

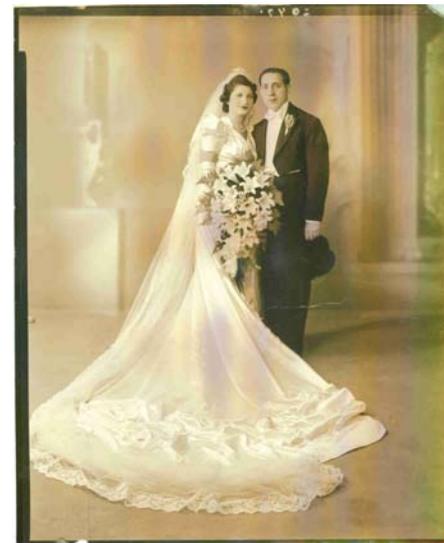
קונטרס

# ארחות יושר

Essays on  
Sefer Bereishis

by  
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לז"נ זלמן צבי בן אברהם  
לז"נ ביילא בת יעקב  
תנצב"ה



עֲטֹרַת זְקֵנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים וְתִפְאֶרֶת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם

*Grandchildren are the crown of elders  
and the glory of children are their ancestors  
(Mishle 17:6)*

This compilation of divrei Torah  
is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents,  
Zaida Harry and Bubbi Belle Haims  
and is presented at a siyum on Sefer Bereishis,  
that was studied by their children and grandchildren  
during the *sholoshim* following the passing of  
Bubbi Belle  
on Rosh Chodesh MarCheshvan, 5770



### ***The Book of the Beginning***

*Bereishis*, beginning, entitles the first *sefer* and *parsha* of the Torah. This word, chosen as the first of the *Torah*, encapsulates one of the most important philosophies of Judaism. The midrash asserts that our world was not God's first, as God in fact created many worlds that were rejected and destroyed, before He settled on ours. This though teaches an incredible lesson to us, for if this can be said of God, then it certainly is true that mankind too can fail at first, before ultimately achieving success and perfection. There can be many beginnings, and new opportunities for beginnings can often be found. Adam and Chava did not get it right at first; neither did their son, Kayin. The midrash suggest that it was Kayin, after his sin of fratricide, who first discovered the notion of *teshuva*, the foundational principal that there can always be a new *reishis*, a new beginning.

### ***Bereishis***

It was not long after creation that man discovers sin. One of the very first actions of mankind was the sin of Adam and Chava, who ate the forbidden fruit. Soon after, their son Kayin killed his brother Hevel, resulting from the jealousy of Kayin of Hevel's more accepted sacrifice. *Meforshim* note that while Adam defied a direct command that was articulated by God, Kayin was never told explicitly not to murder. The

Kli Yakar interprets this was in fact what Kayin's meant when he told God (4:9): "Am I my brother's keeper?" Meaning, am I responsible to protect my brother?" Kli Yakar interprets this to mean: I did not know that I was responsible not to murder! I was never told that! Kayin made the defense of ignorance and of innocence. God's immediate response to him was: "The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to you from the ground" (4:10). This means that it is inherent in the nature of the world that this is unacceptable. People are expected to figure some things out on their own and you Kayin was therefore responsible for his action.

Adam was punished for violating God's directive and Kayin was held accountable for the violation of natural law. The Talmud expresses the notion of natural law in the expression: למה לי קרא, סברא הוא, which means that a *pasuk* is superfluous if it teaches something that can be intuited from nature.

*Bereishis* teaches the duality of our religious observance. From the story of Adam we learn to study the word of God and to follow His commands. In addition, we must learn from Kayin's mistake and become more than a religious robot. We must pay attention to the world and to the broader messages of the *Torah*. We must create in ourselves a personality of *kedusha* and morality and live the values that are inherent in the *Torah* and in the world.

### *Noach*

The *Torah* unequivocally lauds Noach for his piety in the opening verse of the *parsha*. Nevertheless, the *meforshim* are rather critical of him. In the last *pasuk* of *parshas Bereishis*, the *Torah* says that *Noach* “found favor (חן) in the eyes of God”. Sforno, based on the midrash, interprets the word חן not as “favor” but as “mercy”. Meaning that Noach was completely undeserving of being saved and was.

Noach was responsible for the fact that he made no effort to try to help the people of his generation. When he emerged from the ark, the midrash tells us that he cried out to G-d saying, how can You have done this; how did You bring such destruction to the world?! And God responds- “now you ask!?” Where were you before the flood- when I told you of my plan to destroy the world?! Why didn’t you protest then? Additionally, Rav Goldvicht *tz”l* believes that it is for this reason that the *pasuk* in the *haftara* (Yishayahu 54:9) calls the flood-water מן מי “The waters of Noach” – because he was in part responsible for the entire flood and the destruction of the world.

Moreover, the major flaw of the entire generation was the lack of *chesed*. According to the midrash, theft was widespread and apparently that selfishness extended even into Noach’s religious practice. He was saved, but only due to the mercy and generosity of God. God saw potential in him to

acquire the trait of *chesed* in order to build a new world based on the principal that **עולם חסד יבנה**.

Noach was specifically saved and rehabilitated in the ark because he spent his entire time ending to the needs of all of the animals- all day and all night; it was *chesed* 24/7. Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht *tz”l* described the ark as the *beis* midrash for *chesed*. Noach was put into this position in order to prepare him for his “post flood” days. In order to rebuild the world he needed to become an *ish chessed*; he had to join the ranks of Avraham and Moshe. That was the purpose of the ark that “saved” Noach- not only from the water, but from this shortcoming as well. After this intensive *chesed* training Noach was expected to be ready for the task of rebuilding the world.

