

Tehillim 146 – Al Tiftachu B'nedivim

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

This *mizmor* is recited daily right after Ashrei. "I shall sing to Hashem as long as I exist." *B'chai* can mean in my lifetime or with the way I live. If my life is one of *kiddush Hashem* it is a form of praise to Hashem. "Do not trust in princes, in the son of man, who has no salvation." According to many meforshim this is a prophetic statement on our attempt to rely on the non-Jewish nations to help us. Redak says this was written in Bavel. The Babylonian exile was supposed to be 70 years. Bavel was taken over by Persia and the nedivim mentioned here refer to the promises made by the Persians that we could return to the land and rebuild the Bet Hamikdash which was put on hold again and again. According to other commentators this was written in the time in which the Assyrian empire conquered the northern part of Israel and left a small settlement called Judea around the area of Jerusalem inhabited by the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin. The ten tribes were dispersed

and Yeshayahu Hanavi gave support to Chizkiyahu who was then under siege by the Assyrians. Yeshayahu prophesized that eventually all of Israel would be rebuilt and there would be an ingathering of all the tribes who would return to Israel.

"Praiseworthy is he in whose help is the God of Jacob; his hope is in the Lord his God." Why is he called Yaakov here and not Yisrael? We are referring to exile and the constant suffering and hate we endure. He was called Yaakov because he held unto the heel of Esav who despised him. Our sages taught, "...Eisav hates Yaakov." When Yaakov went to Charan he stopped off on the way, put rocks around his head, went to sleep, and had a dream. He saw a ladder with angels coming up and down. He saw there would be no possibility of coexistence with Eisav. Hashem promises him, "I am with you in your troubles. I will watch over wherever you go and will one day return

you to this land. For I will not abandon you until I have not fulfilled the promise I made to you." We will be Yaakov, trod upon and persecuted; but we will survive and come back to that land.

"The Lord guards the strangers; He strengthens the orphan and the widow, and He perverts the way of the wicked." Why is the *ger* singled out? The Torah commands us to love another Jew as oneself but a *ger* one must love more than oneself for he joins with us knowing full well that Jewish people are the most persecuted yet the most honorable of all nations. The *ger* is mentioned so many times in the Torah because he is the stranger, the different one bound only to Hashem and bows before no one else. He knows being Jewish comes at a risk and yet he chose to be courageous and joined us.

Yechezkel: Perek 39- Gog's End

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

Chapter 39 is the last chapter in Yechezkel that concerns itself with the prophecies of the era before *Mashiach*, the war of *Gog U'Magog*. It begins, "And you, Son of man, prophesy about Gog, and say; So says the Lord God: Lo! I am against you, O Gog, prince and head of Meshech and Tubal." Meshech and Tubal are the nations who will join up with Gog in the final war. These nations who are the descendants of the Persians are going to suffer Gog's fate to some degree because of their alliances. Hashem says, "I'll make you wild and entice you and cause you to go up from the furthest point of the north and I'll bring you to the mountains of Israel." Hashem says He will make it easier for them to do what they are planning to do. They will think they are carrying out the final solution so they can suffer the consequences of their free choice. In the end they will be destroyed and we will be saved.

"I'll strike the bow out of your left hand and I'll throw the arrow out of your right hand." The right and left hand symbolize the power

people have to be who they want to be. The left side symbolizes strength and severity. Waging war requires courage and the ability to disassociate from the enemy. They have to feel the justice of their cause. The right side is *chesed*, the sense of self-preservation and wanting goodness. There are always two factors involved in choice making. We encounter the same in reality. We have life and the counterpoint of death. Without death, life wouldn't have value, we wouldn't think about it. The same holds true with hunger and thirst were the value of being satisfied has to do with the possibility of experiencing lack. So there's always the force of what you don't want and do want. Similarly the nations that war against us, that come at us with the left side, opposing us for the sake of opposition, for whatever they represent, will be struck down by Hashem.

"And I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell in safety in the islands, and they will know that I am the Lord." There were always be people who aren't physically fighting but are still allied with the enemy. Even the seemingly security islands will not be able to escape Hashem's wrath.

