

POWERFUL PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

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Parshas Vayitzei

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Parshas Vayitzei

OVERVIEW

I feel this is one of the most difficult parshas to learn. The parsha begins with Yaakov's fleeing from Beer Sheva, subsequent to his taking the blessings from Esav. He is journeying to Charan, to his uncle Lavan's home, to find a wife.

At the beginning of the parsha we read about Yaakov's dream, in which he sees angels going up and down a ladder. When he wakes up, he realizes he is in a very holy place and he calls it Bet-Kel. He vows to G-d that, should he return safely, he will fulfill all his promises of giving charity and sanctifying that place.

He moves on to the land of Uncle Lavan, where he will find his wives. He marries four wives, and has eleven sons and one daughter over a period of the last seven of the 14 years. Then he works another six years to make a living for himself.

After 20 years, he leaves clandestinely, after G-d has commanded him to leave the house of Lavan. Lavan finds out that Yaakov has left, and goes after him to kill him. G-d comes to Lavan in a dream and tells him not to kill Yaakov. Finally Yaakov and Lavan make a covenant, and Yaakov is "out of the frying pan," only to return to the land of Canaan in the next parsha and get "into the fire" to meet Esav.

STRANGE THINGS GOING ON

Many things about this parsha are very confusing. Let's examine some of the issues and after that, we will try to come up with some answers to all these strange events.

A Closed Case

There's something unique about this parsha. It's called a Parsha S'tuma. This means, a "closed parsha."

If you look in a Torah scroll, you will see that there are lines after lines and sometimes, spaces. These spaces separate the chapters in the Torah. Generally, when you finish a parsha, after the last word of the parsha the line is left open, so that the next parsha begins on a new line. We call this a parsha p'tucha – an "open parsha," because the last line is open.

Moreover, it is really a misnomer to call a parsha a "parsha." The proper name for the entire parsha is "seder." "Parsha" really means, "chapter" and every seder usually has anywhere from five to 30 parshas inside the seder. Each of these chapters can be blocked off with a space.

But sometimes one parsha (a.k.a. "seder) – or a chapter within a parsha – ends, and it is followed by a blank section of eight spaces, and then the next parsha continues on the same line. This is called a "closed parsha" because it isn't left blank until the end of the line.

The Rabbis note that, in the case of this parsha (Vayetze), it is separated from the previous parsha (Toledot) by only eight spaces and does not begin on a new line. Instead, the letter samech (which stands for “s’tuma” – “closed”) is written three times in your Artscroll Chumash – to indicate that the new parsha will begin on the same line. Of the 52 Torah portions, there are very few that are closed. The Rabbis tried to figure out why this one is.

The commentator Ba’alei Hatosefot says the reason for this closed parsha is that Yaakov had to leave Canaan secretly because of Esav. Another similar reason is that, since he didn’t tell anyone he was leaving, therefore the parsha is closed.

However, these reasons seem insufficient to spoil the beautiful symmetry of the Torah not to have the parsha begin on a new line as most parshas do.

What Time Is It?

When Yaakov begins to travel, the midrash tells us that he was prepared to start davening, when, all of a sudden, the sun set prematurely, two hours before the normal time, forcing him to retire early for the night. It’s very unusual that the sun sets two hours early. Whatever happened to those two hours? We find the answer in the next parsha, Vayishlach.

There, prior to Yaakov’s confrontation with Esav, he has a confrontation with the angel of Esav. Right after that confrontation, we are told, “The sun rose for him.” The commentators say that the sun rose two hours early to make up for the two hours lost in the previous parsha. Obviously, there are messages here for us to understand.

Hard-Luck Yaakov

If we look at this parsha, you can’t help being perturbed by how bad things turn for Yaakov. His life becomes incredibly miserable. Here is a good man, who listens to his mother and does what she tells him to do regarding the blessings from his father. He listens to his parents when they tell him to go to Charan. And all he gets is more than twenty years of headaches.

In the previous parsha, everything’s fine. For 63 years he has been learning Torah and life was fairly simple. In this week’s parsha, his life becomes a mess.

First, trying to find a wife, Lavan tricks him. He switches wives on him at the last moment and Yaakov marries Leah instead of Rachel. Then, after he marries Rachel, he has to deal with two wives who vie for his attention. The wives then suggest that he marry their handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah. And still, there is no rest for him. He has to deal with Lavan, who is not an easy man to live with. The whole situation is a trying one for Yaakov.

Life doesn’t get any better in the next parsha either. There, he has to confront Esav, and then, when he makes up with his brother, he is faced with another terrible experience: his daughter Dina gets raped. Then, to top it all off, he spends the next 22 years thinking his son Yosef was killed by wild animals.

We’d like to know why all these things are happening to Yaakov and what we can learn from this.

All's Well At the Well

When Yaakov comes to the well at the beginning of the parsha, he meets some shepherds who are from Lavan's territory, and they are all waiting to gather together enough people to remove a huge boulder covering the well. The Torah offhandedly tells us that when Rachel comes along, Yaakov turns into Superman and is able to lift the massive boulder off the well as easy as pie. As the Talmud says, it was as easy as removing a cork from a bottle. And even at the end of the parsha, when Yaakov makes a covenant with Lavan, we are told that he picks up a giant boulder and places it as a monument. Why does the Torah have to tell us about Yaakov's awesome strength?

Under the Wedding Canopy

Why does Yaakov have to go through complications on the night of his marriage? He wanted to marry Rachel; why did he have to marry Leah instead? Why did G-d want this to happen to him?

Now, Yaakov worked seven years because he wanted to marry Rachel. Lavan had his own ideas: He knew that if, after the seven years, Yaakov married Rachel, he would probably leave town with her, and all the blessings that had come to town since Yaakov's arrival would leave with him too. And so Lavan arranged things with the townsfolk to switch the girls at the last moment; and he sent Leah to the chuppah instead.