The end of the story is that Noach may not have succeeded himself, but his descendents did and every generation must remember that *chesed* is the foundation of this world, if it is to sustain itself.

### Lech Lecha

Avraham left his homeland for Canaan with few possessions, but for a promise of success and wealth. The first indication of Avraham's financial success is on his return from Egypt:

וַיַּעַל אַבְרָם מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לֵו, וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ—הַנִּגְבָּה.  
וְאַבְרָם, כָּבֵד מְאֹד, בְּמִקְנֵהוּ, בְּכֶסֶף וּבְזָהָב. (יג:א-ב)

*Avram went up from Egypt with his wife, all that he had, and Lot with him, to the south. And Avram was very rich with cattle, silver and gold.*

This verse offers a very profound insight into the effects of Avraham's newfound wealth on his personality. Rav Soloveichik compared this *pasuk* to the language of an earlier *pasuk*, describing the original decent to Egypt:

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת-שְׂרָי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-לוֹט בֶּן-אָחִיו, וְאֶת-כָּל-רְכוּשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ, וְאֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ, אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ בְּחָרָן; וַיָּצֵאוּ, לְלֶכֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וַיָּבֵאוּ, אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן. (יב ה)

*Avram took Sarai, his wife, his nephew Lot, all of their wealth, and the people from Charan, and they went to Canaan.*

The structure of the *pasuk* is that Avraham went with 1) Sara, 2) Lot and 3) their possessions. Nevertheless, when they return, their party is listed in a different order. There it is 1) Sara, 2) his possessions and 3) Lot. On their way down, the possessions are listed last, after Avraham, Sara and Lot; on their way back, the possessions were moved up, listed inbetween Sara and Lot.

Rav Soloveichik suggested that this highlights the fact that when they went down to *Mitzrayim*, Lot and Avraham were one family, traveling together – not only for pragmatic reasons, but they were united in ideology and philosophy; they shared the same values and vision. However, something changed in *Mitzrayim*. They were introduced to wealth and affluence. They saw it, possibly, for the first time, and they were able to participate. And Lot liked it; it became his new focus and his new ideology. Avraham, however, was fundamentally unchanged.

The Torah describes their return trip:

וְאֶבְרָם, כָּבֵד מְאֹד, בְּמִקְנֵהוּ, בְּכֶסֶף וּבְזָהָב.  
וַיֵּלֶךְ, לְמִסְעָיו, מִנִּגְב, וְעַד-בֵּית-אֵל--עַד-הַמִּקְוֹם, אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה שָׁם אֱהֱלָה בְּתַחֲלָה, בֵּין בֵּית-אֵל, וּבֵין הָעֵי. (יג:ב,ג)

And Rashi says:

**וילך למסעיו** - כשחזר ממצרים לארץ כנען היה הולך ולן באכסניות שלן בהם בהליכתו למצרים. למודך דרך ארץ שלא ישנה אדם מאכסניא שלו. *When they returned, they stayed in the same inns that they stayed in on their way down to Mitzrayim. This teaches us proper ediquite, that a person should never change his inn.*

Why is it so important to always use the same inns? Perhaps this was symbolic of the fact that Avraham did not immediately upgrade his hotel reservations to a five star hotel, now that he ran into wealth in Egypt. He returned to the same exact *אכסניא*. Why? Because the money did not completely change him; he remained the same person, with the same

priorities. Lot, however, was completely changed, as the *pasuk* indicates by separating them when describing their travel on the way back, joining Lot with the property, separated from Avraham and Sara themselves.

One of the greatest strengths of Avraham, and one of the primary aspects of his legacy for us is this ability to transition from rags to riches without allowing the change to effect his character and the essence of himself.

### Vayera

*Parshas Vayera* contains a very unusual dialogue between Avraham and God over the destiny of Sdom. Spanning 17 *pesukim*, Avraham engages God in six rounds of negotiations in which he tried to save the cities of Sdom and Ammora from destruction. Even more striking, I believe, is the fact that *mefarshim* and midrashim describe this encounter as a form of *tefillah*. Avraham, the first Jew to *daven*, who was “*mesaken tefillos Yisrael*” - inventing and introducing the notion of *tefillah* to the Jewish people - models *tefillah* by arguing with God, trying to change God’s mind! If the Torah had not said this, I would not have the audacity to make this up! In what way is this an example to us of *tefillah*?

Rashi, in a way, highlights this tension. When Avraham begins, it says:

(יח:כג) וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאִי תִסְפָּה צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע:

Avraham *approached* God and said,

would you punish the innocent with the guilty?

And Rashi picks up on the usage of the somewhat familiar word “ויגש”:

**ויגש אברהם** - מצינו הגשה למלחמה (ש"ב י יג) וַיִּגַּשׁ יוֹאָב, וְהָעָם אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ, לְמִלְחָמָה, בְּאָרָם; וַיִּגַּשׁוּ, מִפְּנֵי.

הגשה לפנים (להלן מד יח) וַיִּגַּשׁ אֱלִינוּ, הַהוֹדָה

והגשה לתפלה (מלכים א' יח לו) וַיִּגַּשׁ אֱלֵיהֶוּ הַנְּבִיא וַיֹּאמֶר, הֲנִהּ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וַיְשָׂרָאֵל, הַיּוֹם יִדְעֶ כִּי-אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ; וּבְדַבְרֶיךָ (וּבְדַבְרֶיךָ) עֲשִׂיתִי, אֵת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה. עֲנֵנִי יְהוָה, עֲנֵנִי

ולכל אלה נכנס אברהם. לדבר משותף ולפיוס ולתפלה:

The word *ויגש* connoted the dialectical experiences of approaching in battle, as well as in appeasement / begging, as well as in *tefillah*. At once, Avraham was on the offensive as well as the defensive.

