31) Yaakov said, “First, sell me your birthright.” (32) Esav said, “Behold, I am about to die. What good is the birthright to me?” (33) Yaakov said, “Swear to me today,” and he swore to him and sold his

birthright to Yaakov. (34) Yaakov gave Esav bread and lentil stew. He ate and drank, rose up, and went his way, and Esav despised the birthright. (Bereishit 30:34)

Does Yaakov sense the irony of two siblings, the younger and older, once again trading for something sacred? Does Yaakov experience catharsis, sensing that he deserves this treatment?

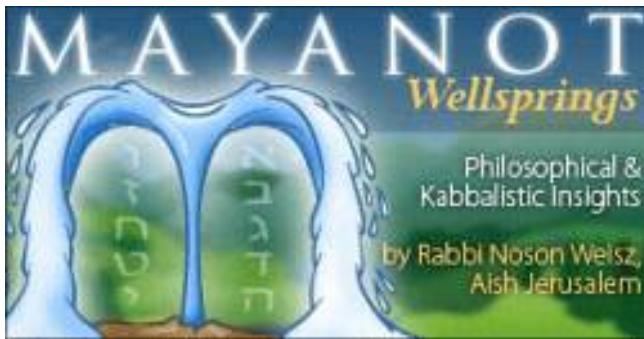
³⁰ Is his lack of resistance an indication that he knows that he must accept it, just as he accepted his marriage to Leah? Although his statement to his father, “I am Esav your firstborn,” may have been technically true after he purchased the birthright, Yaakov understands that as a result he must live the life of that firstborn as well – and that includes being married to Leah.

Though Yaakov could perhaps defend his actions, he most certainly lived with the consequences. The wealth that he accrues, perhaps by virtue of having received the blessing for physical plenty, comes only as a result of twenty years of hard labor, and even then, only when he manages to outsmart Lavan. We sense that all the trials and tribulations endured by Yaakov were designed to repair – to create what rabbinic literature describes as a *tikkun* – his questionable, though perhaps defensible, behavior of his youth.

Now that he has been somehow cleansed, uplifted, “repaired” through these “*tikkunim*” Yaakov is ready to return home. Esav is waiting for him, but this is not the same Yaakov. One more *tikkun* will still be needed before the confrontation with Esav – a powerful *tikkun* which will reveal that a new identity, a force to be

reckoned with, called Yisrael, is about to emerge. That *tikkun* lies just ahead.³¹ That final *tikkun* can only be accomplished by a spiritually enlightened, powerful Yaakov who has faced his past and elevated it, is now ready to return to the promised land and set God's promise in motion.