Knowing what Lavan was like, Yaakov had always harboured a suspicion that Lavan might try to trick him in some way, and so he arranged a secret code with Rachel. In case any doubt should arise at the wedding, he would ask his bride for the code words.

Rachel saw what was happening. She had compassion on Leah and told her the secret code words.

Lavan "turned off all the lights" and the next morning, Yaakov was surprised to find he was with a different woman from the one he had anticipated being with.

[This episode is the source for the custom of "badeken" before a chuppah. We make sure the Chosson himself goes to put the veil on the bride, to make sure than nobody else is waiting to marry him but his intended.]

If my betrothed did that to me, I'd really be upset. Yaakov was upset, too, but I'd be much more upset than Yaakov was. If Rachel was so afraid for Leah's feelings, there are probably a lot of other things she could have done to save her from embarrassment and also stop Yaakov from marrying a woman he hadn't intended on marrying. Why didn't she try other options?

The Morning After

When Yaakov finds out he has been duped, the midrash comments: All night long, she was pretending to be like Rachel. Then the morning came along, and ...she's Leah. What did Yaakov say to her? He said, 'You daughter of a swindler, why did you cheat me?'

"And Leah said to him, 'Didn't you cheat your father? When he asked you, "Are you my son Esav or not?" and you answered, "I am Esav your firstborn," how can you say to

me, “Why did you cheat me?” Didn’t your father say about you to Esav, “Your brother came with cunning?”” Pretty strong words for a woman to say to a man! Is this the way Leah should be talking to Yaakov? It’s not the greatest way to start a marriage!

Do you Love Me?

The Torah says the following (Genesis 29: 30): “And he married Rachel. And he also loved Rachel more than Leah. He worked for another seven years. And Hashem saw that Leah was hated.”

Yaakov was a Patriarch. Patriarchs do not hate people. It’s very difficult to understand that he hated Leah.

The Race for Children

We are told that Leah has the first four children, but Rachel has none. Rachel asks Yaakov what to do. Yaakov says it’s not his fault. He tells Rachel that when his grandmother Sarah couldn’t have children, she gave her handmaid to Avraham and they had a son and afterward Sarah also gave birth. He suggested that Rachel try this system. And so Rachel gave Yaakov her maidservant as a wife, and they had two children. Then Leah, who had stopped having children, gave her maidservant to Yaakov and that maidservant also had two children. Now there were eight children.

The Dudaim

“Reuven went out in the time of the wheat harvest and found dudaim in the field.” [There is some discussion as to the exact identity of these flowers. (Some say it is jasmine; others call it “mandrake.” One thing the commentators agree upon is that, when these flowers are crushed, they have some medicinal or aphrodisiac properties that could help a woman have children.]

The verse continues: “He brought them to Leah his mother. And Rachel said to Leah, ‘Please give me your son’s flowers.’”

“And Leah responded: ‘Isn’t it enough that you took my husband, and now you want to take my son’s flowers, too?’”

“And Rachel said, ‘Tonight is supposed to be my night to lie with Yaakov. But you can lie with him tonight in exchange for the flowers.’”

Yaakov came from the field and Leah came out to meet him and said, “You’re coming to me tonight.” And so Yaakov went with Leah and she conceived and bore Yissachar, and later Zevulun.

We are talking about our Matriarchs, righteous women! Is this how they conduct their lives, fighting over flowers, fighting for Yaakov’s attention.

What’s the purpose of this story? We need to re-examine it and look for hints in the many details it contains.

The Talmud, in Masechet Sandhedrin 99B, comments on Numbers 15:30, which says: “A person who acts high-handedly and blasphemes G-d...” The Talmud asks, What kind of person are we talking about? They say this refers to the evil King Menashe, who

made people turn to idol worship during the era of the First Temple. He was so perverse that he would sit and expound on the scriptural narratives in a ridiculing fashion; for example, he ridiculed Moshe.

He critiqued the verse in the Torah that says: “The daughter of Lotan was Timna. And Timna was a concubine for Eliphaz.” Menashe asked, “Why does the Torah add that Timna was a concubine? Who cares? All it needs to say is the Timna was the daughter of Lotan. The Torah is a holy book and should write about important things and transmit messages of relevance. There is no need to add that she was a concubine.”

And he also scoffed at the story of the dudaim, commenting on the verse, “And Reuven went in the time of the wheat harvest and found the dudaim.” He said, “Why does the Torah tell us when he went to the field? Who cares? Just tell us he found the flowers!”

He was a supreme scoffer. The gemarah says that G-d doesn't like such people and he punishes them. By the way, says the gemarah, why did the Torah mention that Reuven went in the time of the harvest? The answer is, to teach us that righteous people are careful not to stretch forth their hands in acts of robbery. In other words, Reuven made sure to find jasmine flowers, which are not the kind of flowers people own, and so he didn't steal. But that doesn't really answer the question. The Torah teaches us in other places the prohibition of stealing – it is obvious that righteous people do not steal! The question is a good question and deserves a deeper answer. Menashe seems to have a legitimate complaint.

There are people who, G-d forbid, can't have children. They spend \$25,000 and the doctors tell them to do an in vitro procedure, and then ... nothing happens! Similarly, Rachel gave up a night to have these flowers... for nothing. Why did the Torah tell us this story when nothing came of the flowers? [There are those who say, and I disagree with this, “You see how desperate a woman will be to have kids. She gave up a night with her husband for a bunch of flowers, and it didn't help anyway.” It seems as though Rachel has no trust in G-d.]

The Midrash looks at the story as a business deal. It says that in every good swap, each person gives up something to get something. They base their reasoning on the name Leah gave her son Yissachar, a name that has the connotation of “earning wages.” Leah had to give away the flowers, but she gained two tribes – Yissachar and Zevulun, thereby having the majority of the tribes.