I believe that in fact Avraham was teaching us that *tefillah* always contains an element of both – battle as well as begging. And we see this in the text of Avraham's arguments:

Avraham spoke strongly and firmly to God:  
חללה לך השפוט כל הארץ לא יעשה משפט:

*Far be it from You, the Judge of the universe, not to follow justice!*

-as if in *מלחמה*. At the same time, in the very same conversation, he introduces his arguments with:

הנה נא הואילתי לדבר אל אדני ואנכי עפר ואפר:

*If I may speak before my Lord, being myself dust and ashes*

-seemingly recognizing the fact that it is really inappropriate for him to speak to God in this way at all – in *פיוס* – but approaching God as if begging for mercy.

When we *daven*, for anything, we are essentially doing the same thing. We are standing before God, saying that we know better than Him; we know what He should do, and we argue that He should change His plans, or change what He has already done. חלילה לנו לדבר לה' ככה! How do

we speak this way? Every *tefillah* is a combination of *מלחמה* and *פיוס*; every *tefillah* must contain a combination of the arrogance to speak to God in this way, as well as the humility that comes with the knowledge that *אנחנו עפר ואפר*.

Before the verdict was reached, God said:  
(יח:כא) אַרְדָּה נָא וְאַרְאֶה הַכְּצַעְקוֹתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ כָלֵה וְאִם לֹא אֲדַעָה:

*I will descend upon Sdom in order to see what they deserve...*

Here God models the law of the judge:

דאין לדיין אלא מה שעיניו רואות. (ב"ב קלא).

*A judge can only rule based on what his eyes can see.*

Meaning: if there is some knowledge of law or fact that is unavailable to the judge, he may and must judge with what he has. Here God is sure to see the facts. Incredibly, I believe, God is also saying that people also must take a look, and make their own judgments, based on what they see – even if their perspective is limited – and then we are invited to “rule” based on our judgments – and engage God in a dialogue in which we argue our point.

God invited Avraham into this discussion:

(יז) וַיִּקְוֶה אֶמֶר הַמַּכְסָּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה:

*God said, can I conceal my plans from Avraham?*

By extension, God invites all of humanity into this discussion, and expects us to engage Him and debate Him, as long as it is

coupled with the humility and knowledge that we are עפר  
ואפר.

That is *tefillah*. And that is also the essence of our religious experience. We do not embrace complete submission. We are expected to look at the world – אראה – and make judgments (not of people, but) of values – to see what is worthwhile and what is not. Our judgments may conflict with messages from the Torah. We should state our views and engage God in dialogue and debate. But at the same time we have to submit and accept His rulings, when the debate ends, as Avraham did at the end.

(יח:לג) וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק וַיִּקְנֶה כְּאִשָּׁר כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר אֶל אַבְרָהָם וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לְמִקְמוֹ:  
*After their discussion, God departed and Avraham wend back to his place*

Ironically, submission leads to disengagement, because when you just accept without any struggle, you are not personally connected. If Avraham taught us anything, it is to connect to your religious experience – struggle with it – debate it and engage it – and at the same time, in the end, to submit and accept with a healthy dose of humility and self awareness.

### *Chaye Sara*

In this *parsha* we learn about Eliezer's mission to find a wife for Yitzchak, the meeting at the well, the visit to the house of Rivka, Besuel and Lavan, and the eventual marriage of Rivka to Yitzchak. When Eliezer got to the house of Besuel, the pasuk notes that he unmuzzled the camel: וַיִּבֹא וַיִּפְתַּח הַגְּמֵלִים הָאִישׁ הַבְּיָתָה, (24:32). Rashi highlights this detail and says that it teaches us an exemplary quality of Avraham, that his camels were always muzzled when they walked, to make sure that they would not eat anything belonging to someone else on the way...[This might also explain why the camels were so hungry and thirsty at the well!!]

There is an interesting midrash that compares these camels to the donkey of Rav Pinchas ben Yair:

Rav Pinchas ben Yair was a great Rabbi, who was a *tanna*, and was the son in law of Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai. Rav Pinchas ben Yair was a particularly extraordinary person. The Talmud says about him (*Chulin* 7) that God watched over him to make sure that even his donkey would not sin:

”בהמתן של צדיקים אין הקב”ה מביא תקלה על ידן”

*God does not allow a sin to occur to the animals of the righteous*

This phenomenon is illustrated by the time that someone was trying to serve his donkey food but the donkey refused to eat it. No one understood why this happened, so they tried to

give tithes from the food. Remarkably, immediately after separating the tithes, the donkey began to eat! This illustrated the point that God made sure that even his animal would not eat non-kosher!

Another time, Rav Pinchas ben Yair encountered a river that blocked his path, as he was on his way to go to do a *mitzva*. Since there was no bridge or boat, he simply ordered the river to stop - and miraculously the waters split. Moreover, after he went through he saw two other people approach the river, and he split it two more times for them. Rav Yosi said that this proves that Rav Pinchas ben Yair was even greater than Moshe Rabenu, who split the sea only once. Overall, he was considered to be a great *tzadik*, and even today many people visit his grave in *Tzfas*.