1. Bereishit 27:42-45.
2. Bereishit 28:1-5.
3. Rivkah planted this idea in Yitzchak's mind; see Bereishit 27:46.
4. The text of the Torah notes Yaakov leaving twice, once at the behest of his father 28:5, and the second time in 28:10.
5. The name of the servant is not mentioned throughout that mission (the entire chapter 24) – though God certainly helps him – so the name “*Eli-ezer*” seems quite apt.
6. The Ibn Ezra (Bereishit 25:34) claims that Yitzchak had lost all of the wealth of his father, the Ramban (Bereishit 25:34) forcibly rejects this contention.
7. For a description of the kinetic movement of the angels as dancing see Sichot Moharan section 86. This idea is expanded in my Echoes of Eden Bereishit 208,209
8. See Toldot Yitzchak Bereishit 25:27.
9. See the translation of Onkolus Bereishit 25:27
And the youths grew; and Esav was a man of idleness, a man going out into the field; and Jakob was a man of peace, a minister of the house of instruction. (Targum Onkolus Bereishit 25:27)
10. See Rashbam Bereishit 25:27, Ibn Ezra Bereishit 25:27, Bchor Shor Bereishit 25:27, Hizkuni Bereishit 25:27, Ibn Caspi Bereishit 25:27, Seforno Bereishit 25:27. See Bereishit 4:20, and the comments of Rashi.
11. Seforno Bereishit 25:27, sees the relaxed life of the shepherd as a perfect life for spiritual contemplation, R' Dovid Tzvi Hoffman Bereishit 25:27 makes a similar point.
12. See Talmud Sanhedrin 57a, and Rashi's comments, Avodah Zarah, 26a, Shulchan Oruch Chosehn Mishpat 34:13.
13. Mishna Avot 5:11, instead of “angel” the text reads “advocate”. Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov said: he who performs one commandment acquires for himself one advocate.
14. Lest one think this statement contains an unfair assessment of Lavan, a careful reading of Lavan's role which includes “mirroring”, manipulation and deceit, can all be discerned in chapter 24.
15. See Rabbi Chaim Joseph David Azulai (Chida) in his Nahal Kedumim Parashat Vayetze.
16. Bereishit 30:1-2.
Rachel saw that she had not born children to Yaakov, and Rachel became envious of her sister. She said to Yaakov, “Give me children! If not, I am dead! Yaakov grew angry at Rachel and he said, “Am I in place of God who has kept from you fruit of the womb?
17. The pain of Leah is particularly felt when she names her children.
18. Tzror Hamor Bereishit 30:14
19. Aryeh Kaplan in “The Living Torah” notes on this verse: *duda'im* (Targum; Ibn Ezra; Radak, *Sherashim*; Josephus). *Dudaim* in Hebrew, from the word *dodim* denoting passion or carnal love (Radak, *Sherashim*; cf. Ezekiel 16:8, 23:17, Proverbs 7:16). It was called this because of its use as an aphrodisiac and fertility potion (*Midrash Ne'elam, Zohar* 1:134b). The mandrake (*mandragora officinarum*) is a herb of the beladonna or potato family. It has a thick perennial root, often split down the middle, like the lower limbs of the human body. Stalkless, it has large leaves that straddle the ground and violet flowers (cf. Rashi). In the spring, its yellow fruit, the size of a tomato, ripens. This fruit can have an intoxicating fragrance (Song of Songs 7:14). The variety found by Reuben was a rare, extinct species that gives off deadly fumes when pulled from the ground (*Midrash Aggadah* on [Genesis 49:14](#), quoted in *Tzeror HaMor* as *Midrash HaGaluy; Toledoth Yitzchak* on [Genesis 49:14](#). Cf *Niddah* 31a; Josephus, *Wars* 7:6:3). In the Talmud, there appears to be a dispute as to whether Reuben brought home the violet flowers, the fruits or the roots (*Sanhedrin* 99b). Other sources indicate that he brought home two fruits (*Tzava'ath Yissachar* 1:3,5,7; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:19:8). Obviously, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs knew how to use these plants in mystical ways ([Genesis 30:37](#)). Still, Rachel did not bear children because of the mandrakes, but because of her prayers ([Genesis 30:2](#), 30:22; cf. *Zohar* 1:157b). According to one ancient source, Rachel did not eat the mandrakes, but offered them to God (*Tzava'ath Yissachar* 2:6).
20. See Seforno Bereishit 30:15, Alshech 30:14,15
21. See Zohar Berirshit 140b,165b.
22. See R' Dovid Tzvi Hoffman
23. See “The History and Uses of the Magical Mandrake, According to Modern Witches” BY [ANGELICA CALABRESE](#) JANUARY 12, 2016 <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-history-and-uses-of-the-magical-mandrake-according-to-modern-witches>
“In the Bible's Book of Genesis, mandrake root helps Rachel conceive Jacob, and in Greek mythology, Circe and Aphrodite are thought to use it as an aphrodisiac. But its powers are not only mythical: a member of the nightshade plant family, mandrake contains hallucinogenic and narcotic alkaloids. [Dioscurides](#), a first-century Greek physician, tells us that a “winecupful” of mandrake root (that is, mandrake root boiled in wine) was used as an anesthetic in ancient Rome. But be careful, he warns – take too much, and one might end up dead.&rdquo



The Splendor of the Night

Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set... (Genesis 28:10-11)

When Jacob arrived in Haran he said to himself, "How could I have gone by the place that my forefathers set aside for prayer without stopping to pray there myself?" As soon as he decided to return, the earth sprang for him and he immediately *encountered the place*. When he finished his prayer he wanted to start for Haran again. The Holy One, the Source of all blessing said to Himself: "Is it possible that this *tzadik* should visit My guesthouse and leave without spending the night?" Immediately the sun set. (Talmud Chulin, 91b)

The prophet Hosea (12:13) describes Jacob's journey to Haran as a flight to save his life from his brother Esau. (*Jacob fled to the field of Aram ...*) and yet the Talmud teaches that that during this flight to save his life, he double-backed because he forgot to pray at the place of his forefathers.

