Point to Ponder – VaYetze 5774

**And Yakov dreamt and behold there was a ladder standing on the ground, whose head reached the heavens (28:12)** – The **Baal Haturim** notes that Sulam (ladder) equals kol which is a reference to prayer wherein one who has proper Kavana, his/her prayer is able to ascend the ladder to Shomayim. Elsewhere, the Baal Shem Tov compares the gematria of Sulam to that of Sinai. The **Nefesh Hachaim** also notes that man’s Soul is hinted to, symbolically utilizing the image of the Sulam. **Maran HaRav Asher Weiss shlita** notes that Tefillah without Torah or Torah without Tefillah is an incomplete soul. We need both torah and Yiras Shomayim if we are to succeed in ascending the mountain to Hashem.

**This time I will thank Hashem (29:35)** – The Talmud tells us that from the day the world was created, there was no one who was Modeh to Hashem until Leah came along at the time of Yehuda’s birth. Thus, Yehuda whose name becomes synonymous with Judaism all the time, is based on this principle of Hodaah. Yehuda too, is known later on in life for Hodaah – but of a different kind. The Talmud tells us that in regard to the episode with Tamar, Yehuda Hodah V’Lo Bosh. He too, was the epitome of Hodaah. Yet, there, unlike by Leah where the word Hodaah meant “thanks” it referred to an admission. Is there any connection between thanks and an admission**? Rav Hunter ztl.** says absolutely. He notes that contained within each and every Hodaah – thanks, there is also a recognition that” I couldn’t do it without you. “ The recognition of man’s limits is also an admission of man’s failings. **Rav Kook** carries the idea into the Modeh Ani we recite upon rising each morning. By offering thanks at the first moment of the dawn of another day, we are also recognizing and admitting that Hashem created and runs the entire world.

**Yaakov’s anger flared up at Rachel and he said “Am I in place of Hashem who withheld children from you?** (30:1-2) – How could Yaakov have been so insensitive? **Rav Chaim Kamil ztl** was pointing out to her that it was HER tefillos that Hashem desired. It wasn’t that he was refusing to daven but rather that his Tefillah alone would not be the catalyst she sought as much as hers would.

**Was it not enough that you are trying to take my husband but that also you want to take my son’s Dudaim?** (30:14-15) – How could Leah DARE challenge Rachel. Didn’t she KNOW that Rachel had given her the Simanim? **HaRav Shalom Schwadron ztl.** explains that the Simanim were the mitzvos of Niddah, Challah and Hadlakas HaNer (Based on the Baalei haTosafos). Rachel never introduced these as the Simanim – merely as Jewish laws that the bride needed to know. Therefore, Leah never knew the extent of the sacrifice that Rachel had made for her. This is the ultimate in Chessed.

**And Rachel took the Terafim and placed them under the saddle and sat upon them (31:34)** – The **Zohar HaKadosh** explains that she took the Terafim so that Lavan could not use these idols and their spiritual impurity power to find Yaakov and family. By sitting on the Terafim, she rendered them useless. How? The Zohar explains that when we sit on something we are showing that we degrade it. Once terafim are degraded, they are powerless. **HaRav Avigdor Nebenzal Shlita** explains that the same thing is true about the other “forces” that we think control our lives. They have an effect on us only when we allow them to ensare us. Once we decide to overpower these forces, they too, are powerless.

**“And Yaakov became angry and fought against Lavan.  He answered [Lavan] and said ‘what is my transgression….’” (Bereishis 31:36).** What becomes of Yaakov’s anger when he finally loses it on Lavan? How does he express himself? Does he note the regular cheating that Lavan did to him? Does he describe the theft? The mockery? No he doesn’t. **HaRav Yechiel Yitzchak Perr Shlita** explains that Yaakov could not allow himself to get angry at Lavan – the grandfather of his children and the father of his beloved wives. This speaks volumes of the evils of anger and of the lengths that a Tzaddik like Yaakov will go to avoid it. But how are we to handle our moments of anger?   It is told that Rav Simcha Zisel of Kelm, the most senior of the talmidim of Rav Yisroel Salanter had a commitment not to become angry until he put on a certain garment. It seems that by the time he got his coat on, his anger had dissipated.  Giving oneself some space before becoming angry, instead of trying to just restrain it, seems to be the reason that Rav Simcha Zisel succeeded with this practice. If anger is truly controlled, it will die just like any other human quality that can find for itself no means of expression.

**And Yaakov told his brothers “Gather stones**”. (31:46) – Who were the brothers that he spoke to? **Rav Elya Meir Bloch ztl** notes that these are the spiritual brothers – those who join us in our spiritual endeavors. Yaakov was enjoining those who were with him and his mission to feel like full fledged partners in the process.

**Haftorah: And Yaakov ran away to the fields of Lavan and Yisrael worked for a woman and he guarded for a woman (Hosea 12:13-14**) – Why is he first referred to as “Yaakov” and later as “Yisrael”? Why the double mention of the women? **Maran Harav Schachter Shlita** pointed out that the reference was to Yaakov’s experiences with finding a Shidduch. First, he set his eyes on finding a wife and worked at it but it was as easy as a few days. However, after the trickery, the additional years were served in earnest – yet Yaakov had to work harder at it emotionally. Rav Schachter pointed out that the toughness of the Shidduch process for Yaakov was necessary because each of these marriages would produce members of the Shevatim and ultimately Am Yisrael. Things that come with effort and sometimes through difficulty, are things that last. Thus, the Novi begins with Yaakov but ultimately the destiny of the Jewish people result as a consequence of Yaakov’s efforts and his attitude of sticking with it.