

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

## Vayeitzei

Genesis 28:10-32:3

Week of November 30-December 6, 2003

"And Jacob went out from Be'er-Sheva, and he went toward Charan." So opens the Parshah of *Vayeitzei* ("and he went out"), which describes the 20 years Jacob spent on the outside — outside of the Holy Land, and outside of the "tents of learning" within which he had been sheltered for the first half of his life.

Going towards Charan, Jacob encounters the place (as the Torah simply refers to it). Night had suddenly fallen, so Jacob "took of the stones of that place, and put them at his head, and lay down in that place."

And he dreamed.

A ladder stood on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it.

G-d was standing over him; and He said:

"I am the L-rd, the G-d of Abraham your father, and the G-d of Isaac. The land on which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed.

"And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and you shall burst forth to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

"G-d is in this place, and I knew it not," exclaimed Jacob upon waking. "How awesome is this place: this is no other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate of heaven."

Jacob takes "the stone which he had put under his head"

## Commentary

AND JACOB WENT OUT FROM BE'ER SHEVA, AND HE WENT TO CHARAN (GENESIS 28:10)

The story of Jacob's journey to Charan is the story of every soul's descent to the physical world.

The soul, too, leaves behind the spiritual idyll of Be'er Sheva (literally, "Well of the Seven" — a reference to the supernal source of the seven divine attributes or sefirot from which the soul derives) and journeys to Charan (literally, "Wrath"): a place of lies, deceptions, struggle and hardship; a place in which material concerns consume one's days and nights, sapping one's energy, confusing one's priorities, and all but obscuring the purpose for which one has come there in the first place.

Yet it is in Charan, in the employ of Laban the Deceiver, not in the Holy Land and its "tents of learning," that Jacob founds the nation of Israel. It is here that he marries and fathers eleven of the twelve sons who will become the twelve tribes of Israel. Had Jacob remained in the Holy Land, the life of this pious scholar who lived 3,500 years ago would have been of no significance to us today.

The soul, too, achieves its enduring significance only upon its descent into "Charan." Only as a physical being, invested within a physical body and inhabiting a physical environment, can it fulfill the purpose of its creation, which is to build "a dwelling for G-d in the physical world."

*(From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

AND HE ENCOUNTERED THE PLACE (28:11)

"The place" is Mount Moriah (the "Temple Mount" in Jerusalem, where Abraham had bound Isaac upon the altar and where King Solomon would erect the Holy Temple).

*(Rashi)*

Why do we call G-d Hamakom, "The Place"? Said Rabbi Jose ben Chalafta: We do not know whether G-d is the place of His world or whether His world is His place. But when the verse (Exodus 33:21) states, "Behold, there is a place with Me," it follows that G-d is the place of His world, but

His world is not His place.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: Our patriarchs instituted the three daily prayers. Abraham instituted the morning prayer, for it says (Genesis 19:27): "And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before G-d." Isaac instituted the afternoon prayer, as it says (Gen. 24:63), "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening." Jacob instituted the evening prayer, as it says, "And he encountered The Place... because the sun had set."

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

AND HE SLEPT OVER THE NIGHT THERE BECAUSE THE SUN HAD SET (28:11)

G-d caused the sun to set prematurely, so that Jacob should sleep over ... For G-d said: "Should this righteous man enter My home, and depart without staying the night?"

*(Talmud; Rashi)*

AND HE LAY DOWN IN THAT PLACE (28:11)

Here he lay down to sleep, but during the fourteen years of his seclusion in the Holy Land when he studied under Eber he did not lie down... Here he lay down to sleep, but during the entire twenty years he spent in Laban's house he did not lie down.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

A LADDER STOOD ON THE EARTH, AND THE TOP OF IT REACHED TO HEAVEN (28:12)

This is prayer.

*(Zohar)*

THE LAND ON WHICH YOU LIE, TO YOU WILL I GIVE IT, AND TO YOUR SEED (28:13)

G-d rolled up the whole of the land of Israel and put it under our father Jacob, to indicate to him that it would be very easily conquered by his descendants.

*(Talmud, Rashi)*

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and designates it as an altar by pouring oil on it. He then makes a vow:

If G-d will be with me, and safeguard me on this road that I am traveling, and He will provide me with bread to eat and clothes to wear—

And I will return in peace to my fathers house; and G-d will be my G-d—

And this stone, which I have erected as a monument, shall be the house of G-d; and all that You give to me, I shall tithe to You.

At the Well

Jacob now proceeds to Charan, where he encounters a group of shepherds waiting with their flocks at a well. The well is covered with a huge stone. The shepherds explain:

only after all the other shepherds have gathered will they be able, with their combined strength, to roll the stone off the well and water their flocks.

As they speak, Rachel, arrives at the well with her father's sheep.

And when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother... he rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flocks of Laban...

And Jacob kissed Rachel, and raised his voice, and wept.

Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kin, and that he was Rebecca's son; and she ran and told her father.

Laban extends a warm welcome to his nephew. Jacob tells his uncle all that has happened to him, and becomes a shepherd of his flocks.

The Deception

A month goes by, and Laban says to Jacob: "Because you are my brother, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me what your wages shall be."

And Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.

## Commentary

AND JACOB ROSE UP EARLY IN THE MORNING, AND TOOK THE STONE THAT HE HAD PUT UNDER HIS HEAD (28:18)

But earlier in it says, "And he took of the stones of the place, and put them under his head." This tells us that all the stones gathered themselves together into one place and each one said: "Upon me shall this righteous man rest his head." Thereupon all were merged into one.

(Talmud, Chulin 91b)

JACOB... TOOK THE STONE ... AND SET IT AS A MONUMENT; AND HE Poured OIL ON ITS HEAD (28:18)

Monuments are built of stone. For a more monumental monument, one takes bigger and more substantial stones. What is the oil all about?

But in order for the monument to be a house of G-d (as Jacob proclaimed, And this stone which I have set as a monument shall be the house of G-d), one requires oil.

