

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #37—Parshat VaYeitze 5762 (2)

Reb Noson, in one of his classic essays (they're all classics, really) writes: As is known from the Kabbalah, Yaakov represents the Torah and all of Israel. Our matriarch Rachel represents the Oral Law. The Hebrew word *rachel* means sheep. Just as a sheep's wool is continually shorn, yet the wool grows back, so too, the teachings of the Oral Law are constantly studied ("shorn"), yet "grow back" and always provide fresh insights. The beauty of such a corpus of knowledge and intellect is astounding. Thus the Bible testifies that Rachel was beautiful. Leah, on the other hand, had "weak eyes." Rashi explains, "People said, 'Rivkah had two sons, [and her brother] Lavan had two daughters. The elder (daughter, Leah) for the elder (son, Esav), the younger (Rachel) for the younger (Yaakov).'" Leah was terrified at the prospect of being Esav's wife and so she prayed constantly to be spared that terrible fate.

Thus, Yaakov represents the Torah as a comprehensive unit, and the Jewish person who seeks Torah. Rachel represents the Oral Law and Leah represents prayer. Yaakov thought that the best way to enhance one's appreciation of Torah would be to first apply one's self to studying the Oral Law, becoming intimate with all of its pathways and mysteries. Once one had mastered the Oral Law, he would be better able to appreciate the power of prayer, for he would then have clear knowledge of what should be prayed for.

Thus, when asked what he wanted in exchange for his services, he told Lavan, "Your younger daughter Rachel." Lavan had come to the same conclusion as Yaakov, namely that through proper study of the Oral Law one would come to a more perfect prayer. This is exactly what Lavan **DIDN'T** want! Therefore, he substituted his daughter Leah. By inverting the order, Lavan's hoped to keep Yaakov (and, automatically all Jews) from perfection in the Oral Law (by limiting their knowledge of and connection to it) and prayer.

But God is beyond our comprehension. He thinks differently than we do and sees things differently than we do. Lavan's intention in transposing the order of the marriages was to "uproot all of Israel" (see [previous essay](#)). However, God knows that the proper way to attain Torah means first learning to pour out one's heart before God, constantly asking and beseeching that He be at hand and that He help draw one close to God. One must pray that he correctly understand the Torah he studies, that the Torah should illumine his path and open up his mind to God, in order to receive the true intentions of Torah by following its guidelines and directives.

So as much as Lavan tried to uproot the Jews by keeping the Oral Law from them, he actually aided Yaakov's attempts at being a good Jew by first giving him Leah, prayer, as a mate. Having "married Leah," namely, binding himself to the power of prayer, Yaakov was eventually able to marry Rachel too. Thus it was God Who worked things so that Lavan would put forth Leah before Rachel (*Likutey Halakhot, Rosh Chodesh 5:29*).

Interestingly, we find that Yaakov spent fourteen years in prayer. Our Sages teach that during the

fourteen years Yaakov spent tending Lavan's flocks he would recite Psalms (*Bereishis Rabbah* 74:11). We thus find that after spending fourteen years in Torah study, Yaakov spent another fourteen years in prayer! In the interim, because of his prayers and Torah study, he merited marrying his wives and beginning the Jewish nation. After his 28 years of Torah and prayer, Yaakov was blessed with untold wealth, despite Lavan's attempts to cheat and defraud him. Nu? What does all this have to do with us, with our survival and with the Holy Land?

There are many things in this world we simply cannot understand, even with the greatest stretch of the imagination. We face, on a daily basis, such chicanery and deception that we know not where to turn. Our so-called "friends" stab us in the back. Like Lavan, their intentions aren't as altruistic as they present them to be. Their true thoughts are to uproot the Jewish Nation. After all, we've been in exile some 2,000 years. When was the last time the nations gathered together to help the Jews? For that matter, when was the first? Yet they are all "happy" for us and applaud Israeli officials who sell out the Land (and the people) which they do not own, but are responsible for protecting! What greater achievement for the *Beit Lavan* ("White" House?) than this? Shouldn't I be frightened, like Leah, that we will fall into the hands of Esav? Who would sanction such a marriage?

