Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi[1]

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayetze***: **Genesis 29:1-30**
Haftarah: **Hosea 13:4-11**
B'rit Chadasha: **John 1:40-42**

Laban had two daughters ....
[Genesis 29:16]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 85:4-7;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 4, *Ga'al* [*Kinsman Redemption*]

Vayisa Ya'akov raglav - *and Ya'akov picked up his feet/sped up his pace ...* ***vayelech artzah v'nei-kedem*** *– and set out toward the land of the sons of antiquity.* **Genesis 29:1a.**

The first rays of morning sun broke the spell – and caused Ya'akov to sit up with a start. Was everything he had experienced in the course of the night merely a *vision*? Or had it been a *visitation*? Had the hosts of angelic beings, the Great Staircase that served as an open portal between the visible and invisible realms, and the Glorious One that sat enthroned at the top of that Great Staircase, been 'real'? Or had they just been figments of his vivid imagination? What if the amazing things that he had seen and heard while his exhausted body rested with his head were actually the first real things he had ever known? What if everything that preceded this experience had been merely a prelude to, and preparation for, this dream? Ya'akov could not tell you. All he knew for certain was that he had never seen the morning sun so bathed in orange-glow, nor heard the songbirds of dawn sing so beautifully, or risen from a night's rest so inspired, energized, and excited about the future. All he knew was that he was truly alive, alert, and oriented, and ready to fire on all cylinders, for the first time in his life.

Morning Has Broken … Like the First Morning

Perhaps, he thought, this is what it had been like for his paternal grandfather Avraham so many decades ago. Perhaps, Ya'akov mused, his life, like that of his illustrious *saba*, was being commandeered by the mysterious *El Shaddai*. He had an actual encounter with the Creator of the Universe. After all, had Heaven not just touched earth – with his mortal brain serving as the interface? Had his body, soul, and spirit not just felt every eye of Heaven searching him, examining him, smiling at him, and seeing in him levels of possibility and dimensions of potential that he had never even imagined? Had his ears, just heard the majestic Voice that spoke the universe into existence speaking inspiring messages in *lashon hakodesh*

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[Hebrew] over him and his seed? Had his heart not just experienced the kind of cleansing, empowering touch, and basked in the same outpouring of Divine favor, that Avraham had. He had not just received the ultimate blessing from the Ultimate Father – without having to resort to deception or manipulation this time? Was his life not just changed forever by the words the Grand Persona at the top of the Staircase had spoken ***I am the Holy One, God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzchak; <u>the land on which you lie</u> I will give to you and your seed. And <u>your seed</u> will be as the dust of the earth; you will spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed <u>all the families of the earth</u> will be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.***

Had not conversations then ensued? Had stunning reciprocal commitments not then been made? Had not a memorial stone been set in place and anointed with oil to 'seal the deal'? Is not the '*Staircase Addendum' to the Avrahamic Covenant now* in full place and effect?

Ya'akov could not explain it. But he was certain of two things. First, he knew that neither he nor the world would never be the same. Second, he knew that he would never be – or make anything happen – alone. With that knowledge, Ya'akov was content – indeed, at perfect *shalom*. Whatever the Holy One had in mind for the world next, He and His angelic hosts could consider Ya'akov 'in'!

On the Road Again

The dangers, toils, and snares of the 'Ridge Road'? *Child's play!* A difficult deployment among the raging nations, in the domain of that master-manipulator Lavan? *Bring it on!* Yesterday the prospect of what was facing him had stirred dread in Ya'akov. But now, in the afterglow of his nocturnal rebirth, he just felt exhilarated. It now seemed like years ago that he had run away from Be'er Sheva in shame. Now it felt like he was being carried on angel's wings. He had met the Creator of the Universe. Of course, like other mortals, Ya'akov had seen the mysterious El Shaddai's Handiwork many times. He had marveled at that Handiwork in seedtime and in harvest, in summer and in winter, in the cloud formations and desertscapes of the day and in the starry skies and meteor showers of the night. He had often admired the artistry of sunrises, sunsets, eclipses, forests, deserts, waterfalls, and oceans – but never, before last night, had he gazed upon the mesmerizing Beauty, much less felt the majesty, of the Master-Builder Himself. As a young man growing up in a household of faith he had learned to recite all the blessings his father had taught him. He had never doubted for a moment that there was a Supreme Being – his father's God - out there somewhere tending the ecosystem. As a result, he had always tried to resist the base urges of the flesh and