Oil is extracted from the olive only when it is trod upon and crushed. Oil thus represents a person's self-abnegation and submission to G-d.

To walk away from Ebers house — to walk away from fourteen years of in-depth Torah study to begin dealing with the material world, as Jacob did with his move to Charan, requires a great deal of oil. Only one who has totally abnegated his own will to that of G-d's is capable of such sacrifice.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

THIS... SHALL BE THE HOUSE OF G-D (28:22)

Not like Abraham, with whom it is called a "mountain" (Genesis 22:14); not like Isaac, with whom it is called a "field" (Genesis 24:63); but like Jacob, who called it a "house".

(Talmud, Pesachim 88a)

[LABAN] RAN TO MEET HIM, AND EMBRACED HIM, AND KISSED HIM, AND BROUGHT HIM TO HIS HOUSE. AND HE TOLD LABAN ALL THESE THINGS (29:13)

Laban reasoned: Eliezer was but an unimportant member of Abraham's household, yet he came with ten camels laden with gifts; how much more then this man, who is the beloved of his home! But when he did not even see his wallet, "he embraced him," thinking: perhaps he has money in his girdle. On finding nothing at all, "he kissed him," thinking: he may have precious stones which he is hiding in his mouth. Said Jacob to him: "What do you think, that I come laden with wealth? I have come laden with naught but words," and so, "He told Laban all these things."

(Midrash Rabbah)

Elifaz the son of Esau had, at his father's command, chased after Jacob to kill him, and had caught up with him. But since Elifaz had grown up in Isaac's lap, he was reluctant to kill Jacob. Said he to Jacob: "What shall I do about my father's command?" Said Jacob: "Take everything I have, and a pauper is like a dead person."

(Rashi)

LEAH'S EYES WERE WEAK (29:17)

She heard that people were saying at the crossroads: "Rebecca has two sons, and Laban has two daughters; the elder will marry the elder, and the younger will marry the younger. And she sat at the crossroads and inquired: "How does the elder one conduct himself?" "He is a wicked man, a highway robber." "How does the younger man conduct himself?" "A wholesome man dwelling in tents." And she wept until her eyelashes fell out.

(Talmud, Bava Batra 123a)

AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT IN THE MORNING, BEHOLD, IT WAS LEAH (29:25)

When Jacob said to Rachel, "Will you marry me?" she replied to him: "Yes, but father is a sharper, and you will not be able to hold your own against

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Leah's eyes were weak; but Rachel was of beautiful form and of beautiful appearance.

Jacob loved Rachel; and he said: "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter."

Jacob toils seven years for Rachel's hand. "And they seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

Finally, the wedding day arrived. But then came a most bitter disappointment:

And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah.

And he said to Laban: "What is this that you have done to me? Did not I serve with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?"

"It is not so done in our country," is Laban's explanation, "to give the younger before the firstborn." But if you promise to work for me for another seven years, says Laban, you can marry Rachel, too, at the end of end of the week of Leah's marriage celebrations.

And he married also Rachel, and he loved Rachel more than Leah; and he served with [Laban] yet another seven years.

Eleven Sons and a Daughter

"G-d saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb," giving her four sons in succession: Reuben, Simon, Levi and Judah.

Rachel remains barren and is jealous of her fruitful sister. Following Sarah's example, she urges Jacob to marry her handmaid, Bilhah, so "that I may also have children, by her."

## Commentary

him."

"I am his equal in trickery," said Jacob.

Asked Rachel: "May the righteous indulge in trickery?"

Said Jacob: "Yes. 'With the pure be pure, and with the crooked be crafty' (II Samuel 22:27)."

So Jacob gave over to Rachel identifying signals [to protect themselves against Laban's deception]. But when Leah was being led into the bridal chamber, Rachel thought, "My sister will now be disgraced," and she entrusted her with these signals... Thus Jacob did not know that it was Leah he married until morning.

(Talmud; Rashi)

All that night, Leah was impersonating Rachel. When Jacob woke in the morning and saw that she was Leah, he said to her: "Daughter of The Deceiver! Why have you deceived me?" Said she to him: "And you, did you not deceive your father, when he asked you, 'Are you my son Esau?'"

## FULFILL HER WEEK, AND WE WILL GIVE YOU [RACHEL] ALSO (29:27)

From this verse is derived the practice of the week of celebrations following a wedding ("Sheva Berachot").

(Avot d'Rabbi Natan)

## AND HE LOVED RACHEL MORE THAN LEAH (29:30)

The Hebrew words vaye'ehav gam et Rachel mi-Leah also translate, "and he loved Rachel more from Leah" — i.e. he loved her even more because of her noble deed in giving over the identifying signals to Leah, lest her sister be shamed.

(Kedushat Levi)

## AND HE SERVED WITH HIM YET ANOTHER SEVEN YEARS (29:30)

Jacob served Laban as faithfully in the second seven years as he did in the first, even though he had been tricked into them by Laban's deception.

(Rashi)

AND [LEAH] SAID: "NOW THIS TIME WILL MY HUSBAND BE JOINED (YILAVEH) TO ME, BECAUSE I HAVE BORN HIM THREE SONS"; THEREFORE WAS HIS NAME CALLED LEVI (29:34)

A woman who has one child, carries it on her arm; when she has two children, both her arms are full; when her third child is born, her husband has no choice but to help her out... Thus Leah said: "Now this time will my husband be joined to me, because I have born him three sons."

(Chizkuni)

## AND AFTERWARDS SHE BORE A DAUGHTER AND CALLED HER NAME DINAH (30:21)

What is meant by "afterwards"? Rav said: After Leah had passed judgment on herself, saying, "Twelve tribes are destined to issue from Jacob. Six have issued from me and four from the handmaids, making ten. If this child will be a male, my sister Rachel will not be equal to one of the handmaids." So she prayed that the child should turn into a girl.

