

THE PURPOSE OF CREATION PART VII

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Taking A Stand - Making A Difference

Avraham's legacy was to have introduced monotheism into the world's moral consciousness. However, to do so effectively required a force much greater than the individual Avraham. It required the unmatched strength of a nation committed to G-d and His law. Individuals affect changes in individuals but nations affect changes in nations.

The basis of a nation is the family unit and the book of Bereshis is the story of the Jewish family. It details the development of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yakov as they evolved into the basis of the Jewish nation.

Avraham and Sarah became the first parents of Judaism because they devoted the first 75 years of their lives teaching G-d's existence to the rest of the non-Jewish world. In their merit the Jews, their children, would be granted the responsibility of being the world's "blessing." As the Chosen People they would model for the other nations how to live a divinely mandated life of morals and ethics. However, Avraham and Sarah's personal teaching was considerably curtailed when they moved to Canaan. Their primary interaction with the outside world as teachers happened before they left for Canaan. Once they arrived in Canaan their primary job was securing the physical and spiritual safety of their son Yitzchak.

Yitzchak never left Canaan. His primary work on behalf of himself and the future Jewish nation was internal. It was never intended that Yitzchak leave the relative wilderness of Canaan and travel to the centers of civilization to teach about G-d. His job was to focus on his own spiritual growth and the education of Yakov and Eisav. Yitzchak and Rivkah remained apart from the surrounding culture of Canaan, except when they had no other choice. (e.g. The famine in Parshas Toldos.) Their work was building the inner strength of the family within the confines of the Promised Land.

In last week's Rabbi's Notebook we discussed the regrettable self-exclusion of Avraham's brother's from participating in the building of the Jewish nation and the eventual redemption of the world. We noted that family should be the first focus of our mission to bring the world closer to G-d. However, once Haran and Nachor (Avraham's brothers) excluded themselves from active participation, it was left to Avraham to assume the full responsibility of doing G-d's P.R. work. Therefore, Avraham's

family had to extract from the families of Haran and Nachor those elements essential for the continued development of the Chosen People by marrying the daughters of Haran (Sarah) and Nachor (Rivkah, Rachel, Leah, Billha and Zillpah).

Last week's Parsha started and ended with Yakov and Eisav. Had things been different, Yakov would not have had to purchase Eisav's birthright and taken his blessing. Instead, Eisav would have retained the rights of the firstborn son using the blessings for materialism in the support of Yakov's spirituality. Yakov would have married Rachel and Eisav would have married Leah. Twelve sons would have been born, six from Rachel and six from Leah and history would have been completely revised. Bolstered by the leadership and strength of Eisav, Avraham's grand children would have presented an indomitable force for belief and goodness. Together, Yakov and Eisav would have ushered in the Messianic era. It would have truly been, "the voice of Yakov and the hands of Eisav!"

However, Eisav did not wish to be part of Avraham's legacy; therefore, Yakov bought the birthright and assumed both sides of the equation. He took the blessings for materialism and spirituality and married both Rachel and Leah.

Our national name, Sons of Israel, reflects upon Yakov more so than Avraham and Yitzchak. The Talmud refers to Yakov as the "Chosen of the Fathers". It stands to reason that Yakov the person, his failures and accomplishments, is our national template. Whereas Avraham taught non-Jews before he went to Canaan and Yitzchak focused on the internal strength of the nation, Yakov personifies the Jew's ability to be in exile, maintain his family, and model for the non-Jew what it means to have been formed in the image of the Divine.

What elements are essential for maintaining one's own spirituality while at the same time impacting society as a representative of G-d's intentions?

First of all was Yakov's education. Yakov did not leave the confines of Yitzchak's tent until the year 2171 when he was 63 years old and ready to marry. Given the trouble with Eisav and the need to marry, Yakov was sent by his parents to Lavan's home in Charan. However, before doing so he spent 14 additional years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. Shem had died in the year 2158, however his great-grandson Ever was still alive.

(Ever died in 2187. It is possible that Yakov's departure from the Yeshiva at the beginning of this week's Parsha was motivated by Ever's death. So long as Ever was alive Yakov could justify staying in the Yeshiva and learning from him. Once Ever died there was no one left in the academy more knowledgeable than Yakov; therefore, he could not justify staying any longer.

Under Ever's guidance Yakov honed the teachings of Avraham and Yitzchak with a focus on how to survive and impact the outside world. Avraham died when Yakov was 15 and he may have been too young to appreciate the survival and modeling lessons Avraham could have taught him. Yitzchak was the quintessential purist who remained apart from the rest of the world. His lessons were the essence of spirituality, personal commitment, strength and courage. However, he could not impart

to Yakov the nuances of how to engage and interact with the impure world of perversity and idolatry. On the other hand, Ever had been a part of that world; Yitzchak's was not.

Fourteen years later, in 2185, Yakov was 77 years old and ready to move on. Yakov would be the one to give birth to the twelve "tribes." Yakov would be the one to leave the relative seclusion of Canaan and enter the belly of the societal beast. His education was intact. He knew more about nature and G-d's hidden presence in nature than any other person. (E.g. the business with the speckled vs. white sheep) He was prepared to survive Lavan ("I have lived with Lavan and kept the 613 Mitzvos"). He was prepared to raise and protect his family, making sure that all of them remained devoted to G-d and His purpose for creating the world. And he was prepared to influence the non-Jewish society of Charan.

