

## THE TORAH IN EXILE

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

**It is written, “He looked, and behold – a well in the field. ...and the stone over the mouth of the well was large. ... When Jacob saw Rachel...he rolled the stone off the mouth of the well” (Bereshith 29:2-10).**

Rashi cites the Midrash (Bereshith Rabba 70:12) in explaining that Jacob moved the stone “as one removes a cork from a bottle, to let you know how great his strength was.”

It is somewhat surprising to say that the Torah is praising Jacob for his great strength. When it comes to our father Jacob, the greatest of the Patriarchs, the third support of the Divine Chariot – who remained within the four cubits of Halachah without moving from the tent of Torah throughout his life – praising him for his strength seems like an affront to his honor. What can this be compared to? It is like a talmid chacham who gains complete mastery of the Talmud, but is praised for being able to pray Ashrei by heart! The prophet Jeremiah transmitted Hashem’s word: “Let not the strong man glorify himself with his strength...for only with this may one glorify himself: Contemplating and knowing Me” (Jeremiah 9:22-23).

We also need to understand why Jacob rolled away the stone only when he saw Rachel arriving with Lavan’s flock. The shepherds were already waiting for their friends to help them roll away the stone and water their flocks. Therefore if Jacob was capable of doing this all by himself, why did he wait for Rachel to arrive? We cannot say that Rachel arrived as soon as they finished telling Jacob that they were waiting for their friends to help them move the stone, at which point Jacob moved it. In fact the Torah explicitly connects Jacob’s action to Rachel’s arrival, even before he approached and kissed her. The act of rolling away the stone is specifically connected to Rachel’s arrival (see what the Sforno says in this regard). We need to ask what the connection is between the two.

Concerning the arrival of Jacob’s future wife at the well, we know that the Sages have highlighted this detail. In fact when Moshe fled to Midian in order to escape from Pharaoh, the Torah states: “He sat by a well” (Shemot 2:15). Rashi explains: “He [Moshe] learned from Jacob, who found his mate at the well.” We need to ask why a man meets his wife by a well, and why Moshe learned this precisely from Jacob, not from the other Patriarchs.

We may say that when Jacob departed for Haran after having left the Beit HaMidrash of Shem and Ever, he feared for his future and that of his descendants, since he would have to live among evildoers for a long time. Hence he turned to a well – for as we know, water always represents Torah (Bava Kama 82a) – and thereby demonstrated his thirst and quenched it at the well with spiritual energy before confronting the dangers awaiting him in Haran. Now the term be’er (“well”) has the same numerical value as ger (“stranger”). This means that when the Torah is in exile, when it is not in the Beit HaMidrash, it is like a “well” that we can only draw water from with effort. That is, the Torah is concealed

and requires an effort to be revealed. Yet when it is in the Beit HaMidrash, it is like a spring of living water from which water spontaneously gushes. In that case, all we have to do in order to quench our thirst is to open our heart and mind. The passage, “How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel. They stretch out like streams, like gardens by a river, like aloes planted by Hashem” (Bamidbar 24:5-6) is explained by the Sages in the following way: “Just as streams raise man from a state of impurity to one of purity, likewise tents raise man from the scale of guilt to the scale of merit” (Berachot 16a). Rashi explains that these “tents” are houses of study, meaning that Torah learning must take place in the Beit HaMidrash, which is compared to an abundantly flowing stream.

Jacob saw a large stone over the mouth of the well, meaning the evil inclination, which is compared to a stone (see Kiddushin 30b: “If it is of stone, it will dissolve [i.e., wear away]”). This is the stone that prevents a person from drawing the waters of understanding, for it blocks the opening of the well. It blocks the heart of man, as it is written: “Sin is crouching at the door” (Bereshith 4:7). This is the difficulty that exists in exile, when the Torah is belittled. The Sages explain that after the destruction of the Temple, the wellsprings of wisdom were blocked, for all wisdom emanated from the Temple and the Divine service taking place there. At the present time, it is like a well from which we can only draw water with great difficulty.

Now that Jacob was in exile and yearned to cleave to the Torah and draw forth its life-giving strength, he threw himself at this stone. He saw Rachel coming with the flock, and when Rachel arrived – the one who was to be his helper in life – just her very presence helped him to roll away the heavy stone from the well. In fact, the whole raison d’être of a wife is to help her husband in learning Torah, as the Gemara says: “Any man who has no wife lives...without Torah” (Yebamot 62b). When Jacob saw Rachel coming to help him draw from the well of Torah even in Haran, a place so far removed from the atmosphere of the Beit HaMidrash, he gathered the strength of all 63 years that he had spent learning Torah, distanced the evil inclination, and drew water from the well.