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

## AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN RACHEL HAD GIVEN BIRTH TO JOSEPH, THAT JACOB SAID TO LABAN: "SEND ME AWAY, THAT I MAY GO TO MY OWN PLACE, AND TO MY COUNTRY" (30:25)

As soon as Esau's nemesis was born, Jacob no longer feared to return to the Holy Land; as it is written (Obadiah 1:18): "And the House of Jacob shall be fire, the House of Joseph shall be flame, and the House of Esau — straw."

(Rashi)

## I WILL AGAIN FEED AND KEEP YOUR FLOCKS (30:31)

This profession is a most desirable one, seeing that all the prophets occupied themselves with it. Regarding Jacob it is written, "I will again feed and keep your flock"; regarding Moses it is written, "And Moses was shepherding the flocks of Jethro" (Exodus 3:1); regarding David it is written, "And He took him from the sheep pens"; regarding Amos it is written, "I

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Bilhah gives birth to a son, Dan, and then to another, Naftali. Not to be outdone, Leah gives *her* handmaid, Zilpah, as a wife to Jacob. Zilpah bears two children, Gad and Asher.

The competition between the sisters to bear sons for Jacob continues. On the night on which Leah "hires" Jacob from Rachel in exchange for mandrakes picked in the field by her son Reuben, Leah conceives a fifth son, Isaachar. She then gives birth to yet another son, Zebulun, and to a daughter, Dinah.

Finally,

G-d remembered Rachel; and G-d hearkened to her [prayers], and opened her womb.

And she conceived, and bore a son...And she called his name Joseph, to say: "G-d shall add ('yosef') another son to me."

Jacob is Rich

Joseph was born at the end of the second seven-year period of Jacob's work in Laban's service, and Jacob now expressed his desire to return to the Holy Land.

But Laban was loath to let him go; his flocks had greatly prospered in the years that Jacob worked for him. "Set your wages," he says to his son-in-law, "and I will give them to you."

Jacob agrees that it is time that "I earn something for my own house, as well." He proposes that, in return for his labor, he should be given all the sheep and goats that will be born with dark markings. Laban consents, but then attempts to minimize Jacob's profits by changing their arrangement "tens of times": when many spotted sheep are born, he decrees that Jacob will get the striped sheep; when many striped sheep are born, he changes that to speckled sheep.

Jacob, however, bests Laban at his own game:

Jacob took rods of fresh poplar, and of the almond and plane tree; and he peeled white streaks in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods.

And he set the rods which he had peeled before the flocks... And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle streaked, speckled, and spotted.

Six years went by, during which Jacob "prospered exceedingly; and he had much sheep, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses."

## Commentary

am a herdsman" (Amos 7:14).

(Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 8)

AND IT WAS TOLD TO LABAN... THAT JACOB HAD FLED... AND HE PURSUED AFTER HIM A SEVEN DAYS' JOURNEY; AND OVERTOOK HIM IN THE MOUNTAIN OF GILAD (31:22-23)

Jacob had left behind holy letters which he had not yet extracted from Laban. This is why Laban pursued him — to give him the letters which remained with him. An entire chapter was added to the Torah by these letters.

(Ohr HaTorah)

In other words, there are two types of "sparks of holiness" that a person redeems in the course of his life. The first are those which he consciously pursues, having recognized the potential for sanctity and goodness in an object or event in his life. The second are those which pursue him: opportunities which he would never have realized on his own — indeed, he may even do everything in his power to avoid them — since they represent potentials so lofty that they cannot be identified by his humanly finite perception. So his redemption of these "sparks" can only come about unwittingly, when his involvement with them is forced upon him by circumstances beyond his control.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

"ANYONE WITH WHOM YOU FIND YOUR GODS, LET HIM NOT LIVE" .... FOR JACOB KNEW NOT THAT RACHEL HAD STOLEN THEM (31:32)

This was "Like an error which proceeds from a ruler" (Ecclesiastes 10:4) which must nevertheless be carried out. It was because of these words spoken by Jacob that Rachel died in childbirth shortly thereafter.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND LABAN ANSWERED AND SAID TO JACOB: "THESE DAUGHTERS ARE MY DAUGHTERS, AND THESE CHILDREN ARE MY CHILDREN, AND THESE CATTLE ARE MY CATTLE..." (31:43)

The modern-day Laban has the same argument to the "Jacobs" of the world. "The children belong to me," says Laban. "You, Jacob, are fine the way you are: a man raised in the old country whose natural habitat is the tents of Torah learning and prayer. But what do you want of the children? They belong to another generation, another world. They must be raised in the spirit of the times, equipped to earn a living and a place in society. Do you truly expect them to negotiate modern life with nothing but your ancient tomes? You, Jacob, are fine the way you are; but leave the children to me..."

And Laban also says: "The cattle is my cattle, Jacob. I wouldn't dream of interfering with your spiritual life, rabbi — I'll be the first to admit that I'm no authority on religion. By all means, consult your sacred books on how to keep the Shabbat or how to light your Chanukah candles. But when it comes to business affairs, do you think that the stock market conforms to the standards of the Shulchan Aruch? That you can retain both your competitive edge and your talmudic ethics? You'll be eaten alive out there. Reserve your

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## Flight from Charan

After twenty years in Charan, G-d appears to Jacob and tells him that it is time to go home.

Jacob takes his family and possessions and flees in secret. Before going, Rachel removes the idols from her father's house.

Laban and his men give chase. Seven days later, they make camp on Mount Gilad; Jacob and his family are across the valley, on the opposite mountain. That night Laban has a dream in which G-d warns him against harming Jacob.

The next day, Laban confronts his son-in-law. "Why did you run away?" he cries. "And why did you steal my gods?"

"I went in stealth," says Jacob, "because I knew that you wouldn't let me take your daughters with me. As for your stolen gods, whoever took them shall die!" Jacob did not know that his beloved Rachel was the culprit.

Laban searches Jacob's camp, but finds nothing. Now it is Jacob who vents his anger at Laban:

"What is my crime, and what is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued after me?"