the pseudo-intellect, and to be as good a person as he could manage to be. But he did not know the Holy One the way Avraham or Yitzchak knew Him. Before the Great Stairway Encounter he had never felt the Creator's Powerful Breath enter his nostrils, fill his lungs, and awaken the infinite and eternal life-force deep within the way his father and grandfather had. He had never actually heard the Holy One's Beautiful Voice speaking directly to him, and calling him by name. But then Ya'akov came to the end of himself – and the Holy One rent another portal in the *rakia* [KJV 'firmament'] that He had put in place to separate the Heavens and the earth and divide the realm of the seen from that of the unseen. As He had shattered the '*Finity Barrier'* to open the *Moriyah Portal* for Avraham, the *Be'er Lahoi Roi Portal* for Hagar and Yish'mael, and the *Gerar Portal* for Yitzchak, He now had opened the *Beit-El portal* for, and had both appeared in physical form to and spoken substantive, weighty words [Hebrew *devarim*] to, Ya'akov. Now everything has changed. Now Ya'akov is marching to a different drum - and humming a different tune. Now he feels alive in a way nothing in the world has ever made him feel. His distraction matrix has gone into hibernation – and he is able to be totally focused for the first time in his life. The mocking voices of his inner tormentors have all fallen silent. His overdeveloped pseudo-intellect has bowed in reverent awe before the Seat of True Wisdom. His nonchalance about the journey he is on has turned into excitement. His apprehension about leaving home has turned to exhilaration over the prospect of a new beginning. Suddenly the sky is bluer than it has ever been, and the clouds are closer than he's ever seen them. Suddenly the songs of the birds of the morning are igniting a symphony in his soul. Suddenly he is smiling from ear to ear. Suddenly spontaneous songs praise and adoration - like those he used to hear his grandfather Avraham sing - are pounding in his head. Suddenly he wants to dance. Suddenly he is thinking of others, and of ways he can honor, serve, and bless them - instead of how he can 'read' them, control them, judge them as his inferior, and minimize if not neutralize their influence.

Suddenly he feels the urge to *laugh aloud*, to *shout* for joy, to bless everyone and everything he sees. Now the One Who he had always know to be the Great Shepherd that guided the steps of his grandfather Avraham and his father Yitzchak has become *his personal Great Shepherd* as well!

It is funny how an encounter with the Creator of the Universe can have that effect on a person! All it takes is a few moments in the Presence of the Holy One to turn our mourning into dancing, our sighing into laughter, and our overwhelm into overflow.

As it was for Ya'akov, so it should be with us! The scenery in each of our respective lands of exile is changing around us so rapidly it is hard to keep up with

it. Every mountain vista we enjoy quickly gives way to a valley of the shadow of death. Doors are slamming closed behind us; but other doors keep swinging open in front of us. Relationships we once cherished are phasing out behind us; but other relationships are simultaneously beckoning to us from the foreground.

For the rest of this journey just try to remember, and keep in the forefront of your mind, this truth: *you are Ya'akov* – and *Ya'akov is you.* His story is your story. His calling is your calling. His exile is your exile.

Welcome to the Great Witness Protection Plan – and the Glorious Keeper of Covenants and Souls

Having just been called to an ambitious, top-secret mission of redemption, Ya'akov is a human arrow exploding from a Heavenly bow. He is being dispatched in a new direction for a glorious Kingdom Purpose, the significance and potential ramifications of which his mind could not even begin to fathom. Unbeknownst to Ya'akov you see, the impact point of the trajectory upon which he has been launched is the *house of Terach*, Avraham's father. Ya'akov is going to wind up living amongst his grandfather's nearest living kinsmen for over 20 years. They are pagans, one and all. They are hopelessly bound up in the bondage of their own fleshly appetites, uncleanness strongholds, culturally induced deceptions, vile passions, vain imaginations, falsified narratives, reprobate beliefs, misplaced priorities, and self-destructive habits. Lusty idolaters, they are steeped in materialism, narcissism, and cynicism. They are deceivers, manipulators, drama-addicts, and control-freaks. They are drowning in a sea of unbridled emotions. They are self-medicating with illusions and delusions born of the pseudo-intellect. They listen to, and live by, the Voice of the Serpent, and the dark energy they derive from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But they are the kinsmen of His friend Avraham – and the Holy One still loves them. He has, in fact, been visiting them now, reaching out to them, and courting them, for generations. He inspired their patriarch Terach to leave Ur of the Chaldeans and head toward Kena'an. When Terach gave up the grand odyssey of redemption too soon, He reached out to their bloodline a second time by calling the man they knew as 'Avram' and the woman they knew as 'Sarai' out of their midst. For a while, Lot accompanied Avram and Sarai. But alas, he - like Terach before him - gave up on the grand pilgrimage of redemption too soon.

A generation later, the Holy One sent another emissary to the descendants of Terach. He sent Avraham's servant to inspire them with a beautiful, humble kind of worship, and to invite them to a wedding. But they would not come. They sent Rivkah with the servant - but they themselves stayed behind. So now the Great Suitor of Heaven intends to send them yet one more witness – such as he is. He is

sending Ya'akov to model for them a different and better way of viewing and dealing with the holy as well as the common. To Ya'akov, the assigned season of sojourning in the house of Terach will look and feel like an exile. He will almost always feel like he is in a crucible – and, of course, he will be. Sons of the Covenant *are* almost always in a crucible. But each crucible we are assigned to walk through is designed to serve the higher purposes of the Kingdom. Each crucible teaches us another level of Kingdom Diplomacy. Our lives are always the measuring rods that determine whether people within our sphere of influence wind up being *blessed* or *cursed*. Our presence pushes the envelope, but they always get to make the choice. That is the way the Avrahamic Covenant is designed. That is the way the Grand Redemptive Plan of the Holy One works.

