

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS VAYEITZEI**

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS VAYEITZEI

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS VAYEITZEI**

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 1. NAME YOUR PRICE**
- 2. FROM B'ER SHEVA TO CHARAN**
- 3. NINETEEN: THE INCORRUPTIBLE CORE**
 - 4. HOLY OR LOWLY?**
 - 5. LO AND BEHOLD**
 - 6. DREAM BUT DON'T SLEEP**
 - 7. THE THREE MUSKETEERS**
- 8. THE ONLY THING WE HAVE TO FEAR IS FEAR
ITSELF**
- 9. A THOUSAND-FOLD BLESSING**
 - 10. THANKSGIVING**
 - 11. THE GUARANTEE**
- 12. CHARAN OR RINA: ANGER OR JOY?**
- 13. DON'T RUN FROM, RUN TO**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

14. RUNNING FROM OR RUNNING TO

15. PRIORITIES

16. GOING UP OR DOWN?

**17. UNCONVENTIONAL PRAYERS FOR
UNCONVENTIONAL RESULTS**

18. REMOVE THE ROCK

19. JOY AND MORE JOY

20. SEEING AND HEARING

21. REMOVING THE ROCKS

**22. THE PRAYER TO BE A MOTHER AND THE
MOTHER OF PRAYER!**

B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Vayeitzei* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 23 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

The very word Vayeitzei is instructive of Redemption, for the word suggests going out. Even the constraints that are holy will be removed in the Messianic Age.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

ESSAY ONE

NAME YOUR PRICE!

For Jacob marriage was a Mitzvah par excellence.

**His love and passion for Rachel was not simply of a
romantic nature.**

**Rather it was motivated by his passion to be the one to
forge another link in the chain that started with Abraham
and Isaac, and would end with the giving of the Torah on
Mount Sinai to a Jewish nation.**

**Jacob's greatest passion was to be an integral link in that
chain; a link and a chain that exists to this day.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY ONE

NAME YOUR PRICE!

The Four Questions

Jacob fled his brother Esau's wrath and came to live with his uncle Laban. After staying with him for a month, Laban says to Jacob: "Just because you are my brother shall you work for me for nothing?" In the end Jacob works for Laban for seven years. His pay was the wife he wanted—Rachel.

Or Hachaim, one of the great Sephardic commentators, asks two questions: First, who says Jacob was not planning to ask him for remuneration for his work? Second, why did Laban so dislike the prospect of Jacob working for free? After all, Laban was a scoundrel who had no qualms about stealing Jacob's hard earned possessions. Why would he be so reluctant to accept Jacob's gift?

A third question can be asked: If Laban did not want Jacob to work for free, why did he wait a month before offering to pay Jacob?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Fourth, why did Laban not ask simply, “How much do you want to get paid for your work?” Why did he have to throw in the words: “Just because you are my brother shall you work for me for nothing?”

Laban’s Discovery

The following explanation is based on the Hungarian Chassidic work, *Rav Tov*, who addresses some of these questions.

When Jacob arrived, Laban says to him: “You are my bone and my flesh.” With these words he invited Jacob to stay with him. However, in the course of the first month of Jacob’s stay with Laban, he discovered something about Jacob he did not know previously.

When Jacob arrived, he thought he was a person no different from himself; someone who had basically the same material interests. Thus, Laban says to Jacob “you are my bones and flesh.” We both share the same physical properties. We are genetically related.

After staying with him for a month, however, Laban realized that he was not his “brother” in the true sense of the word. While he was a blood relative of Jacob—he was his uncle—in terms of their upbringing, goals and aspirations, they could not be further apart. Laban was a

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

materialist, opportunist and the “ends justify the means person,” while Jacob was a thoroughly spiritual person. Laban realized that there was a huge, unbridgeable gulf that separated between them.

Thus, Laban declares to Jacob, “Are you my brother?”

These words should not be understood that despite the fact that he was his brother he still must pay him. On the contrary, he was disabusing himself from the notion that they were brothers. Laban therefore tells Jacob: “Are you my brother? You are as far apart from me temperamentally and spiritually as one could possibly be? How then will you fit into my business? How can we coexist, when we have such disparate interests and goals in life?” What can I possibly pay you to make you a contributing partner to my less than holy enterprises?

Jacob's Remuneration Must be Spiritual

Jacob would not feel comfortable working for Laban no matter how much he would pay him. The sole form of remuneration that would suit Jacob, Laban came to the conclusion, had to be one that was of an ethereal nature and not ephemeral. It had to involve a Mitzvah.

If Jacob were to become rich without it contributing to his service of G-d and humanity (which is also a service to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

G-d) he could never feel comfortable with his gain. When one receives something for nothing, it is referred to as “shameful bread.” One cannot enjoy a handout. Human nature is such that we have to earn what we get. And for a person of Jacob’s caliber, earning means doing a Mitzvah.

Laban, in effect, says to Jacob, “since you are obviously not my soul-brother, you will not want to work for me for all the money in the world, because for you it will be considered as if you got nothing.”

Free from Mitzvos

Indeed, the term “for nothing-*chinam*” employed by Laban here is also found elsewhere in the Torah. When the Jews were in the wilderness they complained; fondly remembering the food they ate in Egypt—“*chinam*.” What does the word *chinam* mean there? It cannot possibly mean that they did not have to pay for their food, since they were slaves and broke their backs for the measly rations they received. It was hardly gratis!

Our Sages therefore explain that they meant to say that in Egypt they did not have to perform any Mitzvos in order to get their food. They had no spiritual obligations. They complained that when they followed Moses into the wilderness everything was quid pro quo. Their needs were provided for them, it would seem, as payment for their

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

commitment to G-d's commandments. This was a radical departure from their lives in Egypt, to which they were accustomed.

And so Laban senses that Jacob would not want to work for nothing; without truly earning his right to work and live off this work, without a spiritual connection.

The Mitzvah of Marriage

What Mitzvah could Laban possibly give Jacob?

If there was a mitzvah that could be observed at that time, one could be sure that Jacob was already engaged in its performance.

There was one Mitzvah, however, that he had not yet performed. He was still single and could not establish a home and a family that would become the nucleus of the Jewish nation, to whom the Torah would be entrusted.

For Jacob marriage was a Mitzvah par excellence. His love and passion for Rachel was not simply of a romantic nature. Rather it was motivated by his passion to be the one to forge another link in the chain that started with Abraham and Isaac, and would end with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai to a Jewish nation. Jacob's greatest passion was to be an integral link in that chain; a link and a chain that exists to this day.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Couterintuitive

This analysis can shed some light on the rather puzzling statement made by Jacob when he had to work for seven years to be married to Rachel: Jacob's hard work for seven years, the Torah teaches us, "felt like a few days because of his love for her." Isn't that sentiment counterintuitive? If someone is madly in love with another, every minute should feel like a year. Yet here seven years felt like a few days.

The answer is that Jacob's physical passion was an expression of his spiritual passion. In the spiritual world, every minute of preparation for the goal is no less a Mitzvah and source of fulfillment and bliss than the attainment of the goal itself. The journey to the Promised Land is as much the fulfillment of G-d's will as the actual entry into the land. Thus every day that Jacob was working for the goal of marrying Rachel was creating the mechanism for the future. It was therefore so gratifying and fulfilling because he was becoming a conduit for G-d's plan.

The lesson from the above is twofold:

First, for anything we do to be fulfilling it must ultimately be connected with a higher purpose. It must contribute to the betterment of ourselves and the world around us. In short, it must revolve around a Mitzvah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Second, even when we are engaged in the prefatory stages of a Mitzvah, our joy and enthusiasm should not be any less than it is when we do the Mitzvah itself.

Clamoring for Moshiach on the Road to Moshiach?

At this point one could raise a question. Why is there is such a clamor for Moshiach and Redemption, especially in the last few decades? As long as we are on the road towards that end, we are doing G-d's will and we are part of the process. What difference should it make to us that we are not there yet? Isn't every step along the way part of G-d's plan and design.

The answer is that there is one fundamental difference between Jacob's waiting to marry Rachel and our waiting for Moshiach and Redemption.

While Jacob knew that he was destined to raise the family that will forge ahead towards Sinai, he knew that the final outcome of his labor would not be realized in his lifetime. The final outcome was not his mission and challenge. Moving the process along was. He knew that he was but one pivotal link in that chain of events. As such he cherished every moment of it, not only because he knew that in each and every ensuing moment he was one step closer to that end, but also because each step possesses

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

intrinsic value and meaning. In short, it was not his role to complete the process; just to be a part of it.

We are at the Tail-End

By contrast, we are now at the “tail end” of the process. All of the Biblical, Talmudic, Kabbalistic etc. signs point to that which we have been told by the Rebbe on countless occasions that ours is the last generation of exile and the first of Redemption. We cannot be content with the knowledge that we are a crucial link in the chain. Because when one reaches the end of the journey, just “treading water” and not moving forward is not an option. Our generation has been endowed with an unprecedented mission to complete the process, which we hope, pray and trust we are about to do.

To be sure, every moment that we are still here in exile must be filled with meaning, good and therefore cherished. But the focus of our deeds should be to prepare ourselves to greet Moshiach, and internalize the Redemption—thereby completing the process begun by our forbears; crowning their efforts with success.

ESSAY TWO

FROM B'ER SHEVA TO CHARAN

Charan was a place that aroused anger; where the wily and devious Laban lived and idolatry was rampant.

There was no respect for G-d or for others. No wonder our Sages state that Charan was a place where G-d's wrath was aroused.

And yet it was in Charan that Jacob married Rachel and Leah; and it was there that he fathered eleven of the twelve tribes, the nucleus of the Jewish nation. It was there that Jacob flourished and accomplished so much.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TWO

FROM B'ER SHEVA TO CHARAN

Contrast B'er Sheva with Charan

“And Jacob left B'er Sheva and went to Charan.” These are the opening words of this week's parsha that describe Jacob leaving a city in the Land of Israel, where his father and mother Isaac and Rebecca resided, to go to a distant place called Charan.

Contrast the two names: B'er Sheva and Charan. The former literally means the “Well of the Oath,” or the “Well of Seven.”

The latter means “anger.” Jacob is journeying from a place that was a fountain from which life emerges. An oath is a medium that invokes G-d's name and prestige. This was a city that expressed G-d's affirmation that the wells Isaac dug were his. The reference to seven alludes to the seven Divine Attributes that were concentrated in that city where the Patriarchs resided. In short, B'er Sheva was a source of holiness and positive energy.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Charan, on the other hand, was a place that aroused anger. It was the place where the wily and devious Laban lived. It was a place where idolatry was rampant. There was no respect for G-d or for others. No wonder our Sages state that Charan was a place where G-d's wrath was aroused. It was a tough place, one fraught with danger.

And yet it was in Charan that Jacob married Rachel and Leah; and it was there that he fathered eleven of the twelve tribes, the nucleus of the Jewish nation. It was there that Jacob flourished and accomplished so much.

Martyred!

Our own Rabbi Gabi and Rebetzin Rivky Holtzberg, the martyrs from Mumbai, May G-d avenge their blood, went from the modern day B'er Sheva, the spiritual center of Chabad in Crown Heights to a remote corner of the world to spread the message of the Rebbe—goodness, kindness, Jewish knowledge and most importantly the knowledge that Moshiach is on his way and that we must prepare ourselves and the entire world for this age. How ironic and painful that this was the place where the hatred and anger of the evil elements of this world struck them down in the midst of their holy work.

But, there is no question that what they did was not in vain. Their self-sacrificing efforts will yet yield the intended

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

results. The light that they generated was so intense that it will ultimately blind the agents of evil and bring about the realization of their goal-our goal of bringing Moshiach.

May we no longer know of sorrow and may the families of all the martyrs and victims of the senseless and brutal massacre be comforted and may we see the coming of Moshiach, now!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY THREE

NINETEEN: THE INCORRUPTIBLE CORE

The Talmud states Jacob never died.

**Jacob represents immortality more than any other
righteous person because he had the exclusive
responsibility of establishing the Jewish nation.**

**He had to insure that the Jewish nation would acquire the
power of immortality, so as their progenitor he too had to
possess this power.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY THREE

NINETEEN: THE INCORRUPTIBLE CORE

Jacob's Celestial Dream

The beginning of our parsha relates how Jacob fled the wrath of his brother and travelled towards Charan. On the way there, he fell asleep and dreamt of a ladder situated on the earth and reaching into the heavens, with angels going up and down the ladder. In his dream, G-d promises him and his descendants the land upon which he was lying. He also promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and that the entire world will be blessed through Jacob and his descendants.

When Jacob awakens he realizes that this was no ordinary place, and exclaims:

“G-d is truly in this place and I didn’t realize it. ...How awesome this place is! This is none other than the house of G-d. This is the gate of heaven.”

The Torah then relates:

“Jacob arose in the morning. He took the stone that he had placed at his head, set it up as a monument, and poured oil

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

on top of it. He named the place Beis-E-l, but Luz was originally the name of the city.”

Our Sages identify the place of this vision as none other than the Temple Mount, the eventual site of the Beis Hamikdash. It was also the place Abraham brought Isaac for the Akeidah and the location of Isaac’s prayer when he met Rebecca.

The Luz Bone and Jerusalem

However, the one enigmatic detail here is the identification of this place by the name Luz. Why was it important to emphasize that this place was once called Luz? How does that contribute to the story and our understanding of the effect this experience had on Jacob and on his progeny, the Jewish people.

Rabenu Bachya, a 14th century commentator, explains that the name Luz is an allusion to the Talmudic tradition concerning the future Resurrection of the Dead. One of the Thirteen Principles of Faith is the belief that in the Messianic Age, the souls of the dead will return to their reconstituted bodies. This miracle will happen in a somewhat “natural” fashion. The Talmud states that there is one tiny bone in the body that is indestructible. It cannot be destroyed even by fire. It is from this bone that G-d will

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

reconstruct the entire body. This bone is called the Luz bone.

Just as the Luz bone is the nucleus of a new existence, Rabenu Bachya writes, so too Jerusalem is where all of existence started. King David expresses the centrality of Jerusalem as the starting point of the world in his Psalms (50:1-2): “O G-d Almighty, G-d speaks, and calls to the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. G-d appears out of Zion, the perfection of beauty.” Rabenu Bachya interprets this to mean that all of existence (“the earth from the rising sun to its setting”) came forth from Zion, which refers to Jerusalem and the Bais Hamikdash.

In other words, referring to Jerusalem as Luz reveals to us the secret of Jerusalem as an eternal city. Just as the Luz bone is indestructible and will provide the nucleus of new life in the Messianic Age, Jerusalem is an eternal city (and so too are the Jewish people an eternal people).

Hence, when Jacob comes to the Temple Mount in the center of Jerusalem – where G-d reveals himself to him and promises him and his progeny the inheritance of the Land of Israel – G -d alludes to the indestructibility of the his people and the eternal character of the land they will inherit, particularly, Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Although the Temple was destroyed, it will be replaced by a permanent structure. So too the Jewish people will return from long exile to their homeland forever.

The awesome power of all this is hinted at in the name Luz, the indestructible bone from which renewed existence will take place.

Not a Real Change

By saying that Luz was the original name of the city, the Torah wants to impress upon us what we may consider to be counterintuitive: the power of immortality was the **original** state of the world. Death and destruction were a superimposition on the natural and intrinsic status of existence. In the end, death will be removed forever, and eternal life will be reinstated. This leads us to the radical conclusion that, even now, death is an aberration.