Moreover, the midrash compared Rav Pinchas ben Yair to Avraham:

ויבא האיש הביתה ויפתח הגמלים התיר זממיהם, ר' הונא ר' ירמיה  
שאל לר' חייא בר רבה לא היו גמליו של אבינו אברהם דומין לחמורו  
שלר' פינחס בן יאיר. חמרתיה דר' פינחס בן יאיר נסבו לה ליסטאי,  
עבדת גבהון ג' יומין ולא טמעת כלום....(בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק)  
פרשה ס ד"ה (לב) ויבא האיש)

*Pinchas ben Yair's donkey's were unlike Avraham Avinu's,  
because Avraham had to muzzle his camels to make sure that  
they did not steal, but Pinchas ben Yair's did not sin despite  
being unmuzzled.*

We must wonder why it was that Avraham did not merit this extraordinary experience. Was he truly not righteous enough? Rav Avraham Shapiro *tz"l*, the Chief Rabbi of Israel (1983-1993) and *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshivat Merkaz Harav Kook* suggested (in his *sefer, Imrei Shefer*) that Avraham chose not to rely on this "special divine protection" in order to set an example for others. Unlike Rav Pinchas ben Yair, he preferred to set a positive example for others, to demonstrate that it is proper to muzzle one's animal while walking on someone else's property. As the *אב המון גוים* he parented the world by teaching morality by example.

### **Toldos**

The name of this week's *parsha* captures the primary theme of the *parsha*, which is the transmission of a tradition from one generation to the next.

The *parsha* begins (25:19):

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי יִצְחָק בֶּן אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק:  
*And these are the generations of Yitzchak the son of Avraham, Avraham begot Yitzchak.*

This *pasuk* seems to contain a redundancy: if Yitzchak was “*ben Avraham*”, the son of Avraham, then certainly Avraham *holid*, begot, Yitzchak. What is the reason for the repetition? The question is raised by a number of the *meforshim*. Kli Yakar suggests that these two phrases describe two separate dimensions about the relationship of Avraham to Yitzchak. The word *הוליד* represents their biological relationship while *בן* reflects a more spiritual and personal connection. The midrash says that a student can be referred to as the “*ben*” of the teacher, or a person who raises someone else’s child can be referred to as a parent. Esther was called the *בת מרדכי* of (Esther 2:15); Moshe was the *בן* of *פרעה* (Shmos 2:10). Similarly, Avraham’s name represented the fact that he was the “*Av hamon goyim*” – the “father of many nations”, referring to his students, who were his children. A “*ben*” is not only a biological relationship, but anyone who teaches, influences, or raises someone else.

Our *pasuk* therefore seeks to teach us two things: *אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד יִצְחָק* means that he was the biological father and *בֶּן יִצְחָק אַבְרָהָם* signifies the teaching relationship that Avraham had with his son Yitzchak.

Rav Soloveitchik ז”ל analyzed the names of Avraham and Chava in this light as well. Avraham was renamed in order to signify that he was the *Av hamon goyim*; his fatherhood became his name and his essence. Avraham was the first male to be defined in that way, while Chava, the first female to live, was named for her role as a mother – she was *אִם כָּל הָיִ*, the mother of all life. This means that Chava’s identity as a mother defined her from the very beginning. This reflects that fact that the relationship of the mother to the child is completely inherent in the nature of the world. There is a physical connection that exists between a mother and her child that a father does not experience in the same way. Adam was not named or identified as a father; this was an acquired skill that was introduced to the world with Avraham.

In addition, Avraham introduced a new dimension to fatherhood – and to parenthood in general. Not only is there a biological relationship of a parent to a child, but there is also a spiritual connection. A parent also transmits a set of values and a sense of mission. It is this dimension of parenthood that enables one to become like a parent to even someone else’s child. Avraham and Sarah became parents who also

transmitted a *mesorah* to the next generation. They both became beacons of light to their generation, and to their child. Once they found God in the world, Sarah's role as a mother changed, and incorporated this second facet of parenthood – to be not only a physical link but to be responsible for the spiritual growth of his child and of the next generation. Avraham and Sarah become model parents in both of these ways. Avraham and Sarah were *molid* as well as *av vaem*.

### *Vayetze*

וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמִקְוֵים, *And Yaakov encountered at the place.*

This “encounter”, as Yaakov fled the threat of his brother Esav, towards the protection of his cousin Lavan, in hopes of finding a wife, was no ordinary encounter. This place was none other than Har HaMoriah, and this encounter was a *tefillah*, or conversation with God. At this place he slept and dreamt of angels.

Rashi notes that although he was a great distance from this place, he was blessed with miraculous speed. Speed and vigor actually typify Yaakov's very active and energetic personality. In addition, his speed toward his conversation with God symbolizes his accelerated spiritual route towards his relationship with God.

Interestingly, Avraham, his grandfather, also encountered God at this place, during *Akeidas Yitzchak*, and there we find the exact opposite. The *pasuk* says that it took him three days to arrive, and the midrashim explain that, for various reasons, Avraham's trip was actually slowed. It was a trip that was very thought out and deliberate.

These opposing traveling experiences seem to reflect the two opposing attitudes of Avraham and Yaakov, and two different roads that were taken to reach God. Yaakov was quick, spontaneous and passionate, while Avraham was slow, reflective and thoughtful.

This characteristic of Yaakov is further developed in a number of ways. Firstly, when he met his wife, Rachel, it was love at first sight; he kissed her the very first time he saw her. In addition, he moved the enormous rock that sealed the well that Rachel attempted to draw from. Additionally, we find that the word אהבה, love, is used more times in relation to Yaakov than we find it by the rest of the Avos combined. His love for Rachel and for Yosef were very important aspects of his life that had a huge impact on the destiny of his children.

