

# TRUE RICHES

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Vayeitzei

### True Riches

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This week's parashah relates events that transpired during the 20 years that Yaakov was in the home of Lavan. From the verses, we can discern Yaakov and Lavan's differing attitudes toward wealth. On the one hand, Yaakov prays (28:20) that G-d will "give me bread to eat and clothes to wear." He does not ask for more! Lavan, on the other hand, is jealous when Yaakov becomes wealthy--although Lavan himself becomes wealthy also as a result--and he cheats Yaakov at every turn.

R' Shlomo ibn Gabirol z"l (Spain; approx. 1021-1058) offers the following advice regarding wealth and possessions:

A king said to a wise man, "If you would merely ask, I would support you for the rest of your life." The wise man replied, "Why should I ask for anything, when I am wealthier than you?" "How so?" asked the king. "Because, I am happier with the little I have than you are with the much that you have," replied the wise man. (Mivchar Peninim: Sha'ar Ha'histapkut No. 2)

R' ibn Gabirol also writes: "Accustom your body to be satisfied with what you provide it, lest it ask of you more than you can provide." (Ibid. No. 15)

He writes further: "My son! If you are wealthy, consider yourself to be poor since you are destined to be separated from your wealth [when you die]. Then, consider yourself to be wealthy and you will be happy, even if you are poor." (Ibid., Sha'ar Mitzvat Ha'chacham Livno No. 13)

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"He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place." (28:11)

Rashi z"l comments on the last phrase in the verse: "The word 'that' indicates a limiting statement; in

that place he lay down to sleep, but during the preceding 14 years which he had spent in the academy of Ever [according to the midrash], he never lay down at night for he was constantly engaged in the study of the Torah."

[Ed. note: Contrary to popular perception, Rashi and the midrash which he is quoting do not say that Yaakov did not sleep for 14 years, which is not humanly possible (see Nedarim 15a). Rather, he did not lie down for 14 years. See further below.]

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) writes: Our Sages speak of the Patriarchs and even of later sages in terms that seem unbelievable to us, for example that Yaakov did not lie down for 14 years. Likewise, when one sage of the Gemara wishes to dismiss a statement of another sage, it sometimes uses the expression, "He said that in his sleep." While this statement is meant to be dismissive, R' Wolbe writes, it indirectly indicates the sage's praise--that even in his sleep he spoke words of Torah.

[How can we relate to, or be inspired by, such feats, which seem beyond our reach?] R' Wolbe continues: There are still Jews who perform similarly super-human feats. R' Wolbe writes that he personally knew R' Elya Dushnitzer z"l (1877-1949) of Petach Tikva, a student of the Chafetz Chaim, who did not lie down in a bed on a weeknight. He sat at his shtender and studied until he dozed-off, and then he took a short nap at his shtender and resumed learning. Not so long ago, before electricity was widespread, many Torah scholars would learn with candles in their hands so that the dripping wax would keep them awake. People who could perform such feats had no trouble picturing how Yaakov could avoid laying down for 14 years due to his desire to study Torah. (Shiurei Chumash p.90)

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"And it was, when Yaakov saw Rachel, daughter of Lavan his mother's brother, and the flock of Lavan his mother's brother, Yaakov came forward and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan his mother's brother." (29:10)

Why does the Torah reiterate so many times that Lavan was the brother of Yaakov's mother? Rabbeinu Bachya z"l (Spain; 14th century) answers:

The Torah is informing us that everything Yaakov did for the evil Lavan, he did to honor his own mother.

Alternatively: One might have thought that Yaakov obtained the strength to lift the stone off the well because of a desire to impress Rachel, whom he was seeing for the first time. Therefore, the Torah tells us that Yaakov's actions were motivated entirely by his desire to fulfill his mother's command that he travel to Lavan's home. (Commentary on the Torah)

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"Hashem said to Yaakov, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your native land, and I will be with you.' Yaakov sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock. He said to them, 'I have noticed that your father's disposition is not toward me as in earlier days; but the God of my father was with me. You know that I have served your father with all my might. Yet your father mocked me and changed my wage a hundred times; but G-d did not permit him to harm me.'" (31:3-7)

Once, when R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-1995; one of the leading halachic authorities of the 20th century) was speaking to a young bridegroom, he asked the young man, "If you heard a bat kol / Heavenly voice directing you to relocate your family, what would you do?"