On the other hand, Rachel got the flowers, but her loss was inestimable. Rashi tell us that when Rachel said to Leah, “Therefore you may lie with my husband tonight,” she belittled the ability to lie with a holy man, and therefore did not merit to be buried with him in the Patriarchal tomb in Chevron. As we read in the next parsha, Rachel gave birth to her second child Binyamin and died on the road to Bethlehem.

The midrash says that in this “business deal,” Leah gave up the flowers and gained two tribes, thereby giving her the majority of the tribes, and a plot in Chevron. Rachel got the flowers and she had to give up the tribes and the plot. What kind of deal is that? It seems like a rip-off! Those flowers must have been awfully valuable if the midrash seems to feel it was an even swap. If this were not so, the midrash would have said, “Here is an example of a bad deal.” But it did not say that.

The tragedy was that Rachel lost the right to lie eternally beside her husband. This doesn't seem fair after everything Rachel went through.

SOLVING THE MYSTERIES

To understand this parsha better, we have to go back to last week's parsha and to gain a bit more clarity regarding certain events.

But first, let's go back to the beginning of the Torah – to the Garden of Eden. We know that there were two trees in the garden of Eden: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Chassidic masters write: What was the purpose of two trees? Wasn't one tree good enough?

The Rabbis tell us that, in order to have a balanced approach in our service to G-d, the world must be able to perfect two concepts:

“Stay away from Evil and Do Good” (Psalms)

These are two sides of the same kind. For a person to be the proper person he is meant to be, he must be able to resist evil and do good. You need both these components. “Doing good” is the characteristic of Chesed; and “Resisting evil” – i.e., control – is the characteristic of “Gevurah.” The Rabbis say that spiritually, you can probably grow more by resisting evil than even by doing good. The challenges in resisting evil are so much more difficult and also so much more conquerable than doing Chesed and not knowing where to stop. Resisting evil is never a problem – the evil is always there and you can measure your spiritual growth by how much you can resist. Doing Chesed, on the other hand, is harder to limit. The tree of Life represents Kindness and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil represents the ability to choose between Good and Evil. That's what life's all about.

Unfortunately, the first man messed things up miserably. He was not supposed to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but he did. Forevermore, humanity went into a terrible tailspin, from which we have not fully “recovered.” G-d banished him from the Garden of Eden, fearing He would also eat from the Tree of Life. How could he do kindness properly if he couldn't resist evil? For twenty generations after Adam, the world got worse and worse until Avraham came and reinstated the idea of kindness and doing good, and he restored the connection to the Tree of Life. His son Yitzchak chose a different path toward G-d: He worked on his attribute of Gevurah (control) and he therefore championed the cause of resisting evil. At this point, it seems that both trees have begun to reach some level of perfection, and the mystics tell us that the world was now ready for the next generation, as both the attributes – Chesed and Gevurah had undergone a “tikkun” (“correction”). This new generation should have been inaugurated with Yitzchak and Rivka, but for many reasons we will not discuss at this time, they were not chosen for this new beginning.

Yitzchak and Rivka had two children – Esav and Yaakov. What was supposed to happen? Yaakov was to carry on the tradition of his grandfather Avraham and develop the attribute of doing good – chesed. And Esav, who was born first, was supposed to do what needed to be done first (as it is written in the Psalms); namely, stay away from

evil. Each brother had a mission. Had they fulfilled this mission together, each brother would have had six children. Why six?

If you look in the Sefirot, there are six attributes of action in the spiritual realm: Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, etc., and Malchut (which is a conglomerate of all six). The game plan was that the six children of Yaakov would develop their characteristic in the domain of “Ase Tov” (“do good”) and the six children of Esav would develop their attributes in the realm of “Sur me-ra” (“resist evil”) from the corruption of these holy characteristics. In other words, each spiritual realm can be done in both these domains. For example, with chesed, you can actively do active kindness, or actively resist from doing false kindness [which is an unholy corruption of kindness – such as immorality, which is self-centred kindness]. That is why Yitzchak understood that even though Esav wasn’t the greatest guy in the world, he had the harder task. G-d set him up in such a way that he would have much more difficult situations to go through and his mission would be to always resist evil. With Yaakov, it was a question of how much good he was going to do. But with Esav, it was always a challenge to fight against evil; for example, when Esav came in hungry from the field his mission was to resist gulping down the pot of beans. Yitzchak, who himself was champion of the ideology of gevurah and resisting evil, identified strongly with Esav. That’s why the Torah says that Yitzchak loved Esav. In Hebrew, “love” comes from the word “to be at one with”: Yitzchak related with Esav’s personality type. Yaakov identified more closely with Avraham.

The problem is that when Esav sold his birthright, he relinquished his life’s mission of resisting evil. To all intents and purposes, he was saying, “Life’s too short; I’m not going to waste my time resisting evil. Give me those beans.”

And when Yaakov bought the birthright, he regarded it as a simple transaction. He did not realize that there was a lot more involved in carrying the responsibility of the primogeniture than he bargained for.

Esav went after the impulses of self-gratification and refused to do the job he was meant to do. Our Rabbis tell us that **if a person doesn’t address himself to his own purpose and mission in life, the fellow next to him who does, will get his portion and the other guy’s portion in the world, as well.**

Dual Mission

The commentaries explain: Everyone in the world has a unique mission. There are a certain number of missions that have to be accomplished in the world. And it could be that the friend next door to you doesn’t want to do his mission. And so the other fellow, whose doing his own mission, may take on another mission. By taking on the second mission, he will earn all the Olam Haba that the second fellow was supposed to have. The person who takes on an extra mission assumes the potentials and the rewards for that mission as well. And so Yaakov, the “do-good” man, must now add an extra mission to his life to become the “resist-evil” man. Was there anyone else in the family who could assume the mission Esav threw away? There were only two brothers, and Yaakov was the only one who could assume that mission.