This explanation is marvelously in line with what we have said elsewhere, namely that Jacob, who by his nature was a man “abiding in tents,” was completely connected to the Torah like Ben Azzai. He did not need the help of a woman, for at that point his Torah was like a spring from which he could obtain water without any help whatsoever, the evil inclination being annulled within the walls of the Beit HaMidrash. We know that the Sages have advised us to “drag him [the evil inclination] to the Beit HaMidrash” (Kiddushin 30b). Furthermore, Jacob was completely immersed in learning Torah for 63 years, without fearing the evil inclination in any way. Yet by Hashem’s will, he was forced to flee from Esav in Beersheba in order to father 12 tribes. Thus when he went into exile by leaving the walls of the Beit HaMidrash, the Torah became a well, and therefore he needed a helper to roll away the stone from its opening.



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All this allows us to fully understand the teaching of the Sages, who said that Moshe followed Jacob's example and went to sit by a well in order to look for a wife. Moshe also found himself in a situation like Jacob's, having been forced to flee into exile from his home and surroundings. Indeed, Moshe was a stranger in Midian, as it is said: "I have been a stranger in a foreign land" (Shemot 2:22), and he also feared for his life outside the walls of the Beit HaMidrash, when he was far from his Jewish brothers. He therefore followed in the footsteps of Jacob and went

to sit by a well in order to cleave to the Torah and drink from its waters. From Jacob, he learned that the Torah constitutes the only objective and hope of survival in a foreign land, amid a completely different way of life. Thus in Midian, when Moshe found himself in a strange environment and the Torah was like a well, he sought a wife, one who would help him cleave to the Torah. That is precisely what Jacob did when he emerged from the Beit HaMidrash in fleeing from Esav, when his Torah also became like a well. In order to confront the evil inclination in exile, he needed a helper in life and he sought a wife, namely Rachel.

## Real Life Stories

### It is written, "He summoned his brothers to eat bread" (Bereshith 31:54).

Special joy was felt among those who frequented the synagogue of the Maharsha, Rabbi Shemuel Eliezer Eidels, one of the great commentators of Gemara. His noble and impressive personality created a peaceful and serene atmosphere in synagogue that attracted many city residents.

Thus it was not surprising that the Rav was concerned when Reb Shemuel, the town baker, arrived in synagogue one day looking dejected. Whenever people were preparing to start the prayer service, the Rav would usually throw a quick glance at the faithful, which for him was enough to get a sense of their mood and spiritual state.

"Reb Shemuel has been praying here for a long time, and I've never seen him looking so concerned about something. There might be a problem, so I'll go ask him," thought the Maharsha. He immediately went over to see him as the faithful were checking their tzitzit.

In seeing the Maharsha personally making his way towards him, Reb Shemuel arose from his seat with fear. He tried, not without some difficulty, to appear normal and to smile slightly. With tenderness and affection, the Maharsha spoke to him: "My dear Reb Shemuel, what is happening? Why do you look so sad? If you're worried about getting ready for prayer, you're well aware that it is better accepted in joy!"

Reb Shemuel could not hide his inner turmoil. With tears in his eyes, he began to pour out his heart to the Rav:

"You know that my family and I came to live here, in Austria, a few years ago. Until now, we've been able to make a living – my wife sews and mends garments, and I sell bread and baked goods to the townspeople. We have never known good days, but we've never complained. We're happy with the little that we have.

"For some time, however, my wife has been suffering from pain in her wrists, and she can't sew as she used to. What's more is that she needs costly medical treatments. All our finances now depend on me. In order to make up for my wife's lost wages, I'm working two nights a week and preparing twice as much bread as usual to sell on market day.

"Most buyers live in small villages outside of town. Naïvely, I thought that after a day of such exhausting work, they would certainly be happy to buy a few loaves of fresh bread, and I could make a nice profit from it.

"But this week, I was really disappointed. Not only did I have many expenses as usual, I worked a long time kneading and baking a large quantity of bread to sell at the market. But yesterday, after having spent the entire day at my stall in the market, I only sold a few loaves. I returned home with almost all of my merchandise unsold, and without a cent in my pocket.

"My children, who were hoping for some new shoes to replace their torn ones, realized that it was better to abandon their dreams. In the meantime, my debts are multiplying and I don't even have enough money to pay my rent.

"Tell me, how am I going to get through this? What do I have to do?" he finished with a cry of despair.

The Maharsha's brain then began to churn. The situation had to be dealt with before the prayer service started. In fact maybe there was something he could do that would allow Reb Shemuel to pray with joy, as he usually did.