Imagine that you were in Israel and had to run for your life. The trip from Beersheba to Haran on foot takes several weeks. You have finally reached safety and can go to your relative's house and breathe easy at last, the ardors of the trip and the anxiety of your flight safely behind you. Before you enter the door you say to yourself, "Aha! One minute! I forgot to stop in Jerusalem to pray at the wall!" You promptly turn around without stopping to rest and start on the several week journey back to Jerusalem, back to the danger that you fled, to make up for this terrible wrong of not having stopped to pray at the wall. Hardly a likely scenario. Yet this is exactly what we are told that Jacob did, so how do we understand it?

THE RIGHT DECISION

One thing we can see. He surely made the right decision.

God was so excited that He made the earth literally spring to bring Jacob back to the Temple site immediately. God made the sun set several hours early to keep him there overnight, and it was during this night that he had his greatest prophetic vision, the promise of the land of Israel, and a guarantee of safety for his trip. The prayer to which Jacob referred survives to this day as *Ma'ariv*, the night prayer (Talmud Brochot, 26b). How did Jacob realize that so much was at stake?

To answer this question we have to go through several steps. First we must learn a little about who Jacob was.

And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward, and behold! angels of

God were ascending and descending on it. (Genesis 28:12)

Targum Yonoson interprets this verse: "The two angels -- who had been sent to Sodom (to destroy it), and who had been forced out of their place for having revealed God's secrets, and who had been wandering homeless until Jacob left his father's house and had escorted Jacob to Beth El [the venue of his dream] -- were allowed back to heaven on that day and told their friends, 'You can now catch a glimpse of the *tzadik* Jacob whose portrait is engraved on the heavenly throne and who all of you wanted to see.' The other angels of God climbed down the ladder to look at him."

We can understand the idea of a human portrait being engraved on the heavenly throne in terms of the following reference:

Why was man created only a single individual (unlike other species that were created in numbers)? To teach you that whoever destroys a single life is regarded in the eyes of God equivalent to someone who destroyed the entire world; and whoever saves a life is regarded as having saved the entire world ... For the same reason, each person has an obligation to regard himself as someone for whom the entire world was created. (Sanhedrin, 37a)

The heavenly throne represents the inner sanctum of the universe. The heavenly throne is always employed to symbolize God's kingdom. God's

kingdom is the universe. The creature engraved on the throne represents the purpose of the entire enterprise. He is not the ruler, but as God went through the trouble of establishing the kingdom solely for him, he stands for the realm. But while the world was created for every individual Jew, the portrait of only a single Jew hangs on the heavenly throne, the face of Jacob.

THE BEAUTY OF ADAM

The Talmud explains the same idea with the aid of a different image (Baba Mezia 84a): the beauty of Jacob was reminiscent of the beauty of Adam.

Jacob was chosen as the individual human being who best embodies the essence of God's purpose in creating the world. He is a second edition of Adam. The reason why Adam's portrait does not appear on the heavenly throne is that Adam shattered the "image of God" in which he was created. Jacob, the man who fully restored this "image of God" to its full splendor, was chosen as the representative human instead.

Thus, Jacob symbolizes Adam reassembled and renewed. He is the triumph over the sin of Adam, the restorer of man "in the image of God." The evidence of the completeness of the repair is provided by the fact that he did not die. The tarnish on the splendor of the image of God is most apparent in the edict of mortality issued against Adam following his sin. The fact that Jacob was the first human who managed to beat death is the best indicator that he succeeded in restoring fully his "image of God."

Rabbi Yochanan taught: "Jacob our forefather never died." He asked him, "Was it for nothing then, that he was

eulogized, or embalmed, or buried?" He replied, "I'm not saying this on my own, I'm deriving it from a verse in the Torah, '*You, my servant Jacob, have nothing to fear, says God, do not be terrified Israel, because I help you from afar, and your offspring will return from the earth.*' " (Jeremiah, 30; Talmud, Ta'anis 5b)

Let us try to make sense of this idea.

THE CURSE TO WORK

One of the consequences of Adam's sin was the curse that was coupled with the edict of death:

By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the ground from which you were taken, for you are dust and to dust shall you return. (Genesis 3:19)

Jewish tradition teaches that all Divine "punishments" are therapeutic in nature and are designed exactly, measure-for-measure, to fit the fault. How can we understand the edict of eating one's bread by the sweat of one's brow? How does it make sense to force human beings, who were created to engage in a life focused on spirituality, to spend a good portion of their lives focused on filling their stomachs? How is this therapeutic and how does it fit the concept of measure for measure?