"And I will make known My Holy Name in the midst of My people Israel, and I will no longer cause My Holy Name to be profaned, and the nations will know that I, the Lord, am holy in Israel." *Kedusha* is not constricted by time, place or agenda. When the day comes and the nations see they can no longer feel secure no matter where they are, then they will recognize that Hashem is the only true transcendental force. They will be compelled to admit that everything they relied, natural law, is really controlled by Hashem.

"Behold it is coming, and it will be, says the Lord God: that is the day whereof I have spoken." It's Hashem's intent and plan that we not know when the day of redemption will be and our history is replete with mistaken assumptions. In Egypt, the Jews knew they would be in exile for 400 years but when did the count begin? Similarly, there was confusion on when the exile would end in *Galut Bave* and Ahashveirosh misunderstood it. So the date of redemption is shrouded in mystery, but when it comes we'll know it.

Symbolic Stones: Parshat Vayetzei

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Adapted by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Parshat Vayetzei describes how Yaakov Avinu on his way to Charan, stopped off to sleep on Har Moriah. The Torah details how he took rocks and arranged them around his head, and when he awoke, there was one rock. The Midrash says that the rocks fought for the privilege of supporting Yaakov's head. Rashi explains that Yaakov arranged the rocks around the three sides of his head, keeping one stone as a pillow, to deter wild animals. How would these stones deter attacking beasts? Further, Chazal tell us that this stone became the cornerstone of the Beit Hamikdash. Let's explore its significance.

The Midrash says these were the stones of the altar of akeidat Yitzchak, and the Yefei Toar explains that although there were no stones around his body, Yaakov would sense an animal at his leg. The stones around his head would provide him with the few extra seconds to escape.

Rabbi Pinto asks an additional question. When man retains and reflects the true tzelem Elohim/image of God, animals are afraid of him. Certainly, Yaakov retained this image, so much so that the angels, seeing Yaakov's countenance at the Throne of Glory were in awe. Why did Yaakov find it necessary to add protection? Evil animals come to the world as a result of false oaths, and the false oath damages not only the oath taker, but also the one who extracted the oath. Yaakov was afraid that because he had made Esau swear to the sale of the birthright, he would be liable. For when Esau went to get Yitzchak's blessing, he said that Yaakov took the birthright from him, disavowing the legitimate sale. Since Yaakov had made Esau swear, he feared that he too would now be in danger. When one swears falsely, he is profaning the name of God. Animals never lie, are never false to their nature, writes Ethics of Our Fathers. Since Yaakov caused Esau to swear falsely retroactively, he was now afraid.

In truth, everything is in Hashem's hands, both the obviously miraculous and the seemingly natural. Since Yaakov knew this, he could sleep peacefully in spite of possible danger. But within this great faith, one must

also put in his own effort and make the miraculous appear natural. That is why Yaakov built a flimsy protection around his head, teaches the Saba of Kelm. We must do our minimum, but having done that, we must not keep worrying if we should have done more, adds Letitcha Elyon, based on Rav Yechezkel Levenstein. That doubt indicates a flaw in our emunah. It was this faith in Hashem that motivated the Chashmonaim to light the little bit of oil and hope that Hashem would add to their effort. Indeed, the miracle became supernatural, with eight days of light. Yaakov was teaching us that by doing a bare minimum, Hashem would do the rest.

This is the theme of Parshat Vayetzei, writes the Sifsei Chaim. While we must pray to Hashem, we must also do our own hishtadlus. The two are partners. While we do our natural work, we must acknowledge that the results are in Hashem's control.

The Tolna Rebbe takes our discussion into the allegorical realm. How is it possible that Yaakov Avinu thought it adequate to protect only his head? Because he was not protecting his body from wild animals, but his mind from evil thoughts that the yetzer hora would send to his mind at the vulnerable moments of going to asleep. We too must protect ourselves from the evil thoughts of the yetzer hora when we go to sleep.

Yaakov's action in a time of potential danger is meant to teach us how to act when we find ourselves in all kinds of danger, most particularly in spiritual danger. During times of spiritual upheaval in the streets of the city, we protect ourselves and pray that we retain clarity, recognize truth and retain our faith in Hakodosh Boruch Hu, writes Rabbi Walkin zt"l in Daas Chaim Umussar. [Rabbi Walkin was definitely speaking to our generation and the often subtle influence of the media in our woke generation. CKS]

In Chayei Moshe, Rabbi Bick explains that there are two ways to fight the yetzer hora, you can run away, or you can confront it. Yaakov Avinu initially avoids the yetzer hora by running to and learning in the yeshiva of Shem

and Ever for fourteen years. But now that he is about to enter the impure world of his uncle Lavan he needs to confront the yetzer hora "head on" and control it. The stones are a metaphor for the yetzer hora, the pitfalls the yetzer hora places in our path. When Yaakov awoke and felt he had gained control of the yetzer hora underneath his head, he named the place Beit El, the place to build the House of God.