By taking on this different type of mission, Yaakov now had to begin doing the types of things Esav would normally do, such as, hanging around with evil people so that he can bash their heads in. Someone has to work for the vice squad: it’s a

thankless job, but it has to be done. And so when Yaakov stole the blessings from his father, this was his initiation into the more challenging part of life. The act of taking the blessings was not so much an act of doing good, but rather an act of prevention, an act of resisting evil: Had those blessing fallen into the hands of Esav, it would have spelled disaster for the Jewish people.

Where is Yaakov going to be trained to resist evil? Not in Yitzchak's house. He has to go to the gutter! He has to go to Charan and live in the house of his uncle Lavan. Charan was a place of swindlers and crooks who would rob the shirt off your back. He had to deal with this people and resist all the temptations and become a success in society, not by doing things the way they did them, but by doing them honestly.

"Vaytze" means, "he went out." Yaakov had to "go out" of the persona he was used to being and assume an additional persona – the persona of Esav, the persona whose challenge it was to resist evil.

From Vayetze on, it wasn't that Yaakov was punished for stealing Esav's blessings. Rather, **all his trials and tribulations were part of the obstacle course he had to go through in order to develop into the person who could resist evil.** All Yaakov's difficulties were challenges. Yaakov's mission was to confront every headache and deal with it while upholding the principles of Gevurah. By overcoming all the challenges he faced, Yaakov would perfect the ability to resist evil.

When we first read a description of Leah and Rachel in the Parsha, we read that "Leah has unpleasant-looking eyes, but Rivka is beautiful." Since when does the Torah talk so negatively about a woman's eyes?

Our Rabbis explain: Since Leah was the eldest and Rachel was the youngest, and since Esav was the eldest and Yaakov was the youngest, it was understood that Leah would marry Esav and Yaakov would marry Rachel. When Leah would meet sojourners from Canaan, she would ask them, "Do you know a person by the name of Esav? Can you tell me a little about him?" People would reply, "Oh, he's a bad dude! He kills, he rapes, he doesn't believe in G-d." One report was worse than the next. What did the poor Leah do? She cried all the time. That is why her eyes were so ugly. If you would cry as much as she did, your eyes wouldn't look so good, either. But really, the Torah is saying something good about Leah. It was telling us how much Leah didn't want to be involved with such a terrible person as Esav.

Let us try to understand what Yaakov is psychologically going through now. Think of a time your parents asked you to do something you didn't want to do. But, because you were the most responsible person in the house, you had to do it. For example, in a house where you have four or five kids, there's really only one who shows himself to be the most responsible: this is the child who gets straight A's, who always does his homework, who does the babysitting, who takes out the garbage, and who befriends the "nebbiest child" in the class. We're all a bit reluctant to take on these extra tasks.

Now, remember: Yaakov was blazing a trail. He was taking on a mission for the first time. We can judge him with 20-20 hindsight vision, but he had to live through it. And when his mother told him to put on the skins and pretend to be Esav, he didn't really want to do it. But he did it! He didn't fully understand what his new role was and what his new responsibilities entailed.

He was still struggling with his mission. That is why the sun set two hours earlier when he began his trip – he was totally in the dark!

When Yaakov came to Charan, he was looking for a shidduch that matched his personality. Obviously, he was going for Rachel. Her personality suited him.

When Lavan came along and, for his very selfish reasons, wanted to switch Leah and Rachel, Rachel understood there was a lot of true Divine intervention involved in what he was doing, even though he wasn't doing it for the right reason. The two women themselves, with their greater intellect ("binah yeteira") understood that if Esav had opted out of the game, then Yaakov now had two missions, and this meant ... two wives.

It is not unusual to find a scenario where the person who needs to go out of his personality cannot see the obvious, while everyone else around him can. This is true about Yaakov, who is struggling to find himself, and his wives who see his path clearly.

Leah, who was supposed to marry Esav, could now be the "ezer k'negdo" for the "sur me'ra" (stay away from evil) personality. The two women intuitively understood that **Leah, the oldest who had been destined for the eldest Esav, should be the one to marry Yaakov first, and help him develop in the area of "sur me'ra."**

With the understanding that Yaakov now had two missions – more than any one wife can handle –, Rachel and Leah were "in cahoots" as they realized that each wife would be able to handle only one aspect. **Rachel realized that she could help Yaakov develop the attribute of Emet – Truth. He would have to learn what truth really is.**

He had been reluctant to steal the blessings from his brother, because he thought that such an act wasn't truthful. But what he had to learn was to look at the much broader understanding of truth. Had Esav received the blessings, it would have been the greatest lie in the history of the world – Esav masquerading as the biggest tzaddik. And so, if Yaakov masqueraded like Esav, although it wasn't 100% truthful, he had to learn how to really measure truth by looking at the broader implications rather than a narrow perception of truth.

Tell a man of truth to marry two wives? Yaakov would have never listened to this. But just as mother Rivka understood that sometimes you have to do things without telling your husband and excuse yourself later, so too Leah and Rachel understood what must happen at the wedding. And so, in Yaakov's best interests, Rachel selflessly gave Leah the secret code, because she understood that Yaakov had to develop the attribute of "sur me'ra" first. Once he could master this trait, he would then be able to deal with the attribute of Truth, which was more in line with his nature. That is the reason for the switch on the night of the wedding.

From here, we can understand why Leah answered Yaakov's accusation the "morning after" by calling him a cheater too. What she was explaining to him was that he now had a second role, and the person most suited to deal with that role and be his wife was she herself, the daughter of a swindler – she would be his "ezer k'negdo" and she would help him develop his resistance to evil. She was the one who knew all about evil and could teach him what swindling was all about and how to stay away from it and grow

from the experience. She was the eldest and had been around her father longer than Rachel and therefore was best suited to the role.

