

purely for Hashem's sake. *L'shem Shomayim* means that a person does not retain a vestige of personal interest for himself. Everything that he does is purely for the sake of glorifying Hashem. He applies the analogy of a community *darshan*, or *maggid*, who preaches weekly, neither for pay, nor for accolade, but simply to glorify Hashem. What would happen if another *darshan*, speaker, came to town and offered his services? Would the present *darshan* desist and embrace him with open arms – even if it meant having another voice in town? If the first *darshan* cried, "Foul," and refused to allow another speaker (truthfully this applies to another "entity": shul, minyan, school, business, etc.) it would indicate that his *l'shem Shomayim* was nothing more than a sham. He was acting purely for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. It is very much like the humble man whose humility seems to come into question when someone does not give him proper respect.

Our *Imahos* acted purely *l'shem Shomayim*. Certainly, they each desperately wanted to be the progenitress of as many *shevatim* as possible. Rachel sacrificed to procure the *dudaim*, fragrant flowers, from Leah, in the hope that, as a result, she would be blessed with child. Leah was willing to sell the *dudaim*, so that Yaakov would be with her that night. Nonetheless, they were each willing to give up their greatest yearning (to have another son), if it meant not hurting the other. Leah was expecting a boy, but, if it were to cause an infringement on her sister's feelings, she did not want it. She would rather have a daughter than a son that would result in her sister's hurt feelings. Furthermore, Rachel had waited patiently for seven years to marry Yaakov, and, in a split second decision, she gave it all up just so that her sister, Leah, would not be hurt.

We all seek spiritual growth. We all want to glorify Hashem through *mitzvah* performance. We all want to perform good deeds, carry out charitable acts to help those in need and less fortunate. If our aspirations and goals, however, might impinge on those of someone else, who, as a result, will be hurt, then our *bein Adam la'Makom*, relationship with Hashem (*vis-à-vis* our spiritual activities), is at the expense of our *bein adam la'chaveiro*, relationships with man. Hashem does not want such activities from us, and neither should we.

Va'ani Tefillah

ברך עלינו ד' אלקינו את השנה הזאת
Bareich Aleinu... es ha'shanah ha'zos. Bless on our behalf... this year.

We pray to Hashem for sustenance. This is an indication that we realize that sustenance comes from Hashem. We receive His sustenance through the various media that He employs on our behalf. We, of course, think that how we earn a living is our choice, when, in fact, it is totally from Hashem Who guides and directs us. The choices we make coincide with what Hashem wants us to do. In other words, when we do not achieve success at one position, it means that we should move on to another. Quite possibly, Hashem does not want us to earn our livelihood this way.

Hashem has the wherewithal to provide for everyone, and, in fact, He does. What we fail to understand is that Hashem provides for those who study His Torah. One should never make the foolish mistake of thinking that, by studying Torah, he is wasting time that could be spent earning a living. On the contrary, it is only through his spiritual endeavor that he merits material sustenance.

In his commentary to the *Siddur*, the *Kol Bo* observes that the prayer for sustenance begins with a *bais* and ends with a *mem*. The *Torah Sheh'b'Ksav*, Written Law, begins with a *bais*, while the *Torah Sheh'Baal Peh*, Oral Law, begins with a *mem*. A person who studies the Written Law that begins with *bais* and studies the Oral Law that begins with *mem* will merit Hashem's sustenance. The pursuit of Torah learning will not impede our ability to generate a livelihood. On the contrary, Hashem provides for those who learn Torah.

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Parashas Vayeitzei

תשע"ה

פרשת ויצא

ואולם לזו שם העיר לראשונה

However, Luz was the city's name originally. (28:19)

A man goes through life – and then he passes to the next world – the real world, the world of Truth. What is left of all the years that he spent on this world? Nothing but memories: no money; no material assets; no distinction – only memories. In order to perpetuate themselves, people build monuments, erect buildings, make tributes to their achievements. Why? So that they will be remembered. We are so fickle. Everything is for one purpose: so that the next generation will not forget us. No one wants to be forgotten, but are we prepared to lead a life that will engender positive memories, so that we will impart to our children and all future generations an enduring legacy of value? The barometer is quite simple: unless one lives a life worth remembering, he will be slowly forgotten, relegated to mausoleums of antiquity.

