

Parshat Vayeitzei: Surviving Darkness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Parshat Vayeitzei tells how Yaakov dreamed of a ladder that touched the heavens, while angels ascended and descended. The Midrash says that two angels were going up and two were going down. This symbolized the four exiles, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Edom. The Shem Mishmuel asks, Avraham was already told about the four kingdoms at *brit bein habetarim*. Why did Yaakov now have a separate prophetic vision about them?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the Jewish people were meant to be the spokesmen, the *kohanim* of Hashem to the world, as mentioned many times throughout the Prophets. When Mashiach comes this will be our role. Yitzchak knew Esav had failings. He thought if he would give Esav the blessings and the mission to create the kingdom of priests, Esav would grow into his role. The mantle of responsibility would inspire him to repent. It would bring out his hidden potential and overwhelm the weaknesses of his character. And precisely because he was a man of the field, he'd be the perfect leader to bring the message of Hashem to the world. How could righteous Yaakov lead the four kingdoms back to *teshuvah*, growing up as he did in the pure world of Torah? How could he fix the evil of the world? Only Esav, by uprooting the wickedness in his heart and supplanting it with goodness, could lead the nations to repentance.

The Shem MiShmuel explains that the four kingdoms represent the four cardinal sins. Bavel symbolizes idolatry, Persia corresponds to licentiousness, Greece represents murder, and Edom signifies evil talk. Esav, by fixing these four vices, could bring the world to perfection. That is why Yitzchak wanted to bless him. But he did not know, as Rivkah did, that Esav didn't want to change. The blessings would have led him to further corruption. While Esav had a formidable *yetzer hara*, he also had a great *yetzer tov*. He could have gone through a titanic struggle and transformed his evil inclination for the good. But instead he chose not to fight. His *yetzer tov* would live in the house of Yitzchak and his *yetzer hara* would live in the fields. Esav could have been greater than Yaakov. Chazal say, "In the place that a *baal teshuva* stands, a *tzaddik* cannot stand." Turning evil to goodness is a greater achievement than growing up with righteousness. Yet he did not to repent. Therefore, Yitzchak gave the *brachot* to Yaakov. The Torah says, "*Vayarei'ach begadav*." Yaakov may have been an *ish tam*, but some of his descendants rebelled. He needed the blessings so that every Jew till the end of time could have the capacity to return. The Jewish people will be the *mamlechet kohanim*. The evil nations will be defeated and Mashiach will lead the world to perfection.

The Shem Mishmuel notes that Yaakov

vicariously lived through the four exiles through his experiences with Lavan, Esav, Yosef and the tragedy of Dina. In Lavan's home surrounded by sorcery and idolatry, he experienced the exile of Bavel.

Esav sometimes will act openly anti-Semitic. Yet at other times he may masquerade as a friend. This was the Persian exile. King Achashveirosh invited the Jews to feast with him so that they would sin. Unfortunately, many more Jews were lost to brotherhood and assimilation than to persecution.

The tragedy of Dina is similar to the Greek exile. The Greeks attempted to convince the Jews to give up their faith by assuring them they would then receive everything. Shechem told the same to Dina.

The suffering of Yosef came about because of *sinat chinam* (internal strife), which in turn brought the 400 years of exile in Egypt. Likewise, *Sinat chinam* is the root of our current long exile. Yaakov faced these four exiles, yet in the end he survived, thrived and overcame them. The Jewish nation will also survive, return to Israel, and fulfill the mission Yitzchak gave Yaakov. We'll become the *mamlechet kohanim*. We will be redeemed through *teshuvah* and thereby bring the four kingdoms and all of humanity back to perfection and truth.

Honorable Mention II: Fear of Heaven Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

After Avimelech abducted Sarah, Hashem struck him and his household with a plague. He then repented and asked Avraham, "What did you see that you nearly caused me to violate such a terrible sin?" Avraham answered, "I saw that there was no fear of heaven in this place, and they might kill me." He meant that where there is no *yirat shamayim*, life is not valued. This became apparent during the Holocaust. The Nazi death units were staffed by the cream of German intelligentsia, yet they committed unspeakable crimes for lack of fear of

Hashem.

