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Love Is Not Enough

Judaism is supremely a religion of love: three loves. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." And "You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in a strange land." ¹

Not only is Judaism a religion of love. It was the first civilisation to place love at the centre of the moral life. C. S. Lewis and others pointed out that all great civilisations contain something like the golden rule: Act toward others as you would wish them to act toward you,² or in Hillel's negative

formulation: Don't do to others what you would hate them to do to you.³ This is what games theorists call reciprocal altruism or Tit-for-tat. Some form of this (especially the variant devised by Martin Nowak of Harvard called "generous") has been proven by computer simulation to be the best strategy for the survival of any group.⁴

Judaism is also about justice. Albert Einstein spoke about the "almost fanatical love of justice" that made him thank his lucky stars that he was born a Jew.⁵ The only place in the Torah to explain why Abraham was chosen to be the founder of a new faith states, "For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (Gen. 18:19). So why the combination of justice and love? Why is love alone not enough?

Our parsha contains a gripping passage of only a few words that gives us the answer. Recall the background. Jacob, fleeing home, is taking refuge with his uncle Laban. He falls in love with Rachel, Laban's younger daughter. He works for seven years so that he can marry her. The wedding night comes and a deception is practised on him. When he wakes up the next morning he discovers that he has married Rachel's elder sister Leah. Livid, he confronts Laban. Laban replies that "It is not done in our place to marry the younger before the elder." He tells Jacob he can marry Rachel as well, in return for another seven year's work.

We then read, or rather hear, a series of very poignant words. To understand their impact we

have to recall that in ancient times until the invention of printing there were few books. Until then most people (other than those standing at the *bimah*) *heard* the Torah in the synagogue. They did not *see* it in print. The phrase *keriat ha-Torah* really means, not *reading* the Torah but *proclaiming* it, making it a public declaration.⁶

There is a fundamental difference between reading and hearing in the way we process information. Reading, we can see the entire text - the sentence, the paragraph - at one time. Hearing, we cannot. We hear only one word at a time, and we do not know in advance how a sentence or paragraph will end. Some of the most powerful literary effects in an oral culture occur when the opening words of a sentence lead us to expect one ending and instead we encounter another.

These are the words we hear: "And he [Jacob] loved also Rachel" (Gen. 29:30). This is what we expected and hoped for. Jacob now has two wives, sisters, something that will be forbidden in later Jewish law. It is a situation fraught with tension. But our first impression is that all will be well. He loves them both.

That expectation is dashed by the next word, *mi-Leah*, "more than Leah." This is not merely unexpected. It is also grammatically impossible. You cannot have a sentence that says, "X *also* loved Y *more than* Z." The "also" and the "more than" contradict one another. This is one of those rare and powerful instances in which the Torah deliberately uses fractured syntax to indicate a fractured relationship.⁷

Then comes the next phrase and it is shocking. "The Lord saw that Leah was hated." Was Leah hated? No. The previous sentence has just told us she was loved. What then does the Torah mean by "hated"? It means, that is how Leah felt. Yes she was loved, but less than her sister. Leah knew, and had known for seven years, that Jacob was passionately in love with her younger sister Rachel. The Torah says that he worked for her for seven years "but they seemed to him like a few days because he was so in love with her."

Leah was not hated. She was less loved. But someone in that situation cannot but feel rejected. The Torah forces us to hear Leah's pain in the names she gives her children. Her first she calls Reuben, saying "It is *because the Lord has seen my misery*. Surely my husband will love me now." The second she calls Shimon, "Because *the Lord heard that I am not loved*." The third she called Levi, saying, "Now *at last my husband will become attached to me*" (Gen. 29:32-35). There is sustained anguish in these words.

We hear the same tone later when Reuben, Leah's firstborn, finds mandrakes in the field. Mandrakes were thought to have aphrodisiac properties, so he gives them to his mother hoping that this will draw his father to her. Rachel, who has been experiencing a different kind of pain, childlessness, sees the mandrakes and asks Leah for them. Leah then says: "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" (Gen. 30:15). The misery is palpable.