To illustrate this point, the Rebbe cites the law that if a thief steals furniture and alters it, he is not required to return the piece, but rather pay its value. If, however the change can be reversed it is not considered an actual change and he is required to return the object. The Talmud coins the phrase: "A change that can revert to its original status is not a change."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

The same is true about the reversal of eternal life. Since it will be reversed in the future it is not a true change.

The existence of the Luz bone reinforces the notion that we possess an indestructible power at the core of our existence.

“Jacob Never Died”

We can now begin to understand what the Talmud (*Ta'anis* 5) means when it says that Jacob never died. Jacob represents immortality more than any other righteous person although it can be said of all righteous people that their soul and legacy live on. But Jacob was unique in that his not dying is a physical fact. According to Rashi's commentary, even Jacob's body is alive. He was buried only because his contemporaries thought he had died.

Jacob was unique in this regard because he had the exclusive responsibility of establishing the Jewish nation. He had to insure that the Jewish nation would acquire the power of immortality, so as their progenitor he too had to possess this power. It may be suggested that he received this power from his nocturnal experience at the site of the “original city Luz,” the city of eternal life.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

The 19th Blessing

When the Talmud discusses the important Amidah prayer (which originally consisted of 18 blessings and therefore called *Shemoneh Esrei*-18), it states that the blessings correspond to the 18 vertebrae of the spine. [Commentators have reconciled modern anatomy with the Talmudic tradition of 18 vertebrae]. The Talmud then asks what about the 19th blessing, added later to ask G-d for the destruction of informers and other evil people. What does that 19th blessing correlate with?

The Talmud answers that it corresponds to “the small vertebra of the spine.” This small vertebra, the 11th century Aruch states, is the Luz bone.

We can understand the connection between the Luz bone and the city of Jerusalem. Both symbolize eternal life. But how does the indestructible Luz bone relate to the blessing in which we ask G-d to punish the wicked?

To answer this question it is necessary to understand what distinguishes the Luz bone from all the other parts of the human anatomy that are subject to death and decomposition. The Midrash teaches us that the Luz bone was the only part of Adam’s anatomy that did not benefit from the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Hence the curse of death has plagued humanity as a result of Adam’s transgression did not apply to the Luz bone.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Underlying the above thought is the belief that not only is the soul pure and holy but also the human body possesses an incorruptible core.

When the original Amidah prayer was composed, it had, as stated, 18 blessings. The number 18, of course, is the gematria value of *chai*-life. These blessings were requests for G-d's support in all matters of life. When, however, society degenerated and evil influences were threatening the very life of Judaism and the Jewish people, the Sage Shmuel Hakatan incorporated the 19th blessing into the Amidah. While the number 18 represents the conventional form of life, 19 is the power of the indestructible, incorruptible core of the Luz, which insures purity and life even within the realm of the physical and degenerate.

As such, it has the power to neutralize the forces of negativity that threaten life associated with the 18 blessings. When that 19th prayer was inserted into the Amidah it contained the power to remove every vestige of evil left over from the Tree of Knowledge transgression, which led to a mixture of good and evil, which in turn led to death.

The 19th of Kislev: Rosh Hashanah for Eternal Life

The number 19 has assumed even greater significance in modern history. On the 19th of this month of Kislev 5559 (1798), Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (known as the Alter

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Rebbe, the founder of Chabad) was released from tsarist imprisonment. As a result, he was given a new lease on life. This enabled him to continue and increase his dissemination of the teachings of Chassidus. This day has become known as the “Rosh Hashanah for Chassidus” and marks a major turning point on the road to Moshiach and Redemption.

The Ba'al Shem Tov related that he had ascended on high and asked the soul of Moshiach “when will you come?” Moshiach’s answer was “When your fountains of knowledge will be disseminated to the farthest reaches.” The thrust towards Moshiach thus began in earnest after the 19th of Kislev of the year 1798 when the Alter Rebbe was liberated and has greatly expanded the spreading of this knowledge.

The fact that it all began on the 19th day of the month is not an accident. In light of our analysis of the 19th blessing of the Amidah and its connection to the life sustaining and evil negating Luz bone, it is reasonable to conclude that the Alter Rebbe’s release from prison dealt a major blow to the forces of evil and advanced the introduction of the eternal life dynamic.

It is no wonder the Rebbe Rashab (Rabbi Sholom Dovber, the fifth Rebbe of Lubavitch) stated that on the 19th of Kislev: “The light and **life** of our soul was given to us.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

In sum, this dynamic force is represented by the number 19; one more than 18, for it contributes immortality to the conventional understanding and experience of life.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY FOUR

HOLY OR LOWLY?

Jacob states that “whoever stole the idols will not live.”

This was not intended as a curse.

Jacob was merely stating a fact that a Jew cannot possibly survive with the worshipping of Laban’s gods.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY FOUR

HOLY OR LOWLY?

Return Home!

Jacob had spent many years with his unscrupulous uncle Laban; twenty years to be precise. Laban had done everything to make his life miserable, beginning, but not ending, with the ultimate act of deception of giving Jacob the wrong daughter as his wife.

Finally, after he had fathered eleven of the twelve tribes and after much travail – particularly when he was accused by Laban's henchmen that he had stolen Laban's flocks – Jacob receives a communication from G-d to return home. Jacob complied with G-d's request and set out on the journey back to his father's land. Meanwhile, Rachel was so disgusted with her father's idolatrous ways that she had stolen his idols and hid them on her camel.

When Laban discovered that Jacob had departed and that his idols were missing, he pursued him. Among the things Laban said to Jacob when he finally caught up with him was:

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

“Now you left because you longed to return to your father’s house, but why did you steal my idols?”

From the tone of the question it appears that the stealing of the idols was somehow connected to Jacob’s yearning to return to his fathers’ house. And while he understood why Jacob would want to return home, he could not fathom why he wanted to steal his gods. What is the connection between the two matters?

In addition, we must understand why he was so upset about the missing idols. We can appreciate why Laban was upset that Jacob had left. After all, Jacob had brought much wealth and good fortune to Laban. He did not want to lose the “goose that laid the golden egg.” But of what value were a few idols? In comparison with the bounty he would lose with Jacob’s departure the idols were insignificant. Moreover, he could have easily replaced them. Why then did he make such a fuss about these idols?

Contemporary gods

To answer these questions in a way that relates to our own lives we must first reflect on the contemporary meaning of “idols.”

In modern society, as in the days of old, there are many gods that people worship. The acquisition of money and

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

the pursuit of power, fame and pleasure are the most obvious examples of things that modern man worships. And as much as things have changed over the ages in almost every area of life, so little has changed with respect to what people worship. And, indeed, this was what Laban's life was all about. The physical idols of silver and gold that he worshipped were merely representations of the larger objects of worship that were mentioned earlier.

Jacob, by contrast, was not interested in the pursuit of these materialistic goals and gods. All of his success in amassing a huge fortune was for the express purpose of sustaining his fledgling family that was to become the nucleus of the Jewish people whose role it will be to bring the notion of one G-d to the entire world. In other words, to him the acquisition of wealth was no more than a means to an exalted end.

When Laban saw how enterprising Jacob was with his business, he was jealous and understandably – from his materialistic vantage point – suspicious that he had infringed on his turf.

But as long as Jacob was playing on the same turf and following the same rules, i.e., wheeling and dealing and all the tricks of the trade, the most Laban could do was to complain. It did not arouse his ire to the point of a hostile confrontation with Jacob.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

“You Want your Proverbial Cake and Eat it too”

However, when he saw that Jacob “yearned to return to his father’s house,” and had much more spiritual interests, he projected his own arrogance onto Jacob that he was exhibiting a “holier than thou” attitude, even as he had – in Laban’s perverse mind – engaged in the same orgiastic pursuit of all the vices that he Laban identified with. This was too much for him and prompted his outburst:

“I can possibly understand that you have spiritual interests and you wish to return to your father’s home to pursue them, but why then did you steal my gods?! Why did you take all the ill-gotten gains with you? Why have you appropriated my tactics?”

Laban was not so upset that his physical idols were stolen – for those he could easily replace – he was upset that Jacob was trying to “have his proverbial cake and eat it” as well. He was angry that, in his mind, Jacob could maintain the guise of having an indifferent attitude towards wealth even while he was involved in its pursuit, head over heels.

Laban was, in effect, saying: “How can you claim to be so holy and yet be so lowly at the same time? And if you are sincere about your desire to go home, why did you do it surreptitiously? After all, deception is also one of my gods.” Laban, in effect, charged that Jacob had stolen that “god” as well.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Laban's argument to Jacob goes even deeper. Reading between the lines Laban was saying to Jacob:

"If you Jacob maintain that you could live in both worlds why did you have to leave and return to your father's house? Why can't you continue to claim both worlds here with me?"

Jacob's Response: "We Can't Live with Your gods."

The answer to this question is given by Jacob in the next verse: "I was concerned you would steal your daughters from me."

Jacob's response was to partially concede Laban's point that he could have remained with Laban and still have pursued a higher spiritual goal. However, Jacob was concerned for Laban's daughters. The young generation may not be able to discern between Laban's deification of materialism and all that goes along with it and Jacob's use of it as a means to a higher end. For them it was dangerous.

Indeed, Jacob states that "whoever stole the idols will not live." This was not intended as a curse. Jacob was merely stating a fact that one cannot possibly survive with the worshipping of Laban's gods. And therefore he had no choice but to leave.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

We are All Jacobs”

We are all in Jacob’s position of yearning to return to our father’s house. This refers to the close to two-thousand year yearning to return to our home in the Land of Israel. Returning to our father’s house also refers to the return to a life that puts us in our Heavenly father’s home, i.e., the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Return home is a return to a time that allowed us to bask in G-d’s light; where G-d’s presence is not concealed.

The Laban’s of the world, the cynics, argue that our yearning is insincere. If we were so anxious to get back to the Holy Land of Israel why then have we stolen the gods/idols from the nations of the world. Why have we accepted the pursuit of wealth, fame, power, and pleasure and adopted a materialistic lifestyle?

Our response to them is to partly concede their argument: “You are right, we don’t belong here. And while we did not really steal these idols, for our pursuit of material wealth is only intended as a means and not as an end, nevertheless, you are right; we don’t belong in Galus/exile. Our children will be lost if we do not return quickly to our father’s house. We cannot survive here.”

And then we turn our gaze heavenward and pray: “Please G-d, bring us Moshiach who will take us back home in every sense of the word.”

ESSAY FIVE

LO AND BEHOLD

A Jew cannot bear to see the suffering of others and will speak out.

When he or she sees injustice or lack of care for one of G-d's creatures, the Jew cannot remain silent.

A Jew cannot sit idle, period.

Every moment counts, and every second of life was given to us as a resource intended for us to do something for the rest of the world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY FIVE

LO AND BEHOLD

Jacob's Rebuke of the Shepherds and the Arrival of Rachel

In this week's parsha the Torah relates how Jacob came to Charan for a dual purpose. First, he was fleeing the anger of his brother for having "stolen" the blessings of his father from him. Second, he went there to find himself a wife from among members of his mother's family.

Anything that happened to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were not private or passing events. "The deeds of the fathers are signs for the children" our sages say, suggesting that everything that occurred to them relates to and effects what happens to us. Simply put, this means that we must learn lessons from all of the events, even the ones that seem unimportant, that involved the Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

When Jacob arrives in Charan he notices how the shepherds were tarrying to feed their sheep and he says to them: "Lo, it is still the middle of the day, it is not yet time for the cattle to be gathered together; water your sheep

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

and go and feed them." The shepherds replied: "We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and they shall roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." It was at that moment that Jacob first met Rachel and was the beginning of the formation of a Jewish family that became the nucleus of the Jewish people.

One could ask, what is the reason these two seemingly disparate events (Jacob's dialogue with the shepherds, and the arrival of Rachel) are linked?

A Jew Cannot Sit Idle

On a simple (not simplistic) level, the concern Jacob had for the sheep and the distaste he had for idleness is the hallmark of the Jewish leader and, by extension, every individual Jew. A Jew cannot bear to see the suffering of other sheep (figuratively as well as literally) and will speak out, even if he or she is a recently arrived visitor. When he or she sees injustice or lack of care for one of G-d's creatures, the Jew cannot remain silent. And a Jew cannot sit idle, period. Every moment counts, and every second of life was given to us as a resource intended for us to do something for the rest of the world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

The Secret of the Word *Hein*: Singularity

Another answer to the above question is based on the introductory word "*hein-Lo*" that Jacob uses. Commentators ask why this word was necessary. Could he not have begun his sentence with the: "It is still the middle of the day"? And while one can argue that that was simply a figure of speech, or was added by Jacob for emphasis, every word, letter and nuance of the Torah has deeper significance.

One of the answers given to the usage of the word "hein-lo" is based on the fact that the two letters of the word, the Hebrew letter "*hei*" and the letter "nun" share an anomaly. Hebrew letters are also numbers. The letter "hei" is five and letter nun is fifty. (there is no letter corresponding to five hundred). If we take the number one and pair it with the number nine we get ten. Likewise, 2 and 8, 3 and 7, will yield the number ten, and so on. The only number that has no pair in relation to the number 10 is the number five. It cannot be matched with any other number to arrive at the same total. The same is true with the number fifty in relation to one hundred.

The heathen prophet Bilam in his prophetic words declared: "Lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." Here too, the prophecy that establishes the loneliness of the Jewish

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

people and their inability to truly assimilate is prefaced by the word “hein’Lo.”

Jacob beginning his dialogue that led to his marriage to Rachel and the inauguration of the Jewish people with the word “Lo” was to set the tone for the future. Even when we are scattered among the nations in exile – “it is still the middle of the day, it is not yet time for the cattle to be gathered together” – even when it was premature for the Jewish nation to be redeemed from exile, nevertheless, we must not lose our singularity.

Jewish Unity

The word “Hein-Lo” also conveys another crucial message for the future of the Jewish people and their ultimate Redemption from exile. The prophet Jeremiah declares: “*seh pezurah Yisrael*” — “Israel is a scattered sheep.” We have been scattered throughout the world and are awaiting the coming of Moshiach who will gather us together and end the Galus. The introductory word “Lo” hints to us that the internal strife and dissonance, places an obstacle to the gathering of the scattered sheep.

We can take the hint to the call for Jewish unity and apply it to the next verse, which contains the response of the shepherds to Jacob: “We cannot, until all the flocks be

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

gathered together, and they shall roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep."

In effect they were saying that the only way we can provide the sheep with their needs is when there is unity among ourselves.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY SIX

DREAM BUT DON'T SLEEP

A dream is the bridge between reality and fantasy.

A prophetic dream is the bridge between an other-worldly experience and our human mind.

To make the prophecy accessible to the world of human reality, it comes through the medium of a dream.

When we sleep our souls withdraw from our physical existence and become more receptive to ideas and goals that are more sublime than that which we can consider when we are awake and our souls are constrained by our bodies.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY SIX

DREAM BUT DON'T SLEEP

Jacob's Ladder

Dreams and their meanings have intrigued the minds of both the ancients as well as moderns. What significance do dreams have? Are they prescient or are they just the products of our most common thoughts. Do they reflect our sub-conscious aspirations, or are they just some chemicals of the brain gone awry? The Talmud devotes several pages to the subject of dreams. From the Talmud's analysis it appears that dreams contain all these elements. Some dreams are nonsense and some have profound significance and are indeed prophetic.