Here we have the crux of our problems. We must flee from Esav. We must study Torah to be protected from him. We must pray, so we can be on our guard against the Esavs and the Lavans. Instead, we, the Chosen People, have chosen to act irrationally. We have given up our "flight to freedom," our quest for Torah. We do not "run away directly to God." We somehow try, too often manage, to flee from Him. So we fall victim to the Esavs and Yishmaels who slaughter us and blow up human beings with dastardly acts of cowardice and brave displays of bombing mountains and caves. We lose the very perspectives we should be jealously guarding. We choose and elect officials, ministers and government guardians, who would make even Lavan beat his breast with pride.

Can one imagine selling his birthright, his own Land, his pride and joy, to his enemy? Can one imagine giving it away? How can this happen? Rebbe Nachman teaches that there is holiness. There is evil. There is also the medium between the two, the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, an admixture found in the mundane, an admixture which could be elevated into holiness or descend into the depths of impurity. What was Lavan's power? It was to be able to take the mundane, turn it into evil, yet make it appear holy! This way, he would unwittingly entrap those who weren't attuned to his deceptions. Avoiding his traps takes someone of the caliber of Yaakov, one who studies Torah and prays to God to recognize Him. Without Torah and prayer, however, we are defenseless in the face of Lavan's and Esav's onslaughts. With Torah and prayer, we have the power to elevate even the mundane into a state of holiness (*Likutey Moharan* I, 19)!

Instead of rising to the defense of Israel, and revealing the atrocities of Arafat and Co., the injustices of Esav (who bombs mountains and valleys because of the affront to *his* defenses, and who have succeeded in having the Lavan lull and deceive them into a false sense of security), we have fallen victim to Lavan's wiles. We have allowed the wool to be pulled over our eyes. Therefore, a person can rise to the position of foreign minister, but, be bereft of any connection at all to the protection his own birthright offers him; can sincerely stand before a General Assembly and beg of its participants to take away from him his birthright! He can turn into a Lavan and whitewash a non-existent peace process; he can justify the death and destruction of his compatriots. He, too, can become a Lavan who would whitewash everything, and entertain the idea to "uproot all of Israel." It's scary, to say the least.

Yet Yaakov was promised that the Land he laid upon would be his and would be easily conquered" (see [previous essay](#)). So it shall be. Despite Lavan's attempts to whitewash all his evil intentions, Yaakov, who engages in Torah study and prayer, does attain, somehow, somewhere, its protection. Over the course of the last twenty centuries the attempts to remove Yaakov from his prayers have been many—both the church and the imams have sought to ban certain parts of the Jewish prayers throughout the exile—yet, we have somehow managed to "keep on trucking" and getting our requests across to God. So we've managed to stay alive. Despite the heinous attempts to get us to give up our claim to the Land, Yaakov, by his example of Torah and prayer, teaches us that it can easily be ours. It's not as hard as it seems. All we have to do is open our books and read a bit each day. All we have to do is open our hearts and mouths and pour them out a bit each day. Utilizing Yaakov's weapons, we can easily conquer.

What's more, when Yaakov finally left Lavan's home, he left a wealthy man. Despite all of Lavan's changing the contract every few weeks—despite all the routine political shifts which change every day—Yaakov received all the blessings promised to him. He had to "hang in there" for twenty long, hard years. Yet he remained steadfast in his faith, his prayers and his Torah study, and defeated his archenemy. Not only that, but just as Lavan, who was intent on destroying Yaakov, unwittingly played a role in God's master in helping Yaakov attain perfection and build a Jewish home, so too, the Lavans who now seem so deadly will actually be the catalysts through which we end up healthy, wealthy and wise, with all the blessings that were promised to us through our ancestors. Amen.

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