

NURTURE THE YAAKOV AVINU WITHIN OURSELVES

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Help Roll the Rock Off the Well

Our father Yaakov leaves his home, he who is accustomed to study, tranquility, and to "dwelling in tents," and immediately finds himself alone and endangered in a hostile world. A rock is his pillow and he must erect barriers at night to protect himself from wild animals (both four and two footed) as he sleeps on the ground. Though he is reassured by Heaven and by his grand dream and vision it is clear to him that his future is still uncertain and fraught with dangers, peril and challenges.

When he finally arrives close to his destination he encounters the neighbors and daughters of Lavan who are unable to water their flocks because of the great rock that seals the opening to the well of water. The Torah then describes for us in great detail how Yaakov greets the people and the family of Lavan and in a selfless gesture of help and compassion to others - who he has just met - singlehandedly removes the rock from the mouth of the well.

It is interesting to note that the Torah lavishes a great deal of space and detail to this incident at the well while the Torah tells us nothing about the fourteen years of Yaakov's life that passed between his leaving home and arriving at the house of Lavan.

Rashi, quoting Midrash, tells us that Yaakov spent these fourteen years in spiritual study and personal growth at the yeshiva academy of Shem and Ever. So, if this is in fact the case, why does the Torah not tell us of this great feat of spiritual challenge and self-improvement - fourteen years of sleepless study - while it does seem to go into mystifying detail regarding the incident at the well of water? Certainly, it would seem that the years of study would have a greater impact on the life and persona of Yaakov than rolling a rock off of the mouth of a well would have had.

As we see throughout the book of Bereshith, if not indeed regarding all of the Torah generally, the Torah places utmost emphasis on the behavior that one exhibits towards other human beings. Not everyone can study for fourteen years in a yeshiva day and night. Yet everyone has the ability to care about others, to demand justice for the defenseless and to provide to the best of one's abilities help to those who so obviously need it.

Though Yaakov, like all of the great figures and founders of our people that appear here in Bereshith, is unique in spiritual stature and blessed with Divine visions and revelation, he is also essentially everyman. His actions are meant to be a template of attitude and behavior for his

descendants and the people who bear his name.

The Torah, while making it clear that we can never personally be the equal of our ancestors in their exalted spiritual state and accomplishments, we can and should attempt to emulate their values and behavior. We can all help those in need to roll the rock off of their wells and thereby to nurture an environment where the Yaakov within all of us can grow and expand.

Shabat shalom

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