The Torah commandments that relate to not taking advantage of people who are weak or vulnerable repeatedly end with the words, "*V'yeyrayta me'Elokecha*," (you shall fear Hashem). Regarding the prohibition of not taking interest, the Torah says, "If your kinsman who is in difficult straits comes under your authority, do not exact interest from him, you should fear Hashem." Rashi says a lender may sense a legitimate need to take interest. He may feel as if he is wasting his money if he

does not. And because lenders often know that poor people have no recourse, they will charge them higher interest. Therefore, Hashem commands us to to fear Him, which will remind us to treat them justly.

Someone who doesn't believe in Hashem is likely to think he is the end all and be all and therefore he can do as he wishes. *Yirat shamayim* engenders compassion towards those who are weak, prevents us from fearing people more than the One Above, and brings us to wisdom and humility.

Practical Judaism: Reciting the Shema

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Ari Jacobson

Shema consists of three sections, *Shema* (which includes *V'ahavta*), *V'haya*, and *Va'yomer*. When one says *Va'yomer* one should have in mind to fulfill the positive daily commandment of remembering *Yetziat Mitzrayim* (the Exodus). The Rambam explains that *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was more than a major event in the formative stage of our nationhood. It demonstrated in an incredible way that Hashem continually closely governs the world. This is one reason there are so many *mitzvot* that connect directly or indirectly to the Exodus. In the concluding *bracha* of *Yishtabach*, we refer to Hashem as "*Melech chai h'olamim*," the King who continually sustains life. Hashem doesn't have to constantly prove himself to those who question His active involvement. He did it once in a very grand fashion and we are supposed to remember it and pass it down to our children.

There's a dispute whether the obligation to remember the Exodus applies only during the day or also at night. Therefore, we make mention of it at both times. The Magen Avraham says women are obligated in this *mitzvah* while the Shaagat Aryeh disagrees, since the *mitzvah* is time related. The generally accepted view is that women do say *Shema* including the section of *Va'yomer*.

There is a dispute in the Gemara if one can fulfill the obligation of *Shema* if one doesn't hear the words as he says them. According to the Rishonim, *bdieved*, one is *yotze*. But

preferably one should hear the words. However, if someone only reads with his lips so that no air comes out of his throat all opinions agree that one has not fulfilled the *mitzvah*. One should be careful to articulate the syllables, vowels, and letters of *Shema* correctly. Differentiation should be made between a *patach* and a *kamatz*, and between an *ayin* and an *aleph*. Any dialect of Hebrew that's accepted by a significant segment of the Jewish people is halachically acceptable.

Although the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch says one should not motion or make any gestures during the *Shema* and its accompanying *brachot*, there is one exception. When one recites *V'havi'ainu l'shalom*, one should take the four corners of the *tallit* and hold the *tzitzit* in the left hand between the right finger and the pinky, near the heart. When one reaches the paragraph of *Va'yomer*, the parsha of *tzitzit*, one should move them over to the right hand or hold them with the left and right hands. When reciting, *Ur'tem* one should pass them across one's eyes and look at them and kiss them. They should be held in one's hands until the words *V'nechmadim l'ad*, in the *bracha* that follows *Shema*. Then one should kiss them and release them. Although this practice isn't mentioned in the Gemara it has become an accepted custom.

After he finished reciting all of *Shema*, the chazzan repeats the last three words, Hashem *Elokeichem emet*. These last three words make a total of 248 words in *Shema*. This corresponds to the 248 limbs of the body and

the 248 positive commandments in the Torah. If one prays alone one should say *Kel Melech ne'eman* instead before *Shema*. Some poskim maintain that one shouldn't say it but rather repeat *Hashem Elokeichem emet*. This was the custom of the Divrei Chaim and is based on a Gemara in Yerushalmi. However, it is not the common practice.

A person may interrupt in the middle of *Shema* due to circumstances beyond his control, such as to relieve himself or to leave an unclean area. But if he pauses voluntarily for an amount of time that it would take to complete the whole *Shema*, he must repeat it from the beginning. If he already recited *Shema* and then entered a shul to find the *tzibur* reciting it, he should recite along with them so as not to give the appearance as though he is separating himself from the congregation. The Kitzur holds that it is sufficient to recite the first verse of *Shema* and *baruch shem*. The Gra disagrees and says one should ideally recite the entire *Shema*. If someone is in the middle of davening at a point where he can't interrupt, and the *tzibur* is already reciting *Shema*, he should put his hand on his eyes and recite aloud whatever he is in the middle of saying.

If a person arrived late to shul, he should say the *Shema* with the congregation and have in mind not to fulfill his obligation until he can be *yotze* the *Shema* in its proper form.