This characteristic also marked the difference between Rachel and Leah. When they fled for Lavan, Rachel was the one who stole her father's idols. Rachel shared Yaakov's passion and proactive nature.

Leah may have been more like Avraham. Her relationship with Yaakov was not as romantic and glamorous at first, but was one of perseverance and consistency, and that earned her the permanent resting place alongside Yaakov in Me'aras Hamichpela. At the same time, Rachel cries for her children until today, as her love and passion continue to inspire the Jewish people.

There are two distinct ways in which to live, and in which to serve religiously. One is in the model of Avraham and Leah, and the other is in the path of Yaakov and Rachel. Each has its advantages and disadvantages: If it is mere emotion and adrenalin without any profound meaning, it will

not last. However, if it will be subdued and without feeling, it will be empty. Each person must strive to blend both of these extremes and to find the one that most fits each one's own personality in order to travel our paths towards God.

### Vayishlach

In his own mind, Yaakov was overwhelmed by the generosity of God. Upon his return from the house of Lot he says to God: (לב:יא) כי במקלי, עברתי את-הירדן הזה *I came here with merely a staff*, (לב:יא) and now *I am two camps large*. Yaakov recognized that he came alone to the house of Lavan and he now return as literally the father of a small nation, laden with wealth. He was therefore overcome with appreciation and humility.

He was generous with his money, at least when he had to be. He sent hundreds of gifts to his brother Esav, as he prepared for their confrontation, and did not think twice about the cost. At the same time, he was “cheap” with himself. We know that he was left alone when he was attacked by the angel of Esav. Why was he alone? *Chazal* say that it was because after they left Lavan, he realized that he had forgotten to take a few earthenware bowls, and he went back to get them. *Chazal* laud this quality of his care for his money, going to great lengths to save just a few dollars.

We understand that Yaakov worked hard for his money during his years with Lavan, and valued everything that he had.

הייתי ביום אכלני חֶבֶב, וְקָרַח בְּלַיְלָה; וַתֵּדַד שְׁנֵתִי, מֵעֵינַי. (לא:מ)  
*By day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and sleep fled from my eyes*

His prayer was:

(פרק לב:יא) קִטְנִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים, וּמִכָּל הָאֲמֻת, אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ, אֶת-עֲבֹדְךָ:

כי במקלי, עברתי את-הירדן הזה, ועתה הייתי, לשני מחנות. **יב** הצילני נא מיד אחי, מיד עשו: כי-ירא אנכי, אתו--פן-יבוא והכני, אם על-בנים.

*I am not worthy of all the kindnesses, and of all the truth, which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I have become two camps. 12 Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and hit me, the mother with the children*

Yaakov is humbled: ומכל החסדים וומכל האמת, by all of the *kindnesses and of all the truths*. It is understandable to feel appreciative of kindness, for after all, it is unearned, but why is he so humbled by the “truth”? “Truths” seems to refer to the things that he actually earned. Why then is he humbled by them? This should be a source of pride for him?

It was this that truly defined Yaakov’s greatness. Even that which he earned, that he worked day and night, year after year for, was to him a gift from Above, because if God did not want him to have it, then even that, he would not have; had God not given him the talents, the strength, the health, and the opportunities, then he never would have anything, no matter how cold and tired he was from his work. He is humbled by the gifts as well as by his earnings, recognizing the true source of everything that he had. That was Yaakov.

And this exact quality is displayed at the end of *parshas Vayetze* when Lavan chases after him and they have their confrontation.

**(פרק לא) מג וישן לבן ויאמר אל-יעקב, הבנות בנותי והבנים בני והצאן צאני, וכל אשר-אתה ראה, לי-הוא; ולבנותי מה-אעשה לאלה, היום, או לבניהן, אשר ילדו. מד ועתה, לכה נברתה ברית-אני ואתה; והיה לעד, ביני ובינך. מה ויקח יעקב, אבן; וירימה, מצבה. מו ויאמר יעקב לאחיו לקטו אבנים, ויקחו אבנים ויעשו-גל; ויאכלו שם, על-הגל. מז ויקרא-לו לבן, גר שיהיה-א; ויעקב, קרא לו גלעד.**

*43 And Lavan answered and said unto Jacob: 'The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine; and what can I do this day for my daughters, or for their children? 44 And now come, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be for a witness between me and you.' 45 And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. 46 And Jacob said unto his brothers: 'Gather stones'; and they took stones, and made a heap. And they ate there by the heap. 47 And Lavan called it Jegar-sahadutha; but Jacob called it Galeed.*

Lavan asserts his claim of ownership of everything that Yaakov had. Then Lavan suggests that they make a treaty, and Yaakov agrees. It is interesting that the Torah does not specify the terms of the treaty, its purpose, or its contents. It seems possible that the simplest reading is that the *ברית* was the cementing of an agreement about the words of Lavan immediately before this, that nothing truly was

Yaakov's. But how could Yaakov agree to such a thing? Every single thing that he got for Lavan was earned. If anything, Lavan was dishonest; he never gave him anything extra. So what does it mean that everything was from Lavan? Why did Yaakov so readily agree to this treaty? I believe that this too highlights Yaakov's recognition that everything that he had – even that which he slaved to earn, was not coming to him. He realized that everything was ultimately a gift from God and he recognized the people who enabled it as well.