Note what has happened. It began with love. It has been about love throughout. Jacob loved

Rachel. He loved her at first sight. There is no other love story quite like it in the Torah. Abraham and Sarah are already married by the time we first meet them. Isaac had his wife chosen for him by his father's servant. But Jacob loves. He is more emotional than the other patriarchs. That is the problem. Love unites but it also divides. It leaves the unloved, even the less-loved, feeling rejected, abandoned, forsaken, alone. That is why you cannot build a society, a community or even a family on love alone. There must be justice-as-fairness also.

If we look at the eleven times the word "love," *ahavah*, is mentioned in the book of Genesis we make an extraordinary discovery. Every time love is mentioned, it generates conflict. Isaac loved Esau but Rebekah loved Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, more than his other sons. From this came two of the most fateful sibling rivalries in Jewish history.

Even these pale into insignificance when we reflect on the first time the word love appears in the Torah, in the opening words of the trial of the binding of Isaac: "Take now your son, your only one, the one you love ..." (Gen. 22:2). Rashi, following Midrash, itself inspired by the obvious comparison between the binding of Isaac and the book of Job, says that Satan, the accusing angel, said to God when Abraham made a feast to celebrate the weaning of his son, said: "You see, he loves his child more than you." ⁸ That according to the Midrash was the reason for the trial, to show that Satan's accusation was untrue.

Judaism is a religion of love. It is so for profound theological reasons. In the world of myth the gods

were at worst hostile, at best indifferent to humankind. In contemporary atheism the universe and life exist for no reason whatsoever. We are accidents of matter, the result of blind chance and natural selection. Judaism's approach is the most beautiful I know. We are here because God created us in love and forgiveness asking us to love and forgive others. Love, God's love, is implicit in our very being.

So many of our texts express that love: the paragraph before the *Shema* with its talk of "great" and "eternal love." The *Shema* itself with its command of love. The priestly blessings to be uttered in love. *Shir ha-Shirim*, The Song of Songs, the great poem of love. Shlomo Albaketz's *Lecha Dodi*, "Come, my Beloved," Eliezer Azikri's *Yedid Nefesh*, "Beloved of the soul." If you want to live well, love. If you seek to be close to God, love. If you want your home to be filled with the light of the Divine presence, love. Love is where God lives.

But love is not enough. You cannot build a family, let alone a society, on love alone. For that you need justice also. Love is partial, justice is impartial. Love is particular, justice is universal. Love is for this person not that, but justice is for all. Much of the moral life is generated by this tension between love and justice. It is no accident that this is the theme of many of the narratives of Genesis. Genesis is about people and their relationships while the rest of the Torah is predominantly about society.

Justice without love is harsh. Love without justice is unfair, or so it will seem to the less-loved. Yet to experience both at the same time is virtually

impossible. As Niels Bohr, the Nobel prize winning physicist, put it when he discovered that his son had stolen an object from a local shop: he could look at him from the perspective of a judge (justice) and as his father (love), but not both simultaneously.

At the heart of the moral life is a conflict with no simple resolution. There is no general rule to tell us when love is the right reaction and when justice is. In the 1960s the Beatles sang "All you need is love." Would that it were so, but it is not. Let us love, but let us never forget those who feel unloved. They too are people. They too have feelings. They too are in the image of God.

1. Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, and see Leviticus 19:33-34.
2. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, New York, 1947.
3. Shabbat 31a.
4. See for example Martin Nowak and Roger Highfield, *Super Cooperators: Altruism, Evolution and Mathematics (or, Why We Need Each Other to Succeed)*, Melbourne: Text, 2011.
5. Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.
6. This has halakhic implications. *Keriat ha-Torah* is, according to most *rishonim*, a *chovat ha-tsibbur*, a communal rather than an individual obligation (unlike the reading of the Megillah on Purim).
7. The classic example is the untranslatable verse in Gen. 4:8, in which Cain kills Abel. The breakdown of words expresses the breakdown of relationship which leads to the breakdown of morality and the first murder.
8. Rashi to Genesis 22:1.