When Yaakov arrived in Haran, he is confronted with a huge rock on the well. With his renewed spiritual strength, he rolled that stone off the well as if it were a cork in a bottle, and revealed the glory of God beneath.

Stones are the theme of this parshah. They appear at the beginning, on Yaakov's departure from his home, in the middle, arriving in Haran, and at the end, when Yaakov and Lavan formalize a treaty, notes the Rabbi Breslover in Lemachar Aatir. He notes, based on Rashi in Parshat Vayechi, that (a)even is a contraction of Av(b)/father and ben/son. [This is one reason one puts a stone on a matzevah, when visiting a parents grave.] These three episodes create the continuity from father to son and form the building blocks of the family that will become Bnei Yisroel. The first episode, putting the rocks under his head, represents Yaakov's mindset and goal of building the twelve Godly Tribes. He envisions the twelve individual tribes forming one nation that will all serve Hashem and build a House of God. Each Jewish home will be a mini Beit Hamikdash, and each Jewish table will be a mini altar.

The second episode, removing the rock, refers to the stage of actually building the twelve tribes, all of whom will contain the spiritual essence of the Patriarchs and draw up the spiritual waters. He must do the work and actualize the vision.

In the final episode, Yaakov Avinu builds a wall as a sign of strength that separates him from Lavan. He must leave Lavan, separate from that impurity, and raise his family in the sanctity of Eretz Yisroel. Yaakov, and we, must put in our effort and pray that Hashem blesses

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the results.

The Shvilei Pinchas, using a homiletic interpretation, puts this entire first episode into a historical perspective going back to Adam Harishon. Our Sages say that Yaakov was a reincarnation of Adam, and as such, he was tasked with rectifying the original sin. Since Adam brought death to the world, albeit inadvertently, he was exiled not to a refuge city, [obviously they hadn't yet been established, but the premise was laid here CKS] but out of Eden. Here too, Yaakov was "exiled" to Haran, fearing that Esau would kill him. When Yaakov realized Hashem had made night fall early, he understood the significance of this particular spot as the place where his father Yitzchak had been bound as an offering, and as the spot Adam himself had brought an offering to God. Therefore, he himself lay down on this same place, surrounding his head with rocks to protect it.

If we now examine the Torah account of

Adam's creation and the medrashim these verses elicit, we will note that Adam was created dust from the earth. The medrash says that while many parts of the body were formed from dust from all around the earth, Adam's head was formed from the dust where the Beit Hamikdosh would ultimately stand. Further, it was the organs of the head that enticed Eve/Adam to sin: Her ears heard the snake, her eyes saw the fruit as enticing, she touched and tasted the fruit. Therefore, suggests the Shvilei Pinchas, Yaakov Avinu wanted to surround his head to continue the tikun/rectification his father and grandfather had begun at this very site.

The Shvilei Pinchas continues with one further idea. Bnei Yisroel are privileged to live in Eretz Yisroel as long as their head is aligned with the will of Hashem. He sees in the name Yisroel/ישראל an anagram of לי ראש the head is mine/under my control. If your head is in control, you do not need to protect the rest of your body.

The Sichot Chizuk explains that when Yaakov Avinu took from the stones, he was teaching us that when we are confronted with challenges, we should take them, put them under our head, overcome them, and thereby elevate them, for under their darkness is great light. The struggle itself, taking these stones and putting them around your head, is what helps build the Beit Hamikdosh; it's what makes it a matzeivah/monument, adds Rabbi Silberberg in Sichot Hitchazkut. We don't want these challenges, but when we climb atop them, we come closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

Rabbi Belsky now focuses on the ladder. We must continue to climb, to strive, to keep the vision before us, knowing that we are obligated to do our work, but also accepting that the results are up to Hashem.

The stones that Yaakov Avinu encountered at different stages of his life represent history, vision and struggle. As such, they are more precious than diamonds.