### **Vayeshev**

*Chazal* note the negative impact of Yaakov's parenting favoritism:

ר"ל בשם רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אמר:  
צריך אדם שלא לשנות בן מבניו שע"י כתונת פסים שעשה אבינו יעקב  
ליוסף וישנאו אותו וגו', (בראשית רבה)

*Reish Lakish said in the name of Rav Elazar ben Azaria:*

*A person should never differentiate between children because  
Yosef was hated by his brothers because of the coat that Yaakov  
gave to Yosef.*

This mistake of Yaakov is highlighted by *Chazal* in order for us to learn a lesson about parenthood, that children should be treated equally and fairly and that parents should not favor any one child. While there are a number of possible causes for Yaakov's favoritism, one possibility is that Yaakov was reacting to his own experience as a child. *Chazal* point out that during the childhood of Yaakov and Esav, these twins were nearly undistinguishable one from another. Later on, they each went their separate ways, and became quite different from another. During his own childhood, his parents, Yitzchak and Rivkah made the exact opposite mistake, as they treated both children exactly the same. Apparently, their "one size fits all" educational model worked for only 50% of their children. In reality, Yaakov and Esav had very different natures and predispositions and needed to be treated

differently. Perhaps Esav would have turned out different if he was raised in a way that accounted for his own nature.

Ironically, *Yaakov* went to the other extreme with his children, treating them all very differently, and discovered the danger in that extreme as well.

Rav Nisan Alpert ז"ל suggested that this reflects the struggles of Yaakov's entire life. He competed with his brother over the "*brachos*" for his entire life, never sure of who would prevail and carry the legacy as the father of the Jewish people. Yaakov sought to spare his children of a lifelong 12-way competition by clarifying his successor early on.

Not only did this scheme backfire, as his favoritism actually fueled their jealousy, but he actually failed in his choice, because ultimately it was not Yosef who became his successor as leader, but it was Yehuda.

In this light we may be able to explain another difficulty in the Torah. Why did Yaakov send Yosef to "check on his brothers", knowing full well that this conflict existed. Why did Yaakov send Yosef to his near demise?

Rabbi Genack pointed out that the parallel language between this episode and *Akeidas Yitzchak*. They both say "הנני" when they are called on (22:1, 37:13); in both cases the place was seen "מרחוק" (22:4, 38:18) the place of the *Akeida* was called יראה ה', and the brothers said that their purpose

was to be "ונראה מה יהיו חלומותיו", and in both places they were saved from death in the last moment.

Perhaps Yaakov was attempting to reenact the *akeida* because he perceived this as a rite of passage to become the successor. If Yosef was the "chosen one", he would have to survive his own *korban*-experience. Ironically, by sending Yosef into this risky situation Yaakov expressed his firm belief that Yosef was the successor. Although Yosef he did survive, Yaakov indeed miscalculated his own legacy as well as his *shalom bayis*.

There is more to learn about parenthood than just avoiding favoritism. We also learn that the right way to greatness is sometimes the hard way, like it was for Yaakov himself. The designation of the leader should be left open for as long as possible, so that the children can grow and develop and create their own destiny. Yaakov himself may not have been the "chosen one" from birth; perhaps he became it. He sought to save his children from the challenging struggle of his own life, but it was that process that actually made him who he was. Perhaps Esav also had the capacity to become the father of *Am Yisrael*, but Yaakov earned it over him, and that was what made him great. Yosef too had the potential, and in fact he did go on to become one of our greatest leaders in his own life, and he fathered one of the more important

tribes. But the "chosen one" – in terms of leadership – became Yehuda, because he became it.

A profound message of this *parsha*, is that we cannot decide a child's destiny to early. We must make them, and us, believe that anyone can become anything, and then let them chart their own paths. Certainly we must provide each child with the proper support that matches their strengths and weaknesses, but we must then let go and let them develop into themselves.

### *Miketz*

In hindsight, Yosef himself realized that every challenge that he had experienced in his life was carefully designed by God in order to enable him to fulfill his incredibly important mission in life. Nevertheless, he had a very difficult life. He grew up with the hatred of his siblings who nearly murdered him, before he was sold as a slave. Then he was imprisoned for a completely fabricated charge and his sentence was elongated because of the betrayal of his prisonmate. One would have expected him to show some despair and frustration. However, we find the complete opposite to be the case. Yosef never gave up and never became passive. He energetically took advantage of every opportunity that presented itself until he ultimately found success.

*Parshas Miketz* is always read during Chanukah, and Chanukah always contains *Rosh Chodesh Teves* in it (and on occasion all three occur on the same day). Rabbi Mayer Twersky suggested that this quality of Yosef personifies the essence of Chanukah and Rosh Chodesh.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch זת"ל said that the word שְׁחָדָה can also be read as שְׁחָדָה, and that is to accentuate the fact that every month represents the opportunity for renewal. Just as the month renews itself each month, we too are given the opportunity for a fresh start each month. *Rosh Chodesh* is

described as: כַּפֶּרֶה לְכָל תּוֹתוּדוֹתָם זְמַן, a time for *teshuva*, but unlike *Yom Kippur*, *Rosh Chodesh* is not focused on confession and the past, but is about מִזְבַּח חֹדֶשׁ בְּצִיּוֹן, looking forward and putting the past behind us. The *mitzvah* of *Rosh Chodesh* is the first in the Torah because it would be impossible to accept the responsibility of Torah without the gift of a constant opportunity for renewal and rebirth. It is inherent to our existence that we will fail at times, but like the moon itself, we possess the gift of renewal, to grow larger and stronger even after we have diminished.