Rachel and Leah

Parshat Vayetze begins with Jacob on the run, trying on the one hand to escape from his vengeful brother Esau, while on the other hand trying to heed to his parents' request and find an appropriate mate. He heads east, in the direction of his mother's home. There, in the field, he finds the object of his search:

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. And he looked, and saw a well in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it, for from that well they watered the flocks; and a great stone was upon the well's mouth. And there were all the flocks gathered; and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place. And Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are your from?" And they said, "Of Haran are we." And he said to them, "Know you Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him." And he said to them, "Is he well?" And they said, "He is well;

and, behold, Rachel his daughter comes with the sheep..." And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. (Genesis 29:1-6,10-11)

It all seems too simple: Jacob travels, and immediately finds a well and the woman of his dreams. Perhaps we should not be surprised; Jacob had surely heard the tale of his grandfather's servant who traveled far and with great devotion, and found a worthy match for his father in almost no time at all also at a well.

This theme of a well as a place to meet one's mate is later replicated in the story of Moses.¹

TWO WIVES

However the story does not end here, this is not simply a case of "love at first sight" and the subsequent requisite "they all lived happily ever after." Jacob is now in exile. Life becomes more complicated. Apparently, different rules govern exile.

The twist in this week's Torah portion is that while Abraham had one primary partner, and Isaac one wife, for some reason the Divine plan dictated that Jacob's domestic life be far more intricate. Why did the plan need to include the marriage of Jacob to two women?

This question is compounded exponentially when we realize that these women were, in fact, sisters. Additionally, Jacob for his part, was unaware of this plan, and his first marriage takes place under the strangest of circumstances, the product of treachery, against his will, and without his knowledge.

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 then have you deceived me?"(Genesis 29:25)

Instead of finding himself married to the woman of his dreams, Jacob is instead wed to her sister. One would have thought that Jacob would have objected to this arrangement but for some reason Jacob goes along with the plan.

But Jacob has a serious moral argument against Laban -- namely, how can Laban renege on his agreement to provide Rachel as the bride? The moral outrage directed toward Laban is clear. Laban's response is enigmatic:

And Laban said: "It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn." (Genesis 29:26)

It is unclear whether or not Laban himself believes what he says, or if this, too, is simply a case of deception. Perhaps this is an instance of moral subjectivity, whereby Laban actually does believe the words he utters. In either case, Laban is a known liar, as Jacob will come to learn first-hand over the next few years.²

LEAH'S DECEPTION

The stronger question is directed toward Leah. How can this woman expect to stay married to Jacob under these conditions? The courtship was non-existent, the union one which lacked love, the relationship built on deceit.

The words of the Midrash provide an explanation for her actions, though not a justification:

Said he [Jacob] to her [Leah]: "You are a deceiver and the daughter of a deceiver!" "Is there a teacher without pupils?" she retorted. "Did not your father call you Esau, and you answered him! So did you too call me and I answered you!" (Midrash Rabbah - Bereishit 70:19)

Leah responds that her actions were no different than Jacob's. On a moral level, they are a good match, each guilty of deception at a critical juncture in their lives. However, this answer is unsatisfying. Perhaps this was Leah's excuse, but again, why would Jacob wish to remain with her?

The Midrash needs to be probed beyond the simplistic reading. Leah was not merely "making excuses." She was explaining the Divine Plan. When Jacob takes the blessing from Esau, he must dress up as Esau. This is no mere technicality, necessary to wrest the blessing from his father. Rather, in order for the Divine blessing to come to fruition, Jacob needed to "become" Esau. There needed to be a merger between the hands of Esau and the voice of Jacob. The implication of this merger was that an aspect of Esau would now continue to live in Jacob.