The young man answered, "Of course, I would hurry to fulfill G-d's Will!"

R' Auerbach replied, "That is not the Torah's way! The Torah's expectation would be that you would speak to your wife and convince her that your present location is not good and the new location would be better.

"From where do I know this?" R' Auerbach continued. "From our verses. After Hashem commanded Yaakov, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your native land,' Yaakov called Rachel and Leah and reasoned with them: Your father has mocked me, he has changed my wages, and an angel said we should go home. This teaches the importance of making the extra effort to make the word of G-d understandable to our family members and those we wish to influence." (Minchat Avot p.163)

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"Lavan called it [the marker] 'Yegar Sahaduta," and Yaakov called it 'Gal-ed'." (31:47)

Why does the Torah record the Aramaic name that Lavan gave the place where he and Yaakov entered into a covenant?

R' Avraham Tzahalon z"l (16th century; student of the Arizal) explains: Hashem recorded this in the Torah to indicate that He was not pleased with Yaakov's decision to enter into a covenant with Lavan. [Perhaps the non-Hebrew words in the Torah indicate the "infiltration" of Lavan's influence into the Jewish people.] Rather, Yaakov should have learned from Avraham, who sent Lot away. Make no mistake, R' Tzahalon writes, Avraham did not hate Lot, as is evident from the fact that Avraham went to war to save Lot. Nevertheless, Avraham understood that he had to break his ties with Lot.

R' Tzahalon adds: Do not argue that Yaakov had to make a covenant with Lavan because he and his family were in danger. The mere fact that Lavan proposed a treaty between them was a sign of weakness on Lavan's part.

When the Torah describes the sale of Yosef, it relates that the Ishmaelites were coming from Gilad. Why does the Torah mention this detail? R' Tzahalon explains that the Torah is informing us that Yaakov was being punished for the covenant that he entered into there. ["Gilad" and "Gal-ed" are the

same place.] (Galya Raza)

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## Letters from Our Sages

This letter was sent by R' Avraham Shimon Halevi Ish Horowitz z"l (1876-1943; mashgiach ruchani in Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin in Poland) to a student. It is printed in Naharei Eish, p.88.

With the help of G-d, Erev Shabbat Kodesh Parashat Naso, Zelichov, may G-d protect it, 5694 [1934]

To my beloved student who walks in a faithful path and is G-d-fearing, Simcha Bunim, may his light shine, and may he be revealed through the light of the Torah amidst plenty-

I received your letter and I enjoyed it. May the One who gave you these good things [presumably mentioned in the referenced letter] give you all good things--to find a good shidduch and a good name and to receive favor from G-d in all your dealings.

[A paragraph laying out a program of study for the student is omitted here.]

You should be very happy over your good fortune to know the laws of the Torah clearly, for they represent the Will of the Infinite One, Hashem, the Elokim of Yisrael . . . Study whichever [of the halachic works] that your heart desires--the Rambam, Tur, Bet Yosef, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim or Yoreh Deah, Choshen Mishpat, Even Ha'ezer, as our Sages say, "A person can learn only what he wants to learn." However, this does not mean you should study only when you wish to study. This is why Hashem held the mountain over the heads of Bnei Yisrael even after they accepted the Torah with "Na'aseh ve'nishmah," so that even when a person is in a spiritually depressed state ("katnut ha'mochin") and the desire to accept the Torah is gone, he will still be obligated to do so.

[A paragraph laying out a program of study of mussar/ethical works and chassidut is omitted here.]

My beloved student! Whether I deserve any credit for the fact that you are walking in the way of righteousness, I do not know. It is enough for me that I will find out in the World of Truth. But, my hope is that if you continue in this way and do not let go, you will be a talmid chacham. Know, that the most important principle that you should keep in mind in everything you do is that you are alive only for G-d's honor, not at all for your own sake. Let your own existence become smaller in your eyes, and let the truth of G-d's existence and His holy Torah become greater in your eyes. Do not say, "This level is beyond me, and I cannot achieve it." That is the error of those who go along in falsehood, for it is an express verse, "For Bnei Yisrael are servants to Me, they are My servants, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt." As is well known, a servant has no independent existence. When you consistently keep this in mind, your life will be more pleasant, for you will taste the pleasantness of [closeness to] Hashem.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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