

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Avigdor and Beth Loeb, "in memory of Avigdor's mother, Ann Loeb, whose *yahrtzeit* is on 14 Kislev." May her *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- Paula and Fred Minsk, "In gratitude to Hashem for 50 years together, on our special anniversary." Wishing you many more happy and healthy years together!

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Our Parsha traces Yaakov Avinu's journey from his parents home, as he ran away from his brother, Esav.

בראשית פרשת ויצא פרק כה
(י) וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעֵר שָׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חֲרָנָה:

Yaakov left Beer Sheva and travelled towards Charan.

(יא) וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמָקוֹם וַיֵּלֶךְ שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשֶׁם מֵרֵאשִׁיתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בְּמָקוֹם הַהוּא:

He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place.

רש"י בראשית פרשת ויצא פרק כה פסוק יא
וישכב במקום ההוא - לשון מיעוט באותו מקום שכב, אבל ארבע עשרה שנים ששמש בבית עבר לא שכב בלילה, שהיה עוסק בתורה:

Rashi writes that the Torah is pointing out that he slept there, as opposed to the 14 years which preceded this night, when he was diligently studying in the Yeshiva of Ever, and barely slept, using every minute to study.

This raises some obvious questions. Yaakov's mother had just informed him that Esav was planning to kill him and he was on the run for his life. Why did Yaakov endanger his life to learn in Yeshivas Ever now? Isn't that an obvious place Esav would look for him?

And why is he learning so intensely now? What changed? Yaakov had always been a serious student. As Rashi teaches from **Breishis Rabbah**, he had studied previously in Yeshivas Shem and Yeshivas Ever.

בראשית פרשת תולדות פרק כה פסוק כז
(כז) וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צַיִד אִישׁ שֹׁדֵה וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יוֹשֵׁב אֹהֲלִים:

When the boys grew up, Esav became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Yaakov was a mild man who stayed in camp.

רש"י בראשית פרשת תולדות פרק כה פסוק כז
ישב אהלים - אהלו של שם ואהלו של עבר:

[He sat in] the tent of Shem and the tent of Ever (Genesis Rabbah 63:10).

And although Chazal mention in many places that Yaakov studied seriously, there is no mention of this level of diligence—of not sleeping...until now. What suddenly changed?

Until this point, Yaakov had an idyllic situation. His needs were provided for him. He grew up in the home of *tzadikim*. He lived not far from his grandfather, Avraham. He certainly learned, but that level of urgency and passion was not there.

A sense of urgency and passion, *zerizus*, came about for Yaakov only when life suddenly became uncertain. It is when we don't take any aspect of life for granted, when we feel intense gratitude towards Hashem, leading to a sense of mission and purpose that we express our *avodas Hashem* with a sense of focus and single-minded devotion. Hence, the sudden laser-focused devotion and lack of regular sleep for 14 years. At this point, when life was not as certain for Yaakov, when things were not going as

planned, when he could not take anything for granted any longer, he had true gratitude to *Hashem* and a new, deeper perspective on life and in turn on *avodas Hashem*. He was motivated by genuine *zerizus*.

The **Mesilas Yesharim** in Perek 8 discusses gratitude as a method of developing *zerizus*—alacrity, devotion and passion. He writes:

ספר מסילת ישרים פרק ח

ואמנם, מה שיוכל להגביר ההתעוררות הזו הוא ההסתכלות ברוב הטובות, שהקדוש - ברוך - הוא עושה עם האדם בכל - עת ובכל - שעה, והנפלאות הגדולות שעושה עמו מעת הלידה עד היום האחרון, כי כל מה שירבה להסתכל ולהתבונן בדברים אלה, הנה ירבה להכיר לעצמו חובה רבה אל האל המטיב לו, ויהיו אלה אמצעים לשלא יתעצל ויתרפה מעבודתו. כי הרי הואיל ואינו יכול ודאי לגמול לו טובתו יתברך, לפחות יודה לשמו ויקיים מצותיו. והנה אין לך אדם באיזה מצב שימצא, אם עני ואם עשיר, אם בריא ואם חולה, שלא יראה נפלאות וטובות רבות במצבו.

. . . עד שאין לך אדם שלא יכיר עצמו חייב לבוראו. ובהסתכלו בטובות אלה שהוא מקבל ממנו, ודאי שיתעורר להזדרז לעבודתו, כמו שכתבתי למעלה, כל - שכן אם יתבונן היות כל טובו תלוי בידו יתברך, ומה שמצטרך לו ומה שמוכרח אליו, ממנו יתברך הוא, ולא מאחר, אשר על כן ודאי שלא יתעצל מעבודתו יתברך ולא יחסר לו מה שהוא מוכרח אליו.

However, that which may intensify this rousing is looking into the many benefits that the Holy One, blessed be He, does with a man at all moments and times and the great wonders G-d performs for him from the time of his birth until his final day. For the more one looks into and contemplates these things, the more he will recognize his enormous debt to G-d Who bestows good to him.

This looking into will cause him to not grow lazy or lax in His service. For since it is impossible for him to repay G-d, blessed be His Name, for His goodness, he will feel that at least he can thank His Name and fulfill His commandments.