And Leah's eyes were weak (Genesis 29: 17). Rabbi Johanan's *amora* translated this before him: *And Leah's eyes were [naturally] weak*. Said he to him, "Your mother's eyes were weak! But what does weak mean? That they had grown weak through weeping, for [people used to say]: 'This was the arrangement; the elder daughter [Leah] is for the elder son [Esau], and the younger daughter [Rachel] for the younger son [Jacob].' She used to weep and pray, 'May it be Thy will that I do not fall to the lot of that wicked man.'" Rabbi Huna said: "Great is prayer, that it annulled the decree. and she even took precedence over her sister." (Midrash Rabbah - Bereishit 70:16)

Esau was destined to marry Leah, while Rachel was destined to marry Jacob. By deceiving his father, Jacob becomes Esau, and must fulfil Esau's spiritual role. Part of this role is the union with Leah. Leah explains to Jacob that their marriage is the direct result of his own actions, and ultimately is part of Rebecca's instructions, and the Divine Plan.

This idea may be borne out by a passage in the *Zohar*. The Torah states that when Jacob came in from the field in the evening he was greeted by Leah, with whom he was intimate that night:

And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, "You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son's

mandrakes." And he lay with her that night. (Genesis 30:16)

The *Zohar* notes that the text does not state that Jacob was intimate with Leah, rather the nameless mysterious "he" (*Zohar Vayetze* 157b). The Ariz'al stresses that Jacob has two identities: Jacob and Israel. This is an idea with which we are familiar from the biblical text. The Ariz'al explains that Jacob was married to Rachel while "he" who is identified with Israel was married to Leah.³ This is not a case of schizophrenia; rather, Jacob embodies two missions which need to come to fruition. These missions are represented by Leah and Rachel.

RACHEL, THE PRIMARY WIFE

Of the two, Rachel is considered the primary wife of Jacob:

Rabbi Eleazar further remarked:
"Since Jacob had to find his wife by the well, why did he not meet there Leah, who was to be the mother of so many tribes? The answer is that it was not the will of God that Leah should be espoused to Jacob openly, and in fact he married her without his knowledge, as it is written: *And it came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah.* It was also in order to rivet his eye and heart on the beauty of Rachel, so that he should establish his principal abode with her." (*Zohar, Bereishit, Section 1, Page 153a*)

The marriage to Leah was part of the Divine Plan, but it was part of a secretive plan. Nonetheless, the *Zohar* teaches that the primary spouse of Jacob was Rachel.

As there is an identification between Jacob and Esau the mystical sources point to a similar identification between Rachel and Leah.⁴ Many aspects of this concept are extremely esoteric and beyond the scope of this work. We will nonetheless attempt to describe at least some aspects of this relationship.

Rav Shlomo Elyashiv, in his mystical classic *Leshem*, relates that Rachel and Leah actually represent one soul. Had it not been for the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, these two aspects would have remained merged,⁵ or to use the mystical imagery, there would have been no separation between the upper and lower worlds:

"And as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died unto me in the land of Canaan." (Genesis 48:7).

Rachel thus died there, and her place was filled by this lower world, which assumed its rightful place in a completed house. But as long as Rachel was alive the lower world could not be made perfected through them. If it is asked why Leah did not die at the same time, the answer is that the house was in the lower world, and from it all were to be brought to full self-realization, but it was not in the upper world. This was the reason that Leah did not die at that time.