This is how it has been throughout time. People leave mementos. Wealthy people build cities, villas, skyscrapers with their names emblazoned on them, as if this will ensure their eternal perpetuation. Others erect monuments; some even place their picture on their headstones. There was one city, however, the town of Luz, where this was not necessary. Why? Because no one ever died in Luz. They lived on and on. Apparently, the *Malach Ha'Maves*, Angel of Death, had no permit to enter Luz.

Horav Sholom Yosef Elyashiv, zl, has a deeper understanding concerning the renaming of Luz to *Bais Kail* (Beth El). During the tenure of our Patriarch, Yaakov *Avinu*, the goal of the average mindset was: How does one "establish" himself in the idyllic city of Luz? Imagine living in a city in which no one dies! It would be – utopia! The quality of life in such a city must be outstanding. One would think that the real estate agents and power brokers of that era would have converged on Luz from all four points/directions in the world. Who would not want to set up shop in Luz? Real estate must have been at a premium. Who would not give up his life's savings to be freed from the clutches of the Angel of Death?

By the way, whatever happened to Luz? There is no *zeicher*, remembrance, of it. It is gone; it disappeared, as if it had never existed. Does it make sense that such an extraordinary city should become extinct as if it had never existed? *Rav Elyashiv* explains that Yaakov changed all of that. He visited Luz and called out, "He who wants to memorialize himself, to see to it that he perpetuates himself, should be cognizant of one vital fact: Every moment that he dedicates to Torah study will remain in his behalf forever. It will be an everlasting remembrance." Torah is

Hashem's Divine manuscript, His blueprint for life. Yaakov "changed" the name of Luz to *Bais Kail*. He told the people that if they truly want everlasting life, then it can only be in the "House of G-d," within the four cubits of *halachah*. To think that Luz will save a person from the Angel of Death is ludicrous. When a person's time is up, the *Malach Ha'Maves* will find some way to "convince" the person to leave Luz. The angel might not be able to enter, but when one's time is up, the angel will find a way to perform his "ritual."

Nothing – absolutely nothing – can perpetuate a person's life like his connection with Torah. *Bais Kail*, the House of G-d, is the place where we can aspire to achieve eternity. This is a powerful lesson to all of those who seek an avenue to perpetuate their existence on this world. Buildings, monuments, enclaves will not do it. A building devoted to Torah study is not your common piece of real estate. It is a House of G-d! It is a true tribute to one's life, to one's values.

Eternity does not have to be about money. Torah study is one's *Bais Kail*, whether it is full time, part time, or even an hour a week. Time devoted to spiritual endeavors is everlasting. Every moment that one spends studying Torah, he accrues eternal merit. Our *Tanaaim*, *Amoraim*, *Rishonim*, *Achronim*, *Poskim*, *Rabbanim* and *Roshei Yeshivah* are as alive and vibrant today as when they walked the halls of the *bais hamedrash*. Luz is a figment of one's imagination. One cannot escape death. True life is only in *Bais Kail*.

וישא את קלו ויבך

And he raised his voice and wept. (29:11)

Yaakov *Avinu* wept when he met Rachel *Imeinu*. He meets the girl that he is going to marry, the wife with whom he is destined to build *Klal Yisrael*, and he cries. One would expect a somewhat different reaction. *Rashi* offers two reasons for our Patriarch's anomalous reaction. First, Yaakov saw *b'Ruach ha'Kodesh*, through Divine Inspiration, that Rachel would not be buried near him. Why was Yaakov Divinely inspired at this moment? Was there no other time for Yaakov to see *b'ruach ha'kodesh* that he would not be buried with Rachel? Second, *Rashi* offers a reason for Rachel's loss of her rightful place in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. *Rashi* comments (ibid 30:15), *I'fi she'zilzalah b'mishkav tzaddik*, "Because she belittled the lying of the righteous one" (i.e. being with Yaakov, she traded away the opportunity, thus belittling the value of Yaakov's companionship). Yaakov obviously was troubled over the fact that Rachel was denied burial in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. Otherwise, why would he have cried?

