

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT VAYETZEI

DVAR TORAH: ENCOUNTERING GREATNESS

For decades Lavan lived near Yaakov. And during that time Lavan flourished. Even Lavan had to agree that his prosperity, the blessing in his household, was due to Yaakov's presence. נהשתי ויברכני ה' בגללך, says Lavan – "I have, through my sorcery, determined that God blessed me because of you" (Bereishit 30:27).

But we would have also expected Lavan's character to be influenced by Yaakov. We would have expected from Lavan some transformation, some elevation as a result of his prolonged encounter with a person of such greatness. That was not the case, though. לבן בקש לעקור את הכל, we say every year at our Pesach Seder: Lavan, at the end of the entire period, wanted to uproot everything, but God saved Yaakov and his family.

The Meshech Chochmah makes this observation about Lavan in a comment at the end of our Parshah. When Lavan and Yaakov part ways, the following sentences are juxtaposed: "וישב לבן למקומו" – Lavan returned to his place (the end of one sentence), ויעקב הלך לדרכו – and Yaakov went on his way (the beginning of the next)" (Bereishit 32:1-2).

Says the Meshech Chochmah: מי שיש לו איש קדוש כיעקב בתוך ביתו הלא ראוי להתבשם ממעשיו וחכמתו ולקיים בו הולך – Someone who had a man as holy as Yaakov in his household should have been affected (literally, taken on the fragrance) from his actions and wisdom, fulfilling the biblical verse, "One who goes with the wise becomes wise" (Mishlei 13:20). וכאשר הלך יעקב שב לבן למקומו הראשון היינו מצבו הרע – But when Yaakov went, Lavan returned to his original "place", to the original bad state of his character as a cheat and a money-lover. Yaakov, in contrast, went on his way, his path, like a true tzadik and talmid chacham who is constantly growing and elevating, and the parshah closes when he meets up with two camps of angels.

An encounter with a person of greatness can be transforming. It is an opportunity to open up to influence, להתבשם, to walk away with some of the fragrance of that person's character. True, it can also bring material blessing, as it did to Lavan, but that is merely a side benefit.

As Rashi comments on the first verse of our parshah (Bereishit 28:10): When a tzadik leaves a place it makes an impression, for he gives splendor, shine, and beauty to his environment. The Gur Aryeh on that Rashi explains that these three qualities are associated with the three special contributions the tzadik makes. He teaches them yirat Shamayim, fear of Heaven, he shares his wisdom with them, and they are influenced by his character, his midot. Throughout Jewish history our greatest have so influenced their environments that they became associated with their places – the Maharal of Prague, the Mezritcher Maggid and the Dubno Maggid, Rabbi Chaim of Tzanz and the Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Bagdad, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin and the Vilna Gaon. May Hashem give us all the opportunities to connect up with His tzadikim, and to have the good sense to learn from their ways, their wisdom, and their yirat Shamayim.

SOURCE GUIDE: DINAH AND EISAV?

This source guide is built around six comments made by Rashi, both in Vayitzei and Vayishlach. All center around one question: **What righteous woman would want to marry Eisav?**

<p>Rashi on Bereishit 29:17 [The eyes of Leah] were soft – She thought she was fated to marry Eisav and cried. For everyone was saying, “Rivkah has two sons and Lavan has two daughters. The older son will marry the older daughter and the younger son will marry the younger daughter (based on Bava Batra 123).</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית פרק כט פסוק יז (יז) רכות - (ב"ב קכ"ג) שהיתה סבורה לעלות בגורלו של עשו ובכתה שהיו הכל אומרים שני בנים לרבקה ושתי בנות ללבן הגדולה לגדול והקטנה לקטן:</p>
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Leah feared she was fated to be the wife of the evil Eisav; this was the source of her tears.