Moreover, all that concerned Leah is kept under a veil, as she typified the upper world, which is veiled and undisclosed; and this is another reason why Leah's death is not divulged like that of Rachel. It is in accordance, too, with this difference between the upper and the lower worlds that Leah was buried away from sight in the cave of Machpelah; whereas Rachel was buried by the open road. Hence it is that all blessings are from two worlds, the disclosed and the undisclosed, though the whole originates from the upper world. (Zohar, Bereishit, Section 1, Page 158a)

DIVINE PRESENCE

As we have seen, Rachel is the main wife. In mystical literature she represents the Divine Presence, the *Shechina*. At the point when the twelfth son is born -- Benjamin -- the Divine Presence shifts from her to the community of Israel. At that very point, she dies in childbirth, and is buried to wait on the road for generations of Israel to be carried into exile, so that she may pray for them and insure that the *Shechina* does not abandon her children.

So he fled with all that he had. For as soon as Benjamin was born, the *Shechina* attached Herself to the company of the tribes and made Her home with them. And Jacob, through his knowledge of the mystic symbolism, was aware that as soon as the twelve tribes should be complete

the *Shechina* would make them Her adornment and attach Herself to them, and that Rachel would die and the *Shechina* would take possession of the house.

Our tradition tells us that the lower world was assigned to Jacob in the same way as it was later to Moses, but this could not be accomplished until there were the full twelve tribes in the house to whom the *Shechina* could attach Herself. It was then that Rachel was removed, and the *Shechina* took up Her abode in the house with all the tribes, and became the foundation of the house. Assuredly, *He sets in her place the foundation of the house.* (Psalms 113:9). (Zohar, Bereishit, Section 1, Page 158b)

The relationship between Rachel and Leah will enable us to understand another concept taught in midrashic literature. There is an opinion that Rachel and Leah were pregnant at the same time; one was carrying a male embryo who would later go by the name Joseph, while the other carried a female to be named Dina. According to the midrash, Rachel was pregnant with Dina, but prayer and Divine intervention caused the fetuses to be switched!

And afterwards she [Leah] bore a daughter (Genesis 30: 21). We learned: "If, for instance, one's wife is pregnant and he prays, 'May it be Thy will that my wife bears a son,' it is a vain prayer. The School of Rabbi

Yannai said: "This was taught of one who is actually about to give birth." Rabbi Yehuda ben Pazzi said: "Even when she is actually about to give birth [the sex] can be changed, as it is written, *'O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?'* said the Lord. *'Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.'*" (Jeremiah 18:6) (Just as a potter can break a cruse after he has made it and make something else, so can I do likewise even at the hour of birth)." An objection was raised: "But it is written, *And afterwards she bore a daughter.*" Rabbi Abba replied: "Actually she was created a male, but she was turned into a female through Rachel's prayers when she said, *The Lord add to me another son* (Genesis 30:24)." Said Rabbi Hanina ben Pazzi: "The matriarchs were prophetesses, and Rachel was of the matriarchs. It is not written, *The Lord add to me other sons*, but *another son*. She said: 'He is yet destined to beget one more; may it be from me!'" Rabbi Hanina said: "All the matriarchs assembled and prayed: 'We have sufficient males; let her [Rachel] be remembered.'" (Midrash Rabbah - Bereishit 72:6)

UNITY OF JEWISH WOMEN

Aside from the miraculous nature of this description, we are struck by the unity among the

matriarchs; all as one pray for this switch. Instead of the murderous jealousy which characterizes the relationship between Jacob and Esau, here we find Jacob's wives working in unison for a common cause.

Even in instances when we might think there was enmity between the two, the Midrash stresses the love and respect:

And when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister. (Genesis 30:1) Rabbi Isaac observed, "It is written, *Let not thy heart envy sinners* (Proverbs 23: 17), yet you say, *Rachel envied her sister!* This, however, teaches that she envied her good deeds, reasoning: 'Were she not righteous, would she have borne children?'" (Midrash Rabbah - Bereishit 71,6)

The relationship between Rachel and Leah had another implication as well. We have a tradition that Amalek, the descendent of Esau who represents the worst enemy of the Jews, will only fall to a descendant of Rachel.