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, suggests that Yaakov's weeping is connected to the previous weeping of his brother, the wicked Eisav. Hashem overlooks nothing. When Yaakov received the blessings which had originally been designated for Eisav, Eisav returned from the field to discover that Yaakov had preceded him in receiving the blessings. As a result, he emitted a *tzaakah gedolah umarah*, a loud, bitter cry" (ibid 27:34). Hashem "repaid" Eisav when Mordechai *ha'Yehudi*, upon hearing of Achashveirosh's evil decree to murder all of the Jews in Shushan, also emitted a mournful cry. When Eisav came demanding the blessings, he had conveniently forgotten his earlier disdain of the blessings.

The Torah is meticulous in its demands of a *tzaddik*, righteous person, *k'chut ha'saarah*, like a hair breadth. As a result of Yaakov's "purchase" of the *bechorah*, birthright of the firstborn, from Eisav, Leah, who had previously been destined to marry Eisav, was transferred to Yaakov. Thus, the original place in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah* that had been set aside for Rachel was transferred to Leah. Yaakov caused pain to Eisav, a pain which spurred Eisav to weep. As a result, Yaakov had to experience "pay back." It was now his turn to weep. Since he was the *bechor*, firstborn, by purchase, Rachel could no longer be buried next to him. Thus, he wept.

Rashi offers a second reason for Yaakov crying: "He came empty handed." Apparently, when Yitzchak came for Rivkah, he came carrying jewelry and other material gifts. Yaakov, on the other hand, had nothing. This caused him pain, which he expressed by weeping. Let us analyze this. Where did Lavan get the utter *chutzpah* to exchange Leah for Rachel? Knowing Lavan's character, it could have been only because Yaakov was defenseless, since he was poor. No one challenges or pulls one over on a powerfully rich man. If Yaakov would have arrived laden with jewelry, Lavan would have bent over backward to give him Rachel. His *chutzpah* was the direct result of Yaakov's indigence.

This is why Yaakov cried. He realized that, as a result of his poverty level, he was no longer a "player." Lavan could do to him whatever he wanted. As a result, he lost Rachel. Therefore, he wept.

On the other hand, we know that Yaakov lost his money to Elifaz, Eisav's son/agent, who was sent to kill Yaakov. The Patriarch convinced Elifaz that poor is as good as dead, so he told Elifaz, "Take my money!" Had Eisav not sent Elifaz, Yaakov would have arrived with an abundant sum of money. Rachel would have surely been given to Yaakov – to live happily ever after. Leah would have ended up as Eisav's wife, probably turning him around and saving him. Ultimately, whom did Eisav harm the most? Himself!

This is the story of life. We make plans, thinking that we do what we want. We forget that there is "Some One" in charge, that there is a Divine Plan. Who loses out in the end? We do.

In his "Illuminations of the Maggid," Rabbi Paysach Krohn cites a quote (which I believe he heard from *Rebbeitzin Chavi Wagshal* of Manchester, England): "*Any fool can count the seeds in one apple, but only the Highest Power can count the apples in one seed.*" Only Hashem knows the potential that lies in each and every seed. He knows what it can produce and the many offshoots that can be derived from it. As Rabbi Krohn observes, a seed can be anything. Any action that we perform can generate awesome, far-reaching

ramifications that can go on earning incredible spiritual reward for us. One can only imagine the effect that a "good morning" with a smile has on someone who is unsure of himself. Curing a person from depression often means making him feel good about himself, preserving and encouraging his self-esteem. It could be listening to someone. One kind word, one good deed, one smile is all that is necessary. In some instances, it could be a game-changer in a person's life.