Ya'akov is a son of THE COVENANT. That means that wherever he goes, he is never forsaken. He is never abandoned by the One Who initiated the Covenant. He is never, ever alone. He has been designated as a Witness for the Holy One in the great Courtroom of History - and He has been placed in the *Ultimate Witness Protection Program.* The Holy One has positioned *Divine Watchers* to stand guard over him at all times. And the Creator Himself has committed to be His *Keeper of Last Resort.*

The purposes of the 'exile crucible' into which the Holy One is about to shoot Ya'akov like an arrow are two-fold:

1. to firmly *establish humility, trust, and the true fear of Heaven in Ya'akov personally,* and
2. to rescue whoever in Paddan-Aram will allow himself or herself to be positively influenced for the Kingdom in the course of their latest kingdom ambassador's visitation.

The Holy One intends to rescue at least two more souls of the household of Terach from the toxic mix of paganism, materialism, perversion, and self-destructiveness that made up the Arami culture. Who from Terach's bloodline does the Holy One intend to rescue in this generation? First and foremost He has His Heart set on Laban's daughters - Rachel and Leah. He has had His Eyes, Heart, and Mind set on those two since before the foundation of the world. They will be delivered; the question is, will there be anyone else, of any other bloodline, that will come out of this particular house of bondage with them? We will see, Dear Reader – we will see!

... And He Arrived ...

Today's aliyah is going to be about making a transition from one environment to another. And the most substantive thing we will study today will be the changes that this transitioning process brings about within a child of the covenant. The

process is designed by the Holy One to change the child of the covenant's approach to life. It is designed by the Holy One to change the child of the covenant's worldview. And it is designed by the Holy One to change the course of the child of the covenant's future.

How will Ya'akov fare upon arrival in his new environment? What kind of first impression will he make on that new environment – and what kind of first impression will that new environment make on *him*? How will what he discovers in that new environment *change him*? And what are we as his descendants to learn from it all? These are some of the questions we should have in mind as we begin our study of this aliyah of Torah. The experiences of the patriarchs, you see, form the blueprint for our lives as well[2].

The Initial Descent of Ya'akov into Lavan's Lair

In today's aliyah Ya'akov will arrive at ***ar'tzah b'nei-Kedem*** *– i.e. the land of the sons of Kedem*. This place will be Ya'akov's first land of exile. His experiences there will be prototypical 'life-in-exile' experiences for all people of the Covenant. This will be his home-away-from-home for over 20 years. It became for Ya'akov exactly what the Russian village of Anatevka became to Tevye and Golda and family in *Fiddler on the Roof*[3].

Take note, Beloved: the exact same kind of wounded, angry, deceived, untrustworthy and neurotically narcissistic people that Ya'akov will find in the House of Lavan also make up by far the bulk of the population of each of <u>our</u> lands of exile today. The same kind of self-centered, intellectually dishonest, spiritually bankrupt, demonically influenced lifestyles as Ya'akov encountered in Lavan's lair will shape the cultures of our present lands of exile too.

Understanding Our Places of Exile

As we have discussed previously in these studies Charan was the place where Avraham's father Terach settled after leaving Ur of the Chaldees *en route* to the land of Kena'an. We are not told *why* Terach settled in this place instead of proceeding on to his declared destination – we are just told that he did. Charan thus represents a place of *compromise* and of *settling for less than one's destiny and purpose in life* in favor of that which the world has to offer. It is, granted, a step or two removed from the obvious perversion of Babylon; but it is still a 500-mile or so desert trek short of where a person called to covenant with the Holy One should

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[2] See Ramban's commentary to Genesis 12:6, *Or HaTorah*, beginning of parsha *Lech Lecha*.

[3] *Fiddler on the Roof* is a fictional account of life in a particular Russian *shtet'l* between the turn of the Twentieth Century and the Bolshevic Revolution. Tevye was a milkman; Golda was his wife. Together they had five daughters. They, along with all Jewish residents of the village of Anatevka, were ordered to evacuate their homes and be out of the village on 3 days' notice.

begin to feel comfortable.

The last time Torah 'peeked in' on this sleepy Mesopotamian village it did so through the eyes of Avraham's servant, who in Genesis 24 visited Charan in search of a bride for Yitzchak. At that time the village was referred to only as ***Aram Naharayim el-ir Nachor*** [the village of Nachor in the land of the two great fortified rivers]. It was at that time that Torah introduced us to Lavan – the man who will soon become the prototypical villain of parsha *Vayetze*[4]. A new – and lengthy - chapter in Ya'akov's life begins upon his arrival in this Mesopotamian village. He will learn a lot here about life, about love, about evil, about himself, and about God.

So ... where are <u>you</u> sojourning, Dear Reader? Are <u>you</u> living at the place – physically and spiritually – to which the Holy One has called you? Or do you find yourself sojourning in a Charan or Anatevka - a place of *compromise*, of *settling* for less than God's best? If you are in the latter then I have a word of counsel for you. Learn the lessons such a place has to teach you as quickly as you can. Be listening, carefully and constantly, for the Holy One's Voice to whisper to you that it is time to leave. Then press on – until you reach the place to which you are truly called at such a time as this.

Spring Up, Oh Well!