Avraham's primary characteristic was Chesed - kindness. Yitzchak's main characteristic was Gevurah - strength and courage. Yakov's main characteristic was Emes - truth. Avraham accomplished his mission because he remained true to his primary characteristic. Yitzchak accomplished his mission because he remained true to his primary characteristic. Therefore, we can conclude that Yakov's success would also be predicated on his being true to his primary characteristic.

Following the dream of the ladder, Yakov proceeded to Charan. Like Eliezar before him, he was certain that G-d would direct him to the home of Lavan and his designated wife. True to his expectations, Rachel soon arrived with her father's sheep. However, before she arrived, Yakov had an encounter with three local shepherds. That scene deserves our closer attention.

Yakov arrived in Charan as a penniless stranger. His sole possessions were the clothes on his back and his walking stick. He approached the three shepherds and asked them regarding his uncle Lavan. They informed him that they knew Lavan and that his daughter Rachel was approaching with his herds. Instead of turning his attention to Rachel, Yakov began to question their work ethic.

"It isn't yet time to water the sheep. The day isn't yet over! The sun is still high in the sky! Go and do your work!"

The shepherds explained to Yakov that they were not simply lazing around. They were waiting for the other shepherds to arrive so that they could remove the well's cover and water their sheep. Rachel then arrived and Yakov moved forward to accomplish his destiny.

Why did Yakov start up with the shepherds? He certainly did not act in a diplomatically correct manner. Had Yakov appeared as a wealthy merchant it might have made more sense to posture himself as he had; however, he was a pauper. Why start up with three ruff and tough guys? Why didn't he mind his own business? Was it more important to challenge their integrity than it was to focus on his primary mission and the arrival of Rachel?

Yakov had been trained to both survive as well as impact his society. The first Rashi in the Parsha references the famous statement, "When a righteous person leaves or arrives at a place it is noticed."

Yakov's presence made an impact. In every which way Yakov made an impression. Physically, he was exceptionally handsome and strong. Spiritually, he was pure and uncompromised. Socially, he had been trained to take on the mission of Avraham and spread the word of G-d by word and deed.

Often, people move away from the communal centers of yeshiva and synagogue because they do not want to be bothered by that society's religious expectations. They attempt to maintain a low profile so that they will not be disturbed within the confines of their personal choices. On the other hand, if someone wishes to remain strong and committed in an environment that does not support or complement his values, it helps to wear his ethics values on his sleeve. Public statements in word and deed commit a person to maintaining that public image. Proclaiming who and what we are protects us from ourselves and from society. (Talk to any college student who wishes to remain committed and uncompromised within a university environment. Ask them what it takes.)

Within the complex social world the Jew must remain apart. If we do not elect to do so willingly, the world will eventually demands it of us. There are many things that make us appear different such as dress (Kippah and Tznius), Kashrus, and Shabbos; however, the most important and impacting characteristic we should have in relation to the rest of the world is Truth. Emes - truth, should be our calling card. "Hello! I am So and So. I am a Jew, and I am honest! You can trust me in business and you can trust me that I will do nothing to advance my well-being at your personal expense."

Integrity in business and in life is our greatest tool. So long as we are perceived as honest and giving we will be viewed as reflections of G-d's image and trusted to speak in His name. However, as soon as our integrity and honesty are questioned we loose all credibility as the teacher's of G-d's intentions. Dishonesty in one arena of life translates into dishonesty in all arenas of life. So is the perception and therefore, so is the unfortunate reality.

As soon as Yakov arrived at his destination he knew that he had to make a statement of identity and ethic. He was entering the evil society of Lavan. Lavan's reputation was as a user and a thief. So he had been when Rivkah was still a child and so it was 97 years later. (Twenty years till Yakov was born. 77 years till Yakov met Rachel and Lavan. At the time of Yakov's arrival in Charan Rivkah was either 100 or 111.) Yakov wanted to make sure that he would not be negatively influenced by Lavan and his society and that through his own behavior he might have a positive impact on them.

Yakov's primary characteristic was truth. Lavan's primary characteristic was falsehood. In order to maintain his own integrity and begin to effect changes in Lavan's home and society, Yakov had to present himself as a fearless paradigm of honesty and integrity. Therefore, the moment he arrived at the well he saw the opportunity to ascertain the nature of Lavan's society as well as making known to them who at what he was.

Yakov questioned their work ethic at the expense of appearing diplomatically incorrect, regardless of the potential dangers or consequences. He discovered that Lavan's society was built on dishonesty and distrust, which was why the well had been effectively locked. It guaranteed that no

one person could take more water than anyone else. No one could be trusted. Yakov's response was to stand-alone.

"I have come as a stranger and I will remain apart from all of you. I will not become a part of your distrusting and dishonest society. I am self-sufficient because I have integrity. I have no need for riches and possessions because I have trust In G-d and in the gift of physical strength and moral integrity. G-d promised to provide for me and I know that He will do so. My only focus will be to marry Rachel and care for her and my future family! If along the way you are inspired to do the same, so much the better! If not, be absolutely sure of who and what I am and that you will not affect me or my family!"

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