Suddenly, the Maharsha's eyes lit up as he exclaimed: "It's truly the hand of Providence! We're preparing a family meal for the yahrtzeit of my father-in-law, and we'll need a large quantity of bread. In fact just this morning, my wife told me that she didn't know where to order it from!"

"Perhaps you can help by bringing us all your bread? Obviously, I'll pay you generously for it."

Submerged in emotion, his face radiating, the baker promised the Maharsha that he would fulfill his request as soon as the prayers concluded. Thus he began to pray with joy and enthusiasm, as he used to.

The Maharsha's wife was surprised to see an unexpected "guest" knocking at her door, starting to energetically unload heavy bags of bread. However she didn't allow her surprise to show. The baker collected his money and returned home, beaming with joy.

The Maharsha, however, still didn't rest easy. He continued to rack his brain trying to come up with a permanent solution for a Jew who was in distress, thus preventing him from having to rely on other people's donations in order to live. After thinking about it, an idea suddenly came to him. Silently and discreetly, he did what he had to do and said what he had to say. Only then did he return home, his mind at peace.

Someone came knocking at the baker's door the next morning. Reb Shemuel opened it, only to be left speechless. He was stunned to realize who was standing there: An emissary from the Duke, who lived in the royal castle by the edge of town. The emissary carried a request from the Duke: Having heard about the quality of Reb Shemuel's bread, he was now placing a permanent order for 100 loaves of bread, each day, for the personnel of the castle.

For Reb Shemuel, it was truly a gift from Heaven. From then on, his situation began to completely change. A little later, his only competition in town moved away, and all his clients went to see Reb Shemuel. His depressing bakery, which had been almost deserted until then, was now filled with people throughout the day.

Not long afterwards, his wife recovered from her injury and started back to work, just like before. Reb Shemuel had no doubts as to the effort made by the Maharsha in his prayers to awaken Divine mercy for them. Nevertheless, when his wife recovered, he ran to the Rav to announce the good news to him. All in all, the Maharsha had been the only one to perceive the baker's distress, and therefore it was fitting for him to also see the baker's joy!

## Guard Your Tongue

### Even if He Remains Silent

Just as we have explained that it is forbidden by the din to believe Lashon Harah, even if it is said in the presence of the subject, it is also forbidden to accept Rechilus if it is said in the presence of the subject. For example, suppose that Reuven, Shimon, and Levi are all together, and Reuven tells Shimon what Levi said about him (Shimon) behind his back. Even if Levi remains silent and does not defend himself, this is no proof that the information is true. Even if Levi usually responds or defends himself, his silence does not prove that what Reuven has said is true. – Chafetz Chaim

### Extinguish the Lights

It is written, “He encountered the place and spent the night there, for the sun had set” (Bereshith 28:11).

Our Sages say, “For the sun had set – this teaches us that G-d did not make the sun go down at its regular time [but earlier], in order to speak to Jacob in complete discretion [during a dream at night].

To what can this be compared? It is like a close friend of the king who only visits him rarely [which is why the king wants to be with him alone and meet him in private]. The king therefore tells his servants, “Extinguish the lights [of the house] and extinguish the lamps [of the courtyard, so that no one remains in the courtyard or in the house], so I can meet discreetly with my friend.” – Yalkut Shimoni

### Reward and Punishment

It is written, “Behold, angels of G-d ascending and descending upon it” (Bereshith 28:12).

Rabbi Levi said in the name of Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman: Because the ministering angels revealed G-d’s secrets [they informed Lot of Sodom’s destruction], they were banished from their precincts for 138 years.

Where and when did they return to Heaven? Now, as it is written: “ascending and descending.” Those who ascended were the angels of Sodom, followed by others who descended. – Yalkut Shimoni

### A Simple Calculation

It is written, “Of all that You give me, I will surely give You the tenth” (Bereshith 28:22).

Rabbi Yehoshua of Siknin said in Rabbi Levi’s name: A certain heathen asked Rabbi Meir: “Do you not maintain that Jacob was truthful?”

“Certainly,” replied Rabbi Meir.

“And did he not say: Of all that You give me, I will surely give You the tenth?” the heathen pursued.

“Yes,” said Rabbi Meir, “and therefore he separated the tribe of Levi, which is one in ten.”

“Then why did he not separate a tenth of the two remaining tribes?” continued the heathen.

“Were there only 12 tribes?” Rabbi Meir replied. “Surely there were 14, for it says: Ephraim and Manasseh, even as Reuben and Simeon, shall be mine [Bereshith 48:5].”

“Then the difficulty is even greater,” the heathen exclaimed, “for if you add water, you must add flour!”