The first thing that catches Ya'akov's attention in the 'land of the sons of antiquity' is *be'er sadeh* – i.e. a *well in a field*.

Vayar v'hineh v'er b'sadeh
And he looked, and behold! A well in a field!

v'***hineh-sham sh'loshah edrei-tzon rovtzim aleiha***
And behold, three flocks of sheep lay beside it,

ki min ha-be'er hahi yashku ha-adarim
since it was from this well that the flocks were watered.

V'ha-even gedolah al-pi ha-be'er
The top of the well was covered with a large stone.

V'ne'esfu-shamah chol ha-adarim
When all the flocks would come together there,

V'galeilu et-ha-even me'al-pi ha-be'er v'hish'ku et ha-tzon
they rolled the great stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep.

V'heshivu et ha-even al-pi ha-be'er l'mekomah
Then they would replace the stone on the well.

[4] For an introductory discussion of Lavan, please see the Rabbi's son's *Shiur L'Yom Chamishi* [*Thursday's Study*] for parsha *Chayei Sarah*.

Three thirsty flocks. Three watchful, able-bodied shepherds. An ample water source. Why is *no one – man or beast - drinking*? What is the problem? Ah, now Ya'akov sees it. The spring, it seems, has been sealed off from the public. Someone in authority – or the warlord of the local cartel – has placed a heavy stone over the opening of the well. Strangers and passersby are not allowed free access. Water use is being regulated – probably taxed. There are rules – protocols – that have to be followed. There are forms to be completed – and/or watchmen to be bribed. Here, no one 'trusts' anyone. This is not like the land in which Ya'akov grew up, where men and shepherds operate on the "merit system", and everyone takes only what he needs and moves on. This is a land of urban sophistication, where people lock their doors, and where absolutely nothing – and no one - is free, or innocent, or honorable. This is a land of greed – with which always comes things like *cynicism*, *suspicion, distrust,* and *paranoia.* This is a land of control, manipulation, and exploitation. This is a land of conspiracy, nuance and intrigue. This is a land of misinformation, disinformation, nuance, and deception. This is a land of scheming, plotting, and conniving. The amateurish little birthright and blessing ruses Ya'akov played back in Kena'an were child's play compared to the kinds, levels, and layers of duplicity he will encounter here. He is a babe in these woods; and his *naivete* is about to be displayed for everyone to see. That is all part of the plan. Ya'akov has a high calling – and he needs to learn how to navigate through, survive, transcend, and stay true to his new Covenant Partner in the face of every false front of human society, civilization, culture, philosophy, ideology, and political/economic system this fallen world throws at him. There is no time like the present.

Déjà vu – All Over Again

Forty or fifty years ago when Avraham's servant came to a well near Charan - perhaps this same well - he did something Ya'akov is not recorded as doing. What the servant did that Ya'akov did not do is recorded in Genesis 24:12:

Then he prayed, ***"O Lord, God of my master Avraham,***
give me success this day,
and do deeds consistent with Your covenant with my master Avraham."

Alas, unlike the aforementioned servant of Avraham, at this stage in his life Ya'akov was, not much of a man of prayer. If he had been, perhaps he could have saved himself a lot of heartache. Instead of being a man of prayer, however, Ya'akov considered himself a man of *winsome conversation*. He immediately engaged the shepherds of the field in *small talk*.

V'yomer lahem Ya'akov achai me'ayin atem
Ya`akov said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?"

V'yomeiru m'Charan anachnu

They said, "We are from Charan."

V'yomer lahem ha-yedatem et-Lavan ben-Nachor
He said to them, "Do you know Laban, the son of Nachor?"

V'yomeiru yadanu
They said, "We know him."

V'yomer lahem ha-shalom lo
And he asked them, "Is he doing well?"

V'yomeiru shalom v'hineh Rachel*[5] *bito ba'ah im-ha-tzon
They replied:" He is well." and behold - his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep.'

At this point Ya'akov should know that the Holy One has enabled him to reach his destination in peace. So, how will he respond? 40 or 50 years ago when the servant of Avraham had a similar revelation at the well of Charan, he *bowed* and *worshipped the Holy One*. Did Ya'akov? No, he did nothing of the sort. He was not, at this stage of his development, any more a man of *worship* than he was a man of *prayer*. What he did instead is graduate from *small talk* to a *discussion of shepherding technique*. He started *telling the 3 shepherds what to do*:

V'yomer hen od ha-yom gadol
'But it's still the middle of the day.

lo-et he'asef ha-mikneh hashku ha-tzon uleichu rei'u
It's not time to gather the livestock. Water the sheep, and go and feed them."
[Genesis 29:7]

I do not doubt that the 3 shepherds at the well resented Ya'akov's lecture on sheep herding in no small amount. I also do not doubt that they now snickered to themselves remembering that he had asked of Lavan. No doubt these shepherds knew Lavan, and his treacherous ways. No doubt they now thought to themselves "*let us see how this know-it-all stranger fares in the house of Lavan!*" But they answered him politely enough:

V'yomeiru lo nuchal ad asher ye'asfu
We cannot - until all the flocks have been gathered!

Kol ha-adarim v'galeilu et ha-even me'al pi ha-be'er
[All of us] then roll the great stone from the top of the well.