Rabbi Dessler explains: Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. What is evil? Evil is darkness. When a person always understands what is happening to him and exactly why it is happening and that he deserves it, he never takes it as evil. He might be upset or

unhappy that he is beset by painful experiences, but as long as there is light and comprehension, there is no sense of evil. But in a world of darkness everything seems to happen randomly. No one appears to be in charge, and people seem to be subjected to pain and suffering without any just cause. This is evil.

By internalizing the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, man elected to place himself in a world of darkness where it is unclear that things happen only for the good, where everything seems to take place without reference to what people deserve. Living in such a world necessarily involves eating your bread by the sweat of your brow. The providential hand of God that feeds the world has to be concealed by the darkness of *hishtadlut*, "human effort."

RESTORING THE LIGHT

To dispel the darkness of such a world and restore the light so that the guiding hand of God becomes visible once again, man has to overcome the evidence provided by his own senses with the power of his belief.

Even as he goes about his ordinary business, planning the best way to apply his human effort to produce the best results, he must believe that his effort bears no relationship to the success achieved. All that is attained comes directly from the bountiful hand of God and bears no relationship to the effort at all.

In other words, even as he conducts his life in the way one must in a world where nothing good happens just because one deserves it, and often pain and sorrow are the lot of the most deserving,

he must believe that, nevertheless, things are not as they seem. In fact, God is guiding everything, and all that happens is for the good, and the world behaves exactly as required according to the strictest application of the rules of justice.

This is indeed the truth. Evil is merely darkness. If we could see the light, the actuality would match the belief. Therefore such belief has the power to dispel the darkness and is the way to correct the consequences of Adam's sin.

Jacob was the only one of our patriarchs who had to toil in darkness. He was the first to be driven out of his father's house, and the land of Israel, by the fear of what another person might do to him. God did not seem to be able to protect him from Esau.

He was the only patriarch who was totally destitute. He arrived at Laban's house without a farthing. He was helpless against Laban's trickery and was forced to work an extra seven years to earn the wife he desired.

When he finally left, he had to protect himself once again against the threat posed by Esau with lavish bribes. His daughter Dinah was kidnapped and raped. His favorite son, Joseph, was lost to him for seventeen years. He suffered all these troubles without deserving any of them. The Good and Just God that he served so loyally all his life seemed unable to protect him.

MAKING A VOW

Jacob understood that his lot in life was to live in the world of darkness which man entered as a result of Adam's sin and return it to the light

through the power of his belief. His prayer to God was in the form of a vow.

Then Jacob took a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going, will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and I return in peace to my father's house and the Lord will be a God to me, then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall become a house of God, and whatever you give me I shall repeatedly tithe to You." (Genesis 26:20-22)

Abraham tithed the booty he captured in his miraculous victory in his war with the kings (Genesis 14:20). This property, being miraculously acquired, was clearly given to him as a gift of God. Tithing it was Abraham's form of acknowledgement. Isaac tithed his crop when his fields produced a hundredfold during a year of famine and drought (Genesis 26:12; see Rashi, *ibid*). Such productivity was also miraculous and required acknowledgement. Jacob vowed to tithe everything. To him, everything he received had to be acknowledged as having a miraculous source.

Tosefos (Chulin 2b) wonder at Jacob for having made a vow. The Talmud states several times that God does not favor the making of vows. When you take a vow you obligate yourself to fulfill it. Human beings can never see very far into the future and have no idea if they will be in a position to honor the commitments they undertake. Some commitments are unavoidable but vows are voluntary, and, therefore, to be avoided.

Tosefos explain, in the name of the Midrash, that Jacob's vow was made at a time of danger. We learn from Jacob that at a time of danger, it is proper to make vows. But how does this make sense? If it is inadvisable to commit oneself to things in good times on the grounds that it is impossible to know in advance whether the commitments can later be honored, how much more is this so in times of danger when survival itself is at stake?

FAITH

The answer once again is faith. In good times, people make vows out of a sense of security. They are confident that they are in control of their lives. Their bank accounts are healthy, their future is assured, they are healthy and strong. God says don't make such vows. You live in a world of darkness and anything can happen, and you never know what tomorrow will bring. Your sense of security is a chimera and the feelings of expansiveness and generosity that this sense of security generates have no solid bases.