Now we know why Yaakov didn't punch Lavan in the face for substituting Leah for Rachel. He was beginning to realize what his new role entailed. Now he would have to find other ways to deal with Lavan in a more fitting fashion, ways that were more in line with his mission. But he was still having trouble coming to grips with Lavan's deceit.

Love-Hate Relationships

After Yaakov complained to Lavan, Lavan allowed him to marry Rachel a week later. Of course, in line with his dual mission, he had to marry Rachel too. And the Torah tells us, "He loved Rachel more than Leah." Obviously he loved Rachel more, because she was the one best suited to his nature.

Nachmanides comments on the words, "Hashem saw that Leah was hated." The Torah doesn't say that Yaakov hated her, but that G-d saw she was the hated one. When a man has two wives has a tremendous love for one of them, even if he is neutral toward the latter wife when compared to the former, it would appear that the latter wife is hated.

Hatred isn't always the act of commission of hateful acts. Sometimes it's the act of omission of kind acts. Sometimes a wife will say to her husband, "You hate me," when he has ignored her in some way, not because he did something bad. Rachel was Yaakov's soul mate and he was mad about her, and, in the beginning, Yaakov most probably wasn't giving Leah the attention she should be getting. And so, in relation to the attention Rachel was getting, Leah would appear to be hated, although Yaakov certainly did not hate her.

Esav's Mirror Images

To help Yaakov as he struggled with each ordeal, G-d gave Yaakov exceptional strength. **He had to be as strong as Esav in order to resist evil.** He would need to apply this strength in various situations – sometimes to bash in heads, sometimes to show superhuman control, and other times to go to war.

This struggle manifested itself in Yaakov's children. Each of them reflected the various levels of Esav, but in a positive way. For example, Reuven. His name means "See! It's a son." In naming her son, Leah was saying, Look at the difference between my son and my father-in-law's son! Look how different my son is from Esav! My son will be willing to give away the birthright to Yosef and even save his life, while Esav wasn't willing to part with it so easily.

In the blessings Yaakov gave his sons at the end of the book of Bereishit, he said to Reuven, "You have more lifting and more power." That is, he was supposed to have the birthright of being the Cohen, the one who "lifts" his hands to bless people. In other words, Yaakov was telling Reuven to use his hands in a good way. Esav was also the man of hands, but he used his hands to do terrible things. Reuven had some of the qualities of Esav, but they manifested themselves in a more positive way.

In the next parsha, we will learn that when Rachel dies and Yaakov moves into the tents of one of the maidservants, Reuven goes and moves Yaakov's bed into his mother's tent. Here Reuven uses his hands to help his mother. Later on in the Torah, we learn

that in the tribe of Reuven, which settled on the other side of the Jordan, where more murder took place. The hallmark of the family of Reuven is the use of hands to do good. This was the struggle of Reuven. Unfortunately, though he tried hard, in the end he loses the birthright for doing some acts that were not befitting his status.

In blessing Shimon and Levi, Yaakov told them, “Weapons of destruction are what you have.” In the next parsha, we read how Shimon and Levi wipe out the city of Shechem. Although they use their hands the way Esav did, they kill people who did an act that was disgusting in the eyes of the Jewish People. Who are the descendents of Levi? When Moshe needs help in killing the people who worshiped the Golden Calf, the tribe of Levi helps him. When there is a breach in morality among the Jewish People, who comes along to kill the perpetrators? Pinchas, a descendent of Levi.

There are many more examples. Esav had mocked the Priesthood, and had asked, “What do I need the Priesthood for?” and was told that the Levites carried the Holy Ark and if they were not careful they could die. It was then that he said to Yaakov, “I’m going to die anyway, so I don’t need the priesthood.” But Yaakov’s descendents rectified Esav’s negative actions.

The blessing Yaakov gave to Yehuda was: “His hands will be against his enemy.” Who was the greatest descendent of Yehuda? King David, who was a red-haired fellow with a ruddy complexion. He killed hundreds of thousands of enemies of the Jewish People. He was the archetype of what Esav could have been, but he used his hands for good.

The children of Yaakov and Leah were all prototypes of what Esav could have had. Now we understand why Yaakov had to have all those kids. If it weren’t for Yaakov, Esav would have had those children, but with negative traits.

Where Have All the Flowers Gone?

The little innocuous story about the Dudaim is not such a little story after all:

After Adam and Eve, the world went into a tailspin, and get spiralling down until Avraham and Sarah. They brought the world up a notch. Then we got to know the other Patriarchs and the Matriarch, who added more spiritual perfection to turn the world around. Things were looking good. But how do we know that they really accomplished something? We have to look at the regular Jews. The children of Yaakov represent the ordinary Jews.

What kinds of children will a Patriarch have? The birth of Reuven is an important event. And the story of the Dudaim is an important event.

The four-year-old child was raised in the house of Yaakov, who subsisted by the benevolence of Lavan, the man who tries to outsmart everybody. During the first fourteen years that Yaakov worked for Lavan, he didn’t make much money. In retrospect, Yaakov recalls how terrible life was in those first fourteen years: “I never got a wink of sleep; if there were any problems, I had to pay for everything.” You can be sure that whatever wages Lavan gave Yaakov they were barely enough for subsistence. You can be sure that when you were in Yaakov’s house during those first fourteen years, there was probably nothing more on his table than a few crumbs of bread and nothing more. (Only in the last six years did Yaakov become wealthy – and Lavan

couldn't tolerate that.) How much money does a shepherd make, anyway? When Yaakov asked Leah and Rachel if they should leave Lavan's house, they said, "He treats us like strangers; he's eaten everything we have; he hasn't given us anything." Lavan enriched himself through Yaakov's work and didn't share anything with Yaakov, his children or his grandchildren. In a word, for fourteen years Yaakov's home was an impoverished one.