"These twenty years have I been with you; your ewes and your she-goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flock... In the daytime the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from my eyes..."

"I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your cattle; and you changed my wages tens of times.

"Were it not that the G-d of my father, the G-d Of Abraham, and the Awe of Isaac, had been with me, surely you would have sent me away empty. G-d has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and He rebuked you last night..."

Laban is unrepentant. "These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that you see is mine," he claims. But he offers that they make a pact, to be attested to by a mound of stones, that "I will not pass over this mound to you, and that you will not pass over this mound and this pillar to me, for harm." They pile up the stones, make the pact and share a meal. Laban in turn heads back to Charan,

And Jacob went on his way. And angels of G-d met him

to escort him into the Holy Land.

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piety for the synagogue and study hall, but do yourself a favor — leave the cattle to me, okay?"

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

AND JACOB WENT ON HIS WAY, AND ANGELS OF G-D MET HIM... AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE MACHANAYIM ("TWO CAMPS") (32:2-3)

There were two camps of angels: the angels connected with the world outside of the Holy Land, who had accompanied him, and angels of the Holy Land, who came toward him.

*(Rashi)*

BUT IN THE VERY NEXT VERSE (32:4), WE FIND JACOB DISPATCHING THE NEWLY-ARRIVED HOLY LAND ANGELS TO ESAU!

Said the Rebbe of Kotzk: A Jew in the Holy Land has no need for angels. Here, where one has ready access to G-d Himself, Jacob had no desire to deal with any divine emissary, no matter how exalted.

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## FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

## SLEEP ON IT

Most people who have a brain would agree that it is a most useful tool. But there is considerable disagreement as how and when to use it.

Some would say: "I use my intellect for the physical-material challenges of life: to run my business, write a resume, purchase a home, build a boat, program the VCR. These are the kinds of things for which reason and logic will serve as dependable guides. But when it comes to my inner, spiritual life — my religious convictions, my love for my family, my times for meditation and prayer — these cannot be rationalized or weighed with the scales of logic. These are areas in which I surrender to my subconscious, intuitive self."

Others take an opposite approach. "On the contrary," they say, "the spiritual side of life is where the mind's guidance is most necessary. Precisely because of its loftiness and subtlety, it is most vulnerable to corruption. Regarding my material endeavors, I can allow myself to operate on 'automatic pilot'; besides, they're not that important to me — if they don't work out exactly as they should, it's not the end of the world. But in my spiritual life, which is much more important to me, I want to get it right. There, I submit my every action, thought and feeling to the most precise measuring tool I've got — my intellect."

Who's right and who's wrong? According to a fascinating Midrash about Jacob's sleeping habits, both are wrong.

In the 28th chapter of Genesis, we read how Jacob, while journeying from the Holy Land to Charan, spends a night on Mount Moriah (the "Temple Mount"):

He encountered the place; he slept there, for the sun had set ... and he lay down in that place.

As our Sages repeatedly emphasize, the Torah does not contain a single extra word or letter. So what is the meaning of the seemingly superfluous line, "and he lay down in that place"? (The Torah already told us that "he slept there.") What message is hidden in these words?

Says the Midrash:

In that place he lay down, but for all of the fourteen years that he was hidden in the house of Eber he did not lie down... In that place he lay down, but for all of the twenty years that he was in Laban's house, he did not lie down.

"That night", the night that Jacob spent at the holiest place on earth, was framed by the most intensely spiritual and the most intensely material periods of his life. For fourteen years prior to that night, Jacob was secluded in the home of his teacher Eber (Noah's great-great-grandson), devoting his every moment to the pursuit of the divine wisdom. For twenty years following that night, Jacob worked in the employ of his conniving uncle Laban, tending Laban's sheep and amassing a fortune of his own; by his own testimony, his devotion to the task was so absolute that "sleep escaped my eyes" (Genesis 31:40).

But during the one night that interposed between and joined these two periods, Jacob "lay down."

A person lying down positions his head and the rest of his body on the same plane. By doing so, he surrenders the most important advantage that a human has over all other animals — the fact that, in the human being, the head is positioned *above* the body.

Because, as the Chassidic masters teach, man's upright stature is much more than a feature of his physical anatomy. Rather, it reflects a deeper truth: that in the human being, the mind rules the heart, the head is master of the physical self. This, writes Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi in his Tanya, is man's "inborn nature." A person who allows himself to be ruled by his emotions or instincts is a person who has renounced the most important feature of his humanity, the most important priority of man over beast.

This, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is the deeper significance of the Midrash's statement that Jacob did not "lie down" during his 14 years in the house of Eber, nor during his 20 years in Laban's employ. Jacob is telling us that the "mind rules the heart" rule applies to *all* areas of life, from the most spiritual endeavor to the most material occupation.

All areas of life, that is, except when you're on Mount Moriah.

Because there is also a higher truth. A truth that transcends physicality and spirituality; a truth surpasses both intellect and instinct.

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G-d is neither spiritual nor physical. He created both realms, and is equally present in both. He provided us avenues of connection to His higher truth in both venues: prayer, for example, is a spiritual venue of connection to G-d, while giving charity is a physical pathway. And He provided us with a guide — our rational mind — with which to navigate both areas of life.

But we also need to be connected to the higher divine truth that transcends spirit and matter. Indeed, it is only because of this connection that we can inhabit two such diverse worlds and even incorporate them both into our lives.

That's why Jacob had to spend a night on Mount Moriah, site of the Holy Temple, the place of G-d's deepest self-revelation to man and man's ultimate commitment in his service of G-d: . Only an encounter with with Mount Moriah can bridge our "Eber years" and our "Laban years". Only an encounter with Mount Moriah can place our spiritual endeavors and our material pursuits in the same life, cause them to dwell harmoniously with each other and even feed and nourish each other, and impose the same standards of integrity on both.

But on Mount Moriah there are no rules and no tools. You cannot grasp or apprehend, you cannot rationalize or experience. You can only surrender to it. You can only lie down.