Beginning with this week's Torah reading, and continuing throughout the rest of the Book of Genesis, dreams play a very important part in the unfolding of events. Throughout the book, the dreams discussed have a definitely prophetic facet.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Jacob dreams of a ladder standing on the ground with its head reaching into the heavens. On the ladder he sees angels ascending and descending. When Jacob awakens he is troubled by the fact that he slept in such a holy place. He exclaims: "Behold, G-d is in this place and I didn't know!" According to Rashi and other commentaries, he was troubled by the fact that he had slept in the site that was to become the location of the holiest place on earth – the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

One can raise the question: What was G-d's purpose in having him sleep in this holy place. Conversely, if G-d communicated with him through this dream – the way G-d communicates with every prophet with the exception of Moses – why was he disturbed to have been given prophetic inspiration?

The answer to the first question can be given by way of a story. When the famed Rabbi Meir Shapiro was planning the establishment of the greatest Yeshivah in Poland, *Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin* – some cynics and critics derided him for his ambitious goal. One of them put it this way: "Rabbi you must be dreaming, if you think this plan could succeed."

Rabbi Shapiro's quick retort to the critic was, "At least I'm dreaming and not sleeping!"

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Dreams: Bridge between Reality and Fantasy

A dream is the bridge between reality and fantasy. A prophetic dream is the bridge between an other-worldly experience and our human mind. For G-d to enter directly into one's conscious mind, would have overwhelmed the greatest of prophets (with the exception of Moses). To make the prophecy accessible to the world of human reality, it comes through the medium of a dream. When we sleep our souls withdraw from our physical existence and become more receptive to ideas and goals that are more sublime than that which we can consider when we are awake and our souls are constrained by our bodies.

Our sages say that a person who goes seven days without a dream is called an evil person. One possible interpretation of this enigmatic statement is that a person who sleeps through life and do not reach beyond into a higher realm will stagnate. Stagnation, in turn, can lead to evil. When we don't grow we fall.

So G-d's communication to Jacob by way of a dream was His way of taking Jacob out of his mundane existence on earth and elevating him to the heavens. This, however, reinforces our second question: Why was Jacob troubled by this dream?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

A Sign of Tension and Obscuring of Reality

The answer lies in the fact that a dream, no matter how holy and prophetic is still imperfect. It is a sign of tension that exists between the world of G-d and the world we inhabit. To get around the dichotomy that separates heaven from earth G-d created the dream, where everything is obscured to make room for the world of the future to enter into the world of today.

Jacob wanted direct revelation of G-d without the need for a dream to serve as the medium. He hoped that the world, instead of obstructing holiness, would be a window to it.

Exile a Dream

The relevance of this to us is that we too are in a dream. King David compares the exile to a dream state. No matter how pleasant and sweet our dreams may be, they are still not reality and the ultimate good. A dream by definition is not truth. Dreams express inconsistencies. Jacob's dissatisfaction with seeing G-d in a dream is echoed by every one of us in our daily prayers when we say to G-d, "'Ad masai?!" – How much longer do we have to contend with living in a confusing and cognitively dissonant exile experience? When will Moshiach – G-d's human messenger – liberate us from exile, by opening up our potential to relate to G-d without any barriers? We say to G-d, it is not

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

enough that we dream in exile and we do not sleep. We want to be fully awake and bring the G-dly reality into our reality without any obstructions. We are confident that G-d will respond to our requests imminently.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY SEVEN

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

Charan is thus identified with the angry and hostile world that Jacob entered into.

It was in *Charan* that Jacob had to struggle with his uncle Laban, and was ultimately victorious.

This experience imbued Jacob's future descendants with the strength to confront adverse and trying situations and overcome them.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY SEVEN

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

The Three Stages of Jacob's Life

Beginning with this week's Torah portion, and for the remainder of the Book of Genesis, the Torah devotes itself to the life of our third patriarch. Notwithstanding Jacob's colorful and multifaceted life, we can roughly divide it into three periods that correspond to the three geographic areas that he inhabited.

Jacob's spent the first part of his life in the Land of Israel, in his parent's home. It was during this time that he developed as a holy and spiritual person, destined to father the nation of Israel.

The second period of Jacob's life was spent in *Charan* with his corrupt uncle Laban. It was there that Jacob married and established the twelve tribes, thus setting in motion the development of the Jewish people.

The third and final period of Jacob's life was spent in Egypt, during the last 17 years of his life.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

The Three Personality Types

In light of our Sage's dictum that all that had transpired with our forefathers is an omen and guide for us in our daily lives. We must thus be able to discern three stages or themes in our personal lives, corresponding to the three stages in the life of our patriarch Jacob.

There are three levels of righteousness enumerated in the Talmud: The *tzadik* (righteous person), the *benoni* (intermediate person) and the *rasha* (evildoer). The *tzadik* is one who is so refined that he or she has transcended his/her evil impulse and no longer needs to combat evil. Unlike the majority of people, the *tzadik* is not confronted on a daily basis with trials and tribulations.

On the other hand, the *benoni* is the one who is constantly struggling with tests. What is unique about the *benoni* is that he always perseveres and never gives in to the distractions his evil inclination throws his way. succeeds in overcoming.

The *rasha* is the one who all too often succumbs to the desires of his evil inclination. However, eventually he or she will regret those acts and get back on track.

Jacob the Tzadik in B'er Sheva

When Jacob lived in the Land of Israel, the Holy Land, his

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

lifestyle was that of a tzadik. He was surrounded with the pure and holy atmosphere of Israel, under the caring tutelage of his parents, Isaac and Rebecca. The part of Jacob's life gives his descendants the ability to emulate that lifestyle, to transcend the realm of evil and rise above the impurities that, at times, surround us.

Jacob Empowering the Benoni in Charan

Then Jacob moved to *Charan*. The very name of that city is connected with *Charon* meaning anger. Charan is thus identified with the angry and hostile world that Jacob entered into. It was in *Charan* that Jacob had to struggle with his uncle Laban, and was ultimately victorious. This experience imbued Jacob's future descendants with the strength to confront adverse and trying situations and overcome them—just as a benoni does.

Jacob the Liberator of the Rasha

Egypt, the country that was described in the Torah as the “shame of the earth,” was an utterly depraved place. Jacob's life there gave strength to his descendants who might have become entangled in the spiritual web of depravity associated with Egypt like the rasha, to get out of it, by doing *Teshuvah* (repenting or returning).

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

We Comprise all Three

Despite the fact that there are three types of personalities, every one of us comprises these three traits of *tzadik*, *benoni* and *rasha*.

There are times and situations where our soul is naturally drawn to holy things. Other times, we feel that we have to struggle to keep our moral heads above water. And there are times when we stumble, but bounce back shortly afterwards. We can find solace in realizing that our forefather Jacob bequeathed to us the ability to succeed in each of these three diverse situations.

Three Steps towards Redemption

The word Jacob is related to the word “end.” Jacob, the last of the Patriarchs, is also the symbol of the “end of days,” the imminent Messianic Era.

By drawing upon Jacob’s inspiration in all of the foregoing three stages, we will realize the ultimate goal of transforming even the Egypt, the shame of the earth to a place of holiness even as the *tzadik* element in us is elevated through *Teshuvah*. Our Sages tell us that *Moshiach* will lead even the *tzadik* to *Teshuvah*.

ESSAY EIGHT

THE ONLY THING WE HAVE TO FEAR IS FEAR ITSELF

Everything around us compels us to realize that we have “bumped into the place,” that we are living in unprecedented times and are poised to enter into a very special era of closeness to G-d.

We can see how we have been “thrust” into this new “location” and time.

What should our response be?

We should follow Jacob’s example, who instituted the evening service, with which he essentially declared for posterity that “even, nay especially, when it is dark, we must and can enter into a state of connection with G-d and bring about the fulfillment of the ultimate “dream” — the imminent coming of Moshiach.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY EIGHT

THE ONLY THING WE HAVE TO FEAR IS FEAR ITSELF

Jacob “Confronted” the Place!

When Jacob was on his way to Charan, fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau, the Torah in this week’s Parsha relates how “*Vayifga Bamakom*—he confronted the place.” Commentators grapple with this unusual expression and provide diverse explanations as to what “confronting the place” means.

If it were to simply mean that he arrived in a specific location, it could have written simply, “And he **arrived** at the place,” or “he **came** to the place.” What message does the Torah wish to convey when it says that he “confronted” or “bumped in” to the place?

Some commentators explain that it means that he came to this place unexpectedly. Rashi adds that the place — the ultimate site of the Holy Temple — actually “jumped” to come towards him.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

We must realize that G-d does not perform miracles unnecessarily. The fact that he chanced on this piece of land suggests that his relationship with the location was not a casual and predictable one, but, G-d had to serve as a *Shadchan* (matchmaker) of sorts to bring them together.

We must try to understand what the message is for us in the realization that Jacob was brought together with the land.

Furthermore, the Torah relates in this verse that Jacob “stayed overnight there, for the sun had set.” Rashi explains that G-d had caused the sun to set early so as to compel Jacob to sleep in this holy place.” Once again, it becomes clear that G-d was “overriding” His own natural order to bring Jacob to this place. What was G-d’s objective and how does it relate to us?

To understand the significance of Jacob’s “bumping in” to this holy site, we should refer to Rashi’s other rendition of the Hebrew word *Vayifga* to mean that he prayed. Rashi further states that Jacob then instituted the evening service. Here too we are entitled to ask, what connection does the word “confronting” have with prayer and what is Rashi trying to teach us when he states that Jacob then instituted the evening service?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Intimidation!

The answer to all of the above lies in a better understanding of the primary obstacle that prevents us from reaching “the place” and thereby realizing our spiritual goals. It can be summed up in one word. Intimidation. Intimidation is the primary reason for so many people’s reluctance to frequent the synagogues and Houses of Study or to otherwise connect with “the place,” the special place G-d had in mind for us to be at, but from which we might be quite distant.

While there are some who have no interest in climbing the spiritual ladder — the ladder was part of Jacob’s dream that is recounted in this week’s Parsha — most keep away from the spiritual locations because of fear.

For some it is the fear of the unknown. For others it is the fear that they will have to change their lifestyles that they have become so accustomed to, to enter into a new world. And for a third group, the fear is that they are unworthy and would be rejected. In their minds, they do not have what it takes to meet the challenge.

Whatever the cause of the fear, it is what prevents us from realizing our souls’ dreams. It is the single most significant factor that prevents us from coming closer to G-d.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

The Breakthrough

Jacob, the Patriarch of the Jewish People, had to make the breakthrough for all future generations. It was Jacob — whose name is etymologically related to the idea of “breaking through” — who G-d made sure would “bump in” to the holiest place on earth, the future site of the Holy Temple at the most unexpected time. This means that Jacob demonstrated that even when you least likely consider or expect to be at this special location, G-d will make it happen. Jacob’s unexpected confrontation with “the place” paved the way for us to realize unexpected goals.

And what did Jacob do there? He prayed the evening service. This symbolizes that even when it is dark, a time that is associated with fear and uncertainty, we can still connect to G-d; we can still erect the ladder that connects earth to heaven.

No Fear of Future

The lesson for our generation in particular is a poignant one.

We have been reminded by our spiritual leaders that we are living in momentous times; at the tail end of exile, approaching the beginning of the Messianic age of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Redemption. Recent world events have only served to reinforce this belief. Yet, we are also overcome with feelings of fear and trepidation. It may be fear of the unknown: What will life be like in the Messianic Age? Or perhaps it is the fear that our lives will change forever? Will we still retain our jobs, ambitions etc.? And occasionally it is fear that we are unworthy.

Yet everything around us compels us to realize that we have “bumped into the place,” that we are living in unprecedented times and are poised to enter into a very special era of closeness to G-d. We can see how we have been “thrust” into this new “location” and time.

What should our response be?

We should follow Jacob’s example. While Jacob was also fearful, as the Torah itself testifies, nevertheless, he regained his composure and instituted the evening service. By doing this, he essentially declared for posterity that “even, nay especially, when it is dark, we must and can enter into a state of connection with G-d and bring about the fulfillment of the ultimate “dream” — the imminent coming of Moshiach.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY NINE

A THOUSAND-FOLD BLESSING

The purpose G-d had intended for all the nations of the world is to bring perfection to the natural order of the world.

By virtue of their observance of the Seven Noahide commandments that are geared to preserve the civility of the world, they ensure that the world is a perfectly natural one.

The Jewish people's role is linked to introducing the Other worldly into our world.

Our existence has therefore never been bound by the natural historical forces.

Despite all odds, the Jews have survived and flourished.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY NINE

A THOUSAND-FOLD BLESSING

This week's Torah reading, Vayeitzei relates that after the birth of Joseph, Jacob seeks to take his family and return home. His uncle Lavan wants Jacob to continue working for him. In the exchange that follows, as they negotiate over wages, G-d's blessing is mentioned twice. First Lavan declares,

"I have observed the signs, and the L-rd has blessed me for your sake."

Jacob, for his part, asserts that the disproportionate increase in Lavan's herds is due entirely to the blessing given for the sake of Jacob.

"You know how I have served you, and how your cattle have fared with me. For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly; the L-rd has blessed you wherever I turned."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

100 or 1,000 fold

The Midrash cites two opinions concerning the extent of the increase. By how much did Lavan's herd grow? According to one opinion, it was a hundred times; according to Rabbi Abba, it was a thousand times, since a blessing from above never results in less than a thousand-fold expansion.

What difference does it really make if the blessing was a hundred-fold blessing or a thousand-fold one?

The number one hundred indicates completeness. If ten is a complete number, then ten times ten represents completeness even to the minutest detail. Thus, a hundred-fold increase means that the natural blessing is complete and perfect.

A thousand, on the other hand, indicates that something goes beyond the laws and boundaries of nature. In fact, the letters of the word for a thousand in Hebrew "*eleph*" can be rearranged to form the word "*peleh*-wonder;" Saying that something occurs a thousand times means that it is wondrous or miraculous, that it goes beyond the normal limitations, that it is outside the common experience.

Diverse Jewish Roles

The number thousand is reflected in the different roles of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

the Jewish nation and the other nations of the world:

The purpose G-d had intended for all the nations of the world is to bring perfection to the **natural** order of the world. By virtue of their observance of the Seven Noahide commandments that are geared to preserve the civility of the world, they ensure that the world is a perfectly natural one.

Since their role revolves around the natural order, the nations of the world are subject to the forces of nature that dictate which nations survive and which nations will disappear as well as the nature of their existence.

The Other-Worldly

By contrast, the Jewish people's role is linked to introducing the Other worldly into our world. Their existence has therefore never been bound by the natural historical forces. Despite all odds, the Jews have survived and flourished.

Our existence defies the laws of nature, because our existence is not just about making nature complete, our task is to introduce the wonders of G-d into the ordinary. And because our connection with G-d goes beyond creation, it enables us to serve G-d in an unconventional and miraculous manner.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Defying Conventional Forces

The lesson for our times is clear:

Although the Jewish people are dependent on the non-Jewish nation in which they live, a Jew must realize that his/her existence will always be a phenomenon that defies conventional forces.

When a Jew resists the pressures of the outside world to live Jewishly, s/he elicits Divine blessings that are a “thousand-fold.”

The “Thousand-fold” Blessing Extending to the Entire World.