And the four-year-old Reuven went out into the fields during the harvest time. In the fields there were an abundance of juicy fruits and foods all over the place – things the child had never seen in his own home. The deprived child saw all this in front of him and his eyes were popping out. And what did he do? He tried to find something that didn't belong to anyone. Now, Dudaim are wildflowers, and they grow in springtime, not in the harvest period. By harvest time, they are ownerless – no one's interested in them. The child went out and, despite all the temptations in front of him, made sure to find the one thing he was sure would not be considered theft: the dudaim. And he brought these flowers as a present for his mother.

Now, the terrible King Menashe could scoff at this child's honesty. But to G-d, this pure gesture on the part of a mere child was extremely important. How important was it?

Let's go back to the Garden of Eden, and to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and evil, which represents "sur me'ra."

The Talmud asks where Haman is alluded to in the Torah. The answer, it says, appears in the verse in which G-d discovered Adam and Chava hiding after they ate from the fruit of the forbidden tree. He asked them, "Ha'min Ha'etz ...?" ("Did you eat....?") The first word of the question, "Ha'min," has the same letters as the word "Haman." The question is not, Where does Haman appear in the Torah? but, "Where do we find a person with Haman's attitude in the Torah?" What does this mean?

Haman was the richest man in the world – he had everything! But there was one thing he didn't have: Mordechai wouldn't bow down to him! The Torah asks where do you find this attitude, where a person has everything, but is not satisfied and goes after the one thing they don't have? In the Garden of Eden. They couldn't resist this one little "no-no." That was the beginning of the descent of man.

Now, look at Reuven. **He represented the complete antithesis of that attitude. This was a child who had nothing, and yet he made sure not to take anything that wasn't his.** His act was the first dramatic proof of the rectification of man's first sin. It proves that Yaakov came down to Charan for a reason. He came down to Charan in order to develop what Esav had never succeeded in developing. Yaakov's mission was to repair the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

As to the Tree of Life, he would have to repair that through the women he married and the environment he cultivated. How do we know he succeeded? We know it by looking at Reuven.

The Wicked Menashe could not appreciate these things. But the Almighty knew how important Reuven's act was. The story of the Dudaim *had* to take place in the time of the harvest, and the person who did the act *had* to be the firstborn, the fruit of the new union.

Moreover, the Malbim contrasts this incident of the dudaim with the story of Noach's son Cham.

Noach comes out of the ark, plants a vineyard, drinks wine and gets drunk. What does his son Cham do to him? He castrates him. Why? The answer is very simple: Cham's mode of thinking was: *The three of us came out of the ark. When Daddy dies, we'll split the world three ways. I don't want him to have any more kids, so that we don't have to split up the world more ways.* And so, to solve the problem, he castrated his father. This shows what a child is capable of doing, and what sibling rivalry can bring about.

Now, Reuven knew his mother had stopped having kids and they were only four brothers. What did he do? He found a beautiful flower that smelled wonderful; he could enjoy it all for himself. But he thought: *How can I enjoy this flower if my mother wasn't fortunate enough to find it? I'll give it to Mommy, even though this can make Mommy pregnant and there'll be more kids.* Not only did Reuven not have anything, but whatever he didn't have, he was willing to divide it up even more.

This is a tremendous level. This is greatness! This is the result of Yaakov's stealing the bechora in last week's parsha! This is what the muck and mire of Charan is all about! It's all for this one pristine act of a four-year-old child, who represents everything that's going to happen to the rest of the Jewish People. Even if Reuven may have failed later on in life, the first fruit was incredible.

The dudaim flowers were more than flowers. They represented a successful mission for Yaakov in Charan. At this point, Yaakov did not know what his son had done and therefore could not take pleasure in what his son had done. Leah, his mother, wanted to be the mother of that nachas – she wanted to give those flowers to Yaakov.

But Rachel said, *Uh, uh. You may be wonderful, Leah, but how did you get to be Yaakov's wife in the first place? I gave you the code word. I'm the one who could have been married to him first. I could have been the one in charge of everything. But I knew there was a bigger mission in life. And I knew that Esav abdicated his role and you were supposed to be his. I could have married Yaakov without thinking of you. Instead I gave him to you and you have him now. But is it really you or is it really me? Give me the flowers – I'm the one who should present them to Yaakov, because it really came from me.*

At first, Leah misconstrued Rachel's words and thought she was looking for another way to have kids. But Rachel enlightened her: She was not interested in kids. She didn't care if Leah went with Yaakov that night. She didn't want the flowers for their medicinal powers. She wanted them as a sign that the Jewish People had arrived. It was a sign that all the values the Patriarchs had instilled in the world were beginning to bear fruit. And Rachel considered that she had ownership of that heritage and consequently, those flowers.

And so, when the midrash says this was a good deal, they knew what they were talking about: Rachel had to give up two tribes for those flowers. She even had to give up the Patriarchal tomb for those flowers. **But what did she get? She, and no one else, was the mother of the Jewish People.** She was the reason why the children were succeeding – the flowers were in recognition of Rachel's status and in confirmation of

that fact. What did Leah get? She got two more kids, but she did not gain the recognition as the Akeret HaBayit, the mainstay of the household. It was a fair deal.

On the Road to Bethlehem

Where was Rachel buried? On the road to Bethlehem. What's so bad about not being buried in the Patriarchal Tomb?

The Midrash says there are a lot of benefits to being buried in the Patriarchal Tomb. As a matter of fact, when Resurrection day comes, the forefathers buried in that tomb will be resurrected much more quickly than anyone else. Many even say that Resurrection will issue forth from that very tomb.

But is this what the mother of the Jewish People cares about? Is this what the woman who gave up the love of her life only to play second fiddle cares about? Is this something the woman who wants the jasmine flowers for what they represent cares about? Maybe there are things that are more important to her than the Patriarchal tomb.