Our Mount Moriah moments are extremely rare. For Jacob, a single night was enough for 34 years. What's important is not how often they come or how long they last, but that their influence should pervade everything we do.

*By Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org*

## SOMEWHERE BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

Most of us in these spiritual 00's profess a "spiritual side", a "religious self" or however else we might refer to that part of ourselves that's in touch with Something Higher. So the question is not really do we have it, but what exactly is it. Is it a self-improvement thing, like a woodworking class or a therapy session? Is it a duty, like obeying the law of the land and going

to work in the morning? Or is it simply who you are?

The Talmud, addressing this question more than 1500 years ago, put it in these terms: what do you call the place that G-d occupies in your life—a mountain, a field, or a house?

It was something else to each of the three founding fathers of the Jewish people. There is a place—the Temple Mount in Jerusalem—which the Torah regards as the focal point of G-d's presence in our world. When Abraham was there, it's called "the mountain of G-d's revelation." To Isaac, the place was a "field". Jacob spent a night there and proclaimed it "the house of G-d."

The Kabbalists sum up the lives of the three Patriarchs this way: Abraham was the embodiment of love, Isaac personified awe, and Jacob was the essence of truth.

The problem with love is that it can go too far, bearing down on the boundary between self and other to the extent that it becomes smothering and decadent. Abraham was the perfection of love, but his son, Ishmael, was an example of love run amok. The problem with humility, commitment and self-discipline is that it can congeal into cruelty—Esau is an example of Isaacness corrupted.

Truth, on the other hand, is what it is; not because it is reaching for something or recoiling from something. Truth is love that respects boundaries; truth is commitment tempered with compassion. Truth is not a mountain, a distended piece of earth trying to be heaven; nor is it a field, flattening itself to the ground to submit to the plow and spade. Truth is a home: a place that shelters life, facilitates its needs, enables it to be itself.

Of course, the home cannot exist without the mountain and the field. Truth without passion is dead; truth without commitment is ungrounded. To become ourselves, we must climb our mountains and work our fields. But we must remember that life truly lived is not to achieve or to submit, but to inhabit our achievements and commitments. Or as the Midrash expresses it: to make the world a home for G-d.

*By Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org*

## HOME OF STONE

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

## FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

Why are we here?

All possible answers to this question fall under two general categories: a) For ourselves (to enjoy life/ realize our potential/ achieve transcendence/ etc.). b) In service of something greater than ourselves (society/ history/ G-d).

What makes this question so difficult to address is that we sense both a and b to be true. On the one hand, we are strongly driven to better ourselves, to get the most out of every experience and opportunity. We also sense that this is not a shallow selfishness, but something very deep and true in our souls — something implanted in us by our Creator as intrinsic to our identity and purpose. On the other hand, we are equally aware that we are part of something greater than ourselves — that if our existence has meaning it is only because it serves a reality beyond its own finite and subjective being.

Indeed, we find both sensibilities expressed by the Torah and in the words of our sages. On the one hand, the Torah — in passages such as Deuteronomy 11:13-21 (the 2nd portion of the Shema) and Leviticus 12:3-13 — repeatedly stresses that G-d's program for life is for the good of man, both materially and spiritually. "The Mitzvot were given only to refine humanity," says the Midrash. The Talmud even goes so far as to state: "Every man is obligated to say: The world was created for my sake." Thus the Chassidic Masters describes the saga of the soul as a "descent for the purpose of ascent" — the soul's entry into the physical state entails a diminution of its spiritual faculties and sensitivities, but the purpose of it all is that it be elevated by the challenges and achievements of earthly life.

On the other hand, the highest praise that the Torah has for Moses (whom Maimonides calls the most perfect human being) is that he was a servant of G-d. Our sages repeatedly exhort us to strive for altruism in our lives, so that everything we do is permeated with the recognition that "I was not created, but to serve my Creator" (Talmud, Kiddushin 82b; see also Ethics of the Fathers, 1:3; Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance ch. 10; and numerous other).

To understand the interplay between these two apparently disparate aspirations, and the respective places they hold in our lives purpose, we must first

examine a juncture in the life of Jacob, father of the people of Israel.

## Archetypal Journey

"Everything," writes Nachmanides, "that happened to the Patriarchs (the progenitors of the Jewish nation, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), is a signpost for their children. This is why the Torah elaborates in its account of their journeys, their well-digging and the other events [of their lives]... These all come to instruct the future: when something happens to one of the three Patriarchs, one understands from it what is decreed to occur to his descendants." More than role models or sources of inspiration, the lives of our forefathers are all-inclusive blueprints that map every fork and turn in the road of our lives and address every dilemma and paradox that may confront us.

In the 28th chapter of Genesis, the Torah recounts Jacobs departure from the Holy Land, where he had spent the first half of his life immersed in the "tents of learning," and his journey to Charan. In Charan, Jacob worked for twenty years in the employ of his conniving uncle, Laban, in the midst of a corrupt and debased society (the name *Charan*, which means "wrath," reflects the fact that it was "the object of G-d's wrath in the world"). Throughout it all, Jacobs remained true to G-d and man, serving Laban honestly even as the latter repeatedly swindled him, scrupulously observing all 613 commandments of the Torah (cf Rashi on Genesis 32:5) and retaining all that he had learned in his years of study (ibid., 33:18); he even prospered materially, amassing considerable wealth. In Charan, Jacob also married and fathered eleven of the twelve sons who were to yield the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jacobs journey to Charan is the story of every soul's descent to earth. The soul, too, leaves a spiritual idyll behind — an existence steeped in divine awareness and knowledge — to struggle in the employ of a "Laban" in a Charan environment. For the material state is a nefarious deceiver, accentuating the corporeal and obscuring the G-dly, confusing the soul's priorities and perpetually threatening its virtue. But every soul is empowered, as a child of Jacob, to make this a "descent for the purpose of ascent": to emerge from the Charan of material earth with its integrity intact and its memory true. Indeed, not only does it return with its spiritual powers galvanized by the challenge, it is also a "wealthier" soul, having learned to exploit the forces and resources of the



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physical world to further its spiritual ends. Most significantly, in its spiritual state the soul is perfect but childless; only as a physical being on physical earth can it fulfill the divine mitzvot, which are the souls progeny and its link to the infinite and the eternal.