But in times of danger any sense of security comes from the belief that despite outward appearances, the guiding hand of God is running the show. Making vows at such times encourages the development of the inner fortitude necessary to face situations of danger calmly, fully secure in the knowledge that God is watching and nothing is happening by accident or arbitrarily. Such feelings match the true state of the world rather than the false face it presents on the surface, and therefore it is permissible to make vows.

Each of our forefathers opened a channel for us to use to connect to God. The channel of Jacob is the "awesome" channel.

When we speak of God "the great, the mighty, and the awesome" in the first blessing of the *Shmoneh Esreh*, the description of God as "the awesome" parallels Jacob's experience:

*And he became frightened and said,
"How awesome is this place! This is
none other than the abode of God and
this is the gate of the heavens!"*
(Genesis 28:16).

It was Jacob who glimpsed God amidst the total darkness imposed on the world by the evil introduced by Adam when he connected himself to the knowledge of evil. It is his vision that allowed the establishment of the Temple -- the house of God that Jacob vowed to erect -- to contain the glorious light of God's visible presence in the darkness that covers the world.

REDEEMER OF ISRAEL

Praise of God as the "redeemer of Israel" serves as the prelude to the *Shmoneh Esreh* prayer both in the morning and at night. The beginning of this prelude is markedly different at night in the context of the *Ma'ariv* prayer, than it is in the morning in context of the *Shachrit* prayer.

In the morning this prelude begins:

It is true, and certain, established ...

Whereas as night it begins

It is true and faithful ...

It is no less important to be able to see the truth that God is the "redeemer of Israel" at night, when everything is dark, and we cannot see how God is working to bring the redemption, as it is in the morning, when everything is bright and clear and the road to redemption is clearly visible.

Jacob established the night prayer. He bequeathed to the Jewish soul the capacity to reach God in the midst of the darkness and travail caused by Adam's connecting himself and all of us his descendants to darkness and evil. This is the repair of "the image of God" that Jacob wrought, and this is why he conquered the idea of death and merited that his image in particular should be engraved on the heavenly throne.

WORLD OF DARKNESS

When Jacob arrived in Haran, he saw that he had landed in a world of darkness and evil totally devoid of the holy light that pervaded his father's house. He could not possibly enter such a world until he had first established a way to reach God amidst all the evil and darkness that would surround him. So, without stepping foot into this new world, he returned to the place that his forefathers had used to connect to God and established the night prayer. It is through the power of faith instilled in us by this prayer that we have managed to survive the darkness of our long exile.

But what is the source of this power?

Rabbi Dessler explains that the source of Jacob's spiritual power lies in the search for balance and truth. At night, when your senses do not feed you

information, you need to use the power of your reason to orient yourself.

This has an advantage and a disadvantage. It is difficult to orient yourself through reason at night, because when we rely on reason alone, unconfirmed by evidence provided by the concrete inputs that come to us through our senses, we always feel at least insecure if not positively terrified. On the other hand reason only shows the pure truth and is never distracted by the false messages often sent us by our senses.

As I am writing these words a news item flashes on the radio. A bus has been blown up by terrorists in Hadera near Natanya. There are Jews killed and injured. The voices of the reporters and the bystanders they are interviewing are full of fear and bewilderment. When will this ever end? What can we do to regain control of the situation?

Our grip on our homeland seems very insecure. The country is divided. Some think we should retaliate harshly. Some believe we should refrain and wait for reason to prevail among our enemies. Neither side has a clear solution to the problem.

Our faith is being tested as never before since the re-establishment of the Jewish state. Everything seems dark and hopeless and the hand of the redeemer of Israel is nowhere to be seen.

Now is the time to use our heads to see the truth of Jacob.

Did we suffer through two thousand years of exile, and were we returned to our homeland after this hiatus through the terrible loss and anguish of the Holocaust only to lose it again?

Where is our faith?

God runs the world, we do not. All we can do is make an effort.

Let us take a vow to build the house of God as He supports us through this travail, then do what we must, without fear and with confidence in the outcome.



The Up-and-Down Ladder

And behold, there was a ladder, planted on the ground, its top reached into the heavens. (Gen. 28:12)

Among prophetic symbols, Yaakov's ladder is probably one of the most memorable. In his dream, he has a vision of an immensely tall ladder "planted on the ground, its top reaching into the heavens." What is the significance of this ladder? The Midrash and the Rishonim provide innumerable answers.