<p>Rashi on Bereishit 30:22 God remembered Rachel – He remembered her for handing over the “signs” to her sister and that she was distressed about the possibility of ending up having to marry Eisav. [She was worried] lest Yaakov divorce her because she had no children. Even the evil Eisav thought of this when he heard that she had no children (based on Bereishit Rabbah). This is the basis of the poem, “The red one, when he saw that she didn’t give birth, wanted to marry her and she was scared.”</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית פרק ל פסוק כב כב) ויזכר אלהים את רחל - (ב"ר) זכר לה שמסרה סימניה לאחותה ושהיתה מצירה שלא תעלה בגורלו של עשו שמא יגרשנה יעקב לפי שאין לה בנים ואף עשו הרשע כך עלה בלבו כששמע שאין לה בנים. הוא שייסד הפייט האדמון כבט שלא חלה צבה לקחתה לו ונתבהלה:</p>
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Even Rachel, Yaakov’s beloved wife, feared marrying Eisav. Her distress about this possibility was rewarded by God with the birth of a child, Yosef. And, says Rashi, based on the piyut, this fear was not without basis, for Eisav had designs on Rachel (as Og had on Sarah and the snake had on Chavah).

<p>Rashi on Bereishit 33:7 Yosef and Rachel approached [Eisav last] – With all of the other wives the mothers approached before their sons, but, as for Rachel, Yosef approached before her. He said, “My mother is beautiful. [I am worried] lest that evil person cast his eyes upon her. I will stand in front of her and prevent him from looking at her.” It was from here that Yosef merited the blessing of being “above the [evil] eye”.</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית פרק לג פסוק ז ז) נגש יוסף ורחל - בכלן האמהות נגשות לפני הבנים אבל ברחל יוסף נגש לפניו אמר אמי יפת תואר שמא יתלה בה עיניו אותו רשע אעמוד כנגדה ואעכבנו מלהסתכל בה מכאן זכה יוסף לברכת עלי עין:</p>
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Yosef, that child born to Rachel as a reward for her antipathy towards Eisav, protected his mother from Eisav’s eyes, meriting him the special blessing of being above the evil eye. Given all of the above, it is most surprising that Yaakov is criticized for hiding his daughter Dinah from Eisav.

<p>Rashi on Bereishit 32:23 And his eleven children – And where was Dinah? He placed her in a chest and locked her in so Eisav should not cast his eyes upon her. Therefore Yaakov was punished for withholding her from his brother, for she might have caused him to transform for the good – and she fell in the hands of Shechem (based on Bereishit Rabbah).</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית פרק לב פסוק כג כג) ואת אחד עשר ילדיו - (ב"ר) ודינה היכן היתה נתנה בתיבה ונעל בפניה שלא יתן בה עשו עיניו ולכך נענש יעקב שמנעה מאחיו שמא תחזירנו למוטב ונפלה ביד שכם:</p>
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Why was Yaakov supposed to have married his daughter Dinah to his brother Eisav?

Rashi answers this question. Why should Yaakov have allowed Dinah to marry Eisav? Answer – Dinah might have been the catalyst for Eisav’s repentance.

But Rashi now presents us with a new problem. Apparently the *Imahot* themselves, Rachel and Leah, would not have been able to transform Eisav, so why should Dinah have been able to?

The answer might begin with a look at another one of Yaakov’s children who had a special connection with Eisav, Yosef. Of Yaakov’s twelve sons, Yosef was the one who was able to bring about Eisav’s downfall.

<p>Rashi on Bereishit 30:25 When Rachel gave birth to Yosef – when Eisav’s nemesis was born. For it is written, “And the house of Yaakov will be as a fire and the house of Yosef as a flame, and the house of Eisav as straw” (Ovadia 1). Fire without a flame will not take hold of things far away. When Yosef was born Yaakov trusted in the Holy One, blessed be He, and wanted to return [home].</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית פרק ל פסוק כה (כה) כאשר ילדה רחל את יוסף - משנולד שטנו של עשו שנא' (עובדיה א) והיה בית יעקב אש ובית יוסף להבה ובית עשו לקש אש בלא להבה אינו שולט למרחוק משנולד יוסף בטח יעקב בהקב"ה ורצה לשוב:</p>
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Why was Yosef the one who was able to bring about Eisav’s downfall? Suggestion – perhaps the downfall of Eisav could only come about through someone who combined Eisav’s abilities as an *ish sadeh*, a man of the field, with Yaakov’s identity as an *ish tam yoshev ohalim*, a straightforward man, who dwells in the tents of Torah. Yosef had this combination of righteousness and worldliness. He was the *ben zekunim* to whom Yaakov gave over the traditions and teachings of Yitzchak and Avraham. But he was also the man of the world who was in control – first of Potifar’s house, then the Egyptian prison, and then was viceroy of all of Egypt. And all was dedicated to *avodat Hashem*, the service of God. That triumphs over Eisav.