Ultimately, the “thousand-fold” blessing will apply to the entire world. This will occur when the interaction between the Jewish people and other nations yield a two-way beneficial effect.

Firstly, when the Jewish people serve as a Light to the Nations, inspiring them to follow their Seven Noahide commandments, some of our “Other-Worldly” uniqueness rubs off on them.

And secondly, when we utilize the freedom and opportunity afforded to us by the other nations for greater commitment to the ideals of Torah, they too can enjoy the phenomenal blessings that G-d has given the Jewish nation.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

This full effect of these efforts, however, will be felt with the coming of Moshiach, at which time G-d will "turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the L-rd, to serve Him all together." At that time, everyone will access the unconventional blessings.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TEN

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is first and foremost a Jewish concept.

Moreover, it is a fundamental aspect of Jewish tradition and theology.

Our day begins with *Modeh Ani* — I give thanks, in which we express gratitude for having been given back our souls in the morning.

Gratitude has been engrained in us from the beginning of our existence as a nation.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TEN

THANKSGIVING

Gratitude is Ubiquitous

Thanksgiving is first and foremost a Jewish concept. Moreover, it is a fundamental aspect of Jewish tradition and theology.

Our day begins with *Modeh Ani* — I give thanks, in which we express gratitude for having been given back our souls in the morning.

In many prayer book texts, the morning service begins with the word “Hodu” which means “give thanks.” [Incidentally, the Hebrew word for India is Hodu, so is the Hebrew word for turkey!]

Gratitude has been engrained in us from the beginning of our existence as a nation. When we would bring Bikkurim—first fruits to Jerusalem, the objective was to be grateful to G-d for the bountiful harvest. Our sages point to Adam’s big mistake after he had eaten of the forbidden tree of knowledge. Instead of admitting his own guilt he put the blame on G-d for having given him a wife.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

According to classical Jewish commentators, the mitzvah of honoring parents is rooted in the concept of gratitude. We must always show our gratitude to our parents for giving us life and raising us.

But the first time the Torah explicitly mentions the concept of gratitude, in fact, is in **this** week's Torah portion of *Vayeitzei*. When the Matriarch Leah bore Jacob his fourth son, she named him Judah, because she said "Now I shall thank [*Odeh* in Hebrew] G-d."

According to Rashi she was expressing her gratitude to G-d for having her fourth child.

Leah knew prophetically that Jacob would have twelve sons by four wives. Now that she had given birth to her fourth son, she realized that she had been given more than a quarter of the total number of children Jacob would have. For this special privilege she was so grateful that she named her son Judah which means gratitude.

Whenever she would see or talk to Judah or just mention his name, she would be reminded of her obligation to thank G-d for this great gift.

If anyone were to ask whether Judaism believes in Thanksgiving, it should be obvious that it is one of its fundamental requirements.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Daily Occurrence

But there are also two important caveats.

Firstly, Judaism — as much as it endorses the idea of thanksgiving and honoring parents etc.— underscores the need to make thanksgiving a daily occurrence, not just on one day of the year.

To be sure, the Torah has designated the Festivals of Passover and Sukkos to thank G-d for the great miracles of the past. The rabbis likewise instituted Purim and Chanukah to thank G-d for the miracles that are associated with those days. But, from the perspective of Torah, the message of a Holiday is intended for the entire year. Otherwise it is like going to the store to purchase vital groceries and leaving the groceries at the store, returning home without them.

Directed Gratitude

The second note is to realize that when we express gratitude it must be directed towards the giver of the blessing. To simply say “I am thankful” without the words “to G-d” is like accepting a gift from a friend and then turning away from the friend to say “I am thankful for the gift.”

The object of gratitude is to acknowledge the role of the

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

giver of the blessing. To merely be thankful without directing it to the source of all that is good in our lives — G-d — is to acknowledge the gift and our receiving of it and then to forget the One who gave it to us.

Thanksgiving Offering: Surviving Sacrifice

Now that we understand the importance of expressing gratitude to G-d and to others in Judaism, it is no wonder that our sages tell us that in the Messianic Age the only [private] sacrifice that we will still have to bring will be the thanksgiving offering. At that time we will have to express the most heartfelt gratitude for having taken us out of Galus-exile.

It is also noteworthy that Moshiach is a descendant of Judah — the very symbol of gratitude. Indeed, the word Jew derives from the name Judah. Our most basic characteristic is to not take G-d for granted. This attitude will thus usher in the age when nothing will be taken for granted.

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE GUARANTEE

Jacob had no doubt that G-d would keep His promise to bless him with all the material goods.

Jacob was doubtful about his own response and reaction to G-d's bountiful blessings.

Jacob feared that the more G-d would bless him, the more self-centered he might become. He was concerned that the material goods he would accumulate would result in less spiritual sensitivity and awareness of G-d.

Jacob was asking G-d for a guarantee that the abundance of material blessings in his life will in no way undermine his intimate relationship with G-d.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE GUARANTEE

Nocturnal Blessing

This week's parsha describes Jacob's journey to his uncle Laban where he intended to start a family that ultimately became the nucleus of the Jewish nation. Since this journey was part of the very conception of the Jewish nation, it stands to reason that even minor details in this episode are pregnant with meaning. Certainly major aspects of the narrative must be understood as lessons for future generations.

Before Jacob reaches his destination, he falls asleep and has an incredible vision, where G-d blesses him that he will give him and his children the land he was resting upon. Furthermore, G-d promises him that his children will be as the dust of the earth and that G-d would be with him and return him to his land.

In short G-d blesses him with security and prosperity.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

When Jacob awakens he is so inspired by this vision that he makes the following pledge:

“If G-d will be with me, and He will guard me on this route in which I am going, and He will give me bread to eat and garments to wear, and I return in peace to my father’s house, and G-d will be my G-d, and this stone, which I have placed as a monument, will be a house of G-d, and I will definitely separate tithes to You from everything that You give me.”

Isn’t it incredible that Jacob has pledged to tithe his resources on the condition that G-d keeps His promise?!

Did that mean that Jacob harbored some doubt whether G-d would keep His promise? Isn’t this statement a sign of a rather weak expression of faith and trust in G-d, unbecoming of the Patriarchs, the very exemplars of faith?

And second, did Jacob suggest that if G-d would not make good on His promise that he, Jacob, would not tithe his earnings? Isn’t the giving of charity something we do regardless of what G-d does for us?

Part of the Pledge

Commentators answer that Jacob’s request was actually expressed in the latter part of his statement. And what

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

appears to be a conditional pledge is actually part of his request.

Jacob had no doubt that G-d would keep His promise to bless him with all the material goods. Jacob was doubtful about his own response and reaction to G-d's bountiful blessings.

Jacob feared that the more G-d would bless him, the more self-centered he might become. He was concerned that the material goods he would accumulate would result in less spiritual sensitivity and awareness of G-d.

In effect, Jacob was not asking G-d to keep His promise. Jacob was also not making a conditional pledge to tithe his earnings.

Jacob was asking G-d for a guarantee that the abundance of material blessings in his life will in no way undermine his intimate relationship with G-d.

Thus he added the words "and G-d will be my G-d"—with the emphasis on the word "my"—after he repeated G-d's blessings. For Jacob was not concerned that he would lose the closeness and intimacy that he enjoyed previously.

Jacob then continues to ask that he would remain so motivated to serving G-d that the monument that he had placed should eventually be converted into a house for G-d. Jacob wanted to have G-d's assurance that he would utilize

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

his possessions to build houses for G-d rather than monuments to his own achievements.

But Jacob doesn't stop there. He asks G-d to preserve his devotion to G-d that everything that G-d gave him would be tithed. He wanted to be assured that he would never forget that everything he possessed was a gift from G-d by sharing his bounty with others.

Jacob was not making any conditional donations. Rather, he was asking for G-d to guarantee that his prosperity should not corrupt him in any way. And, moreover, he was asking that his good fortune should become a vehicle to turn monuments into houses of G-d and wealth into channels for giving to others.

Why Accentuate Material Blessings in the Messianic Age

When Maimonides describes the blessings to be enjoyed in the Messianic Age, he states that the "delicacies will be as abundant as the dust of the earth."

Some wonder why Maimonides, of all people, would accentuate the explosion of material goods in the Messianic Age. Shouldn't the emphasis be on the spiritual?

However, Maimonides' approach is that in spite of the proliferation of material blessings beyond anything we can imagine, the Messianic Age will be one in which all of those

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

material blessings will become “houses for G-d” and vehicles to help others.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TWELVE

CHARAN OR RINA: ANGER OR JOY?

There are two ways a person can go through life's difficulties.

One can be to see in all of the hardships G-d's wrath—
charan.

And there are those who make an effort, or are naturally inclined, to see the positive in everything.

They see rina/joy as opposed to charan/wrath.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TWELVE

CHARAN OR RINA: ANGER OR JOY?

Charanah: Into the Bowels of Charan

This week's parsha begins with Jacob's departure for Charan, partly to escape the wrath of his brother Esau—who accused him of stealing his birthright and blessings—and partly to begin a family.

The fact that Jacob was on a mission to start the first Jewish family which would form the nucleus of the Jewish people tells us that every detail of the narrative is crucial for the formation of a nation in general and for the success of Jewish family life in particular.

The parsha begins: "And Jacob left B'er Sheva and went to Charan." There are two ways one can write "to Charan" in Hebrew. One way would be to add the letter *lamed* as a prefix to the word Charan—*L'Charan*. The alternative is to add the letter *hei* as a suffix to the word Charan as in *Charan-ah*.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

In this verse, the Torah chooses the latter form although it is the less common of the two ways. Or Hachaim raises the question why the Torah goes out of its way to add the suffix *hei* rather than the more common prefix *lamed*.

One approach is that there is a difference between the two forms. When a *hei* is added it implies that not only did he reach Charan but that he entered into its innermost precincts. Jacob could not be there as a mere guest. He had to enter into its very bowels. His entry was total.

The reason why he had to penetrate into the corrupt environment of his uncle Laban and the culture of Charan is explained in Chassidic sources. Jacob's travel there was geared to refine the place and to redeem all of the sparks of holiness that were lost in Charan because they had become embedded there. Jacob's efforts were intended to extricate those sparks. To accomplish that he was compelled to enter into the very "guts" of Charan. This can be compared to someone who is charged with a mission to rescue a hostage. The rescuer may be required to dress like the captors and identify with them. Only then can he rescue the hostage from the clutches of the captors.

In a nineteenth century Chassidic work Ezor Eliyahu, the author provides another answer as to why the Torah adds the letter *hei* at the end of the word instead of the *lamed* at the beginning.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Two Approaches to Life

The word Charan is virtually identical with the word *rina*-joy. Both share the letters *reish* and *nun*. The only difference is that the word charan has a letter *ches*, whereas *rina* has the letter *hei*. And there is only a hairbreadth difference between a *ches* and a *hei*. Both have a right vertical line that is connected to a horizontal line on top. The difference between the two is that the *ches* has a left vertical line that touches the roof, whereas the *hei* has a similar left vertical line that **almost** reaches the roof. There is but the hairbreadth of difference between them!

There are two ways a person can go through life's difficulties. One can be to see in all of the hardships G-d's wrath—charan. And there are those who make an effort, or are naturally inclined, to see the positive in everything. They see *rina*/joy as opposed to charan/wrath.

Hillel, the great Sage who was known for his kindness, love and patience, was returning from a trip. He heard a scream emanating from somewhere in his own town and remarked, "I am confident that the cry did not come from my home." The question has been raised about his confidence. One can have trust that things will be good in the future. But how could he say I am confident that no evil had befallen his family? It was after the fact!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Commentators answer that Hillel was not expressing trust that nothing tragic occurred in his home. He was, however, confident that if something did happen, there would be no outcry coming from his home because he had so inculcated the ideal of accepting everything with joy. Hillel was a *rina* personality. He did not see Charan, G-d's wrath; he saw only Divine joy!

This then is what the Torah wants to teach us when it refers to Jacob travelling to Charan. By adding the *hei* at the end, the word charan now has the word *rina* in it. Jacob, though he was going to a lowly place of charan, was determined to see that opportunity as one of *rina*.

Jacob knew that he was entering into the bowels of deception and adversity, but he also knew that this will be the catalyst to liberate the sparks and establish a Jewish nation that will bring light and happiness, *rina*, to the entire world.

A Hairbreadth of Difference?

The question still remains. How can we posit that charan and *rina* are virtually the same and that only a hairbreadth of difference lies between them? Isn't seeing the glass half full diametrically the opposite of seeing the glass half empty?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Second, how can one be oblivious to the tragic aspects of life? Can a person who suffered bereavement, G-d forbid, not mourn and grieve their loss? To not be sensitive to the tragedies of life is not only contrary to natural human sensibilities, it is against the Torah as well. The Torah mandates that we mourn the loss of life, that we commiserate with another person's losses of any kind.

Upon reflection we will see that the first question can be answered by first resolving the second question as to how we can ignore the misfortunes of life.

Half-full, Half-Empty and Entirely Full

Whenever people talk about the positive view of life versus the negative, the optimist versus the pessimist, the example given is the half full cup versus the half empty cup. In truth, that is not an accurate or a relevant analogy to the two aforementioned options of seeing life either as charan or as rina. To see the glass as being only half full is to ignore the fact that there is also a half that is empty. And while that may be a useful approach to help get people out of their negative mindset it is not the ideal and nor is it synonymous with the charan/rinah dichotomy.

To see rina is not to ignore the charan. A Jew must be aware of, and responsive to, the suffering of others and to react appropriately to their own misfortunes as well. Rather

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

the objective is to see beneath the surface of the charan to discover that it is truly rina. Or, to use the terminology of Kabbalah, to see the Divine source of adversity as a hidden manifestation of Divine kindness.

However, since we are human beings, by G-d's own design, and so are affected by the surface charan occurrences, we must pause to respect that overt reality and to mourn and grieve the losses that are associated with charan. However, simultaneously, we must also acknowledge that beneath the surface there is rina and that, ultimately, in the days of Moshiach we will see the charan element give way to the unfolding of an exclusive rina reality.

The benefits of this attitude over the half-full half-empty model is twofold:

First, to ignore the negative does not always work. And when we are clobbered over the head with adversity we do not know how to cope with it. By recognizing the negative and responding to it appropriately, coupled with the knowledge that the underlying positive reality will assert itself and dominate in the near future, we are far better equipped to deal with adversity now.

Second, to see the cup half full is to see only a limited measure of good. It is only half-full. To see the rina beneath the surface is to see that in reality it is all good. In King David's immortal words: "My cup runneth over." King

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

David suffered almost incessantly from his brothers, King Saul, his general Yoav, his sons, the loss of a child, etc., and yet he did not say “my cup is half-full.” He realized that his cup was overflowing because King David was able to see the entire picture.

Two Sides of One Coin

Jacob, King David, and Hillel’s positive attitude—with which they infected others as well—was not to ignore the suffering but, rather, to allow their understanding of the inner G-dly reality of life’s experiences to inform their conscious attitude at all times. They taught us that even as we confront adversity and grieve and find ourselves deeply embedded in charan, we ought not lose sight of the underlying rina reality. We must try to see the whole picture so that we can see the half-empty cup in a different light: not half empty but an integral part of the whole picture. The charan and the rina dimensions are not opposites. They are two sides of the same coin—two manifestations of Divine reality—the outer shell of which is charan and its inner soul which is rina.