V'hishkinu ha-tzon
Only then can we water the sheep.'

Enter Divine Redemption Candidate Number One, Stage Right

Ya'akov's discussion with the shepherds of Charan is mercifully interrupted by the appearance of the Lavan's daughter Rachel. The Writer of Torah records it thusly:

[5] Rachel means *'ewe'* – a female sheep kept and pampered for the purpose of producing commercially saleable offspring (marketable lambs).

Odeinu m'daber imam
While he [Ya'akov] *was yet speaking with them*

v'Rachel ba'ah im ha-tzon asher l'aviha
Rachel came with her father's sheep,

ki ro'ah hi
for she was the shepherdess.
[Genesis 29:9]

Now, if you will remember, back in the narrative of Genesis chapter 24 when the girl for whom the servant had come to Charan came into his view he worshipped the Holy One, bowing down and acknowledging His greatness and goodness.

Will seeing Rachel have the same effect on Ya'akov as seeing Rivkah had on Avraham's servant? Hardly. For Ya'akov, his first sight of the beautiful Rachel induced neither prayer nor worship. Cue the lusts of the eyes and the flesh. Cue the pride of life. Cue desire. Cue curiosity. Cue sensuality. Cue romance.

Romancing the Stone

Ya'akov response to the appearance of Rachel was very much in the flesh. Here is how Torah describes their first encounter:

Vayehi ka'asher ra'ah Ya'akov et-Rachel
Ya'akov looked at Rachel

bat-Lavan achi imo v'et tzon Lavan achi imo
the daughter of Lavan who was with his uncle Lavan's sheep.

v'yigash Ya'akov v'yagel et ha-even me'al pi ha-be'er
He stepped forward, and rolled the stone from the top of the well,

V'yashk et-tzon Lavan achi imo
And he watered the sheep of Lavan, his mother's brother.

Notice the ironic reversal of the roles here. 40 or 50 years previously Rivkah had come forth in humility and watered Avraham's camels for his servant *without being asked*. Now Ya'akov steps forth in prideful arrogance and waters Lavan's sheep for Rachel – also without being asked. And then Ya'akov followed up this display of worldliness with an outburst of *outrageous* and absolutely *absurd* behavior. Yielding to impulsiveness, he broke all acceptable social protocol, approached and sullied the reputation of an unmarried female with an unsolicited embrace - and then allowed himself to become an emotional basket case to boot.

Vayishak Ya'akov l'Rachel
Ya`akov kissed Rachel,

V'yisa et-kolo v'yev'k
and he lifted up his voice, and wept.

Ya'akov *kissed*[6] Rachel? *Unthinkable*! *Unheard of*! What on earth was he *thinking*? This is not the Twenty-First Century silver screen – this is a *rural village in Mesopotamia circa 1650 BCE*! The little that Ya'akov learned of the Holy One and His Ways while in the house of Yitzchak and Rivkah appears to have flown right out the window. A pretty face and a demonstration of a little wealth, and there goes all the teaching of his father and his grandfather – and of his own dramatic God encounter along the way - concerning the ways of the Holy One.

By the way - do you remember the last time Ya'akov kissed anyone, Dear Reader? It was in Genesis 27:27. While he was dressed up in Esav's clothes, in the course of pulling an epic 'con' on Yitzchak, Ya'akov kissed his father in order to seal the deception. So just how much do you think a kiss – and a few tears - meant to Ya'akov? Did I mention Ya'akov still had a lot to learn? Well, I have a feeling he's come to the right place. The Holy One will make sure we all do, sooner or later.

The Law of Sowing and Reaping

What did Ya'akov sow in his first few moments in the region to which he had been dispatched on a Kingdom mission of redemption? He sowed impatience. He sowed impetuousness. He sowed a display of fleshly emotion. He sowed an overly forward, self-obsessed greeting. And then he topped it all off by sowing an inappropriate kiss. Alas, Ya'akov will quickly reap exactly what he sowed, measure for measure. Let's continue the narrative:

Vayehi chishmoa Lavan et-shema Ya'akov ben-achoto
When Lavan heard the news that Ya'akov had arrived,

vayarotz likrato v'yechabek-lo v'yenashek-lo
he ran to greet him. He embraced and kissed him,

vayevi'eihu el-beito
and he took him to his house.

Measure for measure. Impatience. Impetuousness. A fleshly greeting. A betrayer's kiss. What Ya'akov sowed, he received.

Ya'akov's First Week of Years in the Crucible of Exile

The events of today will mark the beginning of a new era - a twenty-year period of Ya'akov doing hard labor – for dubious reward - in Lavan's house. And it all began with an *embrace* and a *kiss.* Someone will later say "*that which you sow, you shall also reap*." For, you see, as we begin parsha *Vayetze*, Ya'akov resembles his uncle Lavan much more than he resembles his father, Yitzchak. But do not weep for Ya'akov. All that is about to change. The Holy One knows exactly how far

[6] The Hebrew verb used is a form of the verb root ***nashaq,*** *nun, shin, kuf*, Strong's Hebrew word #5401, meaning to draw very close and kiss.