We mentioned that Rachel was not buried in the Patriarchal tomb because she gave up one night of being with the great Tzaddik Yaakov. But there are other reasons why Rachel was buried along the way. In this week's parsha, we are told that Yaakov, not realizing Rachel had stolen her father's idols, said: "Whoever stole the idols should die!"

The midrash brings another, much more important reason. It says that when the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed and the Jewish People were suffering and it looked as if the Jewish People might never return to the Promised Land, the Almighty summoned the prophet Yirmiyahu to go to the graves of the Patriarchs to beseech G-d to rescind His decree that the Jewish People should never go back to the Land of Israel. All the forefathers came to G-d to plead their case.

Avraham said that, since he had been willing to sacrifice his son, couldn't G-d give the Jewish People a break? And G-d said no. Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe – they all pleaded their case. And then, as the Jewish People were leaving the holy land, bound in chains and crying bitterly, it just so happens that they did not pass by Chevron but by Bethlehem. And they saw the tomb of their grandmother Rachel. And her heart was stirred. And her spirit went up to Hashem. And she said, "Hashem, you know how much I loved Yaakov and you know how much I should have been married to him first; and you know that, because I didn't want my sister to be embarrassed, I gave her the signs. But not only that, so that he might not identify Leah by her voice, I also lay under the bed. When Yaakov spoke to Leah, I was the one who responded, so that she wouldn't be found out. I did everything possible to save my sister from embarrassment. And what about me? All I am is flesh and blood and dust and ashes. And I was not jealous of another wife who was brought into my marriage. And You, O merciful King, are you jealous of the idol worship your children are doing? Can't you please stop it?"

At that point, says the midrash, G-d's mercy welled up and He said, "For you, Rachel, I will return the Jewish People to their place."

When Rachel died, she knew that there were enough people in the Patriarchal tomb. But prophetically, she asked, *Who's going to cry for the children later on? Who's going to care for them? Who's going to make the difference?* She was *the* Matriarch. She

gave selflessly. She gave away everything: her husband, more kids, her burial plot – as long as she could ensure the continuity of the Jewish people!

I would suggest that when Rashi says, “She belittled sleeping with Yaakov,” it was because she understood there were more important things in life. No matter how much she loved him and no matter how much she really wanted to have a child (earlier she said that without a child she was like a dead person), she was willing to be a dead person, as long as the Jewish children came out right – not only her children, but all the Jewish children.

LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE

Obviously, Rachel was not embarrassed to be buried along the road to Bethlehem. It’s a complex world and G-d has His reasons for everything He does. Sometimes we can’t figure out why things happen. Yaakov couldn’t figure anything out in this parsha – from start to finish it was all confusion to him. That it why it is a closed parsha – Parsha S’tuma.

Usually, there are spaces between the parashot. It’s as if G-d is giving room for questions between the parashot, in order to understand. But in this Parsha, it doesn’t pay to make any breaks: G-d’s plans are so wondrous that we can’t always figure out what he wants us to do. Sometimes, even with the breaks, it’s even more difficult to put the pieces together.

All his life, Yaakov never understood why his beloved Rachel wasn’t buried next to him in the Patriarchal tomb. Even when he wanted to move her to Chevron, G-d told him to leave her in Bethlehem. Only in the next parsha, when Yaakov battles with Esav’s angel, does he begin to realize that, no matter how complex G-d’s plans are, if we hang around long enough, we’ll finally figure out there’s a rhyme and a reason for everything that happens.

Notwithstanding all his problems, Yaakov never knew he was carrying two men’s responsibilities. But where would the Jewish People be had Yaakov not carried this double load? He could have divorced Leah, taken Rachel, had six children and left Charan. What would we do with six boys who could do chesed but could not resist evil? Where would we be without a Rachel who would see us in our misery as we were living Israel and intercede with G-d for us? How could G-d not forgive the Jewish People – knowing that Rachel was their mother and knowing that, even though they had sinned, with such a mother as Rachel and her sacrifice and the education she had given all the children, they were wonderful people and He could bring them back?

I think that the most important message of this parsha is that we must accept the challenge of “sur me’ra.” G-d throws many temptations our way. If G-d put us in this world, it means that we are capable of resisting. And we have role models to learn from!

And even though we may be good Jews and are trying our best, unfortunately the vast majority of Jews have not assumed the mission they are supposed to. Someone else must pick up these unattended missions. It’s not enough to come to a Torah class once in a while and do good deeds: Yaakov wanted to do just that. But Hashem said, “I have

other, bigger plans for you. I'll put you into all kinds of situations you may not understand and you may be quite unhappy being in those situations." And we may be faced with the biggest challenges imaginable! The reason why we're given these challenges is that Hashem feels that we are such good people that He can count on us to come through for Him when things get rough, and he expects us to be able to stay away from evil.

Yaakov was the epitome of a person who learned to stand up to evil. In this week's parsha, we suffer with Yaakov to the very end of the parsha. But, have no fear! The story is not over! In next week's parsha, Yaakov will have his next confrontation with the yetzer hara, **and the sun will yet rise two hours early for Yaakov.**

And, in the end, Yaakov will learn what truth is all about. The letters of the word Emet – Truth – are alef, mem and tav. These are the first, middle and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Hebrew word for "falsehood" is "sheker." The three letters that form this word – kof, shin and resh – are one next to the other in the alphabet. That is the difference between true and false. When something is false, you see it in a very narrow perspective. It is something isolated from the entire picture, and once you do that, the thing is false. But truth is true from beginning to end and if you can see the entire picture, you will have the truth.

If you look at any one event in Yaakov's life, you see it's terrible. Only when you look at the entire story, from beginning to end, without breaks in between, can you see the truth emerging and can see the wonderful results G-d meant to happen.

This parsha is one of encouragement. Although we find many challenges in life that we didn't bargain for, it could very well be that we have been given another mission in life that we have to accomplish. Sometimes we'll feel the success in the most unusually simple places.