And while we dare not trivialize the pain and suffering that we endure in exile, we must also not wallow in our grief and know that very soon, with the coming of Moshiach, all the sorrow will be turned into unmitigated joy.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Indeed, to the extent that we are cognizant of the pain of exile and we come to G-d and plead, ad masai, how much longer do we have endure this pain, it is an indication that we know that a time will come when the pain will not only cease, but will be transformed into joy. Consequently the same dynamic that makes us reject and protest the suffering, i.e., our recognition that G-d can and will ultimately bring it to an end, we want Him to do that sooner than later. This is the precisely same dynamic which allows us to revel in the joy that goes along with the transformation of the charan into rina.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

DON'T RUNT FROM, RUN TO

Before Jacob fled to *Charan* he stopped in the Academy of Shem and Ever to study Torah for fourteen years.

This “short” diversion was intended to reorient Jacob towards a positive focus on his journey rather than just escaping his brother Esau’s anger.

Jacob was totally focused on the positive nature of his journey; this is the place that will introduce him to Rachel and it is where he will establish a family, the nucleus of the Jewish people.

While there are times that demand of us to run away from a negative situation, we have to ultimately look for the positive element in that trip.

Moreover, as we progress, we must put all of our energies into making the positive dimension of our journey its primary motivation.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY THIRTEEN

DON'T RUNT FROM, RUN TO

Escape!

Jacob was told by his parents, Isaac and Rebecca, to leave home and travel to *Charan*. Two reasons were given. First, it was a way to escape the wrath of his brother Esau whose blessings he had taken. Second, he was told to go to *Charan* to find himself a wife. At the end of last week's parsha the Torah recounts how Jacob did, in fact, leave his hometown of *Be'er Sheva* and departed for *Charan*.

It is therefore strange that this week's *parsha* begins with the words "And Jacob departed from *Be'er Sheva* and went to *Charan*." Didn't we already read of how Jacob left his hometown to go to *Charan*? Why does the Torah have to repeat this verse?

Upon deeper reflection there is a profound lesson that the Torah imparts with this repetition.

During our lifetime we are called upon to make many moves. Whether they are moves from one physical location to another, or moves from one position in life to another.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

In many of these instances, our move is motivated by a desire or a need to escape a negative situation. There might even be a positive reason for this move, but initially it is subordinated to the need to flee from an intolerable place.

The initial phase in Jacob's departure from home was overwhelmingly an escape from the murderous intentions of his brother Esau. True, his parents—particularly Isaac—emphasized the need to find a wife in *Charan*, but that was only a secondary rationale so that Esau should not think that Jacob escaped in fear. In fact, when Rebecca told Jacob to leave, she did not even mention the need to find a wife there.

Only when Rebecca speaks to her husband, Isaac, does she mention the fact that she would be disgusted if he were to marry one of the daughters of the land in which they lived.

In addition, even the way Isaac told him to go to *Charan* to find a wife was couched in negative terms. Jacob was told by Isaac: "Don't marry a Canaanite girl!." Rather than extolling the virtues of the women of *Charan*, Isaac denigrates the women of Canaan. The focus in last week's *parsha* is predominantly negative.

Under those circumstances, that had to be the focus. Jacob's life was in danger and his parents had to motivate him to leave.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Get Closer

This week's parsha, however, begins on a totally different note. The Torah repeats his departure from *Be'er Sheva* to underscore that as Jacob progressed in his journey, he was able to reverse the motivation for his trip.

This is especially true in light of the Midrashic tradition that before he went to *Charan* he stopped in the Academy of Shem and Ever to study Torah for fourteen years. This "short" diversion was intended to reorient Jacob towards a positive focus on his journey. Jacob was not going to *Charan* to escape his brother Esau's anger, nor was it simply to avoid marrying an undesirable Canaanite woman. Jacob was totally focused on the positive nature of his journey; this is the place that will introduce him to Rachel and it is where he will establish a family, the nucleus of the Jewish people.

We too, have to learn from Jacob's journey. While there are times that demand of us to run away from a negative situation, we have to ultimately look for the positive element in that trip. Moreover, as we progress, we must put all of our energies into making the positive dimension of our journey its **primary** motivation.

Changing our Focus

The Jewish people have been subjected to the miseries of being in *Galus*, exile. Our tradition is replete with prayers

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

that express our heartfelt desire to get out of exile by way of G-d sending the Moshiach. Initially, what motivates us to want Moshiach and the Redemption from exile? It is the negative nature of exile. It is an escape; albeit a necessary one, but nevertheless an escape. Things are not good here.

But as we get closer to reaching our destination—the Era of Moshiach—it behooves us to change our focus. Rather than stressing the terrible character of exile, we should learn what the Torah tells us about the positive nature of Redemption. And just as our father Jacob spent fourteen years studying Torah so that he can reorient himself, so too, we must devote time and effort to the study of Torah.

Why the study of Torah?

Torah is qualitatively different from any other source of knowledge. Torah, as G-d's wisdom, does not suffer from a *Galus* mentality and mindset. Even as the Torah “descends” from its celestial source it remains impervious to the influences of nature and the negativity of life. Torah is free and positive.

By studying Torah—particularly the mystical parts of it that dwell on the spiritual and positive side of things, and even more specifically, the parts of Torah that discuss Moshiach and Redemption—we liberate ourselves from all negativity. We can even free ourselves from the need to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

run away from something negative because we have acquired the capacity to run towards something positive instead.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY FOURTEEN

RUNNING FROM OR RUNNING TO

Our Sages state that a guest must listen to everything the host tells him except if he tells him to leave.

The Rebbe would apply this to our going into exile.

We must listen to everything we are told by G-d but we cannot be compelled to leave His presence.

**If we are forced out of the Holy Land we leave reluctantly.
We never make peace with our existence in exile.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY FOURTEEN

RUNNING FROM OR RUNNING TO

Laban's Accusation

Jacob had been working for his father-law Laban for 20 years. He endured the most harsh conditions; suffering greatly from Laban's duplicity and corruption. An angel of G-d appears to Jacob in a dream and advises him to return to his homeland. The Torah then recounts how Jacob left with all his family and possessions. It characterizes his departure in the following manner:

Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was **fleeing**.

The 18th century Sephardic commentator, Or HaChaim, asks, why does the Torah say that he did not tell him that he was fleeing?" If he told Laban he was fleeing, he would not be fleeing! Indeed, the whole idea of fleeing is to conceal one's departure. The Torah should have said, "He did not tell him he was **leaving**," or that "Jacob deceived Laban by fleeing."

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Coming or Going?

We may find the answer to this question by referring to another difficulty we find in the beginning of the parsha. There, the Torah relates, “Jacob left from Be’er-Sheba and went to Charan.” Rashi notes the obvious redundancy here and states: “It need only have written ‘and Jacob went to Charan,’ why does it mention his departure?” We already know that Jacob lived in Be’er Sheba so it is obvious that if he went to Charan that he had left from Be’er Sheba.

Three Scenarios

One may suggest the following explanation:

When a person leaves one place to go to another there can be three possibilities:

First, the person may feel a need to escape from the negative situation in which he is situated. In this scenario it makes no difference where he goes so long as he is at a distance from his point of origin. Jewish history is tragically replete with Jews in need of escaping the tyranny, persecution and destruction of a given locale; it made no difference where they would go. They just wanted to escape.

The second scenario is the reverse of the first. The person may find one’s place of origin to be fine and comfortable.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

However, there is something even more positive to be had in another location.

The third scenario is the combination of the first two. There is something negative about this person's hometown from which he is forced to leave to avoid harm. However, he or she also has a place to go to that is independently positive. Not only is one escaping the negative, he or she is also running towards the positive.

Jacob's departure from Be'er Sheba appears to have been an example of the third scenario. He was compelled to run away from the wrath of his brother Esau who was plotting to murder him because he had appropriated their father's blessings. This is clearly the rationale he got from Rebecca, his mother.

However, when Rebecca approached Isaac, she understandably did not mention Jacob's need to escape the wrath of Esau for that would have caused Isaac untold emotional pain and anguish. Instead she referred only to Jacob's need to find a suitable wife amongst their family members in Charan.

Hence, the Torah indicates that there were two factors in Jacob's departure: First he left Be'er Sheba to escape with his life. The Torah then states that he went to Charan to indicate the additional, positive, reason for his departure; that it was to find his mate and establish the Jewish people.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

From Rebecca's mention of the danger in telling Jacob to escape it was clear that it was the main reason for his departure. That she mentioned to Isaac the need for Jacob to find a wife in Charan because the daughters of Canaan disgusted her was merely a way of convincing Isaac to let Jacob go without telling him the main reason.

When Jacob meets Laban, the Torah relates that "he recounted to Laban all these events." According to Rashi, Jacob told Laban "that he came only under duress because of his brother." In other words, Jacob did not reveal that he came to find a wife. That came only after he offered to work for Laban and he chose the prospect of marrying Rachel as pay for his work.

Laban understood that Jacob was essentially there because he had to flee.

Laban's Indictment of Jacob

After 22 years of marriage of Rachel and Leah, fathering 11 children (Benjamin had not yet been born), and amassing a huge fortune Laban could not understand why Jacob would want to flee.

Laban claimed that it would not have disturbed him if Jacob wanted to leave because he longed to be back with his family. However, the idea that Jacob had not shed his

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

need to escape demonstrated that he was a fleer. He observed that Jacob was constantly running away from situations. In essence, Laban asserted that Jacob was not motivated by positive stimuli but always ran away from something he believed was negative.

With this canard, Laban self-righteously intended to illustrate Jacob's flawed personality; always running away, never able to make the most of a situation.

This answers Or HaChaim's question. The reason it says that Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was **fleeing**" suggests that Jacob always gave the impression that he was making the most of his stay with Laban but now he had revealed his true character as a perennial "fleer."

Never Made Peace with Exile

In truth, Jacob had it right. Living with Laban was a form of living in Galus. Jacob showed the way for the future of the Jewish people. No matter how much we may prosper in exile, materially and spiritually, we must never make peace with it or consider it to be our lasting home.

This explains Rebecca's focus on Jacob's need to escape the wrath of his brother rather than the positive factor of finding a suitable wife in Charan.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

For Jacob to leave the Holy Land, his parents, Isaac and Rebecca (the Academy of Shem and Ever where he studied Torah, as recounted in the Midrash), there had to be a compelling reason—to save his life. The fact that he would find his mate there was a bonus but, in and of itself, did not justify Jacob's hasty departure. After all, Isaac did not leave the Holy Land to find a wife for himself. Instead Abraham sent Eliezer. The same approach could have been used for Jacob's marriage arrangements.

For the Jewish people to leave the Holy Land, no matter how much we accomplish in exile, is still a tragedy.

Our Sages state that a guest must listen to everything the host tells him except if he tells him to leave.

The Rebbe would apply this to our going into exile. We must listen to everything we are told by G-d but we cannot be compelled to leave His presence. If we are forced out of the Holy Land we leave reluctantly. We never make peace with our existence in exile.

The Torah underscores the fact that Jacob left Be'er Sheba to indicate that he was forced to leave. However, once he left he sought to make the most of his situation by finding his mate and establishing the first Jewish family, the nucleus of the Jewish nation.

Now that he had established a family and had the resources to return home, Jacob decided to escape. By doing so he

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

demonstrated that 22 years of life in Galus did not make him lose any of his natural abhorrence of that state of being. The reluctance he expressed when he left Be'er Sheba because of his attachment to the Holy Land remained with him and motivated him to escape.

Laban, who personified the Galus mentality, cannot comprehend that Jacob had not made peace with Galus. He therefore chided Jacob for being a fleer; unable to focus positively on the future.

Laban Wanted to Destroy It All

This might explain the words of the Haggadah which we recite at the Seder that Laban was worse than Pharaoh, who only wanted to destroy the male children, as opposed to Laban who "sought to uproot everything."

Where do we find that Laban tried to kill all of his children?

The answer might be in his attempt to instill a Galus mentality in Jacob and his progeny. If Jacob had made peace with Galus, he would have brought that mentality with him upon his return home and it would have aborted the Jewish nation. What makes the Jewish people unique and gives them their staying power is their ability to rise

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

above the constraints of Galus. To undermine that gift would be, G-d forbid, their very demise as a people.

The Holy Laban

However, Laban's words cannot be dismissed as merely the tirade of an evil person which we must reject without consideration.

Indeed, there are laws that we derive from Laban such as waiting a week between two marriages in the same family so we do not mix one celebration with another. Likewise, Laban is the source of the custom that dictates it is preferable not to marry off a younger sibling before the older. Likewise, a woman does not get married against her will. All of these practices are actually derived from Laban!

Similarly, there is a message here for us that we can derive from Laban's words (if not his intentions):

In our generation, the last one of exile and the first of Redemption, we have the choice of running away from exile or running towards Geulah-Redemption. Indeed, we cry out *ad masai*, how much longer?! because Galus conditions are intolerable. Particularly, when we see the evil forces that surround and wish to destroy the Land of Israel and its inhabitants, heaven forbid, we are moved to want to run away, Jacob style.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Yet, Laban, whom Kabbalists say relates allegorically to the sublime, transcendent, spiritual “whiteness,” exhorts us to deemphasize the “running away” syndrome of Jewish life. Why do we always need to be in the escape mode? Our primary focus should be running towards Geulah rather than running away from Galus. The prospects of Geulah should be so exciting and extraordinary that our hearts should be racing, impelling us to do everything in our power to hasten the Geulah, even if only one second earlier!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY FIFTEEN

PRIORITIES

There are times when we may be tempted to undertake projects that are new and exciting, at the expense of older and less glamorous, but, more important, responsibilities.

This attitude is rooted in selfishness, looking for projects that will satisfy our egos, rather than fulfilling that which is important for the world.

Our focus must be on what we can do for G-d and the world, not what is most gratifying for ourselves.

In a perfect world the greatest joy comes from the sense that we helped fulfill somebody else's dream.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY FIFTEEN

PRIORITIES

Laban's "Magnanimity"

Jacob was promised by his uncle Laban that he would give his daughter Rachel to him for a wife. Jacob worked hard for his bride. Seven years of grueling labor was the price he paid to marry Rachel. According to our sages the love Jacob had for her was not just romantic love, but a love based on the compatibility of their souls and their shared destiny.

It did not work out the way Jacob had hoped for and anticipated, at least, not initially.

Laban tricked Jacob. Instead of giving him Rachel he had given him Rachel's older sister Leah. When Jacob protested, Laban simply hid behind local custom of not marrying off the younger sister before the older one.

Laban, however, "magnanimously," agreed to give him Rachel as well for the price of another seven years of work for him. Jacob agreed and a week after his wedding to Leah, he married Rachel.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

How Could Jacob Marry Two Sisters?

Commentators raise a very interesting question. According to Talmudic tradition, the Patriarchs kept all the laws of the Torah, even before they were given at Sinai. The Patriarchs anticipated, either prophetically or intuitively, the teachings of the Torah and implemented them into their own lives.

If this was so, commentators raise the question, how did Jacob marry Rachel and Leah who were sisters. Does this not contradict the Biblical commandment in Leviticus not to marry two sisters? How do we reconcile Jacob's professed commitment to the 613 commandments of the post-Sinai era, after marrying two sisters?

Volunteer, but not at the Expense of Obligations

One of the answers to this question, given by the Rebbe (*Likkutei Schos* volume 5), provides us with some insight into the important area of priorities.