Ya'akov needs to grow up spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. He knows exactly what Ya'akov is about to experience - and what he about to do - while on assignment in the household of Terach. He knows that Ya'akov has to be purged of the deceit and trickery that, up to this point in life, has defined his identity. He intends to *build Ya'akov's character* by allowing him to experience the fruit of his own deceptiveness, even as He uses Ya'akov's imperfect witness to redeem Rachel and Leah from the demeaning culture of darkness into which they were born.

Here is how the stage was set for Ya'akov's first seven years – his prophetic 'first week of years' – in exile in Lavan's house. Note that the initial period of exile was not against his will – it was, in fact, the product of Ya'akov's own plan. Enamored by the physical beauty of the shepherdess Rachel, Ya'akov made a proposal to Lavan. He said:

E'evadcha sheva shanim b'Rachel bit'cha ha-ktanah
I will work for you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter.

Please note that Torah does not record Lavan's response to this proposition. It does not record the execution of any betrothal contract, or the sealing of an agreement along the lines of what Ya'akov proposed with either the shedding of blood or a covenant meal. Lavan apparently *never committed to anything*. But Ya'akov apparently never noticed. He was too enamored with his own plan, to enraptured by his own vision, and too caught up in his own out-of-control emotions. Ya'akov was harmless as a dove, but he was not wise as a serpent. He made assumptions. He *jumped right in with both feet*. And Lavan *let him*.

Vaya'avod Ya'akov b'Rachel sheva shanim
And Ya'akov worked for seven years for Rachel.

vayihyu v'eynav k'yamim achadim b'ahavato otah
But in his eyes it seemed like no more than a few days, because he loved her.

After completing seven years of building Laban's flocks and herds without pay, Ya'akov appeared to Laban and said "***havah et-ishti ki male'u yamay*** - *i.e. "Give me my bride, for her days are fulfilled."*

Please note that he left out one important detail – he forgot to specifically mention the name of the daughter for whose hand he was asking. Laban, of course, took careful notice of Ya'akov's omission. Hence we read:

Vaye'esof Lavan et-kol-anshei ha-makom v'ya'as mishteh
[Lavan] invited all the local people and made a wedding feast.

Vayehi v'erev v'yikach et-Leah vito
In the evening, he took his daughter Leah

V'yave otah elav v'yavo eleiha

and brought her to [Ya'akov] who consummated the marriage with her[7].

V'yehi v'boker v'hineh-hi Leah
In the morning, behold, she was Leah.

Wow! *Flash back 7 years, Ya'akov*! Do you remember what your mother Rivkah had <u>you</u> do to seven years ago to secure what she wanted for *you*? Do you remember her having you pose as your brother to deceive Yitzchak? Did you not know that Laban is your mother's brother?

V'yomer el-Lavan mah-zot asitah li
He said to Lavan, 'How could you do this to me?

halo v'Rachel avadeti imach
Didn't I work with you for Rachel?

V'lamah rimitani
Why did you cheat me?'

Skin for skin, Dear Reader. What you sow you shall also reap.

Congratulations Ya'akov - you have just completed the requirements for the Holy One's *school of righteous conduct course 101*. Second semester advanced studies will be coming your way soon.

Living in a World Full of Labans

The world in which we are called to live and operate is full to overflowing with beautiful girls/women (and with handsome boys/men) and crafty Labans. Both are a "dime-a-dozen" in our society. Take a walk in a shopping mall, check out the billboards in any city, or turn on the television or radio – even for an advertisement or two - and you will see exactly what I mean. Please understand that *it is all a test*. The Holy One knows where you are. He knows what you see every day. He is allowing you to be tested to see if you will, like Ya'akov in today's aliyah, allow yourself to be distracted from your destiny by physical beauty and high-sounding but meaningless talk. Your destiny in THE COVENANT is far too precious to "throw it all away" for either a pretty face or a smooth-talker's line.

Keep this principle in mind: *what you see as important and valuable in life will determine whether the primary one to whom your service is directed will be the Holy One ... or a man like Lavan*. Whom will you choose to serve, Dear Reader?

Introducing Beautiful Leah of the Tender Eyes

As we now know very well, Lavan had two daughters. Both are targeted for

[7] It is interesting to note that Torah expressly prohibits a man from engaging in intimate relations with sisters [as Lavan tricked Ya'akov into doing]. See **Leviticus18:18.**

redemption. The elder was named Leah[8], and the younger was named Rachel. Leah's eyes were her most distinguishing feature. In Hebrew Leah's eyes are described as being *rakhot*, a term that can be translated 'tender, soft or delicate, compassionate, gentle or mild.' The point is this: Leah's was a quiet, hidden, inner beauty. By contrast, Rachel's beauty was external and, to some degree, at least early in her life, superficial.

After the fiasco of Ya'akov's wedding Lavan allowed Ya'akov to marry Rachel as well as Leah, in exchange for another seven years of servitude. Imagine, however, for a moment, the impact this had upon Leah. That she felt unloved by Ya'akov is a given. But though Ya'akov may not love Leah the way he loves Rachel, the Holy One loves her more than Ya'akov ever could. How do I know? Consider Leah's third and fourth sons, Levi and Y'hudah. From Levi will come the first deliverer, *Moshe* [Moses] and the fountain of all priests, Aharon [Aaron]. From Y'hudah will come the first king to reign in Jerusalem, David, and the ultimate deliverer, Messiah Himself.