And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Yosef (Genesis 30:25). As soon as Esau's adversary [Joseph] was born, Jacob said to Laban: "Send me away, that I may go to my own land, and to my country." For Rabbi Pinhas said in the name of Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman: "It is a tradition that Esau will fall at the hands of none other than Rachel's descendants, as it is written, *Surely the youngest of the*

flock shall drag them away (Jeremiah 49:20). And why does he call them *The youngest of the flock*? Because they were of the youngest of the tribes." (Midrash Rabbah - Bereishit 73:7)

THE SELF-SACRIFICE OF TIMNA

Esau, the man who was to be married to Leah, married instead a daughter of Ishmael and produced a son named Eliphaz who in turn married a woman Timna; it is from the union of that Amalek descended.

What is the purpose of [writing], *And Lotan's sister was Timna*? Timna was a royal princess ... Desiring to become a proselyte, she went to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they did not accept her. So she went and became a concubine to Eliphaz the son of Esau, saying, "I had rather be a servant to this people than a mistress of another nation." From her Amalek was descended who afflicted Israel. Why so? Because they should not have repulsed her. (Sanhedrin 99b)

Rav Yonatan Eibeshitz in his work *Ya'arot Dvash* (Volume 1 Drasha 12) explains that the power to defeat Amalek comes from Rachel, who was to be the only wife of Jacob and became instead secondary, to the point of not even being buried with her husband. If the power of Amalek emanated from the self-sacrifice of Timna, the power to defeat Amalek must emanate from the same source.

At Leah's moment of need, Rachel took action to assure that her sister not be humiliated at the altar, and she heroically "shared" her husband with her sister. When Rachel was desperate to have another son, it was her sister Leah's prayers that brought about the miraculous switch. These two sisters, linked spiritually from time immemorial, created the people known as Israel. The power of their deeds did more than create the Jewish Nation; their actions serve as a beacon and shield against all types of adversaries to this very day.

1. The *Zohar* notes this connection: "Observe that Jacob when he sat by the well and saw the water rising up toward him, knew that there he would meet his destined wife; and so it was, as Scripture says: *While he was yet speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep. And it came to pass when Jacob saw Rachel ...* It was the same with Moses, who, when he sat down by the well, as soon as he saw the water rising toward him knew that there he would meet his destined wife; and so indeed it turned out, as we read: *And the shepherds came and drove them away ...* (Exodus 2:17), with the result that there he met with Zipporah. (*Zohar*, Bereshith, Page 152b)
2. The text would indicate that Jacob suspected that Laban would try some type of chicanery, when he clearly states that he is interested in his younger daughter Rachel: *I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter.* (Genesis 29:18) Rashi notes the careful phraseology of Jacob.
3. See Etz Chaim, Shaar Haklalim. Also see comments of the Gra to Sifra De Z'niuta chapter 1.
4. See Ariz"al ibid. chapter 13.
5. See Sha'arei Leshem 2:2, 2:3, 2:5



The Up-and-Down Ladder

And behold, there was a ladder,
planted on the ground, its top reached
into the heavens. (Gen. 28:12)

Among prophetic symbols, Yaakov's ladder is probably one of the most memorable. In his dream, he has a vision of an immensely tall ladder "planted on the ground, its top reaching into the heavens." What is the significance of this ladder? The Midrash and the Rishonim provide innumerable answers.

One of the interpretations of the Midrash is particularly curious. Hashem was showing Yaakov two of his descendants. One of these was Moshe, who ascended into Heaven, as symbolized by the top of the ladder, which "reached into the heavens." The other was Korach, who was swallowed up by the earth, as symbolized by the ladder "planted on the ground." What was the point of showing Yaakov these two individuals?

The Baal Haturim points out that the *gematria*, the numerical value, of the word *sulam*, ladder, is equal to the numerical of the word *mamon*, money, and of the word *oni*, poverty. They all total up to 136.