## Jacob's Oath

On his way to Charan, Jacob camped for the night on Mount Moriah. There he had his famous dream, in which he saw angels ascending and descending a ladder reaching from earth to heaven and received G-d's blessing. Upon waking, Jacob took the stone (on which he had slept) and raised it as a monument. He then made an oath, which the Torah relates in the following three verses (Genesis 28:20-22):

*If G-d will be with me, and safeguard me on this road that I am traveling, and He will provide me with bread to eat and clothes to wear;*

*and I will return in peace to my father's house, and G-d will be my G-d;*

*and this stone, which I have erected as a monument, shall be a house of G-d...*

The syntactical construction of Jacob's oath, as written in the Torah, raises several questions. The oath consists of two parts: a) the preconditions for its fulfillment ("if G-d will be with me, provide me bread to eat and clothes to wear," etc.). b) What Jacob is promising to do (e.g. "this stone... shall be a house of G-d"). What is not clear is where the former ends and the latter begins. The first of the three verses is obviously part of the conditions — things that G-d will do for Jacob to enable him to fulfill his vow. The same applies to the first part of the second verse — "and I will return in peace to my father's house." The third verse speaks of what Jacob will do for G-d. But what about the second part of the second verse, "and G-d will be my G-d?" Is this part of the necessary conditions for the vow's fulfillment, or is it part of the vow's objective?

Indeed, two of the greatest biblical commentators, Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105) and Nachmanides (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270), debate this very point. According to Rashi, the first two verses are the conditions, while the third verse is the substance of Jacob's vow — in order for Jacob to make the stone a house of G-d, he requires to experience the Almighty as his G-d. Nachmanides,

however, sees the words "and G-d will be my G-d" as part of the vow itself, not as a condition — Jacob is saying that if G-d will provide him with protection, food, clothes and a peaceful return, he will make G-d his G-d and the stone an abode for the divine presence.

What is the deeper significance of these two interpretations? And why does the Torah recount Jacob's oath in such a way that allows for variant readings?

## The Dwelling

Our sages describe the purpose of creation as G-d's desire for "a dwelling in the lowly realms." G-d desired that there be a realm that is lowly — i.e. an reality that is inhospitable to spirituality and G-dliness — and that this alien place should be made into a dwelling for Him, an environment receptive and subservient to His goodness and truth.

This lowly realm, explains Rabbi schneur Zalman of Liadi in his *Tanya*, is our physical world, "of which none is lower in the sense that it obscures the light of G-d... to the extent that it contains forces which actually oppose G-d with the claim that 'I am the ultimate.'" The physical world is the greatest concealment of the divine truth. A spiritual entity (e.g. an idea or feeling) exists to express something; a physical entity merely exists. The spiritual conveys that, "there is something greater than myself, which I serve"; the physical proclaims "I am" — contesting the truth that G-d is the ultimate and exclusive reality. But when man utilizes the resources and forces of the physical world to serve G-d, he sanctifies the material, so that it now serves, rather than obscures, the divine truth. Instead of "I exist," it now expresses "I exist to serve my Creator"; instead of "I am the ultimate," it now proclaims, "I, for myself, am nothing; my sole function and significance is that I am an instrument of G-dliness."

This is the meaning of Jacob's oath that he will make "this stone... a house of G-d." Jacob is pledging himself to man's mission in life: to fulfill the divine purpose for creation by making the material world a dwelling for G-d. He is promising to make the stone — the brute substantiality of the physical world — into a divine abode.

To achieve this end, Jacob requires several things from G-d: protection from harm, food to eat, clothes to wear, a peaceful return to his father's home. He is not, G-d forbid, negotiating for payment in return for service rendered; rather, Jacob's conditions are liter-

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ally that — the conditions, both material and spiritual, that enable a soul to subsist in a physical body and achieve its aim of making the world a home for G-d. On the material level, there are the basic needs (food, clothing, security, etc.) that are required to keep body and soul together. On the spiritual level, Jacob is also asking for the divine gifts without which man could not gain mastery over his environment and develop it in accordance with G-d's will. These include:

a) "Safeguards" — laws that identify those forces and influences that are harmful to the soul and detrimental to its mission in life. These are the divine prohibitions, known as the *mitzvot lo taaseh* (negative commandments), which guard us against the spiritual pitfalls in our journey through life.

b) "Food to eat" — the divine knowledge and wisdom of Torah, which our sages call "food for the soul": Torah is digested and internalized by the soul to become "blood of its blood and flesh of its flesh" and form the substance of its mindset and character.

c) "Clothes to wear" — the *mitzvot assei* (positive commandments) which clothe the soul, enveloping it with an aura of divine will.

d) The capacity for *teshuvah*, "return". *Teshuvah* is usually associated with the concept of repentance — the ability to restore a relationship with G-d that has been compromised by sin or failing. But this is only one expression of *teshuvah*. In its broadest sense, *teshuvah* is the G-d-given potential to make an ally of an adversary. The repentant sinner rectifies his past by channeling the negative energy of his transgressions to fuel his yearning for deeper connection to G-d; but also one who has not actually sinned can practice *teshuvah*, by harnessing the ordinary, mundane elements of his life (including those that are not directly involved in the performance of a mitzvah) to serve a G-dly end.

## The Human Element

Where does personal fulfillment figure in all this?

Can the "dwelling for G-d in the lowly realms" be constructed mechanically, by devoted workers faithful to their employer but devoid of understanding and appreciation of what they are doing? Can man serve G-d without experiencing Him as a personal and intimate presence in his life?