Lest you truly believe that Ya'akov loved only Rachel and not Leah, fast forward with me for a moment to the end of Ya'akov's life. When Ya'akov was preparing to die, with which of these sisters – his two wives – did he request to be buried? Not with Rachel, Beloved. Oh no, not with Rachel. She was buried on the road near Beit-Lechem. Instead Ya'akov requested – of Rachel's son Yosef, no less - to be buried with Leah, in the cave of Machpelah, with his father and mother, Yitzchak and Rivkah, and his grandfather and grandmother, Avraham and Sarah. Leah had a beauty, you see, which *never faded*.

The truth of the matter is that Ya'akov, upon his arrival at Charan, was simply too immature, too superficial, and too spiritually blind to see in Leah what the Holy One had deposited in her. And though we certainly do not commend his methods or sanction his behavior, we have to admit that in the long run Laban actually did Ya'akov – and all of us – a tremendous favor when he tricked Ya'akov into taking Leah as a wife.

A Parallel Passage in the Apostolic Writings

In today's B'rit Chadasha reading *Sh'mon* [Peter], a burly fisherman from *Kafer-Nahum* [Capernaum] meets Yeshua for the first time.

One of the two who heard Yochanan, and followed him, was Andrai, Sh'mon Rock's brother.
He first found his own brother, Sh'mon,
*and said to him, "**We have found the Messiah!**" (which is, being interpreted, **Anointed One**).*
He brought him to Yeshua.

[8] ***Leah*** is a transliteration of the Hebrew letters ***lamed, alef, hey***.

Yeshua looked at him, and said, ***"You are Sh'mon the son of Yonah. You will be called Kefa"*** *(which is by interpretation, Rock).*

The introduction comes from Sh'mon's brother, *Andrai* [Andrew]. Sh'mon will never be the same; even his *name* will be forever changed. But except for the *name* the change did not happen overnight. For 3 1/2 years[9] prior to His death and resurrection, and for the rest of Kefa's life after Yeshua's death and resurrection, Yeshua continually molded and shaped and rebuked and restored Kefa time and time again, making "attitude adjustments" and behavior modifications when necessary, and slowly, methodically, teaching him *tongue-control*.

Note the parallel between Sh'mon Kefa and Ya'akov. In the case of both men the action of a brother led them to an encounter with the Creator. In both cases they were rough – even downright seedy – characters who changed slowly. Ya'akov's transformation began when he picked up a rock on Mount Moriyah and put it under his head so he could go to sleep. He encountered the Holy One in the night, then rose and took the rock, poured oil on it, and made it into an altar.

Yeshua saw Sh'mon Kefa as like unto Ya'akov's rock. A rough-hewn stone (no cut stone could become an altar) which, when the oil [the symbol of the *Ruach HaQodesh*, or Spirit of the Holy One] was poured on it, became an altar to give glory to the Holy One. Out of Ya'akov the Holy One brought forth His nation – Israel. Out of the revelation that would be revealed through Sh'mon Kefa's teaching on Shavuot the Holy One would bring forth His *Kehilah* [called out ones – the believing remnant of Ya'akov's descendants].

Note also that as in the opening part of our aliyah regarding Ya'akov the "watering of the sheep" by Kefa could not take place until the sheep were all gathered in one place [the pilgrimage to Y'rushalayim on *Chag Shavuot*], and the *stone was rolled away*. Note also that after the watering the job of Kefa was to "feed" Yeshua's sheep, as the final feeding of the sheep of Charan was to take place (as Ya'akov pointed out) after they were watered by the water of the well where Ya'akov met Rachel.

And do you remember our discussion a little earlier in this shiur about Ya'akov's interactions with 'stones'? Now do you sense why Yeshua changed Sh'mon's name to what in the Greek translation we have comes across as '*petra*' – a *stone*? The Master purposely played on these parallels. Indeed they were the basis for all of the Master's interactions with Kefa – and the rest of His *talmidim*. Yeshua did not, you see, have any intention of starting a new religion. What He was doing was calling all people of the world, starting with His own people the Jews, back to the

[9] The time period is not stated Biblically. The 'three years' of public ministry that is assumed here is just an estimate from tradition.

sh'ma lifestyle modeled for us by Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. Hence when Yeshua said to the one we call *Peter* [a stone], upon this 'rock' I will build my *ecclesia* [called out witness-throng] do you really think He was saying something different than Ya'akov said in Genesis 28:22?

Questions For Today's Study

1. In today's aliyah of Torah:

[A] Why were the three shepherds *sitting by the well and waiting* rather than watering their flocks and seeking pasture for the rest of the afternoon?

[B] How did Ya'akov offend the three shepherds?

[C] How old do you think Rachel was when this event occurred? Check out a Bible Dictionary and some Jewish commentary, and see if they say anything about her age.

[D] What was Lavan's response when Rachel told him that his kinsman Ya'akov was at the well? List each response in the order Torah records it.

[E] Do you think Lavan was sincere in his greeting?