Before Sinai, every person had to observe the "Seven Noahide Commandments." They include the laws and practices that help to make the world a decent and civilized world. When Abraham, Isaac and Jacob undertook to follow the commandments of the Torah, they were accepting to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

do things that were above and beyond the call of duty. By no means did they use their new commitments to circumvent the obligations they shared with the rest of the human race.

For Jacob, not marrying two sisters was a personal preference because it provided him with an opportunity to go beyond the requirements of society then. But, if Jacob would have not married Rachel – after he was tricked into marrying Leah – this would have constituted a serious breach of contract with Rachel.

Furthermore, Rachel would have been heartbroken at the prospects of losing Jacob.

Moreover, according to a Midrashic tradition, it was assumed that one daughter of Laban would have to marry Jacob's wicked brother, Esau. Imagine how devastated Rachel would have been had she been forced into marrying the villain Esau instead of the righteous Jacob.

Jacob was not interested in adding on more obligations so that he can feel good about himself. Jacob's motivation to do more was rooted in his desire to better serve G-d. He certainly would not have observed this optional commandment – of not marrying two sisters – at the expense of breaking a contract, and causing irreparable harm to another person.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Satisfying our Egos

We can derive from this an important lesson in assigning priorities. There are times when we may be tempted to undertake projects that are new and exciting, at the expense of older and less glamorous, but, more important, responsibilities. This attitude is rooted in selfishness, looking for projects that will satisfy our egos, rather than fulfilling that which is important for the world.

Jacob's behavior teaches us otherwise. The Patriarchs, while, historically speaking, inhabited this planet over three thousand years ago, actually lived in the future Messianic world of perfection. In their world – and the world we will all soon experience – the focus is on what we can do for G-d and the world, not what is most gratifying for ourselves. In a perfect world the greatest joy comes from the sense that we helped fulfill somebody else's dream.

The Focus Today

As we stand on the threshold of the Final Redemption, we have to be more sensitive to those things that are crucial for our final thrust into this new age. While there are many worthwhile projects that we can undertake, our focus has to be doing those things that carry us over the top.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

The Rebbe encouraged us to study the teachings of the Torah that deal with Redemption as our way of internalizing Messianic energies.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY SIXTEEN

GOING UP OR DOWN?

One can thrive amidst adversity in golus, yet that same person will fervently ask G-d repeatedly in his prayers to bring Moshiach.

We must make sure that we never make peace with the golus and work incessantly and tirelessly to bring it to an end.

As a people and as individuals we have become so accustomed to pain and suffering that we often become inured to it. Indeed, we virtually embraced it intellectually as a necessary part of life to learn to live, and even thrive, with adversity.

Our prayers for Moshiach underscore that the objective is to get rid of Galus and suffering permanently!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY SIXTEEN

GOING UP OR DOWN?

Taking Israel with Him

This week's parsha begins with Jacob leaving his home, fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau, and following his parent's advice to marry a girl from their ancestral home. The Torah describes his departure as follows: "And Jacob left B'er Sheva and went to Charan."

What appears to be a straightforward verse is not so simple at all. When examining the choice of words in this verse a question arises.

When Abraham leaves Israel, the Torah describes his departure as "he **descended**." He didn't just leave, he descended. The simple reason for that is explained by our Sages, cited by Rashi: The Land of Israel is on high ground, whereas the countries surrounding Israel were on much lower ground.

The Talmud also understands the term "descending" in relation to leaving Israel as a spiritual form of descent because Israel is known as the Holy Land. Leaving Israel, by

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

definition, is a form of descent even if one were **to** leave Israel to climb Mount Everest.

The question therefore is, why when Jacob departs from Israel, **does** the Torah simply **state** “and Jacob left.” To be consistent, the Torah should have said, “And Jacob **descended**,” since he was going from the Holy Land to a rather unholy place.

The great Chassidic Master, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev answers that when a righteous person leaves Eretz Yisroel, he takes that holiness of Israel with him. The Tzadik is a personification of the holiness that exists in the Land of Israel. Thus, Jacob did not really go down.

However, now that the problem concerning the term used for Jacob’s departure has been resolved, the question now reverses itself: Why, when Abraham left the Land of Israel, does the Torah characterize it as a descent? Was Abraham’s righteousness less an embodiment of Israel than Jacob’s?

There are two ways we can answer the question by showing that Jacob’s departure was qualitatively much different from Abraham’s.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Jacob's Journey: An affirmation of Israel

Jacob's departure from Israel was **in order to establish** a Jewish nation and was in no way a detachment from Israel. His reason for leaving Israel was not a reflection of anything negative concerning the Land of Israel. He was forced to leave because of his brother, whereas Abraham left Israel because Israel was no longer an hospitable place. The land was plagued by famine. Hence, Abraham's departure constituted a diminution of Israel's status. The Torah, therefore, employs the term "and he descended."

Moreover, Jacob's ostensible departure from the Land was actually the greatest affirmation of Eretz Yisrael, for the Land of Israel cannot exist without the people of Israel. Eretz Yisrael acquired its highest level of holiness only after the Jewish people settled it. Only after they conquered the land did it assume the title "Holy Land" in the fullest sense of the word. And, conversely, after the Jews were exiled from Israel, it lost some measure of its holiness.

Jacob's departure from the Land of Israel was actually a journey to establish the people who would endow Israel with holiness and make Israel complete in terms of its spiritual character.

By contrast, Abraham's departure from Israel took him to Egypt which led to his eventual marriage to Hagar. Hagar, according to the Midrash, was Pharaoh's daughter given to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Abraham as a consolation gift on account of the mistreatment of Sarah. From that incident, Abraham subsequently became the father of Yishmael and the ancestor of his descendants who seek to undermine our attachment to the Land of Israel to this very day.

In effect, Abraham's descent, though it led to many positive outcomes, also sowed the seeds for the challenges that seek to compromise Jewish rights to the Land of Israel. As such, his departure from Israel was not—at least, not overtly—an affirmation of Eretz Israel's uniqueness, but rather, the reverse.

Don't make peace with Golus

One could perhaps draw another distinction between Abraham's departure and Jacob's: Abraham had to leave under entirely negative circumstances and endured great pain when he was in Egypt because his wife was taken by Pharaoh. How can that be described as anything less than a descent?

However, Jacob went for a noble purpose: to start a family that became the nucleus of the Jewish people. That was not a decline of holiness.

One may, however, challenge this distinction on the grounds that both Jacob and Abraham left Israel for

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

negative reasons: Abraham left to avoid the famine in Israel and Jacob fled to escape the wrath of his brother. And, conversely, both of their departures also had a more lofty objective: In Abraham's case his stay in Egypt established his reputation and brought him wealth and influence which he utilized to spread the belief in one G-d. Jacob, as stated above, went to Charan, not only to escape the threat that came from his brother Esau, but also to establish the nucleus of the Jewish nation..

What difference then is there between Jacob's departure, which is not characterized as having descended, and Abraham's which is?

Upon deeper reflection there is a subtle, but profound, difference between the two situations. Abraham's **overt** reason for leaving the Land of Israel—the Land that G-d told him would be the place that would allow him to fulfill his life's mission—was a negative turn of events. And while in the end we see how it actually contributed to Abraham's life mission, one cannot blithely dismiss the fact that to all appearances it looks like decline.

In Jacob's case, by contrast, Jacob's overt reason for going to Charan was to establish a family. It is not entirely clear if Esau's desire to kill Jacob for having taken the blessings from his father was public knowledge. So, for all intents and purposes, Jacob was going to get married and start a

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

family. Even without delving deeper into the circumstances of his trip, it is demonstrably clear that it was for a good cause. Thus, the Torah does not employ the term that expresses descent.

The lesson: Never make peace with adversity

Almost every negative experience has been reinterpreted by our Sages in a positive light. Particularly in Chassidic literature, negative phenomena are understood as hidden positives. Even the most painful curses that appear in the Torah are understood to be hidden or disguised blessings. Nevertheless, when we read these curses in the Synagogue, it is read in a soft and subdued tone. We do not overlook the fact that our senses now experience these curses as negatives, which we therefore ask G-d to remove from us.

One can be stoic in the face of illness or poverty. Yet, these same people plead with G-d three times daily “Please heal us!”

One can thrive amidst adversity in golus, yet that same person will fervently ask G-d repeatedly in his prayers to bring Moshiach. And it is true that golus is in essence a manifestation of the most sublime energies—in fact, too sublime to be experienced—that will be revealed in the Messianic Age. Yet, we pray incessantly for the golus to end. The Talmud relates that one of the things that G-d

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Himself created that he “regrets” having created is golus. Obviously, G-d doesn’t make mistakes and He certainly has a purpose and a plan for golus, which, when revealed will demonstrate its lofty nature. Yet, the Talmud states unequivocally that G-d regrets it, meaning that G-d sees it as a negative that must and will be eliminated.

Perhaps the reason we find this discrepancy—on the one hand, golus is reviled and on the other hand it is extolled as a hidden treasure trove—is to make sure that we never make peace with the golus and work incessantly and tirelessly to bring it to an end.

And there is also an additional related lesson from the above. As a people and as individuals we have become so accustomed to pain and suffering that we often become inured to it. Indeed, we virtually embraced it intellectually as a necessary part of life to learn to live, and even thrive, with adversity.

From the above distinction between Abraham’s descent into Egypt and Jacob’s departure to Charan we learn that notwithstanding all the rationalizations—that are true because they are part of Torah—this is not a permanent fixture. Golus with all of its attendant aches and pains is not the default state of existence and we may never make peace with it, even as we learn to cope and even grow with it.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

UNCONVENTIONAL PRAYERS FOR UNCONVENTIONAL RESULTS

Rachel's child was no ordinary child even in comparison to the other sons of Jacob. Her first son, Joseph, would carry the legacy of the Patriarchs to future generations.

Whatever spiritual energy and light Jacob and his forebears had introduced into the world depended on Joseph to transmit it.

It required a powerful and dynamic prayer for Rachel to bring this powerful and dynamic soul into the world.

Her earlier prayers were certainly sincere and altruistic. But for the unconventional soul of Joseph, with its unparalleled spiritual prowess, to emerge she had to break through additional obstacles.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

UNCONVENTIONAL PRAYERS FOR UNCONVENTIONAL RESULTS

Rachel's Plea

The Matriarch Leah bears four children for which she expresses profound gratitude. Her sister and co-wife Rachel is chagrined because she is childless. The Torah describes her feelings and actions thus:

“Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Jacob, so Rachel became envious of her sister. She said to Jacob, ‘Give me children – otherwise I am dead.’

Jacob's anger flared up at Rachel, and he said,

‘Am I instead of G-d who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?’”

Several questions have been raised about this brief exchange between Jacob and his beloved wife Rachel:

First, how could the supremely righteous Rachel be envious of her sister?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Rashi explains that she was envious of Leah's good deeds, ascribing her co-wife's fecundity to righteous behavior.

The question however remains, why does the Torah have to link her request for children to her envy of her sister's good deeds? Even if her sister had not been blessed with children, Rachel would still have desired children of her own!

Second, why did the otherwise righteous and compassionate Jacob lash out at his wife with undisguised anger? True, the Midrash states that G-d took him to task for this, but, can we understand what motivated him, one whom the Sages described as "G-d's chariot," meaning that he had totally subordinated his will to the will of G-d. What G-dly justification could there have been for his anger?

Third, Rashi explains that Jacob's anger was motivated by his belief that he could not pray for her because he already had children. Ramban is puzzled by this explanation. Why couldn't Jacob pray that his wife should bear children? Where does it say that one may only pray for his own needs?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Craving Children

To answer these questions we must begin by considering a statement made by our Sages (Talmud, Yevamos 64a) explaining why the Matriarchs were initially unable to bear children: “G-d desires the prayers of the righteous.” Ordinarily, righteous people do not ask G-d for anything material because they are happy with whatever blessings G-d bestows upon them. They are happy and grateful just to be alive and serve G-d. They crave nothing more, with one notable exception. Even the most ascetic and self-denying saint wants children.

One may suggest three reasons for this phenomenon:

First, the righteous person wants to give of self and nurture others. They cannot imagine a life which deprives them of the ability to share their blessings. And since there is no parallel to the love and nurturing given to one's own child, the righteous crave parenthood. Just listen to Rachel, who stated, “Give me children, otherwise I am dead.” To Rachel life without a child was not life in the true sense of the word.

Second, a righteous person devotes his or her life to bringing G-dly energy into the physical world. The most dramatic manifestation of G-dly presence happens with the introduction of another Divine soul into the world. This is particularly so when the new soul will be raised to serve G-

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

d and carry the parents' legacy into the future. Not being able to continue contributing to the world through one's heirs is especially painful for the righteous. They feel that it would diminish G-d's presence in the world.

Third, the Talmud (Yevamos 62a) states that Moshiach's coming depends on having all G-dly souls descend into this world. The birth of every child thus brings the world closer to Redemption, when G-d's glory will fill the world. To the righteous, having children is viewed as bringing the world one step closer to Redemption.

For these and other spiritual reasons a tzadik craves for nothing more than for children. And it is the only physical thing for which a tzadik will pray. Thus, by denying the Matriarch Rachel the ability to bear children G-d guaranteed that His delight in the prayers of the Righteous would be served.

Why was Rachel's Prayer Unanswered?

We can now approach understanding Rachel's demand of her husband to give her children.

Rachel obviously had already prayed for children but to no avail. Rachel did some soul-searching and concluded that she was less righteous than her sister Leah. She began to fear that her desire for children was not based on idealistic

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

and spiritual reasons but on personal gain instead. Perceiving a shortcoming in her prayers, she turned to her husband to pray for her.

Jacob responded that since she was the barren one, G-d craved her prayer and wanted her to be more persistent. Obviously, Jacob would and probably did pray for her. But G-d primarily wanted to hear her prayer.

This explains the linkage between her envy of Leah's righteousness and her own desire for children. She plead with her husband to get her with child as she considered that her prayers had failed on account of her lack of righteousness. If she had believed that she were sufficiently righteous, she would have continued praying.

This analysis also answers Ramban's question about why Jacob couldn't pray for Rachel. The answer is that he certainly did but he understood that it was her prayer that G-d craved and would ultimately bring about the desired result.

Shattering Barriers

A question still remains:

Why was Jacob so harsh to Rachel?

The answer can perhaps be found in a story told of the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dovber (known as

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

the “Rebbe Rashab”). A young man came to him with a serious spiritual problem but the Rebbe told him that he could not help him. The man was devastated, left the room, sat down and wept bitterly. The Rebbe Rashab’s older brother, Rabbi Zalman Aharon, asked the man why he was crying. The man replied that the Rebbe had refused to help him. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Zalman Aharon “reprimanded” his younger brother and demanded to know why he didn’t help the man. The Rebbe Rashab agreed to change his mind and proceeded to guide the sufferer and relieve him of his problem.

The question was asked, why did the Rebbe Rashab cause this man so much pain when he did, in fact, end up helping him?

The Rebbe answered that the Rebbe Rashab realized that this person had a major spiritual barrier and was not ready to be helped. His only recourse was to try and break through the young man’s shell by telling him that he was beyond help. When the young man realized that his situation was helpless, he was humbled to the core and the obstacle and resistance to the Rebbe Rashab’s counsel was broken down. It was not until then that he could be receptive to the Rebbe’s guidance.