Ultimately, the answer is no. G-d desires that we

serve Him "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5) — that our life's work should not be a robotic implementation of arcane commandments issuing from an incomprehensible G-d, but a labor of love that stimulates our minds, excites our emotions and fulfills our every faculty.

Is this another a condition, or is it part of the mission itself? Rashi, who states that "I come only to explain the simple meaning of the verse," views the issue in its quintessential simplicity. Why was man created? To serve his Creator. Everything else is a condition, a means to this end. If it is required that man experience fulfillment in life, then G-d provides him with such capacity, just as G-d provides him with all the other necessary tools to do his job. But this is secondary to his purpose in life, which is to make the world a home for G-d.

Nachmanides, on the other hand, reads the Torah through the lens of a mystic and Kabbalist — with an eye to the experiential and anthropomorphic dimension of reality. From this perspective, man's experience of the Divine is not just a tool, but the purpose of life. (Indeed, Kabbalistic teachings describe the purpose of creation in order "that G-d be known by his creations," or "in order to do good to His creations." Ultimately, these are various expression of the quintessential purpose, G-d's desire for a dwelling in the lowly realm, as explain below.)

As with all variant interpretations of Torah, "these and these are both the word of the living G-d." The soul's elevation to a deeper relationship with G-d through its sanctification of physical life is both a condition for, and a component part of, the purpose of creation.

Because the egotistical, self-oriented nature of man is also part of "this stone" — part of the obtuse physicality that is the lowest tier of G-d's creation. It, too, must be developed into a "house of G-d," into an environment hospitable to the divine truth. Thus, if our service of G-d were to be something we merely submitted to, there could not truly be "a dwelling in the lowly realm." It would mean that the physical reality has not truly been transformed, but that an extrinsic state, alien to its nature, has been imposed upon it. A true dwelling in the lowly realm is a product of the lowly realm — a product of physical man, appreciated by his physical mind, desired by his physical heart and motivated by his physical self. So

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an integral part of G-d's dwelling is a human self for whom G-d is *my* G-d — for whom a life in the service of the Almighty is deeply satisfying and the ultimate in self-realization.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org; adapted by Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com*

## HOW PIOUS SHOULD YOU BE?

“You’re holy, but you stink!” That’s what the village children would yell at the *bechor* (first-born animal) who would often be seen wandering about the shtetel.

(According to Torah law, the firstborn young of a kosher domestic animal must be brought as an offering in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Even when conditions do not allow this — as has been the case since the Temple’s destruction more than 1900 years ago — the firstborn animal retains its sacred status, and it is forbidden to eat it or make use of it in any way. In the shtetel, where raising a few head of cattle or a small herd of goats was common practice, these animals would run loose, getting into everything and wreaking general havoc. And since they could not be shorn or groomed, their stench was quite unbearable).

The lesson in this is that something holy can also stink. You might be this really pious guy, but if people hold their noses when you walk by, you’re doing *something* wrong. In the words of one of the greatest sages in Jewish history, Rabbi Judah HaNassi: “Which is the right path for a person to choose for himself? What is harmonious for the one who does it, and harmonious for one’s fellow man.”

In the 29th chapter of Genesis we read of Jacob’s marriages to Leah and Rachel.

Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel, the younger of his uncle Laban’s two daughters. Laban agrees to give him Rachel’s hand in marriage in return for seven years’ labor. Jacob keeps his side of the bargain, but Laban tricks him: the veiled bride given to Jacob is Rachel’s older sister, Leah, and Jacob discovers the deception only the next morning. Laban agrees to let him marry Rachel, too, in return for another seven years of shepherding his flocks.

Marrying more than one wife was common practice in biblical times, and permissible under Jewish law until a rabbinical ordinance forbade it about one thousand years ago. But the Torah expressly forbids to marry two sisters. And while the laws of the Torah were officially commanded to Jewish people at Mount Sinai many years after Jacob’s marriages, the Talmud tells us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob observed the Torah even before it was decreed at Sinai. So why did Jacob marry two sisters, contrary to the code of behavior he had accepted upon himself?

This question is asked by many of the Torah commentaries, and many interesting and innovative explanations are given. The Lubavitcher Rebbe discusses several of these explanations, raises some legal objections to each of them, and then offers a profoundly simple explanation of his own: Jacob married Rachel because he had promised her that he would.

To accept upon yourself a moral standard beyond what is required by law, explains the Rebbe, is a noble and desirable thing — as long as it only involves a sacrifice on *your* part. But if your pious conduct also imposes hardship and suffering on others, you must then ask yourself: what right do I have to aspire to greater spiritual merit at another’s expense?

Not to marry Rachel, after she had waited seven years in promise of a life together, would have caused her grievous hurt and insult. (To divorce Leah, in addition to the hurt and insult to *her* this would have involved, would not have solved the problem — the Torah’s prohibition against marrying two sisters applies also to the sister of one’s living divorcee). Since Jacob was not *obligated* to obey the biblical prohibition against marrying two sisters, he had no right to accept upon himself a higher set of values if it was at the expense of another human being.

How pious should you be? As pious as you can. As long as it’s only you who’s paying the price.

*By Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, www.therebbe.org*

## SEEKING THE OTHER

The story is sad, inspiring, happy and strange. Rachel waits seven years while Jacob slaves for her father to earn her hand in marriage, at the end of which the scheming Laban tricks him into marrying

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her older sister Leah instead. Jacob subsequently marries Rachel as well, but she remains childless for seven years while her rival bears six sons and a daughter. Even the “handmaidens” are blessed with children while the pining Rachel remains barren. She despairs of her very life; it reaches the point where harsh words are exchanged between Rachel and Jacob. Finally, G-d answers her tearful prayers and opens her sealed womb. A boy, Joseph, is born.

The strange part of the story is the child’s name, which means “may he add.” The Torah (Genesis 30:24) explains that, upon Joseph’s birth, his mother proclaimed: “May G-d add to me another son.” One would think that, after all she’d gone through in the last 14 years, there would be a moment of contentment. Of course, she’d be wanting more children; but couldn’t she wait a day, or at least five minutes, before beginning to pray for her next child?