A ladder, according to the Baal Haturim, is a metaphor both for money and for poverty. A ladder can bring a person up to the greatest heights, and it can also bring him down to the lowest depths. Money has the same ability to either elevate or degrade a person. When Hashem entrusts a person with money, he can use it to promote his own and his family's spiritual growth. He can give charity and do acts of *chesed* with other people. He can support community institutions. If these are the paths he chooses, the money will raise him up to the highest levels of spiritual achievement. But if he decides to use the money to indulge his drives and appetites, to push as many pleasure buttons as he can, it will bring him down to the lowest levels of debasement.

This concept may explain why Yaakov was shown Moshe and Korach. Our Sages tell us that both of these men were wealthy. Korach was so wealthy, in fact, that he lacked nothing in the world. His wealth corrupted him, and he developed such a hunger for power that he dared challenge Moshe's authority. His money ladder led him to the abyss - literally. The earth opened its mouth, and Korach descended to a depth no man had even experienced before or since. Moshe was also a wealthy man, but he went on to become the father of all prophets, the teacher of all the Jewish people. His money ladder led him only upwards.

Poverty also has this ambivalent power. On the one hand, it is a terrible ordeal. According to the Talmud (*Eruvin* 41b), a person afflicted by poverty is vulnerable to sinfulness. On the other hand, a person who passes the "test of poverty" is freed from the restrictions of money. His happiness comes from within and is not

dependent on the size of his bank account. People who can adjust to a simpler life, who can successfully trim down their needs and lower their expectations, who have only a little but need even less, these people are truly free, rich and fortunate. They can use their acceptance of poverty to focus on Torah, spirituality and personal growth.

I heard a story that took place right here in Baltimore. A woman went shopping for a *sheitel*, a wig, and she brought along her 12-year-old daughter for company. They spent some time considering different style and shades. Finally, the woman found a *sheitel* that really appealed to her.

"This is the one I like," she said to the saleslady.

The saleslady fidgeted uncomfortably. She knew that the woman was very far from being wealthy. The *sheitel* she had chosen was out of her range. "I don't think that *sheitel* suits you," said the saleslady.

"But it's perfect," said the woman. "I like it. How much is it?"

"Let me show some other styles that are more suited for you."

"What's the point?" the woman persisted. "I like this one. Why do we have to bother looking any further?"

The saleslady cleared her throat. "Well, you see. The *sheitel* you've chosen is rather expensive. I don't think you can afford it."

The woman smiled. "Look, I can't afford any of them. So let me at least take the one that I like." The saleslady shrugged and walked away.

Just then, the woman's young daughter, who had sat by silently during the entire exchange, spoke up. "Mommy," she said, "why can't we afford any *sheitel*? Are we poor? I never knew we were poor!"

I suppose we can fault the woman's lack of discretion for having this conversation in front of her daughter, but we have to admire her ability to raise her children in poverty with happiness and contentment and never feeling deprived. One thing we know for sure. The focus in that home, its source of happiness, is not on material things but on riches of the mind, the heart and the soul. That family's poverty is a ladder reaching into the heavens.

The Talmud states (*Megillah* 16a), "This [Jewish] nation is compared to dust and to the stars. When they are in decline, they descend to the level of dust; but when they rise, they ascend to the stars."

A ladder is, therefore, the perfect metaphor for the Jewish people. No one ever remains standing on a ladder. He either goes up, or he goes down. Chairs, sofas, beds can symbolize a static existence, but a ladder clearly symbolizes change. The Jewish ladder spans the entire spectrum of the people, from Moshe at the very top to Korach at the very bottom. Jewish people are always in a state of change, either progressing or regressing. There is no standing still. They either go down to the dust or up to the stars.



Jacob's Impact For Today

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

Parshat Vayetzei opens with a seemingly straightforward description of Jacob's travels: *"And Jacob left Beersheva and went toward Haran. And he encountered the place, and he spent the night there, because the sun had set"* (Genesis 28:10-11).