This capacity is the essence of Chanukah as well. The name Chanukah stems from the *Chanukas Habayis* that occurred in the *Beis Hamikdash*, when the Temple and all of its vessels were rededicated to be used, as we regained control and initiated it to use once again. Chanukah is the celebration of the rededication of the Temple; the ability to renew its *kedusha* even after being so defiled.

On Chanukah and on *Rosh Chodesh* we attempt to focus on the quality of Yosef, to be resilient and energetic, even in the face of adversity. This quality has been the trademark of the Jew throughout history, that has enabled us to survive and flourish against all odds, exactly in the model of Yosef *hatzadik*.

### Vayigash

After the dramatic reunion of the brothers, following the revelation of Yosef's identity, Yosef sent his brothers to back in order to bring Yaakov down to Mitzrayim. The midrash picks up on a very striking point (45:27-28):

(כז) וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֶת כָּל דְּבַרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיֵּרָא אֶת הָעֲגָלוֹת  
אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשֵׂאת אֹתוֹ וַתְּחִי רִיחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם:

(כח) וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב עוֹד יוֹסֵף בְּנִי חֵי אֲלֶכָה וְאֶרְאֶנּוּ בְּטָרָם אָמוּת:

*And they told him about Yosef and he saw the wagons that Yosef sent to take them back and the spirit of Yakiiv, their father, was revived.*

It seems that somehow, it was the sight of these wagons that revived the spirit of Yaakov. Rashi quotes a well-know midrash that says that the last thing that Yosef had learned with his father Yaakov was the section of *egla arufa* – the *mitzvah* that if a dead body is found on the road, the elders of the closest city must bring a sacrifice to atone for the possibility that in some way the members of that city were responsible for the death. The *agalos* (wagons) that Yaakov saw reminded him of *eglah arufah*, and Yaakov immediately realized that Yosef had remembered his father and his teachings.

This midrash, however, is very troubling. Firstly, how did he figure out that the wagons, which were probably the typical mode of transportation, symbolized something so

significant? Furthermore, how did he know that *eglah*, meaning calf, was related to *agalos*, meaning wagons?! These are two completely different words, how did he realize the hidden meaning of this homonym? Finally, these wagons were not actually sent by Yosef, but by Pharoh, as later attested to in the Torah (35:17-25):

(יז) וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל יוֹסֵף... (יט) וְאֵתָה צְנִייתָה זֹאת עֲשׂוּ קָחוּ לָכֶם מֵאֲרָע מִצְרַיִם עֲגָלוֹת לְטַפְכֶם וְלְנִשְׁיֵיכֶם וּנְשֵׂאתֶם אֶת אֲבִיכֶם

וּבָאתֶם... (כא) וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּתֵן לָהֶם יוֹסֵף עֲגָלוֹת עַל פִּי פַרְעֹה וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם צֹדֶה לְדַרְכָּם:

*Pharoah said to Yosef...bring wagons for your wives, children and father, and bring them back to Mitzrayim. And they did this, and Yosef gave them wagons according to the word of*

*Pharoah...*

–so how were these wagons understood to be a code, conveyed by Yosef to Yaakov?

Perhaps we can explain this midrash in a slightly different way:

Why was it that they “happened” to be learning about this *mitzvah* on that day? The fundamental principal that underlies the *mitzvah* of *eglah arufa* is *זה בזה כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה*, *all Jews are responsible for the welfare of each other* – both physically and spiritually. The community that is closest to the murder takes responsibility even though they may not have actually been responsible, because maybe they could have prevented it. Perhaps they could have invited this victim

to sleep over that night; perhaps they should have escorted him some of the way (*Sotah* 38b). We are always responsible to help other who are in our proximity.

Yaakov taught this law to Yosef because he saw that Yosef was engendering jealousy among his brothers, and this was trouble. He knew that Yosef would never become successful in his life unless he would learn this message of the *egla arufa* – that we must build a feeling of brotherhood and unity, rather than competition and jealousy. A leader cannot be someone who sets himself above others and is unable to connect to other people. Yosef did not succeed in gaining the respect of his own brothers and Yaakov sought to correct that.

When Yaakov saw those wagons – he realized not only that Yosef remembered the word *עגלה* but that he must have absorbed the message as well. The wagons of Pharaoh that were sent on behalf of Yosef represented the fact that Yosef had earned the respect of others, even people very different than himself. Yosef remained in his position of authority for 80 years, which is a very long political career. No scandal or conflict was able to diminish his stature because he heard the message of the *עגלה ערופה*. He rose above the competition and jealousy that plagued him during his youth. When Yaakov saw the wagons, he realized how far Yosef had come, and proudly went to see him in Egypt.

It is precisely for this reason that ultimately, in *parshas Vayechi*, the blessing that Yaakov gives to Yosef is:

בן פרת יוסף, בן פרת עלי-עין (מט:כב)

“עלי-עין” means that Yosef is removed from the *עין הרע* - the “evil eye” - the eye that looks with jealousy and contempt. And Ephrayim and Menashe, the sons of Yosef, are blessed:

וַיְדַגּוּ לְרֵב, בְּקֶרֶב הָאֲרָצִים (מח:טז)

*And they should grow into a multitude in the land.*

This blessing includes the word *וַיְדַגּוּ*, which alludes to fish, because they too symbolize the ability to avoid the *עין הרע*. Fish, by nature, are concealed from the view of the world, beneath the sea. This has become the way that all Jews bless their children, to be like Ephrayim and Menashe, protected from that *עין הרע*. Instead, we hope that our children will reflect inward for self-growth, and will look outwards only in order to assist others. In this way, we create a community of partners, endowing our nation with a unity that strengthens us all.