Many of our prayers are waiting for an answer and there are many blessings waiting to be bestowed upon us. The

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

problem is that we may not be ready to receive those answers or blessings. We each carry with us impediments that encrust and envelop us. In these extreme cases, hearing harsh words of reprimand by an authority figure may be our last hope for receiving the blessings and having our prayers heard.

This may be the reason Jacob got angry at Rachel, despite his personification of the trait of compassion. His anger was aimed at shattering what he thought might be the obstacle to having her prayers answered. Jacob's anger was a form of "emotional surgery" to remove the impediment to her prayers for children.

Unconventional Prayers for Unconventional Results

We must still try to understand why G-d had not answered her prayers. It is hard to imagine that her desire for children was selfish or materialistic and that she, holiest of women, would possess such a strong stumbling block to her prayers.

The answer lies in the nature of the desired result. Rachel's child was no ordinary child even in comparison to the other sons of Jacob. Her first son, Joseph, would carry the legacy of the Patriarchs to future generations. Whatever spiritual energy and light Jacob and his forebears had introduced into the world depended on Joseph to transmit

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

it. Moreover, Joseph, and only Joseph, had the power to take the lofty ideals of the Patriarchs and apply them even to the most materialistic and depraved society of Egypt.

When Joseph was born, Rachel named him Joseph saying: “May G-d add (Yoseph) another son for me.” The Tzemach Tzedek (the third Lubavitcher Rebbe) translates this in a novel way: “May G-d add [so that] the other should be a son for me.” Joseph was able to take even an “other,” an “outsider,” and transform him into an “insider.”

It required a powerful and dynamic prayer for Rachel to bring this powerful and dynamic soul into the world. Her earlier prayers were certainly sincere and altruistic. But for the unconventional soul of Joseph, with its unparalleled spiritual prowess, to emerge she had to break through additional obstacles. Jacob sensed this and therefore displayed his “anger” to break the final barrier to her ability to conceive Joseph.

No More Suffering!

Our Sages (Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b) have foretold that before the Messianic Age, the Jewish people will go through the “birth pangs of Moshiach.” To bring on the unconventional power of Moshiach, who will transform the “outsiders” into “insiders,” we have had to endure unprecedented travail. We must have certainly filled and

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

even exceeded our quota of suffering by now. To hasten and prepare for the Yoseph-unconventional increases of G-dly light of the final Redemption, we do not need more suffering and pain. Instead, let the suffering of the past impel us to cry out to G-d, "Ad Masai, How much longer!" even as we pave the way for Moshiach's efforts at transforming "outsiders" into "insiders." Let us prepare ourselves, our families, our communities and the rest of society to welcome Moshiach by recognizing our/their insider status as G-d's children, who joyously serve G-d with love!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

REMOVE THE ROCK

When G-d gives us a mission He also gives us the energy
and wherewithal to fulfill it.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

REMOVE THE ROCK

Jacob's Rebuke

Jacob sees a group of shepherds sitting idly next to the well that was covered with a huge rock and asks them why they are not working. Their response was that they could not remove the huge rock that covered the well until all the shepherds arrived to assist them with its removal.

Jacob did not initially ask them why they were not working. He first inquires of them where they were from and whether they knew his uncle Laban. After they responded that they were from Charan and that they did know him and that Rachel his daughter had come there, Jacob asked them why they were not working.

Why did Jacob wait to rebuke them for not doing their work after they responded to his inquiries about where they were from and whether they knew Laban? And then only after he saw Rachel did he take them to task for sitting around idly. Why?

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Another question has been raised concerning Jacob's criticism of these shepherds from Charan. Why couldn't Jacob see that there was a huge rock covering the well and that it was impossible for them to remove it without the assistance of more people who were not yet present?

Furthermore, in the end, Jacob removes the rock effortlessly. If he was so strong, why did he not initially offer to remove it for them? Only after he saw Rachel did he demonstrate his physical prowess. Rather than criticize others, shouldn't he have offered his assistance to them?

Make the Effort to Do the Impossible

The Chassidic Master known as the *Sfas Emes* addresses the question as to why he did not realize that it was impossible for them to remove the rock, because Jacob was of the mind that even when a task at hand seems impossible one must always make an effort to do it.

However, *Sfas Emes* questioned his own answer. How did Jacob know that they hadn't made an attempt before he arrived? Why did he rush to judgment about them?

Sfas Emes answered that even when we try unsuccessfully to accomplish our mission, we must continue to try. Giving up is not an option.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

One is, however, entitled to challenge this explanation. Granted, one must always make repeated efforts to accomplish something even if one failed initially. However, there are limits to a person's capabilities. One cannot be expected to do something that is physically impossible. For example, if one is told to fly all the effort in the world would not make it possible. Since these shepherds were physically incapable of doing it why would he fault them for not making repeated attempts, or why would he not give them the benefit of the doubt that they could not do it?

Civilizing the World

Jacob's question to them as to why they were not working was presumably not just prompted by curiosity or to make small talk but because he was genuinely put off by their idleness.

The Midrash tells us that Abraham chose to settle in the Land of Canaan because he found that the people were not idle; they were productive citizens. And that is where, he understood, G-d wanted him to settle. Humanity, after the Great Flood, was charged with the obligation to work and be productive to contribute to the world's stability. This objective of civilizing the world was crucial as the backdrop to the ultimate role and mission of the Jewish people to

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

make the world into a dwelling place for G-d. One cannot introduce holiness in a place that is uncivilized. It is like building a foundation before the structure. Populating the world and making it a inhabitable world is a prerequisite to the Jewish people making the harmonious world into a holy and G-dly world.

Jacob's purpose of coming to Charan was to establish a Jewish family that would be the progenitors of the Jewish nation to whom G-d's Master Plan for the world would be given. Charan—with all of its deficiencies—was to be the stage upon which the unfolding drama of history was to take place. Thus, Jacob saw all of the events that would occur at this place, in particular, as integral to the unfolding of the Master Plan and for which a suitable foundation was a necessity.

He therefore expected that the people who were associated with Charan—especially if they knew Laban, the person in whose home he would establish the first Jewish family—would have at least a modicum of civilization. He expected them to be productive citizens who had respect for the work ethic that makes the world a habitable place. Jacob could not fathom how he could build a transcendent and G-dly world on the shaky foundation of idleness.

We can now understand why he waited to hear that they were from Charan, that they knew Laban and that Rachel

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

had arrived to rebuke them for their idleness. It was at that point that he realized that this was the “place” upon which he was going to build a Jewish home and raise a Jewish family that would be the forerunner of a Jewish people who would pave the way for Moshiach. At this point he demanded to know why they were not fulfilling their mission to tame the world and make it suitable for the fulfillment of his mission.

If it's Your Mission You can Do it

We can now also understand why he demanded of them to do what might have otherwise been impossible for them. In Jacob's mind their mission was to be shepherds and tend to their flocks. That was their G-d given mission. When G-d gives us a mission He also gives us the energy and wherewithal to fulfill it. Jacob thus protested, “Make an effort to lift the rock! And if it didn't work the first time, keep on trying.”

And, indeed, when Jacob saw Rachel—who was the one through whom he would establish a family and fulfill his mission—he immediately proceeded to lift the rock singlehandedly. Perhaps it was a miracle. Perhaps Jacob possessed super-human capabilities. But, the most likely explanation for his ability to lift the rock is that he sensed it was his G-d given mission to get closer to the time that

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

he would marry Rachel. He thus reasoned that if lifting the rock would facilitate this goal, G-d would certainly give him the ability to do it. This elicited hidden potential from the reservoir of his soul.

Had he not connected the dots and seen these events as pivotal in the fulfillment of his mission he might not have been able to perform this feat. Using conventional powers one cannot do the extraordinary. But when we know how crucial our actions are in terms of their ability to fulfill our G-d given mission we discover hidden and heretofore untapped powers.

We can Lift the Rock!

We've been told that our generation is the final generation of the exile and will be the first generation of the Redemption. Our mission is to "welcome Moshiach" and prepare ourselves and all those around us for the final Redemption. Our mission is to literally transform the world. We are charged with the mission of singlehandedly removing the rock that blocks our ability to draw upon the refreshing waters of knowledge that characterize the Messianic Age.

However, when we realize that this is our special mission, we come to the conclusion that G-d has certainly given us the power to remove that rock. We then unleash

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

unprecedented powers from within that we never knew we possessed. With those newly discovered powers we remove the very last impediment to the true and complete Redemption.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY NINETEEN

JOY AND MORE JOY

**Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl, the famous Chassidic Master,
remarked:**

**“Rachel and Leah both desired the same thing—Jacob.
However, what Leah received through crying Rachel
achieved with joy.”**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY NINETEEN

JOY AND MORE JOY

The Mismatch

Leah and Rachel, Jacob's two wives possessed different personalities, which they expressed in many ways throughout their lives.

The first time we encounter these sisters, who were to become two of the four Matriarchs of the Jewish people, is in this week's parsha.

The Torah recounts that Jacob fled his brother Eisav's wrath and ended up in the house of his uncle Lavan. Jacob asked to marry Rachel, and Lavan promised him he could but only after performing seven years of labor. In the end Lavan tricked Jacob and gave him Leah instead of Rachel. When he complained, Lavan claimed it would have been improper to marry off the younger sister before the older one. Jacob then had to wait another seven days before marrying Rachel, in return for seven more years of back-breaking labor for Lavan.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Two Personality Types

In the beginning of this narrative, the Torah describes these two sisters thus:

“Lavan had two daughters, the older one was called Leah, and the younger one was called Rachel. Leah’s eyes were tender, and Rachel had beautiful features and beautiful complexion.”

Why were Leah’s eyes tender? Rashi explains that their contemporaries believed that,

“Rivkah had two sons, and Lavan had two daughters, the older daughter is for the older son, and the younger daughter for the younger son.”

Leah therefore fully expected to fall into Eisav’s grasp and be compelled to marry him. This prospect so appalled her that she wept and wept. As a result, her eyes were made “tender.”

Leah’s tears may be understood as her heartfelt beseeching of G-d to deliver her from this fate. In the end, she got what she wanted. She married Jacob instead of Eisav, and bore half of his twelve sons, among them Levi, the progenitor of the Kohanim and Levi’im, as well as Yehudah, the ancestor of the Davidic dynasty, culminating in Moshiach.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Crying Versus Joy

Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl, the famous Chassidic Master, remarked: “Rachel and Leah both desired the same thing—Jacob. However, what Leah received through crying Rachel achieved with joy.”

In these pithy words, Rabbi Nochum captured one of the fundamental principles of Chassidic thought, which assigns greater value to true joy than heartfelt crying.

One might imagine that a person who spends years of heartfelt prayer for something positive would have a spiritual advantage over someone who expected to receive her heart’s desire with having to agonize over it. Why did Rachel get what she wanted without the heavy cost paid by Leah? In other words, why does joy have so much more power than grief?

Breaking the Boundaries

The answer can be found with a better understanding of the true meaning of joy. In Hebrew the word for joy is *simcha*. The Rebbe Rashab (Rabbi Sholom Dovber, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe) coined an important phrase: “*simcha poretz geder*”—joy breaks through boundaries. In so doing, he expanded upon a Talmudic statement concerning a king: “*Melech poretz geder*—a king breaks through boundaries.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

This refers to the power of a king to break through the boundaries of private property as a short cut on the way to his destination. Indeed, Judaism's ultimate monarch, Moshiach, is referred to as the *poreitz*, the barrier breaker.

What do kingship and joy have in common?

A king answers to no higher human authority; he is confident and resolute. In his mind there are no obstacles to fulfilling his mission. Yehudah, the king of the 12 Tribes, took full responsibility for returning Benjamin to Jacob. It was Yehudah's powerful promise to his father, that he would forfeit this world and the next if he would fail to return Benjamin, which convinced Jacob to allow Benjamin to travel to Egypt. Yehudah knew that he would succeed. He had no need for a Plan B.

When a person is said to act royally, it means that he exudes this confidence and determination to forge ahead. It is this attitude that allows us to overcome our anxieties and stay on the road to our destination.

This is precisely what simcha implies as well. It is our joyful trust in G-d's guidance and support that gives us the confidence that we will succeed.

To think that Rachel's joy was less spiritually potent than Leah's agony is to fail to appreciate the power required to maintain a state of joy. It is arguably the greatest feat for human beings: to rise above all of the negatives in life.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Moshiach: Scion of Leah

The question we may ask now is how we reconcile the fact that Moshiach—the ultimate monarch and the ultimate exemplar of joy, for the letters of the word Moshiach rearranged spell the word “*yismach*-he shall rejoice”— will be a descendant of Leah and not Rachel?

The answer is that although Leah began in misery, she transformed that sentiment into joy. With the birth of each child, her joy was enhanced. Her joy reached its crescendo with Yehudah's birth. At this point she exclaimed: “I will **now** thank G-d.”

Does this statement imply that she did not show gratitude with the birth of her first three children? The answer is that she expected to have three male children, assuming that to be her share of the 12 tribes Jacob would father with his four wives. Her gratitude for those births, which was commensurate with her joy, was therefore anticipated and thus measured. It broke no rules and shattered no conventions. It could not be characterized as a genuine, unmitigated and bunker-busting joy.

However, when she exceeded her expected share and bore Jacob a fourth child, breaking through that barrier with G-d's help, her joy likewise broke through its barriers. She now, for the first time, was able to express unparalleled joy and gratitude.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

The Progenitor of All Major Institutions

At this juncture, Leah transformed herself and even surpassed Rachel in terms of her joy and gratitude. Leah transitioned from a lower level of Teshuvah, that involved crying over the negative, into a higher level of Teshuvah, that was punctuated by an unmitigated joy. Now she felt that G-d had empowered her to get closer to Him and His mission, by allowing her to bring all the main strands of Jewish leadership into the world.

Yehudah, as noted, was the progenitor of kings and some of the greatest prophets, such as Isaiah. Leah's other sons were the source for many important leaders. Levi was the progenitor of the Kohanim and Levites and some of the greatest prophets, from Moses and Aaron, to Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Ezra. Shimon was the ancestor of the teachers of children throughout the Land of Israel. Yissachar's dynasty produced the great Sages, who were responsible for the calendar etc. Zevulun was the ancestor of significant philanthropists and benefactors who supported and facilitated Jewish scholarship.

Rachel's most illustrious descendant, of course, was Joseph. He was the progenitor of the first Jewish leader in the Land of Israel, Joshua, as well as the provisional monarchy established in the breakaway kingdom of Israel. In contrast to Leah's descendants, their role as leaders was to be

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

temporary, unlike the leadership of the Davidic dynasty, which was to last forever.

Indeed, our Sages describe two Moshiach's: Moshiach the son of Joseph and Moshiach the son of David. The difference between them is that the former fights the battles but eventually succumbs. Moshiach ben David then assumes the mantle of leadership forever. In the Messianic Age, we are told, the two leaders will merge into one; but the dominant one will be the descendant of David and Yehudah—who were themselves Leah's descendants.

The Joy of the Ba'al Teshuvah Versus the Tzadik

The Rebbe describes the difference between Rachel and Leah in terms of the Tzadik versus the Ba'al Teshuvah. Rachel represents the joyous approach of the sinless tzadik, who is destined for holiness and dwells in a holy atmosphere. Leah represents the Ba'al Teshuvah, who is in a constant struggle with the Eisav's of the world.