The Kedushat Levi explains that this journey symbolizes Jacob's departure from the Land of Israel and subsequent travels into exile. Since our tradition teaches that every experience of the patriarchs has repercussions for their descendants, it seems that Jacob's travels must still be relevant to our lives today.

Let's examine the opening verses of the parsha in detail:

"And Jacob left Beersheva." The Kedushat Levi says that Jacob's departure from Israel hints to the spiritual greatness of the Land. He derives this from the word *"Beersheva,"* which is a combination of *be'er* and *sheva*. *Be'er* means "well" - a source of water, symbolizing abundance and blessing. *Sheva* means "seven," alluding to a seven-fold increase of blessing. The Land of

Israel is therefore the source of spiritual abundance.

PAIN OF EXILE

The verse continues: *"...and he went toward Haran."* Jacob understands that his journey out of the Land of Israel will cause his descendants to be exiled in the future. According to the Kedushat Levi, the word *"Haran"* is related to the phrase *"charon af,"* meaning "anger." God's displeasure at the Jewish people's future behavior will result in their being exiled from the Land.

This knowledge causes Jacob great pain, as the next part of the verse indicates: *"And he encountered the place"* (*vayif'ga ba-makom*). The word *vayifga* shares a root with the word *lifgo'ah*, which means "to injure." Furthermore, the word *makom*, beyond its simple meaning of "place," often refers to God Himself, the foundation of the world (Bereishit Raba 68:9).

We can understand from these words that Jacob did not only feel the people's pain at being exiled, but he also felt God's pain at being compelled to exile His children.

Jacob was highly sensitive to the pain of exile. Therefore, the verse continues, *"...and he spent the night there, because the sun had set."* The exile is compared to night. Jacob saw that his journeys out of Israel would eventually lead to the darkness of exile descending upon the Jewish people. Just as Jacob slept, the people, too, would be compelled to "sleep."

Jacob understood that his actions were only a prelude to what would happen to his descendants. Based on this idea, we can suggest a deeper

understanding of the words, "*And Jacob left*" (*vayeitzei Yaakov*). Jacob "came out of himself" by allowing himself to feel the pain of the Jewish exile. He broadened his focus, shifting his attention away from himself and making room for others. This teaches us a valuable lesson about the importance of feeling other people's pain.

SECRET SIGNS

We see another demonstration of this quality in Genesis 15:13, when God tells Abraham that the Jewish people will be enslaved to a foreign nation for 400 years. We know from other sources, however, that the Jewish people served in Egypt for only 210 years (Rashi on Genesis 42:2). How can we reconcile this contradiction?

According to the Kedushat Levi, as soon as Abraham was informed about the future Egyptian exile, he felt the pain that the Jewish people would experience there. His pain was so acute that God subtracted 190 years from the original decree!

This ability to feel the pain of others also helps us to see why Rachel was the ideal wife for Jacob. Jacob had arranged to marry Rachel, yet he suspected that his future father-in-law Laban would try to deceive him in some way. He and Rachel therefore agreed upon secret signs that would enable them to recognize each others' true identity. When Rachel learned of Laban's plan to give her sister Leah to Jacob instead, she taught Leah these secret signs - because she was so sensitive to the pain that Leah would experience were she to be publicly humiliated under the *chuppah* (Talmud - Megilla 13).

RETURN TO THE LAND

As soon as Jacob feels the pain of the Jewish people's exile and goes to sleep in the darkness, God blesses him with the promise, "*Behold, I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go, and I will return you to this Land*" (Genesis 28:13-15). We can learn from this blessing the tremendous power of developing sensitivity to others. Although God's Presence is with us even in the exile, feeling other people's pain can give us the merit to return to the Land of Israel. The blessing that Jacob receives is a message to us as well.

May we all learn to become sensitive and responsive to the pain of others, and may this ability bring us one step closer to the final redemption, when we will be gathered from exile and return to our land in peace.

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