“Will you admit that there were four matriarchs?” said Rabbi Meir.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Then deduct the four firstborn of the four matriarchs from these, since the firstborn is holy, and what is holy does not exempt what is holy,” said Rabbi Meir.

“Happy are the people in whose midst you dwell!” exclaimed the heathen. – Bereshith Rabba 70:7

### Brother to Brother

It is written, “Jacob said to them, ‘My brothers, where are you from?’” (Bereshith 29:4).

We should always maintain good relations with people, considering them as “brothers” and “friends,” and we should greet them first. Thus from Heaven, angels of peace and mercy will give us priority (measure for measure).

### At His Foot

It is written, “Hashem blessed you at my foot” (Bereshith 30:30).

What does the expression *leragli* (“at my foot”) mean? Lavan had run to meet Jacob; he “embraced him and kissed him” to know if he had any money, but found nothing. He then invited him to stay with him, thinking that he was hiding his wealth somewhere at his foot (*regel*). Lavan went to dig at the supposed spot, and there he found a wealth of gold and silver.

That is why Jacob used the term *leragli*.

### Avoiding the Appearance of Evil

It is written, “And it came to pass, at the time that the flocks conceived” (Bereshith 31:10).

Jacob recounted this incident in great detail (to his wives) so they would not suspect him of being a thief. From here we learn that a man is obligated to be on good terms with others so as not to appear evil in their eyes. The same is true even in regards to one’s wife and children, or his subordinates. – Midrash Sechel Tov

## In the Light of the Parsha

### A Person’s True Character is Only Seen When He Leaves Home

It is written, “The children struggled within her” (Bereshith 25:22).

Our Sages explain that when Rebecca passed by synagogues and houses of study, Jacob struggled to emerge from her womb. However when she was home, he did not try to emerge. Puzzled by this, she thought: “I’m surprised, for if the child is destined to become a *tzaddik*, why doesn’t he struggle to emerge at home,” for as we know, Hashem’s presence dwelled in Isaac’s home (*Zohar*).

This is what I suggest happened: When Rebecca went to inquire of Hashem in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, she received the following prophetic response: “Know that there are two distinct nations in your womb, two children who are destined to separate from one another. One will be drawn to Torah and the service of G-d, and the other to idolatry. Know as well that they will be recognizable when they are outside. Their paths will be similar as long as they are at home, and the evildoer will even want to act like the righteous. As long as the evildoer lives in his father’s home, his character flaws will not be seen. In fact people will erroneously say, ‘He’s meticulous with every mitzvah, both the light and the heavy.’”

Thus when Jacob and Esav were children and living in the pure and sacred home of Isaac, people could not perceive their true natures, as the Sages have taught (Bereshith Rabba 63:10). It is said that when Esav grew older, he became “a man acquainted with hunting, a man of the field” (Bereshith 25:27). From here we learn that his true character only expressed itself when he became a hunter, and that (since he was a man of the field and left Isaac’s home) his sparks of wickedness make themselves known.

How did this evildoer act when he returned home? He would deceive his father with his sweet words (as explained in Midrash Tanchuma, Toldot 8), saying to him: “Father, how do we classify salt in order to include it in the mitzvah of *ma’aser*?”

Surprised by this, Isaac would exclaim: “My son is meticulous with mitzvot!” However when he went outside, Esav attempted to emulate his idolatrous friends. The result was that he transgressed the entire Torah.

On the other hand, our father Jacob did not always study in the same place. Rather, he would go from yeshiva to yeshiva learning Torah. Nevertheless, although he traveled across the world and understood its futilities, his soul remained attached to Torah. He did not renounce eternal life for the sake of temporary pleasures, but continued to invest himself in Torah all throughout his life.

Among the things for which we eat the fruit in this world, while the principle is reserved for the World to Come, the Sages have included “early attendance at the Beit HaMidrash morning and evening” next to the important mitzvah of honoring one’s father and mother, the mitzvah of demonstrating kindness, and the mitzvah of bringing peace between man and his fellowman, and between husband and wife.

The book Seder HaYom makes a pertinent observation in this regard: It seems that rising early to go to synagogue is not among the mitzvot included in this passage, all of which deal with deeds of kindness, and rising early to go to the Beit HaMidrash is not among the mitzvot that deal with the relationship between man and his fellowman!

It explains things as follows: “Even as such, it is an act of kindness, so to speak, towards the Creator to leave one’s home early morning and night. Since the Shechinah is in exile in our time, it only finds satisfaction within the four cubits of prayer. Whoever rises early to go to synagogue, it is as if he were rising to welcome the Shechinah and to inquire of its welfare. It is comforted and rejoices that a man asks it about its welfare when he is the first to come to synagogue. The Zohar stresses the reward of those who rise early to go to synagogue, providing the example of a king who invites his subjects to a royal feast. It is therefore fitting to include hastening to go to synagogue as a mitzvah in itself, although from a certain point of view it belongs in the category of kindness.”