In the Torah, a person’s name bespeaks his or her very essence. Isn’t it strange to name your firstborn child “I want another son”?

Our sages have said: “Who is rich? One who is satisfied with his lot” (Ethics of the Fathers 4:1). They likewise scoffed at the insatiability of material greed: “One who has a hundred *zuz*, wants two hundred; one who has two hundred, wants four hundred” (Midrash Rabbah, Kohelet 1).

According to the masters of Kabbalah, the physical and material realms mirror each other. Every physical event is a shadow of a spiritual event transpiring in the supernal worlds; every physical action vibrates a corresponding reaction through all the heavens. Every feature and characteristic of the material reality has its counterpart in the spiritual.

Material greed has its spiritual counterpart. In this case, however, it is a true mirror-image — a negative reflecting a positive. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi would say: “One who is satisfied with his lot” describes a great virtue in material matters, and a correspondingly tremendous failing in all that pertains to one’s spiritual attainments. “One who has a hundred, desires two hundred” is a crippling disease when applied to material pursuits, and a correspondingly liberating sign of health in all things spiritual, and in all endeavors undertaken towards a spiritual and G-

dly end.

You can look at the name “Joseph” and see it as a reference to something other than itself. Or, you can see it as an inherent quality — “I want more” as a state of mind and life. Perhaps you know such people, or are such a person yourself. For the archetype, see the Torah’s account of Joseph’s life.

“May G-d add to me another son,” said Rachel, and named her child Joseph. Chassidic master Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866) saw a deeper meaning in the matriarch’s words. The Hebrew phrase *yosef hashem li ben acher* literally translates “May G-d add to me an other son” — i.e., may G-d add to me by transforming an “other” into a “son.”

There are two kinds of addition. One way is to have a certain resource increase and multiply: to have money make more money, have love breed deeper love, goodness blossom into greater goodness, attachment to G-d develop into more meaningful attachment to G-d.

The second way is the way of transformation: to make money out of garbage, to transform alienation and rejection into love, to extract goodness from evil, to discover closeness in distance. To make of an other a son.

This was the way of Joseph. His ancestors and brothers were shepherds, spiritual men who lived in tents and meditated in the bosom of nature. Joseph was a saintly business manager, a *tzaddik* and viceroy of Egypt. A transformer of the alienation and otherness of the material world into the familiarity and intimacy of G-dliness.

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## SHEEP

This week’s Torah reading, *Vayeitzei* (Genesis 28:10-32:3), is veritably glutted with sheep: Laban’s sheep and Jacob’s sheep; white sheep, dark sheep, spotted sheep, speckled sheep, sheep with rings around their ankles. Jacob arrives in Charan, and the first sight to greet him is that of several flocks of sheep congregated around a sealed well; the second is his future wife, Rachel—the name is Hebrew for “sheep”—shepherding her father’s sheep. Soon Jacob is a shepherd himself, caring for sheep, receiving his

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wages in sheep, breeding sheep with special markings, dreaming of sheep, amassing a fortune in sheep, and finally leading his flocks back to the Holy Land where he will present his brother Esau with a huge gift comprised largely of... sheep.

Between flocks, we also read of Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel and the birth of eleven of his twelve sons, progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. What are we to learn from the fact that the nation of Israel was founded in such sheepish surroundings?

**The First Metaphor**

"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine, he who shepherds [me] among the roses" (Song of Songs 2:16). The voice of this verse, explains the Midrash Rabbah, is that of the community of Israel, speaking of her relationship with G-d. "He is my shepherd, as it is written (Psalms 80:1), 'Shepherd of Israel, hearken'; and I am His sheep, as it is written (Ezekiel 34:31), 'And you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture'" (Midrash Rabbah on verse).

The same Midrashic passage also describes our relationship with G-d as that of a child to his father, a sister to her brother, a bride to her groom, a vineyard to its watchman, among others. Each of these metaphors expresses another facet of the relationship: the inherent bond between G-d and Israel, the love and affection, G-d's guardianship over us, our being a source of joy to Him, etc. What does the sheep/shepherd metaphor represent? If the point is that G-d provides for us and protects us, or that we are subservient and devoted to Him, these elements also exist in the father/child relationship. What unique aspect of our relationship with G-d can be expressed only by describing us as His sheep?

The sheep's dominant trait is its docility and obedience. The child obeys his father, but does so out of an appreciation of his father's greatness; the sheep does not obey for any reason—it is simply obedient by nature. It is this element of our relationship with G-d that the sheep represents: an unquestioning subservience which derives not from our understanding of His greatness and our feelings toward Him (in which case it would be defined by the limits of our understanding and feelings), but from the recognition that "I am His sheep."

The Jewish nation was founded amidst sheep because our self-negation and unquestioning obedience to G-d is the foundation of our Jewishness. Of course, we are not only G-d's sheep—we are also His children, His bride, His sister and His vineyard. By the same token, the Torah tells us that when Jacob left Charan after twenty years of shepherding, his wealth consisted not only of sheep: "He had much sheep, maids and servants, camels and donkeys." We have just read that Laban paid him his wages in sheep, and that his flocks multiplied exceedingly; but where did his other possessions come from? Rashi explains that "he sold his sheep for high prices and bought all these." Spiritually, too, Jacob's "wealth" did not consist solely of docility and self-negation, but also included feeling and understanding, fortitude and vigor. But the source and basis of it all were his "sheep."

Being a Jew means studying the divine wisdom (revealed to us in His Torah), developing a passionate love and reverent awe for G-d, and teaching His wisdom and implementing His will in an oft-times hostile world—all of which require the optimal application of our mental, emotional and assertive powers. But the foundation of it all, the base from which all these derive and upon which they are all predicated, is our simple commitment to G-d—a commitment that transcends reason and emotion.

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