### *Vayechi*

Competition over the “rights of the first born” goes on throughout *sefer Bereishis*. Yaakov reversed the brachos of Ephrayim and Menashe, placing his right hand on the head of Ephrayim, giving him the special *bracha* of the first-born. Similarly, Yaakov himself “stole” the בכורה from his older brother, Esav, in his first attempt by pulling at his heel during childbirth, and later on by purchasing this right for beans, and ultimately by impersonating Esav. What exactly is the “*bechora*”?

Let us look back at the life of Yaakov for a moment. The name Yaakov derives from the fact that he pulled the heel of *Esav* during birth, struggling for that position of *bechor*. Rabbi Soloveichik pointed out that act itself represents a stereotypical attitude of a younger sibling. A real first born is independent and confident, and does not compete for attention or recognition. The name Yaakov defines him as a non-*bechor*- in the sense that he does not possess the qualities that a first-born typically has. His entire struggle with Esav further highlights this weakness, and his wrestling with the angel, who the midrash says was the *sar* of *Esav*, symbolizes this struggle too. Ultimately Yaakov emerged victorious, and the מלאך renamed him- that he will no longer be known as Yaakov, identifying him as a subordinate of *Esav*, but rather by *Yisrael*, the independent leader of our people.

ויאמר, לא יקרב יאמר עוד שמך--כי, אם-ישראל:  
כי-שרית עם-אלהים ועם-אנשים, ותוכל. (לב:כט)

*The angel said- you will no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael,  
for you have struggled with men and angels, and you have  
triumphed*

At the same time, the Talmud tells us, that the name Yaakov will not be completely forgotten- for, while it is forbidden for us to call Avraham –Avram- after God changed it, Yisrael may still be called Yaakov, as throughout the Torah he is referred to as both Yaakov and Yisrael. (*Brachos* 13)

Rabbi Soloveichik explained that Yaakov always contained these two dimensions in his personality and persona. While he overcame the “younger brother syndrome”, and became independent, he also had the quality of dependence, and for that is referred to as Yaakov. And both of these qualities are valued and have a role in defining Yaakov as well as his descendents.

Yaakov spent his life transferring the *bechora* from the older child to the younger one. Through this, he was telling his children that this quality of independence- that allows for leadership and redemption is not merely biological. Ultimately, leadership can be earned, as it was in the case of Yosef as well as Ephraim. This is the legacy that will stay with our people forever:

בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר יִשְׁמַן אֱלֹהִים כְּאֶפְרַיִם וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה וְיִשֶּׂם אֶת אֶפְרַיִם  
לִפְנֵי מְנַשֶּׁה: (מח:כ)

*All Jews will bless their children by saying that God should place them like Ephraim and Menashe, and he placed Ephraim before Menashe.*

The blessing is that the Jew will always have the opportunity to overcome the predestination of nature, and to take the mantle of leadership.

Moreover, Yaakov explained how it was that he got this *bechora*. He said: I took it from the *Emori* ובקשתי *Emori* - *with my sword and with my bow*. The midrash interprets that the *Emori* refers to *Esav*, and Yaakov took his *bechora* through his *cherev* and *kashet*, which Rashi interprets to refer to his *tefilos*. Similarly, Yaakov prepared for his encounter with *Esav*, with *tefillah*. And the significance of this is that *davening* represents independence. When a person davens, he expresses his hopes and his aspiration. He asks God for assistance in reaching his own goals. This requires a vision of a future that is much more than the present. While of course *davening* is a manifestation of our ultimate dependence on God, this also requires freedom and independence from everything else in the world. When a person is a dependent, as a slave in the most extreme case, he has nothing to hope for and nothing to look forward to. The only thing that he has to fear is the wrath of his master. When we *daven* we reflect on

our goals and personal aspirations. We must ponder our purpose in life and whether we have achieved it. In this way *tefila* expresses our independence.

Rabbi Soloveichik also explained that the two words – *cherev* and *kashet* represent two aspects of *tefila*- the *cherev*- the sword- is used to combat someone who is immediately in front of you, while *kashet*- the bow- is used to fight the enemy from the distance. Because when we *daven* we focus on these two things- our immediate concerns in life, as well as broader and more distant aspirations- of redemption, of *תקע בשופר* of *redemption*, of *שום שלום*, of *שלום*, of *גדול לחירותינו* and of *השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה* and of *ולירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב*.

*Yaakov's tefila* enabled him to overcome his situation; his ability to *daven* represented the fact that he no longer depends on *Esav*, or anyone else and he therefore was able to become a leader of *Klal Yisrael*. His *tefilos* were referred to as a sword and bow because this was a struggle for him: *he fought with people and with angles, and he triumphed*.

Perhaps it was for this reason that the climax of *Yeytzias Mitzrayim* was the plague of *makkas bechoros*. We became independent of their control and influence. Their *bechorim*, representing their leadership and control over us was shattered and destroyed; only our *bechorim* survived. We then became as a nation, *בני בכורי ישראל*.

The legacy of Yaakov is the ability to find the balance that Yaakov did, to be both dependent and independent. To be the unique individual who can lead, but who also recognizes his weaknesses and learns from others. There is much to learn from the oldest-child syndrome, as well as from the younger siblings, that to be a complete person we must possess both of these qualities. We attempt to become both leaders and followers, who are givers as well as receivers. The blessing that he gave us is to find the insight and strength to bring out these qualities in ourselves, and to implant this sense of balance in our children.