The mashgiach Rabbi Dov Yaffe Shlita once gave a striking analogy to describe the act of rising early to go to synagogue: For a wedding, the parents of the bride and groom are usually the first to arrive, followed by the immediate family, and then by more distant relatives. The same applies to prayer. The closer the “relationship” a person has with prayer, the earlier he comes to synagogue.

We must realize that a person who is careful to come on time is thereby expressing the importance that prayer holds for him, which in itself constitutes a reason for his prayer to be answered.

## Praying in Synagogue

Rav Moshe Aharon Stern Zatzal was always careful to pray with the community. In this regard, his son recounts that when he was about seven years old, he fell gravely ill. His parents made him promise that if he recovered, he would always make sure to pray with the community. In fact he always made certain, even at the age of eight, to go pray with his father, Rav Yom Tov Lipman, after which he went to cheder, except on those rare occasions when he did not pray with the community because he was ill.

Whenever he was ill, he told his family: “If my fever drops below 39°C, I have to go and pray with the community.” He once said that he remembered in the early morning hours that he had not prayed Arvit at the yeshiva. He thought to himself, “If I’m obligated to pray by myself, I least I’ll go pray at the Kotel.” He therefore took a taxi to the Kotel, and when he arrived, said his son, there was a group of young Frenchmen who had come directly from the airport to pray there. He joined them, for man is led by the path that he chooses to take.

In this regard, he used to say when setting up matches: “The ruin of a ben Torah begins when he prays alone at home. If he is forced to pray alone, he must go to synagogue. Besides the fact that it is a place of prayer, when a person is seen praying alone at home, the home is disparaged.

## Long Life

It is said that the Chatam Sofer’s prayers would usually last a long time. One day, a great Torah figure of the generation asked him: “I’m

surprised that you’re praying for so long today. For you, this represents a negligence in Torah study, since it is said in Mishlei: ‘If one turns his ear away from hearing the Torah, even his prayer will be an abomination’ [Mishlei 28:9].”

The Chatam Sofer replied, “This does not worry me at all, for we have already been promised in Berachot 54b that ‘whoever prolongs his prayer, his days are prolonged.’ As a result, if I prolong my prayer, with G-d’s help I will merit long life. I will therefore be able to compensate for the hours of Torah study that I have missed because of my prayers.”

## Prolonging and Shortening Prayer

One day the saintly Rabbi Uri, known as the Seraph [Angel] of Strelisk, arrived in a certain town. As he normally would, he prayed with tremendous enthusiasm and great devotion, praying for a very long time.

Afterwards, the local rav said to him: “Are you not afraid of wearying the congregation? We find in regards to Rabbi Akiva that when he prayed alone, he would start in one corner of the room and finish in another. Yet when he prayed with the congregation, he shortened his prayer so as not to weary them [Berachot 31a].”

Ravi Uri answered as follows:

“Rabbi Akiva had 24,000 disciples, and there were certainly ten among them for whom the prayer of their teacher was not wearisome. Why did he not pray with them in order not to rush? Because when he prayed with the congregation, meaning that the congregation also prayed with concentration alongside him, then their prayers were immediately heard, and he had no need to prolong it. However when Rabbi Akiva prayed separately from the entire community – when he prayed alone – he was obligated to prolong his prayer in order to make their prayers ascend, in order to make their prayers answered as well.”

The saintly Rebbe of Rozhin Zatzal would pray for a long time, and the saintly Rebbe of Belz would pray quickly. A tzaddik said that words of prayer were very important and precious to both of them, however the Rozhiner loved them so much that he could not easily part from them. As for the Belzer, he yearned so much for prayer that he couldn’t stop himself from running through the letters and words in order to merit them more quickly.

## I Am Prayer

### The Promise

One who prays with the community is promised that his prayer will be heard and accepted as is, meaning that it will not be closely scrutinized. Even if a person is wicked and shameful, Almighty G-d will not scorn his prayer, and all the mitzvot that accompany the public’s prayer will also be favorably accounted to him.

Such is not the case when a person prays alone. He misses out on many benefits, and his prayer will not be accepted by the Most High unless both he and his prayer are perfect. Unless a person is absolutely forced to pray alone, he is harming himself and walking in complete darkness by doing so. The prayer of the community is always important, and it cannot be compared in any way to the prayers of numerous people who are praying separately.

– Peleh Yoetz