Points to Ponder

Vayetze 5779

**וַיִּקַּח֙ מֵֽאַבְנֵ֣י הַמָּק֔וֹם He took from the stones of the place (28:11) – Rashi** cites the famous Midrash about the stones fighting as to which one Yaakov should place his head. **Rav Zeidel Epstein ztl**. explained that Hashem does not like the Machlokes that depends on Alai. Hence, he put them together—wherein there was no personal ownership of the Tzaddik.

**וַיִּקַּ֤ח אֶת־הָאֶ֨בֶן֙ אֲשֶׁר־שָׂ֣ם מְרַֽאֲשֹׁתָ֔יו וַיָּ֥שֶׂם אֹתָ֖הּ מַצֵּבָ֑ה The stone (28:18)** – the stone plays a critical role in Yayetze in so many different ways. Yaakov uses the stone to rest his head, he rolls off the stone when he gets to the well and the stone serves a demarcation between his place and Lavan’s – what is the significance of the stone? **Rav Lamm Shlita** explained that when the shepards stood and declared “Lo Nuchal” “We cannot (move the stone)” they taught us what the stone was all about. It is about impediments live. However, noted Rav Lamm the ultimate impediment is the declaration “Lo Nuchal” – that there are things in life we cannot do. Yaakov uses the stones at the beginning of the Parsha as a promise of faith. In essence he was telling Hashem that he believed that with Hashem’s help the stone will be the beginning of something even greater – not an impediment but something to build upon. Throughout his sojourn, he built upon that idea whenever a stone came his way.

**וַיֹּ֗אמֶר הֵ֥ן עוֹד֙ הַיּ֣וֹם גָּד֔וֹל לֹא־עֵ֖ת הֵֽאָסֵ֣ף הַמִּקְנֶ֑ה הַשְׁק֥וּ הַצֹּ֖אן וּלְכ֥וּ רְעֽוּ He said the day is still long it is not the time for gathering the flocks (29:7) - Rashi** explains that Yaakov saw the shepherds slacking off of the job and he called them out on it. How did the visitor at the well think it was his place to chastise them? Moreover, why did they listen to him? **Rav Yosef Kahanneman ztl.** explains that he began with the word “Achai” – he called them brothers – and he meant it. Thus, they understood that his words were honest and accepted them.

**הַפַּ֨עַם֙ אוֹדֶ֣ה אֶת Now I will thank Hashem (29:35) – Rashi** asks why the birth of Yehuda was the reason for thanking Hashem “this time”? He answers that Leah was praising Hashem for giving her “more” than her share of the Shevatim. **Rav Hutner (Pachad Yitzchak, Chanukah II)** explains that there are 2 key critical messages in Hakaras HaTov. One, is the past, recognizing that good has been done and deserves your thanks. The other is the present and the future – that someone did a favor for which you are indebted henceforth. This is why the word Modeh has 2 meanings – it means thanks and also praise. Without thanks, the praise is deficient but without the praise, the thanks is short-lived. Leah recognized the dual responsibility and acted on it accordingly.

**וַיִּפְרֹ֥ץ הָאִ֖ישׁ מְאֹ֣ד מְאֹ֑ד The man became very wealthy (30:43)** – Are we to take the wealth of the Avos to heart as an ideal to aspire to? Or is wealth not a pursuit of significance for true Jewish leaders and if the latter, why the stress on the financial success for the Avos? **Rav Moshe Stav Shlita** suggested that the wealth attained by the Avos was a sub-text to the fact that whatever they attained physically was merely a means of serving Hashem. In addition, this involvement must be rooted in the recognition that one is fulfilling the will of Hashem by helping to sustain the world. One of the points of difference between positive and negative involvement in this pursuit is the difference between wealth of Eretz Yisrael and wealth of chutz la’aretz. The sustenance provided in Eretz Yisrael is a result of direct hashgacha, and eating its fruits is therefore not only physical sustenance, but a reflection of the dwelling of the Shechina. In chutz la’aretz, nature is the guiding force, and it is difficult to see the hand of Hashem in nature. Thus, in chutz la’aretz, the necessary pursuit of wealth demeans the one who is involved in it. The money that the Avot had was dedicated to their avodat Hashem. But it was not appropriate that the money that Avraham received as a result of Sarah would be used to help him survive. He therefore use it to provide for the bnei hapilagshim, who would teach their students in the manner befitting their level. Yitzchak and Yaakov similarly used their wealth to support the survival of spiritual people in the reality of this world. Any possession that came from lowly sources were given to Esav; they were not used for holy purposes.

**וְאַתֵּ֖נָה יְדַעְתֶּ֑ן כִּ֚י בְּכָל־כֹּחִ֔י עָבַ֖דְתִּי אֶת־אֲבִיכֶֽן: You know that I worked with my full force for your father (31:6)** – The **Rambam** notes that halachically a worker must give his all to his job. He is not allowed to say that he is doing the average expectation for someone in his position. The gemara (Bava Metzia) uses this rule to determine that in a case of a Shomer Chinam versus Shomer Sachar is the protection the same as a Baal HaBayis or must he do more. A Shomer Chinam needs to do only what the Baal HaBayis does but a Shomer Sachar must go further. **Rav Schachter Shlita** pointed out that a Shomer Sachar is the Poel on this job—hence although the Gemara applies our possuk to a Poel and the Rambam to the Shomer Sachar. There is no contradiction. Rav Schachter added that we have the responsibility to work and to work hard.

**וַיַּשְׁכֵּ֨ם לָבָ֜ן בַּבֹּ֗קֶר וַיְנַשֵּׁ֧ק לְבָנָ֛יו וְלִבְנוֹתָ֖יו וַיְבָ֣רֶךְ אֶתְהֶ֑ם Lavan got up early in the morning and he kissed his children and blessed them (32:1)** – Why does the Torah want us to know that he gave a Beracha to his children? **Sforno** comments that we see that a parents blessing to his progeny always has potency. **Rav Henoch Leibowitz ztl.** adds that we see what the power of a Beracha offered with a full heart – even if offered by a Rasha with his heart set on destroying them. He might not have related to the family of Yaakov as Tzelem Elokim but in his Beracha, he DID see them as an extension of him and blessed them accordingly.

**Haftara: שובה ישראל Return Yisrael to Hashem your God (Hosea 14:2 )** – The **Noda B’Yehuda** notes that technically we are obligated to do a complete and total Teshuva without any argument that we cannot. The reason is that we were tripped up by our sins. Still, Hashem offers us the opportunity to offer an imperfect Teshuva – to take the Devarim – Vidui, Charata and Kabbalah L’Atid -- and use it to return to Hashem.