

Parshat Vayitzei: Well, Well, Well

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In Parshat Vayitzei, the Torah tells us how Yaakov went to Charan to find a wife. When he arrived, he found a group of shepherds gathered around a well. He asked them why they were waiting and they replied that they needed more shepherds to come so they could roll the heavy stone off the well. Yaakov then saw Rachel drawing near with her sheep. He approached the well, rolled the stone off with his little finger, and watered her flock.

Rav Rice points out that the *ha'even hagedolah*, the great stone, refers to the *yetzer hara*. The *hei hayediah* implies that is a well-known stone that blocks us from drawing forth inspiration from our spiritual wells, namely, *Shabbat*, *Torah*, and *tefilah*. The perfect state of Adam before the sin was a state of innate connection to Hashem. When he sinned, he experienced a confusion in his ability to recognize truth. Adam's center turned towards himself and towards acquiring power, possessions, and honor. It took several generations before the *avot* shifted the trend. They bequeathed to us the strength to bring ourselves back to the state of Adam before the sin. Avraham gave us recognition of Hashem, Yitzchak showed us how to put the soul before the animal self, and Yaakov as the culminating father of the Jewish nation,

enabled the flow of spiritual appreciation to return to the soul, by teaching us how to remove egotistic self-interest.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that in reality Yaakov had no special powers. He saw Rachel and that she needed to water her sheep. He was overwhelmed by such a deep desire to help her that Hashem gave him the spiritual strength to roll the stone off. How do we take our *yetzer hara* off our well? We can tap into our innate spirituality by going beyond ourselves and passionately caring about others. Rav Shor asks, we know that Judaism places great significance on the right side. Why then is the heart of a person on the left side? He explains that it is actually in the right place. We are meant to give our hearts to others and so it is to the right of the person standing opposite us.

The Nesivos Sholom writes that Shabbat is a profound spiritual well. We can lift the stone blocking us from accessing its waters by tapping in to the strength of family, community, intense prayer, and learning Torah. Rav Pincus notes that we can also do so through *zachor* and *shamor*. *Zachor* means being aware of the Shabbat. If the groom doesn't know the bride is present, they cannot rejoice together. Knowing that Shabbat is here means being aware that this day has incredible power to

bring us closer to Hashem. *Shamor* means guarding the day from weekday influences. On Shabbat we can shake off the grip the modern world has on us, and cherish our private time with Hashem. Shabbat contains infinite wells of holiness, love, and *deveikut b'Hashem*. If we truly want it, it can be ours. Our ability to take the rock off the well of Torah learning and *tefilah* is the strength of the community. Attending a weekly *shiur*, designating a set time for learning, and having a study partner makes attaining Torah that much easier. So too, praying with the *tzibur* (community) helps us focus and diverts the negative forces of the *yetzer hara* that attempt to snatch our prayers.

The Sefas Emes asks, why did Yaakov ask the shepherds why they were waiting? Obviously they had already tried in the past to roll the stone off and weren't successful. Yaakov wanted to teach us a lesson for life that a person must never despair. Had the shepherds tried once more, they would've been successful. So if you tried to tap into the well of *Shabbat* or a *Torah shiur* or *tefilah* and you didn't succeed, try again. Every time you flex your spiritual muscles they become stronger. And if you keep on trying, eventually you'll get the stone off the well.

Chodesh Kislev

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

The Bnei Yissachar explains that the month of Kislev is *kas*, *lamed*, *vav*, the concealed thirty six. This alludes to the hidden thirty six *tzaddikim* who live in every generation. It also refers to the first thirty six hours in which a great light shone in the world. Kislev's essence is about the *ohr haganuz*, the hidden light.

The commentators explain the connection between Parshat Naso, the sacrifices of the *Nesiim* (tribal leaders) and Parshat Baha'alotcha. Aharon was distraught that he couldn't participate in the sacrifices. Hashem comforted him with the privilege of lighting the

menora.

The midrash Bamidbar Rabba relates a parable of a king who sent word to his beloved friend that he was coming for a visit. When the friend saw all the pomp and honor accompanying the king, he was ashamed by the simple fare he had prepared and he quickly hid it. When the king entered the poor cottage and saw the bare table he wondered about it. When the friend explained, the king said, "I'm not interested in what you own, but in you." Although Hashem has everything, he tells us, "The little lights of your menora are more precious to me than all the stars in the sky."