As the seed germinates, we are unaware of its growth. In fact, we are often not even cognizant of the planting of the seed. It is only much later, when we introspect, that we realize, "Hey! I planted that seed!" Things happen whose meaning eludes us, but Hashem has a plan. He is preserving the seed that someone else has planted. He is nurturing it and allowing it room to grow. We do; we act; but, at the end of the day, we are all spectators. Hashem controls the world. We can only hope to plant the seeds.

As spectators, we are most often relegated to seeing and analyzing the big picture in retrospect. When "things" happen, whether they are "bad things happening to good people" or just occurrences and events which, to our small minds, are inexplicable, we wonder, we question, we accept, but we might have to wait a lifetime to be able to see how everything fits into its proper place. In his "Living Emunah," Rabbi David Ashear cites a powerful explanation rendered by *Horav Shlomo Kluger, zl*, to the well-known *Chazal* which depicts Rabbi Akiva's martyrdom at the hands of the Romans.

After such cruel torture, which the mind can hardly imagine, Rabbi Akiva's soul finally ascended to its rightful place in Heaven. The Angels had great difficulty understanding the "reward" that this preeminent sage had received for his extreme dedication to Torah. Hashem's response was straightforward: If the Angels will not remain silent, Hashem would return the world to its pre-Creation state – complete nothingness. Why could Hashem not have simply countered, "You do not understand My ways." Why was it necessary to threaten to destroy the world?

Rav Shlomo Kluger answers by drawing a powerful analogy to a king who commissioned a master tailor to make a magnificent robe for him. The king provided the tailor with sufficient gold and silver from which to make the threads to be used for this exquisite garment. It took some time, but the tailor devoted himself to his work, and, in the end, he provided an outstanding piece of work. The king was bowled over by the beauty of the robe. The king's officers, however, were quite upset and jealous that the king was gushing over the tailor at their expense. Jealousy always leads to no good, and this instance was no different. The officers spread a rumor that the tailor had pocketed some of the gold and silver. The king believed his officers, despite the tailor's strong protests that he would never lie. The king's response was what the officers figured would end the entire problem, "Prove it!"

The tailor replied, "My king, there is only one way in which I can prove my innocence: by taking apart every thread of the robe and weighing it, in order to show his highness that I used everything that I received to make the robe. Otherwise, I have no way of proving my innocence." The king understood that this was impossible. He believed the tailor.

This was Hashem's answer to the Angels. If they would want to understand the "reward" received by Rabbi Akiva, Hashem would have to unravel the entire world to show how every single event that ever occurred fits into place as part of His Divine Plan. Every event, from the beginning of time until the end, is interconnected. It is beyond the scope of our limited abilities to understand this – unless each and every event is placed before us and scrutinized. Hashem, however, has it all before Him at all times; thus, He is able to see the entire garment all at once.

One last story demonstrates how little we see and how much less we are aware of everything that comprises any single event. A rabbi and his wife lived in a small town in France that, alas, had no functioning *mikvah*. The nearest *mikvah* was a few hours away by car. They decided to do something about it. Their fundraising efforts received no success. It was not a project that interested the small Jewish population. Not being people to give up easily, they decided to fund the project from their own savings, which meant subsisting on bread and water to save sufficient funds, so that they could transform one room in their modest home into a *mikvah*. It took six years of saving and living frugally, but they did it. Can one imagine the pain and devastation that enveloped them when their two-year old son crawled into the room, fell into the *mikvah* and tragically drowned? All of the sacrifice, everything that they had given up - for what? To lose their only child? They were inconsolable.