Whatever circumstances one may be in, whether poor or rich, healthy or ill, there is no person who cannot see wonders and many great benefits in his particular situation.

There is not a single person who will not find himself indebted to his Creator.

When he looks at these benefits which he receives from G-d, certainly, he will be roused to be Zealous in His service as I wrote earlier. All the more so, if he contemplates that all of his good is dependent on G-d's hand and that all of his needs and necessities is only from G-d alone, blessed be His Name, and no one else. Then certainly he will not become lazy from engaging in His Divine service, so that G-d does not diminish that which is essential to him.

But what is true gratitude? How is it attained? It is first formally expressed by Leah, when we read today how, after gave birth to her fourth son, she called him Yehuda because "*this time I shall thank Hashem.*"

בראשית פרשת ויצא פרק כט פסוק לה

(לה) וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפַּעַם אֹדְהָ אֶת־יְהוָה עַל־כֵּן קָרָאתִי שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתַּעֲמֵד מִלְּדָת:

Chazal teach (**Brachos 7b**), "from the day G-d created the world no one had thanked G-d until Leah came and thanked Him upon giving birth to Yehuda, as it is said, 'this time I shall thank Hashem.'"

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ז עמוד ב

אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: מיום שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולמו לא היה אדם שהודה להקדוש ברוך הוא עד שבאתה לאה והודתו, שנאמר הפעם אודה את ה'.

This raises an obvious difficulty: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov — our *avos*, the founders of Yiddishkeit — were they so callous and indifferent that they never acknowledged G-d's gifts to them? Noach, Shem, Ever — all of them were *neviim* who spoke with Hashem. Did they never thank Him? Were they, then, ungrateful?

Gratitude is a universal concept. Americans celebrate every year, on Thanksgiving Day. Jews recite *modeh odeh ani* upon waking up every morning. It seems odd that no one until Leah expressed thanks...

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, in his work *Derashot LeDorot* (Breishis pgs. 141-146) answers this question by claiming that there are two kinds, or levels of gratitude. In his words: *Thanksgiving can be understood as courtesy or as conscience; as a social gesture — or as sacred grace: as a way of talking--or as a state of the soul as an aspect of personality — or a part of character. The lower level, that of courtesy or social*

gesture, is one in which I give thanks only for goods received. It is a kind of verbal receipt — you give me, I thank you. It is based on a Theory of Compensation--just as I must pay in cash for what I purchase, so must I say "thanks" for gifts or favors. Instead of paying in dollars and cents, I pay in expression of sentiments. If you do not give me anything, naturally I need not thank you. This is an elementary human phenomenon... This is the hodayah- the gratitude which is a rational universal principle even without the specific teaching of Torah. . . But this is only minimal. It is not spiritual, not truly worthy, it lacks greatness and largeness of soul. This quid-pro-quo arrangement is a commercialization of human relations.

The higher kind of gratefulness is based not on Compensation but upon Consecration, the consecration of one's whole character. It is a state of mind in which a man is so devoted to the Almighty, so dedicated to transcendent values, so elevated beyond petty, selfish concerns, that he feels himself grasped by a pervasive gratefulness even when he has not received some special favor in advance, even when not bribed into an expression of gratitude. Perhaps these two kinds of gratitude can be differentiated as "Thanksgiving" for the lower expression and "Thankfulness" for the higher. In Thanksgiving, I give thanks as I would give a tip — it is essentially impersonal and a mere discharge of obligation. Thankfulness, however, is a reaction of the total personality, deeply personal, profoundly human. The most illustrious example of this nobler kind of gratitude, thankfulness, is our Mother Leah.

Dr. Lamm further explains how we see this level of gratitude in Leah's life story. Her life ambition was to marry Yaakov and be sincerely loved by him. According to Chazal, from the moment she heard that she was meant to marry Esav, she wept until her eyes became weak. She hoped and prayed she would marry Yaakov, and when she finally does, she learns that Yaakov really loves her sister, Rachel, and had been tricked into marrying her. Leah does not give up hope. Her desire for Yaakov's love and respect is too precious to yield so quickly. And so, she has a son and feels that now he will love her, so she calls him Reuven, saying, now my husband will love me.

וּתְקַרְאָה שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי־רָאָה ה' בְּעֵנָי כִּי עָתָה יֵאָהֲבֵנִי אִישִׁי:

But this does not accomplish her goal.

And so, a second child comes, and she calls him Shimon, with the same hopes that this child will help her be more loved...but it does not work.

כִּי־שָׁמַע ה' כִּי־שָׁנוּאָה אֶנֶכִי וַיִּתְּנֵה לִי גַם־אֶת־זֶה וּתְקַרְאָה שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן

And then a third child, Levi

עָתָה הַפְּעַם יִלְגֶּה אִישִׁי אֵלַי כִּי־יִלְדֶתִי לוֹ שְׁלִשָׁה בָּנִים עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמוֹ לֵוִי:

This time, she says, "my husband will draw close to me." But he does not.