<p>Rashi on Bereishit 30:21 Dinah – Our sages explained [her name based on the following:] Leah made a judgment about herself. She said, “If this is a boy, my sister Rachel will not be as one of the maidservants (Bilhah and Zilpah, who each have two children).” She prayed about the boy (in her womb) and he transformed to a girl. (based on Berachot 60).</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית פרק ל פסוק כא כא דינה - פירשו רבותינו שדנה לאה דין בעצמה אם זה זכר לא תהא רחל אחותי כאחת השפחות והתפללה עליו ונהפך לנקבה (ברכות ס'):</p>
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Dinah was supposed to have been Yosef! Leah prayed that he should be transformed into a girl, and the next boy could then come from Rachel. Dinah was Yosef-like. But whereas Yosef was the one to bring about Eisav’s downfall, Dinah was in a unique position to bring about Eisav’s *teshuvah*. Hence, Yaakov was punished for preventing their marriage. Neither Rachel nor Leah could bring about Eisav’s transformation, only Dinah. **It is striking to have Eisav portrayed as a potential *baal teshuvah***, penitent, as Rashi here does. True, Dinah - who had the unique Yosef-like combination – was the potential candidate to bring about a change in Eisav; but was Eisav open to change? The answer might appear in the following Midrash, one of the sources of Rashi’s comment:

<p>Bereishit Rabbah 76:9 Rav Huna said in the name of Rabbi Abba Hakohen Bardela: The Holy One, blessed be He, said [to Yaakov]: “He withholds chesed, lovingkindness, from his friend” (Iyuv 6:14) – You withheld chesed from your brother ... You did not want to marry her (Dinah) to a circumcised one (Eisav); behold, she will be married to an uncircumcised one (Shechem) ...</p>	<p>מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה עו פסקה ט ר"ה בשם ר' אבא הכהן ברדלא אמר אמר לו הקב"ה (שם ו) למס מרעהו חסד מנעת מרעך חסד מנעת חסדך מן אחוך... לא בקשת להשיאה למהול הרי היא נשאת לערל ...</p>
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Eisav was *mahul*. At eight-days old Yitzchak gave Eisav a brit milah. This opened up his potential as Dinah’s penitent husband.

TAKING RISKS FOR LOVE, BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

Yaakov was sent by his parents to Charan in order to find a wife. He meets Lavan's younger daughter Rachel at the well and, after giving water to all his uncle's flocks, he kisses his cousin and then, **וישא את קולו ויבך** – and he raised his voice and he cried.

Why does Yaakov cry? Rashi provides two answers. First, Yaakov cries because he foresees that Rachel will not be buried next to him in the Cave of Machpelah. Second, Yaakov is ashamed that he has arrived empty-handed. When Avraham sent his servant to find a wife for Yitzchak he sent him with ten camels laden with wealth. But Yaakov had been robbed of all of his possessions. He has nothing material to offer other than his ability to work.

Yaakov does not cry because he is happy to meet a relative so far from home. Instead, Yaakov was thinking about death and money. This hardly seems appropriate for a first meeting.

Since the universe is based on chesed, kindness, Hashem created the human being to be in a giving marriage relationship. **לא טוב היות האדם לבדו** – human being alone is not good (Bereishit 2:18), not in keeping with the purpose for which the human and the world was created.

Every person needs to love. But there are many obstacles on the path to love. The Hebrew word **אהב**, to love, belongs to the same family as **יהב**, to give. To love is to give, to give without limit. But is it possible to give enough? In Shir Hashirim Shlomo Hamelech says **כי עזה כמות אהבה** – for love is as strong as death (Shir Hashirim (Shir Hashirim 8:6). Love is eternal, but is it possible to love eternally? Too many people refuse to commit to love, thinking, if I cannot give enough I won't give at all. If I cannot deal with loss I won't take the risk.

As Yaakov Avinu prepares to love Rachel he cries, because he is acutely aware of these difficulties. But he knows that to realize his potential and to forge the Jewish people he must build a family based on a loving marriage. He is prepared, despite the risks to give of himself to live and to love.

Shabbat Shalom

This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Dorothy Richards, ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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