Hashem desires the works of our hands. He wants our *ratzon* (will) and our expression of love for Him as actualized through the Torah and *mitzvot*. Chanuka is about turning Greek darkness into light. A Torah is crafted from the hide of a cow, not such a clean animal. Through an involved process, it becomes a holy Torah. This is the message of Chanuka. Hashem tells us we can light up the world by working hard to refine ourselves.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin says, "A person is commanded to say, the world was created for me." Within each person there are thirty six hidden lights and we are like a *lamed vavnik*, a

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a hidden *tzaddik*. It is up to us to reveal the holiness within ourselves and other people.

All the letters in the word *Yavan* are straight. The Greek mindset was, 'What you see is what you get.' This kind of mentality has seeped into our society and we have to fight against it. A person must ask himself, "Am I the sum total of my accomplishments or is there a deeper side to me?"

When we add the letter 'hey' to *Yavan* it

becomes *yonah* (dove). A dove is always faithful to his mate. When we inject faith into our life, when we remember that there is something more profound, we can begin to reveal the hidden light within us. In Parshat Noach, we read how the dove came back to the ark with an olive branch. Hashem says just as the dove brought light to the world, the Jews will bring light to the world with the olive oil. This refers to the menorah in the *beit hamikdash* and Chanuka. We are the *yonah*. Our *avoda* (mission) in the month of Kislev is

to reveal the points of righteousness in ourselves and others.

The sum total of lights on Chanukah is thirty six, which is what the holiday is about. The stories we tell about *lamed vavniks* who appeared so coarse and uncouth aren't just folklore. They teach that within each of us, no matter how far we have fallen, is Kislev, the thirty six hidden lights waiting to be revealed.

Parshat Vayetzei: A Holy Nation

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

If we examine the lives of Avraham and Yitzchak we find that they overcame many challenges and then Hashem blessed them. However, with Yaakov, it seems like things happened in reverse. Yitzchak blessed him and then Yaakov embarked on a long journey filled with difficulties and struggles. What was the difference between Yaakov and the other *avot*?

in Tehilim it says, "*Ashrei shomrei mishpat oseh tzedaka b'chol eit*. Praised is the person who protects justice and does charity at all times." The Zohar links this verse to Yaakov who combined *chesed* and *gevura*. *Mishpat* is internal justice between one Jew and another. *Tzedaka* is spreading knowledge of Hashem to all four corners of the earth. The Shem MiShmuel explains that during the first stage of the development of Eretz Yisrael, the Jews were led by the *shoftim*. The *shoftim* merely enforced justice within the land but did not lead the people to war to expand their boundaries. However, during the second stage of transition, when the kings ruled, they transformed Israel from a nation completely focused on

itself to a nation that expanded outwards to influence other foreign countries. This teaches that first we must be a *goy kadosh*, a holy nation. We must strengthen ourselves spiritually. Then we can become a *mamlechet kohanim*, a model nation whose mission it is to spread the word of Hashem to the world.

Similarly, this was the story of Yaakov's life. In the beginning he was an "*Ish tam yoshev ohalim*," a shofet Jew sitting in the tents of Torah, fortifying himself to face the challenges ahead. Then Hashem led him to Charan as it says, "*Vayelech Charona*." Charon means anger and strife. The world outside Israel was mired in sin and wickedness. Yaakov went to live with Lavan who was the essence of evil. Lavan wanted to uproot the faith of Yaakov. Yaakov, with his own power and that of the *Avot*, succeeded in overcoming him by building a Jewish family and bringing Torah and *mitzvot* into Charan itself. He achieved the mission of a king. Subsequently, Hashem commanded him to return. At that point, by facing Lavan and overcoming his challenges, Yaakov had advanced spiritually to the point that he could defeat Esav, something he could not have done

before.

When Yaakov overcame the angel of Esav, the angel called him Yisrael. Yaakov implies a narrow focus while Yisrael connotes openness. A Jew must maintain a dual focus. Sometimes it is microscopic, such as focusing detailed attention to *halacha*. Sometimes it is telescopic, assuming the responsibility of spreading Hashem's word to the world. In Parshat Yitro, when Hashem commands Moshe to speak to the women, He said, "Thus you should speak *I'beit Yaakov*, to the house of Yaakov" because women are meant to focus on the internal part of Torah. The rest of the Jewish people are Yisrael. As much as Torah is for us, we need to influence others externally through our example and teachings.

Let us take strength from Yaakov's victory over the angel of Esav and over the Lavan ideology. As we face the myriad challenges of life, may He grant us the power to be a *Mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh*, to become the spiritual giants and moral leaders of the world.