CONCLUDING STORY

In Mattesdorf in Jerusalem, on Rechov Sirotskin, a bus was making its way downtown. It stopped at one of the Torah institutions. There were about 75 people trying to crowd into the bus. The bus driver opened up the front and back doors to allow everyone to pile in, and he shouted to those in the back, "Send your tickets forward to be punched." And eight-year-old boy made his way up from the back of the bus all the way to the driver and handed him his ticket. The driver said, "I already punched your ticket."

The little boy said, "No, you didn't."

The driver was hot and sweating and not in the mood to argue with an eight-year-old kid. And he said to the boy, "Just move in. You're blocking the people behind you."

And the little kid looked at the driver and said, "I can't do that. It's stealing."

"I told you I punched your ticket. Now, get to the back," the driver shouted at the boy.

The child, downcast, walked toward the middle of the bus. After a few feet, the bus stopped at an intersection. The driver looked in his rear-view mirror and saw the boy,

leaning against a pole and crying. He called the boy to the front. He said to him, "What's with you, young boy? Why are you crying?"

The child said, "I can't do it. It's stealing." The driver took out his hole puncher, punched the ticket and gave it back to they boy, saying, "*Zeh Yafeh.*" That's beautiful!"

That's what the Jewish People are. That's why Hashem listens to Rachel. That's why He brings us back –because, *Zeh Yafeh.*

Parshas Vayeitzei



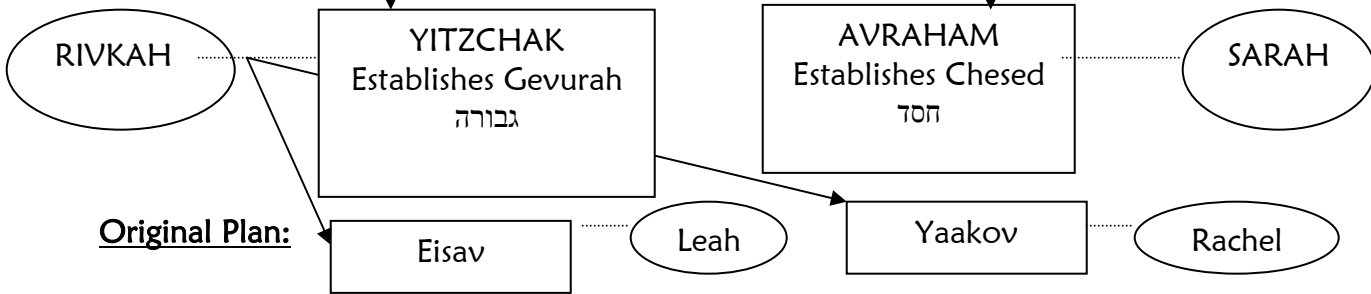
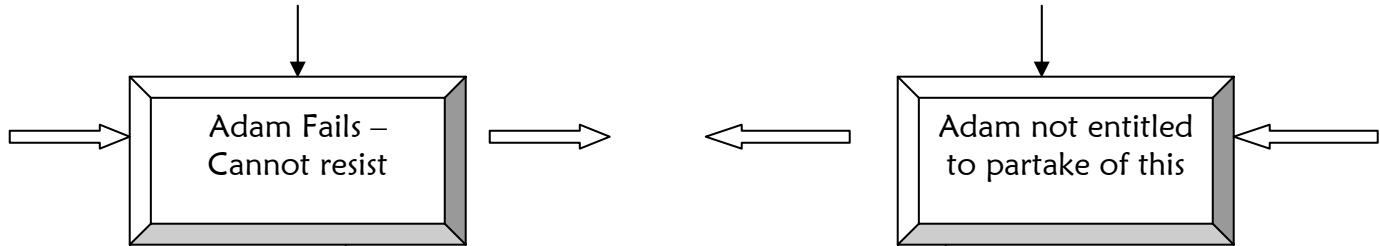
Resist Evil - סור מרע

Control - גבורה



Do Good - עשה טוב

Kindness - חסד

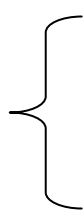


Original Plan:

Gevurah

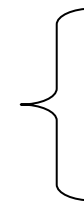
Chesed

Resist 6 edges of Negative Qualities



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Develop 6 edges of Positive Qualities



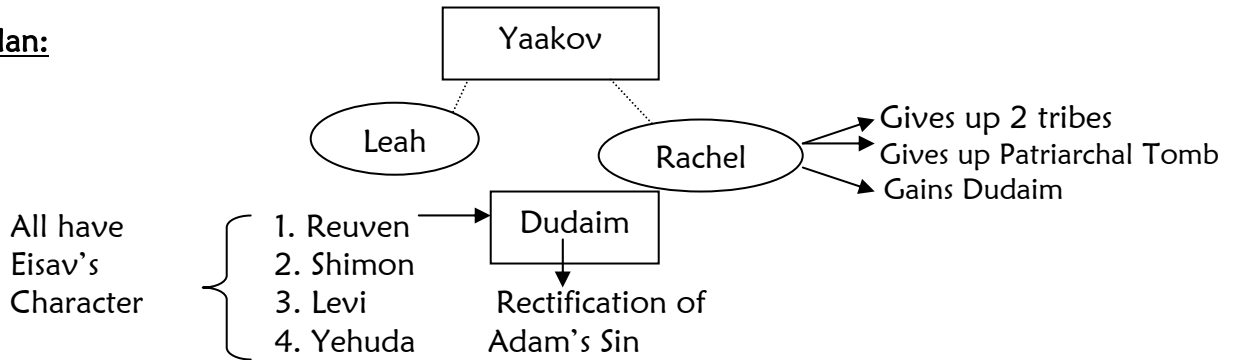
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

What Happens?

“Eisav Fails”

“Yaakov must take on two roles”

Revised Plan:



All have Eisav's Character

WHO GETS THE CREDIT??