One night the soul of their little boy appeared to the rabbi in a dream and informed him that the anguish the father was suffering over the tragic death of the son was causing his soul pain. "You do not understand my background. I had lived 900 years ago as one of the early *Baalei Tosfos*, early commentators to the *Talmud*. I was murdered during a pogrom against the Jews of France. I did not undergo purification in a *mikvah*, thus, my soul was unable to reach the highest level it could attain. For all these years, my soul waited for the purest *mikvah*. Your *mikvah*, which was built on the foundation of pure sacrifice, was the perfect place. I was able to come back as your young son, and, after drowning, I was buried according to the strictest standards of *halachah*. To demonstrate the veracity of my words, within the coming year, you and mommy will be blessed with a little girl, all because of mommy's strict adherence to the *mitzvah of challah!*"

The next morning, the rabbi's wife woke up and told her husband that she had dreamt about *challah*. "Can you imagine?" she asked. "Yes," her husband said, and he told her the "rest of the story." And now – we too know the rest of the story. We experience so many occurrences that we do not understand, but, rest assured, Heaven has an explanation for everything.

ואחר ילדה בת ותקרא את שמה דינה

Afterward, she bore a daughter and she called her name, Dinah. (30:21)

Everyone wants to get ahead, to rise to the summit of the spiritual ladder. What are we willing to sacrifice in order to achieve spiritual distinction? Are we willing to expend time and effort, give up financial security all for the purpose of spiritual achievement? The answer obviously should be a resounding, "Yes." Nothing should stand in the way of spiritual ascendancy. It cannot, however,

be achieved on the "back" of someone else: a friend or even someone who is not a friend. Achieving closeness with Hashem cannot and should not be achieved at the expense of another Jew's feelings or sensitivities, regardless of the veracity and legitimacy – or lack thereof – of those emotions.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, makes this observation based on the ethical behavior of our Patriarch, Yaakov *Avinu*, and our Matriarchs, Rachel *Imeinu* and Leah *Imeinu*. Leah gave birth to six *shevatim*, tribes, sons, while Rachel gave birth to Yosef and Benjamin. Bilhah and Zilpah each gave birth to two sons. It was, however, not supposed to have been this way. Leah had a seventh child, a daughter, Dinah. The root of the name is derived from *din*, judgment. *Rashi* explains that Leah chose this name by design. Apparently, our Matriarchs were aware that there would be a total of twelve *shevatim*. Thus, when Leah became pregnant with a seventh child, she became concerned, lest she have seven sons, and her sister, Rachel, would have only one. This would mean that Rachel would have fewer sons than even Bilhah and Zilpah, who originally had maidservant status. Leah made a judgment and prayed that Hashem change the gender of her fetus from male to female – resulting in a little girl, whom she named Dinah, after her "judgment."

כי אתה ידעת את עבדתי אשר עבדתיך

For you are aware of my service that I labored for you.

30:26)

Imagine in today's day and age, a man working for fourteen years – day and night – exposed to the elements – not for money to provide his family – but for the right to have a family! Yaakov *Avinu* slaved for fourteen years – not to provide for his family – but just so that he could marry Lavan's two daughters, who came to the table without any dowry. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, observes that those fourteen years serve as the bedrock, the foundation, upon which the national existence and family life of the House of Yaakov are rooted. These fourteen years did not constitute an act of chivalry or romance. They provided the shining gateway to that precious treasure of human achievement: the Jewish family. No more important unit in Jewish life exists than the Jewish family. That is where success begins, and, sadly, where a person's misfortune is rooted. A strong, happy, loving family breeds success. An unhappy family, marked by depression and strife, sets the stage for misfortune.

These fourteen years that Yaakov devoted to working are the highest tribute that a man can make to his wife. Yaakov taught us how a Jewish husband regards his wife by how he slaved fourteen years for a suitable partner in marriage. Yaakov's actions defy the inane prattle concerning Orthodoxy's degradation of the Jewish woman in marriage. Where else – what other religion – where, but in Orthodox Judaism, is the woman so venerated? At the end of fourteen years, Yaakov was back where he started – only now he had familial responsibilities. His cares had multiplied. Fourteen years earlier, when he was alone and penniless, he had made a commitment to Hashem. Now, fourteen years later, he was still penniless, but he had amassed the greatest Jewish treasure which money cannot buy: a family.

The *Mashgiach* considers this exemplary behavior to be a demonstration of true *l'shem Shomayim*, acting