Now, she has failed in her life ambition. Now, there is only resignation. The last flicker of hope is gone. She must reconcile herself to being unloved, unfulfilled. How would a normal person react to this kind of problem, to this denial of one's life's dream and ambition? We would expect someone to show despair, bitterness, and hate the whole world, show anger towards God; to complain constantly.

But, says Dr. Lamm, "here is where the greatness of Leah shines forth in its whole glory. Her fourth child is born and she calls him Yehudah. Why? – hapaam odeh es Hashem. This time I shall thank Hashem. This time, when I realize and accept the fact that the greatest, most overwhelming desire of my life will not be granted to me by G-d, this time I will thank Him. Despite all my failures and disappointments — I thank G-d. "This time," the first time in history, a great soul reached into the heights of the spirit and recognized that thankfulness is more than thanksgiving, that it's is a way of reacting to G-ds very Presence, and not merely paying a debt for His favors. Ha-paam - "this time, although my hopes are doomed, my love unrequited, my ambitions dashed, I am yet grateful. I do have a great husband, nonetheless. I do have wonderful children. I do have the Lord's promise to be the matriarch of a great people... This was not Leah's social gesture, but her spiritual ascent. Would that all of us in our affluent society learn that even if we do not get all we want — and who does? — yet there is so very much to be

thankful for. We ought to be grateful *al nishmosenu hapekudos lach*, ... for the hundreds of daily miracles from which we benefit, *al nisecha shebechol yom imanu*. We ought give thanks for life, health, family, friends. . . And it is not only things that we thank G-d for, but gratitude is a state of mind, a psychological attunement to G-d, a climate of conscience, a cast of character, a matter not so much of having something as of being someone. For ultimately, the ability to achieve this higher form of gratitude is an integral aspect of character — it requires humility, a humility based upon deep insight. That insight is — our own weakness and inadequacy in the presence of G-d... Basically, gratitude to G-d means acknowledging our dependence upon Him.

As we say every day in our *tefilla*...

מודים אנחנו לך... נודה לך ונספר תהלתך על חיינו המסורים בידך.. ועל נסיה שפכל יום עמנו. ועל נפלאותיה וטובותיה שפכל עת.
ערב ובקר וצהרים...

We gratefully thank You, Hashem... We thank You and recount Your praise for our lives... Your miracles are with us every day and Your wonders and goodness are with us at all times: evening, morning and noon. This gratitude should motivate us to serve Hashem with passion. This was Yaakov Avinu's epiphany when he was on the run from Beer Sheva, when he detoured to Yeshivas Ever for 14 years. He attained deep gratitude and thankfulness for everything we have, leading to unmatched devotion in his *avodas Hashem*.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks wrote the following personal account of gratitude in his life, in *Covenant and Conversation* on Vayikra, p. 109, called The Thanksgiving Offering

“Elaine and I were on our honeymoon. It was summer, the sun was shining, the beach glorious and the sea inviting. There was just one problem. I could not swim. But as I looked at the sea, I noticed that near to the shore it was very shallow indeed. There were people several hundred yards from the beach, yet the water only came up to their knees. What could be safer, I thought, than simply to walk out into the sea and stop long before I was out of my depth.

I did. I walked out several hundred yards and, yes, the sea only came up to my knees. I turned and started walking back. To my surprise and shock, I found myself suddenly engulfed by water. Evidently, I had walked into a deep dip in the sand. I was out of my depth. I struggled to swim. I failed. This was dangerous. There was no one nearby. The people swimming were a long way away. I went under, again and again. By the fifth time, I knew I was drowning. My life was about to end. What a way – I thought – to start a honeymoon.

Of course, someone did save me, otherwise I would not be writing these lines. To this day, I do not know who it was: by then I was more or less unconscious. All I know is that he must have seen me struggling. He swam over, took hold of me, and brought me to safety. Since then, the words we say on waking every day have had a deep meaning for me: “I thank You, living and enduring G-d, for You have restored my life to me: great is Your faithfulness.” Anyone who has survived great danger knows what it is to feel, not just to be abstractly aware, that life is a gift of G-d, renewed daily. . .

*The first words we are taught to say each morning, immediately on waking, are *Modeh/modah ani*, “I give thanks.” We thank before we think. Note that the normal word order is inverted: *Modeh ani*, not *ani modeh*, so that in Hebrew the “thanks” comes before the “I.”*

The Jewish people are called *Yehudim*, deriving our mission from this very episode of Leah's thankfulness. To mission is clear: to be a Jew is to live a life of recognition and thanks. To be a Jew is to feel a sense of gratitude, to Hashem and to other people. To be a Jew is to see life itself as a gift; which must motivate us to live with a sense of purpose and mission... with passion and focus; living every moment of life to its fullest. During this pandemic, when the uncertainty of life is wearing on us, we too must find the inner strength to say *הפעם אודה את ה'* as well, to thank Hashem for the basic gift of life and all the blessings we take for granted. May we learn the lesson of gratitude from Yaakov and Leah and live life filled with thankfulness every moment, and live with single-minded devotion and passion... towards our mission to fill the world with goodness and light. May we help bring the world to the days when all will live with that sense of passion and devotion... amen.