One of the interpretations of the Midrash is particularly curious. Hashem was showing Yaakov two of his descendants. One of these was Moshe, who ascended into Heaven, as symbolized by the top of the ladder, which "reached into the

heavens." The other was Korach, who was swallowed up by the earth, as symbolized by the ladder "planted on the ground." What was the point of showing Yaakov these two individuals?

The Baal Haturim points out that the *gematria*, the numerical value, of the word *sulam*, ladder, is equal to the numerical of the word *mamon*, money, and of the word *oni*, poverty. They all total up to 136.

A ladder, according to the Baal Haturim, is a metaphor both for money and for poverty. A ladder can bring a person up to the greatest heights, and it can also bring him down to the lowest depths. Money has the same ability to either elevate or degrade a person. When Hashem entrusts a person with money, he can use it to promote his own and his family's spiritual growth. He can give charity and do acts of *chessed* with other people. He can support community institutions. If these are the paths he chooses, the money will raise him up to the highest levels of spiritual achievement. But if he decides to use the money to indulge his drives and appetites, to push as many pleasure buttons as he can, it will bring him down to the lowest levels of debasement.

This concept may explain why Yaakov was shown Moshe and Korach. Our Sages tell us that both of these men were wealthy. Korach was so wealthy, in fact, that he lacked nothing in the world. His wealth corrupted him, and he developed such a hunger for power that he dared challenge Moshe's authority. His money ladder led him to the abyss - literally. The earth opened its mouth, and Korach descended to a depth no man had even experienced before or since. Moshe was also a

wealthy man, but he went on to become the father of all prophets, the teacher of all the Jewish people. His money ladder led him only upwards.

Poverty also has this ambivalent power. On the one hand, it is a terrible ordeal. According to the Talmud (*Eruvin* 41b), a person afflicted by poverty is vulnerable to sinfulness. On the other hand, a person who passes the "test of poverty" is freed from the restrictions of money. His happiness comes from within and is not dependent on the size of his bank account. People who can adjust to a simpler life, who can successfully trim down their needs and lower their expectations, who have only a little but need even less, these people are truly free, rich and fortunate. They can use their acceptance of poverty to focus on Torah, spirituality and personal growth.

I heard a story that took place right here in Baltimore. A woman went shopping for a *sheitel*, a wig, and she brought along her 12-year-old daughter for company. They spent some time considering different style and shades. Finally, the woman found a *sheitel* that really appealed to her.

"This is the one I like," she said to the saleslady.

The saleslady fidgeted uncomfortably. She knew that the woman was very far from being wealthy. The *sheitel* she had chosen was out of her range. "I don't think that *sheitel* suits you," said the saleslady.

"But it's perfect," said the woman. "I like it. How much is it?"

"Let me show some other styles that are more suited for you."

"What's the point?" the woman persisted. "I like this one. Why do we have to bother looking any further?"

The saleslady cleared her throat. "Well, you see. The *sheitel* you've chosen is rather expensive. I don't think you can afford it."

The woman smiled. "Look, I can't afford any of them. So let me at least take the one that I like." The saleslady shrugged and walked away.

Just then, the woman's young daughter, who had sat by silently during the entire exchange, spoke up. "Mommy," she said, "why can't we afford any *sheitel*? Are we poor? I never knew we were poor!"

I suppose we can fault the woman's lack of discretion for having this conversation in front of her daughter, but we have to admire her ability to raise her children in poverty with happiness and contentment and never feeling deprived. One thing we know for sure. The focus in that home, its source of happiness, is not on material things but on riches of the mind, the heart and the soul. That family's poverty is a ladder reaching into the heavens.

The Talmud states (*Megillah* 16a), "This [Jewish] nation is compared to dust and to the stars. When they are in decline, they descend to the level of dust; but when they rise, they ascend to the stars."

A ladder is, therefore, the perfect metaphor for the Jewish people. No one ever remains standing on a ladder. He either goes up, or he goes down. Chairs, sofas, beds can symbolize a static existence, but a ladder clearly symbolizes change. The Jewish ladder spans the entire spectrum of



Vayetzei (Genesis 28:10-32:3)
advanced compendium

the people, from Moshe at the very top to Korach at the very bottom. Jewish people are always in a state of change, either progressing or regressing. There is no standing still. They either go down to the dust or up to the stars.

**Get more great parsha
content:
[aish.com/weekly-
torah-portion](http://aish.com/weekly-torah-portion)**