It may be suggested that although initially it is the tzadik who enjoys the joy and satisfaction of being in close proximity to the Jacob's of the world, the one who "laughs last" is the Ba'al Teshuvah. It is he or she who changes the world and transforms negatives into positives. The resultant joy is much more intense and enduring.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Thus, Moshiach ben David comes as a result of the Ba'al Teshuvah phenomenon that engenders unparalleled joy and breaks through the boundaries of exile. Moshiach, according to the Zohar, is also credited with the ability to enable the tzadik to experience a superior state of Teshuvah. In the context of our discussion of joy it can also be understood that Moshiach will also enable the tzadik, who is accustomed to a more conventional and limited joy, to experience the exuberant and boundary-breaking intense joy of the Ba'al Teshuvah!

ESSAY TWENTY

SEEING AND HEARING

There are two ways that we deal with each other's needs.

**There are times that we see another person's plight; a
simple recognition that something is wrong.**

**We must take this to the next step, by listening to his or
her story.**

**What might seem to be just petty details or minutiae are
not to the person who is suffering.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY

SEEING AND HEARING

Leah's Naming Habit

When Leah, Jacob's first wife, bore him his first child, she named him Reuven., which is a contraction of the phrase "G-d **saw** my **suffering**." Leah felt that by bearing a child for her husband Jacob, he would now begin to have love for her, despite the fact that Jacob was tricked into marrying her.

When she bore him a second son, she named him Shimon, which is a contraction of: "G-d **heard** that I was despised."

The question can be asked, why is it that in the first instance, Leah used the metaphor of sight with regard to G-d taking note of her suffering—"G-d **saw** my suffering"—whereas with the birth of her second son, Leah employs the metaphor of hearing—"G-d **heard** that I was despised"—to describe G-d's attentiveness to her situation?

Second, why is it that when Reuven is born, G-d sees her **suffering**, whereas when Shimon is born G-d hears that she is **despised**? What is the more general experience of

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

suffering associated with Reuven, while the more specific feeling of being despised is connection to Shimon?

Third, we must try to grasp the deeper meaning of these two metaphors—seeing and hearing—and how they can be applied to our own lives, with regard to our relationships with G-d and with others.

Panoramic versus Focus

There are many salient distinguishing features between the visual and the auditory.

Among these differences one finds that when we see something, it is usual a cursory examination and overview of the matter at hand. Vision is panoramic. It generally covers a wide expanse and has no appreciation for the details. It is not that we don't see the details, but it is that we don't focus on them. They count only to the extent that they contribute to the whole picture and they are what make the entire scene what it is, but as individual parts they have minimal value.

Hearing, on the other hand, deals primarily with the details. We hear one sound at a time. (Within sound there are exceptions to this rule, such as the pleasure we derive from listening to a philharmonic orchestra. And, likewise within the visual experience there are times when we do focus our

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

attention on and are memorized by one detail. But these exceptions, only prove the rule that visual is generally sweeping and cursory, while hearing focuses on the details.

Listening and Seeing the Pain of the Other

Translating this difference into human relationships, we can say that there are two ways that we deal with each other's needs. There are times that we see another person's plight. However, because it is visual, it cannot fathom what precisely is wrong. It is a simple recognition that something is wrong.

However, it does not suffice to just see the other person's misery and empathize. We must take this to the next step, by listening to his or her story. What might seem to be just petty details or minutiae are not to the person who is suffering. And they can only be helped if they are listened to. When we not only **see** their suffering, but we also **hear** the details of their situation we have emulated G-d who saw and heard Leah's sad predicament.

When Joseph was in prison, he notices that two of the prisoners—Pharaoh's butler and baker, were miserable. But he doesn't stop there and just say a few comforting words to them. He proceeds to ask them what was wrong. Seeing alone only told him half of the story. He then had to hear from them the details, without which he could not have

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

helped them.

This sheds light on how Leah viewed G-d's response to her plight. First she appreciates G-d's seeing her suffering and gave her a child. When she had a second child, she realized that G-d was not only involved in her life in a cursory fashion—that He was able to sense her suffering—but that He also knew her **particular** situation, that she was despised.

Salient Difference between Reuven and Shimon

These two traits of seeing and hearing —the Reuven and Shimon approaches to life—are reflected in their personalities they developed when they grew up. Reuven makes a general effort to save Joseph from his brother's attempt at killing him. He does not follow through, and while he takes a break, Joseph is sold into slavery. Had Reuven been endowed with the Shimon trait, he would have followed through and not rested until he had saved Joseph.

Shimon, on the other hand, upon hearing how his sister Dinah was violated, did not rest until he redeemed his sister and decimated the entire city of perpetrators. Without going into the ethics of this action, Shimon's personality of hearing enabled him to go to the extreme in addressing the need of the victim.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

When we approach G-d in our prayers, we ask G-d to do both: See us and hear us. We are, in effect saying to G-d: "Don't just respond to our pleas by some general Divine act of kindness, a few words of comfort, we want more."

Our prayers for the immediate Redemption is an expression of how we want G-d to not only **see** our plight but to also **hear** all of the particulars of our suffering and not rest until we are redeemed from all facets and manifestations of exile.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

REMOVING THE ROCKS

In every generation, G-d has blessed the Jewish people with great spiritual mentors, whose lives are dedicated to the well-being of their flock.

Their primary method of nurturing the Jewish people is by serving as the fountainhead of Torah knowledge and inspiration.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

REMOVING THE ROCKS

Jacob at the Well in the Field

The Torah describes Jacob's journey to his uncle Laban, in this week's parsha, in the following manner:

"Jacob lifted up his feet and he went off towards the land of the people of the East. He looked, and behold there was a well in the field, and behold three flocks of sheep were lying beside it, for they would give water to the flocks from that well. There was a large rock on the mouth of the well... And when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, the brother of his mother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, Jacob approached and he rolled the rock from the mouth of the well and he watered the sheep of Laban.."

The Ba'al Shem Tov's grandson, Rabbi Efraim in his work *Degel Machanae Efraim* explains these verses in a rather novel way. This interpretation is based on a premise that

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

the Torah's stories are not just historical accounts of the forebears of the Jewish people. In addition to the simple meaning of the text, and the moral lessons that we can derive from them, these narratives also contain embedded messages about spirituality in general and our role in the Divine scheme in particular.

The "Well" Metaphor

The "well" or "spring" that constantly flows with fresh water is a metaphor from the way our Torah knowledge constantly gushes with new insights and energy. No matter how many times we may study a passage of the Torah, the Torah retains its freshness and originality. To appreciate this dimension of Torah that is likened to a well, one must study Torah *Lishmah*—for its own sake, for the purest of motives.

And while we may, and ought to, study Torah even for ulterior motives; nevertheless, for the Torah to be a dynamic and invigorating force in our lives, we must strive to learn Torah for more sublime motives. The Torah then becomes an endless source of spiritual nourishment and inspiration.

This is what our Sages had in mind when they stated (Ethics of the Fathers, Chapter 6):

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

“One who is engaged in the study of Torah for its own sake, merits many things... He becomes like a gushing fountain.”

When we study Torah for the purest of motives (“for its own sake”) we are capable of experiencing an endless proliferation of knowledge and spiritual enhancement.

In every generation, G-d has blessed the Jewish people with great spiritual mentors, whose lives are dedicated to the well-being of their flock. Their primary method of nurturing the Jewish people is by serving as the fountainhead of Torah knowledge and inspiration. And it is from this “well” of Torah that we read about in this week’s parsha that all future Jewish leaders provide spiritual nourishment to their flock— to the Jewish people who are Biblically likened to sheep.

Obstacles to the Well

However, there are times when a “large rock” can be lodged on the very mouth of the well. There are many obstacles that do not allow us to be receptive to the “living words of Torah” from our spiritual leaders.

Too often we are so consumed by the hardships and challenges of life itself, not to speak of the suffering and persecution our people endured for millennia, that it

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

becomes difficult for us to open our minds and hearts to absorb the true spiritual dimension of Torah.

Two Approaches to Removing the Rock

The Torah thus provides two scenarios how that rock can be removed:

The first is to have all the flocks gathered together. When Jews get together in a brotherly fashion to hear words of Torah, their collective strength and their intense desire to receive, enables them to remove the impediments and drink from the fountains of Torah.

However, there are special occasions—hinted in the words: “And Jacob saw Rachel”—when the leader himself sees the dire needs of the people to be inspired that prompts him to remove the rock and allow the words of Torah to be revealed in an unobstructed way.

The Essence of the Ba'al Shem Tov's Teachings

These concepts, adapted from the work of the Ba'al Shem Tov's grandson, express the very essence of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings and contribution to the Jewish world. The Chassidic movement was based on the belief that the secret to the coming of the Moshiach is to remove the “rocks” that prevent us from imbibing the full extent of the Torah's

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

refreshing waters. The spiritual and mystical teachings of Chassidut were provided for us in these times to withstand the pressures of exile and to prepare us for the Messianic Age, when all of the world will be filled with G-dly knowledge; when all the “rocks” will be eliminated..

The Ba'al Shem Tov, and subsequent Chassidic leaders combined both approaches, alluded to in this week's parsha, to remove the rock.

First, they themselves used Herculean measures in teaching and disseminating the most profound, spiritual and mystical dimensions of the Torah. Second, they encouraged and cultivated “Chassidic gatherings” where hundreds and thousands of Jews would gather together, suffused with friendship and brotherly love. In this atmosphere, our hearts and minds were receptive to the most powerful teachings of Torah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE PRAYER TO BE A MOTHER AND THE MOTHER OF PRAYER!

There is one need and request that stands out among all the others.

When it comes to a person asking for a child one does not need a formalized, structured prayer.

The desire for a child for a childless couple; or the desire for nachas (fulfillment, satisfaction in English, but basically untranslatable) from our children does not require any reminders from us.

It is the most natural position of most human beings.

It did not require an honorable mention in the Amidah because it is the most primal form of prayer; a need that transcends formality.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE PRAYER TO BE A MOTHER AND THE MOTHER OF PRAYER!

Rachel's Pleas and Jacob's Strange Response

Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob cries to her husband that she has no children, demanding from him that he give her children, "if not," Rachel cries, "I am dead!"

Commentators understand Rachel's words as a plea to Jacob to pray for her.

At first glance, Jacob's response to her appears rather strange:

"Am I in place of G-d, who has withheld the fruit of the womb from you?"

Rashi explains that Jacob was essentially saying that it was her problem. She had no children but he had.

Rashi's explanation of Jacob's response to Rachel is quite puzzling.

Why would Jacob exhibit what appears to be a callous attitude towards his beloved wife? The least he could have

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

done is to say to her, “I will pray for you.” True, he already fathered children with Leah, but that did not justify his dismissal of her heartfelt request of him to pray for her.

No Request for Children in the Amidah?

Perhaps this can be understood in light of another puzzling fact regarding prayer.

Judaism’s most important prayer is the Amidah, or the *Shemonah Esrei* (which means “eighteen,” referring to the original eighteen benedictions that comprised this prayer. A nineteenth benediction was added later). The Shemonah Esrei contains the requests for all of our most important needs including intelligence, forgiveness, freedom, health, livelihood, redemption, etc. There is one urgent need that is omitted in this otherwise comprehensive prayer: It is the prayer for children!

It is very strange that the desire for children that occupies so much of Biblical literature—including in this week’s parsha which recounts Rachel’s plea for children—is not even mentioned in the Amidah!

The question is magnified when we consider the fact that the source for many of the laws associated with prayer are derived from the Biblical account of Chanah who was childless and prayed for a child in the Sanctuary. Her

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

heartfelt prayer was so poignant that we read it on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. Indeed, the Talmud states that Chanah was “remembered” by G-d on Rosh Hashanah and she eventually bore a child—Samuel the prophet.

Why then would a prayer as powerful and fundamental as the desire and need for children be missing among the plethora of prayers that we recite three times every day, six days a week? (On the Shabbat we do not ask G-d for our daily needs. The Amidah then focuses instead on the holiness of the gift called Shabbat.)

The Nature of Prayer

To answer this question we must focus on the nature of prayer. According to all opinions the requirement of praying three times a day is of rabbinic origin. All opinions also agree that when a person has a crucial need and pours out his or her heart to G-d in prayer, they fulfill a Biblical obligation to pray. Indeed, the original form of prayer was to ask G-d for our needs when they arise.

The rabbinic requirement of praying three times a day, on the other hand, was instituted regardless of whether we feel the need to pray or whether we feel that we have any needs, period. And although, every one of us is in need of something, we do not always feel that need or the need to express it. Nevertheless, we must constantly remind

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

ourselves of our dependence on G-d and that there are needs that we may not forgo. Even if one individual is not in need of a recovery from illness, there is always someone else who needs our prayers. Shemonah Esrei was intended for those of us for whom turning to G-d and asking for all of our needs is not natural and instinctive. It is an exercise that conditions us to start feeling and acting on those feelings.

No need for Formalized Prayer

There is one need and request that stands out among all the others.

When it comes to a person asking for a child one does not need a formalized, structured prayer. The desire for a child for a childless couple; or the desire for nachas (fulfillment, satisfaction in English, but basically untranslatable) from our children does not require any reminders from us. It is the most natural position of most human beings. It did not require an honorable mention in the Amidah because it is the most primal form of prayer; a need that transcends formality.

If anything, this form of prayer exhibited by Chanah serves as the model for all other prayers. Chanah's prayer was the quintessential prayer from which all others ought to derive

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

their inspiration. Just as we feel the need to ask G-d for our children, so too we should ask for the other basic needs; if not for ourselves, than at least for others.

No Substitute for Rachel's Prayer

We can now shed some light on Jacob's rather indifferent attitude towards his wife's demand for children. What Jacob was imparting to her was not, G-d forbid, a cold insensitive "I don't care for you, I have **my** own needs taken care of." Jacob was attempting to tell her, how can my prayer have any value in comparison to yours? No matter how much I will pray—and we can be sure that Jacob did pray for her—it cannot come close to your own prayer. The plea of a barren woman can break through every boundary and heavenly barrier. If my prayer is like a trickle yours is a torrential downpour!

Jacob was in effect telling Rachel that the power of a woman to pray for her child has no substitute and cannot be delegated and whatever value the prayer of others possesses it pales in comparison, like "a candle in sunlight." Just as it needs no formula and fixed text, so too, it cannot be substituted by anyone else not in her own shoes.

When Chanah—the mother of prayer—prayed to become a mother, Eli, the High Priest thought she was intoxicated.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

Indeed, she was! She was intoxicated with the desire to become a mother!

Intoxicated about Moshiach

There is one other need that matches the need for children in its importance, but does not always evoke the same passion as prayer for children. We do not usually get worked up about it and certainly not to the point of being accused of being “intoxicated” as was Chanah. It is the need for Moshiach to come and take us out of exile and lead the world into the ultimate Redemption. We do not always feel the need for it because being in exile has the capacity to numb our feelings and put us into a state of indifference and virtual sleep.

Our Sages and prophets of old, therefore, inserted no less than five benedictions of the Shemonah Esrei (out of eighteen) that essentially express our desire and plea for Moshiach and all that which Moshiach entails.

As the Chanah of Biblical times was “intoxicated” with her passion for children, so too must we be “intoxicated” with the desire to bring an end to this exile and its heart, mind and soul numbing effects. We must do our part in demanding of G-d to bring us the Redemption along with increase in our own personal attempts to liberate our souls by studying more Torah (particularly the Torah’s teachings

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - VAYEITZEI

about Moshiach and Redemption), increasing in our acts of kindness and more Mitzvos.