[F] In verse 13, Torah tells us that Ya'akov told Lavan "all these things". What do you think he told him? Address whether you think he told him of the deception he and his mother practiced regarding the birthright, whether you think he told him of the real reason(s) he left home, and whether you think he told him of the experience with the Holy One at the place he named *Beit-El* [Bethel].

[G] In light of your answer to the previous subpart what do you think Lavan meant when he said, in verse 14, "*you are my own flesh and blood*"?

[H] How long did Ya'akov work for Lavan for mere room and board?

[I] Torah introduces us to Lavan's oldest daughter, Leah, who would become the mother of 6 of the tribes (more than any other of Ya'akov's wives), merely by saying she had a certain "quality" of eyes. In Strong's and in Gesenius, look up the word translated in our English Bibles as "weak", and write the Hebrew word and its various meanings.

[J] Is it possible the Torah is giving her a *compliment* by thusly describing her eyes? Explain your thoughts. [In this regard, consider the Hebrew idiom of the "good" or "single" eye, as used by Yeshua, in Matthew 6:22-24].

[K] If the Torah in describing Leah to us is using the Hebrew idiom of the eye, rather than referring to a physical condition, what do you think it is trying to tell us?

[L] Does the Torah ever say anything bad about Leah? If so, what and where? What seems to be Leah's primary motivation in life?

[M] By what two phrases does Torah describe Rachel, Lavan's youngest sister?

[N] In Strong's and in Gesenius look up the words translated as "lovely", "form", and "beautiful" [NIV]. Write the Hebrew words [in Hebrew letters, with

vowel markings] and describe the word pictures these words present.

[O] What do you think Torah wants us to know about Rachel at this point?

[P] How many years into Lavan's service does Ya'akov receive Rachel as his wife?

[Q] In verse 30 it says that Ya'akov "loved" Rachel "*more than Leah*". What do you think this means, and why do you think it was so?

[R] Does Torah describe anything "bad" about Rachel? If so, what and where is the information found?

2. In today's reading from the haftarah the prophet Hoshea continues giving voice to the Holy One's indictment of the Northern Kingdom [Israel], descended from Ya'akov's sons Efrayim and Menashe. The timing of Hoshea's message is shortly before the invasion of Israel by the sons of Ashur, who will take them into captivity, beginning the Diaspora that continues even today.

The tribes of which Efrayim and Menashe are the head are about to go into captivity. But they are not unloved.

Yet I am the Holy One your God from the land of Mitzrayim; and you will know no god but Me,
lo teda umoshia ayin bilti *[And besides me there is no savior].*

I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.
According to their pasture, so were they filled;
They were filled, and their heart was exalted.
al-ken shechechuni *[Therefore they have forgotten me].*

Therefore am I to them like a lion; like a leopard I will lurk by the path.
I will meet them like a bear that is bereaved of her cubs,
v'eikra segor libam *[and will tear the covering of their heart].*
And there I will devour them like a lioness. The wild animal will tear them.

You are destroyed, Yisra'el, because you are against me - against your help.
Ehi malkeicha eifo *[Where is your king now] that he may save you in all your cities?*
V'shofteicha *[and your judges], to whom you said,*
T'nah-li melech v'sarim *['Give me a king and princes?']*

I have given you a king in my anger, and have taken him away in my wrath.

[A] How does the Holy One describe the sin of the Northern Kingdom [see verse 6].

[B] In verses 7-8 Hosea uses a series of verb phrases in sequence, to describe what the Holy One is going to do to address the sin of Israel. List, in sequence, the things the Holy One is going to do.

[C] In the same verses, Hosea describes the Holy One, as He engages in the actions you have just described, as having a resemblance to various types of animals. List in order the animals the Holy One will act like.

[D] What does the Holy One say will happen to the dynasty [the line of kings]

of the Northern Kingdom?

3. In today's B'rit Chadasha reading *Sh'mon* [Peter], a burly fisherman from *Kafer-Nahum* [Capernaum] meets the Rabbi from Natzeret [Nazareth] for the first time.

[A] We are told the name on one of Yochanan the Immerser's talmidim, who followed Yeshua after Yochanan revealed Him as "the Lamb of God". What is this man's name, and what does it mean?

[B] Look up as much information as you can about this individual (in Smith's Bible Dictionary or other resource material) and write a one-page essay on his life and deeds.

[C] Who was the first man to whom this man introduced Messiah?

[D] Why do you think English-speaking people today all call this second man "Peter"?

[E] In verse 41 the former talmid of Yochanan introduces Kefa to Yeshua by saying "*We have found the Messiah*". In Strong's, look up the words translated as "found" and "Messiah". Write the Greek words and their definitions. Then find the corresponding Hebrew words and write them, and describe the Hebraic word pictures they present.

[F] What do you think led Andrew to the conclusion that Yeshua was the Messiah? What evidence did he have?

May your eye be good.
And may you learn to recognize the inner beauty God has placed in others.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 85:4-7

Turn us, God of our salvation, and cause your indignation toward us to cease.
Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you draw out your anger to all generations?

Won't you revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?
Show us your lovingkindness, O Holy One.
Grant us your 'salvation'.